

Zdzislaw Piernik

Biography

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Once in a while our profession is inspired by a tuba artist who is a revolutionary for the instrument- one who, in spite of obstacles put in his path, creates a career that is not only successful but also pioneering in its impact on our instrument. One such inspirational artist is Polish tubist Zdzislaw Piernik.

Born in November of 1942 in Torun, Poland, Piernik's musical life began with playing trumpet in a brass band, and later composing and even playing jazz on the double bass. As a tuba student his potential as a soloist was quickly realized when he won the First Prize at the Third National Festival of Young Musicians in Gdansk in 1970 and later graduated from the State Higher School of Music in Warsaw in 1971. Shortly thereafter he began his solo career, quickly becoming one of the major performers in the wonderfully innovative Polish contemporary music scene in the 1970s. Zdzislaw Piernik has been a tireless advocate for the tuba as a solo instrument, performing hundreds of solo recitals of the newest, most difficult solo repertoire (most of that repertoire composed especially for him). His work with the prepared tuba, using the most innovative and revolutionary techniques, made the tuba an equal to all instruments in common use on the contemporary music scene. In addition to his work as a prominent soloist, his resume includes the prestigious position of Principal Tuba in the National Philharmonic Orchestra in Warsaw.

His influence and fame is underscored by the many commissions and works composed especially for him. These works run the gamut of styles and genres, ranging from unaccompanied works to solos with tape. His recitals often have included works of his own composition and works from other composers inspired by his artistry. It was Zdzislaw Piernik that Krzysztof Penderecki had in mind when he composed his Capriccio for Solo Tuba. This work has become an important standard in the tuba repertory that is assured of constant performances far into the future. In addition to contemporary music, Piernik also has performed his own transcriptions of old masterworks and recorded innovative solo recordings that have been distributed worldwide.

Zdzislaw Piernik's fame and success is even more extraordinary when one considers the travel and economic limitations that existed during the Cold War, the period of his greatest activity. His refusal to be limited by the challenges presented through musical, political, or economic difficulties make his artistry and love for music even more of an inspiration to all musicians, let alone those of us who share his love for the tuba.

by John Griffiths

From:
International Tuba Euphonium
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