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Portrait of the Artist as a Young Celebrity Ignacy Jan Paderewski by Lawrence Alma-Tadema

Lawrence Alma-Tadema's *Portrait of Ignacy Jan Paderewski* of 1891 (**fig. 1**)[1] has its origins in the encounter and subsequent friendship of two artists, a Dutch-born British painter and a Polish pianist, respectively. It was a friendship triggered by a shared love of music and nourished by an understanding of its potential for reciprocal publicity for the two men, both celebrities during their lifetime. As I intend to argue in this article, the portrait was a public manifestation of the friendship. Barely dry, it was exhibited twice in the fall of 1891 and again in the spring of 1892.[2] Though modest in size, it demonstrates Alma-Tadema's precocious understanding of celebrity formation as the creation of a simultaneous sense of familiarity and distance between star and public. Through the close-up view of Paderewski and the conceptual integration of his portrait in a broad range of images of the pianist that were well-known to the public at the time, Alma-Tadema created what Richard Schickel has called, a "false intimacy" between celebrity and public.[3] At the same time, the "Byzantine" frontality of the portrait, the golden halo of hair, and the background filled with Buddhist deities lend to the portrait an iconic quality and place the pianist in an exceptional and otherworldly realm.

A Star Portrait is Born: The Genesis of Alma-Tadema's Portrait of Paderewski

Alma-Tadema's portrait of Paderewski was painted in 1890 during the pianist's second of two concert tours in England in the years 1890 and 1891, respectively.[4] Born in what is now Ukraine, of Polish parents, Ignacy Jan Paderewski (1860–1941) had studied in Vienna with the famous Theodor Leschetizky, who himself traced his pedagogical lineage to Beethoven via Carl Czerny. Paderewski was just thirty years old when he arrived in London for his first

[1] Lawrence Alma-Tadema, *Portrait of Ignacy Jan Paderewski*, 1891, oil on canvas, 45.7 × 58.4 cm, signed, bottom right: *L. Alma-Tadema op CCCXI.*, The National Museum in Warsaw, inv. no. M.Ob.1850 MNW. See Hanna Benesz and Maria Kluk, *Early Netherlandish, Dutch, Flemish and Belgian Paintings 1494–1983 in the Collections of the National Museum in Warsaw and the Palace at Nieborów. Complete Illustrated Summary Catalogue*, vol. 1: *Signed and Attributed Paintings* (Warsaw, 2016), pp. 24–25, cat. no. 7 (with earlier bibliography). In that catalogue, however, the authors dated the painting to 1890.

[2] At the Birmingham Royal Society of Artists exhibition in September; the Royal Scottish Academy Exhibition in Edinburgh in November; and at the New Gallery in London in May of the following year.

[3] Richard Sickel, *Intimate Strangers: The Culture of Celebrity* (Garden City, 1985), pp. 7, 16, 262.

[4] Much of the biographic information that follows is from Adam Zamoyski, *Paderewski* (London, 1982).

concert tour in 1890. He had recently experienced a *succès fou* in Paris (1889), but his first concerts in London were disappointing. The British public did eventually warm up to him, and when he returned to London for a second concert tour in 1891, he was a sensation. His concerts were sold out, he was received by Queen Victoria, and the doors of the rich and famous in London were open to him.

One of those doors belonged to the Dutch painter Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1836–1912), who invited the young Paderewski to play in one or more of the legendary house concerts that he organized in his famous home-cum-studio in the fashionable St. John's Wood suburb of London. Alma-Tadema had settled in England at the time of the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71) and had made a reputation for himself as an artist specialized in themes of classical antiquity. A clever self-promoter and good salesman, he had done extremely well for himself.[5] In 1884, he had moved from one fine home called Townsend, which was written up in Mrs. Haweis's *Beautiful Houses* (1882)[6] to an even larger and more splendid one at 34 Grove End Road, which had previously belonged to the painter James Tissot.[7] Here he resided with his wife Laura, née Epps, and two daughters from his first marriage, Laurence (1864–1940) and Anna (1867–1943), all three of whom were themselves involved in the arts, be it painting or literature.[8] Thirty-four Grove End Road was famous among beautiful homes in London. It was written up in numerous publications, both British and international, and visited by hundreds if not thousands of well-known callers.[9] Alma-Tadema was especially fond of music and regularly organized house concerts, which were high in the ranking of London society events. Eminent musicians performed in his home, including Enrico Caruso, Clara Schumann, Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky, as well as the young Paderewski.[10] One of the attractions of Alma-Tadema's concerts was his famous grand piano, designed by the architect George E. Fox in 1878 and built by John Broadwood & Sons, which had a case inlaid with silver, colored woods, and mother of pearl.[11] The piano had set-in panels of parchment paper intended for autographs of those who played on it. In his memoirs Paderewski relates that it was covered

[5] On Alma-Tadema's self-promotional skills and strategies – see Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, "The Importance of Being Famous: Alma-Tadema and the Construction of Celebrity," in *Lawrence Alma-Tadema: At Home in Antiquity*, Elizabeth Pettejohn and Peter Trippi, eds, exh. cat., Fries Museum, Leeuwarden; Belvedere, Vienna; Leighton House Museum, London, 2016–2017 (Munich–London–New York, 2016), pp. 130–47.

[6] Mrs. [Mary Eliza Joy] Haweis, *Beautiful Houses, Being a Description of Certain Well-Known Artistic Houses* (New York, 1882), chapter 3: "Mr. Alma-Tadema's House."

[7] The literature on Alma-Tadema's homes is substantial. For the latest on the subject, see Charlotte Gere, "The Alma-Tademas' Two Homes in London," in *Lawrence Alma-Tadema: At Home...*, op. cit., pp. 74–97. See also, Julian Treuherz, "Alma-Tadema: Aesthete, Architect and Interior Designer," in *Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema*, Edwin Becker et al., eds, exh. cat., Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam; Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, 1996–1997 (Zwolle, 1996), pp. 45–56.

[8] Laura Theresa Alma-Tadema, née Epps (1852–1909) specialized in paintings of women and children. She exhibited at the Royal Academy Exhibitions from 1873 to 1909. Laurence Alma-Tadema (1865–1940) was a novelist and a political activist. An admirer and longtime associate of Paderewski, with whom she maintained a correspondence from 1915 to her death, she supported the cause of Polish independence and from 1915 to 1939 was secretary of the "Poland and the Polish Victims Relief Fund." Anna Alma-Tadema (1867–1943) was a painter whose work was influenced by her father's.

[9] See n. 7.

[10] Michel Didier, "Melody on a Mediterranean Terrace: Alma-Tadema's Musical Life and Paintings," *RIdIM/RCMI Newsletter*, 21, No. 1 (Spring 1996), p. 19.

[11] David Wainwright, *Broadwood by Appointment: A History* (London, 1982), p. 208. For more detail, see "An Artistic Piano," *Music and Drama*, October 21 (1882), p. 21.

with the signatures of hundreds of distinguished musical celebrities from all parts off the world, who had played at the Alma-Tadema house, including his own.[12] He also claims that he often played on the piano during visits to Alma-Tadema's house, though Adam Zamoyski, one of Paderewski's biographers, claims that he refused to concertize on it and when he was asked to play at one of Alma-Tadema's house concerts he had an upright delivered instead.[13]

In July 1891, after the painter and the pianist had become friendly, Alma-Tadema asked Paderewski to sit for a portrait. Paderewski readily agreed, writing in his memoirs that he felt "it was an honor."[14] But there was something in it for Alma-Tadema as well. To exhibit a portrait of this rising star also benefited his own reputation, both as a leading socialite and as a central figure on the London art scene. Indeed, the Paderewski portrait, one of numerous portraits of musicians by Alma-Tadema and his contemporaries, exemplifies a convergence between artists and musicians in the late nineteenth century – equal in their need for stardom in order to make a living.[15] Represented by dealers or impresarios, there was a symbiotic benefit to sharing one another's limelight.

Posing

Paderewski's description of his sitting for Alma-Tadema is worth quoting in full as it challenges our assumptions about the intimate and silent interaction that takes place between artist and model in the process of the portrait pose. Writes Paderewski: "It was probably the most exacting and elaborate posing for a picture that has ever been done, because at the first sitting I found, to my surprise, that there were three people making my portrait! There were the Princess Louise [daughter of Queen Victoria], Sir Lawrence himself, and Lady Alma-Tadema, and all three were furiously painting me at the same time. Each one was constantly begging me to turn *his* way. It was an amazing ordeal; it was not sitting, it was moving all the time, incessant moving. It continued several days and each day was more 'moving' than the last. However, the three pictures were finally completed. Lady Alma-Tadema, who was a very gifted painter herself, had made a very small picture of me. Alma-Tadema made quite a masterpiece as far as painting is concerned. The picture painted by Princess Louise is still in her possession at Kensington Palace."[16] As if the scene was not already lively enough, Paderewski also mentions the presence of Alma-Tadema's daughter Laurence who, according to his memoirs, "seemed highly amused" at his predicament.[17]

What is remarkable is that the allegedly lively interaction in Alma-Tadema's studio described in Paderewski's memoirs appears to have left few traces in the portraits. Alma-Tadema's own portrait depicts the artist in frontal view, in concert dress with his signature white Lavallière tie. One imagines that he is seated at the keyboard, profoundly concentrated on

[12] Ignacy Jan Paderewski and Mary Lawton, *The Paderewski Memoirs* (New York, 1939), pp. 177–78. The piano, allegedly, was destroyed during the London Blitz in 1940–1.

[13] Zamoyski, op. cit., p. 56. The upright was probably a Steinway as it was well-known to those who knew Paderewski that he never gave a concert on a piano other than a Steinway. See Henry Theophilus Finck, *Paderewski and His Art* ([s.l.], 1896), p. 16.

[14] Paderewski and Lawton, op. cit., p. 178.

[15] *Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema*, op. cit., p. 248.

[16] Paderewski and Lawton, op. cit., p. 178.

[17] Ibid.

his music and this, as we shall see, was certainly the way in which the pose was interpreted by contemporary viewers.

The more formal portrait by Princess Louise,[18] known today only through a full-page reproduction in a 1907 issue of *The Graphic* (**fig. 2**), likewise does little to betray the "incessant moving" that Paderewski talks about, unless it is the faint expression of a smile that may betray the pianist's amusement at the scene in Alma-Tadema's studio. Paderewski himself considered it "quite good but not so successful as to the likeness because, quite evidently, I was not turning enough *her way*!"[19]

Paderewski mentions that Lady Alma made "a very small picture" of him, but no portrait of Paderewski by Laura Alma-Tadema is known to this author. There is, however, in the Ashmolean Museum, a small graphite drawing (oval, 35 × 30 cm) by Anna Alma-Tadema, the youngest daughter of Lawrence[20]. Signed and dated "Anna Alma-Tadema | July 1891," its date coincides with that of Paderewski's "sitting" in Alma-Tadema's studio. It is possible that Paderewski wrongly remembered who his portraitists were and that it was not Laura but Anna Alma-Tadema who was seated on his left. It is also possible that both women were present during the sitting[21] and that Anna made a drawing unbeknownst to Paderewski or that she made the drawing after the sitting from memory, perhaps with the help of a photograph.

Apostle and Archangel: Burne-Jones and Paderewski

The presence of four women at the sitting in Alma-Tadema's studio had much to do with Paderewski's striking looks. With his finely chiseled features, pale skin, and striking reddish-blond curly tousled hair, he had especially won over the British female public, which at the end of his concerts flocked to the stage to toss flowers to the artist.[22] But men were attracted to him as well, again, especially in Britain, perhaps because, as one of his biographers remarked, he had "the perfect pre-Raphaelite head."[23] The extraordinary physical attraction of Paderewski may explain the story of the genesis of another portrait of Paderewski's – the silverpoint drawing by Edward Burne-Jones (**fig. 3**), also in the National Museum in Warsaw,[24] which must be seen as the foil for Alma-Tadema's portrait. It had been drawn

[18] According to Paderewski and Lawton (op. cit., pp. 178–79), Princess Louise's was a "painted portrait." At the time when Paderewski wrote his memoirs, the painting was still "in her possession in Kensington Palace." Inquiries made with staff members of the Kensington Palace (July 18, 2015) and the Royal Collection Trust in Windsor Castle (July 21, 2015) have failed to turn it up.

[19] Paderewski and Lawton, op. cit., p. 179.

[20] Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, inv. no. WA1962.64. Avaliable at the museum's website at: <http://collections.ashmolean.org/object/87949>, [retrieved: 24 January 2015].

[21] Vern Grosvenor Swanson – *The Biography and Catalogue Raisonné of the Paintings of Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema* (London, 1990), p. 74 – places Anna in the studio: "In July [1891], he began his portrait of Ignacy Jan Paderewski [...] Alma-Tadema, his wife, daughter Anna and Queen Victoria's daughter Princess Louise, all painted Paderewski's portrait simultaneously."

[22] Henry Theophilus Finch, *Paderewski and His Art* (New York, 1896), p. 22. Finch is especially talking about American audiences, but Paderewski's magnetism was felt everywhere he performed.

[23] Zamoyski, op. cit., p. 55.

[24] Edward Burne-Jones, *Portrait of Ignacy Jan Paderewski*, 1890, pencil on paper, 34.7 × 31 cm, The National Museum in Warsaw, inv. no. Rys.Pol.885 MNW. See *Śladami prerafaelitów. Artyści polscy i sztuka brytyjska na przełomie XIX I XX w.*, Piotr Kopszak, Andrzej Szczerski, eds, exh. cat., Museum of King Jan III's Palace at Wilanów, 2006 (Warsaw, 2006), pp. 32–34, cat. no. 17 (with earlier bibliography).

a year earlier and had become exceedingly well-known in London in the interim. The story of the portrait's origins has been told in several different ways but central to all versions is a chance encounter between Burne- Jones and Paderewski in a London street, shortly after the latter's first arrival in London.[25] Neither man knew, or even knew of, the other but both were so struck with the other's appearance that it became engraved in their memories. Paderewski saw in Burne-Jones an apostle,[26] Burne-Jones thought Paderewski had the appearance of an archangel. He ran home, exclaiming that he had seen an archangel, and immediately started to draw Paderewski's face from memory.[27]

By chance, a few days later, Burne-Jones's friend, the singer George Henschel, brought Paderewski over to Burne-Jones' studio. The artist immediately recognized his "archangel" and asked him to pose so that he could complete the portrait he had started. Paderewski's portrait by Burne-Jones is in silverpoint rather than oils and it shows the pianist's face in profile rather than frontal view, perhaps to portray him the way most people would have seen him as he was playing the piano on the stage; or, perhaps, as a deliberate reference to the archangels in early Renaissance paintings of the Annunciation (**fig. 4**), of whose faces Burne-Jones was so strongly reminded. Burne-Jones's extraordinary attraction to Paderewski may have had other reasons than his resemblance to quattrocento archangels. Georgiana Burne-Jones claims that the Paderewski portrait was one of the first works Burne-Jones made after a lengthy period of inactivity in the 1890s. She quotes a letter by the artist in which he claims that he was struck by Paderewski's face because it reminded him of that of the young Algernon Swinburne during the heyday of their friendship in the 1850s (**fig. 5**). Swinburne, of course, was still alive, but after undergoing a physical and mental breakdown in the seventies, he had withdrawn to the countryside and the two former friends saw little of one another.[28] In the letter to Lady Frances Horner, written in 1890, Burne-Jones wrote, in reference to his meeting with Paderewski: "There's a beautiful fellow in London named Paderewski – and I want to have a face like him and look like him, and I can't [...] there's the trouble. He looks so like Swinburne at 20 that I could cry over past things, and [he] has his ways too – the pretty ways of him – courteous little tricks and low bows and a hand that clings in shaking hands, and a face very much like Swinburne's only in better drawing, but the expression the same, and little turns and looks and jerks so like the thing I remember that it makes me fairly jump."[29] Burne-Jones ends the letter by calling Paderewski "gorgeous," writing, "I praised Allah for making him and felt myself a poor thing for several hours."[30]

It is clear that for the 57-year old Burne-Jones, the encounter with the young and handsome Paderewski signified not only his own lost youth but also served as a reminder of his former unfettered lifestyle in the company of close male friends. It is perhaps no wonder, then, that, as Fiona MacCarthy has noted, Paderewski's features can be detected in several of the Knights

[25] See, i.a., Zamoyski, op. cit., p. 55.

[26] Paderewski and Lawton, op. cit., p. 126.

[27] Though the archangel episode is not mentioned in G[eorgiana] Burne-Jones, *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones* (New York, 1906), almost all biographers of Burne-Jones refer to it.

[28] On the friendship of Burne-Jones and Swinburne, see John Christian, "Speaking of Kisses in Paradise: Burne-Jones's Friendship with Swinburne," [online], *Journal of William Morris Studies*, 13.1 (Autumn 1998), pp. 14–24. At: <http://www.morrissociety.org/publications/JWMS/AU98.13.1.Christian.pdf>, [retrieved: 24 January 2015].

[29] Cited in Burne-Jones, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 207.

[30] Ibid.

of the Round Table in the Morte d'Arthur tapestries, designed by Burne-Jones in 1891 and woven by William Morris (**figs 6–8**).[31] Meanwhile, Burne-Jones's portrait of Paderewski became one of the best-known images of the pianist in England. It was photographed by Frederick Hollyer and it became the pianist's publicity image for years to come.[32]

Alma-Tadema, who doubtlessly knew Burne-Jones's drawing, must have conceived his portrait of Paderewski with that image in mind. His painting was meant, I argue, to present a deliberately contrasting image. It is not merely the contrast between drawing and painting and between profile and frontal view, but also and more importantly, a question of distance and intimacy. Both works imply the presence of a piano in the slight inclination of the head. But whereas Burne-Jones represents the artist as one would see him in the concert hall, bent over the keyboard, or taking a bow – as he as portrayed in many photographs or caricatures, Alma-Tadema shows him in a more intimate view, as if seen by someone standing in the bentside of a grand piano, in the way the little girl (the artist's niece) in Whistler's well-known *At the Piano* (The Taft Museum, Cincinnati, Ohio) would have seen her mother play. Alma-Tadema's own famous piano, on which Paderewski claims to have played frequently, stood in an alcove in his studio, against one of the short walls. Those who were familiar with his studio, and every London socialite was, would have known that behind the keyboard was a large Buddhist painting – which is seen in the background of the Paderewski portrait. The painting, therefore, not only established a generic sense of intimacy between Paderewski and the viewer of the portrait, but specifically between Paderewski and Alma-Tadema.

There is more that distinguishes Alma-Tadema's portrait from that of Burne-Jones. While Paderewski's concert dress and his ever so slightly hunched over pose suggests that he is seated at the piano, he is not concentrating on the keyboard, as he seems to do in the Burne-Jones rendering. Rather, we appear to be witnessing the final chord, the moment immediately after a performance, when the musician looks up, still in a trance from the music. In his 1934 biography of Paderewski, the American author Charles Phillips (1880–1933), basing his discussion in part on comments by the Polish composer, violinist, and musicologist Henryk Opienski, remarks that Alma-Tadema's portrait "has [...] an expression which his audience has often seen on his face as he accepted its applause, the look of a dreamer waked from his dream."[33] Phillips's perception of the portrait as that of a man waking up from a trance, corresponds to numerous observations regarding Paderewski's style of piano playing. The American critic Henry Theophilus Finch wrote that when Paderewski played, he seemed to be "far away in dreamland, playing for himself alone."[34] Elsewhere he went even further, writing, He [Paderewski] hypnotizes [...] [his audiences] by hypnotizing himself [...] he becomes the medium through which the great composers speak to the heavens."[35]

It is noteworthy that, apparently, not everyone admired Alma-Tadema's characterization of Paderewski as a man waking from a dream or a hypnotic trance. Charles Philips speaks of the "touch of irony" that accompanied it and refers his readers to the writings of the Polish artist-writer-musician Alfred Nossig (1864–1943) who once had written that, "at the moment

[31] For example a night in the red tunic, on a horse on the left (fig. 7). See Fiona McCarthy, *The Last Pre-Raphaelite: Edward Burne-Jones and the Victorian Imagination* (Cambridge, 2011), p. 423.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Charles Phillips, *Paderewski: The Story of a Modern Immortal* (New York, 1934), p. 140.

[34] Finch, op. cit., p. 315.

[35] Ibid.

when he [Paderewski] is thanking his audience for its plaudits, the last notes of his music still ring in his ears, and his face, trembling and flaming with inspiration, betrays something of contempt for the noisy crowd." Phillips admits that the contempt – or, as he calls it, the irony – of which Alfred Nossig spoke, was softened in Alma-Tadema's portrait: "If it is irony, it is not an irony that excludes the charm of high sentiment, of idealism and benevolence."[36] But he clearly preferred the Burne-Jones portrait over that of Alma-Tadema, claiming that "all of that sentiment and its idealism glows in the poetic face that Burne-Jones presents."[37] Indeed, Phillips cites the words of the music critic James Huneker (1857 – 9 February 1921), an almost exact contemporary of Paderewski, who called Burne-Jones's portrait "the best and most spiritual interpretation we have had as yet of this spiritual artist."[38]

To Phillips, interestingly, Alma-Tadema's portrait is more realistic than that of Burne-Jones[39] – in part, perhaps because it is in color rather than black and white and is executed in the modern medium of oil paints on canvas rather than the medieval medium of silverpoint. I am not sure that most of us today would agree with his assessment. To this viewer, at least, it is Burne-Jones's portrait that has a sense of immediacy and realism, while Alma-Tadema's portrait has a more distant, esoteric aspect. Perhaps this is due to the strictly frontal view, reminiscent of a Byzantine icon, the more so for Paderewski's halo-like hair. More importantly, however, the esoteric impression of the portrait seems due to its exotic background, strewn with seated Buddhas that seem to emerge out of the darkness at the bottom of the portrait.

The "Genii of Music"

As we have seen already, the Buddhas in the background of Paderewski's portrait are part of a painting that was part of Alma-Tadema's vast art collection. A large horizontal Buddhist painting, generally referred to as Chinese, occupied a special place in the artist's house at 34 Grove End Road in London, as it was hanging in a niche that served as the stage for the house concerts Alma-Tadema organized. The Dutch critic Lita de Ranitz, who visited the house on Grove End Road in 1911, described Alma-Tadema's atelier, the main room in the house, as a spacious vaulted hall, with a long slightly elevated, rectangular niche on one side, that gave the appearance of the apse of a church.[40] The niche received its light from an Oriental-style window, subdivided into many small panes of colored glass, inset with the name of Alma-Tadema in Greek letters. Underneath the window was what De Ranitz described as "a piece of old Chinese art" (**fig. 9**)[41] which is the painting that we see in the background of Alma-Tadema's portrait of Paderewski. The painting clearly was important to Alma-Tadema as it also appears in the artist's self-portrait, commissioned by the Uffizi for its gallery of artist's self-portraits (**fig. 10**), as well as in a number of publicity photographs of the artist (**fig. 11**). One of these photographs shows the painting more clearly. It appears to represent Amida Buddha, ruler of the Western Paradise, with his celestial entourage. Jonathan Hay has suggested that the painting

[36] Phillips, op. cit., p. 140.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Lita de Ranitz, "Het huis van Alma-Tadema," *Het Huis Oud en Nieuw*, 9 (1911), p. 27.

[41] Ibid., p. 28.

may be Japanese rather than Chinese.[42] The catalogue of the 1913 auction of Alma-Tadema's collection lists, "A valuable six-fold temple screen, the whole finely painted to represent Buddha and the 27 Singers and Dancers of Heaven (4-in high, *temp. 14th century*)," which seems to refer to the painting in question. The current whereabouts of the painting are unknown.

Buddhist art was just beginning to be discovered in the 1890s by the likes of Ernest Fenellosa in the US and Albert Grünwedel in Germany, and Alma-Tadema no doubt became interested in it by way of his long-time fascination with Japanese art, which dated back to the 1860s.[43] Popular books on Buddhism abounded, in the 1880s and 1890s, such as the one by Ernest John Eitel, *Buddhism: Its Historical, Theoretical and Popular Aspects*, which appeared in three editions between 1871 and 1884.[44] Eitel devotes a long section to the Western paradise which he describes as a place of beauty and charm on all sensual levels. Here one would walk on paths encrusted with precious stones around ponds with golden sand sporting colorful and fragrant lotus flowers as big as cart wheels, while in the trees, birds would sing the most beautiful songs. It was a place that seemed perfectly synchronized with Alma-Tadema's aesthetic ideals, which likewise promoted the notion of synesthetic pleasure and escapism – as articulated by the German-born British critic Helen Zimmern, who wrote, with reference to Alma-Tadema's art, "with his name [...] we [...] associate blue skies, placid seas, spring flowers, youths and maidens in the heyday of life, and a sense of old-world happiness and distance from our less beautiful modern existence and surroundings."[45] In a general sense, then, the Buddhas in the background of Paderewski's painting could signify musical transport – or as Nossig wrote, in reference to Paderewski's playing, "The soul is raised to heaven."[46]

When Alma-Tadema exhibited the portrait of Paderewski in London at the New Gallery in May 1892,[47] it was reviewed in *The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art,* by an anonymous reviewer, who wrote: "The portraits are prominent and interesting at the New Gallery this year. In the West Room Mr Alma-Tadema holds the place of honour with his Paderewski (18). This is one of the most successful portraits Mr Alma-Tadema has painted, light and golden in tone, delicate in colour and the head admirably modeled. The musician appears to be seated in front of an unseen piano At his back is painted some curious Buddhist altar piece full of saints with golden nimbi and red robes, doubtless a decoration of the room in which the pianist is supposed to be sitting. We might not have thought it necessary to mention this had we not overheard one of those wondrous persons who talk loud in public galleries hazard the supposition that these were the genii of music emerging in allegory

[42] In an email of December 2014.

[43] He assembled a huge collection of Japanese art and became a charter member of the Japan Society in 1892. See Swanson, op. cit., p. 78. On Alma-Tadema's relation to Japanese art, see also pp. 41 and 78–79 in the same book.

[44] I have used the second edition from 1873, published in London by Trübner.

[45] It is interesting that Alma-Tadema used the same background in two other portraits, both of musicians. One is the portrait of Paderewski, the other of the violinist Maurice Sons. It is true that the niche in Alma-Tadema's atelier contained his famous grand piano, which was the centerpiece for the Tuesday night concerts the artist organized in his atelier so that the Buddhist painting, covering the rear wall of the niche, would have been a logical background for these musicians' portraits.

[46] Alfred Nossig, "The Methods of the Masters of Piano-Teaching in Europe: The Secret of Paderewski's Playing," [online] in *The Century Library of Music*, vol. 18, Ignace Jan Paderewski, ed. (New York, 1902), pp. 610–12. At: <https://polishmusic.usc.edu/research/publications/polish-music-journal/vol5no2/source-readings-ii/paderewskis-playing> , [retrieved: 24 January 2015].

[47] See n. 2.

from Mr Paderewski's brain. The Princess Louise has painted the same head, apparently at the same time, from another point of view (239) – an admirable piece of work, executed evidently enough under the influence of Mr Alma-Tadema, but with real mastery of hand."[48]

Though the critic appears to snub the remark of the loud-talking self-proclaimed expert in the gallery, he nonetheless cites it, suggesting that the notion that the Buddhas in Paderewski's portrait are not merely incidental background material but somehow interact meaningfully with the figure, is not entirely unbelievable to him. It is possible that, while the iconographic interpretation of the genii of music emerging from Paderewski's head seemed simplistic, even ridiculous to him or her, that the background nonetheless communicated a sense of spirituality and transport that seemed to befit the portrait of an artist.

This may explain why Alma-Tadema used the same background in his own self-portrait, commissioned by the Uffizi for its Gallery of Self-Portraits. Alma-Tadema conceived the portrait, without a doubt, with Paderewski's portrait in mind but, perhaps even more so, against the grain of an earlier self-portrait, also commissioned by the Uffizi, by his friend and rival Frederic Leighton (1880, **fig. 12**) The portraits differ in many respects: Leighton, dressed in his Oxford honorary doctorate robe, seems to be enthroned, majestically, against the backdrop of a Parthenon frieze. Alma-Tadema, by contrast, is dressed in his frock coat, at work in his studio, against the backdrop of the Chinese painting.

In his book on Alma-Tadema of 1905, Percy Cross Standing, juxtaposes two of what he calls "notable utterances, by Leighton and Alma-Tadema" in order to bring out what he saw as the contrast between the two artists. Leighton's "utterance" is an expression of an almost militant aestheticism: "The enemy," he said, "is this influence of the ugly [...]; it is only by the rooting-out and extermination of what is ugly that you can bring about conditions in which beauty shall be a power among you." Alma-Tadema, according to Standing, saw the role of art differently: "Art is imagination and those who love art, love it because in looking at a picture it awakens their imagination; and that is also why Art heightens the mind." The very different ideas about the role and nature of art, expressed in these two pronouncements shed light on the two self-portraits. Leighton, majestic in his crimson academy robe, represents himself as the ruler and arbiter of ideal beauty, embodied in the Parthenon frieze. Alma-Tadema, a modest figure at work in his studio, transports us to an imaginary paradise.

Alma-Tadema's portrait of Ignacy Jan Paderewski may be seen as a quintessential celebrity portrait in that is creates at once a sense of proximity and distance, of intimacy and unreachability. It is an image that speaks of interaction with other celebrities – specifically Alma-Tadema himself, who was a star in his own right and whose atelier, as everyone knew, was a gathering place for the rich, the powerful, and the famous. It also is an image, that gains its strength as a celebrity image from interfacing with numerous other images of Paderewski that were in circulation in London at the time – photographs, caricatures, sculptures, and paintings. By providing a new and different view of Paderewski, Alma-Tadema attracted attention to the pianist as well as himself.

[48] *The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, 73 (May 21, 1892), p. 599.