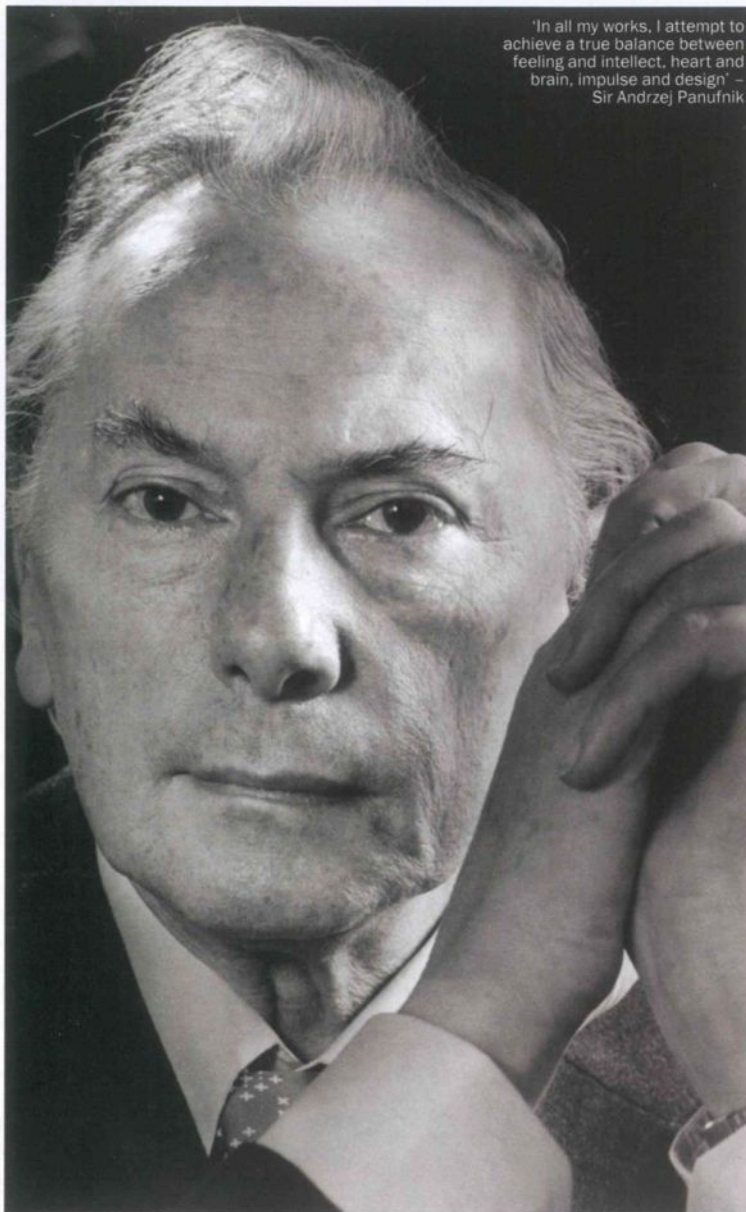


PANUFNIK CENTENARY

Musical architect

Sir Andrzej Panufnik, the Polish émigré composer who made Britain his home, would have been 100 this year. Sarah Lambie meets his family to talk about the man as well as the music



"In all my works, I attempt to achieve a true balance between feeling and intellect, heart and brain, impulse and design" – Sir Andrzej Panufnik

This year marks the centenary of Sir Andrzej Panufnik, the Polish composer whose life was fraught with political drama which in turn silenced and galvanised his musical creativity. Born in Warsaw in 1914 to a violinist mother and a violin-maker father, he began composing at the age of nine – and lived through his country's most troubled times under both the Nazis and the communist regime.

Author and photographer Lady Camilla Jessel-Panufnik, the composer's widow, gallantly battled builders' drilling and wandering grandchildren to speak to me about her late husband: with palpable respect and affection in her tone which made it clear that here had been a marriage between two members of a wonderful team. I asked her what her husband, reportedly something of a shy man, might have made of the celebrations planned for his centenary this year: 'As long as he wasn't made to speak he'd be fine. He always said "Music is my language not my work" – he would communicate with people through his music.' And it is to be his music which does the lion's share of the communicating in the coming months: concerts are planned all over the UK – beginning in the Purcell Room on 7 January and taking in the Barbican and the Liverpool Philharmonic Hall where his violin concerto is to be performed in February, as well as London's St Sepulchre-without-Newgate, and a weekend-long celebration at Kings Place in November involving two concerts, a talk, a film and an evening cabaret.

Poland is of course also celebrating its greatest symphonic composer of the second half of the 20th century: 'It's going to be a pretty hectic year,' says Lady Camilla. 'Apart from anything else I seem to be commuting to Poland. The Poles are really going to town on reclaiming him as theirs. I came back a couple of days ago, and there are lots of things planned, but being Poland they don't start quite as early as we do in England, so there are lots of concerts and events still appearing.'

CAMILLA JESSEL

48 CLASSICALMUSICMAGAZINE.ORG JANUARY 2014

COMMUNIST PROPAGANDA

Reclamation is necessary in this case, because for 36 years the composer was a voluntary exile from his native land, having made a dramatic escape from communist Poland in 1954 – for 23 years whereafter both his name and his music underwent a total censorship in the country. ‘In fact,’ says Lady Camilla, ‘he had a worse time under communism than the Nazis – although it was less physically dangerous. They did terrible things to him, because they altered things that he said. I have a tape recording of something that was supposed to be him: it announces his name in a large noisy place and then the thing goes completely silent and it’s not him at all, it’s someone else in a studio – they put things in his name that he hadn’t really said. He had told me that this had happened to him and I never thought I’d find it: it’s rather a miracle that I did. Somebody researching, an academic, assumed it was him and produced it at a conference in Poland, but I was there and was able to say ‘That’s not him!’ Fortunately they took my word for it – he had a rather distinctive deep resonant voice.’

As Poland’s leading composer, greatly respected throughout Europe, Panufnik had been under particularly intense pressure, bullied to write according to the Soviet imposition of Socialist Realism, artificially ‘positive’ music composed according to the dictates of the authorities. Lady Camilla remarks upon her pleasure that so many new recordings are coming out in line with his centenary, but they carry a sad truth: ‘CPO in Germany have just finished recording eight CDs of all his orchestral music – there isn’t as much as you would think because he really was completely unable to write during the communist period. He lost his will to compose. They made these demands that it had to be “optimistic”. It’s scary how music can be used in the wrong ways as well as the right.’

I ask if she felt that her husband’s music had been affected by his political experiences, after his escape from Poland: ‘I wouldn’t say it so much had an impact as being a reinforcement of his determination. He’d been bullied in Poland and was just never going to be bullied again. He kept his head high.’ The composer’s escape, one of many such stories from the period, but none the less cinematic for that, is to feature in a play about his life and music which will be

Sir Andrzej Panufnik:
Musical structures



CAMILLA JESSEL / BOOSEY & HAWKES COLLECTION

performed in Adelaide at a festival this year – a testament to the global influence of the composer’s work. ‘He came out of Poland with one shirt and suitcase of manuscripts. He was conducting some of his music in the Zurich radio and there was a wonderful man there who was very good at helping people to escape. When Andrzej finished his recording he went off to the gents and was whisked out the back door. He had two heavies with him who discovered he’d gone – realised he hadn’t come back for his coat – and there was a chase across Zurich.’

Having settled in England, where he married Lady Camilla Jessel in 1963 – the same year that he won the coveted Monaco composition prize for what is still his most widely loved and admired work, *Sinfonia Sacra* – Panufnik was once again able to focus on creating the music which much to his surprise continued to be described as new: ‘He was very interested in the Second Viennese School in the 1930s – he thought it was amazing, and he didn’t want to be influenced by anyone else, he decided to make his own way in music,’ says Lady Camilla. ‘He was

“He was unable to write during the communist period. He lost his will to compose”

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Lady Camilla and
Roxanna Panufnik

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loved Mozart because of his incredible clarity, and geometrical structures. He'd sit there reading Mozart, and I'd say, "Don't you want to listen to the CD?" and he'd reply, "No, I want to hear it as I want to hear it."

LEGACY

A hundred years is only a milestone on a much longer journey. Panufnik's familial legacy comes in the form of his musical children: Jem, a graphic artist, DJ and composer of electronica; and Roxanna, also a classical composer.

'What most excites me about Dad's centenary year is that it will bring his music to new audiences,' says Roxanna. 'When he was alive, his music was not "in fashion", being intellectually brilliant but also aesthetically pleasing – people didn't know how to pigeon-hole him. But these days, there is no "fashion" – anything goes, style-wise, and audience, old and new, will listen to his music with fresh ears.'

I ask Lady Camilla what else, besides his music, will live on: 'One of his legacies is the LSO Panufnik Young Composers' scheme I was offered the chance to start by the Helen Hamlyn Trust. They wanted something musical and I remembered a remark he had made about the problems of young composers. He'd be thrilled with what we're doing there, he did care very much about young people and getting the best possible training and opportunities they could.'

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The scheme presents a concert on 5 February and a workshop on 7 February. Both are open to the public and further information is available at lso.co.uk/composers

amazed when people 30 years later were still calling it "new music" because by then he thought it was quite old! He was always trying to find the perfect balance between intellect and emotion: it's not ice cold mathematical music, he talked about "musical architecture", he made new shapes for his music, and didn't stick to sonata form at all. In his head it was a sort of construction based on geometry, which sounds terribly cold, but although one or two of his works are quite difficult, a lot of his music is closer to romantic than structural. He was very original, but more influenced by Mozart than anybody else: he always said he

2014 CONCERT HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶ **5 February, Barbican** – LSO/Michael Francis: *Lullaby* and *Sinfonia Sacra*
- ▶ **14 February, Warsaw Philharmonic Hall** – *Sinfonia di sfere*
- ▶ **27 February, Liverpool Philharmonic Hall** – Vadim Repin/RLPO/Petrenko: Violin concerto
- ▶ **31 March, Purcell Room** – Isis Ensemble/Jacques Cohen: *Modlitwa* (Andrzej and Roxanna Panufnik)
- ▶ **3 April, St Sepulchre-without-Newgate** – Joyful Company of Singers/Peter Broadbent: *Song to the Virgin Mary*
- ▶ **30 November, Kings Place** – Brodsky Quartet, Heather Shipp, Clare Hammond, Norman Lebrecht, Lady Camilla Panufnik, Roxanna Panufnik, Jem Panufnik, Jacqui Dankworth, Charlie Wood: 'Panufnik 100: A Celebration'

JANUARY 2014 CLASSICALMUSICMAGAZINE.ORG 51