

Julian Gringras And His Brothers Playing Music



This photo was taken in our apartment on Kolejowa Street in Kielce. It shows me and my brothers playing music:

Artur's playing the cello, me the fiddle, Maurycy the piano and Leopold the fiddle too. It was 1920.

In this room there were plants on the windowsill and on the floor, because Mama was very fond of flowers. Oleanders and a ficus. There was a palm, not very tall, but the ficus was big.

Those plants stood in the parlor. I remember a cottage piano also, because when I found out I hadn't got into gymnasium, I sat at that piano, on this swivel stool, and I leaned against the piano and I think I cried then, I remember.

I don't know how we came to play music. I suspect Father was a kind of klezmer, playing at weddings, that's what I think. He could play this and that on the fiddle, but it was the country type of playing, I'd say, klezmerish, of a poorer standard.

I played the fiddle, not the violin, because I was small. Fiddles are not made by professional violin makers; they're mass-produced, you can buy them in shops very cheaply.

I only learned the fiddle for a very short time, but both Leopold and Maurycy learned well and systematically. I suspect they learned for at least five or six years. But none of the girls played.

They probably didn't have the leaning, weren't interested. Leopold could play proper things, he played a Mendelssohn concerto, for instance. In Sweden, where he settled after the war, he belonged to a quartet, which he still played in at the age of 70.

I had lessons with a music teacher, a German, who had moved to Kielce with his family to live. He was called Rommel. Leopold learned with him too.

He was a colorful figure, tall, with a closely shaven head, quite strict - I felt the strap across my hands a few times, with the addition of: 'du verfluchter Kerl,' 'you accursed rogue,' when I played out of tune.

I went to those lessons because I was forced to, and waiting my turn, because he had a few pupils, I would sit in this garden at his house - the garden was well kept up - and there we would sneakily eat his gooseberries. It was quite a way out of the center of town.

I went there for about six months, maybe even a year. I think I was about ten or eight then. During the occupation his son was elected mayor of Kielce, apparently.

But he himself never demonstrated any anti-Jewish or anti-Polish tendencies as such.