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## **8th International Violin Making Symposium Poznań, 16 May 2025**

### **Seventy Years of Polish Artist Violin Maker Union**

In 2024, Polish Artist Violin Maker Union celebrated its seventieth anniversary – an event of major importance not only for violin makers themselves, but also for the whole of Polish musical culture.

Though the anniversary fell last year, we chose to commemorate this exceptional occasion only now, at the most appropriate moment, i.e. at the 15th International Henryk Wieniawski Violin Making Competition.

Bringing together most eminent masters of violin making, this internationally-recognised event constitutes a perfect platform for reflection on the accomplishments of our Union and its place in the world of music and the art of violin making.

This presentation is an opportunity to bring back the key moments in the seventy-year long history of the Union, to recall outstanding makers, as well as to take a look ahead – towards new generations of violin makers who vehemently continue this exceptional tradition.

Let us go back to the beginnings.

### **The Establishment of Polish Artist Violin Maker Association (SPAL)**

Post-war years were very difficult for Polish violin making. During the conflict, a great number of instruments had been destroyed, while others were looted and taken away. Most workshops simply ceased to exist. Construction of new instruments almost stopped. Shortages of supplies – resonant wood, basic accessories, violin making tools, professional literature – rendered performance of the violin making profession practically impossible. The remaining few violin making workshops were unable to meet the demand for luthier instruments from newly-established and developing musical institutions: philharmonic orchestras, music theatres and schools.

It was a revival of violin making – an artistic discipline of rich, centuries-long tradition in Poland – that appeared the only way to improve availability of stringed instruments at the time. Outstanding Polish violin players, composers, and art historians rushed to help violin makers, and seventy years ago came up with a motion to establish an organisation intended to bring violin makers together, which came to be known as Polish Artist Violin Maker Association.

In March 1953, during the proceedings of the Culture Council of the Polish Republic, celebrities of Polish violin music – Eugenia Umińska, Irena Dubiska, Wanda Wiłkomirska and Tadeusz Wroński – presented the Minister of Arts and Culture with a memorandum, in which they requested that special care be exercised over Polish artistic violin making, a discipline of centuries-old tradition and great achievements. Upon approval from the Minister, the Founding Committee of Polish Artist Violin Maker Association headed by Zdzisław Szulc,

custodian of the Museum of Musical Instruments in Poznań, was established in June that year. The violin maker Marian Wyka was appointed Secretary to the Committee, while the composer and violin making theoretician Zbigniew Wiszniewski – a member of the body. Several days later, the first meeting of the Committee was held at the National Museum in Poznań.

**On 23 and 24 April 1954**, the Founding Convention of the Association was held at the Column Hall of the Ministry of Arts and Culture in Warsaw.

The **twenty-nine founding members** adopted the Statutes which set out the main goals and objectives of the newly-established Association.

**Feliks Konstanty Pruszek** was elected the Association's first chairman. **Zdzisław Szulc and Józef Radzikowski became deputy chairmen, Marian Wyka – the secretary, while Wanda Wiłkomirska was elected member of the Board. Tadeusz Wroński** became the first chairman of the Membership Committee.

The Convention adopted resolutions setting out the objectives of the Board's operation.

A concert by the greatest luminaries of Polish musical life performing on instruments built by Polish makers added splendour to the event.

Since the 1954 Founding Convention, the association has had five chairmen:

- **Feliks Konstanty Pruszek**, chairman between 1954 and 1961,
- followed by **Józef Radzikowski**, who ran the organisation for one term – between 1961 and 1964,
- **Prof. Włodzimierz Kamiński** chaired the association for twenty-nine years – between 1964 and 1993,
- succeeded by **Krzysztof Pawikowski**, chairman between 1993 and 2005.
- The present chairman is **Marek Pielaszek**, who has been at the helm of the organisation since 2005.

For lack of its own premises in the first year of its operation, the Association operated from the private apartment of its secretary Marian Wyka. However, it was already in March 1955, that the organisation was assigned the premises at 16/18 Krakowskie Przedmieście street, which it has been using until today.

**In 1980, the Association changed its name to Związek Polskich Artystów Lutników (ZPAL), or Polish Artist Violin Maker Union**

From the very onset, the Board of the Association – a body, as a matter of fact, still under construction - began very active operation. In the initial period, SPAL frequently relied on the great authority, support and involvement of its founder-members – the abovementioned professors, violinists and composers.

## **National and International Violin Making Competitions**

The first prestigious event attended by Polish violin makers was the **International String Quartet Competition in Liege (Belgium)** in 1954. Even though no individual Polish maker was successful, Marian Wyka, one of the participants, indicates that eighteen countries to have participated in the Competition learned about the newly-established Polish artistic association.

Participation in all editions of the competition - 1954, 1957, 1960, 1963, 1967, 1972 – brought SPAL members international recognition.

It was already in 1957 that a Polish maker – **Marian Wyka** – was invited to sit on the jury of the International Competition in Liege.

The first Polish maker to be awarded a prize at an international competition was **Franciszek Mardulą**, who found recognition for his viola in Ascoli Piceno in 1959.

A singularly important event in the early phase of SPAL's operation was the organisation of the **1st National Violin Making Competition** in the category of the violin, which was held in May 1955 in Warsaw. The aim of the event was to determine the overall condition and level of violin making in post-war Poland. Forty-six makers who submitted as many as one hundred and forty-five instruments took part in the competition. Despite high attendance levels, quality of the instruments was – in the organisers' opinion – very poor.

The event made it possible to register and select violin makers whose skills deserved recognition, and soon a sizeable group of them joined the ranks of SPAL.

## **International Henryk Wieniawski Violin Making Competition**

The idea to hold an international violin making competition germinated during 2nd International H. Wieniawski Violin Competition in Poznań in 1952.

The prime mover and organiser of the undertaking was **Zdzisław Szulc**, founder and custodian of the Museum of Musical Instruments.

In 1957, **1st International H. Wieniawski Violin Making Competition** was held in Poznań. Organised every five years by H. Wieniawski Musical Society of Poznań in collaboration with SPAL, today the competition is one of the oldest international violin making events in the world.

In the 1957 edition, Polish maker **Eugeniusz Gosiewski** was awarded fourth prize.

The first Polish maker to win International H. Wieniawski Violin Making Competition was **Józef Bartoszek** from Zakopane, who came first in the **5th edition of the event** held in 1977.

Winners of the next edition of the Competition:

- 1986 Jan Bobak – 1st prize
- 1991 Jerzy Piórko – 1st prize  
Tadeusz Słodyczka – 2nd prize  
Stanisław Król – 3th prize  
Antoni Krupa – 4th prize
- 1996 Krzysztof Mróz – 1st and 3th prize
- 2001 Norbert Kijanka – 2nd prize  
Robert Loska – 3th prize
- 2016 Ji Hwan Park – 1st and 2nd prize  
Krzysztof Krupa – 2nd prize
- 2021 Piotr Pielaszek – 1st and 2nd prize  
Jan Jakub Lipiński – 3th prize

### **National Violin Making Competitions**

Bearing in mind immense deficit of child instruments in Poland, on a motion from the Board of SPAL, and in collaboration with the Association, in 1979 H. Wieniawski Musical Society of Poznań organised **1st National Z. Szulc Violin Making Competition**. Two more editions of the event were staged in 1984 and in 1989. All editions were held in the category of child instruments: 1/4, 1/2, 3/4 violins, as well as 1/2 and 3/4 cellos.

A. Stradivari's 250th death anniversary was commemorated with the organisation in 1987 of the **National A. Stradivari Violin Making Competition** in the category of 3/4 violin and 3/4 cello. A violin making seminar dedicated to Stradivari's art attended by Cremona-based makers accompanied the event.

### **Prof. W. Kamiński National Violin Making Competition**

In 1994, upon the death of **Prof. Włodzimierz Kamiński**, the Union's chairman, the **National Violin Making Competition was named after him**. The event is organised by I. J. Paderewski Academy of Music in Poznań and Polish Artist Violin Maker Union. Held at five-year intervals, the six editions of National Prof. W. Kamiński Violin Making Competition in Poznań were organised in 1994, 1999, 2004, 2009, 2014 and 2019.

The 6th edition of the Competition was extended to encompass students of violin making schools from all over the world.

### **International Success of Our Members**

Polish makers have successfully (incl. highest accolades) participated in a number of international events:

Cremona: **Danuta Pawlikowska, Tadeusz Słodyczka, Krzysztof Krupa, Marcin Krupa, Piotr Pielaszek, Paweł Kubacka**

Mittenwald: **Krzysztof Mróz, Tadeusz Słodyczka, Piotr Pielaszek, Klemens Siatkowski**

Mirecourt: **Piotr Pielaszek, Paweł Kubacka**

Malta: **Bogdan Sikora, Michał Różak**

Moscow: **Wojciech Łukasz, Krzysztof Mróz, Marcin Krupa, Krzysztof Krupa, Tadeusz Słodyczka**

London: **Marcin Krupa**

Nachod: **Tadeusz Słodyczka, Krzysztof Krupa**

Prague: **Tadeusz Słodyczka, Piotr Pielaszek**

Dolny Kubin: **Tadeusz Słodyczka, Michał Różak**

Beijing: **Krzysztof Krupa, Marcin Krupa**

**Władysław Stopka, Krzysztof Krupa, Marcin Krupa, Stanisław Kiernoziak, Piotr Pielaszek, Paweł Kubacka** have also enjoyed success at competitions in the USA (Arizona, Baltimore, Portland, Cleveland, Indianapolis).

On several occasions, our members won awards for the best acoustic properties of instruments, prizes for violin-making qualities, as well as other honours and distinctions.

### **Exhibitions**

1955 – Violin making exhibition at International Poznań Fair

1995 - "Polska Sztuka Lutnicza"(Polish Art of Violin Making) exhibition at the National Philharmonic in Warsaw to mark 13th International F. Chopin Piano Competition

1988 – Exhibition at M. Glinka Museum of Musical Culture in Moscow

1993 - 2006 – Exhibitions to mark International Music Courses in Łańcut

2004 - "Apollo skrzypce dał" (Apollo Gave the Violin) exhibition at the Wilanów Palace in Warsaw

2023 – Exhibition to accompany Włodzimierz Kamiński Festival of Violin Making Art.

### **Seminars and Violin Making Symposia**

Violin making seminars have always constituted a very important aspect of ZPAL's activity. They have covered a range of subjects, mainly the principles of instrument and bow construction, maintenance, as well as acoustic topics. A lot of attention has been devoted to questions of varnishing the instruments, methods of varnish application, and all other aspects of this difficult stage in the process of creating an instrument.

The first violin making seminar was held in 1965 at SPAL's premises in Warsaw.

More than ninety seminars, scholarly sessions and courses have been held over the sixty-year period. A number of those were either international symposia or ones featuring international speakers, which mainly accompanied the Poznań-

based International H. Wieniawski Violin Making Competitions, as well as the National Violin Making Competitions. The list of illustrious masters of the violin making trade who have given lectures features such names as K. Roy, G. B. Morassi, G. Nicolini, G. Scolari, St. Conia, A. Capela, P. Špidlen, R. Hargrave, P. Robin, T. Pilař, M. Tiella, P. Guillaume (bows), J. Dilworth, to name just a few.

With improving members' professional qualifications in mind, the Union has held a number of courses in Zakopane, as well as various training sessions, such as expert courses, or bow construction events.

In 1986, it was **Jan Pawlikowski**, while in 1995 **Jan Kudanowski** who ran bow construction courses. The 2010 Seminar in Karpacz featured an extraordinary event, i.e. a practical demonstration of bow construction presented by a leading German bow maker **Rudolf Neudörfer**.

It was also Prof. Włodzimierz Kamiński who ran courses for experts.

### **International Collaboration**

Throughout its entire history, the Union established and maintained broad contacts with violin making organisations from other countries. Observer visits to international competitions were organised for our members; these included events in Moscow, Mittenwald, Sofia, Hradec Kralove, Paris, London and Cremona. Upon return, the makers shared their reflections with others at subsequent seminars. Intense contacts with the world violin making community not only made it possible for our makers to become familiar with the newest violin making trends and technologies, but also provided them with opportunities to gain access to masterpieces by old masters. A great number of ZPAL members had an opportunity to visit Moscow, where they were able to see and inspect extraordinary instruments – works by old Italian masters kept at the Moscow-based Gosscollection, or Russian National Museum of Music.

Members of ZPAL have been invited to take part in seminars abroad, or in various violin-making celebratory events. Invitations issued by foreign partners to our members to sit on juries of various international competitions are proof of recognition of the latter's expertise and knowledge. Polish makers have sat on the juries:

- Marian Wyka – Liege (twice),
- Prof. Wł. Kamiński – Cremona, Moscow, Hradec Kralowe, Sofia,
- Jan Pawlikowski – Prague, Hradec Kralowe and Moscow,
- Józef Bartoszek – Freiburg,
- Andrzej Łapa – Nachod and Moscow,
- Tadeusz Słodyczka – Cremona, Beijing, Malta, Nachod, Dolny Kubin
- Jan Bobak – Dolny Kubin.

## Violin Making Schooling

One cannot overestimate the activities taken by the Association and its members to promote the idea of establishing a system of violin making schooling in Poland. It was already at the Founding Convention in 1954 that Prof. Tadeusz Wroński suggested establishment of the violin making department in one of the higher schools of music.

It was mainly owing to Franciszek Marduła's efforts that the Secondary School of Fine Arts in Zakopane began teaching violin makers as early as 1952.

With support from SPAL, Secondary Technical School of Stringed Instrument Construction was founded in Nowy Targ in 1959. Assisted by his alumni, the person to have put so much effort in the very establishment of the school, i.e. master Marduła, became its workshop manager. Members of the Association – **Władysław Bachleda, Andrzej Janik, Józef Bartoszek** and **Jan Łucek** – taught vocational subjects. The School operated until 1976, while Jan Łucek continued to teach the profession at the Secondary School of Fine Arts in Zakopane, where violin making schooling was reactivated owing to Franciszek Marduła's persistency.

Prof. Włodzimierz Kamiński and Jadwiga Kaliszewska's efforts made Poznań an important centre of violin making schooling. **In 1973**, five students began education at State Secondary School of Music, while our members – Włodzimierz Kamiński, Antoni Krupa, and later Andrzej Łapa and Władysław Baranowski – became teachers.

**In 1978**, various measures and efforts taken by Prof. W. Kamiński, Chairman of the Association, made establishment of a violin making class at I.J. Paderewski Academy of Music in Poznań possible. Currently, twenty students take tuition here. Besides teaching, the Chair of Artistic Violin Making also runs research programmes.

Though at present, violin making classes are held in rather demanding conditions, we do, however, remain optimistic. There are realistic prospects in the near future to move to a modern, specially designed facility. The new space will not only improve work comfort, but above all will offer better conditions in which to run classes and carry out ambitious research projects thus contributing to the development of Polish violin making.

## Closing Remarks

The seventieth anniversary of the Polish Violin Maker Union is a splendid opportunity to cast a proud look back at the vast achievements of the organisation, as well as to look with hope into the future, which – although full of new challenges – also abounds in new opportunities.

May this anniversary be a sign of respect for the masters of the art, as well as inspiration for young artists, who – with their passion and talent – are going to further the beautiful tradition of Polish violin making.