

SUMMARY

Alexander Koshetz and his diary “With a song around the world”

Edited by Walentyna Sobol

Alexander Koshetz (1875–1944) – a conductor, composer, ethnologist, memoir writer – is one of the most outstanding representatives of the so-called second wave of Ukrainian immigration to Canada in the interwar period of the twentieth century, which became marked in history as the period of the cult of Ukraine’s short independence (1918–1920).

Koshetz’s musical ensemble became famous while still in Kiev after performing the works of Artem Vedel, Dmytro Bortniansky, Hryhoriy Lomakin and Alexander Kastalski. Thanks to his close contacts with the eminent composer Mykola Lysenko (1842–1912), Koshetz became fascinated with the works of Joseph Haydn, Franz Schubert, Robert Schumann and Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy.

In 1919, Koshetz became one of the organizers of the Ukrainian Republic Capella and provided it with intellectual support. In 1921, the Capella split up into three ensembles. One of them, led by Koshetz, left for Poland, where the Ukrainian National Choir was founded. In the years 1921–1926, Koshetz as a conductor and the choir toured Europe (Spain, France, Belgium, Germany), and the Americas (including Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Mexico and Cuba). The musical word discovered the beauty of Ukrainian songs, which contributed the growth of interest in Ukraine. In Switzerland, the maestro experienced a revelation, he felt “rapturous” because he realized that he had the honour of showing the soul of the enslaved nation to the world – its charm, power, simplicity, but also mystery. “And all this only

thanks to folk songs”, wrote a French critic about the band’s performance. Queen of Belgium also enjoyed the concert (the ensemble performed in Brussels from January 8 to March 30, 1920), but we can read in the journal that she said: “My sympathy is completely on the side of your nation, [...] but we monarchs, we are hostages to politics...”

Koshetz’s notes from Brussels, written in these dramatic times, are a real and very insightful symbol of freedom of speech, longing for Europe and truth. From the triumphant tour, Koshetz did not return to Ukraine under Soviet rule. Since then, his works, and even mentioning them, have been forbidden, slandered, falsified.

In 1922, Koshetz left for America, where he became even more popular than in Europe. Stunning successes in the United States, Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil did not discourage him from perfecting his art, everyday work, and rehearsals. On the contrary, he constantly worked with the ensemble and strove to achieve the highest professionalism of the choristers. In 1923–1924, Koshetz and his choir gave very successful concerts in Canada, Cuba, Mexico, Florida and California.

Quite numerous ego-documents, both published and manuscript versions, found by the author of the book in the archives of Mr Alexander and Mrs Tetyana Koshetz in the Ukrainian Cultural and Educational Centre, Winnipeg, reveal Koshetz’s writing skills and their evolution. They are necessary to reconstruct the musician’s biography, his valuable literary and musical works with regard to the tragic historical events which happened a hundred years ago. The documents invite the reader to reflect on the history of literature and culture destroyed and persecuted for ages. We can talk about the mission that both the conductor himself and his ego-documents fulfilled. One hundred years later, Koshetz’s testimonies still remain relevant in the intellectual, axiological, moral and ethical as well as ecumenical sense. These diaries seem to serve as a reminder and warning... They inspire thinking about the meaning of the words of Publilius Syrus, a Latin writer from the 1st century BC: *Falsum etiam est verbum, quod constituit superior.* – *False becomes true when the heavy hitter decides it is.*

Transl. *Izabela Ślusarek*