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Manuscripts of Antoni Habel's symphonies in Wielkopolska archives

ABSTRACT: The main aim of this article is to present the manuscripts of Antoni Habel's symphonies preserved in archives in the Wielkopolska region of Poland and attempt to order them chronologically in respect to their dates of composition. Habel lived in Gniezno around the turn of the nineteenth century. Most of our information about him comes from payroll registers, inventories and other documents preserved in the Archiepiscopal Archive of Gniezno, but they do not contain any information about his symphonies. The following works by Habel have survived to this day: a *Sinfonia D*, preserved in two copies (in Grodzisk and Gniezno), and a *Sinfonia ex F*, preserved in Gostyń. A critical analysis of these two compositions allows us to indicate which was composed first, since the simplicity of the composition techniques used in the F major Symphony suggests that it is older than the D major. We must also address, however, the question of the differences between the two copies of the D major Symphony, which vary with regard to melody, rhythm, dynamics, articulation and even form. Analysis makes it possible to reconstruct the order in which the two manuscripts were produced and determine the original version of the D major Symphony.

KEYWORDS: Antoni Habel, Polish symphonies, eighteenth century, church archives, Gniezno

The symphonies of the eighteenth-century composer Antoni Habel are among the many compositions found after the Second World War in ecclesiastical and monastic collections. It was Władysław Zientarski (1916–1991), director of the Archdiocesan Archive of Gniezno in the years 1961–1991, who discovered them. Despite thorough archive research into Habel's life and works conducted by Zientarski and continued by Danuta Idaszak, it is not clear where the composer studied or what he was doing before he started working in the cathedral chapel. Only payroll registers, inventories and other documents preserved in the Archiepiscopal Archive of Gniezno yield some insight into Habel's life and activity.

The surname Habel appears in Gniezno during the mid eighteenth century. We know that Antoni Habel was born in 1760 in Gniezno and that his parents were most probably Regina and Łukasz Habel, who married ten years before Antoni was born. No information as to his education has survived to this day.

The next mention of our composer does not appear until 1794, when he took up the post of first violinist in Gniezno cathedral chapel. Such a lofty position proves that he must have possessed considerable musical talent, as the selection process for chapel musicians was rigorous.¹ A resolution passed by the cathedral chapter, from 1794, stipulated that only skilled musicians could be admitted.² It is likely that Habel was also the chapel-master, although we have no evidence to that effect.

Little is known also about the later years of Habel's life. Due to a financially-induced reduction in the chapel's activities in 1798 (the Prussian authorities confiscated church property), and also Habel's need to support his growing family (he had eleven children, born between 1798 and 1819), he was forced to find extra work. He took a job as a registry clerk in a land court in Gniezno, which he kept till the end of his life. Subsequent decades were difficult for the chapel; because of its meagre funds, its activities were heavily restricted. In 1810, it was reorganised, but the list of members from that year still includes Habel. His surname disappears from the list the following year, only to return in 1818. In his justification of Habel's reappointment, the music prefect wrote: 'Mr Habel, well known for his musical proficiency, has been reappointed'.³ It was not possible to establish what Habel was doing in the years 1811–1818. His surname appears on the musicians' register from 1823, though we know that ill health prevented him from actively participating in the chapel's activities. His surname remained on the list of members until 1831, the year in which he died of cholera, on 6 October.

Habel not only played an instrument in the chapel, he was also a composer and scribe. For the chapel's needs, he prepared transcriptions of works by such composers as Carl Heinrich Graun, Giovanni Battista Pergolesi, Ignaz Pleyel and Johann Stamitz, as well as nine symphonies by Joseph Haydn.

The first mentions of Habel as a composer date back to 1795, when he received ninety zlotys from the chapter for ten symphonies, a *Veni Creator* and two masses. It is not known how large Habel's musical legacy was. Nineteenth-century lists of musical works from the Gniezno chapel mention three works: *Matutinum pro Festo Pentacostes*, a Mass and a Symphony. Two of these works are to be found in the preserved collection of the *Cappella Musices*:

¹ Władysław Zientarski, 'Antoni Habel, nieznan kompozytor i muzyk z końca XVIII i początku XIX wieku' [Antoni Habel, an unknown composer and musician from the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century], *Z dziejów muzyki polskiej*, 5 (1963), 6.

² Leon Przyłuski, the provost selected by the cathedral chapter, 'chose and nominated a suitable, musically-skilled man to hold the position' ('eligat et constituat virum aptum, in arte musica peritum ad hocce munus plene exequendum'). See Zientarski, 'Antoni Habel', 14.

³ 'Pan Habel dobrze znany z biegłości w sztuce muzycznej ponownie przyjęty'. See Zientarski, 'Antoni Habel nieznan kompozytor i muzyk', 9.

– a *Sinfonia D*, in two copies (held in Grodzisk⁴ and Gniezno⁵), for two violins, viola, bass, two flutes and two horns.

– a *Matutinum pro festo Pentacostes* (Invitatorium, Psalm 1. Magnus Dominus, Psalm 2. Exurgat Deus, Psalm 3. Benedic anima mea),⁶ a composition from the Gniezno collection for four soloists, two violins, violone, two flutes, two horns and organ. The clarinet parts, as Danuta Idaszak has established,⁷ were written on different paper, during the 1830s, by Franciszek Ścigalski and were most probably composed later.

Another Habel symphony is preserved in Gostyń:

– a *Sinfonia ex F*,⁸ for two violins, viola and bass, as well as two flutes and two horns, dating from c.1826.

Also two title pages have come down to us:

– in Gostyń: a fragment of the title page of a *Symphonia [sic] in...*⁹ for two violins, viola, cello, two flutes and two horns, with the note *Pro Choro Congregationis/ Oratorii Sancti Philippi Neri/ Gostinie*, manuscript dating from c.1810.

– in Grodzisk: an autograph of the title page of a *Sinfonia in D*,¹⁰ dating from c.1800.

The two extant symphonies are held in church archives in Wielkopolska. The manuscript of the Symphony in F major is held in the library of the Congregation of the Oratory of Saint Philip Neri (pp. 12, cat. no. V/2), in very good condition. It was written by three scribes: Paweł Biskupski, Franciszek Koperski and Andrzej Niestrawski (who added the *finis coronat opus* maxim after his anagrammatised surname). Besides their names, the scribes also placed on the manuscript's pages the date they completed their work, and so we know that the manuscript was produced in 1826. Information on the scoring of the symphony is presented on the title page: *Sinfonia ex F /ulożona na dwoje skrzypcy, Altówka/, 2 Cornu ex F, 2 Flauti i /Bass/ Auth Habel / Nro 14* [Symphony in F major for two violins, viola, 2 horns in F, 2 flutes and bass by Habel, no. 14].

The symphony comprises four movements. In the first and last movements, sonata form is applied, a minuet is used in third place and an AB-form Andante comes second. The musical language used in the symphony is very simple, with a predominance of chromatic passages. In the slow movement, the violin part

⁴ PL-Pa Muz GR V/44.

⁵ PL-GNd VI/8 (Archdiocesan Archiv in Poznań, music collection from Grodzisk Wielkopolski).

⁶ PL-GNd IV/2 (Archdiocesan Archive of Gniezno).

⁷ Danuta Idaszak, 'Autografy Antoniego Habla w zbiorach gnieźnieńskich' [Autographs of Antoni Habel in the Gniezno collection], *Z dziejów muzyki polskiej*, 7 (1964), 25.

⁸ PL-GOkf V/2 (Gostyń, Congregation of the Oratory of Saint Philip Neri Archive in Święta Góra).

⁹ PL-GOkf V/3 (Gostyń, Congregation of the Oratory of Saint Philip Neri Archive in Święta Góra).

¹⁰ PL-Pa Muz GR V/14.

consists of an ornamented melodic line with figuration, in the concertante manner, resembling the slow movements of Haydn symphonies from the 1760s.

The orchestration is conservative, with the strings dominant (particularly first violin) and the wind instruments relatively discreet (the flutes double the violin parts; the horns appear only in moments of culmination). The whole composition is dominated by a simple homophonic texture; quasi-imitation between parts appears on just a few occasions. Judging by the simplicity of the means applied in the F major Symphony, this composition predates Habel's second symphony, the D major, which uses a more elaborate musical language, especially in the sonata form. In contrast to the F major Symphony, where the development sections are short and introduce new material rather than motifs or themes from the exposition, the development of the D major Symphony is of equal proportions to the exposition and consists of altered motifs from both themes.

The Symphony in D major has survived in two copies: one dedicated to the parish chapel in Grodzisk, the other dedicated to the *Capella Musices* associated with Gniezno cathedral. Like the F major Symphony, it is based on a four-movement plan. It opens with a sonata form, which is followed by a theme with variations, a minuet and a sonata rondo to close. Stylistically more advanced, it is characterised by enhanced melodic inventiveness, diversified texture, with the activation of the wind instruments, and more elaborate form (for example, the sonata rondo in the finale).

The manuscript of the D major Symphony from the collection of Grodzisk parish chapel is currently deposited in the Archiepiscopal Archive in Poznań (cat. no. V/44). For many years, this composition remained anonymous, until it was identified, in 1989, by Bohdan Muchenberg.¹¹ The title page most probably dates back to 1888 and was created by Paweł Kinosowicz, who at that time was collating and inventorying the chapel's musical collection, marking compositions with catalogue numbers and an ownership note to the effect that these were gifts to Grodzisk parish church. The upper part of the page bears the following scribe's annotation: 'NB complete and tasteful'.¹² Danuta Ignaszak dates the manuscript to 1780, which is dubious when we consider that the composer would have been only twenty at the time.

The manuscript comprises eight instrumental parts on a total of fourteen pages. It is preserved in good condition; soiled areas in the page corners are a sign of frequent use. In some places, accidentals are missing or misapplied. The horn and cello parts lack several bars.

The other copy of the D major Symphony, which is deposited in the Archdiocesan Archive of Gniezno (cat. no. VI/8), dates from 1820. This comprises twelve pages, plus additional copies of the parts of the woodwind instruments, which unfortunately, like the bass parts, are preserved in very poor condition. This copy

¹¹ Danuta Idaszak, *Grodzisk Wielkopolski: katalog tematyczny muzykaliów* [Grodzisk Wielkopolski: a thematic catalogue of musical items] (Cracow, 1993), 105.

¹² 'NB cała i gustów'.

also lacks a title page. A list of instruments is provided on the page with the bass part, which is also marked with an old catalogue number (no. 169).

The Gniezno manuscript of the D major Symphony was undoubtedly used on numerous occasions, as is evidenced by soiled areas in the page corners and many annotations and corrections made on the score by musicians. Blue pencil was used to highlight repeat marks, pauses and *dal segno* indications. Here and there, gaps in slurs are filled in and bar numbers entered above conventional signs designating rests. Black pencil was used for numbering bars and for 'Fine' markings in the third movement. As in the case of the Grodzisk manuscript, here too one of the musicians expressed his opinion about the symphony, adding 'very good' in the top left corner of the first page of the first violin part.

A comparison of the two manuscripts of the D major Symphony yields some interesting conclusions. The two versions vary significantly with regard to melody, rhythm, articulation and dynamics, as well as form.

In the melodic layer of all the movements, the greatest number of differences can be found in the horns and flutes, fewer in the viola and bass parts. Most of the changes consist in the moving of fragments of the melody up or down by a particular interval (usually a third) or changes to the pitch of individual notes, as in the first movement in the viola and bass parts (see Example 1):

a)

The image shows the musical score for the Grodzisk version of the first movement of Antoni Habel's Symphony in D major, bars 43-54. It features four staves: Violino I (top), Violino II, Viola, and Basso (bottom). The key signature is D major (two sharps) and the time signature is 4/4. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings. Bar numbers 46 and 51 are indicated above the staves.

b)

The image shows the musical score for the Gniezno version of the first movement of Antoni Habel's Symphony in D major, bars 43-54. It features the same four staves as in (a). The notation is similar to the Grodzisk version but includes specific differences, such as triplets in the Basso part (indicated by '3' above the notes) and different phrasing in the Viola part. Bar numbers 46 and 51 are also present.

Example 1. Antonii Habel, Symphony in D major, first movement, bars 43–54,
a) Grodzisk version, b) Gniezno version

In the Grodzisk MS, many sections are also simplified with respect to melodic and rhythmic features or even substituted with rests – especially in the horn parts (see Example 2):

a)

91 96

Corno D 1

Corno D 2

Violino I

Violino II

Viola

Basso

fp *fp*

b)

91 96

Corno D 1

Corno D 2

Violino I

Violino II

Viola

Basso

fp *fp*

Example 2. Antonii Habel, Symphony in D major, first movement, bars 90–96,
a) Grodzisk version, b) Gniezno version

Also with respect to articulation and dynamics, the Gniezno version seems more refined. Some fragments have different articulation markings. In many places, the Gniezno MS has slurs or staccato which are lacking in the Grodzisk version, and in the first movement and the minuet there are basso continuo figures over the bass part which are absent from the Grodzisk MS.

The most interesting and perplexing issue concerns the formal design of the second movement of the symphony. This relates to both manuscripts, and especially to the theme with variations, specified in the Grodzisk MS as *Andante Cantabile* and in the Gniezno source as *Andante Amoroso*. In the Grodzisk version, the second movement consists of three numbered variations between which the theme is to be repeated.

In the Gniezno version, the second movement contains a theme and two unnumbered variations played without a break. The Gniezno copy lacks, therefore, the middle variation – the *Minore* with the solo cello part.

It is difficult to explain the lack of one variation in the Gniezno MS. Without any knowledge of the original form of the work, it is difficult to state with certainty whether this variation was written by Habel or added by another composer. We cannot know the composer's original intention: numerical variations interspersed with a theme or a continuous notation without the theme being repeated between variations.

The number of differences between the copies of the D major Symphony makes it possible to consider them as two alternative versions of the same work. Some questions relating to the order in which the copies were produced remain unanswered. Given our scant knowledge of the composer's life, a definitive answer is almost impossible. Analysis of the differences between the two versions of the work suggests that the Gniezno MS could have been used to prepare a copy that was adjusted to the performance capabilities of the Gniezno ensemble, so the Grodzisk MS would be a simplified version of the symphony. Perhaps the skills of the Grodzisk chapel were insufficient, necessitating certain modifications, especially in the brass section.

The phenomenon of having alternative versions of a single composition results from the common eighteenth-century practice of exchanging scores and adjusting them to the needs of a particular ensemble. Due to high printing costs, music ensembles often exchanged compositions, which were copied by hand with frequent changes.¹³ The existence of different notation in the score of a symphony is also congruent with a common practice among composers of that period.

Summing up, the preserved symphonies of Antoni Habel, not previously discussed in the musicological literature, are an interesting source of knowledge regarding both the history of the symphony in Poland and also local common practice in music ensembles. They are also, alongside the works of Jan Wański and Karol Pietrowski, an important part of the symphonic output in eighteenth-century Wielkopolska, situated between the pre-Classical symphonies of Jakub Gołąbek and Jan Engel and the mature symphonies of Józef Elsner.

¹³ Habel also tampered with the original score while copying Haydn's symphonies. For further information, see Danuta Idaszak, 'Rękopisy symfonii Józefa Haydna w zbiorach Archiwum Gnieźnieńskiego' [Manuscripts of Joseph Haydn symphonies held in the Gniezno Archive], in Zofia Lissa (ed.), *Studia Hieronymo Feicht septuagenario dedicata* (Cracow, 1967).

