



Karol Szymanowski.

Szymanowski, Karol Maciej (1882-1937)

by Douglas Blair Turnbaugh

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Revered as the father of Polish contemporary classical music, Karol Szymanowski unequivocally expresses homoeroticism in his music.

He was born at Timoshovska, Ukraine, on October 3, 1882. Although born in Russian territory, Szymanowski was of a noble Polish family.

The family estate was a center of musical activity, and, with his father as his teacher, Szymanowski's musical education began at an early age. A masterly pianist, he later studied privately in Warsaw, but was an autodidact in composition. His earliest work, influenced by Chopin and Scriabin, is lyrical, but dominated by sentimental melancholy.

In 1905 Szymanowski began to live abroad, as he continued his "self-education." The rich, talented, handsome young aristocrat was an ornament in the stupendous social whirl of pre-World War I Berlin, Leipzig, and Vienna.

With his friend Stefan Spiess, he visited Sicily in 1911 and Algiers and Tunis in 1914. Szymanowski, not unlike other European gay artists, such as Baron von Gloeden, Oscar Wilde, and André Gide, found the spectacle of unabashed boy-love in the less inhibited southern climate to be psychologically liberating and, thereby, an inspiration to his art.

Szymanowski celebrated his newly liberated sexuality in his music. After the Sicilian visit, the melancholy of his earlier work was vanquished by the joy that would be present throughout the rest of his creative life.

Homoeroticism is discernible in much of his music, especially in such works as "Love Songs of Hafiz" and "Third Symphony--Song of the Night, for tenor solo," a setting of a poem by the thirteenth-century Persian poet Rumi. Kryszynski and de la Motte-Sherman declare that Szymanowski's music is "unrivalled as a lyric song of a soul in love."

Szymanowski lived on his family's estate from 1914 until it was destroyed by the Bolsheviks in 1917. He then moved to Warsaw. He traveled in Europe and twice visited the United States.

Also a writer, between 1917 and 1919, Szymanowski devoted himself to composing his legendary novel "Efebos," of which only one chapter survives. Then in 1919, he met his fantasy ganymede in the person of a fifteen-year-old refugee from Moscow, Boris Kochno.

Boris was a precocious boy from a noble Russian family and a budding poet. Szymanowski fell deeply in love and wrote poems to him. His passion was for a time reciprocated.

However, unknown to Szymanowski, Boris also became the lover of the redoubtable Sergei Diaghilev. The pianist Artur Schnabel, a friend of Szymanowski, describes in his memoirs a chance meeting of the trio in

Paris--Szymanowski's pain, Kochno's chagrin, and Diaghilev's jealousy.

After the war, with pianist Ignace Paderewski as Prime Minister of a free Poland, Polish folk music became a factor in Szymanowski's music. The composer spent much of his time in the Podhale region, where a large community of friends, musicians, and artists was devoted to him.

He dealt with his spirituality--the guilt-inducing Catholic attitude toward homosexuality during his youth now mitigated by a Dionysian concept of Christianity--in his *Stabat Mater* (1928).

He was appointed rector of the Academy of Music in Warsaw in 1927, but intrigues, fueled by homophobia, caused him to resign in 1932.

In failing health, in 1934 Karol Szymanowski declared that there was one thing in his life he did not regret: he had loved many. He had been loved, too.

He died on March 29, 1937 at Lausanne, Switzerland.

UNESCO declared 1982 as the International Year of Karol Szymanowski.

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