

NFPMA 99161/2: WEINBERG BIOGRAPHY EXTRA PRINTABLE INFO:

In the late XXth century, in the atmosphere of the end of history¹, with the strong peaceful statement *Nie wieder Krieg*² resonating in the western world, exactly on the 26th of February 1996 **Mieczysław Weinberg** passed away in Moscow. The composer of 154 opuses, 7 operas, 22 symphonies, 17 string quartets, and around 150 songs among them, and plenty of film and even circus music³. He was the father of two daughters, husband of two wives, Jewish, Christian, Polish, Soviet, composer and pianist. Born in Warsaw on the 8th of December 1919, son of a violinist⁴ - Jewish immigrant from Chisinau⁵ - from early childhood immersed in the world of sounds. As a promising pianist at Warsaw Conservatory, student of the famous Polish pianist Józef Turczyński, he would have attended the Chopin International Competition with real chances to win it, had the competition taken place in 1940. Had an invitation promised by another famous pianist and composer, Józef Hoffman arrived on time⁶, he would have emigrated to the United States in 1939 to become someone completely different. Yet, History made him a refugee in September 1939. When Nazi Germany attacked Poland and were advancing on Warsaw, the only way of escape for many happened to be the east - not for long though, as the USSR invaded Poland a few years afterwards. Weinberg's emergency corridor led through Minsk - where he finished his musical studies, already as a composer⁷ - Tashkent, and eventually Moscow, where he settled, having survived the Holocaust as the only member of his family. Being still in Uzbekistan, in 1943 he managed to send the score of his *First Symphony* to Dmitri Shostakovich, which was followed by an official invitation to Moscow and the beginning of a close friendship between composers, that lasted for the next 32 years, being a great source of support and inspiration for both of them⁸.

Mieczysław Weinberg was not the type of dissident actively fighting for freedom, nor was he fully or actively supporting the Communist Party - of which he was never a member. In one of the late-life interviews with a Dutch journalist Doron Nagon he stated: *My music had no dissident character, and I am a Russian-Polish-Jewish composer*⁹.

Weinberg composed his songs throughout his whole life, in several different eras and three different languages: Polish, Russian and Yiddish. His first song cycle *Acacias* op.4 to the words of Julian Tuwim were composed during the

¹ Francis Fukuyama *The end of history?*, available online on <http://www.wesjones.com/eoh.htm> (access 19.05.2023).

² Käthe Kollwitz *Nie wieder Krieg*, Käthe Kollwitz Museum Köln, 1924. Available online: <https://www.kollwitz.de/plakat-nie-wieder-krieg> (access: 17.01.2025).

³ For a full list of works see for example Verena Mogl, *Juden, die ins Lied sich retten. Der Komponist Mieczysław Weinberg (1919-96) in der Sowjetunion*, Münster 2017, p. 385-438.

⁴ Antonina Klokova, *Werke in memoriam Holocaust-Verarbeitung im Instrumentalwerk Mieczysław Weinbergs im Kontext der sowjetischen Musik*, Hofheim 2023, p. 195.

⁵ David Fanning, Michelle Assay, Per Skans, *Mieczysław Weinberg. The Composer and his Music*, [manuscript], p. 21.

⁶ Ibidem p. 30.

⁷ He studied composition by Vasily Zolotaryov. See Ibidem p. 13.

⁸ See: David Fanning, *In search for freedom*, Hofheim 2010, p. 40-44.

⁹ Mieczysław Weinberg (interviewed by Doron Nagon), *De componist die niet bestond* [The composer who did not exist], „Algemeen Dagblad”, Rotterdam, 7.04.1994 quoted in: D. Fanning, M. Assay, P. Skans, op. cit. p. 487.

Second World War, in Minsk in June 1940. His last songs, ***From the lyric poetry of Afanasy Fet*** op.134 were composed in August 1981. Moreover, in July 1981, Weinberg finished his last Polish song, to the words of Elżbieta Szemplińska - *Souvenir* op.132 dedicated to the memory of his Mother. In that piece appears the *motif of home*, present already in one of his first compositions *2 Mazurkas* op.10a from 1933, composed still in Warsaw, dedicated to Józef Turczyński, which Weinberg had taken, along with very little, while fleeing from home in 1939. In that very last *Polish piece* he states and underlines his Polish legacy, the strongest root, he was proud of until the very end of his life - with the ability to speak fluent Polish, although he had few chances to practise it. He claimed not to know Yiddish at all¹⁰. While being arrested on the accusation of 'Jewish bourgeois nationalism' in 1953, he is believed to have said that the only bourgeois nationalism that he can be accused of is Polish, for he has some 2000 Polish books at home and knows no word in Yiddish¹¹.

His whole oeuvre is filled with connotations mainly from Jewish, but also from the Polish and Russian musical worlds. However, it should be rather seen as *the expression of full and rounded human being, and not the simple culmination of any national tradition*, as Daniel Elphick states¹².

Mieczysław Weinberg was a great witness of the World War II era, as well as the whole post-war time in the Soviet Union. His works transfer the heavy load of that time through the years into our modern reality. His musical oeuvre is *an extremely valuable testimony of the times in which he lived. It is a legacy unique in the history of the world's music literature*¹³.

¹⁰ He changed his mind on his knowledge of Yiddish throughout the years. See: Antonina Klokova, op. cit. p. 30-31.

¹¹ See: D. Fanning *Mieczyslaw Weinberg...* op. cit., p. 86-87.

¹² Daniel Elphick *Music behind the Iron Curtain: Weinberg and His Polish Contemporaries*, Cambridge 2019, p. 193.

¹³ Agnieszka Nowok-Zych, *Mieczysław Weinberg and the Category of Borderland*, „Kwartalnik Młodych Muzykologów UJ” no. 46 (3/2020), p. 49-50.