Resilience

Yulianna Avdeeva

RESILIENCE

Władysław Szpilman (1911-2000)

1	**Mazurek**	02. 24
	Suite „The Life of the Machines"	
2	I. ---	02. 33
3	II. Machine at Rest	01. 51
4	III. Toccatina	01. 41

Dmitry Shostakovich (1906-1975)

Piano Sonata No. 1, Op. 12

5	I. Allegro	02. 18
6	II. Meno mosso	01. 51
7	III. Adagio	01. 10
8	IV. Allegro – Poco meno mosso	02. 25
9	V. Adagio – Lento	03. 09
10	VI. Allegro – Meno mosso – Moderato – Allegro	01. 43

Mieczysław Weinberg (1919-1996)

Piano Sonata No. 4 in B Minor, Op. 56

11	I. Allegro	06. 41
12	II. Allegro	03. 25
13	III. Adagio	05. 54
14	IV. Allegro	07. 29

Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953)

Piano Sonata No. 8 in B-flat Major, Op. 84

15	I. Andante dolce	14. 50
16	II. Andante sognando	04. 10
17	III. Vivace	10. 21
	Total playing time:	74. 04

Yulianna Avdeeva, piano

FINDING PATHWAYS TO RESILIENCE

It was in September 2020 when the family of Władysław Szpilman asked me to perform on his house piano. Szpilman is widely known for his memoir, in which he describes his experience during the Holocaust and World War II. It is his story which Roman Polanski would later base his award winning film „The Pianist“ on.

I believe that the piano is the closest friend of its owner and becomes the keeper of their most intimate feelings and secrets. Performing the pieces that had played a significant role in Szpilman's biography on his own piano was a unique opportunity to come closer to this inspiring personality. Among the pieces I played was Chopin's C-Sharp Minor Nocturne Op. posth. which was one of the last pieces Szpilman performed on the Polish Radio before the building was bombed in September 1939. It was also the piece he played for a German officer Wilm Hosenfeld at the Aleja Niepodległości Street 223 in Warsaw in 1944 — a performance that saved his life.

In the past years the world has been shaken by tragedies which affected so many people around the globe. Perhaps it was providence that during this in my personal experience unprecedented time I was going to play the instrument of Wladislaw Szpilman. A person, whose never-ending belief in the good in humanity and strong will to live, no matter how hopeless the situation, guided him through one of the darkest times in history.

Delving into Szpilman's music deeply resonated within me, and I realized that when all of my coping mechanisms were exhausted, my rescue was to reflect about difficult situations using the language of music.

Thus the idea for this album was born: It was to be Władysław Szpilman's music that should provide the frame for this recording

which explores how he but also Dmitry Shostakovich, Mieczysław Weinberg and Sergei Prokofiev faced times of great instability. All of these composers doubtlessly faced their very individual fates as human beings but their personal tragedies were immediate results of grave global disasters. The personal reaction, processing and conclusion of those crises by each of these composers was very different, according to their personalities. Nevertheless what connects them from my perspective is the enormous strength and courage to remain faithful and to hold on the highest human ideals, finding the way to express themselves in their music and not to surrender under the pressure around them. The pieces on this recording provide various ways of overcoming the darkness. They remind us of who we are and what we stand for. Listening to their music brings us closer together and helps to see the light, no matter how dark the reality seems to be. It is the inexhaustible source that gives hope, light and belief. The music made them resilient in their own times of social unrest and global changes.

FIGHT THE DARKNESS WITH CREATIVITY

Szpilman: Mazurek (1942) and the Suite „The Life of the Machines" (1933)

Andrzej, Władysław Szpilman's son, was the one who gave me the scores of the Piano Suite „The Life of the Machines" (1933) and Mazurek (1942). Together with his Concertino for Piano and Orchestra (1940) and „Waltz in the olden style" (1937) they are the only extant pieces Szpilman composed before or during World War II.

The Mazurek — composed in 1942 while he was suffering in the ghetto of Warsaw — is a deeply stirring historical document. Composed in the mazurka style of Chopin it was Szpilman's way to circumvent the prohibition for Jewish artists to play Chopin's music. This work shows his unwavering creative energy with which he faced this dark historical moment.

The Suite dates from the year 1933 and consists of three movements:
I. ---
II. "Machine at rest"
III. Toccatina

The autograph of the Suite was considered lost, and according to Władysław Szpilman's son, Andrzej, his father was not able to restore the 1st and the 2nd movements after his traumatic experiences during Holocaust and World War II. So it is a great luck that the personal copy of the Suite, dating from 1934, was found and given back to Andrzej Szpilman in 2000.

In his Suite "The Life of the Machines" Szpilman reflects on the industrialization with a sense of humor by musically assigning human adjectives to the machines but also by giving its movements titles like „Machine at rest". It gives us a glimpse of what Szpilman might have composed if he hadn't experienced the atrocities of the World War.

DESTROY TO MAKE WAY FOR THE NEW

Shostakovich: Piano Sonata No. 1 (1926)

Shostakovich composed his First Piano Sonata after experiencing a deep personal crisis: The great success of his First Symphony raised high expectations in him as one of the leading composers of the Soviet Union, which after the October Revolution in 1917 and the Civil War was in a fragile state. Young Shostakovich felt great pressure while searching for his own musical language and personal standing in this „new" world. The First Piano Sonata is a radical, groundbreaking piece in which Shostakovich broke with the „academic" musical language. In a time of uncertainty and doubt Shostakovich found the courage to face it with enormous power and intransigency. He destroys the old in order to even the ground for something new.

DIGNIFIED ACCEPTANCE OF FATE

Weinberg: Piano Sonata No. 4 (1955)

It was Gidon Kremer who introduced me to Mieczysław Weinberg's music, whose music we performed and recorded together. From my first glance at the scores I was amazed by the deep expression of this music — a fascination that has not left me since. Weinberg's tragic personal experience left a clear mark on his music: In 1939 he escaped Poland alone after his parents and sister were murdered by the Nazi regime. He continued his studies in Minsk until 1943 when — thanks to Shostakovich's support — he was able to move to Moscow where he stayed until his death in 1996. Weinberg composed his Piano Sonata No. 4 in 1955 after another tragic period in his life: His father in law, famous actor and theatre director Solomon Mikhoels, was assassinated in 1948 and on Stalin's order Weinberg was also persecuted and arrested in 1953. It was essentially Stalin's death which saved his life. The Fourth Piano Sonata expresses multifarious states of the soul: Fear, despair and resignation appear hand in hand with hope and warmth. In the end it feels like he meets his fate with dignified acceptance.

RISE ABOVE THE TURMOIL

Prokofiev: Piano Sonata No. 8 Op. 84 (1939-44)

After living in the United States and Paris Prokofiev returned to the Soviet Union in 1936 and had to adapt to the rules of cultural life there. The political atmosphere was becoming more taut with the beginning of repressions in 1937. The arrest and murder of Vsevolod Meyerhold, a theatre director and friend of Prokofiev's, shocked and scared him to the highest degree. He perceived his personal situation as unstable and the harbinger of war aggrieved him a lot. In 1939 he started to work on three piano sonatas — No. 6,

7 and 8 —, which are known as his „War Sonatas" today. These works were created in the same period of time but could not be more different: The bridge connecting them consists of various expressions of fight and survival. Sonata No. 8, finished and premiered in 1944 by Emil Gilels, is the largest and most ambiguous of the three. Its dreamy, almost surreal mood in the first movement interrupted by violent, painful episodes is a reflection of the fragile world he was facing. An allegedly safe world suddenly turns out to be dangerous but within this piece Prokofiev musically rises above the turmoil to overcome this dark time.

Yulianna Avdeeva

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