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THE PHENOMENON OF WITOLD MALISZEWSKI: A VIEW FROM THE 21ST CENTURY

The study examines the multifaceted legacy of Witold Maliszewski (1873–1939), an eminent Polish composer, pedagogue, and musical public figure, whose enduring impact and achievements have remained underrepresented in contemporary scholarship, particularly in Western musicological discourse. Drawing on the authors' ongoing research and newly uncovered archival materials from Poland and Ukraine, the study reconstructs Maliszewski's life and contributions — highlighting his foundational role in interwar Polish musical

culture and his enduring influence as a teacher of figures such as Mykola Vilinsky and Witold Lutosławski. By integrating music analysis, pedagogical legacy, reception history, and institutional context, the paper addresses persistent historiographical omissions and repositions Maliszewski within the broader European musical landscape.

The Relevance of the Study. Research into the life and legacy of Witold Maliszewski is of particular significance to musicology, as it addresses a longstanding lacuna in scholarly literature and seeks to correct historical imbalances in the remembrance of musical heritage. As a composer, conductor, and pedagogue active across both Ukraine and Poland, Maliszewski's career offers valuable insight into the artistic and intellectual currents that shaped early 20th-century music. His compositional output, especially works created in Warsaw, synthesizes elements of late Romanticism with a strong grounding in Polish musical traditions, while resisting the emerging tensions of modernist idioms. His influence as a teacher — most notably to Mykola Vilinsky and later Witold Lutosławski — warrants renewed attention, particularly in terms of his pedagogical philosophy and the transmission of musical values. As a founder of the Odessa Conservatory and co-founder of the Chopin Institute, and as a leading figure in Warsaw's institutional musical life, Maliszewski played a formative role in fostering generations of musicians at a time when national music was being actively redefined. Reexamining his legacy allows for a more nuanced reconstruction of Eastern European musical modernity and helps reinsert previously marginalized or suppressed voices into the broader canon of European music history. Despite the breadth of his achievements, Maliszewski remains markedly underrepresented in contemporary scholarship, making this inquiry both timely and essential. In a broader cultural context, the research also reflects the authors' fascination with the vibrant cultural landscape of interwar Warsaw — an epoch whose brief on historical scale but a radiant artistic chapter, is too often unfairly overshadowed by the contemporaneous glamour of the Parisian scene.

Main Objective of the Study. This study seeks to reestablish Witold Maliszewski's rightful place within the broader narrative of European music history by dismantling long-standing myths and addressing

ideologically driven distortions that have marginalized his legacy. While earlier accounts have often reduced Maliszewski to a merely conservative or peripheral figure, such portrayals collapse under scholarly scrutiny — an issue made even more troubling when these narratives align with Soviet-era efforts to obscure or discredit his contributions. Advancing the authors' ongoing research, the paper undertakes a critical reexamination of both Polish and Ukrainian archival and other sources — including documents from the Mykola Vilinsky family archive — alongside a broader musicological and objective historical analysis. A central objective is to identify and rectify enduring historiographical distortions, particularly those stemming from uncritical reliance upon Soviet or post-Soviet narratives, which continue to shape even some Western scholarship and, in some instances, perpetuate circular reasoning. The study also aims to integrate Ukrainian, Polish, and Western perspectives into a coherent and factually grounded account.

Methodology: Temporal and Aesthetic Dynamics. This study adopts a multi-layered methodological framework aimed at transforming a fragmented, often regionally constrained view of Witold Maliszewski into a coherent and critically grounded historical narrative. The approach combines microhistorical reconstruction with broader sociopolitical, cultural, and aesthetic analysis. Local archival findings — such as the persecution of Maliszewski's family or his institutional appointments — are embedded within wider European and global dynamics, such as the cultural crisis of 1908 or the redefinition of national musical identities.

The authors employ a unified, systematic mode of inquiry that resists ideological distortion and historiographical inertia. At the core of this methodology lies the integration of ontic reconstruction (fact-based archival work) with epistemic interpretation (theoretical and contextual understanding), enabling a balance between documented evidence and reflective analysis. Importantly, the research seeks to overcome parochial or reductive treatments of Maliszewski's role by articulating a more generalizable conceptual model — one that situates his contributions not only within Polish and Ukrainian contexts, but also within the broader framework of European music history. In doing so, the study reflects a commitment to reconstructing a more complete,

intellectually rigorous picture of artistic continuity and disruption across early 20th-century musical modernity.

Main Results. This study positions Witold Maliszewski as a pivotal, though long-underrecognized, figure in European music history. His life and work provide a compelling case study for understanding the mechanisms through which certain artistic legacies are canonized while others are marginalized or almost forgotten. The findings of this research can be summarized in several key areas:

1. Maliszewski's Compositional Method and Aesthetic Position.

Maliszewski's oeuvre reveals a distinctive synthesis of late-Romantic expressiveness and Polish national idioms, integrated with structural rigor and formal clarity. His works resist the dominant aesthetic movements of his time — particularly modernist and avant-garde agendas — while maintaining a high level of technical and emotional sophistication. This aesthetic stance was not merely conservative but consciously rooted in artistic integrity and cultural continuity.

2. Pedagogical Innovation and Institutional Legacy.

Maliszewski developed a unique pedagogical approach, especially in the teaching of musical form, which had a profound influence on subsequent generations of musicians. His students, including Mykola Vilinsky and Witold Lutosławski, testify to the reach of his educational philosophy. As the founder of the Odessa Conservatory, co-founder of the Chopin Institute, and a central figure in the musical life of interwar Warsaw, his institutional work laid crucial foundations for musical education in Eastern Europe and beyond.

3. Historiographical Correction and Cultural Recontextualization.

By critically examining Polish, Ukrainian, and Western sources — many of which have perpetuated distorted or ideologically influenced narratives — this study identifies and corrects longstanding historiographical biases. It challenges the portrayal of Maliszewski as a marginal or overly conservative figure, particularly where such portrayals align with Soviet-era attempts to suppress some aspects of Polish national culture.

In conclusion, the research reaffirms Maliszewski's rightful place in the broader European musical canon. His contributions — as composer, pedagogue, and institution builder — extend far beyond

regional significance. They represent a vital thread in the fabric of 20th-century musical modernity, grounded in cultural identity and pedagogical excellence.

Witold Maliszewski: A Contemporary perspective on his Life and Legacy. Witold Maliszewski (1873–1939) was born 150 years ago — a milestone commemorated on July 20, 2023. The Polish composer stands as one of the key figures in the development of music in Eastern Europe during the first half of the 20th century. Although his work and influence have largely been overshadowed by the political and cultural shifts of the Soviet era, a closer examination of his life and career reveals his significant contributions to Ukrainian, Polish and European music history. His compositions, educational innovations, and the role as a founder of musical institutions make him a compelling subject for research and reassessment. This paper explores Maliszewski's life, legacy, and cultural significance, emphasizing his unique place in European music, his educational impact, and the historiographical distortions that have shaped his posthumous reputation.

Early Life and Education. Witold Maliszewski was born on July 20, 1873, in Mohyliv-Podilskyi, a town that was then part of the Russian Empire, now in Ukraine. He was born into a Polish noble family, a background that would later influence his identity and the trajectory of his career. His father, Józef Maliszewski, was a Polish patriot, whose participation in the January Uprising (1863) led to persecution by the Tsarist authorities. Later, this forced the family to relocate to various parts of the Russian Empire, shaping the young Maliszewski's early experiences.

Maliszewski initially pursued his musical studies under Mikhail Ippolitov-Ivanov in Tiflis, then the Russian Empire. He graduated from the Imperial Military Medical Academy and studied mathematics at the Saint Petersburg University. But his passion for music led him to shift his focus. He entered the Saint Petersburg Conservatory in 1898, where he studied composition under the guidance of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Alexander Glazunov (musical forms) and music theory with August Bernhardt. These formative years provided him with a robust classical foundation that would later illuminate his work as both a composer and educator.

Career and Educational Impact. After completing his studies in 1902, Maliszewski's career took a significant turn. He was appointed as the director of the Odesa musical school of the Russian Musical Society in 1908, which set the stage for his future contributions to musical education. In 1913, he founded the Odesa Conservatory, where he would serve as rector and professor of composition until 1921. Maliszewski's time in Odesa was marked by his dedication to nurturing a new generation of musicians — among them Emil Gilels, David Oistrakh, and Sviatoslav Richter (who was connected to the conservatory through his father) — figures who would later go on to shape the course of 20th-century music. His distinguished composition student Mykola Vilinsky, a renowned Ukrainian composer and pedagogue, greatly benefited from Maliszewski's mentorship and, as Maliszewski's artistic and intellectual heir, went on to become a prominent figure in Ukrainian music.

Following the turbulence of the Russian Revolution and the political upheavals in Ukraine, Maliszewski moved to Warsaw in 1921. His arrival in Poland marked a new chapter in his career, where he continued to make significant contributions to music education.

In Warsaw Maliszewski was among of the founders of the Chopin Institute in Warsaw (1934). He held the position of professor at the Warsaw Conservatory of Music (1921–1925 and 1931–1939), was the director of the Warsaw Musical Society (1925–1927) and at the same time the director of the Chopin School of Music in Warsaw. Maliszewski also served as Chairman of the jury for the First Chopin Competition (1927) and headed the Music Department at the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Education (Poland) (1927–1934). Among his most notable students were Witold Lutosławski, Andrzej Panufnik (class of musical forms). Lutosławski, one of Poland's most famous composers, recalled Maliszewski's lectures on musical form as highly influential, praising the depth and clarity of his teaching. Lutosławski and Panufnik would later achieve great success by establishing themselves as the world's leading symphonists.

Contributions to Music Composition. The composer's creative output is multifaceted and complex; his style and aesthetic doctrine resist simplistic schemes — particularly those that assess talent

and mastery primarily through the lens of prevailing trends or the so-called notion of ‘progressiveness’. Maliszewski’s oeuvre spans several genres, including symphonies, operas, ballets, and chamber music. His symphonic works, including his four symphonies, are some of his most enduring contributions. Notably, his Fourth Symphony, Op. 21, composed in the aftermath of World War I, is a poignant reflection of the rebirth of the Polish nation and showcases his skill in integrating nationalistic themes within a symphonic context. His Piano Concerto in B-flat minor, Op. 29 (1938), also stands out as a testament to his ability to blend formal complexity with emotional depth.

In addition to his symphonic and orchestral compositions, Maliszewski composed opera-ballets such as *Syrena* (1927) and *Boruta* (1929). These works demonstrate his innovative use of the stage and his ability to integrate narrative and music in ways that were distinctive for the time. His incorporation of Polish folk elements into his music, particularly in works like *Fantazja kujawska* (1928), highlights his commitment to the nationalistic movement in music that was gaining momentum in Poland and Eastern Europe during the interwar period.

Personality. Contemporaries held Maliszewski in high esteem for his talent, professionalism, and natural charisma. According to those who knew him, even before his return to Poland, he always carried with him the unique and unmistakable aura of Polish noble identity. This inner nobility, expressed through quiet dignity influenced his interactions with students and colleagues alike. It shaped the atmosphere of his teaching, where discipline, refinement, and a deep sense of artistic purpose coexisted.

It was Maliszewski who, when facing imminent danger to himself and his loved ones in Odesa, which had fallen to the Bolsheviks, made a courageous attempt to rescue Mykola Vilinsky and his family. It was Maliszewski who offered Witold Lutosławski free tuition — on the condition that he, in turn, would one day help younger musicians. It was Maliszewski who first discerned the talent of the young Andrzej Panufnik and instilled in him confidence by remarking that compositional individuality was the rarest of gifts — and that Panufnik possessed it. Lutosławski, in numerous interviews, expressed deep admiration

for his teacher, praising his unwavering integrity and artistic ideals, and referring to him as ‘a crystal person’.

Recognition and Legacy. Despite his significant achievements, Maliszewski’s reputation suffered during the Soviet era. His works were suppressed in the Soviet Union, and the Odesa Conservatory, which he had founded, was renamed after Antonina Nezhdanova in 1950, erasing his legacy from the institution he had built. This suppression, coupled with the larger ideological shifts in Eastern Europe, the Cold War’s reductive historiography, post-Soviet research stagnation contributed to the curious historical amnesia regarding his legacy and his oeuvre in the decades following his death in 1939.

Nevertheless, his influence can be seen in the works of his students, especially Lutosławski, who carried forward the traditions of rigorous musical form and deep intellectual engagement with the strong modern idiom in his compositions. The rehabilitation of Maliszewski’s legacy has been slow but ongoing, as scholars and musicians alike seek to reintroduce his music to contemporary audiences.

Ideological Distortions and Historiographical Challenges. If Ronald Reagan’s famous remark ‘Trust by verify’ has any application beyond the realm of politics, it applies first and foremost to Soviet musicology. One of the most challenging aspects of researching Maliszewski’s life and legacy is the impact of Soviet and post-Soviet historiography. Maliszewski, like many of his contemporaries, faced ideological distortions that shaped how his life and work were remembered. In the Soviet Union, the authorities marginalized artists who did not conform to the political requirements of the state. Furthermore, the political climate in Eastern Europe during the Cold War led to a redefinition of many artists’ legacies, with some being repressed entirely, while others were distorted to fit a particular ideological framework.

The historiographical distortions surrounding Maliszewski’s life reflect broader trends in the interpretation of Eastern European music history, where superficial views often took precedence over objective historical analysis. These distortions have made it difficult for scholars to fully appreciate the breadth of his contributions. However, as scholars

revisit the period with a more nuanced understanding of the political and cultural forces at play, Maliszewski's legacy is being restored.

Conclusion. Witold Maliszewski's life and work occupy an important place in European music history, particularly within the context of early 20th-century Eastern European music. His contributions to music education, his compositions, and his role as a mentor to future generations of musicians have left an indelible mark on the cultural landscape of Ukraine, Poland and beyond. Although his legacy was suppressed during the Soviet era, the ongoing reevaluation of his work and the recognition of his influence on composers like Lutosławski suggest that Maliszewski's place in the pantheon of European music is being rightfully restored. His music, deeply rooted in both the national traditions of Poland and the broader European musical heritage, deserves to be rediscovered by contemporary audiences, allowing his artistic achievements to be fully appreciated for generations to come.

When we reflect on the life and legacy of an extraordinary figure like Witold Maliszewski, time reveals a paradoxical virtue: the more it passes, the clearer and more pristine our image of such a personality becomes. What once may have been obscured by political shifts or cultural neglect now stands in sharper contrast — underscoring his true significance, perhaps even his greatness. The distinguished life of Witold Maliszewski belongs among the brightest chapters in the history of cultural exchange between two nations. In our view, this is a historic opportunity to break the cycle of injustice and omission — a moment that must not be missed.

We should bow in reverence to the noble memory of an eminent Polish musician who devoted his life to the highest artistic ideals and to raising generations of musical talent in both Ukraine and Poland. The authors believe that such a tribute is long overdue.

Keywords: Witold Maliszewski's Life and Legacy, History of the Odessa Conservatory, History of the Chopin Institute, History of the Chopin Piano Competition, interwar Warsaw, Mykola Vilinsky's Life and Legacy, Witold Lutosławski's Life and Legacy, music pedagogy, Polish music, Eastern Europe, archival research.



1. Польські повстанці під Ковелем. «Le Monde illustrè» від 11 квітня 1863 року (№ 313, с. 233)

14
MUSICAL COURIER
January 26, 1928


Ravel Predicts a Return to Melody

Maurice Ravel is in America. That is a fact of importance so great that for the moment it seems to overshadow other things. To have with us a musician who for the past generation has been recognized as one of the greatest composers in the world is a rare privilege that no music lover is likely to underestimate.

Ravel is a man who has apparently shunned publicity. It is a well known fact that in his native France he is a difficult man to meet, a man who has no very warm welcome for the average newspaper interviewer, and who for the past twenty-five or thirty years has worked quietly along at his calling producing one gem after another, and only occasionally coming to the foreground to take part in or to superintend their presentation.

People who think of Ravel are likely to think of him in whatever way his life and work have particularly appealed to them individually. To some music lovers he was best known by his splendid piano compositions—his *Jeu d'eau*, his waltzes, the three poems of *Gaspard de la nuit*; to others he will be recalled for his *Rhapsodie Espagnole*, his orchestra waltzes; to others again, his string quartet, his songs, his orchestra pieces, or his music for the stage will make the greatest appeal. However that may be, it is sure that everyone will know Ravel from one side or another and will have found something in the general trend of his music that accounts for his universal reputation.

Ravel very courteously received an interviewer of the *Musica* Gazette a few days after his arrival in New York. Unfortunately, it was necessarily a brief interview, for rehearsing has been necessary for his American appearance with the artists who are to assist him, and Lisa Roma, the soprano who is doing his songs throughout this tour, came in for rehearsal while the interview was in progress. However, a few interesting ideas were received and one obtained a general picture of Ravel as he is today. A description of him may not be out of place. He is small and slight. His hair is getting gray. He has strong features and a definite, incisive way of expressing himself, though he appears to be inclined to take things from their humorous side. By way of starting a conversation Ravel asked the interviewer what he had to talk about, and the interviewer replied, "Everything. Music of the past, present and the future." Mr. Ravel laughingly said that he could speak for the music of the past and the music of the present, but as for the future, that was beyond his prediction.



And yet he did predict, and his prediction was that there would be a revolution toward melody. In fact, he pointed out that he himself had already started a revolution toward melody, and although the experiments that were begun in the last decade of the nineteenth century in excessive harmonization were still being tried, yet if one looked a little deeper one must perceive that the harmonic concept was running its course and reaching its end. He pointed out that in Debussy's quartet the tendency was almost entirely harmonic, while in his own he turned definitely to melody (Debussy's string quartet was first heard in 1892 and Ravel's quartet was written ten years later). It may be well to indicate at this point that Debussy's trend was more and more towards the harmonic, what was known in those days as impressionism. Ravel has definitely escaped from impressionism, if it is an escape, which is a question which cannot be argued here. However that may be, Ravel allied himself with the melodists and he believes that the music of the future will be melodic music.

At the same time Ravel does not deny or ridicule present experiments in harmony. He feels that music advances in a jerky manner, going beyond its peak in a series of experiments and then reverting to something more useful, enriched by the efforts of the experimenters. He points out that France, where the impressionistic school had its birth, and its greatest strength has been the least influenced by Schoenberg and the school of dissonance. He also points out that the school of modern France has influenced music the world over and has had, particularly, a great influence on the harmonization of popular music.

Speaking of popular music, Ravel is intensely interested in jazz. He says it is the most important innovation of the present time, the one music of the world which is establishing something definitely new and definitely national. Speaking of his own music, of which the last movement is a "Blue," he says that people find it amusing but that it was not intended to be amusing. To him the general trend of our American music is galling, a yearning towards something unperceived and unexpressed, but still poignantly desired. The interviewer remarked that it was impossible for the American to see in jazz what the European saw in it, and that so far as our experience has gone the people of

continental Europe have shown themselves unable to write real jazz. To that Ravel replied that we were still treating jazz as frank folk music, but that in Europe they were treating it as material for serious composition, and he said that this was exactly what took place in the days of chais or composition, that the sarabande, or the minuet, or gigue of the classic composer were not the same as those dances as they rose among the people. It seems, unless the interviewer misunderstood what Ravel intended to say, that the composers of Europe would take jazz just as they have taken folk songs for the basis of serious works, such as Spanish or Hungarian rhapsodies, Italian fantasias, and so on. At all events, the color and the rhythm and the spirit of jazz appear to Ravel as entirely new, of extraordinary interest, and of the greatest value as the basis for serious composition.

He said another thing on this same subject that is of interest. He pointed out that although America is made up of people from all sorts of countries, it has made for itself a distinct personality of its own, and that in exactly the same way American popular music, which is made up of influences from everywhere, has a personality that is absolutely and distinctly its own. He says that it is ridiculous to attempt to find out where jazz came from or to give any individual source the credit for it; just as ridiculous as to give any particular source the sole credit for America's striking personality. It is quite impossible, according to Ravel, to explain the derivation of jazz or the derivation of what is recognizable to any foreigner as Americanism.

Naegele Soloist with American Orchestral Society

On January 30 the American Orchestral Society will present Charles Naegele, American pianist, as the feature of its program. Mr. Naegele will play the Saint-Saens Concerto No. 5 in F major. Of this concerto is very little heard; in fact, it is the only one of Saint-Saens' concertos which he himself did not play for the American tour a few years ago. For though it is, perhaps, the most brilliant of the Saint-Saens concertos, it nevertheless requires extremely delicate and rapid finger work. From the last movement comes the principal material and theme for Saint-Saens' brilliant concert study, the *Toccata*.

William Martin's Success in Faust

The rapidly growing success of William Martin, young American tenor, in the part of Faust at the Paris Opera, is attracting general attention. Engaged for a few months in the past, he has now been asked to sign a contract until next summer. The number of roles assigned him is increasing, and the fact that he is repeating them frequently is the most eloquent proof of satisfaction.

Martin gives an excellent performance of Faust. His melodizing is impeccable and his acting convincing. On the high notes his voice is especially good, the tones being well produced and clear. His diction likewise is excellent.

2. Фрагмент сторінки з «Musical Courier» за січень 1928 року

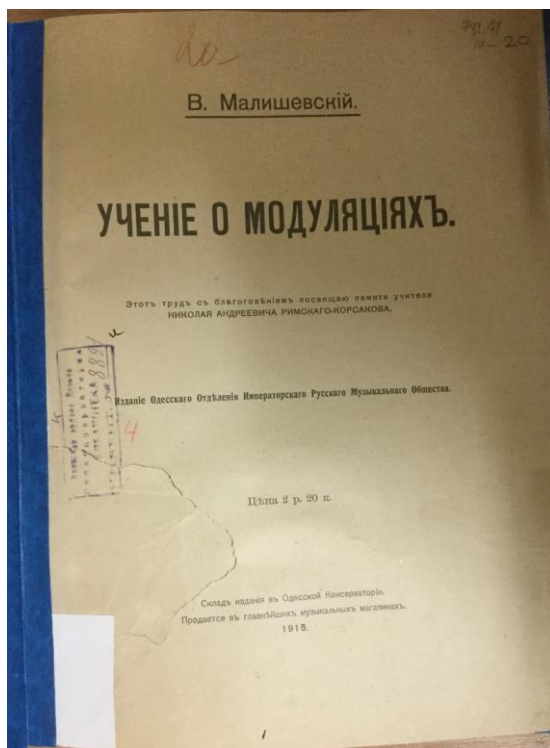


**3. Група учнів Консерваторії
на чолі з головою Одеського відділення ІРМТ
Василем Орловим (1) і Вітольдом Малішевським (2).
Ліворуч (стоїть в уніформі), ймовірно, Микола Вілінський.
Фото з газети «Одесские Новости» від 7 вересня 1913 року**



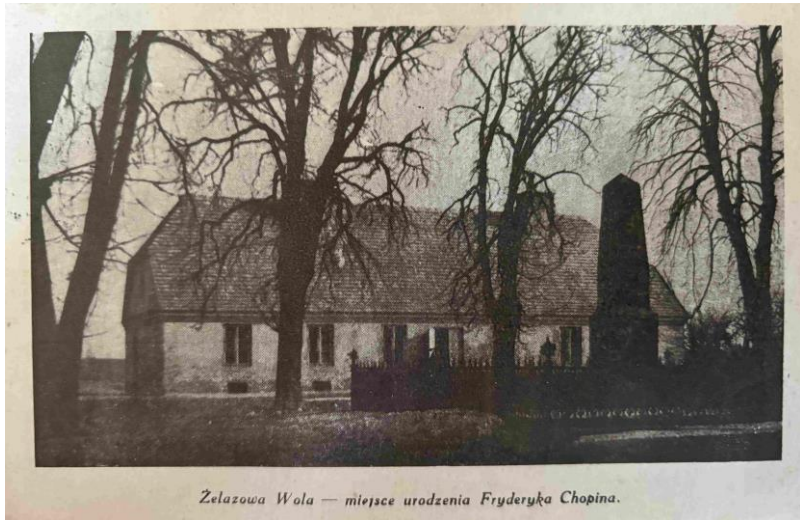
4. Перший випуск Одеської консерваторії

**5. Обкладинка
роботи Вітольда
Малишевського
«Ученіє
о модуляціяхъ»
(примірник
із бібліотеки
НМАУ імені
П. І. Чайковського)**



**6. Микола
Вілінський
зі студентами.
Одеська
консерваторія.
1930-ті роки**





7. Рідний дім Фридерика Шопена в Желязовій Волі.
Раритетна польська листівка, видана після 1894 року (архів авторів)



8. Вітольд Малішевський, директор Музичної школи імені Фридерика Шопена у Варшаві, з учнями
(<https://polona.pl/item/5862675/0/>)



**9. Урочистий банкет на честь Моріса Равеля і Маргеріт Лонг.
Вітольд Малішевський сидить напроти Моріса Равеля.
Hotel Europejski. Березень 1932, Варшава**
Ілюстрація з видання: Gołębiowski M. Filarmonia w Warszawie.
1901–1976. PWM, 1976. 360 s.



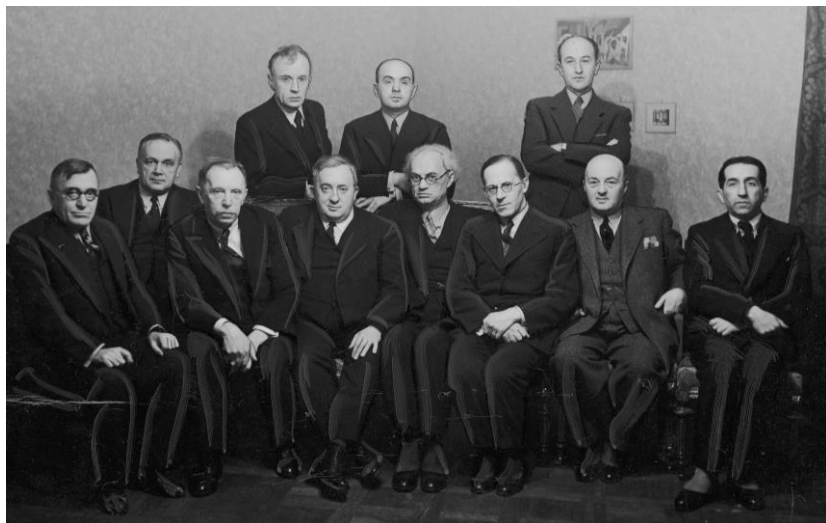
10. Варшава. Teatr Wielki



11. Варшавська філармонія (початок 1900-х)



12. Варшавська консерваторія до 1939 року



13. Художня рада Варшавської опери. 1937 рік.
 Тадеуш Чернявський, Пьотр Ритель, Вітольд Малішевський,
 Кароль Стромєнгер, Людомир Ружицький, Єжи Мазаракі,
 Єугеніш Моравський, Казімеж Сікорський, Адам Венявський,
 Збігнев Джевецький, Міхал Кондрацький



**14. Будівля Міністерства релігійних віросповідань
 і народної просвіти до 1939 року**



15. Варшава. Театральна площа



16. Варшава. 1945 рік