

The Concept of Polish Music: In Search of Adequate Criteria

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses the notion of Polish music, the possibilities of defining that notion, establishing its scope and listing specific problems related to it. For about 150 years, writers on Polish music have expressed the conviction that it has its own distinctive stylistic and expressive character. Studies concerning the specific qualities of Polish national style after WWII have naturally linked up to Polish music history, mainly that of the 19th century. The new political and cultural situation in Poland after 1989 calls, however, for a change of perspective. We must take into account the present-day cultural situation, in which boundaries are blurred, while supra-national structures and global thinking are beginning to dominate.

The paper attempts to define Polish music as a notion in contemporary discourse on history, to examine the resonance of that category, and to point to artistic phenomena which this notion may be said to describe. I will list and analyse the criteria that have been used to define that notion. Though the problem concerns the history of Polish music at large, the cognitive situation is particularly complex and ambivalent with reference to the 19th century. I will discuss the most common ways of defining the criterion of Polishness in music, namely: the origins and nationality of the composers; their place of activity; references to Polish music traditions, and the expressive qualities of the music itself. In the conclusion, I will present my thesis concerning the possibility of defining Polish music.

Key words: Polish music, criteria, definition, Polish Music in Historical and Cultural Perspective.

1. POLISH MUSIC IN HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

All societies in every historical period ask questions concerning their own identity, tradition and relation between themselves and other societies. This obvious fact is surprisingly relevant also today, when the distinct globalising tendencies mean that lifestyles, attitudes, cultures and forms of art are becoming uniform worldwide, while boundaries between social groups and between nations are gradually getting blurred. Some people react to these phenomena by seeking national identification, by asking questions concerning the category of the nation and its distinctive qualities, how the national communities differ and what they have in common, what ‘patriotism’ and ‘cosmopolitanism’ mean¹.

¹ The limited space of the present paper makes it impossible to discuss these problems in more detail, but there are numerous publications dealing with these issues. In the context of music, one should point to the most recent one: D. Hebert & M. Rykowski, (2018). *Music Glocalization: Heritage and Innovation in a Digital Age*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

In this context they also frequently ask what defines their own culture, what values and traditions it should be associated with. These tendencies are also evident in the debate about music, its national dimension and character. From the perspective of Polish musical culture, these problems – which keep resurfacing in discourse about music – have remained relevant and deeply rooted in the nation’s historical awareness for nearly 200 years. They originated in the 19th-century concepts of the nation and in Romantic ideologies which promoted the separate ‘local’ identity of each national culture.

In this paper I will look at how the idea of Polish music has been understood, whether and how this term can be defined, what its range and thematic scope may be. Though the 19th-century ideas emphasising the Polish national character of artistic works may seem anachronistic and outdated today, and have already been commented upon on many occasions – they still prove vital and surprisingly relevant to trends currently observed in Polish cultural policies, social preferences and types of behaviour. For one and a half centuries, those commenting Polish music have been convinced of its separate stylistic and expressive identity. Research on the qualities of the national style, frequently undertaken in Poland after World War II, has naturally linked up with the study of Polish music history². Returning to these problems today, we may be criticised for taking up a subject that has been thoroughly explored and well-nigh exhausted in academic writings, or for reiterating well-known and established viewpoints and attitudes. All the same, Poland’s new political situation after 199 calls for a new fresh look at these issues, which would take into account the current cultural perspective, characterised by blurred boundaries, the domination of supra-national structures and global ways of thinking. In the context of changing values and conditions, the question of Polishness in music paradoxically appears to be more

² The key publications dedicated to this subject have been: Z. Lissa, (1956). *Problemy polskiego stylu narodowego w muzyce Chopina* [Problems of the Polish National Style in Chopin’s Music]. *Rocznik Chopinowski*, No. 1, pp. 96–170; Z. Lissa, (1956). *O stylu narodowym w muzyce* [On the National Style in Music]. In: eadem, *Szkice z estetyki muzycznej* [Sketches on Music Aesthetic]. Kraków: PWM, pp. 146–180; E. Dziębowska, (1971). *O polskiej szkole narodowej* [On the Polish National School]. In: Z. Chechlińska (Ed.), *Szkice o kulturze muzycznej XIX wieku* [Sketches on 19th-Century Musical Culture], Vol. 1. Warszawa: PWN, pp. 13–32.

relevant than it was a hundred years ago – the more so, since against the background of this universalist landscape nationalist and separatist tendencies are becoming more and more manifest as a reaction against the processes of homogenisation in the contemporary world³.

The concepts of Polish music and of national culture have evolved in history. Before the Romantics put forward the idea of the separate identity of national cultures, Polish music was naturally incorporated into its European context. Until and during the Age of Enlightenment, universalism of culture depended on free borrowing and transfer of cultural models, so to speak – across national boundaries⁴. This changed significantly in the 19th century with Johann Gottfried Herder's pioneering and visionary emphasis on the role of national cultures and the attention he attracted in this context to musical matters. Herder's collection *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern*, comprising texts of folksongs sung by different nations, can be considered today as one of the first examples of linking music repertoire to the specific qualities of individual national groups⁵. National culture came to be defined from this perspective, and this way of thinking also influenced the perception of Polish music under the Partitions of Poland. In the later communist People's Republic of Poland (1944-89), national music was understood quite differently, since Polish culture was essentially conceived in opposition to the political model imposed by external powers. In Poland after 1989, the debate concerning Polish music has become part of the tension between an universalist or sometimes

even cosmopolitan stance of participation in European and global culture on the one hand, and an orientation toward national self-identification, hypertrophy of pride and a xenophobia shutting itself off from other cultures – on the other. Naturally, these are the extremes of a wider spectrum, which I presented in a somewhat exaggerated fashion in order to bring out the main aspects of the problem under study.

The problems discussed here had their antecedents in the past, primarily in the 19th century. For this reason, problems of the contemporary self-identification of Polish music ought to be considered in the historical context of earlier manifestations of such national identification, strongly and distinctly rooted in culture. In order to earnestly approach the subject of *Polish music and musicians*, a historian of music must first consciously define the subject of his or her research. For me, the aim of this paper is to attempt a definition of Polish music in contemporary historical discourse, to assess the current resonance of the idea of Polishness in music, and to relate it to specific phenomena in art. The historical context will be indispensable to place my discussion in a proper perspective, but the key objective is to systematically define by means of scientific research tools how the concept of Polish music is variously understood in our own times⁶.

The basic tenets that underlie the contemporary understanding of Polish music were developed in the Romanticism. Romantic ideologies fostered an interest in one's own national culture, which was arguably a key factor in the formation of modern national societies. Interest in local and national traditions, awakened in the 19th century, bore abundant fruit in the form of the numerous forms and varieties of Romantic culture.

3 The synthetically conceived entry for *Polen* in the new edition of the MGG music encyclopaedia does not define "Polish music", though in the introduction to this entry Jan Stęszewski points to such factors as migrations, the presence and influence of other nations. Cf. J. Stęszewski, (1997). *Polen*, Allgemeine Einführung. In: *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Sachteil, Vol. 7. Kassel-Basel: Bärenreiter, col. 1623–1624.

4 On 18th-century concepts of nationality vs universality, cf. R. D. Goliańek & P. Urbański, (2010). *Händel, Haydn i idea uniwersalizmu muzyki* [Handel, Haydn and the Idea of Universalism in Music]. Poznań: Rhythmos.

5 J. G. Herder, (1953). *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern*, W. Creutziger (Ed.). Leipzig: Reclam. Of Polish musicologists, Zofia Lissa already tackled this problem in her *Znaczenie filozofii J.G. Herdera dla romantyzmu muzycznego* [The Significance of J.G. Herder's Philosophy for the Musical Romanticism] (1972), reprinted in: Z. Lissa, (2008). *Wybór pism estetycznych* [A Selection of Aesthetic Writings], Z. Skowron (Ed.). Kraków: Universitas, pp. 141–155. Cf. also: I. Poniąowska, (2005). *O narodowości w muzyce polskiej XIX wieku* [On Nationality in 19th-Century Polish Music]. *Niepodległość i Pamięć*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (21), pp. 21–30.

6 Most studies dedicated to Polish music history do not define this term, but take it intuitively to mean the sum total of music composition and music life in the (changing) territory of Poland. Also the most recent monographs of 19th-century Polish music by Zofia Chechlińska and Irena Poniąowska do not define the concept under study. They are the two works published in the series „Historia muzyki polskiej” (“History of Polish Music”) as its Vol. V: Z. Chechlińska, (2013). *Romantyzm, część 1: 1795–1850* [The Romanticism. Part 1: 1795–1850]. Warszawa: Sutkowski Edition Warsaw; I. Poniąowska, (2010). *Romantyzm, część 2A: 1850–1900: Twórczość muzyczna w drugiej połowie XIX wieku* [The Romanticism. Part 2A: 1850–1900: Music Composition in the 2nd Half of the 19th Century]. Warszawa: Sutkowski Edition Warsaw. Volume V finds its rather curious complement in Elżbieta Szczepańska-Lange's (2010) *Romantyzm, część 2B 1850–1900, Życie muzyczne w Warszawie* [The Romanticism. Part 2B: 1850–1900: Music Life in Warsaw]. Warszawa: Sutkowski Edition Warsaw.

The new and fascinating, previously little known manifestations of local cultures were incorporated at that time into the sphere of the dominant, universal values. It is from that moment on that we can talk about the birth of national identity, which found its fullest expression in art. Eminent artists – first of all poets and writers, but also painters and music composers – therefore came to be considered as exponents of the national spirit, which, in conjunction with the Romantic cult of outstanding personalities, of geniuses – shaped the image of the ‘national bards’.

In Poland revived after the Partitions (from 1918 onward) the sphere of national identification naturally gained special importance. Preservation of cultural traditions could guarantee the survival of the nation – hence the natural cult of artists who determined the shape of national art. In Polish music this status was acquired by (the life and work of) Fryderyk Chopin and Stanisław Moniuszko, who became the icons of Polish musical culture and the models of Polishness in music, and whose works gained acclaim comparable to that enjoyed by the national bard and poet Adam Mickiewicz⁷. The prominent place given to these two composers resulted in a definite shift in the understanding of the idea of Polish music in 19th-century culture. Previously the question of national identification was related – at best – to some kind of local colour and specific qualities of Polish music traditions, mostly limited to mazurka and polonaise rhythms. From the time of Chopin and Moniuszko, however, national elements in music became the criterion of its value and a necessary condition for its proper social reception. The semantic scope of the term ‘Polish music’ was thus significantly reduced and came to be identified with that current in music which emphasised the element of national tradition. This change of viewpoint and system of values proved long-lasting and took root in culture; its consequences can be observed also today.

Differences in the style, level and character of Chopin’s

and Moniuszko’s music are less important in this context, because they are only evident to experts, but hard to grasp for the general audience. In the wider context, the work of those two composers laid the foundations for the understanding of Polishness in music compositions. At the same time it led to the creation of a kind of founding myth for Polish music, which claims that Polish national style and national school in music can only be dated from these two composers and originates in them. Manifestations of this myth can be found in publications on Polish music history, which exploit such terms as ‘the pre-Chopin period’, ‘the pre-Moniuszko era’, etc⁸. Because of the prominent position of these two composers in Polish culture, we will assume that our discussion refers to a view of Polish music that formed in the period of Chopin’s and Moniuszko’s activity, or – more generally – in Polish aesthetic thought of the 19th century. For the same reason the phenomena discussed below refer to a much smaller extent to the national awareness in earlier eras, though some manifestations of Polish identity in music, which reached their climax in the oeuvres of Chopin and Moniuszko, had their antecedents in those periods.

2. ARTISTS’ NATIONALITY AND DESCENT

The most common understanding of Polish music can be summarised as follows: **Polish music is one that has been composed and performed by Polish artists (i.e. persons of Polish origin, born of Polish parents)**. In this sense, a composer’s national identity is determined by his or her birth and descent. A Pole is someone whose parents also were Poles, and they could therefore pass on to that person their sense of national identity and knowledge of tradition – their Polishness. In musical culture such links to tradition, and (emphasised especially from the 19th century onward) the knowledge of native folklore and references to its elements in one’s own compositions – were considered as positive values

7 I. Poniatowska, (2006). Chopin – czwarty wieszcz [Chopin – The Fourth National Bard]. In: W. Nowik (Ed.), *Topos narodowy w muzyce polskiej pierwszej połowy XIX wieku*. [National Themes in Polish Music of the 1st Half of the 19th Century]. Warszawa: Akademia Muzyczna im. Fryderyka Chopina, pp. 257–271; A. Topolska, (2014). *Mit wieszcza. Stanisław Moniuszko w piśmiennictwie lat 1858-1989* [The Myth of the National Bard: Stanisław Moniuszko in Writings, 1858-1989]. Poznań: Wydawnictwo PTPN. Cf. also: eadem, (2016). Stanisław Moniuszko as a National Prophet: Facts and Myths. In: *Nationality vs Universality: Music Historiographies in Central and Eastern Europe*, S. Żerańska-Kominek (Ed.). Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 73–87.

8 This kind of periodisation was common especially in older works. For instance, in the collective work *Z dziejów polskiej kultury muzycznej* [From the History of Polish Musical Culture]: Vol. 2. *Od Oświecenia do Młodej Polski* [From the Enlightenment to Young Poland] (Kraków: PWM, 1966) we have a separate chapter dedicated to “The output of the leading Polish Romantic composers” (by Stefania Łobaczewska, *Fryderyk Chopin*, pp. 153–236, and Witold Rudziński, *Stanisław Moniuszko*, pp. 237–264). This is followed by such chapters as, among others, *The Opera after Moniuszko*, *Solo Artistic Song after Moniuszko*, and *Piano Music after Chopin*.

representative of a national artist. In the writings of Polish music historians, the above-presented criteria of Polishness in music are particularly strongly present in discussions concerning musicians' ancestry, their mother tongue and their families' places of residence, as well as the proper forms of their surnames⁹. 20th- and 21st-century musicologists have used these criteria to incorporate a number of composers and performers into the sphere of Polish music. In popular opinion, the criterion of the artist's nationality still remains valid and relevant.

Though the above-presented definition is arguably reasonable, such a delimitation of the scope of Polish music leads to a number of problems related to the interpretation of national origins. It is especially difficult in the frontier land, where questions of national identity are hard to answer unambiguously. In many cases, links to the local community and culture prove more important to an artist's identity than being assigned to a given national group. This has been the case with composers from Gdańsk (Danzig), Warmia and Masuria (former East Prussia), or Silesia. The life and work of Feliks Nowowiejski (recently much discussed in the context of his birth and death anniversaries) is a case in point¹⁰.

This kind of ambivalence related to the artists' origins leads to further doubts concerning the criteria for national identification. We are immediately faced with the problem of the Polishness of Chopin – the most 'Polish' of all composers. His father's French nationality

was viewed as an obstacle by nationalistically-minded music historians and music life animators. In his surname, stress was moved to the first syllable to make it sound less foreign, and it was quite frequently spelled (especially in the 19th century and until World War II) in a Polonised version as 'Szopen', which reflects the attempts to assign him and his oeuvre unequivocally to the sphere of Polish musical culture¹¹.

The criterion of origin is not very convincing as the sole justification for assigning a given musician to Polish culture. What is more, in the 20th century this criterion was largely compromised because of the persecution of the Jews and racial segregation. Interestingly, the topic figured large in the debate about Polish music between the world wars, and one of the best known participants of this dispute – Karol Szymanowski – felt at ease lavishly applying the term 'race' to the national identity of composers and its reflection in music. In this context, allotting artists to a given national category becomes problematic, and its foundations – dubious, leading to questions such as: Can a composer's own declaration of nationality be taken as a reliable proof that he or she is / was really a Polish artist? Or should we ask for the person's (Polish) passport and examine official documents confirming his or her nationality?

The composer's descent as the criterion for belonging (or not) to Polish culture gives rise to further doubts if we consider the numerous cases of foreign musicians who have found adequate conditions for development in our country. They are not Poles by birth, and sometimes they do not even apply for a Polish citizenship; still, they actively co-create Polish music culture. This is the case, for instance, with the Ukrainian singer Olga Pasichnyk, associated with Poland for many years and involved in many projects related to Polish music, or with the Hungarian composer Szabolcs Eszényi, who has contributed for many decades to Polish music life. Their artistic output undoubtedly belongs on many levels to the

9 This process of incorporation into Polish musical culture can be illustrated by the case of Mateusz Kuci, an 18th-century composer of symphonic works from the circles of Jasna Góra Monastery. Beata Stróżyńska writes: "That he belonged to the world of Polish culture is highly likely, but in the present state of knowledge it can only be put forward as a hypothesis. Both the substantial number of his symphonies preserved at Jasna Góra archive [...] and some stylistic features of his works suggest that his proper place is among Polish composers. But we cannot exclude the possibility of some new facts emerging in the future which will refute this proposition." B. Stróżyńska, (2015). *Symfonia w XVIII-wiecznej Polsce. Teoria, repertuar i cechy stylistyczne* [The Symphony in 18th-Century Poland: Theory, Repertoire and Stylistic Features]. Łódź: Akademia Muzyczna im. G. i K. Baciewiczów, p. 303.

10 Feliks Nowowiejski's national identity is still debated by scholars. The most recent biography by Iwona Fokt contains remarks on this subject which suggest that the question has been deliberately omitted or approached in a stereotypical fashion; some of those remarks are highly questionable and seem unjustified, for instance: "I believe that before leaving Warmia Nowowiejski did not consider his own national identity. It was only during his studies in Berlin that he was forced to define it clearly." I. Fokt, (2017). *Feliks Nowowiejski*. Poznań: Akademia Muzyczna im. I. J. Paderewskiego, p. 19.

11 The spelling 'Szopen' can be found not only in the title of Cyprian Kamil Norwid's poem *Fortepian Szopena* (1865), but also in the titles of biographical works dedicated to that composer published in the interwar period, such as: J. Jankowski, (1927). *Miłość artysty: Szopen i Pani Sand* [Love of an Artist: Chopin and Mrs Sand]. Warszawa: Gebethner i Wolff; M. Gliński (Ed.), (1932). *Szopen: monografia zbiorowa* [Chopin: A Collective Monograph]. Warszawa: Drukarnia Współczesna; J. Iwaszkiewicz, (1938). *Fryderyk Szopen*. Lwów: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Książek Szkolnych. A new periodical launched in 1932 in Lviv bore the title "Szopen: popularny miesięcznik muzyczny" ["Chopin – A Popular Music Monthly"].

world of Polish music, but the artists themselves might deny such a classification; they hold foreign passports and feel connected with the cultures of their respective countries of origin. In contemporary writings on Polish music history, omitting their contributions would be an obvious falsification and would lead to a tendentious image of the national art, whose image would thus be censored and therefore incomplete.

It should clearly ensue from the above that the criterion of Polish music as one composed and performed by Poles simply will not hold. Not only is it too narrow, but it leads to an impoverishment of the nation's music culture. Also in the past, the contributions of non-Poles to Polish music were significant and multidimensional. Polish music history would be incomplete without the Hungarian Valentin (Bálint) Bakfark, the Italians Marco Scacchi and Jan Ludwik Quattrini, the Czechs Jan Stefani and Wojciech Dankowski, as well as the Germans Józef (Joseph A.F.) Elsner and Jan Dawid (Johann David) Holland. All these and a great number of other musicians not listed here have earned a permanent place in Polish music history.

Today this conclusion seems obvious and well justified, but in musical historiography the value of foreign artists' contributions has not always been recognised. Poland's situation under the partitions, and especially the experience of World War II, generated man xenophobic and nationalistic opinions also in the sphere of music culture. One symptomatic case is that of Józef Elsner, a major composer of the 1st half of the 19th century, of unquestionable merit to Polish music and musical life, whose output fell victim to a smear campaign launched by nationalistically minded music historians for whom the composer's German origins constituted an unredeemable fault. This view was represented in its most chauvinist version by Józef Władysław Reiss, who in his book *Najpiękniejsza ze wszystkich jest muzyka polska* [*Polish Music Is the Most Beautiful of All*] first published directly after World War II (in 1946) made a number of comments questioning the artistic value of Elsner's achievements, in blatant denial of historical facts rejecting all his merits and categorically repudiating all his oeuvre:

Józef Ksawery Elsner, invited to Warsaw by W. Bogusławski [...] grew up in an atmosphere of hostility toward Poland, to which he later owed the high posts of Warsaw Opera's Kapellmeister and director of the Conservatory; overestimated in our country in these capacities and as a composer. His output comprises nearly all genres of music, but – except for his operas – is of little significance to our music. It bears testimony to his lack of any major talent. As a composer, Elsner was mediocre. [...] Nor are all of his operas of any value. Some are based on Polish national topics, such as *Leszek the*

White (1809), *King Ladislaus the Elbow-High, or the Peasant Girls of Wislica* (1818), and *Jagiello in Tenczyn* (1820), but despite the use of Polish national rhythms, they have nothing to do with Polish music¹².

It is in the context of such an understanding of 'Polish music' that we should consider the delicate question of artists possessing double citizenship, holders of the passport of another country apart from a Polish one. Counting such persons exclusively as Polish artists and disregarding their links to another national culture would be as false (and morally harmful) as treating them as foreigners, non-Poles, and therefore remaining outside the scope of Polish music. Even more awkward is the question of the national identity of musicians of Jewish origin, which still provokes strong reactions in the musicological circles, which confirms the importance of national identity in discussions of Polish music – and the persistence of anti-Semitic sentiments, through the prism of which artistic achievements are frequently evaluated¹³. Another aspect of this problem is some

12 J. W. Reiss, (1984). *Najpiękniejsza ze wszystkich jest muzyka polska* [*Polish Music Is the Most Beautiful of All*]. Kraków: PWM, p. 99. In recent years, however, the life and work of Józef Elsner have been properly studied and described without this kind of value judgments. Cf. e.g. R. Pośpiech, (2013). *Józef Elsner (1769-1854). Życie – działalność – epoka* [*Life – Work – The Times*]. Opole: Wydział Teologiczny Uniwersytetu Opolskiego.

13 In the case of Polish composers, information about their Jewish descent has very frequently been deliberately withheld, and no mention was made of it in official academic publications. A good case in point (for 19th-century music) is that of Henryk Wieniawski, whose Jewish ancestry was not mentioned until very recently, even in the entry dedicated to him in the relatively recent last volume of PWM Edition's *Music Encyclopaedia* (cf. R. Suchowiejko, (2012). *Wieniawski Henryk*. In: *Encyklopedia Muzyczna PWM, Część Biograficzna* [*Biographical Part*], Vol. W-Ż. Kraków: PWM, pp. 168–179). An interesting context for this topic can be found in the monograph *Żydzi w kulturze muzycznej ziem polskich w XIX i XX wieku. Słownik biograficzny* [*Jews in Music Culture in the Polish Territories, the 19th and 20th Centuries. A Biographical Dictionary*], by Leon Tadeusz Błaszczyk – a lexicon of musicians of Polish origin which does contain an entry for Henryk Wieniawski. In his "Preface", the author lists the criteria for including a given figure in the *Dictionary*: "We have included Jews residing in the Polish territory and active in the separate current of Jewish music life [...] as well as those active in Polish music life, frequently assimilated to the point of converting to Christianity and full identification with the Polish society, and those who – working outside Poland – identified themselves, for various reasons, with the societies of Russia, Austria or Germany, or other countries to which they emigrated [...]. L. T. Błaszczyk, (2014). *Żydzi w kulturze muzycznej ziem polskich w XIX i XX wieku. Słownik biograficzny*. Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny w Polsce, p. 5.

artists' self-identification with their homelands (local communities), as in the case of those Polish musicians who declare Silesian or Belorussian nationality. If we accept family origins as a decisive criterion, those artists and their achievements would have to be excluded – which would result in a tendentious, impoverished view of Polish music.

Despite all these problems and ambiguities, artists' origin remains a key factor for the identification of national music. Among music historians, this paradigm is now even being extended, for instance so as to include the descendants of Polish émigrés in discussions of Polish music. A good example is the figure and work of Józef Michał Ksawery Poniąkowski, restored in the last decade to the consciousness of the audience in Poland. Poniąkowski was born in 1816 in Italy, where his father – nephew of the last king of Poland, Stanisław II Augustus – had come after the fall of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Józef M.K. Poniąkowski had virtually no links to his ancestors' fatherland; most likely he did not even speak Polish. He was a Tuscan citizen, later a French senator, and in his music he focused on the genres of Italian and French opera. Apart from his descent, he had hardly any relations or links to Poland to talk about, which did not prevent scholars from incorporating him into their vision of Polish 19th-century music¹⁴.

3. POLISH MUSIC AS MUSIC IN POLAND

The criterion of origin proved too narrow adequately to define Polish music. It excluded non-Poles composing and performing music in Poland. It seems only logical to consider not so much the origin as the artist's place of activity. In this approach, **Polish music comprises manifestations of musical activity undertaken by various artists in the territory of Poland**. This definition makes it possible to include the already mentioned foreigners who, regardless of their descent, have contributed to the development of Polish music¹⁵.

¹⁴ R. D. Goliańek, (2010). *Włoch? Francuz? Anglik? Polak? Społeczne, polityczne i narodowe konteksty działalności artystycznej Józefa Poniąkowskiego (1816–1873)* [An Italian? A Frenchman? An Englishman? A Pole? The Social, Political and National Contexts of Józef Poniąkowski's (1816–1873) Artistic Work]. *Polski Rocznik Muzykologiczny*, No. 8, pp. 79–90.

¹⁵ This is how the term 'Polish musicians' was defined by the authors of *Słownik muzyków polskich* [Dictionary of Polish Musicians], cf. the editorial preface by Józef M. Chomiński: "In our *Dictionary of Polish Musicians* we have included entries for foreign musicians residing in Poland, particularly those whose

Naturally, for the period of the Partitions this definition needs to be modified. The words "in the territory of Poland" must be replaced by "in the former territory (lands) of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth". This definition significantly extends the list of artists and their works, but also excludes émigré artists working outside Poland. This concerns both 19th- and 20th-century musicians. Their reasons for leaving the country were mostly related to the cultural and political situation in Poland¹⁶. They constituted a very large proportion of the entire population of Polish musicians – from Fryderyk Chopin, Henryk Wieniawski and Juliusz Zarębski to Roman Palester, Andrzej Panufnik and Aleksander Tansman, to contemporary artists such as Piotr Moss, Bettina Skrzypczak, and Marta Ptaszyńska, to mention but a few names. Apart from composers, they are also performing musicians connected for many years with foreign music institutions, such as the violinists Daniel Stabrawa, long-time concert master of the Berliner Philharmoniker and Bartłomiej Nizioł, concert master of the Zurich Opera. Should their artistic achievements also be considered as contributions to Polish culture and therefore taken into account in analyses of Polish music and music life? All those musicians have lived outside Poland, visiting their mother country only sporadically, and if they do perform in Poland, it is part of the international concert life rather than proof of their actual bond to Poland and Polish musical culture.

This second definition also seems methodologically incorrect because it is too general. Musical activity may have very different manifestations and character. While the Polish émigré musicians working for many years in Polish musical milieux arguably had strong links to Polish music, the sporadic visits of foreign artists in Poland, the occasional recitals and concerts given in our country for many centuries by musicians from all over the world – may

activity was of unquestionable importance to our musical culture." J. M. Chomiński (Ed.), (1964). *Słownik muzyków polskich*. Kraków: PWM, p. 6.

¹⁶ The most precise application of this concept can be found in Benjamin Vogel's lexicon of violin-makers, which is evident in the very title of the work: B. Vogel, (2007). *Słownik lutników działających na historycznych i obecnych ziemiach polskich oraz lutników polskich działających za granicą do 1950 roku* [A Dictionary of Violin-Makers Active in the Historical and Present-Day Territory of Poland, as well as Polish Violin-Makers Working Abroad before 1950]. Szczecin: Uniwersytet Szczeciński. Such a precise definition of the scope of research is very rare in musicological writings. Naturally, Vogel does not include a definition of Polish music.

have some degree of influence on Polish musical culture, but their performances can hardly be called 'Polish music'. Most of the phenomena under study are located on an axis between these two extremes. A quantitative criterion, even if logically justified, does not seem correct. If an émigré pianist gives two concerts a year in Poland, is it enough to be recognised as a contribution to Polish music? The criterion of being composed or performed in Poland is not sufficient to define 'Polish music' in logical and reliable terms.

Inclusion of foreign artists and of Polish musicians working abroad in discussions of Polish music has given historians of Polish music much headache, since they need to define the topic of their research. A survey of musicological studies whose titles point to 'Polish music' as their subject does not provide us with any convincing criteria for including or excluding artists from abroad. Unfortunately most authors do not even mention perfunctorily how the scope of the term 'Polish music' ought to be defined, though such a definition seems to be an obvious requirement for any scholarly research. The fundamental works on 20th-century Polish music history, printed in the 1980s – Zofia Helman's *Neoklasycyzm w muzyce polskiej* [*Neo-Classicism in Polish Music*] and Krzysztof Baculewski's *Polska twórczość kompozytorska 1945-1984* [*Polish Music Compositions 1945-1984*], much quoted and disseminated in their time, even used for many years as handbooks of music history – prove that their authors at times clearly lost control of how the scope of 'Polish music' ought to be defined. In his analyses of the works of Szabolcs Esztényi, Baculewski added a biographical footnote, clearly as an attempt to persuade his readers that Esztényi's activity belongs to the sphere of Polish music despite the artist's foreign name and surname:

Szabolcs Esztényi, a Hungarian, connected with Polish music culture as a pianist and composer: residing permanently in Warsaw and frequently performing at contemporary music festivals in Poland as a soloist, chamber musician and accompanist¹⁷.

Helman wrote about the achievements of Polish émigré composers such as Tansman, Rathaus, Szałowski, Spisak, Laks, Maciejewski, and others:

17 K. Baculewski, (1987). *Polska twórczość kompozytorska 1945–1984* [*Polish Music Compositions 1945–1984*]. Kraków: PWM, p. 250. Reprinted without change in: K. Baculewski, (1996). *Współczesność, część 1: 1939–1974* [*The Modernity, part 1: 1949–1974*]. In: S. Sutkowski (Ed.), *Historia muzyki polskiej* [*History of Polish Music*], Vol. 7. Warszawa: Sutkowski Edition Warsaw, p. 328.

Although these composers always stressed their personal sense of being connected with the Polish cultural traditions, their music is frequently little known or almost unknown in Poland. It not always had access to audiences in Poland and did not exert any impact on transformations taking place in music within our country. It had fewer points in common with Polish contemporary culture than with the cultures it was created in. This does not mean that the situation cannot change. There is always the possibility that their music will be 'regained' and incorporated into our Polish tradition; this process is actually to some extent taking place at the moment¹⁸.

This opinion merits some analysis. On the one hand, Helman clearly states that the music of Polish émigré composers was unknown in Poland and had no impact on the development of Polish music – which suggests that they should not be discussed under the heading of 'Polish music'. On the other hand, she considers the possibility of 'regaining' them – that is, incorporating their output *a posteriori* into the realm of Polish music, which entails the necessity of rewriting the history of Polish music so as to include in it a previously omitted or excluded body of works and artists. This postulate seems only natural, considering the progress of research and new facts emerging in its course. But the situation of the works of émigré composers is quite different from that of the unearthed pieces of early music or of composers from bygone eras restored to contemporary audience awareness. Those artists fell into oblivion over the centuries, but in their own time they were active and present in Polish music life. On the other hand, including or leaving out foreigners and émigrés is more the question of how we define the term 'Polish music' itself.

4. THE POLISHNESS OF MUSICAL WORKS

Since the criteria of artists' nationality or place of activity did not result in a satisfying definition of Polish music and led to a number of doubts concerning its scope, it seems that instead of considering the musicians as persons, we can turn to the music itself, to the 'product' in the form of musical works as a precise criterion. In this approach, we leave out the activity of performers and teachers, since our previous analysis did not yield any methodologically convincing principles for including in the scope of Polish music, for instance, the work of Polish violinists active as performers and teachers in Germany or Switzerland. Limiting the scope of Polish music to the musical compositions alone does not, however, solve our

18 Z. Helman, (1985). *Neoklasycyzm w muzyce polskiej XX wieku* [*Neo-Classicism in 20th-Century Polish Music*]. Kraków: PWM, p. 51.

problem with the definition. On the contrary, it makes matters even more complicated, since there are no clearly and commonly accepted criteria for labelling any work of music as Polish. This subject has been taken up in many publications, as the category of national style in Polish music is one of the most frequently discussed topics in Polish musicology after World War II.

Polish music comprises those works in which one can point to references to Polish musical traditions. Their main quality is their link to musical folklore, in particular – to the style of Polish folksongs and dances, though researchers accept other forms of tradition, such as historical songs or the genres and styles of urban or gentry-house music. Not without significance in this context are references to local and national subjects, artistically reworking tales, customs and rites, incorporating episodes of national history in musical works or praise of Polish wildlife and landscape. The thus conceived repertoire of Polish music is vast, popular, obvious, and undisputed. Every musically educated Pole can list many works representing the thus defined Polish music – such as Chopin's polonaises and mazurkas, Moniuszko's *The Haunted Manor* and *Halka*, Zygmunt Noskowski's *Morskie Oko*, Władysław Żeleński's *In the Tatra Mountains*, Karol Szymanowski's *Harnasie* and *Kurpie Songs*, and many other works permanently associated with the national themes.

In this approach, the artist's descent or place of residence is of much smaller import. Chopin is a good case in point, since doubts concerning his French father and residing abroad throughout his mature life prove without significance if we consider his role as the most perfect manifestation of Polishness in music, which puts him at the very centre of the scope of the thus defined Polish music. However, because of the (above mentioned) special place of Chopin's (and Moniuszko's) life and works in the Polish music pantheon, their case may be considered untypical. There are other examples, such as those of the 19th-century émigrés Henryk Wieniawski and Juliusz Zarębski, viewed as obvious representatives of Polish music despite spending most of their lives in Western Europe. Their close links to Polish music traditions are the key argument in favour of considering their compositions as Polish music, though in both these cases their Polish descent also played a role.

However, the situation becomes quite confusing when we consider the output of those Polish composers who do not include direct national references in their music. Most artists write out of personal inspiration, drawing

first and foremost on their individual musical imagination and sensitivity, which need not necessarily be justified by national tradition. What manifestations of Polishness can one find in such pieces as Karol Szymanowski's *Metopes* or Witold Lutosławski's *Livre pour orchestre*, whose composers consciously drew on other than Polish national traditions for these works? Since they both composed in independent Poland, drawing or not on Polish national traditions was not such a sensitive issue as in the period of the Partitions. This is why we need to look differently at the decisions taken by e.g. Mieczysław Karłowicz, whose fascination with the major foreign composers of his day had little to do with the cultivation of Polish national traditions in music.

Similarly, though for rather different reasons, it does not seem proper to associate the works of Polish early music composers, such as Adam Jarzębski's concerti or Grzegorz Gerwazy Gorczycki's religious works, as manifestations of Polish music tradition. Those early composers did not aim at reflecting national identity in their art. Quite the contrary, for many centuries music composers only strove to imitate the styles and solutions developed at foreign centres of musical avant-garde in their own times, such as medieval France, the 17th-century Italy or Vienna in the Classical period. In Jarzębski's music we can easily point to elements of Italian style, in Dankowski – to the influence of Haydn. This certainly does not make an Italian composer of Jarzębski or an Austrian one of Dankowski. Until the end of the 18th century, the knowledge of canons and styles developed in Europe's leading music centres was a sufficient criterion of a composer's professionalism. It was only the 19th-century Romantic ideologies that introduced the category of national art. This logically limits the period in which we can look for national identity in music to something like the last two hundred years, which is contradicted by the presence of the numerous references to traditional and folk music already found in compositions of the earlier eras.

Theoretical works on the national style consider the use of the vernacular tongue as one of the key criteria of national character in a work of art. This is also true of music, since vocal music has been a very important segment of musical output in every epoch and country. The artistic song and the national opera became in the 19th century the key genres of national identification, and the relations between words and music in this type of repertoire led to the treatment of the two as an organic unity. One can hardly imagine a performance of

Wagner's *Ring Cycle* in French or Italian, and the Russian romances by Pyotr Tchaikovsky would make little sense when performed in German or English translation. This sphere also plays an important role in the study of Polish music. It is no coincidence that Stanisław Moniuszko, considered as the father of Polish national music, wrote songs and operas to texts in the Polish language.

But for periods other than the 19th-century Romanticism, this criterion is no longer so clear. The status of Latin as the universal language of the Christian liturgy meant that throughout Polish music history sacred texts in that language have been set to music. Many composers wrote vocal pieces to texts on other languages, for instance – Ignacy Jan Paderewski composed songs to French texts by Catulle Mendès, while Krzysztof Penderecki created foreign-language operas: *Paradise Lost* to an English libretto and *The Black Mask* to a German one.

A relatively recent element in the discussion of Polish music as the body of works drawing on Polish music traditions are the works of foreign composers which either have Poland as their subject or contain quotations and stylisations of Polish music. This is true of numerous polonaises and mazurkas written by non-Polish composers, but also works whose extramusical topics seem to be strongly rooted in Polish culture, history and tradition, such as the programmatic symphonic works by Richard Wagner and Edward Elgar (both entitled *Polonia*), operas and operettas bearing such titles as *Le Juif polonais*, *Der Pole und sein Kind*, *Polenblut*, *Polnische Wirtschaft*, as well as Carl Loewe's settings of Mickiewicz's ballads. There is a wealth of Polish themes in European music. Until recently this field of research was marginal to music historians, who mentioned these works but did not consider the possibility of treating them as part of the Polish music heritage¹⁹. In recent years they have begun to be incorporated into the category of Polish music, though the authors usually write in such cases of

Polish style, Polish rhythms or Polish themes²⁰. The very study of links between foreign music and Polish culture appears to be an attractive field, though any attempt to treat these works as manifestations of Polish music would most likely be opposed by Polish music historians.

5. IN SEARCH OF THE RIGHT CRITERIA

In her classical work on the national style, Zofia Lissa distinguished one more interesting aspect of national character in music – the expressive character of the music, which can be associated with the national expressive qualities or stereotypes, and which she referred to as 'the expressive climate', perceived and understood in a specific manner by representatives of a given national community²¹. Though this criterion seems very attractive as one that tackles the essence of what seems to be national (here – Polish) in music, the principles for the classification of types of expression as national would be very hard to work out. Consequently also attributing specific types of expression to individual national traditions – by reaching a consensus concerning the specific qualities of that national 'expressive climate' appears to be very difficult, if not impossible.

Expressive qualities may also be related to audience preferences, which determine the reception of specific works in a given national environment. Carl Dahlhaus explained this phenomenon as the adequacy of a given type of music in relation to the tastes and expectations of the given nation's audience, which makes it possible for that audience to identify this music as their own²². When looking for the defining criteria of the national opera in the Russian and Czech traditions, he compared the stylistic qualities of two operas: Mikhail Glinka's *Ivan Susanin* and Bedřich Smetana's *The Bartered Bride*. He found no stylistic qualities in common, but he concluded that they function as symptomatic representations

¹⁹ One of the first publications to approach this problem in a different manner was Kornel Michałowski's *Opery polskie* [Polish Operas], published in 1954. This small catalogue consists of two parts, the first of which briefly discusses operas composed by Polish composers, while the other lists works on Polish subjects written by foreign composers. The general title suggests a wide understanding of the concept of Polishness in the publication, where it may refer both to the composer's origins and to the topic of the opera. In the case of Polish composers, Michałowski does not present the additional requirement of including national themes in the stage action, which means that e.g. Moniuszko's *Paria* can be considered as a Polish opera despite its exotic topic. Cf. K. Michałowski, (1954). *Opery polskie*. Kraków: PWM.

²⁰ Cf. E. Dahlig-Turek, (2006). „Rytmy polskie” w muzyce XVI–XIX wieku [“Polish Rhythms” in 16th- to 19th-Century Music]. Warszawa: Instytut Sztuki PAN; Sz. Paczkowski, (2011). *Styl polski w muzyce Johanna Sebastiana Bacha* [The Polish Style in the Music of Johann Sebastian Bach]. Lublin: Polihymnia.

²¹ Z. Lissa, (1956). *O stylu narodowym w muzyce*, op. cit., p. 175: “Sibelius to Finns, Debussy – to the French, Bartók – to Hungarians, Prokofiev – to Russians, Chopin and Moniuszko, Szymanowski and Lutosławski – to Poles represent a certain ‘expressive climate’, not so easy to grasp for foreigners.”

²² C. Dahlhaus, (1989). *Neues Handbuch der Musikwissenschaft*: Vol. 6. *Die Musik des 19. Jahrhunderts*. Laaber: Laaber Verlag, in the chapter: “Die Idee der Nationaloper”, pp. 180–187.

of their respective national cultures. In Dahlhaus's view, the concept of national style refers less to the musical substance, and more to the political and socio-psychological functions of the work. Translating this into the realities of Polish musical culture – counting a given piece as representative of Polish music is not the consequence of the composer's biography, or of the use of quotations and references to Polish musical traditions, but solely – of the audience identifying a given piece of music as Polish. Artistic value is not a decisive criterion in this context, especially if we consider the commercial potential of national music and the fact of catering for popular tastes, quite justifiable since popular culture reflects the nation's preferences to the greatest extent. To the wide masses, Polish contemporary music consists of *disco polo* songs, which, though devoid of any artistic value, are identified as 'our own', local and Polish. The second word of this style's name clearly points to Poland, which supports the identification of this repertoire with Polish music. Apparently accepting Dahlhaus's proposition might result in the complete omission of the whole canon of high art from the sphere of national music.

To conclude my whole discussion – it is impossible to present any obligatory criterion for including or omitting a work or person from the scope of national musical culture. It therefore also seems impossible to define the term 'Polish music', which suggests that the term cannot be used legitimately, since undefined terms should not be applied in academic work. This conclusion may, however, seem paradoxical and difficult to accept, considering the widespread use of the term. All we can recommend is an attempt to sort things out and attain some kind of *modus operandi* with regard to defining Polish music.

On the basis of the above-presented analyses, we may cautiously argue that – since the concept of Polish music has been conceived in many different ways – the most appropriate approach is to accept a relatively wide and therefore not very strict definition, which would include in the scope of Polish music the activity of various artists whose lives have in different ways been associated with Poland, whether as their country of origin, place of residence, or context of artistic activity. Nevertheless, one should avoid authoritative 'appropriating' gestures or decisions concerning the national identity of artists. In this approach, Andrzej Panufnik's output of compositions would find a place in the history of both Polish and British music, and Bartłomiej Nizioł could be called both a Polish and a Swiss violinist and teacher. This inability to

precisely separate and distinguish national identities ought by no means to be regarded as a methodological weakness by music historians. On the contrary, it is by pointing to the overlap of national traditions, to cultural exchange and mutual correspondence, to the interpenetration of different points of view – that we arrive at a colourful and multi-dimensional vision of music history. Polish artists will not lose their national identity in this process, but, quite conversely, the participation and contribution of Polish culture to the European and global heritage will prove richer and more profound.

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