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Contact:

Archives & Special Collections
Waidner-Spahr Library
Dickinson College
P.O. Box 1773
Carlisle, PA 17013

717-245-1399

archives@dickinson.edu

Szymanowski a Step Nearer Place in Sun

BY CECIL SMITH.

The music of Poland's greatest composer, the late Karol Szymanowski, moved one step nearer to adequate recognition in Chicago last night. At a gathering of the Polish Arts club in the quarters of the Woman's City club Wanda Paul, young Chicago pianist of Polish descent, spoke upon the career and works of Szymanowski and played examples of his music from various periods of his career.

The overflow size of the audience, and more especially the surprising number of visitors from outside the Polish group, bespoke an encouraging growth of interest in this little understood but enormously gifted musician. No doubt many were drawn to the lecture recital by the memory of Miss Paul's capital performance of Szymanowski's "Symphonie Concertante" with the Illinois Symphony orchestra last March.

The Polish composer's activity was cut short by his death in 1937 at the age of 54. A brief visit to the United States in 1921 served to introduce his work to a somewhat skeptical New York audience. To this day the musical public of Chicago has been granted opportunity to hear only four of his major works, and each of these only once.

In her plea for more cordial treatment of this music Miss Paul dwelt upon the impassioned warmth of its melodies, the evocative color of its harmonic schemes, and the humaneness of its frequent reliance upon Polish mountain folk tunes. This plea gained strength from the effective propaganda of her own playing—notably of her expert treatment of the youthful "Variations on a Polish Theme."

In his later years, according to Allan Tanner of Chicago, a close friend of Szymanowski, the composer said that the variations were too long to be worth the trouble of any pianist. Miss Paul showed him to be wrong, as so many composers are when they bring the harsh judgment of maturity to bear upon their own early works.

The Polish Arts club brought great credit upon itself by sponsoring so intelligent and progressive an evening. Perhaps it can exert enough influence in high places to make possible a Chicago hearing of one of Szymanowski's last masterpieces, the suite for chorus and orchestra drawn from the ballet-pantomime "Harnasie." Why not challenge the 1939 Evanston festival.