

INTRODUCTION

The present study seeks to gain an insight into the life and work of Feliks Nowowiejski, a versatile Polish artist, composer, virtuoso organist, conductor of choral and symphonic music, and teacher. His imposing musical oeuvre encompasses a variety of genres and forms of instrumental, vocal, and vocal-instrumental music. Such abundant and diverse work was highly acclaimed by audiences and some of the critics even in his own lifetime, and recognized with a number of prizes at composing competitions as well as distinctions and honors awarded to the artist at home and abroad.¹

The first significant publications devoted to Nowowiejski's life and work appeared in the early 20th century.² Mostly written by the composer himself or based on data received from him, they informed about his achievements and selected artistic projects. Unfortunately, most of the sources lacked impartiality and contributed to the spread of distortions and aversion to the artist. Other reports published in cultural and musical press were almost exclusively limited to reviews of Nowowiejski's compositions.³ Analysis of these articles allows one to conclude that the audiences and musical critics from various musical milieux assessed the composer's work according to their own tastes and esthetic preferences.

It was only the post-war period that brought major studies authored by Nowowiejski's sons and Jan Boehm, which considerably expanded the knowledge about the composer's life. While professional literature features few mentions of his output, the recent years have witnessed an increasing interest in his works, and Nowowiejski-related issues are now frequently selected as topics of master's and doctoral dissertations. However, the current state of knowledge about his extensive legacy does not allow for its full exploitation: notwithstanding numerous attempts to popularize his works, he remains an almost forgotten artist.

One of the reasons for the hostile attitudes towards Nowowiejski, demonstrated by some critics and musicologists, was the fact that they did

¹Appendix III – *Prizes, Distinctions, and Honors*.

²E.g. A. Poliński, *Dzieje muzyki polskiej w zarysie* (Lviv, 1907).

³Press articles and reviews related to Nowowiejski were published in the years 1898–1946, at times frequently, at other times rarely. Many of them are referred to hereafter and listed in the *Literature section*.

not understand the circumstances of his artistic development. The distrust was related not only to his composing output, but also, or maybe first of all, his background and artistic path. The criticism was obviously fueled by those of his works which had a mass culture provenance and were imbued with clearly patriotic content. The present author argues that in his artistic work Nowowiejski was not inspired by novelty, originality or modernism, but mainly the will to meet the certain social demand. It was the compositions written in this popular esthetic that were frequently performed and published on a large scale, thus widely known, while some of his major works have remained in the manuscript form. It is also from the angle of these popular pieces that the artistic value of Nowowiejski's oeuvre is, often negatively, evaluated. In the post-war, Stalinist times, works of unambiguously religious and patriotic essence were not valued by the official critics, but rather scorned. Negative attitudes to Nowowiejski's output were also impacted by the post-war generation of avant-garde musicians who were convinced of the artistically imitative character of their predecessors' works.

In such circumstances Nowowiejski's compositions were inaccessible for many years, hence removed from the artistic repertoire. In this context it is almost impossible to assess his output: the several-decade gap between the composing and publication or performance of the works has left them, so to say, hibernated, creating an interpretation vacuum. The respect and acclaim that the composer had enjoyed in his own lifetime vanished soon after his death.

It was the above-mentioned issues as well as a belief that Nowowiejski was an extremely fascinating personage (particularly through his intriguing versatility) that spurred the present author to devote herself to systematic research on his life and work.

Writing this biography was preceded by an extensive study of source materials, which enabled the present author to verify the hitherto known facts. As the composer's life abounded with momentous events, this required retrieving sources and studies of various provenances, available at home and abroad. The present author conducted preliminary research in a number of libraries, museums, and other relevant institutions storing various sources,⁴ located in the composer's whereabouts, including Barczewo, Olsztyn, Berlin, Paris, London, Cracow, Lviv, Poznań, Prague, Rome, Święta Lipka, and Vatican. While developing this biography as well as the portfolio of Nowowiejski's compositions, the present author also resorted

⁴Personal records, forms of personal particulars, resumes, letters, memoirs, autobiographies, correspondence, diaries, reports, obituaries, official documents (IDs, diplomas, certificates) and letters to mark promotions and nominations, clippings, bibliographic and iconographic materials.

to other sources of information, including interviews, consultations with experts, and the Internet.

Feliks Nowowiejski's biography demonstrates the major events of his life in the chronological order.⁵ Chapter 1 describes his childhood and family background, his youthful years and education up to his first composing success; the period when his personality and character were shaped. Chapter 2 commences when Nowowiejski assumed the post of head of the Musical Association in Cracow (1909–1914), and describes the emigration years spent in Berlin until the end of the First World War. After the time in exile Nowowiejski decided to return to his homeland, got involved in the plebiscites in Warmia and Masuria, and participated in the fight for the borders of the revived country; the events are discussed in chapter 3.

Finally, in chapter 4, the present author concentrates on Nowowiejski's multi-faceted activity in the city of Poznań. In the capital of Greater Poland the composer found a favorable atmosphere for the initiatives related to his rich and versatile activity covering a number of domains of musical practice and output. Considering his extensive public activity, the study emphasizes the facts which had a considerable impact on the composer's life or were likely to determine the motives behind his professional decisions. The present author focuses on Nowowiejski's collaboration with artists from other regions of Poland. Chapter 4 is concluded with a description of the German occupation, the composer's illness and his death in early 1946.⁶

The present study is summed up in the Conclusion. The monograph is supplemented with Literature and Appendixes: I *The Nowowiejski Family*, II *Calendar of Feliks Nowowiejski's Life and Work*, III *Prizes, Distinctions, and Honors*, and IV *Alphabetical List of Works*.

⁵Some exceptions to the rule refer to the fragments which describe the composer's surroundings. At times it is impossible to retain the chronological order; exhausting information on a given subject would distort the narration.

⁶The present study does not include a number of documents, e.g. press paragraphs from the years 1942–1946, because they were not signed by the composer. When Nowowiejski fell ill, his image was developed by his sons: Feliks Maria, and Kazimierz.