March 5th, 1974

Dear Aunt Nela and Uncle Arthur,

How very sorry we are to have missed seeing you during your last visit. Aunt Nela, I did call your hotel various times and left messages and can't understand why you didn't receive any of them. I do hope you'll be back in May, as Steve told me you might be, and if so, we'll definitely get together. The reason for your possible return is quite exciting - you may be assured your book will be my bible.

I've enclosed a copy of the eulogy Steve gave for Tato as well as a copy of the clippings we had copied. I'm also very sorry for not sending you them while you were here. Steve thought I had done it and I thought he had - anyway, here they are.

Steve and I spent a lovely few days in Washington last week - he on business and me visiting my family, which I always enjoy. One night we were there, we took a client and his wife to dinner and who was seated at the next table but Agnew, his wife and another couple. We were amazed at how he was treated like a hero - it was really incredible to see.

Richard moved in with us a couple of weeks ago while looking for a job. He has some good prospects but it's been very tough. He's been a big help to me around the house (when he isn't out on interviews) and has matured greatly in his attitude and feeling for people. We have no problems any longer and I know I'll miss him when he leaves.

Tomorrow morning Steve leaves for Montreal for two days so I'm going to take Linda and Richard out for dinner at a place where you can get delicious hamburgers made any way you want which is better than steak to me.

Steve is back on his "mush" diet because he has had such a bad time recouperating from his operation. His doctor assured him that that was the only reason he's still having such pain. So hopefully, he'll soon be over that. I'm doing prescribed exercises every day and swimming about three times a week, which we're still hoping will deter any future operation. At least I'll know that I've done all I can and if it is necessary, at least I'll be in much better physical condition than I was the last time and that will make a big difference.

March 15 --

Please forgive the long delay between the time I first began this letter and now -- no excuse except that I have been busy and at the end of a day, I really find it very difficult to sit down and write. At this moment, Steve is sound asleep as is Richard. It's only 5:00 PM, but Steve has the flu and Richard came home feeling rotten - so I put him to bed as well. Actually, Steve is just getting over the flu - has had it all week - and I'm afraid Rich is just coming down with it - it's been very popular here for the last month. Good news - Steve is much better in the bottom since he's been on his "mush" diet - enough, enough!

I received a lovely letter from Aunt Doris the other week, and she seems to be fine. She told us her garden is beautiful but needs rain. Also, she's been staying close to home due to the gas shortage. I do hope we'll be able to see her soon. She told me how much Steve's eulogy touched her - reading it, she felt as though she were there, which meant so much to Steve.

Yes, Richard is still here, it will be a month on Sunday and he'll probably be here for a time to come. It's a bit crowded at times, but really not as difficult as it could be - I guess.

Please accept our deepest sorrow for the passing of a great man - Sol Hurok. The tribute paid him from all over the world was truly touching, and we thought of you quite a lot knowing your close relationship with him.

Steve and I may be in New Orleans around the middle of April because he's been asked to be on a panel of broadcasters and they've offered to pay most of my trip as well as all of his. If it's okay for me to travel that far, I will go because I've never been there and would love to go after hearing so much about it. I was invited last year about this time when Steve was invited to make a speech for Blue Cross but couldn't because of my back. Hopefully, this time I'll make it.

I wish I had more exciting or interesting news to convey to you, but I really don't. Oh, I'm also enclosing an article from "W", which I've meant to send you since last year.

Please let us hear from you soon - until later --

All our love,
Geralyn
XXX OOO

Eulogy for Wiktor Labunski
Kansas City, Missouri
January 29, 1974

I'm Stephen Bronek Labunski and I want to say a few words about my father. People used to ask him, "What do you eat before a concert?" "Big black butterflies", he would reply. He might have been talking about me today.

Father was a Christian, but he was not a formally religious man. That's why you're not listening to a man of the cloth. Father wanted someone who knew him to speak about him, to spare his friends the ritual of a eulogy by a well-meaning stranger drafted for the occasion.

When Mother died, Walter Cook spoke so beautifully and so movingly, that we shall never forget. Walter was like another son to Father and Mother, and we love Walter too much to put him through it again.

This is a difficult assignment. I may not get through it without some tears or momentary interruptions, but please don't let that embarrass you, especially if we agree to treat this brief talk not as a performance -- to be judged by the usual standards -- but as a sharing of some personal thoughts about Wiktor Labunski which might make this occasion more meaningful for you who so kindly came to say good-bye.

Besides, I'm not embarrassed to cry for my father. He cried for me...and for my brother Stas. He told us he cried when each of us was born, and he cried again when we were notified, during World War II, that Stas had flown his last combat mission. I was not in combat during the war, but Stas had flown as a navigator on more bombing missions that the usual allotment designed to give you some kind of statistical break, and I remember how thrilled -- and tearful -- we all were when the telegram came that Stas had flown -- and survived -- his last combat mission, before someone began enforcing the law of averages.

Father was born in Europe and for the rest of his life, he reflected many European traits and Old World customs. We spoke Polish at home, even when Stas and I found it increasingly difficult to express ourselves as easily and fully in our native tongue as we could in our adopted English. We ate a variety of European foods. We sang Polish Christmas carols. We listened to a rich repertoire of music and met guests from all over the world. I guess it was fair to say that Father was a worldly, sophisticated man, and our home reflected it.

And yet, Father was a warmly patriotic American, deeply in love with his adopted country. Since 1898, when Father was only three, his father visited the United States to study railroading, and it had always been the family dream that the Labunski sons would one day emigrate to America, where they could follow their careers without the restrictions Europe imposed. Father liked to say of himself, and of Mother, too, "We were born Russian subjects, my sons were born Polish citizens, but all my grandchildren are native born Americans."

He was mindful of the sanctuary and opportunity this country gave us, and he was easily annoyed at people whom he considered ungrateful, taking advantage of American ways but quick with snobbish criticisms of often superficial and unimportant things they didn't understand or like about America.

I remember a wartime incident in which Father overheard a conversation in a foreign language, full of that kind of carping on the part of people who should have been glad to be here. He listened for a while, then chastised them publicly, and because he was a linguist, he had the special pleasure of doing so in the language they were speaking.

I remind you, too, that Father lived in only three cities in America -- Nashville, Memphis and Kansas City. He had opportunities to move elsewhere, but he didn't. He liked it here, in Kansas City, where he spent not quite half of his life, and where he died peacefully in his sleep last Saturday morning.

Father lived a good and fruitful life, reaching almost nine years beyond the Bible's promised three score and ten. He couldn't defeat the actuarial tables, but he stretched them a bit. He passed away in his sleep, a whole human being, with no tubes coming out of him and no needles sticking in him, with his dignity and self-respect intact.

From the time he was widowed in 1968, he had the loving attention of his older son Stas and his family, who looked after him, cared for him, and indulged him. We saw him as often as we could, in New York when he could still travel, and in Kansas City when he couldn't. We called and wrote often.

If you knew my father well, you might have considered him a man without visible passions. He was not particularly demonstrative, very deliberate in what he said, measured in what he did not say, and seemingly indifferent to many things which absorb or excite other people. Maybe it's because he cared about relatively few things -- but about those few things he

cared very deeply. His love for Mother was indestructible, and their marriage lasted almost half a century. Father loved his family. Being from the kind of European background he came from he was a patriarch, but being a kind and gentle man, he was no tyrant. There were rules -- about a lot of things. Sometimes we broke them, but at least we knew what the rules were and we understood the consequences of disobeying. I don't recall disputing my father very many times on matters of substance until I was pretty grown up. I don't feel any scars from having been brought up to respect and obey my father and mother, even when I thought they were wrong.

On the other hand, Stas and I were never spanked, although corporal punishment was very much in the European tradition. The family excuse was that as a pianist, Father couldn't risk hurting his hands whacking husky sons who had crossed over the line. But I doubt that that was the whole reason. After all, there were paddles and belts and other appropriate equipment available. No, Father was too gentle, too civilized for all that. He didn't have the heart to whip his sons, even when it might have been the tempting solution. There was plenty of discipline, but no mayhem. It wasn't that kind of a household.

Father cared about something else: justice and decency in how you treat people. He despised bigotry of any kind and fought against it all his life.

And, of course, what else could you call Wiktor Labunski's love of music except a lifelong passion? It was his staff of life, the connecting link between the great musicians he knew and the struggling students he loved and so often virtually adopted. Music was always more important than material considerations. He played as enthusiastically -- and seemingly as often -- for scholarship funds and the Conservatory record collection as he did for fees. He wheedled donations for poor but deserving students from countless unsuspecting business friends. He was proud of students who succeeded and followed their careers with devoted interest.

As I look back on him now, I see that while he could be demanding in some ways, he was a rather undemanding person in others. Proud, yes, but not vain in that unfortunate way which obscures many good qualities. He was gracious in sharing credit, or acknowledging the gifts of others, including those of rivals. He didn't understand the idea which seems to afflict so much of our society that you look out first for yourself and only incidentally for anybody else. That's not how he felt.

I said at the beginning that Father was not a formally religious man. But he obviously believed in something because of the way he lived. Maybe he was more religious -- in the true sense -- than he himself realized.

It seems a very long way from St. Petersburg in nineteenth century Imperial Russia to a retirement home in Lenexa, Kansas. But is it really...when you have family, friends, music, books, paintings, and all those incredibly rich memories? Perhaps it's not so far after all.

It's highly appropriate that any service for Father should begin and end with music. Mrs. Martha Brown will pay the Bach-Gounod "Ave Maria" to end our services. Maybe each of you will, in your own way, say a prayer for Wiktor Labunski. His family would be most grateful.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 26, 1974

THE KANSAS CITY STAR

Concert Pianist, 78, Dies

Wiktor Labunski, of Lenexa, a concert pianist and former director of the U.M.K.C. Conservatory of Music from 1941 to 1968, died today at a nursing home at 8039 Holmes. He was 78 years old.

Mr. Labunski, of 13830 W. 90th Terrace was born in St. Petersburg, Russia. He made his professional debut at the age of 18 in St. Petersburg. Appearances with orchestra and in recital followed.

He was appointed professor of piano at the Conservatory of Krakow, one of the oldest institutions of music learning in Poland.

While successfully instructing an exceptional group of young Polish pianists, he continued his concert career throughout Europe and the British Isles.

Between 1918 and 1928 he was soloist with the Warsaw Philharmonic.

He made his American debut in 1928 at Carnegie Hall, New York. He has appeared as soloist with the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra, the Cleveland, St. Louis and Toronto symphonies, the Kansas City Philharmonic and with orchestras in Oklahoma City, Tulsa, Memphis, Knoxville, Tenn., Milwaukee and Chicago.

WIKTOR LABUNSKI

As a composer, he is widely known for his Symphony in G minor, his Piano Concerto, which initially was performed with the Kansas City Philharmonic under Karl Krueger, his Duo-Piano Concerto and Concert Variations, original works and transcriptions for two pianos, many piano pieces published here and abroad, as well as songs.

In his first 26 years residency here, Mr. Labunski performed more than 200 public concerts. He also taught a class in Russian at the Metropolitan Junior College.

He was a first lieutenant in the Russian Army at the outbreak of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917. He left Russia the year after the Bolshevik gained control, moving to Krakow, Poland. He moved to the United States in 1928 and to Kansas City in 1937.

In recognition of his distinguished musicianship, the Curtis Institute of Music, Philadelphia, conferred upon him the degree of Doctor of Music. Upon returning to Europe for concert appearance in 1935, he was invited to conduct the newly formed Warsaw Symphony Orchestra and appeared as guest conductor of other symphony orchestras in Poland, including the Warsaw Philharmonic.

His repertoire marks his versatility. Rockhurst College last May gave its Pro Meritis award to him. In 1971 he was chosen by the Kansas City Musical Club to receive its annual musical award for outstanding contributions to music in Kansas City.

The Kansas City Times
(The Morning Kansas City Star)
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The Associated Press exclusively is entitled to use for republication all local news published herein as well as all AP dispatches.
Tuesday, January 29, 1974

Wiktor Labunski, Musician

Over the years the home of Wiktor and Wanda Labunski was a warm place of music and musical talk—a gathering spot for distinguished visiting artists and the musicians and music-lovers of this region. As a teacher, concert pianist, composer and director of the Conservatory of Music, Wiktor was at the center of events.

Old-timers will remember his lecture-recitals with particular affection. His background and store of anecdotes made a lecture on Chopin or Schumann, with piano interpolations, a delight.

Mr. Labunski was a proud Pole, although born in St. Petersburg. He was educated at the Conservatory of Krakow and was a lieutenant in the Russian Army in World War I. After the revolution he returned to Poland and came to the United States in 1928.

To outsiders he sometimes seemed rather stiff and unbending. But his personality was quite the opposite among his intimates. His students were devoted to him, and his sense of humor was constant. He loved little piano tricks. One was to pretend that a certain key on the piano was missing. The note would be rendered by the thump of a knuckle against the piano front when it appeared in the score. This could be quite a feat in the midst of a rapid arpeggio, and the effect was startling, to say the least.

Wanda Labunski died in 1968, six years before the death of Wiktor this past weekend. Friends usually thought of them as a couple, for she was a skilled pianist in her own right. Her sister was married to Artur Rubinstein, and when he visited Kansas City, the great pianist always stayed with the Labunskis, much to the appreciation of friends who would come to pay homage.

Wiktor Labunski was a kind man and influential teacher. He was one of that band of foreign-born musicians who, over the decades, contributed much to the musicianship of this region and undoubtedly advanced standards beyond the times.

THE NEW YORK TIMES,
MONDAY, JANUARY 27, 1974

WIKTOR LABUNSKI, 78, CONSERVATORY DEAN

Wiktor Labunski, composer and pianist, who retired three years ago as dean and artist-in-residence at the Conservatory of Music of the University of Missouri in Kansas City, died there yesterday. He was 78 years old and lived in Lenexa, Kan.

Mr. Labunski was born in St. Petersburg, Russia, and studied at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. From 1920 to 1928 he headed the piano department of the Conservatory of Krakow.

In 1928 he made his American debut at Carnegie Hall. He became head of the piano department at the Nashville Conservatory in 1928, and director of the Memphis College of Music in 1931 and joined the University of Missouri faculty in 1937.

His compositions include Symphony in G Minor, Concerto for Piano and Orchestra, and many piano pieces.

His wife, the former Wanda Mlynarska, a sister of Mrs. Artur Rubinstein, died in 1968.

Surviving are two sons, Stephen B. of New York, former president of N.B.C. Radio, and Stanislaw of Kansas City; a brother, a sister, and seven grandchildren.

VARIETY

Wed., January 30, 1974

Wiktor Labunski

Kansas City, Jan. 29 — Wiktor Labunski, 78, concert pianist, composer and former director of the Kansas City Conservatory of Music, died here Jan. 26. He was born in St. Petersburg, Russia, and made his concert debut there at the age of 18.

He was a first lieutenant in the Russian Army at the outbreak of the 1917 Revolution, but left after the Bolsheviks gained control, moving to Krakow, Poland, where he was professor of piano.

He moved to the United States in 1928 and made his American debut at Carnegie Hall, N.Y., that year.

He came to Kansas City in 1937, and was director of the conservatory, now affiliated with the University of Missouri at Kansas City, from 1941-1958.

Survived by two sons, brother, sister.

VARIETY

Wednesday, Feburary 6, 1974

Wiktor Labunski, 78, musician, composer and teacher, father of Chuck Blore Creative Services v.p. Stephan B. Labunski, died Jan. 26, in Kansas City. He is also survived by a second son and seven grandchildren.

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD — *Extensions of Remarks*

February 4, 1974

WIKTOR LABUNSKI, MUSICIAN

HON. RICHARD BOLLING

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, February 4, 1974

Mr. BOLLING. Mr. Speaker, there follows the Kansas City Times lead editorial on Wiktor Labunski, a fine musician, a great teachers, and a dear personal friend:

WIKTOR LABUNSKI, MUSICIAN

Over the years the home of Wiktor and Wanda Labunski was a warm place of music and musical talk—a gathering spot for distinguished visiting artists and the musicians and music-lovers of this region. As a teacher, concert pianist, composer and director of the Conservatory of Music, Wiktor was at the center of events.

Old-timers will remember his lecture-recitals with particular affection. His background and store of anecdotes made a lecture on Chopin or Schumann, with piano interpolations, a delight.

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A Remembrance of Wiktor

By John Haskins
Music Editor

This is a sad occasion, a time to lament the passing from Kansas City's musical life of Dr. Wiktor Labunski, pianist, composer, conductor, teacher, who died last weekend at the age of 78 years.

Wiktor was one of that vanishing breed of European musicians whose influence, transmitted to a New World—and they all thought of that way—has made the United States a contemporary leader in international music. He was born in Russia, musically educated there, taught in Poland, and came to America in 1926. With him he brought an outstanding musical talent, an acute awareness of tradition, and an essentially aristocratic outlook.

There are many in Kansas City who knew him better than I did, for he was already past retirement age when I came here 8 years ago. He held an emeritus artist-in-residence rank at the Conservatory then, and his activities were somewhat limited. Yet there were occasions to hear him in recital and as soloist with orchestra, and a thoughtful listener soon became aware of elements in his playing that suggested he was a very special artist in his prime.

I gave him the nickname, "Count Casimir," a title suggested by his deep voice, his portentous delivery, and the uncommon severity of expression he adopted in his formal photographs. The telephone would ring, that deep voice would intone, "John, this is Wiktor," and for a fleeting moment one would anticipate an edict, or at least a major pronouncement. That nickname became established around The Arts section of this newspaper. Once I returned from lunch to find a note written by a raffish colleague: "Count Casimir called —from Transylvania!" It was a little joke he would probably have appreciated, for he was a sophisticated man with an awareness of public image.

Dr. Wiktor Labunski

Wiktor was an intellectual, and a cultivated man. He was broadly knowledgeable in fields besides music, and tilting a lance with him might find one ultimately mired in metaphysical areas that had little connection with the nature of the subject originally under discussion. But that was what made conversation with him rewarding: he was a deeply thoughtful man.

It is an odd characteristic of the musical life, that generations do not really count after a certain point. Though there was a legitimate generation gap between Wiktor and myself, it only became pronounced when we discussed music criticism, and he cited the time when he wrote critiques for a Warsaw paper.

I snorted in something like derision when he described how it was then—you went to a concert, had a drink and a late supper with friends, wrote your review in a leisurely fashion the next day, and called the paper to send a messenger around to pick it up. As a music critic Wiktor fortunately missed the life of the modern deadline-ridden critics who were described by Max Graf (he also missed it, in Vienna) as "gliding like eels through the concert halls." Count Casimir would have been out of his depth knocking off the 30-minute review in time to make the morning paper.

Wiktor Labunski came from another time, another place, and fortunately for this area, he brought it with him when he settled here. The musical life of Kansas City is the better for his 26 years of service as teacher, performer, and sometime director of the Conservatory. His pupils by the hundreds mourn his passing, as do his many friends, and his work here stands as an enduring monument. Ave atque vale, Wiktor.