

QuickTime\$ and a  
decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.

From: thescotsman.scotsman.com  
Published: 20 June 2007

## The £100-a-week cleaner from Poland who sparkled as a secret virtuoso

By Jim Gilchrist



**Picture: Jane Barlow**

THE swirl of a Chopin waltz ripples around the gothic vaulting and stained glass of Glasgow University Chapel. These are echoes of an old Poland in a bygone Europe; the young pianist, stooped and intent over the keyboard, is a product of the new Europe, an economic migrant.

Six months ago, Aleksander Kudajczyk, fresh from his music studies and seeing no future in Poland, stepped on a plane at Krakow Airport and flew to Prestwick in the hope of finding a teaching job.

Instead, he found himself working a few hours a day as a cleaner in Glasgow University's School of Law, starting every morning at 7am.

It earns him around £400 a month, compared with the 900 Polish zlotys - some £160 - he believes he would be getting for teaching music in Poland.

Eventually, the urge to play began to stir and he asked if he could practice on the grand piano in the chapel, just across the quadrangle from the law school. His casual performance was picked up on the chapel's webcam by astonished staff who suddenly became aware of the talent they had in their midst, hidden under a cleaner's overall.

Which is why Mr Kudajczyk, 28, finds himself playing again in the chapel - this time before a rapt audience - in his second Chopin recital in two days, as part of Glasgow's West End Festival and International Organ Festival.

Following rapturous applause from the audience, the pianist vanishes to unwind with a hasty cigarette, then appears clutching a brush and a plastic bucket, leaving a faint smell of disinfectant. Such is the double life of Aleksander Kudajczyk.

AN OBJECT lesson for those who assume that economic migrants, refugees or asylum seekers - those they deem

"outsiders" - come here without anything of their own to give, Mr Kudajczyk, like many of his compatriots in recent years, took the Prestwick-bound plane because the economic situation was so hopeless in his homeland. "The economy in Poland is probably getting better, but slowly," he says in careful, heavily accented English.

"I love Poland, it is my country, but I just decided to move here and settle."

Back in Poland, he explains, he had little chance to play classically since graduating, although he has played in jazz clubs - "but from sheet music, not strict jazz", he adds, and spent some time playing on cruise ships and in restaurants. Fresh from his music studies at Katowice's Akademia Muzyczna, he saw adverts for music teachers in Scotland that would make it well worth his while to come here, compared to what he would be paid for the same job in Poland.

He feels fully qualified, but he has had no luck so far. He needs more money, too, he says, to further his music studies "because I still have many, many other things to do about my education, but it is too expensive for me just now to study".

Why did he choose Scotland, where he has never played until this week's unexpected and triumphant debut in the university chapel?

"It is a beautiful country, and I know the people are nice. I heard that before," he replies.

He is aware of some fellow migrants' stories of racism and beatings: "There are stories like that. everybody has heard them. I suppose that happens in every country. But I have met only nice people."

Standing by as Mr Kudajczyk dutifully grabs his brush and bucket for the cameras, the Reverend Stuart MacQuarrie, chaplain to the university, describes how the young Pole approached him one day. "His supervisor asked me whether Aleksander could practice on the chapel piano. I said yes, and I'd actually forgotten all about it until I was checking the webcam one day and there was this wonderful sound.

"I thought someone was playing a CD through the sound system, but when I changed cameras I saw it was Aleksander. It took off from there, and we encouraged him to give concerts."

Mr MacQuarrie hopes that there might be academic possibilities for the young pianist. "I hope he'll come back and play again in the chapel. We'll certainly arrange some more concerts around him."

At the moment, however, he continues to work as a cleaner - this week's recitals were voluntary and unpaid, but Mr MacQuarrie hopes that other offers may now come his way.

WHAT is it about Chopin, I ask him hastily, as a ring of lenses and microphones descends on the slightly bemused Pole. "Everything," he says with feeling, his normally serious features breaking into a grin. "He is a very, very unique composer for piano. If it's about the piano, it has to be Chopin."

One consolation is that his girlfriend, Eweline Lukawska, is with him, also working as a cleaner at the university, despite her business studies in Poland. She had just returned yesterday from sitting examinations to hear him play. "Perhaps I'll be his manager one day," she laughs.

Following his second Glasgow concert - an all-Chopin programme, naturally, although he also favours Russian classical music such as Rachmaninov - Mr Kudajczyk describes himself as feeling "lighter". It was really, really stressful today."

Michael Dale, director of the West End festival, believes this week's concerts could help steer the Pole towards "much greater things". In the meantime, after this afternoon's performances, it will be up at 7am tomorrow and back to the cleaner's cupboard for the pianist.

The Chopin he loves so much spent much of his life outside Poland. Although he would hardly compare himself to his country's great romantic composer, Mr Kudajczyk, too, sees his immediate future, at least, in exile. "I came to make my future here," he says. "I hope it will be good, but you never know."