

## 15. POLONAISE FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO OP. 4 IN D MAJOR BY HENRYK WIENIAWSKI

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**Abstract:** *Wieniawski's creations for violin imposed themselves in the romantic musical literature both by their special melodic musicality and by the difficulty of the technical passages. Polonaise for violin and piano, op. 4 in D major is one of the most beautiful musical jewels of the romantic century. The piece has become famous since the time of the composer, who performed it quite frequently in his tours. In this composition, Wieniawski emphasizes to the maximum the timbre, technical and interpretive potential of the violin.*

**Key words:** *Wieniawski, Polonaise, violin, piano, analysis*

### 1. Introduction

Henryk Wieniawski (1835-1880), one of the most representative performers of the Polish violin school, distinguished himself from an early age as a very talented child. He has toured in various countries and has developed a fabulous violin career. Another remarkable talent is that of composer, his creations imposing themselves in the romantic musical literature both by the special melodic musicality and by the difficulty of the technical passages. Among the most important works dedicated to the violin, we mention: *Souvenir of Moscow, op. 6, Modern L'Ecole Studies, op. 18, Concerts for violin and orchestra no. 1, op.14 in f # minor and no. 2, op. 22 in D minor, Legend, op. 17, Fantasy on themes from Faust, op. 20, Introduction and Variations on an Original Theme, op. 15, Scherzo Tarantella, op. 16 and two Polonaises for violin and piano or orchestral accompaniment, first op. 4 in D major, and the second, op. 21 in A major. Although the two Polonaises do not take up much space in Wieniawski's creations, Polish musicologist Zofia Chechlinska<sup>94</sup> describes their importance because [...] constitutes an essential part of his artistic inheritance [...].*

### 2. Discussions

*Polonaise de Concert op. 4* is one of the most beautiful violin musical jewels of the romantic century. According to the Polish musicologist Irena Poniatowska<sup>95</sup>, the first sketch of the composition *Polonaise de Concert, op. 4* was conceived by Wieniawski in 1848, before he graduated in harmony and counterpoint at the Paris Conservatory. The work was composed in two versions, one for violin and piano accompaniment and the other for violin and orchestra. The original variant of the piece was inspired by the violinist Karol Lipinski, to whom it was dedicated. Wieniawski met him in Dresden and had a special respect for the great virtuoso due to his mastery of the violin works of the titans Bach and Beethoven.

The composition was first published in 1853 in Germany. In 1858, it was

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<sup>94</sup> <https://pwm.com.pl/en/sklep/publikacja/2me-polonaise-brillante,henryk-wieniawski,17478,shop.htm> (available on August 16, 2021, 14,41)

<sup>95</sup> [https://www.wieniawski.com/polonaise\\_de\\_concert\\_op\\_4.html](https://www.wieniawski.com/polonaise_de_concert_op_4.html) (available on August 14, 2021, 19, 49)

republished in Paris under the title *Polonaise Brillante*. The work has become famous since the time of the composer, who performed it quite frequently in his tours. Another piece composed in the same period as the Polonaise in D major was *Adagio élégiaque*, op. 5. The author recommends to the violinists that the two works be performed together in the concert repertoire, in the *Adagio-Polonaise* succession. In the *Dictionary of Musical Terms*<sup>96</sup>, the Polish term refers to *an old Polish dance in 3/4, similar to a walk (in procession), in rhythmic steps not without solemnity. Characteristic rhythm:*



Frédéric Chopin transforms this traditional dance *into a genre piece, on its own*<sup>97</sup>. In his *Polonaises* for piano, Chopin fully emphasizes the patriotic specificity and the essence of Polish folk music in a piano writing with an accentuated profile of technical and interpretive virtuosity. Wieniawski never stated his point of view on Poland's independence, but like Chopin, he is a composer who used the rhythmic-melodic specifics of this dance in his creations.

The architecture of this piece can be followed both from the perspective of a reprise form and a *rondo* form. We consider that the form of *rondo* folds best on the musical content of the composition, because it does not allow deep thematic developments. The work consists of phrases with similar thematic content, slightly varied by cadences or rhythmic-melodic dynamization. The internal architecture of the stanzas is not affected by the presence of thematic extensions or cadential complements. The tonalities in which the composition takes place are related from harmonic point of view. The thematic material of some couplets (for example stanza D) derives as content from the refrain and the cadential complements have the role of strengthening the basic tonal framework. In some transitional fragments between stanzas, Wieniawski makes the most of the technical and interpretive possibilities of performers and instruments. In order to understand better its inner structure, we present the basic scheme according to which the musical discourse takes place:

A	B	A	Tranz.	C	A	D	Tranz.	A	Coda
a a	b	a							
4 8 8									
1-20	21-30	31-38	39-62	63-94	95-102	103-118	119-133	134-139	140-155
D	B moll	D	f #	B moll	D	D		D	D

### 3. Results

The piece debuts on the piano in *Allegro maestoso* with a signal on dominant (a), organized in the first 4 measures in the repetitive form of the Polish

<sup>96</sup> Zeno Vancea, *Dictionary of Musical Terms*, Scientific and Encyclopedic Publishing House, Bucharest, 1984, p. 388

<sup>97</sup> Dumitru Bughici, *Dictionary of Musical Forms and Genres*, Music Publishing House, Bucharest, 1978, p. 262

rhythm: Eg. 1, Wieniawski, *Polonaise op. 4*, m. 1-4

The piano is preparing the appearance of the main theme to be exhibited by the *solo* violin. The nuance (*forte*) is gradually diminished towards *piano* to let the violin take over the leading role. The main theme of the composition (marked with A), carried out during 8 measures (m. 5-12), has a bright character, virtuosity and can successfully fulfill the role of a refrain. Throughout the work, it covers various characteristic aspects, because it is very flexible from an interpretive point of view: Eg. 2, Wieniawski, *Polonaise op. 4*, m. 5-12

The first measure of the violin score, considered the launching ramp of the main theme, takes place through the succession of sounds A, B and C, repeated imitatively in the low and acute registers at a distance of two octaves, by alternations of external strings (G and E) and by replays of the bow at the frog. From an interpretive point of view, this preparatory passage is executed in a slightly *rubato*, the progressive dynamic evolution aiming to prepare the culmination of the passage from the sound E, highlighted by the bright color of the flageolet. The majestic character from the beginning of the refrain evolves in measure 7 towards a contrasting melodic exposition, with a more graceful profile in the *piano*, enriched with ornaments (single and double *appoggiatura*). In measure 8, the author indicates that the melody should be performed only on the second string of the violin, a phenomenon that causes changes in position at bigger intervals (ascending small seventh, respectively descending perfect fifth). These uncomfortable jumps will be studied separately, from rare to fast, with the help of position changes by the guide finger. The tactile and mental automation of the jumps will determine the intonational justice and the safety of the changes of the left hand.

Next, the melodic material from the first measure of the violin score is resumed varied by rhythmic diminution (the eighths are transformed into sixteenths), causing the alternation of the extreme strings to be done very quickly. In order to obtain the clarity of the sound in this passage, we will try as much as possible to maintain the elbow between the planes formed by the double strings (G-D and A-E), eliminating as much as possible the additional movements that could

intervene in the musical fluency. The passage must be performed more from the right wrist, which must be both flexible and firm to support the nuance (*forte*).

In the next measure (m. 10), the melodic material is organized on the sounds of a descending reduced *arpeggio* performed in the *detaché* stroke, suspended by a delicate flageolet on the string in small nuance (*piano*) and finished with a graceful passage, organized on a rhythm syncopated, alternating with sixteenths. From a technical point of view, we notice that Wieniawski alternates on very small spaces many right-handed techniques (clarity of sound emission in fast passes over strings, alternations of staccato and *détaché* strokes, fair use of bow portions and quantities) and left (intonational justice on difficult position shifts and at increased and reduced intervals, the choice of the best application according to the musical needs and the physical and technical possibilities of the performer). In the next section (m. 13-20) of the first stanza, the refrain is repeated identically, in the idea of strengthening and to fix in the listener's hearing this grandiose theme, characteristic of the style of Polish music. The second occurrence of the refrain may be presented in a more pronounced nuance compared to the first exposure. The second stanza, marked with B, begins in the key of B minor in contrasting nuance (*ff*) in relation to the end of the first stanza and takes place during 10 measures (m. 21-30), organized 4 + 4 + 2: Eg. 3, Wieniawski, *Polonaise op. 4*, m. 21-25:



In the first two measures of stanza B (m. 21-22), the violin presents a new thematic material, rigorous and contrasting, enriched with numerous double strings and chords of three and four sounds highlighted by accents. The clarity of the sound emission of this complex technical passage will be achieved by using a generous amount of bow, avoiding excessive pressure on the strings. The ribbon of the wand must adhere very well to the string to emphasize the expressiveness of the harmonic sounds. Consideration will be given for keeping the fingers on the strings, especially on the common sounds of the chords.

Next, the violin presents a graceful melody (m. 23-24), sometimes joking, which unfolds in a reduced nuance from a dynamic point of view (*p*) and is played by *ricochet* on double strings. The rhythm also participates in the character underlining by alternating the exceptional triolet formulas with the syncopated ones. The piano faithfully follows the new character of stanza B by using the characteristic of the polish rhythm, this time enriched with after-beats. Wieniawski uses various timbre effects specific to the violin, including the *pizzicato* on simple notes and chords of three and four sounds, which shows that he wants to make full use of the timbre, technical and interpretive potential of the instrument. The following four measures (m. 25-28) bring slight changes in the melodic content by introducing new timbre effects rendered by natural and artificial flageolets, which

enrich the sound colors of this miniature violin jewelry. The refrain reappears and is presented identically by the violin during the 8 measures (m. 31-38).

The next section (m. 39-62) has a transitory character and makes the connection to stanza C of the rondo form. The fragment is dedicated to the piano, which will take over the *solo* role by brilliant presentation of the rhythmic and melodic elements characteristic of the refrain in the basic key of the piece (D major). This section has an accentuated aspect of virtuosity, because it makes maximum use of the resources of the instrument and implicitly of the performer (by overlapping chords of three and four sounds, large interval jumps enriched with numerous accidental alterations, differentiations in the use of the pedal and the piano touch depending on the alternation of the *marcato* character with the *legato* one, extended use of the keyboard, use of all sound possibilities).

The main thematic material is processed in sequences and evolves both melodically and rhythmically, as well as harmonically. In the version dedicated to the violin-piano couple, some accompanying pianists resort to a text artifice by eliminating the section between measures 44 and 59, a reduction that has the role of intensifying the drama of the next section. Stanza C begins in B minor key and takes place during 32 measures (m. 63-94), which are organized in three phrases of 14 measures (m. 63-76), 12 measures (m. 77-88) and 6 measures (m. 89-94). The thematic material of stanza C consists both of lyrical-expressive cantilenas and of passages with an accentuated virtuoso character transposed in the form of double strings, chords of three and four sounds, flageolets, etc. The new stanza of the rondo form begins at the piano with the same specific Polish rhythm; its presence has the role of preparing again the entrance of the *solo* instrument, which will expose a new theme, strongly imprinted with a dramatic character: Eg. 4, Wieniawski, *Polonaise op. 4*, m. 65-75:

The musical score shows the first phrase of stanza C (measures 65-75) from Wieniawski's *Polonaise op. 4*. It is written for violin and piano. The violin part starts with a *sul G* instruction and a *f largamente* dynamic. The piano accompaniment is complex, with many chords and textures. Dynamics include *p*, *pp*, *p*, and *p*. Performance markings include *con luoco cresc.*, *rit.*, and *p*. The score ends with a *sul G* instruction and a *p* dynamic.

The first phrase of stanza C is organized in the form of a dialogue (4 + 8 measures) of the question-answer type between the low and the medium to acute register of the violin. In the first four measures (m. 65-68), the composer indicates the interpretation of this theme only on the G string in order to emphasize the serious, even dramatic timbre of this string, especially in its higher positions. This theme presented in a sustained nuance (*f largamente*), must be supported on each note with a fairly wide vibrato that highlights the timbre of the bass string.

In the next 8 measures (m. 77-88), the melodic material, constructed in the form of a sequential response, evolves in three dynamic and characteristic stages (*piano dolce*, *crescendo*, *con fuoco crescendo*). Towards the end of the phrase, the melodic material is gradually relaxed in terms of nuance (*diminuendo*, *piano*) and tempo (*ritenuto*). The second phrase begins with the same specific Polish rhythm, present this time in the violin score (m. 76) by imitation with the piano. The secondary phrase, organized according to the model of the first (4 + 8), is slightly varied rhythmically in the first 4 measures (m. 77-80) by diminishing the initial rhythmic formulas (sixteenths are transformed into sixteenths of sextolets).

The last phrase (m. 89-94) of couplet C presents only the sequential thematic material, which will make the transition to the return of the refrain through a sequential off-beat material with a preparatory role (m. 93-95), in which the bass register (in *forte*) is alternated with the acute one (in *piano*) in the violin score. The sequential anacrusis has the role of announcing the return of the refrain. The refrain (m. 95-102) returns as bright and unfolds almost identically as in the second thematic exposition. The last measure in the refrain ends with an open crown on a dominant chord with a small seventh that prepares the appearance of stanza D (m. 103-118), which consists of two symmetrical phrases (8 + 8), very similar to the refrain in appearance thematic content, also performed in the basic key, D major. The piano accompaniment is organized on a repetitive syncopated rhythm, also of Polish origin: Eg. 5, Wieniawski, *Polonaise op. 4*, m. 103-110:

The first phrase (m. 103-110) is constructed sequentially and symmetrically (4 + 4) and begins in the violin score with a syncopated rhythm that immediately evolves to a punctuated marching rhythm, highlighted by accents located on each sixteenth dotted, on the notes of the arpeggio the key of D major, used intensely by the composer to emphasize the bright timbre of the violin. The thematic material is enriched with exceptional rhythmic formulas (triolets on sixteenths) executed in *spiccato*, alternating with *détaché* close linked to the string. The rapid succession of these bow specialties presupposes that the violinist possesses a good technique of the right hand.

The last four measures of the first sentence (m. 107-110) follow the rhythmic and melodic pattern of the first measures, only this time they start from the E minor key and cadence at the end through the dominant to the basic key. The violin

prepares the exposition of the secondary phrase through a slight dynamic relaxation (diminishing to the *piano*), agogic (*poco ritenuto*) and of character (the diaphanous appearance of the flageolets). The second sentence of stanza D begins this time in a nuance reduced as intensity (*piano*). From a technical point of view, the violin score is enriched with double notes performed ascending and descending on a long *staccato* in the direction of the "up" bow. This technical problem first involves solving the intonational justice of the double strings unfolded on many changes of position in a fairly fast time. It is recommended to study from rare to fast and to use different punctuated rhythmic formulas to gain the safety of interval jumps. As for the *staccato*, the index finger of the right hand must "bite" each note separately by a pronation movement, first rarely, then faster and faster until we get the fluidity of execution. If the quantity of the bow has been used before finishing all the notes in the legato, the rest of the sounds will be performed by repetition of the stroke, also on the "up" bow.

The next section (m. 119-133) has a transitory character and takes place during 16 measures, structured organized 4 + 4 + 4 + 3. The thematic material begins in the key of E flat major and has a harmonic evolution (G, D, pedal on the dominant) adjacent to the basic key of the piece. In the first four measures (m. 119-123), the violin presents a delicate melody, decorated with trills that will be enriched with double chromatic strings. The piano accompaniment faithfully follows the chromatic evolution of the *solo* instrument, the voices of the two instruments merge into a perfect melodic and harmonic symbiosis. The next 8 measures (123-130) are carried out according to the model presented above, slightly varied from a rhythmic and melodic point of view. In measure 130, the virtuoso character of the violin score is made more difficult by the addition of a series of double ascending strings (tenths), also performed in *staccato*. The last three measures of the transitional episode (m. 131-133) announce through a pedal on the dominant (present in both instrumental scores) in *ff* the last exposure of the refrain during only 6 measures (m. 134-139), cadenced on an open dominant chord with crown, which prepares the final section of the piece (Coda).

In the Code (m. 140-155), the composer uses the thematic elements characteristic of the refrain and stanza D to reinforce the key of D major. The score of the violin abounds with elements of technical virtuosity of left and right hand. The first four measures (m. 140-143) of the Code are organized in the scores of both instruments in the form of a sequential imitative dialogue with gradual and ascending chromatic course. The last 12 measures (m. 144-155) are organized in measures of 3 + 3 + 6, each structure representing the three stages of the Code. The first stage (m. 144-146) describes rhythmic and melodic elements characteristic of stanza D to which are added double strings and chords, followed by an ascending scalar range organized in perfect ascending melodic octaves that will cadence on the D sound. The second stage of the Code (m. 147-149) follows the thematic model of the first stage, to which are added other elements of violinistic technical virtuosity such as quadruple stop (four strings sounded normally as an arpeggio). In the last stage (m. 150-155), the thematic content is enriched towards the end with double strings on different intervals, which will culminate with a scalar passage in

tenths located in the acute register. The last three measures of the piece bring back to the audience's attention the characteristic Polish rhythm, exposed this time in both instrumental scores that will end triumphantly with a repetitive cadence on tonic.

The last section of the piece represents a moment of maximum violin virtuosity, which challenges the performer both technically and interpretatively. One of the most difficult technical problems concerns the extended use of the sound compass of the violin, frequent use of double strings (including ciphered perfect eights and tenths) and chords of three and four sounds combined with changes of position performed on large intervals, application of a dense and bright *vibrato*, mastery of all species of bow etc. The musical beauty of the themes and the brilliant sound of the passages of virtuosity must be doubled by the perfection of intonation accuracy.

#### 4. Conclusions

Polonaise in D major, one of the beautiful masterpieces of musical literature dedicated to the violin, abounds in brilliant passages with a high degree of virtuosity, along with which we find melodic themes, built with great skill. The choice of the D major key was certainly not accidental, because this solar scale fits perfectly on the pattern of the violin, enhancing its timbre resonance. The use of the relative minor in one of the sections of the rondo form determines important changes in the expressiveness and general character of the work. Awareness of various technical and interpretive problems, solving and mastering them at the highest level through various approaches will naturally lead us to an exceptional interpretation, imprinted by the temperament, originality, imagination and sensitivity of each artistic personality.

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