



Reuben Stern, Conductor

Divertimento for String Orchestra (1965)

Allegro
Adagio
Giocoso

Grażyna Bacewicz (1909–1969)

Symphony for String Orchestra (1946)

Allegro ma non troppo
Adagio
Allegretto
Temat z wariacjami

Grażyna Bacewicz (1909–1969)

North American Premiere

Music for Strings, Trumpets, and Percussion (1958)

Allegro
Adagio
Vivace

Grażyna Bacewicz (1909–1969)

Sunday, October 17, 2021
5:30 PM

This recital is offered in partial fulfillment for the degree of Master of Music

Dear Friends,

It is a true privilege to present to you this recital of music by Grażyna Bacewicz. I first came across her work two years ago, when I programmed her *Concerto for String Orchestra* with a group I conducted in college. It baffled me that so little else of her orchestral music is regularly performed – how could a composer of the genius to write the *Concerto* have so few other works worthy of performance? I couldn't accept that reality. The deeper I dug into Bacewicz's oeuvre, the more rewarding it became. Hers is a music full of rhythmic vitality, harmonic creativity, brilliant virtuosity, and formal genius extending far beyond that showcased in the *Concerto for String Orchestra*. It became an obsession of mine to learn and share as much of Bacewicz's music as possible.

This obsession started to bear fruit this spring, when I began collaboration with the Polish Cultural Institute New York. PCINY and their music curator Anna Perzanowska were just as excited about Grażyna Bacewicz as I was – indeed, *everyone* I spoke with about her work was just as excited as I was! I knew immediately that the time was right to start a major project to re-inspire interest in her amazing music.

In recent months, as orchestras have sought finally to diversify their old, homogeneous repertoire, more and more ensembles have begun to program Bacewicz's works. If you tally up these programs, though, you'll see that nearly all performances consist of two pieces of hers: the *Overture* for orchestra, and the *Concerto for String Orchestra* I mentioned earlier. These are both phenomenal pieces, but they do not represent Bacewicz as a whole! Indeed, her compositional career extended fruitfully for more than 20 years after the *Concerto* was first premiered. We thus recognized how important it would be for us to lead the re-invigoration of interest in Bacewicz by sharing as much of the rest of her work with the world, and this recital is a major first step.

I sought with this brief program to represent three major compositional periods in Bacewicz's life, roughly corresponding to the '40s, '50s, and '60s. While the precise harmonic, melodic, and orchestrational languages shifted as she evolved in her work, a few key elements stay static and make her music unmistakably unique. Relentless rhythmic energy, registral extremes, and virtuosic string writing all help with making her music unforgettable.

This recital would not be possible without the help of so many friends, family, and mentors. First and foremost, my debt of gratitude to Anna Perzanowska and the Polish Cultural Institute New York cannot be overstated. Their interest and assistance have spurred me on, and I eagerly look forward to all the other parts of this project that we will produce together. Just as important, I am so grateful to my phenomenal conducting teachers Marin Alsop and Joseph Young. Beyond the unbelievable instruction they have provided me and my fellow conducting students, Marin and Joseph have spent countless hours helping me directly with this project. It quite literally would never have gotten off the ground without their assistance. Following up right behind, I graciously thank the rest of the Peabody conducting studio – Ryo, Jotaro, Sam, Hae, Chi-Yuan, Valery, Juliano, Blake, Quinton, and Jorge – for their constant support, encouragement, and inspiration. To my parents Lori and Alan; my siblings Jeremy and Celia; my grandparents Sam, Joan, and Arthur; and the rest of my loving family and friends, thank you. Thank you for believing in me as I take this crazy leap of faith to pursue a career in what I love most. Finally, to all of you who have shown interest in this project, it is my absolute joy to share the results with you.

Dziękuję bardzo,

Reuben

This recital presented in partial collaboration with



POLISH CULTURAL
INSTITUTE
NEW YORK

Orchestra

Violin I

Fangming Shen – *concertmaster*
Nicolle Avila
Angela Che
Elias Fredericks
Sophia Freed
Kevin Huang
Anna Pavlou

Violin II

Olivia Chen – *principal*
Adam Davis
Anita Kuo
Sumin Lee
Eashwar Mahadevan
Nina Youn

Viola

Margaret Klucznik – *Principal*
Asha Baylor
Michael Chong
Wesley Hamilton
Brian Jennings

Cello

Steven Chen – *Principal*
George Jennings
John Sample
Kyle Victor
Natalia Vilchis

Bass

Rachel Kost – *Principal*
Leonard Kang
Abigail Koehler
Chelsea Strayer

Trumpet

Dillon Parker – *Principal*
Chase Domke
Antonie Jackson
Evan Kirshen
Weifeng Zhao

Timpani

Mingyu Son

Percussion

Matt Boyle
Samuel Carullo

Celesta

Samuel Hollister



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This concert marks the beginning of a multifaceted project about the life and works of **Grażyna Bacewicz**, spearheaded by Reuben Stern and Anna Perzanowska. With this first program, we sought to introduce an American audience to Bacewicz's oeuvre as it evolved over time, choosing three works that are representative of the major periods in her compositional style.

Bacewicz was born to a musical family in Łódź, Poland, in 1909. With basic instruction from their parents, Grażyna and her three siblings – Kiejstut, Witold, and Wanda – quickly exhibited artistic excellence and began lessons at local music schools. Grażyna, always the polymath, studied piano and violin; already, she had begun to establish herself as an impressive virtuoso violinist. Always lurking in the background, though, was a passion for composition.

As her formal education continued, Bacewicz entered the Warsaw Conservatory studying composition with Kazimierz Sikorski, in addition to violin and piano. At Sikorski's suggestion, she traveled to Paris to study with the illustrious Nadia Boulanger. Boulanger thought very fondly of the young Bacewicz: "I don't think I have to tell you how moved I am when I think about Grażyna. When she arrived in Paris, still as a young girl, she already displayed great talent, which over the years would develop constantly."

But the world came to know Bacewicz the violin soloist before it knew her as a composer. She first gained acclaim after performing exceptionally well in the first round of the 1st International Henryk Wieniawski Violin Competition. Despite not placing in

the competition (she would later attribute her poor performance in the second round to having had her flat broken into the night before and spending all night at the police station), she had solidified her presence as an exceptional soloist with a flourishing career. Over the subsequent years, Bacewicz would continue to perform on the world stage as a soloist, while always yearning to turn back to composition. As concertmaster of the Polish Radio Orchestra, she performed as soloist on the premieres of her first four violin concerti.

Until her untimely death in 1969, Bacewicz continued to compose feverishly and lead her work through a handful of periods all unmistakably Bacewicz. She leaves us with 7 violin concerti, 2 cello concerti, a viola concerto, 7 string quartets, 4 symphonies, 5 sonatas for violin and piano, a radio opera, three ballets, and dozens of other works for full orchestra, string orchestra, chamber orchestra, chamber ensembles, solo violin, solo piano, and more.

Bacewicz's most famous work is undoubtedly her *Concerto for String Orchestra* (1948), praised for its masterful and virtuosic string writing and its brilliant use of classical form in a fresh, invigorating way. The **Symphony for String Orchestra (1946)** serves as a clear spiritual and technical predecessor to the *Concerto*. It lacks none of the virtuosity of its successor, and its devotion to classical form is even clearer. Nevertheless, Bacewicz imprints her unmistakable signature of wit, sarcasm, and incessant rhythmic drive with a fire fueled by the nervous energy of war-torn Europe. We are thrilled to have the opportunity to give a North American premiere of this outstanding work.

Bacewicz's style evolved dramatically over the next decade. Eschewing traditional harmony and melody, she turned toward a "sonoristic" orchestration style accompanied by the "tonality through insistence" familiar in works by Bartok. A high point of this evolution – and, indeed, a work in contention to be called Bacewicz's *magnum opus* – is the **Music for Strings, Trumpets, and Percussion (1958)**, premiered at the 3rd Warsaw Autumn Festival. The *Music* quickly became one of her most popular works and it isn't hard to see why: the excitement, technical difficulty, color, and textures of the piece are intoxicating. Who but Bacewicz has written a piece for strings, five trumpets, and percussion? It is utterly unique.

Her mastery of sonorism – a compositional technique generally attributed to 20th-century Polish composers and characterized by emphasis of timbre, articulation, and dynamics above harmony, melody, and rhythm – strengthened throughout the 1960s. A great example of this is her brief and exciting **Divertimento for String Orchestra (1965)**, which will open our concert. The use of extended techniques in the strings provides a fascinating sound-world, while the rhythmic agility provides a joyful playground for performers and audience alike.

THE POLISH CULTURAL INSTITUTE NEW YORK was founded in 2000. It is a diplomatic mission of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, operating in public diplomacy. The PCI is one of 24 such institutes around the world. It is also an active member of the network of the European Union National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC) in its New York cluster.

The Institute's mission is to share Polish heritage and contemporary art with American audiences, and to promote Poland's contributions to the success of world culture. The Institute does so through initiating, supporting, and promoting collaboration between Poland and the United States in the areas of visual art, design, film, theater, dance, literature, music, and in many other aspects of intellectual and social life. The Institute's main task is to ensure Polish participation in the programming of America's most important cultural institutions as well as in large international initiatives.

The Institute works with renowned cultural and academic centers and opinion leaders operating on the American market. Its main partners include such prestigious organizations as Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, the Museum of Modern Art, PEN American Center, the Poetry Society of America, the National Gallery of Art, Yale University, Columbia University, Princeton University, the Harvard Film Archive, the CUNY Graduate Center, the Julliard School of Music, the New Museum, the Jewish Museum, La MaMa E.T.C. and many others. For more than fifteen years, it has presented Americans the achievements of outstanding Polish artists, including the filmmakers Andrzej Wajda and Jerzy Skolimowski; the writers Czesław Miłosz, Adam Zagajewski and Wisława Szymborska; the composers Krzysztof Penderecki, Witold Lutosławski and Mikołaj Górecki; theater artists Krystian Lupa, Jerzy Grotowski and Tadeusz Kantor; the visual artists Krzysztof Wodiczko, Katarzyna Kozyra, Alina Szapocznikow and many other important figures in the arts. The Institute initiates and actively participates in debates around the humanities in the broad sense, including those concerning history and the today's most important social and political occurrences.