

A Polish *Composer* *of Jewish* *Descent*

*in Interwar Lwów.
Reflections on the National and
Religious Identity of Józef Koffler**

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ABSTRACT

Józef Koffler (born 1896 in Stryj, died 1943/1944) has so far usually been perceived as a Polish composer of Jewish origin. He was a composer and professor at the PTM Conservatory of Music in Polish Lwów (now Lviv, Ukraine) in the years 1924–1939. This article attempts to analyse his identity against the background of his education, work, professional activity, and circle of acquaintances and friends. The problem deserves attention, especially since the fact that Koffler abandoned Judaism in favour of Christianity before World War II has been completely unknown so far. The composer's letter of December 1941, especially important in this context, has likewise been unknown. This paper inquires whether baptism influenced Koffler's career in any way, and whether this decision could have resulted from internal motives. Koffler's conversion at a rather late age may have been related to his late fatherhood. However, the wish to ensure his son's full (including religious) assimilation did not necessarily preclude a change in the Koffler couple's personal beliefs.

Keywords: Józef Koffler, Lwów (Lviv), baptism, conversion, Jewish, Catholic

Józef Koffler has so far mostly been perceived as a Polish composer of Jewish origin.¹ This paper attempts to capture the transformation of his identity – a subject that deserves attention, especially since Koffler's rejection of Judaism in favour of Christianity as well as his WWII letter discussed below have been completely unknown so far.

FROM GALICIA TO VIENNA

Born into a Jewish family in 1896, Józef Koffler came from Stryj (now Stryi in Ukraine) which, like Lwów (Germ. Lemberg, Ukr. Lviv)² and Kraków, was then part of the Austrian province of Galicia. The province had emerged as a result of Austrian annexation of southern Polish territories in 1772. In the late 1860s, Poles in Galicia were granted autonomy with respect to administration, education, and culture. This situation

continued until 1914. In Koffler's childhood and youth, the status of the Polish language was thus reinforced by the Polish (rather than German) administration and by his education in Stryj's Polish secondary school, from which he graduated with final exams in 1914. Of much significance was also the assimilation of many Jews to Polish culture (which was a voluntary process since no Polish statehood existed at that time). Galician Jews seldom underwent Germanisation in Koffler's time, and almost never became assimilated to Ukrainian culture.³

Koffler studied at the University of Vienna in 1914–1923. In his enrolment form for the first semester in 1914, he declared that his mother tongue (*Muttersprache*) was Polish.⁴ Koffler spent the years 1916–1920 in the army, serving first in the forces of Austria-Hungary (as an Austrian citizen till 1918). Soon after Poland regained independence in November 1918, its southern pre-1772 territories including Lwów, Kraków, and Stryj became part of Poland again, which allowed Koffler to receive Polish citizenship and enter the Polish army. He probably took part in Poland's war with the Bolsheviks (1919–1920).⁵ From the autumn of 1920 he continued his studies in Vienna, where in 1923 he obtained his PhD in Musicology on the basis of a dissertation about the music of Felix Mendelssohn.⁶ We do not know whether his choice of subject was related in any way to Mendelssohn's image as a Jewish composer (despite the latter's conversion to the Lutheran faith at age seven).⁷ On his return to Poland in 1924, Koffler settled in Lwów, where he spent the next seventeen years.

The double Polish-Jewish identity characteristic of the generation growing up under the Partitions (before 1918) was mostly no longer acceptable for either the Polish or

¹ Maciej Gołąb, *Józef Koffler* (Kraków, 1995), 7; Leon Tadeusz Błaszczyk, *Żydzi w kulturze muzycznej ziem polskich w XIX i XX wieku* (Warszawa, 2014), 136–137. Of recent publications: Cindy Bylander, *Engaging Cultural Ideologies. Classical Composers and Musical Life in Poland 1918–1956* (Boston, 2022), 58–59.

² This paper uses the Polish names of cities as they were officially called in Koffler's lifetime (Stryi and Lviv have been part of independent Ukraine since 1991). About the name Lwów in recent publications see: C. Bylander, *Engaging Cultural*, 16.

³ Norman Davies, *Galicja. Historia nie narodowa*, tr. Bartłomiej Pietrzyk (Kraków, 2023), 222, 320.

⁴ Archiv der Universität Wien (AdUW), Universität Wien, Juridische Fakultät, Nationale, Winter Semester 1914/1915 (Josef Koffler), shelf mark 603, manuscript, unnumbered pages.

⁵ Roman Goldberger, ed., *Almanach i leksykon żydostwa polskiego*, vols 2–3 (Lwów, 1938), 723; Gołąb, *Józef Koffler*, 210.

⁶ 'Über orchestrale Koloristik in den symphonischen Werken von Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy'. *Verzeichnis über die Seit dem Jahre 1872 an der Philosophischen Fakultät der Universität in Wien eingereichten und approbierten Dissertationen*, vol. 1 (Wien, 1934), 205.

⁷ David Conway, *Jewry in Music. Entry to the Profession from the Enlightenment to Richard Wagner* (Cambridge, 2016), 181.

the Jewish side in the interwar period, as Anna Landau-Czajka points out.⁸ The term ‘Pole of the Jewish faith’, very common before 1918, was progressively becoming a thing of the past.⁹ Many Jews came to consider Poland as their fatherland. Full assimilation to the Polish language and culture, and even a nearly complete loss of contact with Jewish culture, was not necessarily tantamount to a change of national identity, though.¹⁰ At universities between the world wars, Jewishness was defined as being of the Jewish faith. All the same, Jews were viewed more and more frequently as a national, not a religious minority, and a similar tendency also manifested itself among the Jews themselves. Many of them (though not all) had a sense of separate, unique identity.¹¹ Koffler probably considered these issues frequently in his head. Every assimilated Jew in the 1930s faced the question of ‘who I am’, and, as Landau-Czajka emphasises, each situated his or her identity at a different point on the axis between ‘a Pole’ and ‘a Jew’. Both Poles and Jews demanded unequivocal declarations with regard to nationality.¹²

IN THE POLISH LWÓW

Lwów had the second largest group of Polish intelligentsia in interwar Poland, after Warsaw. It boasted a large numbers of academic teachers, including those working at music conservatories.¹³ In 1931 Lwów was a city of more than 312 thousand inhabitants, 63.4% of whom (more than 198,000) declared they spoke Polish at home, 24.1% (more than 75,000) – Yiddish or Hebrew, 11.2% (more than 35,000) – Ukrainian or Ruthenian, 0.78% – German.¹⁴ The majority of those

who declared themselves as native speakers of Polish were Roman Catholic, but a large proportion of them were of the Jewish faith. Of the 99,000 Lwów inhabitants of that confession, nearly a quarter (i.e. ca 25,000) indicated that Polish was their home language.¹⁵ It is to that latter group that Koffler must have belonged.

In 1924–1939, Koffler held the post of lecturer at the Lwów Conservatory of the Polish Music Society (PTM), the largest and oldest institution of musical education not only in that city, but in the whole of southern Poland,¹⁶ with 46 faculty members and 926 students, 55% of whom were Roman Catholics and 37% were of the Jewish faith (data for 1926).¹⁷ The Conservatory was headed by Mieczysław Sołtys (1899–1929) and Adam Sołtys (1930–1939), both of whom were Poles and Roman Catholics. Koffler was a member of the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM), Lwów branch (operating in 1930–1933 as part of the Polish section established in 1924 in Warsaw). The Lwów branch was presided over by Adam Sołtys; his deputy was Stefania Łobaczewska, while the musicologist Prof. Adolf Chybiński was its honorary chairman. Section members included such musicians and musicologists of Jewish descent as Zofia Lissa, Seweryn Barbag, Józef Koffler, and Leopold Muenzer.¹⁸ In the late 1930s, Koffler maintained direct contacts with the ISCM structures abroad. Until 1939, Koffler’s music was performed primarily in Lwów (1927–1939, in its main concert halls),¹⁹ sporadically in Warsaw (1932), and was sometimes broadcast on Polish Radio. Foreign performances included Oxford (1931), The Hague (1932), Amsterdam (1933), Vienna (1935), Ljubljana (1937), and London (1935, 1936, 1938). Many of those events were held by the ISCM Lwów branch and the ISCM headquarters.

In the early 1930s, Koffler was also briefly the head of Jewish Academic Choir.²⁰ As a journalist, he sometimes also

8 Anna Landau-Czajka, ‘Trudny wybór. Asymilowani Żydzi o problemie tożsamości narodowej w II Rzeczypospolitej’, *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, 2 (2005), 52, 54–56.

9 Landau-Czajka, ‘Trudny wybór’, 57; Anna Landau-Czajka, *A syn będzie Lech... Asymilacja Żydów w Polsce międzywojennej* (Warszawa, 2006), 286.

10 ‘Trudny wybór’, 63, 68.

11 Piotr M. Majewski, ‘Społeczność akademicka 1915–1939’, in Piotr M. Majewski, ed., *Monumenta Universitatis Varsoviensis 1816–2016. Dzieje Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego 1915–1939* (Warszawa, 2016), 261–262.

12 ‘Trudny wybór’, 71.

13 There were 54,000 white collar employees and their families in Lwów in 1931. *Mały rocznik statystyczny* (Warszawa, 1939), 38.

14 *Mały rocznik*, 37.

15 *Mały rocznik*, 37–38.

16 Leshek Mazepa and Teresa Mazepa, *Шлях до музичної академії у Львові*, vol. 1 (Lviv, 2003), 195; Gołąb, *Józef Koffler*, 211; *Konservatorium Polskiego Towarzystwa Muzycznego we Lwowie* (Lwów, 1939), 6.

17 Mazepa and Mazepa, *Шлях до музичної*, vol. 1, 181, 195.

18 Michał Piekarski, *Przerwany kontrapunkt. Adolf Chybiński i początki polskiej muzykologii we Lwowie* (Warszawa, 2017), 372.

19 Mostly at the PTM hall. *Symphony No. 2*, Op. 17 was premiered at Lwów’s Grand Theatre. Cf. ‘IV koncert symfoniczny’, *Gazeta Lwowska*, 14 (1937), 2.

20 Alfred Plohn, ‘Muzyka we Lwowie a Żydzi’, in Herman Stahl, ed., *Almanach żydowski* (Lwów, 1937), 48.

reported on concerts held by the Jewish Artistic-Literary Society.²¹ The claim that in 1938 Koffler became a member of the World Center for Jewish Music in Jerusalem is probably false (this issue will be discussed later).²²

CONTEXTS OF KOFFLER'S MUSIC

References to Jewish tradition in Koffler's output are not numerous. Much more frequently he drew on Polish culture, including religious themes. Jewish influences of dubious attribution include *Jewish Folksongs* for piano. Koffler also composed some now lost 'Hasidic dances' which, among other 'folk dances', were presented during a classical dance night at Lwów's Nowości Theatre (1932).²³ Polish elements are present in his *Musique. Quasi una sonata*, Op. 8 for piano (1927) and *Concerto pour piano*, Op. 13 (1932), which employ Polish folkdance motifs, as well as his set of *Forty Polish Folksongs* for piano (publ. 1925).²⁴ The latter collection includes Polish patriotic songs, folk tunes, as well as arrangements of four Polish Christmas carols, sung both at private homes and in Roman Catholic churches in Poland. Koffler may have known many of those songs from the time of his military service or even his secondary school education. He also printed Christmas carol arrangements in the periodical *Orkiestra*, of which he was the editor in 1930–1938. As an author of Polish patriotic songs, Koffler continued along a path already mapped by some nineteenth-century composers of Jewish descent, who chose to assimilate but without rejecting their Jewish identity.²⁵

Christmas carols, highly characteristic of Polish culture, were not the only Christian element in Koffler's output. He directly referred to Christianity in its universal dimension as the composer of the cantata *Die Liebe*,

op. 14 for voice, clarinet, viola, and cello, published in 1931 in Vienna. The cantata sets the words of St Paul's *First Epistle to the Corinthians* in German translation. Koffler (who may have been attracted to the figure of St Paul as a Christian of Jewish descent) starts with the well-known passage: 'Wenn ich mit Menschen- und mit Engeln reden und hätte der Liebe nicht, so wäre ich ein tönendes Erz oder eine klingende Schelle' ('If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.', transl. NIV Bible). This is a New Testament text belonging exclusively to the Christian tradition, and not recognised as a divine revelation by Judaism (though Jews may have known it as a 'text of culture'). Jews and Christians share a common Biblical tradition in the form of, for instance, the *Book of Psalms*, but Koffler did not take it up. The cantata was printed in Vienna in a small edition of twenty-five copies only, which does not look like an attempt to attract the attention of the Polish audience. The first Polish-language note on this cantata appeared as late as 1934.²⁶ This suggests that the composer probably wrote this work motivated by personal need.

PRIVATE LIFE

In 1929 in Lwów, Józef Koffler married Róża Roth (b. 1904 in Galicia), who was likewise of the Jewish faith. They married in the presence of a rabbi.²⁷ Róża graduated in French philology from Lwów's Jan Kazimierz University (UJK).²⁸ She was probably a cousin of Leopold Spinner, Lwów-born Jewish avant-garde composer working in Vienna and then London.²⁹ Leopold Muenzer, one of the witnesses present at the Kofflers' marriage ceremony, was a pianist and piano teacher (1928–1939) on the faculty of the PTM Conservatory, like Koffler himself.³⁰ Muenzer

²¹ Natan Landau, 'Koncert Żyd. Tow. Art. Lit., a szerzenie kultury muzycznej', *Chwila*, 6332 (1936), 9; Sylwia Jakubczyk-Ślęczka, 'Jewish Music Organisations in Interwar Galicia', in François Guesnet, Benjamin Matis, and Antony Polonsky, eds, *Polin. Studies in Polish Jewry* (London 2020), 346–347.

²² Henryk Apte, 'Musica Hebraica', *Nowy Dziennik*, 226 (1938), 10. I am grateful to Prof. Iwona Lindstedt for attracting my attention to this paper.

²³ Stefania Łobaczewska, 'Z opery i sali koncertowej', *Gazeta Lwowska*, 109 (1932), 7. See: Gołąb, *Józef Koffler*, 266.

²⁴ Józef Koffler, *40 polskich pieśni ludowych*, Leipzig, ca 1926; Gołąb, *Józef Koffler*, 145, 255.

²⁵ Halina Goldberg, 'Na skrzydłach estetycznego piękna ku świetlanym sferom nieskończoności. Muzyka i żydowski reformatorzy w XIX-wiecznej Warszawie', *Studia Chopinowskie*, 1 (2020), 13.

²⁶ Jerzy Freiwiler, 'Sprawozdania z współczesnej twórczości polskiej', *Muzyka Polska*, 1 (1934), 75; Gołąb, *Józef Koffler*, 223.

²⁷ Archiwum Akt Dawnych [Central Archives of Historical Records], [collection] Księgi metrykalne gmin wyznania mojżeszowego z terenów tzw. "zaburzańskich", Księga zaślubin izraelickiego okręgu metrykalnego [Register Books of Jewish Communities from the Former Polish Territories in the East. Marriage Register of the Jewish Jurisdiction], [entry concerning the marriage of Józef Koffler and Róża née Roth], Lwów, 15 Oct. 1929, shelf mark 1/300/0/-/661, typescript, c. 632.

²⁸ Gołąb, *Józef Koffler*, 213–214.

²⁹ Regina Busch, *Leopold Spinner* (Bonn, 1987), 37.

³⁰ *Konservatorium Polskiego Towarzystwa Muzycznego*, 7; Herman Stahl (ed.), *Almanach żydowski*, (Lwów, 1937), 329; Мазепа, Мазепа, *Шлях до музичної*, vol. 1, 188.

eagerly and frequently performed Koffler's works. It was to him that Koffler dedicated his *Concerto pour piano*, Op. 13 (1932).³¹ According to Róža's friend Waleria Solecka, it took Koffler a lot of time to start a relationship or a friendship. He maintained close relations with Muenzer and the German conductor Hermann Scherchen (who often led performances of Koffler's music).³²

From 1936, the Kofflers resided in a three-storey tenement house at 5, Piotra Chmielowskiego St.,³³ in a part of the city centre populated by well-off members of the intelligentsia. The house was close to the old university building in św. Mikołaja St., the university church of St Nicholas, and the PTM Conservatory. In the same year, the Koffler's only child Alban was born.³⁴ Giving non-Jewish names to children was then common even among the less assimilated Jews,³⁵ but the Latin name Alban was rare in Poland at that time. St Alban, who lived in the third century, is, among others, a patron of converts. Of Koffler's acquaintances, composer Alban Berg also bore this name.³⁶

CIRCUMSTANCES OF KOFFLER'S CONVERSION AND BAPTISM

Józef Koffler left the Jewish (religious) community on 17 November 1937.³⁷ It was not known until lately whether he adopted any other faith or only referred to Christianity in some of his works. Previously unknown documents have now confirmed beyond any doubt that on Monday, 24 January 1938 Józef Koffler and his wife were baptised at St Nicholas' Church in Lwów,³⁸ and

they had their son baptised on the same day, christening him Jan Alban Reginald.³⁹ Koffler turned forty-two, and his wife – thirty-four in that year. Other, well-known Viennese composers to have converted before him included Gustav Mahler (in 1897, at age thirty-seven, to Roman Catholicism) and Arnold Schönberg (who became a Lutheran in 1898 at age twenty-four, but returned to Judaism in 1933 at age fifty-nine as an act of solidarity with the persecuted Jewish nation). Józef, Róža, and Alban Koffler were all baptised by Father Stanisław Narajewski, professor emeritus of the Jan Kazimierz University's Faculty of Theology. The godparents were Polish senator Wojciech (Adalbert) Gołuchowski (previously Lwów provincial governor) and his wife Zofia née Baworowska. This triple baptism was exclusively a family event and was not publicised anywhere.

According to Anna Landau-Czajka, Jews converted to Christianity in the interwar Poland typically for two reasons. One was pragmatic – to obtain a social status they aspired to, for themselves and their children. The other was assimilation and the last step towards becoming a Pole.⁴⁰ Every such decision, however, required careful consideration. Acceptance of baptism was outright condemned even by assimilated Jews and those who paid no attention to religious practice. Jewish converts to Christianity universally met with unfriendly or even hostile attitudes, since such an act was tantamount to a complete rejection of Jewish identity.⁴¹ We do not know how the Kofflers' family members and their friend Leopold Muenzer reacted to their conversion.⁴²

By the mid-1930s, baptism was no longer a 'ticket' to becoming a fully-fledged Pole, nor did it impact nationality and career. Jewish converts were often not quite welcome by either party.⁴³ The number of conversions in the 1930s Lwów was small in comparison with the number of Jewish inhabitants (of whom there were ca 100 thousand). Both in 1936 and 1938, the number of such conversions was

31 Gołąb, *Józef Koffler*, 213, 216–217, 229, 244, 256.

32 Gołąb, *Józef Koffler*, 213.

33 Biblioteka Jagiellońska w Krakowie, Oddział Zbiorów Specjalnych [The Jagiellonian Library in Kraków, Special Collections] (BJ OZS), *Korespondencja A. Chybińskiego*, file: K-1-25, shelf mark K14/16, Józef Koffler's letter to B. Rutkowski [copy], Lwów, 16 Nov. 1936, typescript, unnumbered cards.

34 Národní muzeum – České muzeum hudby, Praha [The National Museum – Czech Museum of Music, Prague] (NmČmh), Józef Koffler's letter to Alois Hába, Lwów 19 April 1937, shelf mark 4227, typescript. I am grateful to Prof. Iwona Lindstedt for attracting my attention to this letter. See footnote 38.

35 Landau-Czajka, *A syn będzie Lech*, 234.

36 Józef Koffler, 'Nekrolog. Alban Berg', *Orkiestra*, 1 (1936), 15.

37 Maciej Gołąb, 'Garść informacji o Józefie Kofflerze i jego rodzinie z ksiąg metrykalnych gminy żydowskiej w Stryju', *Muzyka*, 2/52 (2007), 67.

38 Archiwum Arcybiskupa Eugeniusza Baziaka w Krakowie [Archbishop Eugeniusz Baziak Archive, Kraków] (AAEBwK),

Libri extraneorum of St Nicholas Roman Catholic Parish in Lwów, [Joseph Koffler, Róža Koffler], Lwów, 24 Jan. 1938, shelf mark CXXXIV-14, manuscript, unnumbered cards.

39 AAEBwK, The *Libri extraneorum* as above. According to his baptismal entry, Alban Koffler was born in Lwów on 3 August 1936.

40 Landau-Czajka, *A syn będzie Lech*, 289.

41 *A syn będzie Lech*, 293, 296–298, 300, 306.

42 We are not aware of any collaborations between Koffler and Muenzer in 1938–1939.

43 *A syn będzie Lech*, 305, 309–310.

much smaller than one per cent (only seventy-six persons in 1936). Most of them were made at a relatively young age (20–39), typically by single women under thirty who planned to marry a Christian. Persons over forty enjoying a stable social and professional position, such as Koffler, converted only rarely.⁴⁴

Józef Koffler's decision to leave the Jewish religious community (in 1937) and be baptised (in 1938) may largely have been influenced by the birth of his son (in 1936). His late conversion, in this interpretation, would thus have been correlated with his equally late fatherhood, and his likely desire to ensure that his son could fully assimilate into the Polish society. Since Koffler had arranged Polish carols as early as 1925, he may have been one of those Jews who observed Christmas to some extent. However, as Landau-Czajka points out, religious festivals as celebrated by assimilated Jews differed from both traditional Jewish and Catholic Polish festivals, which often gave their children a sense of estrangement from their social environment.⁴⁵ Koffler may have wished to spare his son a similar experience by ensuring his full assimilation, also in the sphere of religion. This, however, need not preclude the possibility that the Koffler couple embraced Christianity with personal conviction.

In Koffler's case, a conversion to Catholicism might be interpreted as motivated by non-religious considerations both at the start of his career and later, when his position was already secure and respected. Nevertheless, if we ask whether Koffler abandoned the Jewish faith and accepted baptism for professional benefit (as Mahler was suspected to have done in Vienna back in 1897), the answer can only be negative. Koffler left the Jewish community thirteen years after taking up the teaching post at the PTM Conservatory. By that time, he was highly regarded as a professor and a composer. The Conservatory employed Jewish lecturers until its dissolution in 1939. Koffler's friend Leopold Muenzer was one of them.

Could Koffler's choice of such noble godparents (senator Gołuchowski and his wife were both aristocrats) be interpreted as an expression of his desire to join the then Polish elites and thus further improve his social status? This would contradict what Waleria Solecka says about Koffler as a 'physically and mentally strong' person

'with a sense of full self-esteem', a rationalist who behaved in predictable ways.⁴⁶ We are not aware of any works dedicated by Koffler to the Gołuchowski couple, which would have been advisable, had he really been trying to win their favours. Craving to further his career and join the elites at the expense of seriously damaging relations with his family and friend would hardly have been rational and would rather suggest an inferiority complex, which, according to Solecka, Koffler did not exhibit. What is more, in 1938 conversion was no longer a ticket to career or to 'the society'. The choice of godparents by adult converts was a highly personal matter and certainly not accidental. Koffler's contacts with the Gołuchowski couple most likely dated from earlier times, especially since establishing close relations was hard for him. It is possible that Koffler had met Wojciech Gołuchowski already during his military service in 1920 (though there is no proof of this to date).

For many converts, religion played little role in their lives, or none at all. In Koffler's case, however, we have no proof that he was indifferent in religious matters. Some members of Jewish communities did embrace Christianity for reasons of faith. However deep that faith might be (and it was very sincere in many cases), such persons did not expect their social environment correctly to interpret their motifs.⁴⁷

Koffler's biographical entries, prepared in the period preceding his baptism, were published in the 1937 and 1938 editions of *Almanach żydowski* [Jewish Yearbook].⁴⁸ We do not know to what extent Koffler could moderate the content of those bios or whether he wanted to be listed there as a Jewish composer at all, despite drifting further and further away from Jewish tradition and environment as his baptism suggests. Three weeks after being baptised (1938), Koffler received a letter with an offer of membership in the (then established) World Center for Jewish Music. He refused, excusing himself with lack of time, but did not mention his baptism (abandoning the ancestral religion was not something one would announce in such contexts).⁴⁹ There is no

⁴⁴ Wacław Wierzbieniec, *Żydzi w województwie lwowskim w okresie międzywojennym. Zagadnienia demograficzne i społeczne* (Rzeszów, 2003), 39–40.

⁴⁵ Anna Landau-Czajka, 'Między Chanuką a Gwiazdką: święta w asymilowanych rodzinach żydowskich okresu międzywojennego', *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów*, 2 (2004), 176–179, 181.

⁴⁶ Gołąb, *Józef Koffler*, 213.

⁴⁷ Landau-Czajka, *A syn będzie Lech*, 289–290, 293–294, 296.

⁴⁸ Herman Stahl, ed., *Almanach żydowski* (Lwów, 1937), 322; Roman Goldberger, ed., *Almanach i leksykon żydostwa polskiego*, vols 2–3 (Lwów, 1938), 722–724.

⁴⁹ The National Library of Israel, Archive of the World Centre for Jewish Music in Palestine, Series A: Correspondence, [Letter] 13.2.38 Józef Koffler to World Centre for Jewish Music in Palestine, Lwów, no. 464, typescript, unnumbered cards. I am

evidence of Koffler's activity in Jewish institutions in Poland in 1937–1939.

Koffler mentioned the possibility of emigrating from Poland at least twice. In a letter to Slavko Osterc of September 1936, he admitted he considered leaving for South America.⁵⁰ To Alois Hába he wrote in April 1937⁵¹ about the nasty remarks concerning his Jewish descent from an (unnamed) Warsaw-based antagonist, but no similar unpleasant situations in the Lwów circles are mentioned. Koffler feared that anti-Semitic campaigns might deprive Jews of their posts at Polish universities and conservatories. Though such measures were eventually never applied in the interwar Poland, in the mid-to-late 1930s academics of Jewish descent progressively feared for their future.⁵² In January 1937, a vote was passed at the general assembly of the Association of Graduates from Jan Kazimierz University and Veterinary Medicine Academy in Lwów that eliminated not only Jewish members, but all persons of Jewish origin – a genuine *Arierparagraf*.⁵³ In March 1937, a resolution was carried during an academic youth rally in Lwów that demanded an immediate removal of Jewish teachers of history and the Polish language from all secondary schools and academic institutions.⁵⁴

These hostilities were part of progressively more aggressive anti-Jewish campaigns that intensified in Lwów and other academic cities from the mid-1930s onwards. Adam Redzik points out that these events in Poland were part of an anti-Semitic hysteria mounting throughout Europe – in Germany, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and Czechoslovakia (in the last year before the war). Those countries introduced *numerus clausus* as a state regulation. In Poland, however, universities that adopted *numerus clausus* broke the state constitution by doing

so.⁵⁵ Anti-Semitic incidents at universities took place soon after Koffler had written the two letters mentioned above. Eventually, however, he did not emigrate from Poland. He may have been waiting till the last moment in the hope that anti-Jewish sentiments would not spread to affect music education. PTM Conservatory was not a state institution and therefore did not need to introduce the same restrictions as state universities. On the other hand, it was one of the music schools whose status was confirmed in 1932 by the Polish Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Education, which acted as its supervisory body.⁵⁶ Koffler possibly feared his antagonist's ministerial connections. From 1937 onwards, Jews and persons of Jewish descent were gradually excluded from numerous academic and professional organisations in Poland. This concerned engineers, architects, physicians, but there is no evidence that such practices took place in music societies, specifically in Lwów. Nor did Adam Sołtys, the head of PTM Conservatory, exhibit anti-Semitic attitudes.

THE SOVIET AND GERMAN OCCUPATION

As a result of the USSR invading eastern Poland in September 1939, Lwów was under Soviet occupation in 1939–1941. The new Soviet authorities closed down the previously functioning music schools and in early 1940 they launched the Lvov State Conservatory (Львовская государственная консерватория, LGK), whose head was the Ukrainian composer-pianist Vasył Barvinsky. LGK employed both Józef and Róża Koffler (the latter – as a piano teacher) as well as some prewar music school lecturers including Adam Sołtys.⁵⁷ The new authorities granted Józef Koffler the title of professor, appointing him deputy rector and chair of composition at the Faculty of Composition, whose dean was Zofia Lissa.⁵⁸ Koffler's appreciation by the Soviet authorities was also confirmed by his being selected as one of several LGK delegates for the 1940 assembly of the Union of Soviet Composers in Kyiv, during which Koffler's *Symphony No. 2*, Op. 17a (1933) was also performed. In 1940 Koffler published in *Sovetskaya Muzyka* a forced critical reappraisal of

grateful to Prof. Iwona Lindstedt for attracting my attention to this letter.

50 National and University Library, Ljubljana, Music Collection, shelf mark M rkp Osterc, S., Kronika, Korespondenca, Józef Koffler's letter to Slavko Osterc, Lwów, 27 Sept. 1936, [no shelf mark], typescript. I am grateful to Prof. Iwona Lindstedt for attracting my attention to this letter.

51 NmČmh Józef Koffler's letter to Alois Hába, Lwów, 19 April 1937, shelf mark 4227, typescript.

52 Majewski, 'Społeczność akademicka 1915–1939', 278.

53 Szymon Rudnicki, *Falanga. Ruch narodowo-radykalny* (Warszawa, 2018), 214.

54 'W sprawie odzyskania kultury polskiej', *Warszawski Dziennik Narodowy*, 81 (1937), 3.

55 Adam Redzik, 'Zarys historii Uniwersytetu Jana Kazimierza', in Adam Redzik, ed., *Academia militans. Uniwersytet Jana Kazimierza we Lwowie* (Kraków, 2017), 194–196.

56 'O szkołach muzycznych', *Szopen*, 1 (1932), 6.

57 Mazepa and Mazepa, *Шлях до музичної*, vol. 2, 38.

58 *Шлях до музичної*, vol. 2, 40–42; Gołąb, Józef Koffler, 232–235.

the prewar past as viewed from the perspective of the new ideology. For similar reasons, in order to meet the communist rulers' expectations, he wrote pieces drawing on Ukrainian folklore, which were printed in 1940–1941 in Kyiv.⁵⁹ Koffler had his successive compositions performed until early 1941, which proves that he was a composer recognised by the Soviet authorities. Nevertheless, on the list of LGK teachers compiled in April 1941, both Józef and Róża Koffler declared Polish nationality, while for instance Lissa and Muenzer wrote that they were Jewish.⁶⁰ This declaration of Polishness by the Koffler couple was particularly significant since the Soviets favoured other nationalities in the occupied territories and were biased against Poles.

Nazi Germany, which had attacked and occupied Western and central Poland since September 1939, continued its military expansion. As a consequence, between June 1941 and July 1944 Lwów was under German occupation and became part of Distrikt Galizien (established in August 1941). Lvov State Conservatory was closed. Musicians and musicologists of Polish and Jewish nationality lost their jobs. Only Ukrainian musicians could officially continue to work at a music school created for them, and at the opera theatre that could only be attended by Germans and Ukrainians.⁶¹

Late July 1941 saw the first German-inspired pogrom of Lwów's Jews, mostly carried out by the Ukrainian police. The Lwów (Lemberg) ghetto was established in September of the same year, and, according to a decree, all the Jews were obliged to move there by 15 December.⁶² Stripped of his teaching post, Józef Koffler lived with his wife and son in the same apartment as before, located in a district far away from the ghetto. It seems he was not afraid of his neighbours, who were presumably aware of his Jewish descent. Still he may well have feared, for instance, that the *Almanach żydowski* and other documents would be found and used by the Germans. Koffler had been an LGK professor under the first Soviet occupation and had enjoyed the then authorities' favour. He did not, however,

flee the Germans by travelling to the Soviet interior, as some Jews did in June 1941. One of those latter was Zofia Lissa, who left Lwów not only because she may have feared the Germans, but also due to her communist beliefs, which Koffler never shared. Koffler seems to have been all too well aware of the mechanisms of the Soviet system and wanted nothing more to do with it. Though he did not choose to flee in panic to the east in 1941, he must surely have heard how not only Jews, but anyone of Jewish origin was treated under the German occupation in central and western Polish territories. His behaviour suggests that he was one of those persons of Jewish descent who, as Landau-Czajka explains, identified as Poles to such an extent that at the start of the occupation they believed that anti-Jewish decrees did not concern them.⁶³

On 19 December 1941, four days after the final date by which Jews were obliged to move to the ghetto and half a year since the start of the German occupation in Lwów, Koffler wrote a previously unknown letter to Prince Andrzej Lubomirski, the prewar PTM president in Lwów and an acquaintance of the Gołuchowskis.⁶⁴ Lubomirski had an estate in Przeworsk near Rzeszów, more than 100 km west of Lwów. In the letter, Koffler declares his national and religious identity, requesting shelter for himself, his wife and son:

Józef Koffler in Lwów to Prince Andrzej Lubomirski in Przeworsk
Lwów, 19 December 1941⁶⁵

Your Most Honourable and Distinguished Lordship,
I must sincerely apologise for venturing to address you in this manner. Let me present my most humble request to Your Honourable Lordship as long-time President of the Polish Music Society in Lwów, for which I had the honour and pleasure to be a professor from 1922 [sic!] onwards.⁶⁶
I am at present in a morally very grave situation. Morally [emphasis by JK], not materially, since in material terms I need no help.
I and my wife are Poles, believing and practising Catholics, albeit of 'non-Aryan' descent. For such persons it is hard, exceptionally

⁵⁹ Józef Koffler, *Chotyry Dytyachi Pyesy* for piano, *Ukrainski eskizi*, Op. 27 for string quartet. Cf. Gołąb, *Józef Koffler*, 262–263.

⁶⁰ Mazepa and Mazepa, *Шлях до музичної*, vol. 2, 37–38, 40.

⁶¹ *Шлях до музичної*, vol. 2, 45; *Opernhaus Lemberg, Theatervorstellungen für Ukrainer*, [stage schedule for October] 1943, Biblioteka Narodowa – Polona, shelf mark DŻS XIXA 6.

⁶² Grzegorz Mazur, Jerzy Skwara, and Jerzy Węgiński, eds, *Kronika 2350 dni wojny i okupacji Lwowa. 1 IX 1939–5 II 1946* (Katowice, 2007), 218, 223, 249, 251.

⁶³ Landau-Czajka, 'Trudny wybór', 58.

⁶⁴ The Gołuchowskis had to flee Lwów (Lvov) as early as January 1940, so Koffler probably could not contact them at this point.

⁶⁵ Muzeum w Przeworsku Zespołu Pałacowo-Parkowego [Museum in Przeworsk – Palace and Park Complex], Letter from Józef Koffler to Andrzej Lubomirski, Lwów, 19 Dec. 1941, shelf mark MP-DA-164/1, manuscript, unnumbered cards. I am very grateful to Łukasz Chrobak, PhD, adjunct at Łańcut Castle Museum, for making this letter available to me.

⁶⁶ Koffler started teaching at PTM Conservatory only in 1924. Until and including the 1922/1923 academic year, he was a student at the University of Vienna.

hard, to live in Lwów today. The conditions on the other side of the river San present themselves as much better. For this reason, I intend to leave Lwów with my wife and six-year-old⁶⁷ boy, in order to find possibly the most peaceful living conditions until the time of our departure abroad, which I am making all effort to ensure. Any longer stay in Lwów would surely end for us with grave nervous illness or worse.

It is therefore my most humble request that Your Grace and our President might kindly accommodate us in Przeworsk or on one of your estates by allowing us to use one room and an equipped kitchen as a place of residence.

Let me repeat that I am not requesting material aid since I am financially sufficiently well provided for. What I most insistently beg for is that you kindly help us by giving us residence and moral support. Believe me, please, that it was only after long consideration and hesitation that I ventured to address Your Grace with this entreaty. Please also give credence to my words when I say that this is the only way out of my present desperate situation.

It is with a trembling heart that I will await Your Grace's decision, since my life and the lives of my [family] depends on it.

With deepest respect and veneration,
yours most humbly,

Prof. Dr Józef Koffler
Lwów, 19 Dec. 1941
5 Chmielowskiego St., apt. 2⁶⁸

67 According to the baptismal entry, Alban Koffler was two years old at the time of his baptism.

68 'Józef Koffler we Lwowie do ks. Andrzeja Lubomirskiego w Przeworsku
Lwów 19 grudnia 1941 r.

Jaśnie Wielmożny i Czcigodny Panie, Wielokrotnie przepraszam za to, iż śmiem zwrócić się tą drogą. Najuniżej przedkładam moją prośbę Jaśnie Wielmożnemu Panu jako wieloletniemu Prezesowi Polskiego Towarzystwa Muzycznego we Lwowie, którego profesorem miałem zaszczyt i szczęście być od roku 1922 [sic!].

W obecnej chwili znajduję się moralnie w nader ciężkim położeniu. Moralnie [podkr. – J.K.], nie materialnie, bo pod materialnym względem nie potrzeba mi żadnej pomocy.

Wraz z żoną jesteśmy Polakami, wierzącymi i praktykującymi katolikami, ale – pochodzenia „niearyjskiego”. Takim ciężko, niesłychanie ciężko, dziś żyć we Lwowie. Znacznie lepiej przedstawiają się natomiast warunki po drugiej stronie Sanu. Dlatego zamierzam wraz z żoną i 6-letnim chłopcem wyjechać ze Lwowa, by czas aż do możliwości wyjazdu zagranicę – o co usilnie się staram – przeżyć w warunkach możliwie spokojnych. Dalszy bowiem nasz pobyt we Lwowie skończyć się musi ciężką chorobą nerwową lub też i gorzej.

Moja najuniżej prośba do Jaśnie Wielmożnego Pana Księcia i Prezesa idzie w tym kierunku, by łaskawie zechciał mi umożliwić pobyt w Przeworsku lub którejś z Jego posiadłości oddając mi na mieszkanie jeden pokój i kuchnię wraz z urządzeniem.

Powtarzam raz jeszcze, iż nie proszę o pomoc materialną, iż finansowo jestem dostatecznie zaopatrzony. Błagam natomiast jak najusilniej o łaskawą pomoc przez udzielenie możliwości zamieszkania i przez moralne poparcie.

We do not know whether and in what manner Prince Lubomirski replied to this letter. Nevertheless, Koffler did find himself west of the San River, in accordance with the wish he expressed therein. In that area there were fewer Ukrainians, whom he seems to have feared the most due to their frequent collaboration with the Germans. Koffler may originally have found refuge on the outskirts of Wieliczka near Kraków.⁶⁹ According to Koffler's sister-in-law Gizela Hercholorfer, from 1942 onwards the composer lived in Krościenko Niżne near Krosno, where they sometimes met, as Gizela then resided in Krosno. She was not instrumental in bringing Koffler to that area; according to her account, they met by chance at the railway station.⁷⁰ Recent finds by Maciej Gołąb suggest that Koffler, his wife and son may have found shelter in Krościenko Wyżne, a village half a kilometre from Krościenko Niżne, in the household of local parish organist Władysław Piękoś (1905–1988). Father Gerard Szmyd (1885–1938) from Krościenko Wyżne had been the parish priest at Lwów's St Mary Magdalene's. With his brother, a Polish Army colonel, they owned a summer house in that village, and it is probably in that house that Koffler hid with his family (later possibly at another spot in the same village).⁷¹ The Kofflers apparently attended the Holy Masses at St Martin's parish church in Krościenko Wyżne nearly until the last days of their lives. They were eventually captured and murdered by the Germans in 1943 or 1944.⁷² One of the versions of their

Proszę mi wierzyć, iż długo zastanawiałem się i wahałem nim pozwoliłem sobie zwrócić się do Jaśnie Wielmożnego Pana Księcia z tą suplikacją. Proszę mi również wierzyć, iż jest to w mej rozpaczliwej sytuacji jedyne dla mnie wyjście i ratunek. Zapewniam, iż z drżeniem serca oczekuję łaskawej decyzji Jaśnie Wielmożnego Pana Księcia, gdyż od tej decyzji zależy życie moje i moich.

Z wyrazami najgłębszej czci i poważania

kreślę najuniżej

prof. dr Józef Koffler

Lwów 19 XII 1941

ul. Chmielowskiego 5, mieszkania 2'.

69 Koffler reportedly hid at the home of Henryk Apte's family (15 św. Sebastiana St.). Apte's son Ryszard had been Koffler's pupil in Lwów. Cf. Gołąb, *Józef Koffler*, 236–238; Ewa Solińska, 'Józef Koffler – biografia z zagadkami', *Życie Warszawy*, 101 (1987), 5.

70 Gizela Hercholorfer, 'List z Wenezueli', *Życie Warszawy*, 151 (1987), 7.

71 A letter from Helena Filar [Stanisław Józefczyk's daughter] to M. Gołąb, dated 10 Jan. 2005.

72 I am grateful for detailed information on this subject to Prof. Maciej Gołąb. Cf. Zofia Przybył's [daughter of Władysław Piękoś] response to a letter by M. Gołąb of 23 Aug. 2004; a letter from

end was told by Marzanna Pluta-Kotyńska, who believed that Róża Koffler's Semitic features attracted the attention of the Germans, and when she was arrested, Koffler also handed himself over with his son.⁷³

Józef Koffler did not consider himself as a representative of a national minority. Ever closer integrated with the Polish nation and culture, and identifying himself with that culture, he loosened his ties with Judaism while being attracted by Christianity. In the 1930s (unlike before 1918), it was becoming less and less possible to be a member of both the Polish and Jewish nations at the same time. To many Jews, assimilation and full Polonization, even coupled with an almost complete loss of contact with Jewish culture, was still not tantamount to a change of national identity. Conversion to Christianity, on the other hand, usually marked the decisive step that led converts to discard Jewish identity. Koffler eventually converted to Catholicism and his family was part of the Catholic Church for the last five years of their lives. This decision did not have any impact on Koffler's career. He had been highly regarded as a conservatory professor in Lwów before that moment as well, and his works had been performed in Poland and abroad. Anti-Semitic trends and incidents in Poland and in Europe at large must have made Koffler aware of the fact that baptism was unlikely to save him from losing his teaching post as a person of Jewish descent. He probably heard the news of Arnold Schönberg's return to Judaism in 1933. Though he mentioned emigration in 1936–1937 and witnessed the pressure of anti-Semitic circles throughout Europe, he eventually did not leave the country. In order to move to South America, baptism was not necessary since Koffler had a Polish passport, which was decisive in this case. The wish to allow his son fully to assimilate with the Polish society may have played a major role. All the same, his conversion to Catholicism may also have been motivated by personal convictions.

Not having emigrated before 1939, Koffler did not flee the German invasion in June 1941, either. He felt so strongly about his Polish identity that he declared himself to be a Pole even under the Soviet occupation. Though aware of his Jewish roots, he may even initially not have realised the seriousness of the German threat with regard

to his own family. It is therefore possible that he expressed his heartfelt conviction when (admittedly already under the German occupation) he wrote in the letter to Prince Lubomirski: 'I and my wife are Poles, believing and practising Catholics, albeit of "non-Aryan" descent.'

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⁷³ Marzanna Pluta-Kotyńska, 'Kilka informacji o życiu Józefa Kofflera', *Ruch Muzyczny*, 1 (1965), 5.

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