Stanislaw Skrowaczewski Dies at Age 93
By Susan Elliott, MusicalAmerica.com
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Stanislaw Skrowaczewski, distinguished conductor and composer, conductor laureate of the Minnesota Orchestra and the Deutsche Radio Philharmonie Saarbrücken Kaiserslautern, died today in Minneapolis at the age of 93. His affiliation with Minnesota, in particular, was notable, having been its music director for 19 years, from 1960 to 1979, and then returning every season in his laureate position. He last led the group in October 2016 in Bruckner’s Symphony No. 8, honoring his 93rd birthday. The previous year he led the same composer’s Fifth Symphony with the London Philharmonic, becoming the oldest conductor ever to perform at London’s Royal Festival Hall. Bruckner was a specialty.

Born in 1923 in Lwów, Poland, Skrowaczewski was a child prodigy; he played and conducted Beethoven’s Third Piano Concerto at the age of 13. During a Nazi bombing of his city in 1941 he suffered a hand injury, and so switched from piano to conducting and composing. Following a move to Kraków after the war, he joined musical circles that included Andrzej Panufnik and Witold Lutosławski, whose Concerto for Orchestra he was to premiere in the U.S. in 1958. He led the Paris premiere of the Shostakovich’s Fifth Symphony in 1948 with L’Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France.

He became music director of the Wroclaw (Breslaw) Philharmonic in 1946, moving on to hold the same position with the Silesian State Philharmonic of Katowice (1949-54), the Kraków Philharmonic (1954-56), and the Warsaw National Philharmonic Orchestra (1956-59).

Winning the Santa Cecilia Competition for Conductors in Rome in 1956 led to an invitation by George Szell to conduct the Cleveland Orchestra in 1958, launching his U.S. career. Engagements with the New York Philharmonic and others followed, and in 1960 he was appointed music director of the Minneapolis Symphony, at age 36. At that point he decided to become a U.S. citizen and move to Minneapolis.

The Sixties marked debuts with major international groups, from the Royal Concertgebouw, Vienna Philharmonic, and Chicago and Boston symphonies to the Vienna Staatsoper and Metropolitan Opera. The orchestras of Cleveland, Philadelphia, and Berlin were particular favorites. He was principal conductor of the Hallé in Manchester (1984 to 1991) and the Yomiuri Nippon Symphony from 2007. His made numerous recordings with these groups; those with the Saarbrücken Kaiserslautern include the complete Bruckner, Brahms, Schumann, and Beethoven symphonies, for Arte Nova, now Oehms, Classics.

In the 1940s he studied in Paris with Nadia Boulanger; his compositions have been performed and recorded widely, including Concerto for Orchestra (1985) and Passacaglia Immaginaria (1995). He was awarded the Knight’s Cross of Polonia Restituta, one of Poland’s highest decorations, and had six honorary doctorates, from the universities of Minnesota and Wroclaw, the New England Conservatory of Music, and the Karol Szymanowski Academy of Music, Katowice. He was also the recipient of the Bruckner Society of America’s Kilenyi Medal of Honor and the Gold Medal of the Mahler-Bruckner Society, as well as five ASCAP Awards for his programming of contemporary music.

A celebration of his life will be held on March 28 at Orchestra Hall in Minneapolis, , Minnesota, USA.

Statement from the Minnesota Orchestra:

*It is with aching hearts that we share the news that Maestro Stanislaw Skrowaczewski, who suffered a second stroke earlier this month, died earlier today. He was 93.*
It is hard to express all that Maestro Skrowaczewski has meant to the Minnesota Orchestra. He served as music director for 19 seasons, from 1960 to 1979, equaling our founding Music Director Emil Oberhoffer for the longest tenure in that position. He returned each season since then as our conductor laureate. Although he traveled the world conducting major orchestras until just last year, he continued to make Minnesota his home across the decades. He was a champion of new music, an extraordinary interpreter of Bruckner, a celebrated composer, an advocate for musicians during the lockout—and the major force behind the creation of Orchestra Hall in 1974. In total, his partnership with the Minnesota Orchestra spanned 56 years, and we are deeply grateful for more than a half-century of music-making with him.

A memorial service to celebrate his legacy will be held on Tuesday, March 28 at Orchestra Hall, with more details to follow. We offer our deepest condolences to his family.