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I Sing to Myself and the Muses ... Poetry and Music in the Works of Wanda Warska

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This article concerns the artistic activity of Wanda Warska, especially in the field of sung poetry, of which she was an outstanding representative. At the beginning of her career, she was hailed as the lady of Polish jazz, but it was her musical interpretations of Polish poetry by such composers as Jan Kochanowski, Stanisław Wyspiański, Cyprian Kamil Norwid, Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński, Halina Poświatowska, and Czesław Miłosz that brought the artist recognition and fame. The article essentially consists of two main parts, preceded by a general introduction to the subject of the relationship between poetry and music in a historical perspective. The first part presents an extraordinary figure of the artist who was active in various fields of art. The second part introduces the musical interpretations of poetry performed by Warska.

Keywords: Wanda Warska, music, song, sung poetry, Polish poetry

Introduction

From ancient times, poetry and music, often combined with dance, constituted an inseparable whole. The Greek muse of love poetry—Erato was depicted with a cithara, i.e., an instrument used to worship Apollo. In turn, Euterpe—the goddess of lyrical poetry—was imagined with aulos, associated with the rites of the cult of Dionysus. We find a continuation of these noble ideas in the activities of French troubadours and trouveurs or German minnesingers who since the 12th century created the medieval court culture. This tradition was maintained in the successive centuries by itinerant singers called minstrels.

The literary works of the Polish authors have been for centuries an inexhaustible source of inspiration for many artists. In the history of music, there is a range of poetic texts accompanied by music which in their "new being" found a true meaning and understanding. An example might be one of the most important monument of the Polish music—*Melodie na psalterz polski, przez Mikolaja Gomółkę uczynione w tłumaczeniu Jana Kochanowskiego* (Melodies for the Polish Psalter by Mikołaj Gomółka in translation by Jan Kochanowski). Native language and music which was defined by the composer himself in the preface to the first edition from 1580 "…nicely done/for simple people not too difficult./Not for Italians, for the Poles/for our simple countrymen" (Gomółka, 1981, n.p.) caused that the collection became one of the first Polish songbooks, in common use until this day. This is evidenced by contemporary music arrangements of Gomółka's songs and their constant presence in the concert repertoire of the Polish bands.

A special role was played by the Polish poetry in music in the years of partitions and struggle for independence of the country. Stanisław Moniuszko announcing his Śpiewnik Domowy (Home Songbook) wrote

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in 1842 in the journal *Przegląd Petersburski* (Review of Petersburg):

Since a beautiful poetry combined with beautiful music can open the entrance to the ear and heart belonging to a person who is not very musical, then even the poorest music which is not so successful, will obtain an indulgence for itself, and what is national and local, what is an echo of our childhood memories, will always be enjoyable for the dwellers of the earth on which they were born and grew up. My songs are arranged under the influence of such inspiration, although they contain various types of music, but their nature and targets are national. (Jachimecki, 1961, pp. 43-44)

Polish composers have for years adored and still reach for the poetry of Romantic authors (including Zygmunt Krasiński, Józef Ignacy Kraszewski, Adam Mickiewicz, Cyprian Kamil Norwid, Juliusz Słowacki) and representatives of the Young Poland (including Jan Kasprowicz, Bolesław Leśmian, Kazimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer, Leopold Staff, Stanisław Wyspiański). Some of the poems used in the songs are even more commonly perceived as musical than literary.

In the 1950s, Poland began to develop a broadly understood verbal and musical genre called sung poetry¹, which, due to the performance, source and thematic criteria, includes acting, artistic, cabaret, literary, poetic, satirical, and student songs as well as the so-called author's song, if the performer is the author of the text and music. The development of this music trend was associated with the artistic student movement, which promoted new currents of thought and the spiritual development of man. At that time, numerous cabarets, theaters and student clubs were established in larger academic centers, gathering outstanding writers, musicians, artists, theater and film creators, and above all, lovers of free art and freedom of speech. These were important places for meetings and discussions, as well as for promoting jazz music. Apart from artistic and literary activities, members of this movement manifested a new awareness and approach to life, often as an expression of their opposition to socialist realism and socialist propaganda of success.

The club atmosphere and jazz atmosphere inspired artists to seek and discover Polish poetry as a source of song lyrics. The sung poetry is characterized by word and music relations: a sophisticated poetical text presented in the interpretation emphasising its meaning and message using various implementing measures. Among the Polish performers of such genre of music alongside such famous artists as Elżbieta Adamiak, Michał Bajor, Ewa Demarczyk, Marek Grechuta, Antonina Krzysztoń, Czesław Niemen, Grzegorz Turnau, Magda Umer and many others a unique place is occupied by Wanda Warska.

An Artist With Many Faces

Wanda Warska (1930-2019)² belongs to the legendary Polish artists. Her timeless music creations put her alongside the most prominent jazz singers and performers of sung poetry. She is not only a singer but also the songwriter and composer. She received a music education in a non-existent today Ballet Centre attached to Poznan Opera and the secondary school of music education in Poznan, where she studied among other things singing in class of Janina Janowska-Kopczyńska. She continued the study of singing in Cracow with Franciszek Delekta. Music is not the only passion of Warska, who studied philosophy at the University of Warsaw and as a mature artist she graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. She paints on the

¹ The development of this music trend was possible in connection with events of the Polish October 1956, the so-called "October Thaw", which contributed to a change in the internal and foreign policy of the Polish People's Republic (partial de-Stalinization and democratization of the communist system).

² The year of birth quoted in many Internet and literate sources during the artist's lifetime is 1932 (the same as the year of birth of her husband Andrzej Kurylewicz). After Warska's death, however, this fact was corrected. See: http://jazzforum.com.pl/main/artykul/wanda-warska (access: 22.02.2021).

wood and adorns hats with adornment. In her artistic output she has 20 exhibitions and over 700 works. For creative work, in recognition of her contribution to the Polish culture she was honoured, among other things with the Officer's Cross of Order of Poland Reborn, well-deserved Gloria Artis Gold Medal and Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany—the Cross of Merit of 1st Class (popularly known as Bundesverdienstkreuz I Klasse).

It is worth having a closer look an interesting and rich artistic Warska's biography in order to get to know her extraordinary personality, a distinctive expression that characterizes the songs performed by her, as well as her outstanding interpretive skills which are not devoid of acting feeling.

Warska debuted as a singer in 1954 performing with Cracow band MM 176, acting under the direction of Jerzy Borowiec. A year later, she entered into cooperation with the late Andrzej Kurylewicz, privately her husband, composer, pianist, trumpeter, trombonist and conductor, but first of all, a precursor of jazz in Poland. With the organ sextet of the Polish Radio in Cracow conducted by him, she made the first recordings. In the 50's, 60's, and 70's, Warska performed as a jazz singer in many prestigious music events, including the International Jazz Festival in Sopot, the International Jazz Festival Jazz Jamboree in Warsaw, and the World Festival for the Youth and Students in Warsaw. She was associated with various music bands, such as Kwintet Andrzeja Kurylewicza (Andrzej Kurylewicz Quintet), Hot Club Melomani, Jazz Believers. She often performed abroad, in Austria, the former East Germany, the former West Germany, the former Yugoslavia, Denmark, Sweden, Hungary, and Cuba.

The name of the artist will be always associated with the vocalise for the movie by Jerzy Kawalerowicz *Pociąg* (Train) (1959), which at one time became a radio signal for the broadcast of the second program of the Polish Radio *W Dwójce raźniej*. As a vocalist she has also contributed to other films from the 60's, such as *Szpital* (Hospital), *Pingwin* (Penguin), and *Cyrograf dojrzałości* (Pact of Maturity).

In Cracow, where she stayed until 1964, in *Piwnica Pod Baranami* (The Basement Under the Rams), she run her own theatre Klara. After moving to Warsaw, she set up with Kurylewicz *Piwnica Artystyczna Wandy Warskiej* (Artistic Basement of Wanda Warska), which was originally housed in the headquarters of the Warsaw Music Society and then in the Old City Square.

The club operates to this day, currently under the name of *Piwnica Artystyczna Kurylewiczów* (Kurylewicz Artistic Basement) and is run by the daughter of Warska and Kurylewicz-Gabriela Kurylewicz. Literary and music evenings as well as painting exhibitions are organized there. In interviews, we can read about a wonderful tradition of singing Christmas carols in Kurylewicz Basement and about the fact that all verses of Christmas carols were sung even if there were several of them, to which Kurylewicz paid attention and did not allow to finish singing on the first or second verse.

The activity resulted and will certainly continue to result from the need for a creative meeting with another human being, who Warska always refers to with extraordinary respect, out of need for joint singing and experiencing things.

When I stand on stage—said the artist—I choose the songs and the way how to interpret them [...] A meeting with the audience is an enormous responsibility, you have to be careful not to be false and not to fall into artificiality. It means imposing a task on myself—here I stand in front of another man. (Bernat, 2011, p. 28)

Warska is mainly a performer of a great number of wonderful, memorable songs to the texts of the most outstanding Polish poets—Jan Kochanowski, Julisz Słowacki, Adam Mickiewicz, Cyprian Kamil Norwid,

Staniaław Wyspiański, Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński, Halina Poświatowska, Agnieszka Osiecka, Czesław Miłosz, as well as to her own texts. She is the epitome of "the Polish song of the top class"—as was aptly defined in one of the radio stations³ commenting on her singing activity. It is impossible to mention here all the most well-known songs performed by Warska. It is worth mentioning at least a few songs, which are identified with the mistress of the Polish song, such as *Oczy masz niebiesko—zielone* (Your Eyes Are Blue and Green), *Zabierz moje sukienki* (Take Away My Dresses), *W Weronie* (In Verona), *Czułość* (Affection), *Taka głęboka przy fontannach cisza* (Such a Deep Silence at the Fountains), *Ptaku mojego serca* (The Bird of my Heart), *Sobie śpiewam a Muzom* (I Sing for Myself and the Muses), and *Czego chcesz od nas, Panie?* (What Do You Want From Us, Lord?).

In the biography of the artist, an important role is played by a composing activity. Warska is the author of the music for two very popular films in Poland directed by Jan Batory: *Jezioro osobliwości* (The Lake of Mysteries) of 1972, which is the adaptation of a famous novel for the youth by Krystyna Siesicka under the same title and the television series *Karino* which was created two years later. She also composed music for short subject films, television shows and drama theatres. She is also the author of music of many songs which she performed including—*Już kocham Cię tyle lat* (I Love You For So many Years) to the text by K. I. Gałczyński and *Uroda* (Beauty) to the text of Osiecka. Among the compositions by Warska, we can also find instrumental work entitled *Utwór na 10 kontrabasów i głos* (Song for 10 Basses and Voice).

Warska is also the author of text to many songs including *Pani Róża* (Mrs Rose), *Zabierz moje sukienki* (Take Away My Dresses), *Żona* (Wife), *Po co jest tak* (Why it Is So), scripts for the theatre *Klara* in Cracow. She also wrote libretto for the performance *Hommage à Tadeusz Kantor*, dedicated to one of the greatest theater artists, Tadeusz Kantor, a longtime friend of Warska.

An amazing creative potential of Warska, her sensitivity and perception of the world outside music is revealed in painting on wood. She said herself that she signed a pact with trees. Here is the painter's credo from 1976, written on one of the paintings:

The tree cut down by a human being for thousand years has been serving him endlessly, my paintings are a tribute to the blessed matter, I pick up the abandoned pieces of wood and frame them and perhaps out of some yet unknown gratitude it reveals gently to me its great mysteries of life and death and I reveal them but not entirely because this is the conract between them. (Wanda Warska Kurylewicz, August 1976)

Her artistic output includes 20 exhibitions and over 700 works. A significant role in Warska's work, apart from music and painting, is played by the "wandeusze" accompanying her painting exhibitions. "Wandeusze" (name inspired by the artist's name) are hats with fabulous colors and cheerful patterns. And although they are works of art, they can have utility functions, and you can go to the beach, prom, summer cafe or for a walk.

Songs From Wanda Warska's Basement

An enormous music output of the artist has been recorded on several albums. The first ones, released in the late 50's and early 60's mainly document jazz music inc. *Warska: Jazz 58, Polskie Nagrania Muza* (Polish Recordings Muse) 1958, L 0246; and *Somnambulits, Polskie Nagrania Muza* (Polish Recordings Muse) 1961, L0348.

³ See http://www.polskieradio.pl/8/22/Artykul/751868,Wanda-Warska-%E2%80%93-polska-piosenka-najwyzszej-klasy- (access 22.02.2021).

In 1969 appears the record *Piosenki z Piwnicy Wandy Warskiej* (Songs from Wanda Warska's Basement)⁴, *Polskie Nagrania Muza* (Polish Recordings Muse) XL0543 in the arrangement by Kurylewicz and Nahorny, which mainly featured songs with music and lyrics by the singer as well as the mentioned earlier *Już kocham Cię tyle lat* (I Love You For So many Years) to the text by Gałczyński and *Uroda* (Beauty) to the text by Osiecka.

Music interpretation of one of the most famous poems by Gałczyński—as the singer said—the first ballad composed by her in the Basement under the Rams in Cracow. Lyrically she takes up the subject of love which connects two people and which has different faces after all (*już kocham cię tyle lat/na przemian w mroku i w śpiewie* [I love you for so many years/consecutively in the dark and singing]). Peaceful, sentimental music highlights this lasting feeling that although it got entangled and aged, it creates an inseparable bond between them (*że tyś jest rewolta, upór i mgła,/a ja to twe rzęsy i loki* [since you are a revolt, stubborn and mist/and I am your eyelashes and curls]). At this point, it is hard not to mention the marriage of Warska and Kurylewicz, which was widely considered a unique, but difficult relationship of people who love each other (Osiecka, 1984, pp. 36-37). In Warska's comment on the cover of the above-mentioned album, we can read: "The song is created and passes away in a natural way so as it often happens—one returns to it with a tear in the eye. I think that the song itself knows what to do" (Warska, 1969).

It is not hard to notice an analogy here to the song *Uroda* (Beauty): *Uroda*, *uroda*, *uroda*/już po *urodzie/przygoda*, *przygoda/już po przygodzie/Idą sierpnie i wrześnie/a my jeszcze i jeszcze/po co nam to* (Beauty, beauty, beauty/the beauty has already passed away./...Augusts and Septembers are coming/and we again and again, why do we need it). This song is sung by Warska who shares her own thoughts on life as she does in many other songs. The music perfectly captures an internal dialogue through the height contrast (question- answer) and motility (a continuous course of life).

Masterpieces of the classics of the Polish poetry are brought along with another album recorded with Czesław Niemen Muzyka teatralna i telewizyjna (Theatre and Television Music), Polskie Nagrania Muza (Polish Recordings Muse) XL 0831, 1971, reissue on CD 2006. The album features seven songs performed by Wanda Warska: Czułość (Affection)] (lyrics C. K. Norwid); Pietrucha (lyrics Sz. Szymonowic), Romanca cherubina (lyrics Beaumarchais, translated by St. Hebanowski), W Weronie (In Verona) (lyrics C. K. Norwid), Taka glęboka przy fontannach cisza (Such a deep silence at the fountains) (lyrics J. Słowacki), Przy kościołku (At the chuch) (lyrics J. Słowacki), and Kołysanka (Lullaby) (lyrics Z. Krasiński). The artists are accompanied by a jazz quartet and an orchestra conducted by Kurylewicz, the composer of all the songs on this album. The songs were written for the National Theater and the famous Studio 63, which operated in 1963-1972 under the auspices of the Television Theater. Warska's performances, especially Czułość and W Weronie, win the hearts of the audience with their lightness and attention to the word at the same time. Kurylewicz, the composer of the songs, especially emphasized the meaning of the text:

⁴ The album included the following songs: Już kocham Cię tyle lat (I Love You For So many Years), music W. Warska, lyrics K. I. Gałczyński; Uroda (Beauty), music W. Warska, lyrics A. Osiecka; Pogoda (Weather), music and lyrics W. Warska; Niepotrzebna podróż (Unnecessary Trip) music and lyrics W. Warska; Róże, Róże są tylko Róże (Roses, Roses, There Are Only Roses), music and lyrics W Warska; Daj mi od siebie coś, daj (Give Me Something From You), music W. Nahorny, lyrics W. Warska; Babciny kajet (Grandma's Notebook), music and lyrics W. Warska; Po co jest tak (Why it is So), music and lyrics W. Warska; Posłuchaj mnie (Listen To Me), music and lyrics W. Warska; Pani Róża (Mrs. Rose), music D. Caymmi, lyrics W. Warska; Zabierz moje sukienki (Take Away My Dresses), music A. Kurylewicz, lyrics W. Warska; Puzoniści (Trombone Players), music. A. C. Jobin, lyrics W. Warska.

One thing which I was sure about from the very beginning: the most important is the poem. It must not be camouflaged or skipped. It rules everything. It must come to the foreground, it needs to be clearly specified, audible and clear, especially because it is not recited but sung, and the melody, rhythm and instrumentation comes and finally an individual interpretation of the performer. Music should highlight it and bring closer and not flatten or dismiss it. (Kurylewicz, 1971)

Warska has repeatedly expressed her love for Polish poetry during public appearances. At one of the concerts, she confessed: As usual, I will say at least one poem, because I am helpless in the face of the beauty of Polish poetry; Wyspiański, Kochanowski—I love Kochanowski! (Bernat, 2011, p. 28). In the artistic output of Warska, the poetry of the bard from Czarnolas occupies an important place. A monographic album Wanda Warska śpiewa pieśni i fraszki Jana Kochanowskiego (Wanda is singing songs and epigrams by Jan Kochanowski), Polskie Nagrania Muza (Polish Recordings Muse) 1982, SX 1996 includes philosophical songs which are full of reflections on life: Sobie śpiewam a Muzom (I Sing for Myself and for the Muses), Do dziewki (To the Girl), Do snu (To the Sleep), Pieśń XXIII (Song XXIII), Czego chcesz od nas Panie (What Do You Want From Us, Lord), Gościu siądź pod mym liściem... (Guest, Please Sit Under My Leaf), and Na dom w Czarnolesie (To the House in Czarnolas)⁵. Just as before, the music had been composed by Kurylewicz, and the singer was accompanied by the Small Ensemble of the National Philharmonic Orchestra. A special recognition of the sung poetry lovers was gained by one of the lyric Sobie Spiewam a Muzom (I Sing for Myself and for the Muses)⁶. It seems to be a profession and life motto for many artists (and not only), aware of the fact that a creative effort does not often bring tangible gains but it gives hope and faith that after death it will reward a later age. Only 16 verses of the poem were used in the work, which was written in a 13 syllable verse with a caesura after the seventh syllable. Pieśń—unlike Kochanowski's—Warska ends with a repeated introductory rhetorical question: Sobie Śpiewam a Muzom. Bo kto jest na ziemi,/co by serce ucieszyć chciał pieśniami memi? (I sing for myself and sing for the Muses. Whoever is on the earth,/who would like to gladden the heart with my songs), thus creating a closed form.

Out of fascination of the singer with the creativity of Wyspiański, the album Stanisław Wyspiański—Jakżeż ja się uspokoję (How will I calm down) Polskie Radio CD (Polish Radio CD) 2002 came into being (Dulisz, 2015-2016). A short youthful poem express the fear and dread of the future, it was created when the poet was threatened with a serious disease. The text composed only of six 8-syllable verses became an inspiration for a number of outstanding Polish artists. I like those songs—said Warska—and I am somehow grateful to myself for gaining the courage and asking a few composers to write the music for the text by Wyspiański. To my invitation responded Wojciech Kilar, Zygmunt Konieczny, Krzysztof Penderecki, Zbigniew Preisner, Henryk Mikołaj Górecki and naturally Kurylewicz. Those songs composed 1995 for a solo voice with various instrumental accompaniment are characterized by an incredible expression and mood, obtained with various means, among which the most important is a distinctive voice of Warska. Sometimes it resonates with a deep vibrate in the dark, with a disturbing timbre, other times it sounds subtle, it always remains unforgettable. The album also includes a recitation of Rachela's text from *Wesele* (Wedding) by St. Wyspiański.

Describing the artistic activity of Warska associated with poetry, one cannot skip one more character—prematurely deceased poet Poświatowska. In one of the radio interviews, Warska emphasized that

⁵ In addition to the songs mentioned on the album, the repertoire of Warska also includes other songs to the words of Kochanowski, namely *Pieśń XXIV* [Song XXIV] and *Na Zdrowie* [On health].

⁶ The title comes from the first words of the verse of the poem, which Kochanowski entitled *Muza* [The Muse].

people perceived her poems in an incredibly beautiful way, like sacred songs. Poświatowska's poetry was very important in the artist's life, it gave her enormous strength—recalled the singer. The most beautiful music interpretations of the poems by Poświatowska undoubtedly include the songs *Samotność ma barwę zieloną* (Solitude Has a Green Hue) or *Ptaku mojego serca* (The Bird of My heart).

A kind of summary of Warska's artistic achievements is an album *Piosenki z piwnicy* (Songs From the Basement) consisting of 10 CDs with archival recordings of songs and concerts from the 1960s to the beginning of the 21st century, arranged chronologically and thematically, published by Polish Radio in 2004.

In December 2015, on the centenary of Tadeusz Kantor's birth and the 25th death anniversary, the aforementioned performance *Hommage à Tadeusz Kantor* took place. These are 14 paintings with elements of dance, music, recitation, film images, enriched with light elements (directed by Natalia Korczakowska). Warska was not only the author of the libretto, but also the performer, among such outstanding artists as Małgorzata Walewska, Andrzej Seweryn, Andrzej Jagodziński (Piekutowa, 2015).

The artist worked on the art scene until the end of her creative possibilities. In 2015, the last songs of Warska were written: *Jest tyle szelestów* (There's so much rustle) and *Już za długo czekam* (I Am Waiting too Long), the last one expresses the singer's longing for her husband, who died in 2007. The songs was included on the double-disc CD Domowe Piosenki, released by Polskie Radio SA in 2016. The album is a cross-section of the artist's entire vocal output.

Conclusion

Although Wanda Warska's artistic career, which began in the 1950s, was initially associated primarily with jazz, she received the greatest recognition in the field of sung poetry, as a singer and as a songwriter, as well of music. Her excellent musical interpretations of her own poems, as well as of outstanding Polish poets from the Renaissance to the present day, have become timeless works.

These verbal and musical relations contain her personal statement about love, eternal longing, anxiety, and passing away. Poetry sung by Warska conveys the message and truth; it is the answer to the problems of the world and a way of life. Her poetic awareness, sensitivity and emotions flowing from the poems she sings create an atmosphere of an unprecedented encounter between art and reality.

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