

MAZURKA - 1925

[p.37-38]

Mazurka was composed in 1925 and performed for the first time by Andrés Segovia in Paris on May 6th and then on May 13th, 1925 in the Salle du Ancien Conservatoire.

It was released in 1926 by the Schott's Söhne Publishing House in Mainz. In 1928, Aleksander Tansman transcribed *Mazurka* for piano. It should be mentioned that the work also exists in the version for violin and piano, adapted by Samuel Dushkin in 1931.

Tansman's transcription for piano was translated into a key which was fourth lower. The composer did not limit himself to just a straightforward transposition, but allowed himself to expand and strengthen the chord groups and introduce counterpoint elements.

These additional versions prove that *Mazurka* was a great composition which went far beyond the world of guitar.

While *polonaise* belongs to the ballroom and stylized dances, *mazurka* is a purely stylized dance. The basis of this stylization were Polish folk dances of the *mazur* type. These were *mazur*, *kujawiak*, *oberek* differing from each other in character, but all remaining within the triple meter. The *mazurka* form developed by Chopin as a stylized artistic dance found many followers among both Polish and foreign composers. *Mazurka* was given a new face as a result of the work of Aleksander/Alexandre Tansman and Karol Szymanowski. The melodic and harmonic tones were enriched by the use of the simplest elements originating from folk music, and by the more complicated ones which were achieved thanks to the expansion of harmonic and formal properties.

The composition at the *tempo moderato* begins with a pedal note 'd' repeated in quavers for the first ten bars. In the third bar of two beats, there appears the first theme built of second and third arpeggios in D major with the altering sounds of 'c' and 'g'.

[Example 1]

In the late 1970s Tansman's position in the world of guitar was very well-grounded. For many years then Polish style *mazurka*, *cavatina* or *suite* had been very successful all over the world. In 1978, Andrés Segovia, the addressee of almost all Tansman's compositions, asked Tansman for a new one. He sent the composer scores of two Spanish folk songs and suggested Tansman compose *Deux chansons populaires*. As always Tansman reacted to the request of an old friend with enthusiasm. In his letter of the 2nd June, 1978 to Segovia he writes:

‘I'm sending you two transcripts of “Chansons populaires” hoping you will like them. I have tried to compose a bit of music as an extension of the character and style of those beautiful themes...’

Segovia, however, was not too impressed by those little pieces. Maybe it was due to the technical difficulties that he never performed them. The musicians did not try to change anything in them either, as it used to happen in the past.

Both themes used by Tansman came from the old Catalan folk songs. The first one called *Plans* is very simple. The original theme was only preceded by the *introduction* while the rest of it remained in an unchanged form – the very same Segovia sent to Tansman.

The other song, wonderful *Canción del Lladre* was transformed in a more sophisticated way. The original theme was based on eight bars, that is why Tansman extended it by *introduction* and *coda*.

Those pieces had to wait a long while to be for recognised. It was only in March, 1996 that a Japanese virtuoso Kazuhito Yamashita registered them at the Music Hall in Chichibu Muse Park and then recorded a CD with them on it (BMG BVCC-747).

In their versions for two guitars, they present a very attractive repertoire proposal for students of music or less advanced guitarists.

[Tansman's manuscript from the composer's archive in Paris]

Such a modal type of scale will come back in later parts of the composition. An augmented fourth is by the way typical of folk music from various regions, for example Neapolitan major; or typical of old master's compositions, such as in *El Maestro* by Luis Milan, for example...

In the eleventh bar when the pedal note is released, the other part of the theme becomes softer, more lyrical and starts modulating.

In the twenty third bar, the four-bar fragment 'etouffe' is based on E major pentatonic scale with an altering 'ais' fourth .

[Example 2]

After the next four bars with these charming fourths, there appears a new melodic motif in A-dur supported in bass by a pedal note 'a' and in mid-point sound by a repeated figure 'e', 'gis' and 'fis'.

[Example 3]

Of course, the altering 'dis' fourth comes back sporadically. This part ending in a changed cadence D-T in bar 44, moves smoothly with no modulation to the *tranquillo* part now based on the 'cis' pedal note.

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In bar 103, to maintain the chords, the 'd' pedal point comes back. We observe the reminiscences of the second motif of the A theme only to, after the septime D-dur chord, introduce the last episode with 'g' pedal note in bar 115,

[Example 7]

which will determine the rest of key as G-dur, although in bars 119-125 there will tenaciously appear sounds 'des and 'as' as an alternating fifth and ninth.

It is worth mentioning here that this bar ambiguity will be one of the characteristic elements of Tansman's technique.

Mazurka became very popular among guitarists and the composer would go back to its stylistics because *mazur*, or its rhythm rather, had for decades been associated with the Polish style. The composers such as Chopin, Moniuszko or Szymanowski were all using the *mazur* motifs¹.

Aleksander Tansman used it in a variety of ways. Sometimes in a gay way, sometimes in a light manner, sometimes in a melancholic or reflective mood. He could either adapt original folk melodies, like *Twenty Easy Pieces on Polish Folk Song Themes*, or create a version for piano or guitar (like the example discussed above). He could also use the stylistics to combine it with other elements and compose for example *The Piano Concerto*, or sweet miniatures for children, e.g. *Petit chant Polonais*, for guitar. No matter what it was, Tansman always remains natural, unique and creative, presenting somehow modest and yet very elegant expression.

¹ It is believed that Tansman's *mazurkas* were inspired by Karol Szymanowski's. It is in fact a big misunderstanding. Szymanowski published his *Mazurkas* with Universal Editions in 1926-1931 and had been composing them since 1924, that was when Tansman had already had dozens of his composed. Tansman did not know Szymanowski's compositions at all, and they only met in Paris when Tansman introduced his 15 years senior colleague into the artistic scene of Paris. After: Janusz Cegieła 'Dziecko Szczęścia' PIW Warszawa 1986