“Why Are Our Women- Composers So Little Known?”

*Concerning Women’s Musical
Output in Poland Between the
Two World Wars*

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ABSTRACT

Polish women-composers of the interwar period (1918–1939) have not been the subject of adequate research so far. We only have some contributory publications and general surveys dedicated to their output. This paper presents the initial results of a study that aims at creating a more multi-sided, in-depth picture of women-composers’ work, including their participation in local and international music life as well as their achievements in the field of composition, the styles and genres practised by selected representatives of this milieu. The paper also discusses the reception of these phenomena in the press of the period. My research leads me to the conclusion that, despite functioning in a kind of ‘parallel world’ in relation to the virtually all-male domain of music composition ‘proper’, the Polish women-composers did penetrate into that world, contributing to its dominant trends and tendencies, from Romantic inspirations to musical modernism, as well as popular music. Their contributions need to be taken into account if we wish fully to reconstruct and appreciate the Polish music created in that period.

Keywords: Polish women composers, Polish music, interwar period, musical life, styles and techniques

WOMEN COMPOSERS: A SURVEY

In the 1939 issue of *Kalendarz dla kobiet* [*Women’s Almanac*], in the section for *Music Composers*¹, the editors listed (along with the brief profiles quoted below) the following names² of the then active female composers of music:

- Bacewicz-Biernacka Grażyna – “an extreme modernist trend. Symphonic works”;
- Białkiewiczówna Irena – “a conservative trend. Symphonies, concertos for piano and orchestra. Songs”;
- Dorabalska Helena – “a moderate trend. Opera *Hanusia*. Piano pieces. Songs”;
- Drège-Schielowa Łucja – “Songs, minor instrumental forms”;
- Gnus Ryta – “Composer of songs for adults and children. An eminent teacher”;
- Grzegorzewicz-Lachowska Janina – “a modernist trend based on folk music. Songs and minor piano pieces”;

- Klechniowska Anna Maria – “a modern trend”;
- Markiewiczówna Władysława – “writes mostly for piano and chamber ensembles”.

This list was supplemented with the names of a few dance, popular song and operetta composers, such as: [Wanda] Vorbond-Dąbrowska, [Fanny] Gordonówna, as well as [Helena] Karasińska, daughter of Adam Karasiński, who wrote the then popular waltz entitled *François*.

This list obviously does not provide us with the complete picture of women-composers’ environment in Poland, not only on the eve of WWII, but in the entire interwar period. What we can glean from the list, though, is just how varied that environment was and how many different trends it involved. A year earlier, a much larger group of women-composers was represented at the 1st Congress of Women’s Social and Civic Work held in June 1938 in Warsaw³. The programmes of chamber and symphonic music concerts presented during the Congress featured works by Stefania Allinówna, Zofia [Obtułowicz]-Wróblewska, Janina Rupniewska-Freyerowa, M[aria?] Szubertowa, Maria Trębicka, and Alicja Janiszewska-Nebelska⁴. Even more names can be found in archive materials and press notes. Other women-composers of the interwar period were: Zofia Ossendowska [Iwanowska-Płoszko], Lucyna Robowska, Zofia Zdziennicka-Bergerowa, Ilza Adelajda Sternicka-Niekraszowa, Leokadia Myszyńska-Wojciechowska, Maria Poznańska, Jadwiga Baum-Czajkowska, Maria Orion-Bąkowska and – if we consistently take into

3 The Congress, summoned by 17 women’s organisations in collaboration with 24 others, was held on 25th-30th June. Music was represented at the Congress by the Committee for Artistic-Literary Work, during whose session three papers were presented: Zofii Lissa’s *Znaczenie muzyki w życiu młodzieży w okresie dojrzewania* [*The Place of Music in the Life of Adolescents*]; Ryta Gnus’s *Rozwój twórczości muzycznej kobiecej w Polsce* [*The Development of Women’s Music Composition in Poland*], and Stefania Łobaczewska’s *Rola tradycji w twórczości muzycznej* [*The Role of Tradition in Music Composition*]. Cf. *Pierwszy Kongres Społeczno-Obywatelskiej Pracy Kobiet w Warszawie. Program* [*The 1st Congress of Women’s Social and Civic Work in Warsaw. A Programme*], Warsaw, 1938.

4 Cf. the press notes that summed up the Congress, such as: ‘Od Marii Szymanowskiej po dni dzisiejsze’ [‘From Maria Szymanowska to Our Day’], *Dzień Dobry*, no. 172, 1938, p. 9. An. Wal., ‘Złot polskich kompozytorek’ [‘A Rally of Polish Women Composers’], *Antena*, vol. 5, no. 28, 1938, p. 8.

1 *Kalendarz dla kobiet na rok 1939* [*Women’s Almanac for 1939*], Warsaw, Tow. Wyd. “Bluszcz”, 1939, pp. 62–63.

2 In the Polish language, the ending ‘-owa’ is added to a married woman’s surname, and ‘-ówna’ – sometimes to her maiden name, but only until she marries.

Example 1. Portraits of Polish women-composers. Left to right, from the top row: Grażyna Bacewicz-Biernacka, Helena Dorabalska, Lucja Drège-Schielowa, Anna Maria Klechniowska, Janina Grzegorzewicz-Lachowska, Zofia Ossendowska, Lucyna Robowska, Ilza Sternicka-Niekrasz, Wanda Vorbond-Dąbrowska, Zofia Wróblewska, Leokadia Myszyńska-Wojciechowska, Zofia Zdziennicka-Berger. Sources: *Bluszcz*, vol. 71, no. 46, 1938, pp. 56–59; *Antena*, vol. 5, no. 28, 1938, p. 8; *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, vol. 80, no. 27, 1939, p. 531; <http://cyfrowe.mnw.art.pl/dmuseion/docmetadata?id=25477>

account popular music as well – Anda Kitschmann and Stefania Górka.

The work and artistic legacy of these composers is still very little known, not only owing to material losses resulting from the ravages of war, but also because of the scarcity of research in this field in recent decades. The very mention of women-composers' interwar output in historical studies must already be considered as a success⁵, just as the entries dedicated to them in Polish and international lexicography⁶. The existing

Muzyków Polskich [A Dictionary of Polish Musicians], vol. I: A–L, vol. 2: M–Z, Kraków, Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1964, 1967; K. Janczewska-Sołomko (ed.), *Leksykon polskich muzyków pedagogów urodzonych po 31 grudnia 1870 roku* [A Lexicon of Polish Music Teachers and Educators Born after 31st December 1870], Kraków, Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls, 2013; S. Dybowski, *Słownik pianistów polskich* [A Dictionary of Polish Pianists], Warsaw, Selene 2003. Paradoxically, the number of entries dedicated individually to Polish women composers in the *Encyklopedia Muzyczna PWM* [PWM Edition's Music Encyclopaedia] is much smaller (Kraków, Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne 1979–2012). A rich collection of such entries can be found in the lexicon *Kompozytorzy polscy 1918–2000* [Polish Composers 1918–2000], vol. II. *Biogramy* [Biographies], Gdańsk-Warsaw, 2005, as well as in the catalogue of an exhibition prepared by Magdalena Dziadek and Lilianna Moll (Górnośląskie Centrum Kultury [Upper Silesian Cultural Centre], Katowice, 5th–20th November 2003). Cf. M. Dziadek and L.M. Moll, *Oto artyści pełnowartościowi, którzy są kobietami...*

⁵ As, for instance, in J. Reiss, *Najpiękniejsza ze wszystkich jest muzyka polska* [Polish Music Is the Most Beautiful of All], Kraków, Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1946.

⁶ Publications comprising biographies of Polish women composers from the interwar period include: J.M. Chomiński (ed.), *Słownik*

texts that dedicate more attention to Polish women-composers working between the two World Wars⁷ are fundamentally general surveys. It is only very rarely that their compositions have become the subject of analytic studies and appraisal, such as those contained in Marcin Gmys's book on the 'Young Poland' generation of composers (which discusses, among others, Ryta Gnus's song *Cień Chopina* [*Chopin's Shadow*] and Anna Maria Klechniowska's symphonic poem *Wawel*⁸), as well as publications by Magdalena Dziadek⁹, and Aleksandra Bilińska's doctoral dissertation¹⁰.

In a paper of this size I cannot, for obvious reasons, even attempt to make up for all this research backlog. Instead, my aim here is to define the role and place of women's output within the body of Polish music from the interwar period, and to draw a more in-depth picture of women-composers' activity at that time, including

Polskie kompozytorki 1816–1939 [Here We Have Fully Competent Artists Who Happen to Be Women... Polish Women-Composers 1816–1939], Katowice, Związek Kompozytorów Polskich [Polish Composers' Union, 2003. *Grove Music Online* only comprises entries for Grażyna Bacewicz (A. Thomas, 'Bacewicz, Grażyna', *Grove Music Online* 2001, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000001669>, accessed 10 September 2019) and Anna Maria Klechniowska (B. Zwolska-Stęszewska, 'Klechniowska, Anna Maria', *Grove Music Online*, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0002020174>, accessed 10 September 2019).

7 Synthetic presentations dedicated to Polish women-composers include e.g. M. Dziadek, 'Wstęp' ['Introduction'], in M. Dziadek and L.M. Moll, *Oto artyści pełnowartościowi*, pp. 7–38; M. Trochimczyk, 'From Mrs. Szymanowska to Mr. Poldowski: Careers of Polish Women Composers', in M. Trochimczyk (ed.), *A Romantic Century in Polish Music*, Los Angeles, Moonrise Press, 2009, pp. 1–40.

8 M. Gmys, *Harmonie i dysonanse. Muzyka Młodej Polski wobec innych sztuk* [Harmonies and Dissonances. The Music of Young Poland in the Context of Other Artistic Disciplines], Poznań, Wydawnictwo Polskiego Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk, 2012, esp. at pp. 265–266 (Gnus) and pp. 427–429 (Klechniowska).

9 M. Dziadek, 'Utwory fortepianowe polskich kompozytorek do 1939 roku. Kontekst kulturowy, strategię wyboru gatunków i środków' ['Piano Works by Polish Composers before 1939. The Cultural Context, Strategies for the Choice of Genres and Techniques], in Janusz Krassowski (ed.), *Muzyka Fortepianowa XIII* [Piano Music XIII], Gdańsk, Wydawnictwo Akademii Muzycznej im. St. Moniuszki w Gdańsku, 2004, pp. 543–560.

10 A. Bilińska, 'Twórczość instrumentalna kompozytorek polskich XX wieku i jej kontekst kulturowy' ['The Instrumental Works of 20th-Century Polish Women-Composers in Their Cultural Context], PhD dissertation, UMFC Warsaw, 2018.

their participation in local and international music life as well as their artistic achievements (the most eminent personalities, stylistic and genre-related questions), viewed primarily from the perspective of their reception in the contemporary press and other publications.

OPINIONS

As Magdalena Dziadek reminds us,

to be a composer, even on the eve of World War II, meant – to respect certain 'limits of decency', as outlined by the Lwów- (Lviv-) based musicologist Seweryn Barbag in his assessment of his contemporary, Irena Białkiewicz: "[S]he knows the limits of her talent, avoids the problems that result from the spirit of the age, and remains faithful to the traditions of the Romantic era" Quoted after: *Polska pieśń artystyczna* [The Polish Art Song], in: *Muzyka polska. Monografia zbiorowa* [Polish Music. A Collective Monograph], Mateusz Gliński (ed.), Warsaw 1927¹¹.

This observation is of crucial importance to any understanding of the Polish women-composers' status in the society and culture of the interwar period. They worked within a dominant aesthetic discourse in which women, despite considerable achievements in the area of equal rights, still remained on the margin of 'true' artistic work, and had to deal with the burden of the 19th-century legacy of 'women's music' being identified with *Salonmusik* or *Trivialmusik*¹², which immediately lowered the woman-artist's status. This situation had at least two consequences: First of all, it translated into the critical reception of their works, and secondly – it limited the space in which their music could function, as well as affecting its scope of impact.

Extremely representative of this tendency are those records of historical reception that show how the artist's gender determined the characterisation of the products of her or his creative talent, as exemplified by the brief composer profile quoted above by Magdalena Dziadek. The topic was discussed by Józef Reiss in his 1928

11 Dziadek, 'Wstęp', p. 26.

12 Cf. C. Dahlhaus, *Studien Zur Trivialmusik Des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Regensburg, Gustav Bosse Verlag, 1967; Andreas Ballstaedt and Tobias Widmaier, *Salonmusik. Zur Geschichte und Praxis einer bürgerlichen Musikpraxis*, Stuttgart, Steiner Verlag, 1989. On the qualities of 'salon music', see also: I. Poniatowska, *Muzyka fortepianowa i pianistyka w wieku XIX* [Piano Music and Piano Art in the 19th Century], Warsaw, "Rewasz", 1991, esp. at pp. 278–279.

article¹³ on the differences between men's and women's musical sensitivities, as approached from a psycho- and sociological point of view. Reiss firmly argued that, unlike men, women are first and foremost 'reproductive types', which is confirmed by their successes in the field of music performance, and in particular – in the performance of songs. He also elaborated on the differences between the feminine and the masculine ways of listening to music, and concluded that only a man is capable of deriving an "aesthetic experience" from music, whereas a woman looks first and foremost for "emotional thrills", since she "discovers herself" in the music¹⁴. This led him to a thesis that is of key importance to the subject of this paper. According to Reiss, "a woman-composer is a great rarity, and, should one emerge at all, her status is extremely feeble and unimportant, devoid of any originality and independent thinking. A woman-composer can only imitate, and even that – not always with talent!" Reiss also refuted the argument that there had been no eminent women-composers only because women were not allowed to study music, since "it is to music that the greatest proportion of women are attracted, and they dedicate to it definitely more time than men do."¹⁵

Astonishing as Reiss's theses undoubtedly may sound for present-day readers, they make us realise how deep-rooted and durable this way of thinking was in interwar Poland. A similar tone can be found in the statements of other leading critics from that period, even those who were otherwise genuinely kindly predisposed toward women's musical 'productions'. One example is Felicjan Szopski's 1929 review of a recital by Lucyna Robowska, a well-known social activist and pianist, highly regarded by both musicians and the audience, who strove to promote especially those Polish music works that had never been publicly performed before¹⁶. While (quite rightly) abstaining from drawing any definitive conclusions on the basis of individual examples, he nevertheless ventured the proposition that the

non-emotional, intellectual faculty is not available to all women to an equal extent. He summed up the recital programme in this way:

While the works of J. Niekraśzowa, H. Dorabalska, and [then] H. Krzyżanowska seem to be based on the element of reflection and thought, the inventions by H. Łopuska, M. Trębicka and H. Klechniowska speak primarily with their lyricism, whereas the compositions of L. Wojciechowska and M. Borkowiczowa attract attention with their clarity and serenity, expressed through the use of dance rhythms. P. J. Grzegorzewiczówna is now studying composition, and she demonstrates a considerable talent¹⁷.

Several years later, in a review of another concert by Robowska, Michał Kondracki, rather than commenting on the gender of the composers, focused on the artistic quality of the presented works, discovering among them some genuine jewels, while others he criticised as unnecessary effort to perform "mediocre writing by (male and female) composers not worth their salt," among whom, from among the women, he listed Szubertowa, Wojciechowska and Łopuska, and among the men – Lipski, Sym, Świerzyński and Boruński¹⁸.

Kondracki's review, however, was hardly a *signum temporis* heralding some radical change of attitudes. Also in later years the writings of Polish music critics confirmed their mistrust and distance towards women-composers. The already mentioned Congress of Women's Social and Civic Work was accompanied by a number of concerts which received wide coverage in the press. Reports and commentaries once again demonstrated critical attitudes and conservative thinking, as in the review written by Władysław Burkath for *Mysł Narodowa* [*The National Thought*] weekly:

If we were synthetically to characterise the sum total of women's musical productions that could be heard there, I must conclude that the 'gift of God' which characterises men's artistic output in

13 J. Reiss, 'Muzykalność kobiety' ['Women's Musicality'], *Muzyk Wojskowy*, no. 17, 1928, pp. 1–3.

14 Reiss, 'Muzykalność kobiety', p. 3.

15 Reiss, 'Muzykalność kobiety', p. 2.

16 She gradually and painstakingly collected such repertoire from manuscripts, and included it in the programmes of her piano recitals. Cf. e.g. Bis [Leopold Binental], 'Koncert Lucyny Robowskiej' ['A Concert by Lucyna Robowska'], *Kurier Warszawski*, vol. 116, no. 71, 1936, p. 8.

17 F. Szopski, 'Z Sali Konserwatorium. Recital Lucyny Robowskiej' ['From the Conservatory's Concert Hall. A Recital by Lucyna Robowska'], *Kurier Warszawski*, vol. 109, no. 72, 1929, p. 5. We do not know what specific works by the composers mentioned here were performed during that recital. Presumably the programme included *Variations a l'antique* by Grzegorzewiczówna, a *Prelude* by Dorabalska, and a *Scherzo* by Trębicka, which Robowska also played in the same year at one of her concerts in Lviv. Cf. St. Lip., 'Lucyna Robowska', *Chwila*, vol. 11, no. 3828, 1929, p. 10.

18 M. Kondracki, 'Utwory polskich kompozytorów w wykonaniu Lucyny Robowskiej' ['Works by Polish Composers Performed by Lucyna Robowska'], *ABC*, vol. 11, no. 75, 1936, p. 4.

Example 2. The poster for a piano recital held by Lucyna Robowska on 7th March 1931, source: <https://polona.pl/item/program-inc-sala-konservatorjum-dnia-7-go-marca-1931-recital-forte-pianowy-lucyna,NjY2NzU5MjQ/7/#info:metadata>

particular (I hope the Ladies may forgive me this comment) is rather rare in the two dozen or so of the Polish women-composers represented there. It is most typically replaced by decent technique, precision and meticulousness¹⁹.

Naturally, some of the presented works and artistic personalities did win recognition. The reviewer of *Nowy Głos* [*New Voice*], for instance, praised Helena Dorabialska's "excellent knowledge of a composer's profession", Bacewicz's temperament and "ardent rhythms", as well as Zofia Ossendowska's "good artistic taste."²⁰ The dominant tone of those reviews, however, was condescending. The authors were convinced that "a woman's psyche" has a preference for small-scale musical forms, and that such a large representation of women in Polish music promises that the "musically gifted Polish mothers" will develop the musicality of the future generations²¹. The critics also remarked that the diversity of forms, genres, styles and preferences represented in the concert programmes could not compensate for some gaps in "the composers' professional education and practice", as well as in their "autonomy." Only after these shortcomings have been eliminated can it turn out "to the advantage of what women have achieved and can still achieve in the field of music composition, which is still rather far from their reach,"²² as one of the reviewers concluded.

The most complimentary report seems to have been the one written by Leopold Binental for *Kurier Warszawski* [*The Warsaw Courier*]. The author observed, admittedly, that few "women can be said to have synthesised any specific style in their composition, or to have contributed with their works to the artistic enhancement of the aesthetic values promoted by great composers." Still, he appreciated the women-composers' "thorough qualifications for independent work in a wide field of practice"²³.

19 ASPER [Władysław Burkath], 'Twórczość muzyczna kobiet' ['Women's Music Compositions'], *Myśl Narodowa*, no. 30, 1938, p. 474.

20 Echo, 'Koncert symfoniczny w Teatrze Wielkim' ['A Symphonic Concert at the Grand Theatre'], *Nowy Głos*, no. 184, 1938, p. 4.

21 Zastępca [Piotr Rytel], 'Wrażenia muzyczne z Kongresu Społeczno-Obywatelskiej Pracy Kobiet' ['Musical Impressions from the Congress of Women's Social and Civic Work'], *Warszawski Dziennik Narodowy*, vol. 4, no. 180, 1938, p. 6.

22 E.O., 'Twórczość kobiet w muzyce' ['Women's Musical Output'], *Gazeta Robotnicza*, vol. 42, no. 162, 1938, p. 6.

23 Bis [Leopold Binental], 'Muzyka na kongresie pracy kobiet' ['Music at Women's Work Congress'], *Kurier Warszawski*, vol. 118, no. 179, 1938, p. 11.

THE RESPONSE

What did the women-artists themselves say to all this? One could hardly dispute the argument that the history of music had not yet yielded a female genius comparable to that of Bach or Beethoven. Zofia Lissa commented on this subject rather cautiously and apparently without great expectations in 1930:

Overall we must admit that women-composers have never excelled in their works beyond the average standards, and never determined the general directions of music's development, though in many cases their output was of a much higher than average quality. In the context of the ever greater development and autonomy of women's intellectual life, will they prove equal to the really great masters? This remains a question for the future²⁴.

On the other hand, however, it seemed extremely important to make the Polish women's compositions more prominently present in the social awareness; in other words, to make the Polish society aware that such music existed and was worthy of closer attention. This aim was pursued by the authors of texts printed in women's press, daily papers, and music periodicals, which synthetically presented the women-composers' musical output as well as their artistic biographies. Such articles did not aspire to the role of musicological publications and sometimes contained errors (even in the names of the artists). Nevertheless, they did fulfil their aim as vehicles of information and promotion.

One example is Zofia Zdziennicka-Bergerowa's text published in 1934 in *Polska Zbrojna* [*The Polish Armed Forces*], which aimed to disprove one journalist's opinion about music composition being the only discipline of art "foreign to women." She responded to this claim by presenting brief profiles of such Polish women-composers as Helena Dorabialska ("an outstanding talent supported by in-depth knowledge of music"), Łucja Drège-Schielowa ("a talent in the making"), Anna Klechniowska ("a truly exuberant talent active in different fields of music composition"), as well as herself (presented as the one who "has dedicated her work to the revival of early instruments")²⁵. Probably the most comprehensive survey

24 Z. Lissa, 'Udział kobiet w twórczości muzycznej' ['Women's Role in Music Composition'], *Chwila*, vol. 12, no. 4071, 1930, p. 9.

25 Z.B. [Zofia Bergerowa], 'Kobieta polska jako kompozytorka' ['The Polish Woman as a Composer'], *Polska Zbrojna*, vol. 13, no. 141, 1934, p. 6. A similar list of women-composers' names coupled with profiles of a similar kind was included two years

of Polish women's musical output since the 19th century was presented in *Muzyka Polska* [*Polish Music*] by a well-known pianist, teacher and music life organiser from Toruń, Stefania Jagodzińska-Niekraszowa²⁶, who, from among her contemporaries, particularly distinguished Leokadia Myszyńska-Wojciechowska, Anna Maria Klechniowska, and Ilza Sternicka-Niekraszowa, taking great care to list their major works and awards, and concluding that this refuted the "widely-held view that women had no talent for music composition."²⁷

Following the 1st Congress of Women's Social and Civic Work, *Bluszcz* [illustrated women's weekly] printed an article by Ryta Gnus entitled *Muzyczki polskie w okresie XX-lecia niepodległości* [*Polish Women-Musicians during the Twenty Years of Independent Poland*]²⁸, which was most likely an abbreviated version of the paper that the same author delivered at the Congress. Apart from presenting profiles of women-composers²⁹, Gnus discussed in this text the main fields of women's musical activity, which included musicology (represented by Helena Windakiewicz, Bronisława Wójcik-Keuprulan, Helena Dorabalska, Zofia Lissa, Stefania Łobaczewska, and Alicja Simonówna), music education and performance (including concert masters), as well the organisation of musical and cultural life.

Of special interest is Stefania Łobaczewska's article³⁰ printed in the 1933 *Almanach spraw kobiecych* [*A Women's Almanac*], which, apart from presenting a survey of the key achievements of individual

women-composers³¹, also put forward the thesis that the role of women's music in the society had changed significantly in comparison to the period before WWI. Rather than consisting of individual talents "isolated from their backdrop," women's musical milieu had been integrated with regard to both their "internal identity", "structure", and even "standards"³².

Łobaczewska justified this claim focusing on "the creative powers" contributed by women to musical culture, and on the new "way of experiencing music." In this way she alluded to Reiss's opinion in what might be considered as a veiled polemic against that latter author. She resolutely argued that creative powers "are given to every person to a certain extent; all that counts is that they should be developed and properly channelled, in which case, even if manifested in an incomplete form, they can still bring excellent results."³³ The stimulus that releases those powers in an "average woman of today" is education, "giving women access to university studies," which has provided them with numerous new possibilities of creative work in the fields of science, art and teaching, and most of all – has intensified the tendency to "experience music not only emotionally, but first and foremost with their intellect."³⁴

It would be naïve to think that Łobaczewska's arguments convinced the sceptics. It was exceedingly difficult in the interwar period for women to be admitted to the circles of "serious composers worth their salt."³⁵ Even if some compositions received performances in prestigious contexts and attracted wide interest, it was still a mere drop in the ocean, quite out of proportion

later by Maria Łepkowska in her text 'Współczesne kompozytorki' ['Contemporary Women-Composers'], *Światowid*, no. 5, 1936, pp. 120–122).

26 S. Jagodzińska-Niekraszowa, 'Zarys twórczości polskich kompozytorek XIX i XX stulecia' ['An Outline of Polish Women-Composers' Output in the 19th and 20th Centuries'], *Muzyka Polska*, no. 8, 1935, pp. 247–254.

27 Jagodzińska-Niekraszowa, 'Zarys twórczości', p. 254.

28 *Bluszcz*, vol. 71, no. 46, 1938, pp. 56–59.

29 The composers presented in that article were: Bacewicz-Biernacka, Białkiewiczówna, Dorabalska, Drège-Schielowa, Grzegorzewicz-Lachowska, Klechniowska, Markiewiczówna, and Sternicka-Niekraszowa.

30 S. Łobaczewska, 'Kobieta w muzyce' ['The Woman in Music'], in Herminia Naglerowa (ed.), *Almanach spraw kobiecych. Postulaty, zagadnienia* [*A Women's Almanac. Problems and Postulates*], Warsaw, Wydział Prasowy Z.P.O.K, 1933, pp. 174–177.

31 For comparison with the above-quoted composer profiles, let me cite these as well: Ilza Sternicka-Niekraszowa – "the only woman expressionist in Polish music"; Łucja Drège-Schielowa – "author of very characteristic children's songs"; Władysław Markiewicz – "composer of songs and piano pieces in impressionist style"; Anna Maria Klechniowska – "wrote the high-quality symphonic poem entitled *Wawel*"; Helena Dorabalska – "composer of orchestral, vocal and violin music, as well as author of theoretical works"; Janina Grzegorzewicz-Lachowska – "composes piano music and songs", and Ryta Gnus – "an excellent teacher and a talented composer." Cf. Łobaczewska, 'Kobieta w muzyce', p. 174.

32 Łobaczewska, 'Kobieta w muzyce', p. 175.

33 Łobaczewska, p. 176.

34 Łobaczewska, pp. 176–177.

35 This phrase was used by Roman Palester in his programme on Grażyna Bacewicz (from the cycle *Wiadomości kulturalne* – *Culture News* no. 623) broadcast on Radio Free Europe on 22nd January 1969.

to the talent that at least some of the women-artists represented. The majority of women-composers' works remained in manuscript. Only some few selected ones were published, frequently at their authors' own expense. Of much importance to the popularisation of that music was the 'campaign' launched by *Bluszcz* women's weekly, which in the mid-1930s created a kind of music publishing series dedicated to "our women-composers", which included editions (mostly prepared directly from manuscripts) of, among others, numerous piano pieces and songs by Klechniowska, Dorabalska, Gnus, Wróblewska, Myszyńska-Wojciechowska, Baum-Czajkowska, and Gordonówna³⁶.

As we can see, Polish women-composers certainly did not have the chance freely to develop their talents. The one who seems to have come the closest to such a chance was Sternicka-Niekraszowa, pupil and protégé of Karol Szymanowski, upon whom enormous hopes were pinned; however, she died prematurely at the age of 34. In most cases, Polish women-musicians who had some aspirations as composers focused their professional activity on music performance and on teaching. Despite her substantial output of compositions, Anna Maria Klechniowska was mainly known as the inventor of a pioneering (and highly ingenious) piano method (still applied by piano teachers today)³⁷; Helena Dorabalska – as the author of *Ćwiczenia praktyczne z harmonii* [*Practical Exercises in Harmony*] (1927) and the dissertation *Polonez przed Chopinem* [*The Polonaise before Chopin*] (1938), as well as a music journalist and, perhaps most of all, as the sister of the famous scientist (physical chemist) Alicja Dorabalska. Nor were the women-composers widely represented in the male-dominated professional organisations. Three of them appear to have played prominent roles in such milieux. Dorabalska became (with Kazimierz Sikorski, Piotr Perkowski, and others) a founding member of the Club of Polish Musicians Studying in Paris (later known as the Association of Young Polish Musicians in Paris)³⁸; Klechniowska was elected (in 1935) treasurer of the Polish Composers' Association's managing board;

Markiewiczówna was active in the Young Musicians' Association in Cracow³⁹.

Symptomatic of women's position in music at that time is Anna Maria Klechniowska's comment found in an interview conducted by Stefania Jagodzińska-Niekraszowa, where the composer emphasises that her creative powers and the ease with which she wrote music had not yet yielded an adequate output of compositions, since she was hindered in this task by various "domestic problems" and by her sex. She then adds:

Our society unfortunately doesn't trust women's talents yet, and our colleagues would rather not notice, or hear, the music [we write], even if it can equal or sometimes even excel in its ideas and originality some of their frequently poor productions... Someone told me I must die first in order to gain fame! But I don't feel like dying yet. And I prefer to justify my posthumous fame by writing a greater number of compositions first⁴⁰.

In the efforts to make the Polish society aware of women's musical output, an enormous role was played by women's organisations and women-activists, who organised exhibitions and concerts. Preparations for the Polish participation in the International Congress of Women (Chicago, 17th–19th July 1933) involved the establishment of a special Committee which aimed to make Polish women-artists' journey to the United States possible. At the same time, the works of Polish women-authors and composers were collected for presentation at the Congress exhibition⁴¹. Unfortunately, due to the lack of funds only exhibits were sent to the Congress (to be shown on a special books-and-music stall), and Poland's only representative in Chicago was Zofia Zdziennicka-Bergerowa, who travelled to the USA at her own expense. It was Zdziennicka-Bergerowa as a 'semi-official' delegate who, with the help of the Polish diaspora in Chicago, held an evening presentation dedicated to Polish women's literary and musical

³⁶ Cf. *Bluszcz*, vol. 68, 1935 and vol. 69, 1936.

³⁷ For beginners, the author recommended replacing clefs with a division of the keyboard into groups of tones lower or higher than the middle C.

³⁸ Cf. *Muzyka*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1926, p. 87.

³⁹ In 1931–1937 Markiewiczówna was one of the two women-composers in that organisation (the other one was Barbara Mańkowska). Cf. *Stowarzyszenie Młodych Muzyków w Krakowie 1931–1937* [*Young Musicians' Association in Cracow*], Kraków, Gebethner & Wolff, 1938.

⁴⁰ S. Jagodzińska-Niekraszowa, 'Rozmowa z Anną Marią Klechniowską, kompozytorką poematów symfonicznych' ['An Interview with Anna Maria Klechniowska, Composer of Symphonic Poems'], *Gazeta Gdańska*, no. 151, 1936, p. 12.

⁴¹ An. Wal., 'Powszechny Kongres Auterek w Chicago' ['The General Congress of Women-Authors in Chicago'], *ABC*, vol. 8, no. 55, 1933, p. 6.

achievements at the McCormick Memorial Building. A paper was delivered; excerpts from writings (by Maria Dąbrowska, Kazimiera Iłakowiczówna, and others) were read out, and music was performed, including songs by Myszyńska-Wojciechowska, piano pieces by Ossendowska, Klechniowska's triptych *Bilitis* and her *Legend* for violin and piano, as well as Bergerowa's own works for zither. The presentation received favourable reviews in the US press, and attracted great audience interest, which led to the establishment of a Society for the Promotion of Polish Women's Artistic Work⁴².

Following the US congress, the concert activity of Polish women-composers in our own country intensified. It involved both events for a wide audience and for the professional milieu. This activity was partly an attempt to answer the question (contained in the title of the present paper) concerning the reasons for the Polish society's ignorance with regard to the women-composers' output. Especially rich in such events was the year 1934, when the Warsaw Society of Friends of Arts held, among others, 'an evening of Polish women-composers'⁴³, Zofia Bergerowa organised an 'evening of Polish women-composers' music' in her private salon⁴⁴, while the Polish Association of Professionally Active Women presented a music audition at the Institute for the Propaganda of Art in Warsaw⁴⁵. In February 1938 a concert of songs by Polish women-composers was held in the salon of Ada Sławińska-Lenczewska⁴⁶. The concert 'by invitation' at Bergerowa's home was described in detail by *Kurier Warszawski* in a report that excellently reflects not only the programme and manner of performance, but also the unique atmosphere of that evening:

The concert begins. Mme Langeron⁴⁷ plays her own pieces: a nocturne, a lullaby, and preludes. Warm applause follows. Then Mme Matjasiak-Klechniowska's violin, accompanied by Mme Wilecka, plays a wild melody derived by Mme Ossendowska from Negro motifs collected in Africa. Subsequently they sing a piece by the same composer about *Hidalgo and Gitana*. After a few minutes' break, the colourful voice of Mme Strońska recounts, with perfect diction, the text of *Bilitis*, bringing back to life the pagan beauty of Greece. [...] Mme Kozłowska's strong voice sings the main part, accompanied by the voices of Mmes Gabriela and Wilkoszewska. Mme Wilecka produces flute-like trills on a piano, or imitates the hooves of the awakened deity... [...] Mme Robowska gave a wonderful recital: first A. M. Klechniowska's modernist *Wizja żeglarza* [*Vision of a Sailor*], then Janina Grzegorzewicz-Lachowska's *Étude*, her own *Wesola fuga* [*Joyful Fugue*] – brief and true to its title, Stefania Allina's highly atmospheric prelude *Dzień zaduszny* [*All Souls' Day*], Maria Poznańska's prelude *Wspomnienie* [*A Memory*], Maria Trębicka's *Scherzo*, and, finally, three beautiful preludes by Helena Dorabalska. [...] Mme Matjasiak-Klechniowska played Klechniowska's wondrous *Legenda* [*Legend*], accompanied by Mme Wilecka. A different aspect of the versatile talent of the composer of *Bilitis* was presented by Mme Wilkoszewska, who sang [Klechniowska's] charming *Kohysanka* [*Lullaby*] on Polish folk motifs, followed by Dorabalska's beautiful songs, and, in the end, a surprise – the song entitled *Czemu?* [*Why?*] which, when many people asked who had written that splendid and atmospheric piece, proved to be the singer's own (both the music and the lyrics). "For your betrothal..." sang 'Those Four'⁴⁸. [...] 'Those Four' 'right afterwards' switch over to the most modernist foxtrots and to Wanda Vorbond-Dąbrowska's tango, accompanied by the composer on the piano. The energy and harmonious sound of the chorus carry the audience away, and as a finale, the sapphire ensemble proposes a very different song by the same artist, *Morze* [*The Sea*] (to words by Kleszczyński), filled with the swoosh of waves and special atmosphere, as if they wished to illustrate the diversity of her young but fast developing talent⁴⁹.

THE WORKS

Let us finally take a closer look at Polish women-composers' output of music written in the interwar period. The artists who contributed to it were both

⁴² L. Ciechanowiecka, 'Amerykański babiniec. Rozmowa z p. Zdziennicką-Bergerową' ['The American Nest of Women. An Interview with Mrs Zdziennicka-Bergerowa'], *ABC*, vol. 8, no. 295, 1933, p. 8.

⁴³ 'Dlaczego nasze kompozytorki są tak mało znane?' ['Why Are Our Women-Composers So Little Known?'], *Nowy Czas*, vol. 4, no. 100, 1934, p. 8.

⁴⁴ Z. Zaleska, 'Kompozytorki polskie (Wieczór twórczości muzycznej kobiet)' ['Polish Women-Composers (An Evening of Women's Music)'], *Kurier Warszawski*, vol. 114, no. 149, 1934, p. 11.

⁴⁵ Bis [Leopold Binental], 'Audycja muzyczek. — O pewnym recitalu' ['A Women-Musicians' Audition — Concerning a Certain Recital'], *Kurier Warszawski*, vol. 114, no. 274, 1934, p. 7.

⁴⁶ 'Pieśni polskich kompozytorek' ['Songs by Polish Women-Composers'], *Kurier Warszawski*, vol. 118, no. 42, 1938, p. 13.

⁴⁷ That is, Irena Białkiewiczówna.

⁴⁸ Vorbond-Dąbrowska's vocal ensemble. The secret of the success of this 'women's barbershop chorus' was thus explained: "First and foremost, perfectly matching voices, considerable subtlety of performance, great finesse, the ability to take advantage of vocal effects, as well as a rich and varied repertoire. 'Those four' perform an extremely versatile array of songs, from folk pieces by Adam Wieniawski, to Boccherini's minuet, to dance songs, to truly phenomenal humoresques composed by Wanda Vorbond-Dąbrowska". Cf. rb, 'Te 4' ['Those Four'], *Światowid*, no. 41, 1936, p. 17.

⁴⁹ Zaleska, 'Kompozytorki polskie'.

well-recognised composers with an established position and others who were only just embarking on their careers; well-educated in the field, and 'semi-amateurs'. They represent a wide spectrum of styles and composition techniques, the same ones that were practised by the male representatives of the Polish music world: from the 19th-century neo-Romantic legacy, to impressionism, to neoclassicism and other forms of musical modernism.

The closest to the heritage of the Romantic era are the works of Leokadia Myszyńska-Wojciechowska, Zofia Wróblewska, and Irena Białkiewiczówna. The oeuvre of that last composer is of particular interest, since, apart from songs, she also wrote symphonic works, in genres at that time rarely associated with the 'female soul'. Her output includes *Piano Concerto* [in C-sharp minor], premiered in January 1919, which "won the audience's hearts with confident writing, [...] ingenuity, and an eminent sense of form. It is a 'male' piece of work, skilful and with temperament, definitely rich and quite interesting."⁵⁰ Her four-part *Symphony* [in C-sharp minor], presented at a 1936 matinée at Warsaw Philharmonic, struck the reviewer with its "sincerity", combined with "modesty of artistic expression."⁵¹ Following another performance of the same work, however, it was observed that as a pupil of Piotr Rytel Białkiewiczówna "manifestly follows her teacher's style"⁵², and even that this kind of music "was old hat", with distinct "echoes of Tchaikovsky's symphonies."⁵³

There are several reasons to claim that the most interesting female personality in the Polish interwar music scene before Grażyna Bacewicz⁵⁴ was Ilza Sternicka-Niekraszowa. It was Sternicka that Roman Statkowski described as the most talented woman he had ever met⁵⁵. Szymanowski had the strongest impact on the development of her artistic personality. Under his

influence, as Szymon Waljewski commented, "she began to write valuable works, imbued with a poetic atmosphere and already demonstrating excellent technical command of the musical syntax, especially in her orchestral works."⁵⁶ One of her first compositions was *Baśń* [Fairy Tale], a fantasy for piano and orchestra, premiered on 27th December 1928, which delighted Felicjan Szopski with the beauty of its motifs, the logic of construction, and its noble orchestral sound⁵⁷. Adam Wieniawski added that the work confirmed not only its composer's high aspirations and invention, but also her thorough knowledge of composition technique, representing a subtly modernist stance."⁵⁸

Sternicka's symphonic suite *Chess* was praised for vigour, sense of humour, but also for the quality of her sound textures⁵⁹. It consisted of seven brief and expressive movements dedicated to individual chess pieces and their respective roles in the game: *A March of Pawns, Bishops, Knights, Rooks, The Queen, The King, and Checkmate*. It was first performed in its complete form only after the composer's death, at a concert conducted by Grzegorz Fitelberg. Szymon Waljewski was particularly impressed by the artist's "acoustic imagination", extending "from abstraction to sound painting." He further commented:

The movement entitled *The Queen* — majestic, with brilliant use of triple time; *The King* was highly expressive in form, with distinct lines. The movement that has made the greatest impression on me personally was *Rooks*. It indeed musically depicts the rooks [in Polish called 'towers' — translator's note] — lofty an piling up. Excellent instrumentation, a tasteful use of jarring dissonances and artistic moderation in imaginative writing; all this is likely to secure to *Chess* a permanent place in symphonic concert programmes⁶⁰.

Other pieces by Sternicka-Niekraszowa undoubtedly had a similar potential. Following a concert under the baton of Stanisław Wiechowicz, she was praised for the style and concept of her composition, as well as "skilful presentation of the principal theme, written in the style of medieval church jublations", as well as a texture "of

50 'Muzyka. Nowe kompozycje' ['Music. New Works'], *Rydwan*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1919, p. 29.

51 Bis [Leopold Binental], 'Poranek filharmoniczny' [A Matinée at the Philharmonic], *Kurier Warszawski*, vol. 116, no. 12, 1936, p. 7.

52 E.O., 'Twórczość kobiet w muzyce', p. 6.

53 Echo, 'Koncert symfoniczny w Teatrze Wielkim', p. 4.

54 I do not discuss her output separately here, but another article in the same volume of *Musichology Today*, written by Małgorzata Gąsiorowska, has been dedicated to her oeuvre.

55 M.T., 'Z działu muzyki na P.W.K.' ['From PWK's Music Department'], *Kurier Poznański*, vol. 24, no. 450, 1929, p. 12.

56 Sz. Waljewski, 'Piątkowy koncert symfoniczny' ['The Friday Symphonic Concert'], *ABC*, vol. 8, no. 75, 1933, p. 4.

57 M.T., 'Z działu muzyki na P.W.K.'

58 A. Wieniawski, 'Z życia muzycznego' ['From Music Life'], *Rzeczpospolita*, no. 357, 1929, p. 4.

59 Zastępca, *Muzyka*, vol. 8, no. 4–6, 1931, p. 236.

60 Waljewski, 'Piątkowy koncert symfoniczny'.

a high technical standard."⁶¹ The work in question, *Oratorium* [*Oratorio*] for four solo voices, mixed choir and orchestra, sets the words by the composer's husband, the poet Jan Niekraś. After a fragmentary performance in Poznań, a reviewer wrote about the composer's "rich and bold" stylistic means, including harmony⁶².

Another very interesting example of Sternicka's output is *Suita kolorowa* [*Suite of Colours*] for piano, in which she attempted "to describe in sounds the expressive qualities and mood of the various colours: blue, yellow, black, etc." Her vision of the 'lilac' colour was printed in *Muzyka's* sheet music series, while *Ojciec nasz* [*Our Father*] for voice and piano appeared under the imprint of the Polish Music Publishing Society (TWMP). The latter piece was said to be distinguished by its "far-from-banal melodies" and "fresh if not very original harmonies, in which a listener familiar with Szymanowski's style will easily recognise echoes of *King Roger*, Act One, as well as the central movements of his *Stabat Mater*."⁶³

A composer who made important contributions to Polish musical modernism, Anna Maria Klechowska, a close friend of Karol Szymanowski, remained in her early period under the influence of the Young Poland movement. She made her mark with the symphonic poem *Wawel*, whose versified programme was written by Professor Edmund Żegota-Cieglewicz, the well-known translator of Aristophanes. The work, dedicated to Marshal Józef Piłsudski, was performed several times in the interwar years (for the first time – in 1927 in Cracow by an orchestra made up of military bands, conducted by Juliusz Schreyer)⁶⁴. "The moods that the music of *Wawel* successively reflects," wrote a reporter of 'Kurier Poznański' after the premiere, "are at first those of the times of [national] bondage, later – dreams of a revival, and finally – the triumphant dawn of freedom." He stressed the modern harmonies and wealth of

orchestration⁶⁵. *Wawel* met with a strong response also outside the music circles. Its programme and type of sound inspired, among others, a 'literary impression' by Hanna Huszcza-Winnicka⁶⁶.

A composition that proved a great success was Klechowska's triptych *Bilitis* for voice, a chorus (of dancers) and piano, in three movements: *Bilitis' Offering (Invocation)* — *Night* — *Pan and the Dryads*. This "rhythm-and-visuals dance piece" not only earned its composer acclaim in the United States (where, at the concert held in May 1934, the vocal part was sung by Maria Krakowska, prima donna of Chicago Civic Opera House, and the sets were created by Polish painter Ludwik Bodzewski)⁶⁷, but was also included in the syllabus of Émile Jaques-Dalcroze's prestigious Institut de rythmique in Geneva⁶⁸. Nor was this Klechowska's only contribution to the ballet genre. Her collaboration with Tacjana Wysocka, a choreographer and dancer trained in the Jaques-Dalcroze eurhythmics and in classical ballet, bore fruit in the form of *Yurid*⁶⁹ to a libretto by Ewa Szelburg-Zarembina, a piece conceived in the spirit of modern folklorism and Stravinsky's models as a kind of Belarussian and Vilnius-regional counterpart of *The Rite of Spring*. It comprised, among others, the Belarussian dances *Lavonikha* and *Charot*, as well as songs collected in the Świeciany (now Švenčionys) and Mołodeczno (now Maladzyechna) regions.

Stylistically speaking, most of the Polish women-composers represented, so to speak, the middle way, steering

61 M. Gliński, 'Z opery i sal koncertowych' ['From the Opera and Concert Halls'], *Muzyka*, vol. 7, no. 2, 1930, p. 106.

62 "Oratorium" Ilzy Sternickiej-Niekraś' ['Oratorio by Ilza Sternicka-Niekraś'], *Przegląd Muzyczny*, no. 12, 1929, p. 9.

63 'Nowe wydawnictwa nutowe' ['New Sheet Music Publications'], *Muzyka*, vol. 13, no. 7–12, 1936, p. 118.

64 We must therefore reject Marcin Gmys's thesis that *Wawel* may never have been performed, as well as his otherwise very interesting claim that Klechowska's poem may have been inspired by Stanisław Wyspiański's drama *Akropolis*. Cf. Gmys, *Harmonie i dysonanse*, pp. 427–428.

65 (mn), 'Nowa kompozycja polska' ['A New Polish Composition'], *Kurier Poznański*, vol. 23, no. 35, 1928, p. 7. The composer called for the use of iron bars in the orchestra to imitate the sound of bells, accepting (as a last resort) that they might be replaced by a tam-tam.

66 H. Huszcza-Winnicka, "Wawel". Poemat symfoniczny A. Klechowskiej' ['Wawel. A Symphonic Poem by A. Klechowska'], *Kobieta Współczesna*, vol. 4, no. 22, 1930, p. 14.

67 'Sukces kompozytorki polskiej za oceanem' ['A Polish Woman-Composer's Overseas Success'], *Polska Zbrojna*, vol. 13, no. 166, 1934, p. 5.

68 *Orkiestra*, vol. 3, no. 6, 1932, p. 100.

69 "The action takes place in the times related to the figure of St George, patron of forests and plants. The ballet scenario combines the realism of Vilnius folklore with the world of the imagination, when after sunset on 23rd April, St George introduces a child to the wonders of the woods." Cf. *Poranek taneczny baletu i szkoły Tacjanny Wysockiej. Program* [Tacjana Wysocka's Ballet and School Matinée of Dances], Warsaw, Teatr Narodowy, 1937.

OJCZE NASZ

ILZA STERNICKA - NIEKRASZ.

CANTO

PIANO

mp

Oj - cze nasz, Któ-ryś wie - bie,
Va - ter un-ser Der Du bist im Himmel

p *Sempre legato*

mf *molto cresc.*

Oj - cze, Oj-cze nasz Święć się i - mię Two - je
Un-ser Va - ter Un-ser Va - ter ge - heiligt werde Dein Na - me

molto cresc.

f *Più mosso*

Oj - cze nasz! Przyjdź kró - l - stwo Two - je ,
Va - ter un - ser Dein Reich kom - me zu uns

T.W. M.P.
60

Wszystkie prawa zastrzeżone.
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1935.

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Warszawa.

Example 3. Ilza Sternicka-Niekraszowa, *Our Father* for voice and piano, Warsaw: Towarzystwo Wydawnicze Muzyki Polskiej 1935, page 1, source: <https://polona.pl/item/ojcie-nasz-spiew-i-fort,NzE1MTg0MTg/1/#info:metadata>

clear of radical novelty, but also of 'Romanticising' tendencies. Helena Dorabialska, whose approach to music composition was most likely influenced by her reputation as a researcher and musicologist, was one of those praised for maintaining this kind of balance. At one of the first concerts presenting her works, held by the Polish Composers' Association in 1928, the audience had an opportunity to hear her songs, *Sonata* for violin and piano, as well as minor piano pieces. A reviewer commented:

those pieces belong on the whole to the Romantic trend, but with some evident traces of the influence of the French impressionists. They are distinguished by: rich, fluid and pleasant melodic invention, supported by solid knowledge, lyrical in character, but frequently with a predilection for dramatic effects and musical characterisation⁷⁰.

Dorabialska's output was varied and quite substantial. It included *Variations* for piano and orchestra, a string quartet with harp, a symphonic *Prelude*, a *Mass* for mixed choir, solo tenor and piano (or organ), as well as two operas: *Dewaki* after Édouard Schuré's *The Virgin Devaki*, and *Hanusia* after Gerhardt Hauptmann's *Hanneles Himmelfahrt*. For *Bluszcz* magazine's sheet music collection, the composer presented her modest-scale *Dialog* [*Dialogue*] for piano.

Łucja Drège-Schielowa was an independent phenomenon among Polish women-composers, described as one who "does not embrace any trend in advance, nor does she count herself as an adherent of any."⁷¹ She was most successful as a composer of songs. Following a concert dedicated to her own choice of such songs (to words by Polish masters) she was praised for her "ability intelligently to correlate verbal contents with musical semantics."⁷² Her *Partita* for piano, flute and cello presented in 1933 at Warsaw Conservatory demonstrated logical construction and the skill of "combining the sound qualities of different instruments."⁷³

Władysława Markiewiczówna attracted critical interest in 1928 with her piano pieces which, as Stefania Łobaczewska reported, "demonstrated a very good sense of form and of colouristic qualities, mostly modelled on the recent French school."⁷⁴ A decade later her *Sonatina* for oboe and piano, which combined "the French taste" with "interesting stylisations of Polish melodies" received praise for its "lively dramatic structure" and "mastery of composition technique."⁷⁵ Markiewiczówna also wrote a *Suite* for two pianos, and another *Suite* for flute, oboe, bassoon and contrabassoon. After her own performance of the former composition with Stefania Allinówna at a concert in Warsaw, Konstanty Regamey highly appreciated "the skilful and ingenious texture" as well as the "tasteful and quite modern style" of her music. He added, however, that "her invention is rather meagre and monotonous, particularly because of her predilection for a static bass."⁷⁶

The eminent violinist Zofia Iwanowska-Ossendowska, who ran her own music school in Warsaw, was a unique figure in the feminine music scene in Poland. Her main successes as a composer followed in the wake of a journey through Spain and Africa which she had undertaken with her husband, Ferdynand Ossendowski. They visited North Africa with a camera, collecting materials for "Poland's first exotic film,"⁷⁷ premiered in 1927. Ossendowska's task was to study the music of the local tribes. It was a kind of ethnomusicological field research, which involved not only notating the melodies she heard, but also participating in the local communities' music life, as Ossendowski himself confirms in, for instance, his description of the following incident:

My wife spotted a 'kora', that is, a 21-string guitar, and could not withstand the temptation of accompanying the black musician on her own violin. It must certainly have been for the first time in

⁷⁰ J.R., 'Koncert "Stowarzyszenia współczesnych kompozytorów polskich"' ['A Concert of the Association of Contemporary Music Composers'], *Robotnik*, vol. 34, no. 68, 1928, p. 5.

⁷¹ Gnus, 'Muzyczki polskie', p. 56.

⁷² Bis [Leopold Binental], 'Wieczór pieśni p. Drège-Schielowej' ['Mme Drège-Schielowa's Evening of Songs'], *Kurier Warszawski*, vol. 117, no. 112, 1937, p. 8.

⁷³ Bis [Leopold Binental], 'Koncert kompozytorski p. Drège-Schielowej' [A Concert of Works by Mme Drège-Schielowa], *Kurier Warszawski*, vol. 113, no. 345, 1933, p. 9.

⁷⁴ Łobaczewska, 'Z sali koncertowej i opery', p. 5.

⁷⁵ Zastępcza, 'Koncert w Stowarzyszeniu Młodych Muzyków' ['A Concert at the Young Musicians' Association'], *Czas*, vol. 90, no. 330, 1938, p. 9.

⁷⁶ 'Tydzień koncertowy' ['This Week's Concerts'], *Prosto z mostu*, vol. 5, no. 13, 1939, p. 4.

⁷⁷ The title of the film was *Wyprawa F. A. Ossendowskiego do Afryki Podzwrotnikowej* [F. A. Ossendowski's Expedition to Subtropical Africa]. Cf. M. Hendrykowska, *Historia polskiego filmu dokumentalnego (1896–1944)* [Polish Documentary Film History, 1896–1944], Poznań, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. A. Mickiewicza, 2015, pp. 100–103.

19 - (2087)

Example 4. Helena Dorabalska, *Dialogue* for piano, source: *Bluszcz*, vol. 68, no. 43, 1935, p. 19.

2

Dedié à mon mari.

OUANGO.

TANIEC FETYSZÓW.
DANSE DE FÉTICHES.
(Afrique occidentale.)

ZOFJA OSSENDOWSKA.

Allegro vivace.

VIOLINE.

PIANO.

f *p*

con sordino

rit. e con molto sentimento *a tempo*

rit. e con molto sentimento *a tempo*

f *giocoso*

rit. *a tempo e risoluto*

Z. 80. Mus. III. 71.974
1959. K. 1313/36

Example 5. Zofia Ossendowska, *Ouango. Taniec fetyszów* [Dance of Fetishes] for violin and piano, Warsaw: Gebethner & Wolff, p. 1, source: <https://polona.pl/item/ouango-taniec-fetyszow-danse-de-fetiches,MzkwNzcxOTY7/#index>

history that a genuine old Gagliano violin's sound blended with the wild roar of an African 'kora'⁷⁸.

The artistically transformed exotic motifs gave rise to Ossendowska's enthusiastically publicly acclaimed violin and piano works, which represent interesting examples of exoticism in music. A reporter of *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* listed the following pieces:

[...] Songs of warriors (*Mujahid* and *Devant Morho-Naba* for piano), of fishermen (*La Malinké* for piano), of warlike invaders (*La Foulah* for piano), farmers (*Chant Bambara*, *Melancolie*, and *Triste Berçeuse* for piano and violin); the dances of fetish-worshipping sorcerers (*Ouango* for piano) — all these new and previously unknown themes found in the person of Zofia Ossendowska a talented and discerning composer and performer⁷⁹.

Polish women-composers did not exclude popular music authors from their milieux. Even those who specialised in 'serious' music [*poważna* – Polish equivalent of 'classical' – translator's note] did not shun writing lighter repertoire as well, as evident, for instance, from the press account of the concert in Bergerowa's salon (quoted above). It was also such 'light' music that filled the entire second part of the evening concert held during the 1938 Congress of Women's Social and Civic Work, first as the accompaniment for choreographic productions (one of the ballet composers was Helena Karasińska), and later – in a performance by Wanda Vorbond-Dąbrowska's vocal quartet⁸⁰. Dąbrowska is considered as the first Polish woman-composer of film music. For the movie *Fredek uszczęśliwia świat* (English title: *Fredek Changes the World*, 1939) she wrote two songs which her own ensemble performed on the set. Another candidate for Poland's first female composer of film music is Anda Kitschmann, who created the soundtracks for cartoons by Włodzimierz Kowańko⁸¹. The case of Fanny Gordonówna proves very clearly that popular music has long been governed by its own rules. This composer with no specialised education in the field, who conjured up beautiful melodies with

immense ease, wrote numerous hit songs as well as music for larger-scale revue-type spectacles, such as the operetta *Jacht miłości* [*The Yacht of Love*], staged in 1933. In an interview conducted by Stanisław Niewiadomski she thus summed up the gist of her job: "I supply the melody, and let the others take care of the rest."⁸²

CONCLUSIONS

The above-presented brief panorama of women's musical output in Poland in 1918–1939 is naturally far from complete. A full reconstruction may be impossible because some of their careers proved ephemeral, many basic biographical facts remain unknown, and finding any proof of their activity other than mentions in the press is exceedingly difficult. Though the Polish women-composers basically functioned in a sort of a 'parallel world', complementary to the world of Polish music composition 'proper', there is no doubt that their output penetrated into that other 'mainstream' world, as well as reflecting its dominant trends and tendencies. Their music embraced, for instance, the concept (put forward by Karol Szymanowski) of a modern national style developed in connection with European culture and making use of modern means of expression. This style manifested itself not only in the use of folk music material, but also of other vehicles for transmitting the nation's 'spiritual qualities' in music. Polish women-composers likewise joined the neoclassical trend which transformed historical stylistic and formal models in the spirit of modernity, or continued the impressionists' work with sound colour. Some of them also demonstrated an interest in the 'New Objectivity' movement, understood as an art linked to such characteristic phenomena of contemporary civilisation as sport or modern dance rhythms.

The musical output of Polish women-composers active in the interwar period, with the notable exception of Grażyna Bacewicz, did not stand the test of time. What has not been lost, has been marginalised and forgotten, even in those cases when the composers themselves were still active after WWII. The reasons for such a situation are very complex, but it is certainly not merely a result of the low artistic value of their works, or of the local

78 F. Ossendowski, *Wśród czarnych. W górach Futa-Dżalon* [*Among the Blacks. In the Mountains of Fouta Djallon*], Lwów [Lviv], Ossolineum, 1927, pp. 54–55.

79 'Nowy dorobek muzyczny Zofii Ossendowskiej' ['Zofia Ossendowska's New Compositions'], *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, no. 7, 1927, p. 137.

80 Echo, 'Wieczór symfoniczny w Teatrze Wielkim'.

81 'Pierwszy polski twórca filmów rysunkowych' ['Poland's First Cartoon Film Maker'], *Górnośląszak*, vol. 31, no. 263, 1932, p. 7.

82 S. Niewiadomski, 'Którędy chadza melodia...' ['Where the Melody Goes...'], *Chwila*, vol. 17, no. 5780, 1935, p. 7.

Polish social, cultural and historical context⁸³. Many musicological studies take up the subject of the reception of women's musical output and of attempts to solve the problem of their meagre presence in the musical canon, providing an in-depth methodological basis for such work⁸⁴. All the same, research on women's musical output still seems to be insufficient. The scope of their achievements as presented in this article, within the narrow spatial and temporal boundaries of interwar Poland, also calls for further insights, including analytic studies. This kind of work is worthwhile even if its only purpose were to be a fuller reconstruction and assessment of Polish music in that period.

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⁸³ Marta Beszterda wrote about those uniquely Polish contexts in her paper: 'At the Intersection of Musical Culture and Historical Legacy: Feminist Musicology in Poland', *Kwartalnik Młodych Muzykologów UJ*, no. 34, 2017, pp. 29–50. Available from: <http://www.ejournals.eu/kmmuj/2017/Issue-34/>, (accessed 10 September 2019).

⁸⁴ Cf. M. Citron, 'Music as Gendered Discourse', in M. Citron (ed.), *Gender and the Musical Canon*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 120–164; S. McArthur, *Towards a Twenty-First-Century Feminist Politics of Music*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2010; K.K. Koay, 'Women Composers and Modern Society', in *The Kaleidoscope of Women's Sounds in Music of the Late 20th and Early 21st Centuries*, Newcastle-Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015, pp. 3–39.

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APPENDIX: POLISH WOMEN-COMPOSERS ACTIVE IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD⁸⁴

Name	Dates	Music education
Allinówna Stefania	19.11.1895 Łódź – 20.04.1988 Warsaw	Studied composition with Felicjan Szopski and Kazimierz Sikorski (Warsaw) as well as Hugo Leichtentritt (Berlin).
Bacewicz-Biernacka Grażyna	5.02.1909 Łódź – 17.01.1969 Warsaw	Studied composition with Kazimierz Sikorski (Warsaw) and Nadia Boulanger (Paris)
Baum-Czajkowska Jadwiga		Studied in Warsaw.
Białkiewiczówna Irena [Andraut de Langeron]	6.02.1891 Nieżyn (now Nizhyn in Ukraine) – 14.04.1957 Warsaw	Studied composition with Piotr Rytel, Zygmunt Noskowski and Roman Statkowski (Warsaw) as well as Ottorino Respighi (Rome).
Cieślakówna Maria	1915 Warsaw – c. 1985 Los Angeles	Studied piano with Zbigniew Drzewiecki (Warsaw).
Dorabalska Helena [Julia]	22.05.1895 Sosnowiec –20.07.1944 Wołomin	Studied composition with Roman Statkowski (Warsaw), obtained a PhD in musicology (Cracow).
Drège-Schielowa Łucja	13.02.1893 Warsaw – 26.01.1962 Łódź	Studied theory and composition with Felicjan Szopski (Warsaw).
Erwest Ida	c. 1905–1942 Warsaw	
Gnus Ryta	1881 Warsaw – 5.02.1978 Warsaw	Studied piano and composition (Kiev).
Gordonówna Fanny [Fajga Jofe Gordon]	23.12.1914 Yalta – 9.07.1991 Petersburg	Studied voice (Chicago).
Górska Stefania	6.01.1907 Warsaw – 3.08.1986 Warsaw	Learnt at Stefan and Tacjana Wysocki's School of Music (Warsaw).
Grzegorzewicz-Lachowska Janina [Lachowska Stefania]	20.08.1898 Lwów (now Lviv in Ukraine) – 24.05.1966 Cracow	Studied composition in Lwów and with Kazimierz Sikorski (Warsaw)
Janiszewska-Nebelska Alicja	1874–22.10.1966 Warsaw	Studied violin (Petersburg).
Karasińska Helena	c. 1897 Warsaw – 25.01.1987	Learnt at Ludwik Urstein's secondary music school (Warsaw) and at Professor Kossovsky's music courses (Moscow).
Kitschmann Anda [Anne Weiner Kitschmann]	9.12.1895 Vienna – 10.10.1967 Cracow	Studied conducting (Vienna).
Klechniowska-[Sas] Anna Maria	15.04.1888 Borówka (now Koloniya Boruvka in Ukraine) – 26.08.1973 Warsaw	Studied music theory and composition with Gustaw Roguski (Warsaw), Mieczysław Soltys and Stanisław Niewiadomski (Lwów), Stephan Krehl (Leipzig) as well as Richard Heuberger and Franz Schmidt (Vienna).
Markiewiczówna Władysława	5.02.1900 Bochnia – 17.05.1982 Katowice	Studied music theory and composition with Zdzisław Jachimecki (Cracow) and Hugo Leichtentritt (Berlin).
Myszyńska-Wojciechowska Leokadia	9.05.1858 Łowicz – 12.11.1930 Warsaw	Studied harmony with Gustaw Roguski, composition with Władysław Żeleński and Zygmunt Noskowski (Warsaw).
Obtułowicz-Wróblewska Zofia ⁸⁵	19.07.1889 Buczac (now Buchach in Ukraine) – after 1935si	Studied composition in Lwów and with Max Reger (Leipzig).
Orion-Bąkowska Maria		Studied with Henryk Melcer and Władysław Żeleński.
Ossendowska [Iwanowska- Płoszko] Zofia	18.02.1887 Sieradz –1943 Warsaw	Studied violin with Stanisław Barcewicz (Warsaw) and César Thomson (Brussels).
Poznańska Maria		

(Continued)

⁸⁴ Compiled on the basis of available lexicographic entries, archive materials from the Polish Composers' Union, press notes and internet databases.

⁸⁵ Her name is frequently misquoted in publications as Wróblewska-Obtułowiczowa (cf. e.g. 'Biogramy', in M. Dziadek, and L. Moll, *Oto artyści pełnowartościowi, którzy są kobietami...*, p. 79), or sometimes she is split into two different persons, Zofia Obtułowicz and Zofia Wróblewska (Trochimczyk, p. 16, 18). Obtułowicz was the composer's maiden name; in 1911 she married Władysław Wróblewski.

Robowska Lucyna	11.02.1876 Łódź – 21.11.1957 Warsaw	Studied piano with Adolf Guzewski and Aleksander Michałowski (Warsaw) as well as in Berlin.
Rupniewska-Freyerowa Janina	25.04.1897 – after 1954	Studied piano teaching (Warsaw).
Sternicka-Niekraszowa Ilza Adelajda	20.09.1898 Petersburg –27.06.1932 Warsaw	Studied composition with Alexander Glazunov (Petersburg) as well as Roman Statkowski and Karol Szymanowski (Warsaw).
Szubertowa M[aria?]		
Trębicka Maria	26.10.1893 Linowa (now Linova in Belarus) – 26.09.1985 Warsaw	
Vorbond-Dąbrowska Wanda	?–26.09.1939 Warsaw	
Wereszczyńska Mira [Maria]	16.06.1896 Kaunas – 27.11.1955 Warsaw	Studied at Warsaw Conservatory.
Zdziennicka-Bergerowa Zofia	?–1950	Studied performance on plucked string instruments (Warsaw).