

**A Word from the President
of the New York Conservatory of Music
on the Occasion of the School's Twentieth Anniversary**

Dear Students, Families, and Friends,

Soon it will be twenty years since the beginnings of The New York Conservatory of Music in Manhattan, which I founded along with my wife Joanna in 1998. The NYCM turned out to be our second child, as our son Gabriel came into the world exactly one year earlier. At this point, I would like to take a look back at our beginnings and arrival in the USA.

I had the good fortune of being invited by the United States of America as Poland's representative to the International Piano Festival in Palm Beach, Florida, under the honorary patronage of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and George Bush. Only one pianist was invited from each given country. The concerts were held at The Breakers Hotel.

Why was I chosen as the Polish representative? Even though this came as something of a surprise to me, I realized that the organizers had taken artistic achievement into account. I had already performed concerts with approximately twenty different orchestras in Europe and Asia; I had worked with the best conductors, and had performed solo recitals for Chopin and other musical associations in Germany, Belgium, Italy, and other European countries; I had won first prize in three prestigious piano competitions; I had many archival recordings to my credit.

It was the beginning of January 1990, and Florida welcomed me not only with sunshine but also with a splendid atmosphere. I was driven straight from the airport to The Breakers, where a red carpet and a welcoming fanfare greeted each pianist. It was a great celebration of music, consisting not only of splendid creations of art, but also those, for example, of the world of fashion. The ladies who attended the concerts were dressed phenomenally. Or was this simply a sign of respect for art and artists?

I perceived that my concerts made a great impression on the listeners, as evidence not only by ovations, but also persuasion and encouragement for me to try my strength in New York. Many people offered me specific help with finances and housing. I stayed in New York with my wife Joanna and my sister Kasia in a beautiful home, on Clyde Street in Forest Hills, of the Zielenskis, who turned over their keys and paid all the bills. This was a tremendous help, thanks to which I was able to calmly prepare for a competition organized in April by Artis International, the winner of which was to make his or her debut at Carnegie Hall.

The sold-out debut concert took place at Carnegie Hall on June 2nd (that is, six months after my arrival in the US), and on June 4th, the New York Times ran a review of the concert, which turned out to be the "best review of the whole season of debuts."

Almost immediately after this auspicious debut, I received a proposal for another appearance: a historic recital during the 100th Anniversary Year of Carnegie Hall. The concert took place on November 18 and was also sold out. (In the first year of my stay in the USA, I gave a total of over 20 recitals.) Listeners began to ask me more and more often whether I taught, whether I gave courses. Young and old asked me for advice and consultations.

Thus the idea of teaching came slowly to life. I'd never thought of teaching before; I had simply wanted to play.

In October 1998, thanks to the help of many people, particularly Krystyna Davidson, whose assistance was invaluable, we completed the construction of the school. We built everything from scratch, from the soundproof walls, doors, air conditioning, and instruments to flood-resistant external walls with a special security system!

Our first students began to appear, many of whom have remained friends ever since. To name a few: Dr. Linda Tao, Michael Harvey, and Anthony Lehman.

To date, several thousand students have passed through the Conservatory; many of them have been accepted by prestigious American universities such as Harvard, Princeton, and Yale, and many have extraordinary artistic achievements to their credit.

Over the years, we have organized many concerts and lectures given by the outstanding professors frequently invited by the Conservatory (among others, Prof. Andrzej Jasiński, the teacher of one of the most eminent pianists of our time, Krystian Zimermann, as well as one of the reviewers of my doctoral dissertation), along with excursions, such as “Follow Chopin” with David Dubal, and accompanying events, including post-concert receptions, balls, suppers, and meetings with eminent artists.

And, speaking of eminent artists: over the past 28 years I have had the good fortune to meet many of them. To mention a few ...

While still in Florida, I met Sergei Babayan, representing the Soviet Union, who traveled to New York with us and stayed in Forest Hills as our guest. Today, he is a professor at the Juilliard School, and one of America’s top pianists and educator’s. Recently, his student Daniil Trifonov won a Grammy Award in the field of classical music.

Byron Janis, known as Vladimir Horowitz’s greatest student, invited me to his apartment on Park Avenue. I will never forget my surprise when I saw two Oscar statuettes standing on his splendid grand piano. Janis’s wife is Maria, the daughter of Hollywood star Gary Cooper, who received those Oscars for *High Noon* and for his lifetime achievement. Unforgettable stories about his lessons with Horowitz, especially about the first in which he played, among others, Schumann’s sonatas. We spent a great deal of time at the piano, playing and analyzing music. He told me about his great love for Chopin (I recommend his book, *Chopin and Beyond*) and showed me many pieces of memorabilia related to Chopin and George Sand. It was moving to see a golden box containing Chopin’s hair intertwined with Sand’s, and Chopin’s last formal dress coat in green velvet. What a great inspiration!

Another unforgettable personality is David Dubal, also a student of Horowitz, as well as a writer (I recommend his *Evenings with Horowitz*), pianist, professor at the Juilliard School of Music, and creator of the program “Reflections from the Keyboard,” which is broadcast every Thursday and Sunday on Radio WQXR. A man of great knowledge, he has served as master of ceremonies at several of my concerts. I’ve learned a great deal from him.

The next fascinating personality is Ruth Slenczynska, renowned pianist and student of Josef Hofmann and Rachmaninoff. Together, we spent many hours at the piano, as she demonstrated the teaching methods of her own mentors. This, too, was a great inspiration.

A few years ago I met one of the greatest cellists of our time, Christine Walevska (www.christinewalevska.com), pupil of the famous Gregor Piatigorski about whom Arthur Rubinstein said of her, “She’s the only cellist who takes my breath away.” Christine has traveled all over the world under the management of Sol Hurock. Most of her cello concertos have been recorded by the Philips record label. I have had the incredible pleasure and honor to perform with her in October of 2016 at Carnegie Hall, which will hopefully not be the last time!

I can’t omit Mr. Leszek Wojcik, head of the recording studio in the famed Carnegie Hall. Leszek, who has recorded the greatest performers appearing over the last thirty years in this famous hall, became known for his recording of the debut of Evgeny Kissin, which critics hailed for its “miraculous sound.” Together, Leszek and I recorded six disks, which were received with lovely reviews from periodicals such as *The New York Times* and the London-based *Pianist*, as well as Radio WQXR (the radio station of *The New York Times*) and Polish radio and television. Most of these reviews are included on my website, www.stryjniak.com. Several works are currently recommended by Google. In the near future, we will record a DVD together with the most popular and best-loved works of the pianistic repertoire.

Of course, I’ve encountered many more of these fascinating personalities over the years; here, I’ve only mentioned a few of those I met in the USA. It would be difficult to mention them all in this space.

In referring to the methods of the great masters, I’d like to say a few words here about my own teaching methods, which are simple. First of all, the most important value I look for in each student is his or her passion and willingness to enter and understand the space beyond the material world, the space that we call art. For many, this space is inaccessible. I also explain the essence, the role of being an artist—a role responsive to art, which depends not only on the struggle against mediocrity (a serious threat to art), but on setting one’s course according to the need and search for the beauty and truth so necessary in both in life as well as in art. For me, the level on which a given student finds him- or herself is less essential.

I could continue in this way to lead you through these scenes from my artistic life (of which there are, naturally, many, many more)—but perhaps some other time.

This brings me to 2018, the year of the 20th anniversary of NYCM, a year in which we plan to organize many events:

March 6th Performance at The Kosciuszko Foundation by Professor Miroslaw Herbowski and advanced NYCM students, titled **“Master and Students”**

May 8th at The Steinway Hall where our NYCM students will perform.

May 24th at Ida K. Lang Hall at Hunter College where all NYCM students will be performing

June 10th The Kosciuszko Foundation banquet, serving some of the finest Polish and French cuisines. Cocktails followed by buffet dinner and mini recital by Jazz pianist **Adam Makowicz** performing pieces by **Oscar Peterson** which will be followed by live entertainment.

October 15th Piano Recital by **Jerzy Stryjniak** at Zankel Hall, titled *“Jerzy Stryjniak and His Guests”*

November 18th at Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall for our advanced students as well as guest artists Elzbieta Stefanska

- **This means that the extent to which we can fulfill this goal is limited to your generosity.**
- **All contributions are deductible to the maximum extent permitted by law.**

I hope that, by working hand in hand with all the supporters of NYCM, people on whose support we can always count on, we'll be able to succeed in highlighting this unique year for the Conservatorium.

I thank you in advance and wish you all the best in this special year.

“The measure of the success of an artistic concert is the turnout and support of the audience.”

President
Jerzy Stryjniak