
Eliminating cheesiness. The social use of music

Adam Czech interviewed by Anna Zawadzka

Abstract: The interview with Doctor Adam Czech deals with various forms of distinctions made with the use of music, in the circles of both its authors and recipients. The conversation addresses, among other things, the current status of contemporary classical, folk, and popular music in Poland, and the status of different manners of music consumption. Another issue under discussion concerns the prevailing artistic categories of music evaluations, such as being original and abstract, and the ways of validating and delegitimizing different musical genres.

Keywords: music; distinction; cultural consumption; music education; nostalgia.

Poznań, 2016

Anna Zawadzka: Why do people in today's Poland listen to music?

Adam Czech: Let me start by saying that approximately 20% of people in Poland could do without music (*The population's participation in culture in 2014*, 2016). The remaining part of the population uses music as a background.

In comparison with other countries, western and eastern alike, the Polish society is not very musical. Ours is a post-peasant society, which does not stop us from pretending that our roots are not rural. Therefore, we have repudiated folk music. North American popular music can be traced back to two variants of folk music: blues and country. In Western Europe, the French *chanson* has a folk origin. The Balkans, in their turn, offer turbo folk, with its nationalist motifs. Czechs are not afraid of their folk music, either. Jaromír Nohavica is a Czech equivalent of Wojciech Młynarski. Nohavica steps onto a stage with an accordion and plays whatever his father taught him; the musician sells hundreds of thousands of records. Craftsmanship and instrument production are so well developed in the Czech Republic that people come from the US to buy instruments there. Unlike Poles, Czechs do not mind their peasant roots. They aspired to the bourgeois culture, the bourgeoisie were their point of reference. In Poland, the burgers were of German or Jewish origin and for this reason Poles distanced themselves from them. Poles continue to build manor houses with columned porches, considering themselves descendants of nobility.

Folk music has been replaced by various artificial developments, one of them being *disco polo*. Some journalists promote the idea that disco polo is a contemporary form of

folk music. There are absolutely no references to the music from Masovia, the area of Radom or Kielce in either the melodic or the harmonic aspects. There are, however, Balkan, Romany, Russian and Ukrainian influences, as well as of genres like Italo disco and Eurodance. *Hej, sokoły* [Hey falcons] is the most popular song played at weddings and family parties. The melody is anything but Polish. For all their declared patriotism, Poles do not have their own music.

Audience measurements indicate that PoloTV, a channel dedicated to disco polo, has an audience of 600,000 people. This is the reason why the elites decided to “embrace” the phenomenon. The publisher of the newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* co-produced a film entitled *Disco polo*. The TVP Kultura channel dedicated one episode of the *Hala odlotów* series to the phenomenon of disco polo. The guests were Sławomir Świerzyński, the lead vocalist of Bayer Full, Izabela Skrybant-Dziewiątkowska – the singer from Tercet Egzotyczny, writer Ziemowit Szczerek, and Maciej Bochniak – director of the *Disco polo* film. [Musician] Krzesimir Dębski was requested for his expert assessment. Only Ziemowit Szczerek protested when the lead singer of Bayer Full said that disco polo musicians were the contemporary counterparts of Marek Grechuta.

A. Z.: There is also folk music, representing the opposite pole from disco polo.

A. C.: Genuine Polish folk music is the subject of interest of big city intelligentsia, typically rightist, and the extremely conservative American Polish diaspora. They want things that are national, lowbrow, traditional and Catholic. People in the country could not care less for this music. I think this process is irreversible.

A. Z.: Folk music and disco polo do not exhaust the spectrum.

A. C.: Mainstream Polish music is a proud imitation of Western music. And one that is rather inept. In Poland, the situation where a pop or rock band puts more than one singer on the stage is still sensational. We are in Poznań, so I should mention boys’ choirs. There is no tradition of collective singing, except for singing in football stadiums, in churches or the (inept) singing of sea shanties.

Poor musicality also holds true for instruments. Most of them are not even recognized by Poles. This results not only from the lack of a bourgeoisie, but also the fact that bourgeois culture in Poland has never been something to aspire to. What was the object of aspiration was the culture of nobility, which by definition despises craftsmanship. Therefore, the knowledge of making instruments, including the fact that they must cost considerable money, has to this day not been assimilated in Poland. Most people are surprised when I say that a good guitar costs at least several thousand zlotys. Yet they do not bat an eyelid when purchasing iPhones for two thousand zlotys and changing them every year, even when the phones are not their tools of trade.

A. Z.: You are talking about music from the point of view of its creation rather than its reception. As for reception, we have now at our disposal lots of music channels. The costs of accessing music have gone down. Aren’t we living in a golden age of listening to music?

A. C.: Indeed, channels like YouTube or Spotify provide free-of-charge access to the works of millions of artists from all over the world. This is topped with the development of music marketing and with the role of music as a flagship element of lifestyles. All this is accompanied by an acute creative crisis faced by musicians and lyricists. For this reason, music has lost its autonomy and blends with other projects. Just like many other areas of culture, music is finished.

A. Z.: A creative crisis in terms of originality?

A. C.: Genres have evolved and are trapped in a vicious circle. Not much more can be offered in pop or rock music, jazz or rap. When someone does manage to do that, they immediately face an accusation of stepping outside the genre. For this reason, musicians make efforts to be a part of various events, as in the case of Polish artists. Alternatively, they reinvent themselves by launching re-edited records, go on concert tours singing songs from the 1970s and preying on nostalgia, or perform during events like the opening of the Warsaw Uprising Museum. Sometimes the results are horrific, like the rock and roll meets twist record *Placówka 44* [Post 44] by Voo Voo and their guests, where music was written to poetry of the Warsaw Uprising. Let's erect barricades with twist music in the background, let's have fun dying, let's die having fun.

A. Z.: I think that the type of events you are referring to is not accidental. The Warsaw Uprising, as well as the existence of nationalistic guerrilla warfare, have been promoted by the most official registers of the dominant culture as the chief sources of pride for people identifying as Poles. The production of successive commemorations and gadgets accompanying the events come down to an excellent symbolic business. Lao Che published a record entitled *Powstanie Warszawskie* [The Warsaw Uprising] and De Press launched a record *Myśmy rebelianci* [We are rebels] with songs sung by the "cursed soldiers."

A. C.: Top that with *Panny Wyklęte* [The cursed maidens]: a record featuring mainstream female singers like Natalia Przybysz, Paulina Przybysz, Kasia Kowalska, Marika, and Halina Mlynkova. Patriotism is here a form of blackmail: how could you dislike Chopin, let alone the Warsaw Uprising? These initiatives are canonical before they see the light of day. The participating artists stick to the rule that a national seal of approval guarantees the quality of whatever they do.

A. Z.: Let us go back to the end of music: why should originality mark the continued existence of music and a lack of originality herald its end? Perhaps we should turn to democratization? Some people say with malice that nowadays, everyone plays in one band or another. Maybe this is a revival rather than the end? Even if these bands are more imitative than creative, why should this be the criterion of the bands' worth?

A. C.: There are bands playing covers and nobody expects them to be original. However, in the case of artists like Maciej Maleńczuk, new songs and new records are commonly expected. Lamentably, Maleńczuk sings Vysotsky or produces records as Psychodancing, where he quotes himself.

A. Z.: Let's stick to the category of originality. I have heard many times from people regarded as hip hop experts that Polish rap (and listening to it) is a disgrace, because American rap is the real thing. Following this reasoning, Polish rap is "only" imitative. The real thing has to be from the West.

A. C.: As a result, Polish radio stations would only broadcast Western music. In Poland, the problem is not to produce a piece of music but to have it played on the radio. This, in turn, results in corruption because music presenters decide what will be broadcast. If you happen to know a radio DJ, chances are that your song will be played. At some point, political parties stepped in to promote Polish music by introducing a quota. At present, at least 33% of music broadcast by public radio stations needs to be Polish. Liroy demanded in parliament that the share be raised to 50%. The French were the forerunners of this solution. The problem with originality is that we live in a time of mass production of hits which are bought from music banks. The division into the center and peripheries also exists in music. Whatever has not been sold in the West is launched to the Eastern markets. Most typically, winners of "be the next star" type of shows sing covers all their lives. When it comes to recording something of their own, the producers buy them songs from banks. This was alluded to by Doda's former manager when he boasted that for 100,000 zlotys he could make anyone a star.

A. Z.: What is the status of classical music?

A. C.: When you ask people about the indicator of good musical taste, they will invariably refer to classical, academic music. We know more or less what music is welcome by the elites, yet hardly anyone listens to it. The Chief Statistical Office (GUS) carried out a survey which suggests that more than 90% of people do not visit classical concert halls or the opera. These institutions are hardly public. Even if 600,000 people watch the finals of the International Chopin Piano Competition, it is only because the TV broadcasts it. People get excited about it the way they get excited about any competition: a Polish pianist has made it to the finals, so we will watch it. My father once told me he had witnessed taxi drivers placing bets on the contest's winner. Meanwhile, several top-class facilities have been sponsored by the European Union, among them the Łódź Philharmonic Hall and the National Forum of Music in Wrocław.

Classical music is used as a means of refinement, and this testifies to its high status. In one of his video clips, Piotr Rubik used a cello. You will not hear it but you can see it. In a commercial for Ferrero Rocher, classical music is played at an embassy party. However, when it comes to the repertoire, we have never gone beyond the 19th century. If you do not believe me, listen to Channel 2 of the Polish Radio. There is a nasty joke that philharmonic halls play only covers. In a Polish film entitled *Sala samobójców* [Suicide room], representatives of the middle class go to a concert hall to listen to Schubert. Progress tends to be faster in painting: Picasso and the cubists have been accepted on a mass scale. On the other hand, *The rite of spring* by Stravinsky is still considered avant-garde music in Poland, even if it was composed more than 100 years ago. The classical

idiom remains the benchmark for the audience and musicians alike; for this reason, the canon is worshipped but remains conservative and perceptually easy.

What is more, not listening to classical music has never been shunned by Polish elites. Before WWII, President Mościcki visited a concert hall twice in his 13-year-long tenure, including a concert of [operetta singer] Jan Kiepura. He did not go to concerts and he did not think it an affront. And bear in mind that before WWII elitism was much more acute than in People's Poland. I follow the music listened to by Poland's financial elite. It is a mixture of everything. When the Sky Tower was opened in Wrocław, Leszek Czarnecki invited Ennio Morricone. When the last section of the A2 motorway was completed, Jan Kulczyk did invite Aleksandra Kurzak, an opera singer, but in an interview he admitted that his favorite song was *You raise me up*. When he was approached to sponsor the Lech Poznań football club, he refused and justified his decision saying: "Football is not my world. My world is culture, art, opera, and paintings." He sponsored a harp for the philharmonic hall. On the other hand, the president of the WBK bank in Poznań used to be Poland's honorary consul to Ireland. As a result, the bank sponsored Irish music concerts in Poland. In private, the bank CEO did not like this type of music, he liked blues. So he purchased 750 harmonicas for the 750th anniversary of Poznań's town rights. A former president of Orlen admitted without embarrassment that he liked disco polo, and without any repercussions.

A. Z.: Are you trying to tell me that in Poland there are no circles where delighting in classical music is the done thing?

A. C.: They do exist but in an autotelic manner, most frequently consisting of music professionals. The people who are subscribers to philharmonic concerts. The remaining part of the concert hall is force-filled with bonus tickets for companies. The Poznań philharmonic hall offers 600 seats and the city's population amounts to 600,000 people. They don't fall over themselves to buy tickets. At the same time, those who regularly listen to classical music cherish the illusion that it is widely accessible. The same is the case of the intelligentsia fascinated with folk music: when they organize a festival attended by 2,000 people, they think that their cause is blooming. I am not questioning the importance of these festivals, but I am questioning their prevalence and accessibility.

A. Z.: What role do music schools play?

A. C.: Music education in Poland has been adored and has validated the status of musicians. Being a musician means either playing in a famous band like Perfect, playing at wedding parties, or having graduated from a music school. Only the latter enjoy respect and are treated seriously. You can have a band of home-schooled musicians and be successful. However, a music school diploma is magically imbued with appreciation for the owner, who seems to be better than others.

A. Z.: Who attends music schools?

A. C.: First and foremost, it's a hereditary caste: if a father plays the trumpet, so will the son. These children have it easy: they are acquainted with music, listen to it every day. Another group consists of the victims of the bourgeois ethos. After all, hardly anything is as distinctive as playing a noble instrument like the piano or the violin. Admittedly, the image of the violin is slightly tarnished, as the instrument is associated with folk fiddlers. Nevertheless, bourgeois education requires that a child plays the violin. The utmost requirement, however, is playing the piano. I know many people who attended elementary and secondary music schools, oftentimes apart from regular schools, and gave up playing instruments when they entered university. They do not need it to be happy.

A. Z.: Have music schools added to their social prestige?

A. C.: The parents want to believe it. It is a bit like speaking French: it is something to be admired. However, gender seems to complicate it all. In our culture, professional musicians, as well as composers, have been predominantly men. On the other hand, amateur instrument playing – “because it's something one needs to be able to do” – is something that happens more often to women.

These schools prevent the idiom of classical music from fading. Classical guitar remains the benchmark for rock guitar players. You need to go through all the motions: I am a musician, I can read music notes and I can play guitar transcriptions of Paganini. Many musicians have developed a complex of not being music school graduates. Yet the schools are meant to educate classical musicians. The Poznań Academy of Music introduced a jazz faculty barely a few years ago.

A. Z.: Jazz also enjoys a high status.

A. C.: True, but in snobbish terms.

A. Z.: Exactly: snobbery guarding elitism.

A. C.: This is a good moment for introducing the category of safe music, that is to say, validated music, one it is accepted to listen to. This includes classical music, jazz, Sting's concerts or a record by Katie Melua. Sting is an excellent example of how this validation fluctuates: at the beginning of his career with The Police, he was extremely popular, but people in their 50s would not admit to listening to his music. Today, Sting is a classic, who, incidentally, is keen on fusing different kinds of music. At the opening of the Poznań football stadium, he played with the Royal Symphonic Orchestra from London.

A. Z.: You are referring to safe music. What about the music whose high quality is supposedly guaranteed by the very fact of its being difficult, music which does not evoke pleasure in an obvious way and requires competence to be satisfactory? There are concerts held in Warsaw attended by 15 people at most, and this is where the events' attractiveness lies. It is all about initiation. In order to enjoy this type of concert, you need, for example, to be able to identify quotations. Then you celebrate the fact of being privy.

A. C.: Elitism comes at different levels. Pierre Bourdieu wrote that what to the petty bourgeoisie is orthodoxy, is in fact heterodoxy. So they frequent operetta, rather than opera performances. Besides, the status of entire genres, as well as specific works of art changed in the course of Bourdieu's research into distinctions. That was the case of Vivaldi: approximately in the mid-20th century, he was rediscovered. From pieces of music rarely played and known only to select few, Vivaldi's works made their way to the global sonosphere and total trivialization. Today, *The four seasons* can be heard as the background for football computer games produced in South Korea. Back to Bourdieu's research though: Warsaw is different from Paris. There are no bourgeois elites here, living for generations in the central quarters of the city. Therefore, if people aspire to something, it is the opera, and this comes at a price. Opera has an element of potlatch to it: it needs to brim with gold. It needs to be wasteful. By definition, opera is unprofitable. It has an equivalent in the form of hiring a band to play at a wedding party. It is more fashionable now to hire a band of five than a DJ. At least the guests know you can afford it. The time of wedding receptions where music was played from a computer is practically over. It all needs to cost money, and it should show.

Of course there are people who will snub classical renditions of Beethoven's music. So they organize a festival during which Beethoven is played on a saw, someone else connects a double bass with a transducer and tops it all with the sound of drones from a computer. This type of elitism is promoted by journalists.

A. Z.: I guess it depends on the media. Even if *Super Express* selects the record of the year, the choice will not be accepted by the elites.

A. C.: If *Super Express* covers music, it is only in the context of stars and performers. In the world of popular media, music serves only as a pretext for gossip. *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Polityka* are the most opinion-forming titles when it comes to cultural consumption. The reception of the Stara Rzeką [The Old River] project is a good example: it was extensively covered by both *Polityka* and *Wyborcza*. They promoted Stara Rzeką as a star of the avant-garde. This is why people who listen to Stara Rzeką can be proud of their taste.

A. Z.: What criteria do the media use to decide what is worth recommending?

A. C.: The key is originality. Being abstract to an average listener. Little music in music. These media's discourse is pseudo-expert, and the journalists oftentimes have a poor idea about music. Bartek Chaciński, head of the culture section of *Polityka*, lamented on his blog that Polish national footballers listened in the changing room to a disco polo song *Przez twe oczy zielone* [Because of your green eyes], when they could have listened to Stara Rzeką. Why should things always be primitive and in a major key? Well, the song happens to be in a minor key, like the majority of disco polo songs. Journalists who form opinions on music in Poland do not even differentiate between major and minor keys.

A. Z.: You have mentioned newspapers. What about the radio?

A. C.: Channel Three of the Polish Radio enjoys a separate status. And a specific one because Channel Three is extremely conservative. Suffice it to say, every year Dire Straits is the winner of the channel's music chart. Radiostacja used to be an opinion-forming radio station.

A. Z.: Radiostacja was based on contempt for popular music, and for this reason it had a cult status among young people from good schools and universities. To them, listening to popular music was embarrassing – unlike listening to Radiostacja. The music you listened to was your trademark: it classified you in the peer group hierarchy, determined your social attractiveness. Is this still the case?

A. C.: The age at which it matters has dropped. Today, music consumption defines one's peer group in junior high school and even earlier. It certainly is not as important as it was in the 1990s. Back then, entire subcultures formed around a single band. At present, external emblems manifesting the type of music you listen to have lost their meaning. On top of that, what was counter-culture 20 years ago has lost its edge. In a Poznań pub managed by an avowed nationalist, one of the bartenders wears dreadlocks. His views do not differ from his boss's. Today, dreadlocks do not mean a thing, they are like the color of a T-shirt; they represent only aesthetic choices.

A. Z.: But the category of uncoolness is still there.

A. C.: When you are 12, chances are everyone in your class listens to Justin Bieber. In a year's time, that very same Justin Bieber will be a symbol of uncool for the same group of kids. But today you can listen to both death metal and Polish rap. The field is decomposed. Rap enjoys immense popularity on social media, but you can no longer see young people in the streets who could be pigeonholed as "hip hoppers." Rather, it is a post-modernist mishmash of music inspirations where everyone looks for something suitable.

A. Z.: There is also a "full on" alternative, that is, music played in squats: punk rock, hard core and many other derivatives. This music is very difficult to listen to. Firstly, it requires the skill of a nuanced differentiation between sub-genres; an unskilled ear will not hear any difference. Secondly, the music is based on noise, un-accompaniment, unpleasantness, shrieking. It is devoid of an easily identified rhythm. It is brittle, changeable, and unmelodic. It is a sort of musical turpism. At a declarative level, the counter-culture movements producing this music are anti-elitist, yet their aesthetic choices contradict it.

A. C.: It is a matter of group exclusiveness. This does not necessarily need to refer to music. When you enter an online forum on any given subject, the amount of data will kill you. The forums are an area of a never-ending war between "us" and "the cheesy ones." It is about standing out within the field. We don't have many opportunities for social advancement, so we will multiply distinctions wherever we can. It is true, though, that sects are very robust in music. I play Irish folk music, sea shanties, as well as American country music hits for a living. Before a concert I was told that if I played country music,

I had to put a hat on. Which means that you either share our lifestyle or you do not belong. To some extent, this is a fascist approach. Between the Orbis Interior and the Orbis Exterior there were folk musicians, whom I described in my book *Sprzedawcy wiatru* [The wind sellers] (Czech, 2008): they were needed during wedding parties but not recognized as “us” because they did not till the land, were not farmers.

A. Z.: It was in alternative groups that I most often encountered the opinion that music must not be a source of income. This stems from an extremely elitist thesis on selflessness as a prerequisite for creating and receiving art.

A. C.: This in fact is a quite common belief. People are often shocked when I say that we want money for a concert. They are certain that if you enjoy doing something, this means that it is your hobby, not a profession. The conclusion is that most people do for a living things that they do not like. The standard in this country is that whatever you like, you do after hours. Even more than that: you don’t have the right to make money out of it, since you would play the guitar for free anyway. By the same token, folk musicians were never treated seriously. Their job was not perceived as work because people associated it with entertainment. This is the subject of *Money for nothing* by Dire Straits. A manual worker looks at musicians and says “this isn’t working.” And concludes that he should have learnt to play the guitar and now would have “money for nothin’ and chicks for free.”

A. Z.: Let us expand on the other end of the political spectrum in music: country music. Is it really as conservative as the opinion has it?

A. C.: Michael Moore’s *Bowling for Columbine* includes a three-minute insert about the history of the United States. When the Ku Klux Klan is mentioned, banjo and bluegrass music is heard in the background. As the stereotype has it. In practice, things are not so clear cut: Dixie Chicks publicly criticized George Bush, as did Kris Kristofferson. In Poland, Wojciech Cejrowski branded country music as rightist when he promoted it in his TV program *WC kwadrans*, and this is difficult to overcome. But many people from country music circles are indeed conservative. The same holds true for sea shanties.

A. Z.: Maybe this is because the enthusiasts of sea shanties and country music represent the average Pole?

A. C.: To some extent, they are the products of today’s Poland. However, you must bear in mind that conservatism sort of “goes along” with these genres. Because of deep-rooted tradition, performers are unwilling to stray from the music’s canon in any way. Sea shanties, country and folk music draw on tradition. This is just a step away from affirmation of “traditional values.”

A. Z.: Would you call R.U.T.A. a folk project?

A. C.: The project was based on its ideology and lyrics rather than music. From the point of view of the latter, it is chiefly a punk record with the addition of acoustic instruments. The power of R.U.T.A. was in re-addressing the question about serfdom as a form of

slavery. R.U.T.A. initiated a discussion in *Gazeta Wyborcza*,¹ followed by Monika Strzępka's theatrical performance of *W imię Jakuba S.* [In the name of Jakub S.] about Jakub Szela, while Jan Sowa published the book *Fantomowe ciało króla* [The king's phantom body]. As a result, the contemporary liberal media are no longer shocked when faced with the opinion that serfdom was slavery.

A. Z.: Let's top it with the Pochwalone [Praised Them Be] project: a compilation of folk songs and contemporary poetry with a feminist angle, the Same Suki [Sukas/Bitches Only] ensemble with their record *Niewierne* [Unfaithful], Andrzej Leder's *Prześniona rewolucja* [A dreamt-through revolution] – a reminder of the rearrangement of the class structure following the post-WWII agricultural reform – and *Niepamięć* [Oblivion], a film directed by Piotr Brożek. The question about serfdom brought back the issue of the peasant origin of a majority of Poles, coupled with an attempt at reclaiming peasant pride. Why did big cities get so high on R.U.T.A., Jakub Szela, the suka [archaic vertically played fiddle]? Is this supposed to be *Django*, made in Poland?

A. C.: Borys Lankosz said that he would like to shoot a Polish version of *Django*.

A. Z.: Perhaps we are using Jakub Szela and the militant peasant songs from 200 years ago to maintain our non-conformist and revolutionary identities, while in fact hiding away in the safe, distant past, so that we don't have to talk about present-day class divisions: contemporary capitalism and its dramatic effects?

A. C.: To some extent, these artistic and intellectual projects are responses to the rightist discourse of nobility. Many people in Poland still believe that they are of noble origin. In a now famous discussion about gender, during which Roman Czepe, a rightist politician, referred to "Mrs Judyta,"² he also said that half of Poles come from the nobility. In their homes, people hang sabers and gorgets to make a statement about the half to which they belong. This discourse had to be balanced, even if only for the sake of our sanity.

Arkadiusz Pacholski wrote that the way Polish people drive is a reflection of peasants pretending to be noblemen in carriages: "everyone needs to yield to me" (Pacholski, 2014). Pacholski's thesis was criticized as full of haughtiness to peasants. My opinion is that it does not make any sense to build up a society on feudal phantasms, regardless of the side of the feudal structure we are on. That is why I am cautious when it comes to the urban fascination with Jakub Szela. However, it may also be interpreted as an attempt at vindicating Marxism, which in Poland takes significant courage. All you need to do is to go back to the scandal of Adrian Zandberg sporting a T-shirt with an image of Karl Marx. Judging by the reaction, it could have had an image of Pol Pot for all it mattered. Today you can refer to Marx, even in an article published by *Gazeta Wyborcza*. It

1 See in chronological order: Pawłowski and Szajkowski, 2012; Sroczyński, 2012; Czech, 2012; Łubieński, 2012; Czech, 2014a, 2014b.

2 This is a reference to *Tak jest* [The way it is], a program on the news channel TVN24, broadcast on January 31, 2014, and attended by Roman Czepe (Łapy councilor/PiS) and journalist Kazimiera Szczuka. By "Mrs Judyta," Czepe meant the philosopher Judith Butler.

would have been impossible in the early 2000s. Some issues, previously dismissed as “communist,” have been brought back, among them serfdom.

A. Z.: Only it resulted in the return of a romantic image: peasants as rebels who fight and shake off their shackles in emotional outbursts.

A. C.: The image of Janosik the highwayman. However, the peasants who are presently romanticized were not so unambiguously “in the right,” if only because of their conservative division of sexual roles.

A. Z.: Let me go back to that PiS politician and his claim that half of Poles come from the nobility. The issue is quite complex, because PiS presents itself as an anti-elitist party representing the inhabitants of small towns and villages. So, on the one hand there is adulation of manors and a grandfather’s saber on the wall, and hatred of the elites on the other?

A. C.: Monarchists and fascists walked hand in hand back in Nazi Germany. Ephemeral or not, there was a common denominator: anti-communism and antisemitism. In Poland, we had an alliance between conservative peasants and the aristocracy, that is, the people’s movement as represented by Wincenty Witos and the National Democracy. Expecting that the Right will be consistent is doomed to failure. It’s like the banjo: an instrument of Afro-Americans which evolved into a classic element of racist music.

A. Z.: Let me go back to distinctions in music: on top of classical, alternative and turpist music, as well as music school education, we are also dealing with knowledge-related elitism. I remember my colleagues competing discreetly about who knew more. A seemingly non-committal conversation would conceal frantic showing-off. “Do you remember that piece by X?” “Dude, I heard a corrected version live, he played it later on with Y.” “That version was recorded on Z’s album, the one published by W’s studio.” They would go on for hours.

A. C.: I attended an elite Poznań secondary school, but I operated as a semi-idiot because I did not have a back-pack with a Nirvana patch. In their effort to eliminate cheesiness, older kids interrogated the younger ones about band members. I played basketball with my friends from the neighborhood. I listened to different music. I remember my friend telling me he listened to grunge music and Soundgarden. “It’s complicated music, you wouldn’t understand it,” he summed up. This is not necessarily about music but every area which serves for introducing an exclusion code. Undoubtedly, music comes in very handy when it comes to creating elite knowledge, because it does not serve any other purpose.

A. Z.: It does if it allows you to make a mark for yourself among people whose opinions are important to you.

A. C.: But only music journalists need this knowledge to survive. Having said that, even they can look up the information you have mentioned in lexicons. Besides, the actual music which was once related to work is no longer essential in anybody’s life.

Technology and equipment are other music-oriented distinctive areas. There is a phenomenon called Rock in Rio, which operates like a franchise: for a fee, you can organize Rock in Rio in Poznań. The city council wanted to spend a fortune on it. The local TV broadcast a debate during which one of the councilors said he liked “to listen to good music on good equipment at home.” When at Poznań University I was taking an entrance exam to a PhD course – my topic was on the social importance of musical instruments – among the examiners was a professor who never forgets to write in his biographical notes that he is an audiophile. During the exam, he could not even pronounce the name of the popular violinist Stéphane Grappelli. As their status rises, men feel a need to purchase equipment. It is yet another area of masculine gadget obsession. Audio equipment is a toy controlled by men by means of remote controls and knowledge. Then they will boast about it over beer to their friends. “I have bought new loudspeakers,” they would say. It is a strong, status-related game.

From a music perspective, audio equipment, just like record covers or knowing a band’s members, is like stage directions, or footnotes. On the other hand, audiophiles are capable of spending several hundred thousand zlotys on equipment. Lately, at the Audio Video Show in Warsaw, home audio equipment was presented costing several million zlotys. I am certain that someone will buy it, even if 99.99% people in Poland cannot hear the difference between music played on equipment costing 5,000 and one costing 50,000 zlotys. The difference is audible to a handful of people. The financial aspect of music is related to its quality to a much lesser degree than opinion has it. Even the question of whether music from a vinyl record is better than from a CD is debatable, because for over a dozen years of the domination of CDs, people were led to believe it was the other way round.

Vinyl records are another example of music-related distinction. It is a Veblenesque distinction because listening to vinyl records is a demonstration of having the time to relish music from vinyl records, instead of listening to music on the run, on an iPhone from a Spotify playlist while on a tram. Vinyls have made Spotify poor man’s way of listening to music. It is a bit like a watch: we all have it in the phone, so when you want to differentiate yourself, you will buy a watch for 20,000 zlotys. The same holds true for buying magazines like *Glissando* or *Audio* from [a media megastore like an] Empik. It is a show-off of an activity.

There is no denying that some people derive pleasure from listening to music played on good equipment. The thing is that in Poland, the poor music culture does not agree with the omnipresent equipment-based distinction. People who cannot tell a clarinet from a fagot will boast about their expensive equipment.

A.Z.: Bearing in mind the love of the hissing and crackling of a vinyl record, can we compare the comeback of vinyl records to the fetish of the original rendition in the visual arts? I mean the opinion that you need to see Caravaggio’s *Medusa* even if you can see the painting at home, comfortably, in detail and for free, for example on the Internet?

A. C.: Vinyl records are more about the power of cultural nostalgia. The faster the technological progress, the more frequently we try to create enclaves of tradition. Take amplifiers: lamp-based amps are en vogue again, even if several years ago they slipped into oblivion. What is more, the designers model them on amplifiers from the 1950s, for example by covering them with tweed. On the aesthetic level, we pretend that there has been no progress and the industrial revolution never happened. We want to return to pre-modern times.

A. Z.: What is the benefit?

A. C.: Being in commune with the familiar, the tamed, and the warm. Even to the touch, the design from the 1950s is warmer than the contemporary silvery metal, just like a wooden gramophone and wooden loudspeakers look more welcoming than those made of metal. It sounds funny but it works. Rockabilly is having its moment of fame, yet again. In big cities dance groups referring to the traditions of the 1950s operate. These sub-cultures grow around nostalgia.

A. Z.: Perhaps it is nostalgia for a time when there was no mass access to music, so you could feel special when you had that access?

A. C.: It is more about problems with modern times which transform us into Janus-like creatures. One face is turned towards the future, the other one towards the past. Nationalisms show it very distinctly: on the one hand there is mass secularization of the society, on the other there are vivid references to tribal blood bonds. Poland is a technologically modern country yet at the community level it remains primitive and coarse. In music, nostalgia is represented by time machines like an accordion, a mandolin or a banjo. A mandolin designed in 1919 is still in production, the retro design included. An example outside the world of music is the comeback of beards, and with them barber shops. They are like historical enactments. They act like balms to alleviate any pain of modernity, to add warmth to it.

A. Z.: Has the time of People's Poland changed the way of consuming music?

A. C.: To a large extent. Long before EU funds, the Polish People's Republic invested in classical music and its promotion. A platform for learning about classical music was created. The state assumed that every region's capital should have its philharmonic hall. Yet before WWII, only Warsaw and Krakow had concert halls. The philharmonic hall in Bydgoszcz was opened as early as in 1953. Until recently, acoustically it was the best concert hall in the country.

A. Z.: Was it like the Adornian project of propagating high culture instead of favoring popular culture?

A. C.: First and foremost, it was a modern project. Organized like a factory, a philharmonic orchestra is a child of the industrial revolution, with its hierarchy, conductor, subsets and sections, each with its own concertmaster. A new type of orchestra emerged,

modeled on a modern institution. Not only its music, but also its structure carries the pattern of its native culture.

However, credit is due to the state for more than building concert halls. It created a musical education and, very importantly, TV and radio programs for children and adolescents popularizing music. In People's Poland, propagation of music culture was carefully thought out, while today classical music is covered by TV almost exclusively during the Chopin Competition and the New Year's concert by the Vienna Philharmonics, or in programs featuring stand-up comedians: Grupa MoCarta or Filharmonia Dowcipu Waldemara Malickiego. Even RMF Classic, the radio station which used to play the hits of classical music, changed its name to the station of "the most beautiful film music," which means that its former formula lost its appeal.

Data provided by the Chief Statistical Office suggests that the Polish People's Republic failed to spearhead a revolution in music.

Translated by Katarzyna Matschi

References

- Czech, A.** (2008). *Sprzedawcy wiatru: Muzykanci i ich muzyka między wsią a miastem*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar.
- Czech, A.** (2012, August 29). Chłop potęgą jest, nie miasta. *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Retrieved June 22, 2016, from http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/1,128592,12387387,Chlop_potega_jest_nie_miasta.html
- Czech, A.** (2014a, April 25). Chłop chłopu wilkiem. *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Retrieved June 22, 2016, from http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/1,137926,15854674,Chlop_chlopu_wilkiem.html
- Czech, A.** (2014b, April 25). Szlachcic na zagrodzie o gustach nie dyskutuje. *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Retrieved June 22, 2016, from http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/1,137926,15854682,Szlachcic_na_zagrodzie_o_gustach_nie_dyskutuje.html
- Łubieński, T.** (2012, October 2). Głos panicza, co panem nie został. *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Retrieved June 22, 2016, from http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/1,128599,12597222,Glos_panicza_co_panem_nie_zostal.html
- Pacholski, A.** (2014, March 7). Samochodoza polonika. *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Retrieved June 22, 2016, from http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/1,136821,15583349,Samochodoza_polonika.html
- Pawłowski, R., & Szajkowski, M.** (2012, August 11). Jak cham z chamem. *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Retrieved June 22, 2016, from http://m.wyborcza.pl/wyborcza/1,105226,12291009,Jak_cham_z_chamem.html?as=2
- The population's participation in culture in 2014 [Uczestnictwo ludności w kulturze w 2014 r.]*. (2016). Retrieved June 22, 2016, from <http://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/kultura-turystyka-sport/kultura/uczestnictwo-ludnosci-w-kulturze-w-2014-r-6,2.html>
- Sroczyński, G.** (2012, August 11). Lemingi orzą w korporacjach, sarmaci stoją z bronią przy nodze. *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Retrieved June 22, 2016, from http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/1,126715,12291253,Lemingi_orza_w_korporacjach_sarmaci_stoja_z_bronia.html

**Eliminacja lamerstwa. O społecznym użytkowaniu muzyki:
Z Adamem Czechem rozmawia Anna Zawadzka**

Abstrakt: Wywiad z dr. Adamem Czechem dotyczy różnych form dystynkcji dokonywanych za pomocą muzyki zarówno w środowisku jej twórców/twórczyń, jak i odbiorców/odbiorczyń. Przedmiotem rozmowy jest m.in. obecny status muzyki poważnej, muzyki ludowej i muzyki popularnej w Polsce, jak również status poszczególnych sposobów muzycznej konsumpcji, czyli słuchania. Rozmowa dotyczy także dominujących w sztuce kategorii oceniania muzyki, takich jak oryginalność i abstrakcyjność, oraz sposobów uprawomocniania i delegitymizacji poszczególnych gatunków muzycznych.

Wyrażenia kluczowe: muzyka; dystynkcja; konsumpcja kulturalna; edukacja muzyczna; nostalgia.



Article No. 1382

DOI: 10.11649/slh.1382

Citation: Zawadzka A. (2017). Eliminating cheesiness. The social use of music: Adam Czech interviewed by Anna Zawadzka. *Studia Litteraria et Historica*, 2017(6). <https://doi.org/10.11649/slh.1382>.

This is the translation of the original article entitled *Eliminacja lamerstwa. O społecznym użytkowaniu muzyki: Z Adamem Czechem rozmawia Anna Zawadzka*, which was published in *Studia Litteraria et Historica*, 2017(6).

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 PL License, which permits redistribution, commercial and non-commercial, provided that the article is properly cited. www.creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/pl

© The Author(s) 2017

© To English translation: Katarzyna Matschi 2017

Publisher: Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw.

Author: Anna Zawadzka, Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw.

Correspondence: annazawadzka@poczta.fm

The work has been prepared at the author's own expense.

Competing interests: The author has declared she has no competing interests.