

RUGGERO GERLIN. A PORTRAIT SKETCH

The article is an attempt to introduce the figure of Ruggero Gerlin, an outstanding harpsichordist from the last century (1899–1983), a legendary student of Wanda Landowska, a virtuoso and a well-regarded teacher of many generations of musicians. Enchanted in his young years by the extraordinary artist Wanda Landowska, a renowned pianist and harpsichordist, Gerlin decided to leave his mother country, Italy, to study with her in Paris.

Gerlin's coming to France was the beginning of the 20-year-long cooperation with Landowska. As a talented student, he developed his piano and harpsichord playing skills and widened his theoretical knowledge. He adored and valued his teacher, her way of playing and teaching methods, so he gladly and enthusiastically explored the world of music of old times. Diligent, ambitious and hard-working by nature, he soon became Landowska's secretary and close assistant, as well as her music partner during concerts performed together. First in Paris, and then in Saint-Leu-la-Forêt, in the house of music meetings and the seat of École de Musique Ancienne, he actively participated in Landowska's undertaking to promote harpsichord in the society of that time. The outbreak of WWII interrupted their joint endeavour and parted the two musicians forever.

During the war, Gerlin returned to his home country, summoned by the Italian army. Soon afterwards, he became a professor at Conservatorio di Musica San Pietro a Majella in Naples and a lecturer at L'Accademia Musicale Chigiana in Siena. He conducted prestigious music courses for almost thirty years, which attracted numerous now renowned harpsichordists. These students remember Gerlin as a friendly and kind man and at the same time an amazing erudite person and an expert on literature and art. As a demanding teacher, with his natural pedantry, he worked on every detail of a music piece: he explained new technical exercises and showed how to shape a phrase in a beautiful and expressive way.

Gerlin's teaching activity went hand in hand with concert life. The artist performed on many European stages as a soloist, harpsichordist and accompanist. He enchanted the audience with refined sound, his way of playing, which was full of elegance, emotions, fantasy and vividness. He performed the music pieces of all national schools but he most eagerly chose compositions by Johann Sebastian Bach and Italian masters. His virtuoso interpretations are also reflected in his wide discography – he made over a hundred recordings throughout his life.