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Passion: Penderecki

Warsaw ——— 28 November 2025



Passion: Penderecki

28 November (Friday) — 7.30 pm

Warsaw Philharmonic
Concert Hall
5 Jasna Street
Warsaw

Honorary patronage: His Excellency Wasył Bodnar, Ambassador
Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ukraine to the Republic of Poland

Concert programme

Krzysztof Penderecki (1933–2020)

St. Luke Passion

(*Passio et Mors Domini Nostri*

Iesu Christi secundum Lucam)

for three soloists, narrator, boys'
choir, three mixed choirs
and orchestra

libretto: Krzysztof Penderecki –
after the Gospel of Luke, Psalms,
Book of Lamentations, the Gospel
of John (excerpts from Latin
translations) and liturgical texts
from the 1949 Roman Missal
(1966)

Part I

O Crux, ave

Et egressus ibat

Deus, Deus meus

Domine, quis habitabit

Adhuc eo loquente ecce turba

Ierusalem, Ierusalem

Ut quid, Domine

Comprehendentes autem eum duxerunt

Iudica me, Deus

Et viri, qui tenebant illum

Ierusalem, Ierusalem

Miserere mei, Deus

Et surgens omnis multitudo

Part II

...et in pulverem mortis

Popule meus

...ibi crucifixerunt eum

Crux fidelis

...in pulverem mortis

Et stabat populus spectans

Unus autem de his

Stabant autem iuxta crucem

Stabat Mater dolorosa

Erat autem fere hora sexta

In te, Domine, speravi

Performers:

**Karol Szymanowski Krakow
Philharmonic Choir
and Orchestra**

Polish Radio Choir – Łusławice

**Boys' Choir of the Krakow
Philharmonic**

**Krakow Philharmonic Ukrainian
Boys' and Girls' Choir**

Maciej Tworek
conductor

Iwona Hossa
soprano

Mariusz Godlewski
baritone

Artur Janda
bass

Krzysztof Gosztyła
narrator

Janusz Wierzgacz
preparation of the Karol Szymanowski
Krakow Philharmonic Choir

Dawid Ber
preparation of the Polish Radio Choir –
Łusławice

Lidia Matynian
preparation of the Krakow Philharmonic
Boys' Choir

Olena Yatskulynets
preparation of the Krakow Philharmonic
Ukrainian Boys' and Girls' Choir

Passion: Penderecki

*Hail Cross, of hopes the most sublime! Now, in the mournful Passion time;
grant to the just increase of grace*¹

This call opens one of the most important works by Krzysztof Penderecki, which is the *St. Luke Passion*. The symbol of the cross, identified with the tree of life, is particularly connected to the sphere of nature, which was of vital importance to the composer. The artist used to say that a work of art, like a tree, has to be rooted both in heaven and on earth. The choice of the Passion genre, which undoubtedly directs our gaze towards the cross, was not a coincidence. In the Passion, the sacred intertwines with the profane; the divine with the human. Penderecki, hailed as a representative of the avant-garde, took up this genre, which even then seemed outdated. Certainly, he must have also been aware of the burden of tradition, as only a few music creators had had the courage to return to the genre of Passion after Johann Sebastian Bach.

Penderecki's work premiered in 1966, on the millennial anniversary of the Baptism of Poland, which the communist authorities ignored. It was Otto Tomek who commissioned the piece from Penderecki on the occasion of the 700th anniversary of the completion of the Münster Cathedral (1264); therefore, the piece was not only an artistic challenge, but also an opportunity to send a clear message to the authorities of the Polish People's Republic. Outside the political context, the composer also had an excuse to tell his version of the story contained in Pilate's words "Ecce Homo". This is not only a tale of Jesus in the Christian context of the Passion, death and redemption; this is also a story of an everyman facing indifference or aggression, both from the crowd and the individual.

The dual nature of the work – these double roots – is reflected in many dimensions, such as the use of various compositional techniques. Here, Renaissance polyphony is juxtaposed with the twelve-tone technique, while traditional sounds – with sonoristic techniques. There is also a reference to the master of the Passion, Bach, whose name is included in the sound material. The B–A–C–H motif appears as the last four tones of one of the dodecaphonic series, becoming a sign of tradition present in the structure of a modern work.

However, it is the dramatic component in which binary oppositions are most pronounced. Sudden changes and sound contrasts can be interpreted as musical equivalents of irrational changes in the human psyche torn between euphoria and apathy, terror and numbness, anguish and solace. On the one hand, such emotional changes are typical of pathological states of mental illness; on the other hand, they can be caused by prolonged fear and pain. This is how Penderecki outlined the portrait of the main protagonist of the drama – the suffering Christ. The mind of a tired and humiliated man echoes everything he hears: whip sounds, the laughter of the crowd or even breathing or footsteps, which intensifies the pain inflicted from the outside. The composer deliberately decided not to display Jesus' divinity; instead, he focused on his human features. Consequently, this thoroughly dramatic, almost cinematic structure takes us through successive scenes of human death, in the centre of which we see a wrongfully accused person, facing the court and sentenced to death. However, an open question arises. Which punishment is more severe: the court's sentence or the crowd's indifference and mindlessly repeated insults?

In the world of cultural texts, it is difficult to find a work depicting a human being in a more poignant way than the Passion. Although Penderecki set his composition in a Christian context, he provided it with a universal dimension. This is not only a tale of the Passion of Christ; this is also a story about the experiences of the twentieth century: about Auschwitz, Katyń, armed conflicts and hate speech, which is an equally dangerous weapon nowadays, as sharp as a blade. Aggression manifests itself not only in the clang of steel or the sound of a shot. Violence is here and now: in words that hurt, in silence in the face of harm, in indifference and in the fact that the story of Jesus keeps repeating itself. As evidenced by Penderecki's music, this story will never cease to be relevant.

René Libert

¹ Translated by Walter Kirkham Blount (1670).

Mixed Choir of the Karol Szymanowski Philharmonic in Krakow

The choir started its activity in 1945. It has participated in grand international events, such as the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the pontificate of John Paul II, a concert in Berlin on the occasion of the Reunification of Germany in 1990, the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp in 1995, and the Canonisation Mass of Pope John XXIII and Pope John Paul II in the Vatican (2014). For many years, the choir has received the acclaim of audiences, reviewers and conductors. Numerous tours abroad have established the choir's reputation as an "ambassador of Polish culture".

Orchestra of the Karol Szymanowski Philharmonic in Krakow

The Krakow Philharmonic Orchestra started its activity in February 1945 as the first Polish symphonic orchestra after the Second World War. The ensemble has contributed significantly by performing works by Karol Szymanowski and Krzysztof Penderecki together with the mixed philharmonic choir and the boys' choir. The orchestra has performed in over 30 countries (including Iran, Japan, Canada, South Korea, Lebanon, Turkey and the USA), as well as at international festivals. The ensemble has performed several first performances of pieces by 20th century composers.

Polish Radio Choir – Luślawice

One of the best vocal ensembles in Poland. Composed of recognised vocalists – young people, full of energy and unlimited imagination – and experienced singers navigating the difficult vocal art with perfection and finesse. For over seventy-five years the choir has performed a repertoire that includes both a cappella music and vocal and instrumental forms. It has premiered works by the most significant contemporary composers, including Penderecki, Lutosławski, Górecki and Kilar.

Boys' Choir of the Krakow Philharmonic

The choir was founded in 1951 as an initiative of Józef Suwara – a pedagogue, musician and music aficionado. The Krakow Philharmonic Boys' Choir performs in philharmonic halls, in churches, for schools and at charity

concerts, presenting a varied repertoire, including pieces dedicated to the ensemble. On a number of occasions, the ensemble has been invited by Polish orchestras to perform together. The choir has been awarded a Grand Prix du Disque for their recording of the *St. Luke Passion*.

Krakow Philharmonic Ukrainian Boys' and Girls' Choir

The choir was established in June 2022 upon the initiative of the Krakow Philharmonic. The principal idea behind the choir's activity is to acquaint the audiences with the rich tapestry of Ukrainian culture, and to support the young singers' bond with their native traditions. Over the two years of their operation, the choir has participated in numerous high-profile artistic endeavours on the stage of the Krakow Philharmonic. The choir has also extensively toured around Poland, and was involved in the performance of Hans Krása's opera *Brundibár*.

Maciej Tworek – conductor

Maciej Tworek has performed in Europe, Asia and the Americas. In 2002, he began a conducting collaboration with Krzysztof Penderecki, which resulted in numerous projects, including the recording of Penderecki's complete symphonies and instrumental concertos with the Sinfonia Iuventus orchestra, conducting the Violin Concerto No. 2 "Metamorphosen" with soloist Anne-Sophie Mutter and Rundfunk Sinfonieorchester Berlin in 2018 (as part of celebrations of the composer's eighty-fifth birthday) and the ensuing tour of China with Anne-Sophie Mutter and the Sinfonia Varsovia orchestra.

Iwona Hossa – soprano

Iwona Hossa is considered one of the leading sopranos of her generation. The artist's domain is, above all, the precision and technical possibilities of an extremely versatile voice, an extraordinary purity of sound and a captivating timbre. Her vocal artistry has been admired in many places around the world, where she always charms audiences and gains critical acclaim. Hossa has performed many world premieres of pieces of Polish contemporary music. She has recorded twenty-seven CDs and DVDs, most of which have received prestigious phonographic awards.

Mariusz Godlewski – baritone

Graduate of the Academy of Music in Wrocław, where he studied under Bogdan Makal. He is the winner of numerous

national and international competitions. In 2002, he made his debut at the National Opera in Warsaw, where he sang the part of Pelleas in Debussy's opera *Pelleas and Melisande*. The artist has numerous main opera parts in his repertoire. He also performs songs composed by Schubert and Brahms as well as German and English Baroque music.

Artur Janda – bass

As a soloist, he has performed on most Polish philharmonic stages under the baton of distinguished conductors. He collaborates with the early music ensemble La Tempesta, among others, with whom he regularly performs and records. Artur Janda has an extensive oratorio repertoire. In 2018, he received the Fryderyk 2018 award in the Early Music – Album of the Year category for his recording of *Antonio Caldara: Maddalena ai piedi di Cristo*.

In 2019, 2020 and 2022, he was nominated for the Jan Kiepura Theatre Music Award in the “Best Opera Singer” category.

Krzysztof Gosztyła – narrator

A Polish film, theatre and dubbing actor. He has acted in films since his childhood; he made his first film appearance in *Do przerwy 0:1*. In the early 1970s, he studied at the Higher State School of Music in Warsaw; however, after two years, he passed the entrance exam to study in the Acting Department at the Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Higher School of Theatre in Warsaw. In the theatre, he made his debut as Pan in *Operetka [Operetta]* by Witold Gombrowicz directed by Maciej Prus on the stage of the Drama Theatre in Warsaw.

Krzysztof Gosztyła has acted at the following Warsaw theatres: Dramatic Theatre, Scena Prezentacje [Stage Presentations] Theatre, Polish Theatre, Na Woli [Wola] Theatre, Roma Musical Theatre, National Theatre, Teatr Wielki, Ateneum, Jewish Theatre and Rampa Theatre, as well as at the Krakow theatres: Bagatela and KTO Theatre.

He is a popular audiobook narrator.

Janusz Wierzgacz – preparation of the Karol Szymanowski Krakow Philharmonic Choir

A graduate of the Academy of Music in Krakow in choral conducting. In 2009–2012, he was a singer of the Polish Radio Choir in Krakow. Since 2010, as a conductor, he has been associated with the Jagiellonian University Academic Choir “Camerata Jagellonica”. Since 2017, Janusz Wierzgacz has also conducted the

Krakow Academic Choir of the Jagiellonian University. In 2020–2024, he was the head of the Krakow Opera Choir.

Dawid Ber – preparation of the Polish Radio Choir – Łusławice

Conductor, choirmaster, music theorist, teacher. Since 2008, he has been employed as the Chair of Music Education of the Academy of Music in Łódź, where he runs a class of choral conducting as a professor. He conducts the Chamber Choir of the Academy of Music in Łódź “Łodz Chamber Choir”, the “Vivid Singers” Chamber Choir, the “Lutnia” Male Choir in Warta and the Mixed Choir of the Baptist Church in Łódź. Together with his choirs, he has received several dozen awards and honourable mentions at numerous choral festivals and competitions in Poland and abroad.

Lidia Matynian – preparation of the Krakow Philharmonic Boys’ Choir

A choirmaster, graduate of the Academy of Music in Krakow, Professor of Musical Arts. For nearly 30 years, she has prepared the academic choir for both vocal and instrumental as well as concert performances. In 1993, she took over the Karol Szymanowski Philharmonic Boys’ Choir in Krakow. For her achievements, the artist has been awarded a Gold Cross of Merit, the Decoration of Honour Meritorious for Polish Culture, a Gloria Artis Silver Medal for Merit to Culture and the Order of the Smile.

Olena Yatskulynets – preparation of the Ukrainian Boys’ and Girls’ Choir of the Krakow Philharmonic Orchestra

Olena Yatskulynets graduated from the Faculty of Choral Conducting at the D. Bortnianski Music School in Sumy in 1996, qualifying as a music teacher. In 1996–2001, she studied at the Ukrainian National Tchaikovsky Academy of Music, where she obtained the diploma of Choral Conductor and Teacher of Choral Disciplines. Olena Yatskulynets served as Music Director of the Kyiv Academic Puppet Theatre (2011–2022) and Artistic Director of the Moravski Chamber Choir (2016–2022).

Organisers

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