



Ignacy Jan Paderewski was one of the most important figures connecting Poland and the United States. He was a pianist, composer, diplomat, and statesman. With thousands of concerts all over the world, including 1,500 in the United States alone, Paderewski achieved the status of the most popular and admired pianist of his time. He was famous for his renditions of Bach and Beethoven but above all he was the most masterful interpreter of Frederic Chopin's music.

Paderewski was born in 1860 in the village of Kuryłówka in the province of Podolia, then under the control of the Russian Empire (present day Ukraine). He studied music from early childhood. He first worked under the supervision of a private tutor; in 1872 he moved to Warsaw to enter the Warsaw Conservatorium. At the beginning of the 1880s he traveled to Berlin and Vienna to study music with Friedrich Kiel, Heinrich Urban, and Teodor Leszetycki. He became an overnight success with his first concerts in England, France, and the United States and the most popular pianist in a time where solo recitals were still a very new form of artistic expression. During his first years in America, Paderewski also established links with Western New York. On January 12th and February 13th, 1892 he gave two successful concerts in Buffalo. His popularity was not only a result of his virtuosity but also his magnetic personality. He was also the first pianist to give a solo recital in the newly built

Carnegie Hall in New York City. Almost 3,000 people attended the concert that was only one of many that attracted crowds previously unknown at classical music events.

An internationally recognized figure, he was also known for his activism and devotion to various social causes. As early as 1895 he founded the Paderewski Fund in New York to establish triennial prizes for American composers, regardless of race or religion. Throughout the years his projects gave substantial support to such diverse groups as unemployed musicians in England, playwrights, Polish composers in Poland, unemployed workers, wartime orphans in Italy, and Jewish refugees from Germany in France.

His career allowed him to establish intimate friendships with many of the leading statesmen of Europe and America. He soon came to be considered an expert on Polish affairs. Polish American organizations united to appoint Paderewski their leader. During World War I, while Poland fought to regain its independence, the U.S. Congress passed a resolution of sympathy for the Polish state and President Wilson, by proclamation, established January 1, 1916 as a day commemorating the suffering of the Polish people. Thanks to Paderewski's efforts this document, unique in history, bore the seals and signatures of all the Polish organizations in the United States.

World War I brought Paderewski back to Western New York. In 1917 he called for the formation of a Polish Army of volunteers to support American troops. At the same time he became a member of the newly formed Polish National Committee in Paris and was delegated to be its representative in the United States. As the United States remained neutral, the training camp for the Polish Army of volunteers was established at Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, then the British Dominion of Canada. As the nearest American city, Buffalo became a transit point for the volunteers. Paderewski visited the camp and addressed the troops. After the United States declared war against the Central Powers,

another Polish Army training camp was also formed at Fort Niagara, across the river from Niagara-on-the-Lake. The units of the Polish Army of volunteers were soon shipped to France and participated in combat at the Western Front.

With the end of World War I Poland regained its independence. In January 1919 Paderewski became the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs. He represented Poland at the Paris Peace Conference and signed The Versailles Peace Treaty, which reconstituted the territories of Poland after over a century of being wiped off the map of the world. After being abandoned by many of his political supporters, Paderewski handed in his letter of resignation on December 4, 1919. The same year he was designated the first Polish Ambassador to the League of Nations.

In 1923 Paderewski returned to his musical career establishing his second home in the United States. He purchased what was to become Rancho San Ignacio, California. There he planted walnut, almond, and plum trees and quite unexpectedly became famous for his petit syrah grapes. Wines produced from these grapes won several awards, beginning with a gold medal at the 1933 California State Fair. Down to the present, the community of Paso Robles in Northern California sponsors a Paderewski Festival weekend every March with music concerts, lectures, tours of wineries, and a Polish breakfast.

In 1939, when Nazi Germany invaded Poland and World War II broke out, Paderewski, then 79, once again was looked to provide leadership to Poles all over the world, especially the ones who found themselves in exile. Despite poor health, he agreed to travel to Paris to inaugurate a new government but refused to be Prime Minister again. His home in Switzerland became a shelter for emigrants of many nationalities during the war. Having spent some time in Switzerland, he returned to the United States to continue efforts supporting the Polish cause.

In 1941, after a rally in New York in extremely hot weather, Paderewski became ill. He passed away a few days later. His funeral mass in St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York was attended by 4,500 inside and 35,000 outside. It included statesmen and leaders of the political and musical world. By presidential decree (an action taken only once before in U.S. history) he was buried at Arlington Cemetery in Washington, D.C. He was laid to rest under the mast of the battleship Maine until his body could be transported to Poland only in 1992.

Ignacy Jan Paderewski remains a model citizen of the world. His life as a pianist, composer, humanitarian, statesman, and private entrepreneur constitutes one of the most fascinating links between Poland and the United States, each of which bears and commemorates the indelible marks of his life and work. His life has become a reflection of the consummate Polish-American experience.