

Paweł Kochański – A Universal Artist

Malina Sarnowska

The name of Paweł Kochański, a Polish violin virtuoso, has somehow been omitted in the many publications about the greatest violinists of the 20th century. However, some musicologists, for instance Izrail Yampolski, thought that "nobody but Kochański had such a big influence on forming the new violin music. The contemporary style of the violin writing was developed through his performing art".

Kochański is interesting for a music biographer; born in Odessa in 1887, early virtuoso career, to New York in 1921 where he settled and lived until his death in 1934 aged 46. But his teaching work, intensive collaboration with several composers, and his own compositions give him the features of a musician that I would call a universal artist.

I am myself a young violinist and find Kochański a role model for musicians today. His attitude to both music and musical life corresponds well with the advice given in one of the music magazines (*The Strad*, January 2000): "Start teaching, write a song, learn Irish fiddle, improvise, play new music and get as much experience as you can".

Today, having one's eyes and ears open in the musical and non-musical world is the key for a young musician to being noticed and getting jobs. Things were different for Kochański. His interest in different musical disciplines, as much as his travels and social openness allowed him to introduce new ideas into 20th century violin music. He used the violin like the palette of a modern painter, achieving extreme contrasts of moods and registers, new colours, improvisatory sounding rhythms, and sometimes integrating the sonorities of the violin and the piano. Although the colours are those typical for impressionist art, they often still form a story that is full of expression. The musical pictures reflect their geographic origins. One recognises the fiddle of a Polish mountaineer in Kochański's transcription of Szymanowski's *Danse from "Harnasie"*, a Spanish guitar in the transcription of Joaquín Nin's *Suite Espagnole*, oriental drone in the transcription of Glazunov's *Mélodie Arabe*, American Indian songs in Kochański's *Flight*, and drums of a primitive tribe in *Danse Sauvage*, also by Kochański.

Touring Round the World

Kochański spent his early childhood in Odessa. He started to play the violin as a small boy, and was accepted aged 7 as a pupil by Emil Młynarski, reputedly the best teacher in Odessa. Kochański quickly became

not only Młynarski's favourite pupil, but also his friend and protégé. Teacher and pupil both moved to Warsaw, where the 12-year-old Kochański played the Mendelssohn concerto at his debut concert.

Warsaw was Kochański's home for the next 15 years, with a short break in 1903 when he went to Brussels to finish his formal violin studies with César Thomson. His career began parallel with the founding by Emil Młynarski of the Warsaw Philharmonia in 1901. Kochański was for some time its concertmaster, and from 1907 he started to perform with the orchestra as soloist. He also played chamber music - duos with Karol Szymanowski or Artur Rubinstein, and trios with the latter and Kochański's brother, Eli, then principal cellist in the Warsaw Philharmonia.

In 1913, two years after his marriage to Zofia Kohn, Kochański moved to St. Petersburg where Glazunov had offered him a teaching post in the conservatoire. He continued to give concerts (during 1914-1915 he played a lot with Szymanowski in the Ukraine), and their number even increased in the war time. He gave almost 90 performances during a few months in 1918. He was then living in Kiev (he had moved there in 1917), and his partners at the piano were Josef Turczyński, Heinrich Neuhaus, and Karol Szymanowski.

Kochański moved back from the Ukraine to Warsaw in 1919, though not for long. The Western European countries opened their borders after the end of the war, and Kochański could continue his international career. His concert in London in 1920 was a big success, followed by the offer of a concert tour in the US. He went there in January 1921, together with Szymanowski and Rubinstein. He played the Brahms concerto at his first concert, in New York with Walter Damrosch conducting. Rubinstein wrote in his diary: "Paweł's debut was a real sensation..... Paweł quickly became a soloist that all orchestras wanted to play with; he would have a full concert season".

Kochański was lucky to find a good manager, George Engels, in America. He not only organised concerts for the Polish virtuoso, but also suggested him as a valuable teacher for the Juilliard School of Music in New York. Kochański was offered a full-time post there in 1924, and, becoming more and more popular in the States, he decided to settle in New York.

His home was New York for the next 10 years, but he continued to travel. Most of his overseas travel was in connection with concert tours. Apart from one tour in South America (Uruguay and Argentina were very open for European art at that time, and Buenos Aires became an important centre of music; Rubinstein often performed there), Kochański was giving concerts in Europe. He played a lot in Spain, and was often invited to London, Paris, and Berlin, not forgetting Warsaw. According to Lionel Salter, Kochański was the first violinist to give whole-evening solo recitals.

There were also travels of a non-musical character. He usually spent his holidays in French or Swiss spas where he could recover after an intensive concert and teaching periods, often in the company of good friends, the artists. It was then impossible not to talk and live music, and Kochański was busy with home musical evenings (such as the one in the Blanchard's house, Basque Country, in the summer of 1926 when Rubinstein, Jacques Thibaud, and Maurice Ravel listened to Kochański playing his arrangements of de Falla and Stravinsky) and composing work, e.g. the transcriptions of Szymanowski's music: *Roxana's Aria* – St. Jean de Luz, 1926, and *Dance from "Harnasie"* – Zuoz, 1931.

Kochański's health problems became serious in the 1930s, and he needed to rest more and more. However, the idea of a new Szymanowski concerto challenged him, and he spent a lot of time in 1932 working on it with the composer. Kochański gave the first performance of Szymanowski's second violin concerto in Warsaw in October 1933, one of his last concerts. He died in New York four months later, in January 1934.

Always feeling himself a Polish artist, Kochański promoted his national culture (he had many Polish works in his repertoire) and was interested in Polish musical life. He helped to found the Society of Young Polish Musicians in Paris, being one of several distinguished artists of Polish origin (Bronisław Huberman, Rubinstein, Szymanowski, and Alexandre Tansman, among others) who gathered in Paris in December 1926. Ignacy Jan Paderewski became the Honorary President of the society.

Among the Artists of His Time

Living in different countries and travelling a lot, Kochański met many great artists. His wife Zofia was careful to keep contacts, and her salon in New York was so famous that Jan Lechoń referred to it several times in his diaries as a haven for the Polish community in America. Młynarski wrote that "the cultural life of the Metropolis focused around it. It was frequented by the most remarkable people in the art world, and by other New York socialites". Among the guests at one of the evenings were an art Maecenas, Cornelius Vanderbilt and his wife, Misia Sert and her husband José Louis Sert, Spanish architect, Walter Damrosch, famous conductor, with his family, and Fritz Kreisler with his wife.

Kochański knew great soloists and well-known composers. He was acquainted with Eugène Ysaÿe, played trios with Thibaud and Pablo Casals, and duos with the pianists Turczyński, Neuhaus, and Mieczysław Horszowski. They appreciated not only Kochański's violin artistry, but also his talent for storytelling that made him a nice companion on concert tours.

Performing his friend Ravel's sonata with the composer sitting at the piano had an unexpected ending. Tansman, who had been turning the pages, reported that Ravel got lost and missed half a bar. Kochański tried to fit in but did not succeed. They continued to play half a bar apart until the end, finishing at different times!

Szymanowski, Rubinstein, and Kochański were similar in age, and Kochanski maintained lifelong friendships with them both. Rubinstein wrote in his diary that "the friendship was an important thing in my life", and also named his son Paweł. Kochański and Rubinstein together had a huge violin (piano repertoire, but they recorded only one work, Brahms' D minor sonata.

Szymanowski collaborated with Kochański as pianist and composer. All the violin music he wrote was influenced by Kochański's playing. The idea of writing for the violin came up after they had first met, and it came to realisation in 1903 with the *Sonata in D minor* op. 9, Szymanowski's first published work. Eleven years later, in close collaboration with Kochański, he began work on his best pieces for violin: *Myths*, *Nocturne and Tarantella*, and the first violin concerto, all representing an "impressionistic" period of Szymanowski's mature writing. They spent a lot of time together during the First World War, in the composer's family home in Tymoszkówka, or in a neighbouring estate in Zarudzie belonging to Józef Jaroszyński. Szymanowski described

the work process: “Kochański’s inexhaustible resourcefulness and inventiveness suddenly opened up new horizons and boundless possibilities. He came with unexpected solutions which avoided both cliché and unjustifiable eccentricity. Whole pages were covered with emendations and alternatives that always improved the expressive qualities and individuality of the work’s sound”.

Two short pieces, *L’Aube* and *Danse Sauvage*, though published as Kochański’s miniatures, were also co-composed with Szymanowski; as were transcriptions of Chopin’s *Mazurka* op. 6 no. 3 and *Nocturne* op. 62 no. 1. All these compositions appeared in the series *Paul Kochanski. Compositions & Transcriptions for Violin & Piano*, and *Paul Kochanski. Concert Transcriptions & Arrangements for Violin & Piano*, published by Carl Fischer in New York. *L’Aube* and *Danse Sauvage* have a note: *Piano accompaniment arranged by KAROL SZYMANOWSKI*. He did not want his name to be printed as the composer, suspecting perhaps that his publisher in Vienna, Universal Edition, would object. Szymanowski was very fond of the two Chopin transcriptions, called by Teresa Chylińska “the sins of youth” that were apparently committed in Tymoszwówka. Both arrangements are made in a very traditional way, without many changes in the musical material, and only the mazurka having some interesting sound solutions that intensify the folklorist character of the piece.

“A particular case of an artistic symbiosis” is how Chylińska describes the friendship between the violinist and the composer. This bond was special in the history of creator/performer relationships – it was free from jealousy, and it was present equally in life and in the music. Szymanowski, in one of his letters to the Kochańskis, dated January 1929, wrote: “It is a strange thing that all the best and most joyful in my life, including music, is associated with you. My first concerto, for example, where there is so much of Pawelek to be felt with each nerve and every single emotion – that has been my best composition so far.”

One could say that Kochański commissioned violin concertos by Szymanowski. It is not surprising then that he took an active part in composing them; Szymanowski even asked him to write the cadenzas and to place them. Both concertos were dedicated to him, the first completed in 1916, the second in 1933, less than a year before Kochański’s death. In the score of the second concerto, Szymanowski wrote: “In memory of a Great Musician, my dear and unforgettable friend, Paweł Kochański” – not a simple inscription, rather a posthumous memorial.

Several composers dedicated their works to Kochański, being inspired by his performing art. Many asked him for advice, mostly about the sonority, and brought their scores with them, ready to make necessary corrections. As Szymanowski recalled, they included not only younger colleagues/ musicians, but also renowned composers.

Antoni Szałowski, belonging more to the first group, probably met Kochański in Paris, moving there from Poland in 1931 in order to attend Nadia Boulanger’s composition classes. His *Suite*, dedicated to Kochański, is a nice, interesting four-movement piece, full of fourths and fifths, the violinist’s favourite double stops. Unfortunately it is not often performed today. Kochański worked with the English composer Arnold Bax on the revision of Bax’ *First violin sonata*, later dedicated to Kochański, and with the Swiss composer Ernest Bloch on his *First sonata*, premiered by Kochański and Rubinstein in New York.

Kochański knew several Russian composers, and appreciated their music. His repertoire included many works by Glazunov: the *Concerto*, *Meditation*, *Waltz*, *Mazurka-Oberek*, and his transcription of the *Mélodie arabe*. The orchestral version of the mazurka, dedicated to Kochański, was performed by him with the composer conducting.

Prokofiev was thinking of Kochański as soloist at the premiere of his first violin concerto, on which they worked intensively in 1916/17, at the same time as Szymanowski composed his best works for violin. Perhaps not coincidentally, Prokofiev's first violin concerto is often compared with Szymanowski's *Myths*; the techniques employed by both composers are similar – many trills, left-hand tremolos, and weaving passages. Kochański wrote in Prokofiev's notebook: "I love the sun. I love Prokofiev's music. I love Prokofiev himself". Two other pieces went through consultations with the composer: the sonata for 2 violins op.56, and *Five Melodies for violin and piano* op. 35 bis. The first, third, and fourth melodies have an inscription *À Paul Kochanski* – Prokofiev's thanks for helping to transcribe his *Songs without words* op. 35 - the earlier form for voice Prokofiev found "unpractical".

Stravinsky, whom Kochański met for the first time in 1914 in London, also later became a citizen of New York (they had the same doctor, A. L. Garbat) and was a guest in the Kochański salon, where he met Gershwin. After the violinist's death, these contacts developed into a real friendship between Zofia Kochański and Stravinsky and his daughter.

Stravinsky's first work for violin and piano was composed because of the need to fill out the programme of his solo recital. Planning his tour, he thought of Kochański as a possible performer of the suite from *Pulcinella*, Stravinsky's stage work. Unfortunately it was not Kochański who gave the first performance (1925) of the *Suite Italienne*, as the five extracts from *Pulcinella* were titled. Stravinsky wrote on the manuscripts of two of them: *I. Stravinsky to Paul Kohansky, London 1921*. As a kind of compensation Kochański received the transcriptions of three extracts from *The Firebird* (*Prélude*, *Khorovod* and *Berceuse*), and the new version of the *Suite Italienne* (made in 1932 with Samuel Dushkin), all these pieces being dedicated to him.

According to American critics, Kochański was much appreciated as a performer of Spanish miniatures, mostly his own transcriptions of works by Manuel de Falla and Joaquín Nin. de Falla met Kochański in 1907, playing together in a concert in Bilbao, and then followed him to Paris, hoping to make a career there with the help of the violinist's manager. Although the latter did not provide him with any support, de Falla stayed in France for some years and kept contact with Kochański. de Falla did not compose anything for violin, but the violin repertoire includes his music through Kochański's arrangements: *Suite populaire espagnole* (originally *Siete canciones nacionales españolas*) and three extracts from the ballet *El amor brujo – Dance of Terror*, *Pantomime*, and *Danse rituelle de feu*. Unfortunately these last miniatures are not often played nowadays (though they are very good pieces), and nor are the *Suite espagnole* and *Chants d'Espagne* by Nin. The first cycle is Nin's original composition (no. 4, *Andaluz*, dedicated to Kochański, is an arrangement of his most famous song, *El vito*), the second was adapted by the violinist from the version for cello. A serious man, talking only about serious things, with a hairstyle à la Robert Schumann, playing mainly music from the pre-Bach period – this is the

picture of Nin given by Rubinstein in his diaries (they and Kochański met on the ship cruising to South America). This can be explained by the fact that Nin, having Cuban origin, was brought to Spain as a small boy, and later became fascinated by the culture of his new country, especially by Spanish baroque music. Nin was the father of Anaïs Nin, an American woman writer, the author of scandalous diaries.

Teacher and Magician

Kochański's virtuoso career proceeded during all the year simultaneously with his teaching work. He started to teach in his twenties and became a professor at four conservatoires – Warsaw, St. Petersburg, Kiev, and, for the longest period, New York. These many years of teaching experience had a colossal meaning for Kochański's general knowledge of music. The perfect understanding of the mechanical principles of violin playing, attributed to good teachers, made him a valuable collaborator, much in demand by the modern composers. In an interview with the writer Frederic Martens, Kochański said that “the development of fine musical ideas should not be hampered by technical considerations. Besides, modern music may secure its special and very beautiful effects and yet be thoroughly violinistic!”

On the one hand, he possessed a wonderful technique. Młynarski recollected: “Kochański could easily play fast scales not only in thirds, fifths, octaves, and tenths, but also in fourths”, “How magnificent his staccato was! I could hear at least 40 notes taken in one bow at the frog.” As proof, it is enough to look at some of Kochański's compositions and transcriptions: the manuscripts of *Danse Sauvage*, *Flight*, or the sketches for *Moustique*, *Młynek* (an idiomatic noun that can be translated as “whirling round”) – such titles! – the transcription of Paganini's *Campanella*, and the final variation of *Caprice* no.24 in Szymanowski's arrangement.

On the other hand, he had an uncommon musicality and imagination of the sound. One of his students from Kiev, later concertmaster of the orchestra, Boris Rowicki said: “Kochański would give place to many violinists on the strength and power of tone. However, due to his masterly way of using dynamics, gradation of the sound, astounding variety of nuances (huge diversity of shades in piano) he gave an impression of a large volume. His talent was in many aspects similar to Kreisler's. Like Kreisler, he was master of the miniature, many of which he arranged himself: Ravel's *Pavane pour une infante défunte*, Bizet's *Habanera*, Schubert's *Impromptus*, Scriabin's *Etude* op.42 no. 4, *Bach's Aria from D major Suite* and others.

At an auction in New York in December 1988, the National Library bought a collection of Kochański's manuscripts from Irena Weiss. Eight years later a large part of them was still waiting to be identified and verified as Kochański's sketches. Lacking a Polish specialist who would take on the task, the Library received great help from Tyrone D. Greive, an American violinist, teacher, and musicologist, professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison who had been doing research on Polish music for many years. His article about the collaboration of Kochański and Szymanowski was printed in *The Strad* in December 1999, and his revision of *Serenade* by Kochański was used by PWM in its edition of this miniature in 1999.

It is rather sad that what Szymanowski wrote after his friend's death still sounds true almost 70 years later: "It happened that Poland – whose culture he represented with glamour everywhere abroad – Poland, this very country, not least in the matter of his art, is not sufficiently aware as to who this great and rare artist was".