

Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra

The National Orchestra of Poland

The Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra gave its first concert on 5th November 1901 in the newly erected Philharmonic Hall. This inaugural concert was conducted by Emil Mlynarski, the Philharmonic's first Music Director and Principal Conductor and featured the world-famous pianist, composer and future statesman Ignacy Jan Paderewski. The all-Polish programme of this historic concert included Paderewski's Piano Concerto in A minor as well as works by Chopin, Moniuszko, Noskowski, Stojowski and Zelenski.

Warsaw Philharmonic's rapid rise of performance level soon attracted distinguished artists from all over the world. As early as pre-World War I and during the inter-war years it established itself as the main centre of musical life in Poland and one of the major musical institutions in Europe. Performances were given here by nearly all the famous conductors and soloists of the day including Claudio Arrau, Edvard Grieg, Arthur Honegger, Vladimir Horowitz, Bronislaw Huberman, Otto Klemperer, Sergei Prokofiev, Sergei Rachmaninoff, Maurice Ravel, Artur Rodzinski, Arthur Rubinstein, Pablo Sarasate and Richard Strauss.

During the first post-war years the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra was conducted by among others Olgierd Straszynski and Andrzej Panufnik. In January 1950 the post of Director and Principal Conductor was entrusted to Witold Rowicki, who embarked on establishing a new orchestra. Despite the difficult working conditions related to a lack of venue (concerts were given in various sport halls and theatres) thanks to Rowicki's efforts the orchestra regained its position as Poland's leading ensemble.

The opening of the new Philharmonic Hall in Jasna Street on the site earlier destroyed by German bombing raids took place on 21st February 1955. On that day Warsaw Philharmonic received the title of the National Philharmonic, highlighting its status as the leading musical institution of Poland.

During the years 1955-58 the orchestra's Director was Bohdan Wodiczko, a distinguished promoter of contemporary music who collaborated with among others Arnold Rezler and Stanislaw Skrowaczewski. The orchestral forces were transformed and enlarged. The enormous success enjoyed by performances of 20th century music led to the establishment at the National Philharmonic of the "Warsaw Autumn" International Festival of Contemporary Music, which in time became one of the most important festivals of its kind in the world.

In 1958 Witold Rowicki was once again appointed Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the Philharmonic, a post he held until 1977. The Orchestra's principal guest conductors at the time were Stanislaw Wislocki and Andrzej Markowski. During Rowicki's directorship foreign concert tours and performances in prestigious concert halls throughout the world became a permanent feature of the orchestra's artistic schedule.



On 1st July 1977, the post of Artistic Director and Principal Conductor was taken up by Kazimierz Kord who held this position till the centenary of the Philharmonic in 2001. From the beginning of his work with the orchestra he placed emphasis on augmenting the repertoire thanks to which alongside symphonic compositions, successive programmes of the artistic seasons featured large-scale vocal-instrumental and operatic works as well as many pieces of contemporary music.

New initiatives included the concert cycle “The National Philharmonic presents”, recorded live and released by Polskie Nagrania as well as concerts given by undergraduates of Warsaw’s Academy of Music. Together with Witold Lutoslawski, Kazimierz Kord put forward the idea of short contemporary music festivals centred on the concept of a rendezvous for various disciplines of the arts. The first of these festivals took place after the composer’s death and in his honour was named “Lutoslawski Forum”, since when it has been held annually, then bi-annually through to the jubilee ‘Lutoslawski Year’ of 2013.

From 2002 to 2013 the Managing and Artistic Director of the Warsaw Philharmonic was Antoni Wit, who continued the repertoire policy of his predecessor augmenting it by a greater presence of Polish music often performed by foreign artists. Under his baton ensembles of the Warsaw Philharmonic recorded over 50 albums, of these nearly 40 for Naxos. These recordings of mainly Polish composers (Karłowicz, Szymanowski, Lutoslawski, Penderecki, Gorecki and Kilar) received several awards, among them a Grammy in 2012. In August 2013 he concluded his tenure in a performance with the Warsaw Philharmonic (for the first time in its history) at the BBC Proms Festival in London.

From the 2013/14 season the post of Music and Artistic Director, responsible for the development of the Philharmonic’s ensembles and repertoire as well as choice of guest artists – was taken up by Jacek Kaspszyk. His historic “Warsaw Autumn” Festival concert in 2013, featuring the pianist Krystian Zimerman, became one of the highlights of the Lutosławski Year (programme: Lutoslawski’s Piano Concerto and Symphony No.3) and won the “Coryphaeus of Polish Music” Award in the category of “Event of the Year”. Jacek Kaspszyk also conducted the first concerts in the history of the Philharmonic to be streamed online. By the end of 2015 the Orchestra under Jacek Kaspszyk had recorded three CDs: for Warner Classics – music by Weinberg (2014), Brahms and Bach in Schönberg’s orchestral versions (2015), as well as for Deutsche Grammophon – Chopin’s works, with Ingolf Wunder as soloist (2015).

The symphony orchestra of the Warsaw Philharmonic has to its credit over 140 tours on five continents and has appeared in almost every major concert hall where it has been warmly received by audiences and praised by music critics for its excellent and dynamic performances. The orchestra has also performed at many prestigious international festivals among others in Vienna, Berlin, Prague, Bergen, Lucerne, Montreux, Moscow, Brussels, Florence, Bordeaux and Athens as well as the “La Folle Journée” festivals in Nantes, Bilbao, Lisbon and Tokyo. The National Philharmonic also regularly participates in the F. Chopin International Piano Competition, the “Warsaw Autumn” Contemporary Music Festival, the “Chopin and his Europe” Festival and the Ludwig van Beethoven Easter Festival. It records for Polish Radio, Polish and foreign record labels as well as film companies. Since 2016 the Warsaw Philharmonic has introduced regular online streaming of selected concerts.



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