

The Figure of Maria Szczepańska (1902–1962)  
in the Light of Archive Materials

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Maria Klementyna Szczepańska is one of those leading figures in the history of Polish musicology who were active in the city of Lvov (now Lviv). A student and close collaborator of Prof. Adolf Chybiński, with whom she associated her academic career. Her main places of work were Lvov and Poznań in a period which abounded in dramatic turning points and which decided about the fates of Polish musicology. The Adam Mickiewicz University library contains archive documents which were donated to it after Szczepańska's death. These comprise several files with personal documents and photographs, the texts of lectures delivered at the Faculty of Musicology in Poznań, students' works, copies of music scores, musicological papers, scripts for radio music broadcasts, reviews of doctoral dissertations, and — apart from the few letters that she wrote — mostly letters written to her. The archives of the Adam Mickiewicz University also preserve Szczepańska's personal files and the minutes of the meetings of the Philosophical-Historical Department Council and the University Senate, including fragments that refer to Maria Szczepańska. These materials provide us with knowledge not only of her life and activity, but also of the reality around her, particularly — about the circumstances of establishing and closing the chairs of musicology in Lvov and Poznań.

Szczepańska was born in Zolochiv (Pol. Złoczów) in Lvov Voivodeship on 13<sup>th</sup> May 1902. She attended the Ursuline Sisters' Grammar School in Lvov, also learning the piano at the Conservatory of the Polish Music Society. She then studied musicology (with archeology as her minor) at the Jan Kazimierz University.<sup>1</sup> The talent and industriousness of the young student quickly met with the appreciation of Prof. Chybiński, who conducted most of the lectures at the Lvov Chair of Musicology. He employed Szczepańska at the Chair's library and began to involve her in academic research. The character of this work can be guessed on the basis of the Professor's letters: "[...] I brought two manuscripts from Wawel, of utmost importance and necessary for your work" (Lvov, 1<sup>st</sup> April 1924).<sup>2</sup> Or: "We will play a few

<sup>1</sup> The choice of archeology as her minor must have been related to the fact that her father Jan Szczepański was an archeologist and philologist.

<sup>2</sup> All the quotations, unless stated otherwise, come from materials kept in the Adam University Archive.

more of Dukas's pieces<sup>3</sup>, as you must certainly write an article about him for *Przegląd Muzyczny*..." (a letter from Milówka, 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1925). Chybiński acquainted Szczepańska with his methodology, recommended to her the literature of the subject, providing her with foreign publications difficult to obtain in Poland at that time, and inspired her academic ideas. In a letter from Milówka of 29<sup>th</sup> July 1925 he wrote:

I have a certain problem on my mind, and you must work on it, too. If you have Adler's 'Stil' or 'Methode' [...], please read carefully what he writes of 'Stilmischung' and 'Stilkreuzung'. Perhaps this may give you some clues [...] with regard to the transitory style of Nicolaus de Radom. [...] Admittedly, Adler's concepts refer to the intrinsic features of style, but perhaps they also find their expression in the notation?

Initially, Chybiński edited Szczepańska's work, which was supposed to "be instructive to her for methodological reasons" (a letter from Milówka, 15<sup>th</sup> July 1925). He also recommended his pupil in academic circles, affirming that she was "reliable as a researcher and worthy of support". He entrusted her with numerous duties, but also took good care of her as a person, showing much concern when she was ill or worked too much to the detriment of her health. The letter of 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1925 was one of many in which he expressed his concern:

How are you and how is your health? With the priest, we are both worried about you [...]. We must ask you not to leave your house until you have fully recovered [...]. Do not worry about anything: we are both substituting for you at the Chair.

Chybiński also criticised Szczepańska's spending her private money on behalf of the Chair, calling her an "anti-materialist," and admonished her to be more firm in relations with people whom she treated too gently: "I would hope to see you energetically responding at last. A real marvel — our Mary throwing someone out of doors" (a letter of 7<sup>th</sup> May 1927).

In August 1926 the Professor appealed to Szczepańska to complete her doctorate quickly in order to take over Father Feicht's post. He wrote about it in a letter from Hrebenov (now Hrebeniv) of 13<sup>th</sup> August 1926, dealing with the problems he encountered at his Chair:

<sup>3</sup> Chybiński refers here to playing four hands piano, which they often practised.

Our priest has been appointed director of a Missionary Seminary [...] in Vilnius, and so from September on we will not have him with us. [...] I have made the most energetic efforts to keep him till mid-December, and you will have surely guessed that this is related to your doctorate and your succeeding the priest as senior assistant. More precisely, I want to keep that important acquisition — the post of senior assistant — at our Chair. If you do not submit your Ph.D. dissertation by 20<sup>th</sup> November at the latest, that post and the related University salary will irrevocably be lost to our Chair, at least for several years.

He motivated Szczepańska with these words:

Your ambitions are high enough to take this post, with which both you and your honoured parents [...] will be satisfied. ... You will be — again — Poland's only senior assistant in musicology.

In agreement with the Professor's wish, Szczepańska took the doctoral exam a day before the date quoted in his letter, obtaining her doctorate on the basis of a dissertation about Nicolaus de Radom.<sup>4</sup> She was promoted, as planned, to the post of senior assistant and began to teach harmony and counterpoint. At the same time she also taught theoretical subjects in the I.J. Paderewski Music School (till 1931) and in the Conservatory (till 1935). Her appointment as a "corresponding member" of Société française de musicologie (1926) and the reception of her paper at the Beethoven Congress in Vienna (1927) prove that she was already recognised and appreciated as a musicologist also outside Poland.

A person who particularly warmly reacted to her successes was Father Hieronim Feicht, with whom Szczepańska maintained a special bond until the end of her life. On the occasion of her promotion, Feicht sent her a telegram, and later — a congratulatory letter. He received the news of granting her the post of assistant with great joy: "And so the Chair is no longer imperiled," he wrote, "which lets me feel at rest" (a letter from Vilnius, 9<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1926). He advised the young assistant lecturer on how to behave towards her older colleagues:

It may be a little hard for you at the start [...] but you must master these skills from the outset [...]. I wish you two times more resolution than you have already demonstrated

<sup>4</sup> Published ten years later in *Polski Rocznik Muzykologiczny*, vol. II.

as a librarian at the Chair, keeping a tight rein on us all, even the Professor (source as above).

Feicht addressed Szczepańska with a characteristic sense of humour that one can only use with friends. When he reprimanded her, for instance, for sending him to Vilnius the assistant's salary, he wrote:

I'm sending the well deserved wages back to you, and will take a cruel revenge for your mischief: I'm bidding you buy, for your first salary, a proper outfit for the autumn, a fashionable hat, a sky blue blouse and... If I only knew what you call all those things... (a letter from Vilnius, 10<sup>th</sup> September 1926).

From the first years of their friendship, Father Feicht and Szczepańska shared their finds with each other and supported each other in their research. Feicht asked openly:

[...] could you give me the number and titles of Nicolaus De R.'s works, including also the hitherto unknown facts (which are your intellectual property), with a brief note (including dates) concerning the *Liber generationis*, and, if you recall these, please list the arrangements of Polish polyphonic songs, as I am completely unfamiliar with this area [...]. I can't promise I will use all this knowledge [...] but whenever I do, I will naturally acknowledge your work... (a letter from Olcza in the Tatra, 12<sup>th</sup> July 1926).

He received all the information he was asking for. Szczepańska, in turn, admitted that it was Feicht who had attracted her attention to Pękiel's dances in the Gdańsk Tablature, which she later made the subject of her research (footnote 3 in 'Studia z historii polskiej muzyki XV–XVI w.' [Studies in 15<sup>th</sup>- and 16<sup>th</sup>-Century Polish Music], a paper contained in the file with her musicological works).

In 1927–1930, Szczepańska published numerous articles in *Przegląd Muzyczny*, in the periodical *Hosanna* and in *Kwartalnik Muzyczny*. In 1927, she began to prepare (with Feicht) Prof. Chybiński Memorial Book (for his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, published in 1930). The papers contained in it concern mostly 15<sup>th</sup>- and 16<sup>th</sup>-century manuscripts with polyphonic works. One of those manuscripts, the Krasieński Library signature 52, was the subject of earlier studies by Zdzisław Jachimecki, whom Szczepańska criticised for imperfect transcriptions and mistakes in the interpretation of performer line-ups, forms

and functions of the works. She supported her claims with the results of research by acclaimed authorities such as H. Besseler, F. Ludwig, or Marius Schneider. This criticism resulted in an increasingly sharp polemic, resembling the arguments between Chybiński and Jachimecki. The polemic developed both in public and in private letters. In a letter of 9<sup>th</sup> April 1929, Szczepańska admonishes Jachimecki:

All the works you have written about Polish music leave me with an overwhelming impression that you do not know the music of that period [...], and your writing about it is amateurish. You have already made so many mistakes [...] I have pointed them out and will continue to do it also in my future works, though it gives me no pleasure, but is necessary for scientific reasons.

Jachimecki's assessment of Szczepańska's paper (Szczepańska 1928–1929) which was the source of this conflict was the following:

For a long time I have not come across an 'academic' work based on such false premises, so naively and falsely argued, and leading to such absurd results (Jachimecki 1930: 6).

The preserved documents demonstrate with what kind of strong response this dispute met within the Polish Musicological Society. A special panel appointed by the Society members passed a verdict in which it condemns the language used by Jachimecki against Szczepańska in the brochures he published under his own imprint as "failing to fulfil the academic standards of polemic accepted in the world" and "not justified by the scientific level of Szczepańska's work". This verdict did not put an end to mutual attacks. Years later, Szczepańska attempted a reconciliation, similarly as she tried to reconcile Chybiński with Jachimecki. In a letter of 1<sup>st</sup> April 1948, she could finally inform Chybiński that she had achieved her purpose. Szczepańska and Jachimecki later met regularly as members of the Musicological Committee at the Polish Academy of Learning in Cracow.

In the 1930s, Szczepańska began to collaborate with the Early Polish Music Publishings, printing numerous transcriptions of Polish 16<sup>th</sup>- and 17<sup>th</sup>-century lute music by Wojciech Długoraj, Jakub Polak, Diomedes Cato, Bartłomiej Pękiel, as well as compositions by Wacław of Szamotuły, Adam Jarzębski and Mikołaj Zieleński. She wrote the academic prefaces for many volumes in

this series and co-edited some of them. Her contributions to the series continued till the end of her life and we have many documents related to these projects, including her letters, contracts and bills.

The archives also contain scripts of radio music broadcasts, probably from the Lvov period, held in the file with Szczepańska's own writings. The main topic of those broadcasts was the music of Polish 15<sup>th</sup>-, 16<sup>th</sup>- and 17<sup>th</sup>-century composers. One exception was a programme signed "From the cycle: Instrumental Concertos", in which Szczepańska presented Mozart's *Concerto in D Major*. The conjecture that the scripts for those broadcasts were written in Lvov is corroborated by the closing words of the broadcast about Marcin Leopolita, in which Szczepańska revives the memory of that composer from Lvov, ending with this appeal:

We, then, have much to be proud of, and it is our duty to cherish the memory of the great music master from Lvov. Since even much smaller ones have their monuments here, and their names are commemorated in street names, we must see to it that in Lvov we should also have a street dedicated to Marcin Leopolita, who, according to Zimorowicz, a chronicler of old Lvov, was one of the "viri illustres civitatis leopoliensis" — "the illustrious men of the city of Lvov".<sup>5</sup>

In 1940, after the reorganisation of the Jan Kazimierz University, the Chair of Musicology was closed, and the teaching of musicological disciplines was transferred to Lvov's Higher School of Music. Szczepańska became a teacher in that school, with the title of Reader. Under the occupation she also engaged in underground teaching, and after the recapture of Lvov by the Soviets she became a deputy professor, and later — dean of the Historical-Theoretical Department in Lvov's Higher School of Music. In 1945, Prof. Chybiński offered her the post of senior assistant at the Chair of Musicology in Poznań — an offer she enthusiastically accepted, even though from the point of view of academic hierarchy it meant a lower position. She took up her job at Poznań University in 1946, initially teaching classes of strict counterpoint and paleography, and some time later — also analysis of musical forms, music history and the history of musical culture. In 1949 she was promoted to the post of lecturer (assistant professor). Her experience of library work in

<sup>5</sup> She also propagated Leopolita's work (Szczepańska 1936), postulating the performance of his *Missa Paschalis* on Easter Sunday.

the Lvov period allowed her to organise a high standard library at the Poznań Faculty. She purchased new books, scores and periodicals. We can assess the value of the library collection based on the fact that it was also used by the Institute of Musicology, Warsaw University, by the Chair of Music History and Theory, The Jagiellonian University, and by the PWM Edition (state music publisher) in Cracow.<sup>6</sup> Szczepańska also took care of the administration of the Faculty. Similarly as in Lvov, also in Poznań she taught simultaneously at the university and at music schools. In 1948–1951 she lectured in theory at the State Higher School of Music.

In Poznań Szczepańska was frequently ill, which caused the concern of her friends. Still, she must have felt happy in that city, as she wrote: “I feel really well among my Poznań friends...” (a letter from 1<sup>st</sup> June 1948).<sup>7</sup> A large number of surviving letters and postcards with greetings from friends and students show she was really liked by her environment. Her correspondence also testifies to close contacts with religious circles, for which she was criticised by the university authorities:

Not actively involved in community actions. Ideologically represents an idealist standpoint. Strongly pro-clerical, which also has influence on her students (opinion of the University’s vice-chancellor, Prof. Jerzy Suszko, Ph.D., issued on 21<sup>st</sup> April 1953).<sup>8</sup>

Despite her failing health and low income, she actively supported charities, especially those working on behalf the incurably ill and children. She was also involved in volunteer work, acting in 1951 as head of the Women’s League at Poznań University, later — as member of the board.

Prof. Chybiński’s death in 1952 totally depressed Szczepańska, and her crisis was aggravated by the authorities’ decision to suspend the enrolment of new students at the Faculty of Musicology. Szczepańska continued to lecture, but without the right to examine students. They had to take their exams in Warsaw with Prof. Chomiński and Prof. Lissa.

<sup>6</sup> Adam Mickiewicz University chronicle, 1959/1960.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted after Rudnicka-Kruszewska 1974: 129. This letter is not kept in the Adam Mickiewicz University Library.

<sup>8</sup> Adam Mickiewicz University archive, Szczepańska Maria, Personal Section, signature 205/6 item 140.

One of the files at the Adam Mickiewicz University Library contains the texts of lectures on the history of Polish music held by Szczepańska in Poznań. The lectures on Polish music, covering the period from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, were divided into four parts. The section entitled “16<sup>th</sup>-century Polish music” clearly consists of typescripts of Chybiński’s lectures used by Szczepańska after the Professor’s death. The texts of the remaining lectures about Polish music in the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the Polish opera from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries — are written in Szczepańska’s own hand. The materials for classes include manuscripts dedicated to European music: 10<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century heterophony and polyphony, 13<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century music, and the *ars nova*. The same archive also contains several MA theses supervised by Szczepańska, focusing on the musical culture of Poznań and Greater Poland. Summing up Szczepańska’s achievements as an academic teacher one must note that, together with Chybiński and Sobieski, she educated in Poznań several dozen musicologists, many of whom now occupy key positions in Polish musicology.

The difficult situation of the Faculty of Musicology after Prof. Chybiński’s death is confirmed by this fragment of M. Sobieski’s letter of 6<sup>th</sup> September 1954:

[...] I questioned Lissa about the Poznań Musicology. [...] She told me this: The letters from the Poznań Musicology to Bierut and Rokossowski ended up in the Ministry of Higher Education in Warsaw, which summoned Lissa to reach an agreement on this subject. They decided that students of musicology from Poznań University can take their exams in Warsaw as extramural students. The Poznań Musicology will not be closed, and — as Lissa says — will be revived as soon as Brüstiger, Strumiłło, Szwejkowski, Stęszewski, and Czekanowska have passed their probationary and habilitation exams (I am no expert on this matter).

Despite the mounting difficulties, Szczepańska did not interrupt her research work. In 1954 she began her collaboration with Prof. Chomiński as a representative of the State Institute of Art. In a letter of 28<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1954, Chomiński encouraged her to become a member of the editorial board of *Monumenta musicae in Polonia*, for the benefit of the Chair:

I must explain that it would be ill advised of you not to accept this offer. Now that the fate of the Poznań Chair is nearly decided, your greater activity in the academic field is

very desirable, in your personal and the discipline's interests. I can already see specific tasks you could undertake, such as the edition of some volumes of the *Monumenta*, e.g. the entire Polish lute music, as well as the works of Jarzębski.

Chomiński held Szczepańska's work in high regard, which he confirmed in his letter of 17<sup>th</sup> September 1954:

I am satisfied with your work [...]. Do you wish to remain in Poznań, or move to Warsaw, considering the impossibility of quickly reactivating the Faculty of Musicology at Poznań University?

Szczepańska did not move to Warsaw, however, and two years later she also rejected the offer of taking the Chair of Religious Vocal and Vocal-Instrumental Polyphony at the Catholic University of Lublin as an associate professor, though Father Feicht insisted on creating such a Chair specially for her.

Until the end, Prof. Chomiński remained one of Szczepańska's main allies in her struggle to maintain a Faculty of Musicology in Poznań. He informed her of decisions taken in Warsaw and instructed on further steps:

Yesterday at the Ministry of Higher Education they held a conference about the extramural studies for Poznań musicology students. They decided that you would teach some of the classes in Poznań exclusively for those students who have the Ministry's permission for extramural studies [...]. Please accept all those classes *u n c o n d i t i o n - a l l y* and do not make *a n y* reservations. Consider all the information about issues related to the Poznań affairs as confidential (from a letter of 28<sup>th</sup> September 1954).

Prof. Zofia Lissa, supervising the Chair after Chybiński's death, seemed to be favourably disposed towards Szczepańska. This is at least what we can glean from letters, in which she reassures Szczepańska, who worried about the conditions of living for the commuting students, and declares her assistance in obtaining a readership for Szczepańska and maintaining the Faculty in Poznań. However, in her opinion of 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1955, responding to the request of the dean's office of the Philosophical-Historical Department at Poznań University to grant Szczepańska the academic title of Reader, Lissa supported this request, but added that Szczepańska's works "were mostly of contributory nature" and "in the area of analysis, did not always keep

pace with the most recent achievements in the field of musicology".<sup>9</sup> When on 26<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1956, the Central Committee for Academic Workers granted the readership to Szczepańska, in a congratulatory letter Lissa wished her "success in the revival of the Poznań Faculty of Musicology" (a letter of 1<sup>st</sup> January 1958), which — as we know — never happened. In February 1957, as a result of Lissa's recommendation, Szczepańska was invited to participate in an international symposium on lute music. The organisers wrote in the invitation that they were familiar with Szczepańska's papers on Długoraj and Polak and recognised the value of her academic output.

In the same year 1957, the vice-chancellor of the Adam Mickiewicz University, Prof. Alfons Klafkowski, Ph.D., appointed Szczepańska to the post of Head of the Chair of Musicology at the Philosophical-Historical Department,<sup>10</sup> which only apparently promised an improvement of the situation. The continued efforts of the Department Council, which we can now reconstruct on the basis of the minutes of the meetings of both the Council and the Senate, to reactivate regular studies at the Chair, did not bring the expected results.<sup>11</sup> The requests to employ local academics: Prof. Marek Kwiek, Ph.D. and Zygmunt Sitowski, Ph.D., Reader at the Higher School of Music — or scholars from Warsaw: Prof. Hieronim Feicht, Ph.D. and Prof. Józef Chomiński, Ph.D. — did not gain the Ministry's approval. The Ministry explained its stance by claiming that it had no vacancies at its disposal. Chomiński expressed his disappointment at this decision even as late as 1962, a month before Szczepańska's death:

I regret that my plans with regard to Poznań did not come through. I cannot understand why it was not possible to open the 1<sup>st</sup> year of studies in Poznań. Despite the Ministry's refusal to send me to work in Poznań, I am always willing to collaborate with the Poznań musicological centre in other ways (a letter of 10<sup>th</sup> September 1962).

<sup>9</sup> Adam Mickiewicz University Archive, Szczepańska Maria, Personal Section, signature 205/6 item 140.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>11</sup> Adam Mickiewicz University archive, Minutes of the Senate meetings 1958/1959, Minutes of the meetings of the Council of the Historical-Philosophical Department 1957/1958 — 1959/1960, signatures 186 /7-11/.

In March 1959 Szczepańska was a member of the Musicological Committee at the Philosophical-Historical Department, which addressed the Ministry of Higher Education with another written request to reactivate regular studies in Poznań. It seemed that this time the request would be granted, as musicology was on the list of the Department's sections sent by the Ministry. For this reason the University began to enrol students for the 1<sup>st</sup> year and to look for appropriate staff. The hopes proved futile again, though, as it turned out that the list was meant for the University of Warsaw and had been sent to Poznań by mistake (Muszkietą 1974: 54).

Despite all these failures, the campaign to save Poznań musicology was not abandoned, as evident from Sobieski's letter of 16<sup>th</sup> May 1961:

Michał is determined to fight for the Poznań Chair with Zofia. He claims that even if this year enrolment for the musicology studies did not start, the opening of doctoral studies is a good beginning.

This last sentence refers to the opening of the conferment procedure for eight doctoral degrees in Poznań in 1961; Szczepańska was the supervisor of six of the doctoral theses, but, due to her death, did not see the completion of any of these, and they were taken over by Prof. Chomiński and Prof. Feicht.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Szczepańska continued intensive academic work. She became a member of a body working on Polish music history. She selected the examples of 15<sup>th</sup>-century music for the anthology *Z dziejów polskiej kultury muzycznej* [*History of Polish Musical Culture*] edited by Szweykowski (1958). She was herself the editor of a volume containing Jarzębski's *Concerti*. She also edited more Polish compositions for the series *Monumenta musicae in Polonia*, edited by Feicht. Chomiński commissioned her to prepare an edition of Zieleński's *Communiones* with commentary for the State Institute of Art. She also prepared for print the large Leningrad Library Manuscript No. 375. She became a member of the F. Chopin Society, and in 1960 delivered a paper on Chopin's work at the 1<sup>st</sup> International Musicological Congress, dedicated to Chopin.

She died unexpectedly on 18<sup>th</sup> October 1962, a few days before the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Prof. Chybiński's death, leaving not only her doctoral stu-

dents, but also — many planned academic projects, some already at a very advanced stage.

Czesław Sikorski's posthumous tribute to Maria Szczepańska ends with these words:

With her death we lose an industrious researcher of Polish musical culture, and excellent teacher and a wonderful, though extremely modest person, who will never be forgotten by the society she lived in (Sikorski 1962: 7).

Let us hope that these words will prove true.

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