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LONDON

SIR ANDRZEJ PANUFNIK  
– AN UNTYPICAL EMIGRATION

I

Musicians of course are natural émigrés, partly because music is an international language, so they can work in almost any country that enjoys a similar aesthetic. This has always been so: there were always „wandering minstrels”, plying their skills from village to village, country to country, anywhere else than home because you cannot perform the same music, or even the same style of music, in the same place all the time. Sophisticated concert audiences constantly expect to hear different virtuosic interpretations, and musical village enthusiasts equally enjoy variety.

The desire of composers and performers to travel abroad reflects the instinctive urge of each new generation of graduates, who want to study with famous teachers, to listen and learn. They gravitate naturally to wherever they feel they can develop as a musician or composer most interestingly.

This broadening of his horizons was the aim of the young Andrzej Panufnik after graduating in the 1930s. Through a grant, following his Distinction graduating from the conservatoire in Warsaw, Panufnik travelled and studied from 1937 to 1939, first and foremost accepted by a friend of Johannes Brahms,

the famous Felix Weingartner, the Chief conductor of the Great Vienna Philharmonic. When Weingartner in 1938 left Vienna in protest against Anschluss and Nazi policies, Panufnik followed him to Paris, where he also studied French Impressionist music with Philippe Gaubert, the conductor and friend of Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel. Gaubert was so taken with the young Panufnik's comprehension and sensitivity to his specialisation that he refused to be paid for his generous gift of unique knowledge of French impressionist music.

After these exceptional experiences Panufnik took himself to London where he attended every possible major concert. In those two years before the war broke out, he not only absorbed invaluable conducting skills from two very great men, but he considered it a part of his learning process to listen to every orchestra possible, until he had amassed a rich knowledge of how to conduct all types of works, and also, to him even more important, how to understand communication and orchestral possibilities, which would be beneficial to his future compositions. Throughout his professional life, composition was far more important to Panufnik than conducting. Through his self-imposed studies, therefore, travel became a natural part not only of his musical culture but also his way of life. He belonged to Europe long before his emigration, though his Polish heritage reappeared profoundly within his music all his life.

Obviously, he was not the only Polish composer of his generation to go abroad. Others include Roman Palester and Antoni Szałowski who went to Paris, along with innumerable students from the USA, Britain, and many other countries, to study with the famous and extraordinary Nadia Boulanger, both before and after the Second World War. Panufnik, despite his warm respect for Boulanger, instinctively avoided being too strongly influenced by her (although post-war she developed a deep admiration for his work and publicly stated that he was one of the most interesting composers of his generation).

In 1939 he returned to Poland to care for his parents, owing to the threat of war. His duo with his friend Witold Lutosławski lasted for three and a half years in one of the artistic cafés. They also gave dangerous but exhilarating secret concerts in defiance of the Nazi ban. He also had time for composition but. He lost every note of music he had composed (including two symphonies) in the aftermath of the 1944 Warsaw Uprising as well as, much worse still, losing his dearly beloved brother, a brave member of the Armia Krajowa (Home Army) resistance.

After the War he naïvely but passionately set out to restore orchestral music to the Polish people. He rushed into re-assembling the Kraków orchestra after five miserable years of orchestral concerts being banned by the Nazis. This was a major tactical error on his part, as it got him noticed by the new conquerors of Poland. For the first four years under the communist regime, however, he and his fellow composers were left in peace as far as composing was concerned, creating, experimenting absolutely as they wished.

The crunch that eventually led to his emigration came in 1949 with the imposition of *socialist realism*, an absolute nightmare for independent and original composers. Like everyone else, he compromised to the minimum possible, but he had to buy medicine and food for his father who lived with him; also helping to support his little orphaned niece, Ewa, who was staying with her deceased mother's relatives in Silesia. The years from 1949 onwards were a hell as he saw his post-war compositions, previously admired, now mostly criticized and banned as being in the communist language: „Bourgeois, decadent, not fit for the great socialist era” (and other intended insults). At the same time he was under much tougher pressure to conform than his contemporaries because, without his permission, he had been named a „Composer Number One”<sup>1</sup> in Poland, which was a very unwelcome title.

By 1954, due to political pressures, he felt so dried out and desperate that he could no longer compose with fresh, exciting, imaginative ideas, which had been the first main purpose of his whole life. In his last four years in Poland, the only serious work he seemed to have written was his „Heroic Overture”, but that was a work he had mostly composed in 1939, on a wave of optimism that the Polish Army could defeat the invading Germans, leaving it unfinished when there was no more heroism to celebrate.

Circumstances got worse and worse. His adored baby daughter of his first wife was drowned in the bath when the mother had an epileptic fit. The bullying by the authorities became devastating. Panufnik sunk into deep depression. His Irish wife, Scarlett, who still had a British passport, was able to get to London on the excuse that her father was ill. She bravely managed to arrange an invitation to Zürich radio for her husband to conduct Polish music and was able to inform crucial British officials of his impending arrival.

Having briefly filled in the reasons for the escape, let us jump to Panufnik's arrival into Britain. He flew to London Airport from Zürich on 14<sup>th</sup> July 1954.

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<sup>1</sup> Internetsite: [Ninateka.pl/kolekcje/panufnik/biografia](http://Ninateka.pl/kolekcje/panufnik/biografia), last accessed 15 VI 2018.

Highly strung under any circumstances, he arrived with battered nerves, no money and just one small suitcase filled with his scores – possibly plus two shirts? He was almost 40 years old but had painfully few scores to bring with him, owing to the loss of all his music in 1944, as well as to the last four musically infertile years in Poland. He was met by Scarlett and two officials from the British Foreign Office Special Branch, who took him to a hiding place up-river on the Thames.

After a short recovery period, a press conference was organised, presumably by the Foreign Office. (This of course was deep within the Cold War period.) Panufnik, though a profoundly reserved, shy man, with a loathing of public speaking, was aching just at that point to explain the miseries suffered by all creative arts' individuals in his native land. He wanted to describe to his Western colleagues the crushing of the imaginations of Polish creative artists. He said at the press conference:

„I have longed to speak out about Poland's enslavement by Soviet Russia, about the misery of our people and the frustration of intellectuals, scientists and all creative artists”.

He went on in some detail about the difficulties, finishing on the words:

„I hope that my protest will help my fellow composers still living in Poland with their struggle towards liberation from the rigid political control imposed upon them”.

(The thaw a couple of years later does seem to relate to Panufnik's flight – the authorities didn't want any more composers following his example, so they might have loosened up because of this.)

He was speaking from his heart. He had been through hell on earth, with official interference in everything he did or tried to do – now his great longing was to be able to return quietly and peacefully to composition. Meanwhile, he was pained by a left-wing British journalist who was shocked that he could want to leave his *socialist paradise*. He was all too aware of the fashion in London to be pro-Russian – a whole myriad of intellectuals whom Lenin described as the *Useful Idiots*<sup>2</sup>. To try to reach the consciences of these mostly wealthy poseurs, though he was now longing to start to compose again, out of duty, he agreed to give interviews for the BBC and for the Radio Free Europe. He even accepted a commission from The Times newspaper to write two serious articles and lat-

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<sup>2</sup> Internetsite: [Hnn.us/articles/122.html](http://Hnn.us/articles/122.html), last accessed 15 VI 2018.

er wrote a long, very detailed article for the French émigré publication „Kultura”, condemning of course social realism. And that was published in English and French magazines.

Unsurprisingly, this caused a fresh outburst of damning lies from the Soviet propaganda *factory*, character-assassinating, dirty propaganda against the *traitor* who had escaped. In Poland all Panufnik’s scores were to be destroyed, his name was not allowed to be written or spoken. He ceased to exist... He had never existed... He was *cleaned off the slate*. He really did disappear off the radar in Poland, and the younger generation had no idea of his existence.

The main accusation was that he had left Poland to make money, which anyone who knew him would, of course, find ridiculous. Panufnik was never interested in wealth. He had other priorities, mainly composition. He was at this time only interested in conducting enough to cover living expenses for himself and Scarlett and to pay back his debts. Then what he wanted, more than anything else in the world, was to find a quiet place without interference to compose as his soul needed.

Meanwhile he had to borrow money. He was helped with great generosity and grace by the leading British composer of the day, Ralph Vaughan Williams. And then, Sir Stuart Wilson, who had a high position at Covent Garden Opera, arranged a guaranteed overdraft for Panufnik at his bank. The musical, warm-hearted Lord Norwich gave him a key to his front door and invited him to come in and work on his piano whenever he needed to.

In those early days in England, the BBC was also helpful. The Music Controller of the Third programme – all classical music programme – was Richard Howgill who greatly admired Panufnik. He commissioned two works and invited Panufnik three times to perform in the Proms. Panufnik greatly enjoyed the buzz and the enthusiasm of the young audience at these concerts.

With the help of the Arts Council he was invited to become the Music director and Chief Conductor of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra from 1957 to 1960. Grateful to Scarlett for her major role in his escape, he accepted this job for two years only, partly to be able to finance her partying, night-clubbing lifestyle which he did not enjoy. But Scarlett refused even to come to one concert in Birmingham, which she imagined to be a *dull provincial city*. 1957 turned out to be the end of their marriage, as she then eloped with an Italian, her fifth husband. Her disappearance probably saved Panufnik’s future as a composer.

## II

When I first met Andrzej Panufnik in 1960, despite his popularity with the Birmingham audience, he had cheerfully thrown away his career as a world class conductor in order to work on what he felt to be his true calling – composition. Never a practical man, he did this at an unfortunate moment, just as the BBC's friendly Richard Howgill, reached retiring age. Howgill's job had been taken over by the stern William Glock, totally dedicated to the promotion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Viennese school of composers, Arnold Schönberg, Alban Berg and Anton Webern. Panufnik recognized these composers as great initiators. In Vienna in the thirties, he had found their method extremely interesting and had carried out his own experiments with 12-tone rows, but he had decided that other people's new ideas were not for him. However, in 1960, in the eyes of someone as musically sophisticated as Andrzej Panufnik, those serialists were *old hat*, with a composing ideas dating from the 1920s and 30s.

Now, quite shockingly, the new bosses at the BBC, William Glock and Hans Keller, fanatical promoters of the three dear and worthy Viennese experimenters, were preparing to wipe the BBC's classical music Third Programme clean of any 20th century music that was not a derivation from Schönberg. They were describing 12-tone rows as „new music” despite the fact that the idea was more than 30 years old.

Many British-born composers were treated at least almost as badly as Panufnik, which was very unpleasant. Of Panufnik's recent recordings made by the BBC, still not broadcast, one was said to be destroyed, the other to have been lost. Two concerts abroad that included his recently award-winning „Sinfonia Sacra”, were broadcast omitting this symphony, which, just after Panufnik's acquisition of British citizenship, had won for Great Britain Prince Rainier's Prix de Composition Musicale in 1963. A great honour.

Nine whole years passed before Panufnik's music was heard again on the BBC. At one point he started to write an angry article with the title *Banned in Poland and on the BBC*, but he did not use it. He was not the bitter type. However in 1963 when his „Sinfonia sacra” won Prince Rainier of Monaco's Prix de Composition Musicale, suddenly a flow of confidence rushed back into him. Suddenly, happy with his award, he felt able to admit to himself what had been obvious to me for a quite a while, that he could and he did return my totally overwhelming love for him. We were married at the end of 1963, and moved to my beloved late grandmother's lovely 18th century home on the River Thames,

a good miracle (for once in Andrzej's life) that it was available just at that moment. My grandmother should have met him – she would have loved his music of course and his love of aesthetic beauty, his high culture, his distinguished appearance, his exquisite good manners, his natural warmth.

My first job after our marriage was to convert the ruined stable building at the end of our garden into an ascetic but comfortable studio with wooden panels and a warm carpeted floor, with my grandmother's old Bechstein piano and a beautiful old architect's table (symbolic but also very comfortable to work on – and apt because Andrzej was an architect in the way he shaped his symphonic music).

Riverside House, where we lived, became a much loved and welcoming home where many musicians and artists regularly came as friends, to join us for celebratory meals in our old fashioned kitchen. One of the first to stay with us, while visiting the Yehudi Menuhin School to teach, was Nadia Boulanger. Another very famous guest who used to stay with us often was the international Maestro Leopold Stokowski, who had first performed Andrzej's music, „Tragic Overture”, in 1949, had later conducted other Panufnik works in the USA, and had taken a great personal liking to him as well as his music. Stokowski was a very amusing, whimsical character. He loved the simplicity and warmth of our way of life, and would sit in my old fashioned kitchen, contentedly podding peas, or pottering around the garden cutting dead wood out of our apple trees. He had the highest regard for my husband's music and gave the American premieres of several works, indeed world premieres of three of them. Stokowski of course was of Polish origin: it was his father who emigrated to England. Well, we had a lot of Polish friends, a lot of friends of various nations. My husband, though extremely shy with strangers, once he knew someone well, he was a wonderful friend and host; „Gość w domu, Bóg w domu”, that was the order!

Another brilliant Polish musician friend, often with us, was the witty and brilliant André Czajkowski; he was a superb pianist and his work as a composer is now at last getting recognized. He died tragically young, having enjoyed the thought of shocking all his friends by leaving his skull to the Royal Shakespeare Theatre for the use in the graveyard scene of „Hamlet”. When people asked this superb but mischievous musician if he was related to Piotr Tchaikovsky he would always say, „Oh yes, I'm the father”. But of course in front of the piano he was very serious.

Ida Haendel was also a great friend, such a superlative violinist, and deeply passionate about understanding the intentions of the composers whom she interpreted supremely.

Another fine violinist was Krzysztof Śmietana, who, after Yehudi's recording, made the second excellent disk of the Panufnik „Violin Concerto” – and Ryszard Bakst who was a faithful Panufnik's admirer.

Andrzej spent a long time after our marriage working disciplined hours in his studio, looking within himself for a way to develop his musical language into something genuinely avant-garde, not just the over-copied Second Viennese School ideas, but something with a musical character different to anything that had ever been heard before.

In 1968, just when the birth of our first child was due, his great idea was also born: the whole concept of his triads, his reflections, his geometric designs became bright and clear to him. Thirteen months later, when our second child, Jeremy, arrived, he was becoming a different man. He was less shy, less nervy. A *pater familias*, now he laughed easily and happily. The music flowed also easily and speedily. With his new ideas, he first composed a piano work, then he composed a cantata „The Universal Prayer”, the great ecumenical poetic prayer the poet Alexander Pope – whose initials were also AP, who lived and worked in Twickenham in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and loved the River Thames in the same way as Andrzej Panufnik did.

That work was premiered and recorded by Stokowski. Making a statement to be printed on the back of his recording, he wrote:

„In my opinion, Panufnik's composition »Universal Prayer« is one of the most original musical creations of the middle 20th Century. It is an entirely new development in music... In every way this composition is individual, and musically path-breaking”.

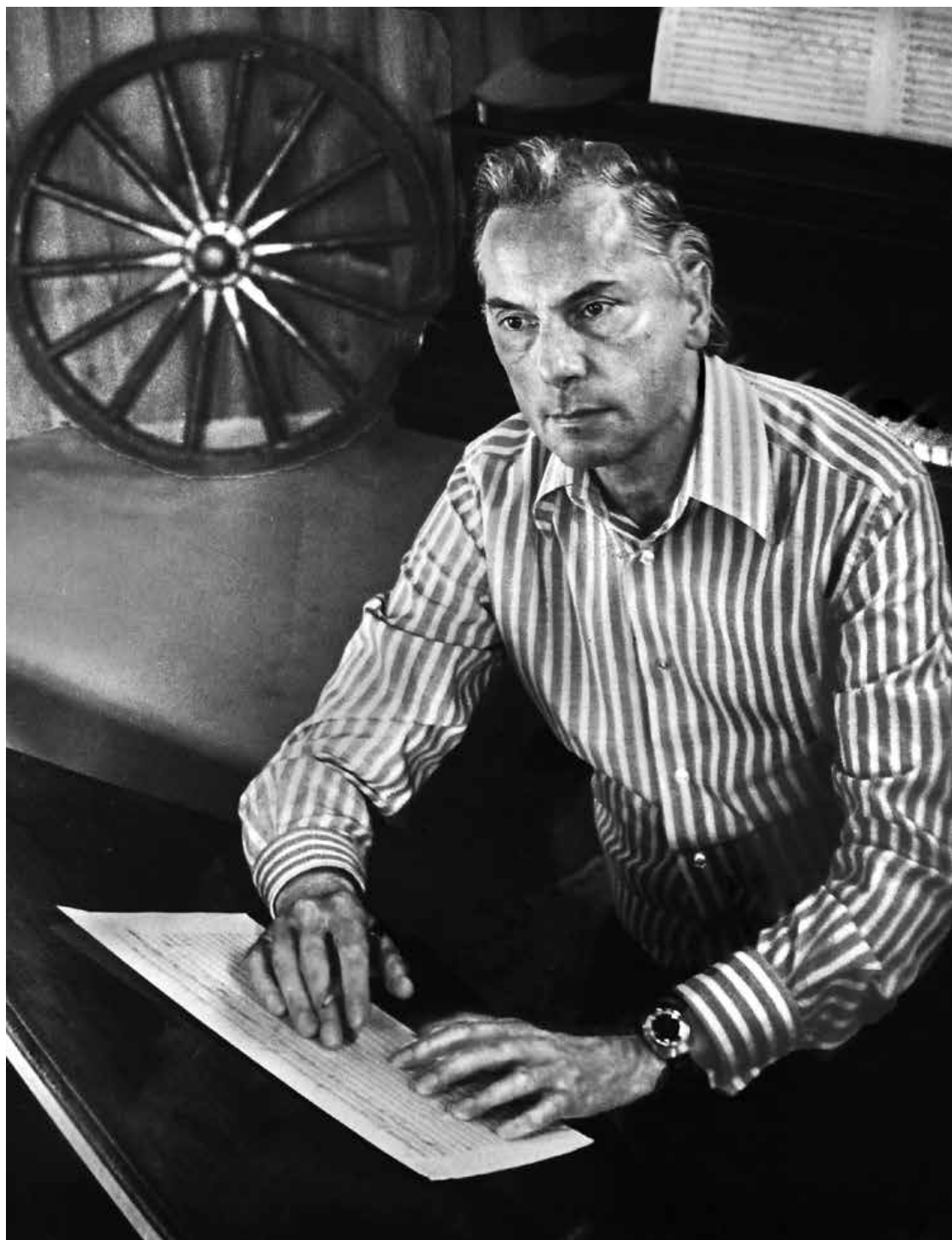
Leopold Stokowski was awed and thrilled by „The Universal Prayer”. He premiered it in St John the Divine Cathedral in New York, insisted also to perform it in the St. Patrick's Catholic Cathedral also in New York and in the University town of Princeton. Then he came and performed it in the little Parish Church just along the road from our home, where Alexander Pope was buried, and he recorded it in the huge Westminster Cathedral in London.

Musical acceptance at last was taking off for Panufnik. He was never going to hit the publicity highlights because he mostly refused to be interviewed and he deeply disliked any sort of publicity. Composing, he said, was his „private kitchen” and, unlike almost every other composer I have come across, he didn't like talking about his work. In addition to this, he was quite capable of turning down very lucrative commissions – if they did not fit in with his mode of com-



SIR ANDRZEJ PANUFNIK – AN UNTYPICAL EMIGRATION

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Andrzej Panufnik at work in his studio, composing his „Violin Concerto” for Yehudi Menuhin, Riverside House, Twickenham, 1971; phot. Camilla Jessel Panufnik

posing at that time – for instance a ballet for Sir Kenneth Macmillan and the Royal Opera House in London and a film by the interestingly provocative Ken Russell.

From 1970 onwards, the mighty and wonderful London Symphony Orchestra started to record much of his music, first of all with Jascha Horenstein. Over the years this one orchestra commissioned three works from him, celebrated his special birthdays, and continued to find reasons to celebrate him after his death even for his centenary. In 1971 – Yehudi Menuhin commissioned and later recorded his „Violin Concerto”, then the commissions started to fly in at speed, getting more and more important as we went on into the 1980s.

Especially significant were the three last symphonies, two of them highly prestigious Centenary commissions for the USA's two greatest orchestras: Georg Solti's Chicago Symphony and Seiji Ozawa's Boston Symphony orchestras. The Royal Philharmonic Society commissioned Panufnik's „9<sup>th</sup> Symphony”, proudly asking for another 9<sup>th</sup> because their predecessors had commissioned Beethoven's „9<sup>th</sup>”. At that time Mstislav Rostropovich and the LSO commissioned his „Cello Concerto”.

In his Twickenham studio, the old stables and carriage house, Andrzej Panufnik composed seven symphonies, four concertos, three cantatas, and fulfilled numerous commissions for shorter works, for orchestra, for voices, for soloists.

In the 1970s, Andrzej rejoiced that the Polish avant-garde was so successful. He admired their daring and was pleased at their successes. He privately felt he might have helped the change; that within two years of his leaving Poland the composers remaining there had dispelled the hideous burden of socrealism – and this might have been partly due to his rebellion and government fear that there would be more defections to the West. While he admired their courage at rejecting socrealism, however, he remained completely independent of their experiments, maintaining his own original voice in composition. Meanwhile, he went quietly on in his own way. Perhaps even more intellectually searching than many of them, but, because of his shy nature and his deep dislike of publicity or promotion of any sort, his extraordinary originality was hardly even noticed.

In 1977 the total ban on Panufnik's music was lifted for the annual Warsaw Autumn Festivals after an almost unanimous vote by members of the Composers Union: the first work to be included was his „Universal Prayer”. In 1978 his „Sinfonia Sacra”, celebrating the Polish Millennium of Statehood, with its strong emotional appeal, caused great excitement and lengthy ovations in the audi-

SIR ANDRZEJ PANUFNIK – AN UNTYPICAL EMIGRATION

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Andrzej Panufnik rehearsing his „9<sup>th</sup> Symphony” with the Seattle Symphony Orchestra, Seattle, USA, 1989; phot. Camilla Jessel Panufnik



Camilla and Andrzej Panufnik, London, 1963, the year of their marriage; Panufnik collection

ence. Though invited, Andrzej could not be there – he maintained his vow that he would not return to Poland until communism was totally defeated and democracy was restored.

With Martial Law, Panufnik's music was silenced again. Quite possibly the oppressors did not like the idea of his „Sinfonia Votiva”, commissioned for the centenary of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, was dedicated to the Black Madonna of Częstochowa, the iconic religious image signifying „Solidarność”!

### III

**I**n 1991, Panufnik's last year, before the dreaded cancer claimed his life, in the New Year Honours of 1991 Andrzej Panufnik was amazed to be made a knight by Queen Elizabeth, for his „services to British music”. He was so surprised when the small envelope containing this news arrived from 10 Downing Street, the Prime Minister's residence, he thought someone was playing a joke



Andrzej and Camilla Panufnik in garden, Riverside House, Twickenham, 1990; Panufnik collection

on him! He just didn't believe it. This Polish composer, who arrived with no money and only a small suitcase containing mostly his manuscripts and printed music, received one of the highest honours possible in Britain, his adopted country.

But he was to the very end also a Polish patriot which can be heard also in much of his music, in his „Sinfonia Sacra” composed for the Millennium of Polish Statehood and Christianity, in his „Bassoon Concerto” tribute to the martyred Father Popiełuszko, in his „Katyń Epitaph”, in his „Rhapsody”, his „Homage à Chopin” and so many more of his beautiful compositions.

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CAMILLA PANUFNIK

## SIR ANDRZEJ PANUFNIK – NIETYPOWA EMIGRACJA

### STRESZCZENIE

**A**utorka wspomina swojego męża, kompozytora Andrzeja Panufnika. Ze szczegółami opowiada o korzeniach muzycznych kompozytora, jego działalności przedwojennej, edukacji muzycznej i rozwoju. Pisze o kolejnych etapach twórczości, związkach ze Szkołą Wiedeńską, twórczości w czasach II wojny światowej oraz restrykcjach powojennego reżymu komunistycznego.

W drugiej części opisuje życie Panufnika po emigracji do Wielkiej Brytanii i adaptację w nowej ojczyźnie. Opowiada o okolicznościach poznania męża i ich wspólnym życiu w artystycznym środowisku. Panufnika opisuje jako patriotę, wyklętego przez socjalistyczne władze, muzycznego wizjonera i inspirację dla wielu artystów, którzy byli częstymi gośćmi w domu państwa Panufników.

Ostatnia, trzecia część pokazuje emocje związane z nadaniem kompozytorowi tytułu szlacheckiego przez królową Elżbietę II oraz podsumowuje drogę, jaką w swojej artystycznej karierze przeszedł Panufnik pomimo trudności i przeciwności losu.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Andrzej Panufnik, kompozytor, muzyka, socrealizm, emigracja, Szkoła Wiedeńska