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Chopin and Polish FOLK

ABSTRACT: Although Chopin's music is continually analysed within the context of its affinities with traditional folk music, no one has any doubt that these are two separate musical worlds, functioning in different contexts and with different participants, although similarly alien to the aesthetic of mass culture. For a present-day listener, used to the global beat, music from beyond popular circulation must be "translated" into a language he/she can understand; this applies to both authentic folk music and the music of the great composer.

In the early nineties, when folk music was flourishing in Poland (I extend the term "folk" to all contemporary phenomena of popular music that refer to traditional music), one could hardly have predicted that it would help to revive seemingly doomed authentic traditional music, and especially that it would also turn to Chopin. It is mainly the mazurkas that are arranged. Their performance in a manner stylised on traditional performance practice is intended to prove their essentially "folk" character. The primary factor facilitating their relatively unproblematic transformation is their descenderal triple-time rhythms.

The celebrations of the bicentenary of the birth of Fryderyk Chopin, with its scholarly and cultural events of various weight geared towards the whole of society, gave rise to further attempts at transferring the great composer's music from the domain of elite culture to popular culture, which brings one to reflect on the role that folk music might play in the transmission and assimilation of artistic and traditional genres.

KEYWORDS: Fryderyk Chopin, mazurkas, traditional music, folk music

Any scholar striving to explore the phenomenon of the Polish character of *Mazurkas* by Fryderyk Chopin will inevitably face the problem posed by the connections between the eminent composer's oeuvre and traditional Polish folk music; the solution to the problem, although intuitively obvious, still escapes precise description and analysis.

Inspirations with traditional folk music in Chopin's work have already been discussed by many authors, who searched for their concrete manifestations. The conclusion has usually been that the composer's allusions to folklore were indirect, and were realized rather by employing a certain type of mood and melodic line than by simple quotation. It can therefore be said that Chopin brilliantly recognized and then masterfully simulated the idiom of

traditional folk music, but did not reproduce the music as such.¹ Although this idiom was a complex one, because

Chopin's dependence on folk music is not limited to [...] imitating dance rhythms, [but] also consists in employing the original structure of measures, sentences and periods, in using the rhythmic and melodic patterns of traditional folk music and exposing new rhythmic, tonal and harmonic principles which potentially exist in folk melodies; its crucial component, at least in the case of dance genres, was rhythm.²

While discussing Chopin's music in the context of its connections with traditional folk music there is no doubt that we are dealing with two absolutely distinct musical worlds, functioning in different contexts and having different participants. Nevertheless, from the perspective of the mass audience, these two types of music, however disparate, have met the same rejection, or at least marginalization, although obviously for completely different reasons.

In the case of Chopin's oeuvre, we are dealing with elite art, which generally does not penetrate mass culture, unless incidentally in the form of a movie soundtrack or a commercial. Folk music, on the other hand, in the wake of cultural and social transformations, had become a genre of the past, a museum exhibit, interesting only to scholars studying folklore or local cultural operators. After years of exploitation in radio programmes and as musical setting for local and state celebrations at various levels, which went against the reception by the mass audience, who rejected both the raw, unpolished aesthetics of genuine performers and the homogenized Cepelia variety proposed by song and dance companies, traditional music had in fact lost any potential for finding acceptance, especially by the young generation. There-

¹ Jim Samson ranks Chopin alongside Franz Liszt, and notices the following similarities between the two composers: their music drew energy from the national repertoire, but was not subject to limitations imposed by either national repertoire or aesthetics; also, both composers found reception beyond the small local circle and became world-famous artists of global standing. Jim Samson, 'Myth and Reality: A Biographical Introduction' in *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin*, ed. Jim Samson (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, 1992), 6.

² See Helena Windakiewiczowa, 'Wzory ludowej muzyki polskiej w mazurkach Fryderyka Chopina' [Folk music patterns in mazurkas by Fryderyk Chopin], *Rozprawy Wydziału Filologicznego PAU* 61/7 (Kraków, 1926), 49. For the sake of precision, one must not forget about the musicologists who believe that the inspirations drawn from Polish folklore do not suffice to explain the essence of the Polishness of Chopin's music. According to Adolf Chybiński, "as far as Chopin is concerned, the national character of his works does not result exclusively from employing the features of traditional folk music, but also reveals individual characteristics, which are nevertheless thoroughly Polish. It was exactly this merging of the folk factor with the individual features, forged under the pressure of our political reality at the time, that produced the national style, remaining the strongest national tradition to date. Adolf Chybiński, 'Zagadnienia tradycji narodowych muzyki polskiej' [The problems of national traditions of Polish music], *Muzyka* 1 (1951), 6.

fore, it was an obvious necessity to seek new forms enabling folklore to exist in musical culture.

When FOLK³ music started flourishing in Poland in the early 1990s, it was very hard to foresee that it would contribute to the revival of the authentic music of the Polish folk, which at the time was slowly but inevitably fading away, especially as the former emerged in a sense, in opposition to the latter. It would have been even harder to foresee that the new genre would also reach for Chopin's works. Youth music inspired by elements of tradition, treated very superficially and interwoven with rhythms and sounds typical for pop music, entered the Polish musical scene as early as the 1970s, but it was only over a decade later that a genuine folk movement resembling its earlier counterparts in Western Europe emerged with its astonishing abundance of varieties.

I use the term FOLK as a cover term for all contemporary forms that belong in the field of popular music and draw on musical folklore, ranging from the most primitive to the most artistically sophisticated ones. This definition of FOLK music sees it as part of the comprehensive notion of folklorism, defined by Józef Burszta as:

[...] deliberate, intentional and purposeful transposition in appropriate contexts of selected elements of traditional folk culture from its original, natural environment, contemporary or historical, into a broader context of the entire society and its culture.⁴

Tomasz Rokosz⁵ in his attempt to classify forms belonging to the "broad notion of folklorism" identified five trends:

1. New lease of life for folklore: village singing bands.
2. Dance and song companies.
3. FOLK music.
4. Reconstructions of folklore by city-based bands.
5. Alternative and experimental theatres.

According to Burszta's comprehensive definition, FOLK music and Chopin's music have to be classified under the same category of folkloristic music, despite the huge discrepancy in terms of quality, whereas the classification proposed by Rokosz excludes any forms of sophisticated culture, thus

³ It is crucial to differentiate between *folk music* (in Polish: "muzyka ludowa") understood as genuine traditional music of ethnic regions of Poland, and *FOLK* music (in Polish: "muzyka folkowa"; "folk") being its contemporary free adaptation. To avoid confusion, the second term is written with capital letters.

⁴ Józef Burszta, *Kultura ludowa – kultura narodowa: Szkice i rozprawy* [Folk culture, national culture. Essays and dissertations] (Warszawa, 1974), 308.

⁵ Tomasz Rokosz, *Od folkloru do folku. Metamorfozy pieśni tradycyjnych we współczesnej kulturze* [From folklore to folk. The metamorphoses of traditional songs in contemporary culture] (Siedlce: Akademia Podlaska, 2009), 64.

denying any affinity between Chopin's and folkloristic music. The exclusion confirms Roch Sulima's standpoint that relates folklorism to the popular and mass culture.⁶ At this point, however, it is necessary to mention Antonina Kłoskowska's definition of mass culture as "the phenomena of contemporary transmission of identical or analogous content coming from a small number of sources to huge masses of recipients"⁷, according to which FOLK music is not mass music as its circle of listeners is limited.

During its first period of bloom, the Polish FOLK music was inspired above all by the "exoticism" of the Irish and the Andean music, to be followed by the Hutsul and the Lemko musical traditions; the representatives of the genre sought inspiration closer and closer to Polish borders, before they finally succumbed to a fascination with Polish folklore. FOLK bands gradually started reaching for the repertoire of native songs, obviously the more archaic – and therefore out of the ordinary in musical terms – the better. This repertoire was framed in arrangements that were basically a far cry from the practice of Polish traditional performers, in terms of the instrumentarium as well as harmonic and rhythmic structures, and soon gained a circle of devoted listeners, who became visible during various festivals (e.g. Eurofolk). Almost immediately one could observe an astonishing acceptance, or even enthusiasm, which the newly emerged and easily accepted genre aroused also for the repertoire and performance of the authentic folk music artists.

In the wake of the revived interest in "musical roots", numerous bands started to emerge, representing very diverse approaches to musical folklore. Taking into consideration the three crucial elements of traditional rural performance: repertoire, instrumentarium and performance styles (the fourth significant criterion, the context of the performance, is of limited application nowadays), it is possible to differentiate several approaches⁸:

1. The most faithful adherents of tradition ("the purists"⁹) try to recreate the historical reality of rural musical performance in its purest form by presenting traditional repertoire, instrumentarium and performance styles. As

⁶ Roch Sulima, 'Folklor' i 'Folkloryzm' [Folklore and Folklorism] in *Nowa Encyklopedia Powszechna* [The New Polish Encyclopaedia] (Warszawa: PWN, 1995), 392.

⁷ Antonina Kłoskowska, *Kultura masowa. Krytyka i obrona* [Mass culture: critique and defence] (Warszawa, 1983), 95.

⁸ Ewa Dahlig, 'Folk Music Revival in Poland and Northumberland', *East European Meetings in Ethnomusicology* 5 (Bucharest, 1998), 45-50.

⁹ I used this term for the first time in an article in 1998 (see footnote 8). Despite the years that have passed, it remains – like the whole phenomenon – still valid, and so is the classification of FOLK music proposed at that time, which I recall in this study. See Ewa Dahlig, 'Muzyka ludowa, muzyka narodowa' [Folk music, national music], in *Studia dedykowane profesorowi Mieczysławowi Tomaszewskiemu w osiemdziesiątolecie urodzin* [Studies dedicated to Professor Mieczysław Tomaszewski on the 80th Anniversary of his Birth], eds. Małgorzata Janicka-Słysz, Teresa Malecka, Krzysztof Sz wajgier (Kraków, 2001), 589-598.

disciples of authentic masters, they assume the role of continuators of tradition, although they do not perpetuate the tradition in the literal sense, as their background is not rural and their performance takes place out of the context typical for traditional culture. The purists' great merit consists in the fact that, unlike representatives of other trends, they attach considerable attention to triple-time dances, which constitute the most important part of Polish traditional folk music. In this field, the long-standing documentary, educational and artistic activities of the association "The Dance House" in Warsaw are particularly remarkable. Of course, this type of activity, which from the very start was supposed to keep tradition alive, escapes the notion of FOLK music as a phenomenon of popular culture.

2. Another interesting form is the combination of two (or more) clichés, one of which is genuine folk music in authentic performance, while the other(s) is (are) derived from other genres, e.g. jazz, rock or pop. The spectacular success of the highlander folk band Trebunie-Tutki, which presented a surprisingly harmonious fusion of the authentic music from the Podhale region with reggae in a joint project with the Jamaican rastamen band Twinkle Brothers¹⁰, is an example of a successful incorporation of folk tradition into the contemporary global musical scene. The success was possible due to the lowest common denominator shared by the two distant musical traditions, i.e. regular duple meter.

3. Furthermore, there have appeared bands formed by professional musicians with an academic musical background, who perform the authentic folk repertoire in a manner typical for the classical tradition. The performance involves perfect intonation, high-quality (usually custom-built) instruments and – often very sophisticated – arrangements rising above the simplicity of genuine folk performance. Performance styles are characterized by professional habits coupled with imaginary, sometimes grotesque folk elements. Such realizations represent a compromise between tradition and the aesthetic preferences of modern listeners, who still expect performers to "polish up" the raw original. As in the purists' case, the performers place emphasis on bringing out the most archaic characteristics of musical folklore. However, while purists are interested primarily in preserving tradition, professionals seem to be focused on finding interesting and artistically attractive sounds, such as can be found e.g. in narrow-range, pentatonic and modal melodies or additive and free meters.¹¹

¹⁰ *Higher Heights*, produced by Twinkle Music (London, 1992) and Kamahuk (Warszawa, 1993).

¹¹ This approach is exemplified by the band Zespół Polski [Ensemble Polonais], formed in 1994 and headed by Maria Pomianowska, and (although to a limited extent) by the internationally successful band Kapela ze wsi Warszawa [The Warsaw Village Band], formed in 1997.

4. Combining traditional repertoire with the means of expression characteristic of popular music results in works of second-rate artistic value, which nevertheless gain considerable popularity as they suit the unrefined taste of the average listener. Being basically dance music, this category is therefore limited to the duple meter, in accordance with the unwritten laws that govern light music. The trend is quite abundantly represented during the auditions of the “New Tradition” Radio Festival of Folk Music, but fails to win the jurors’ approval.

5. Another trend produces music inspired by folklore, but often considerably transformed in relation to the original, drawing on tradition quite freely and having more characteristics of an independent composition than of a modified source. In this respect, the result approaches artistic music because it frequently uses genuine folk music as a raw material for creating new qualities representing various genres and sometimes possessing high artistic merits.¹²

6. Finally, the last approach is distinguished from all the trends described above by the reversal of transformation: its starting point and raw material is not musical folklore, but the repertoire of artistic music, modified stylistically in the folk vein. As early as the 1990s, the band Zespół Polski reached for “Polish dances” from the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century tablatures, which could be justified by the fact that both repertoires share the same ludic function and aesthetics. The “folk-like” performance of historical dances may preserve little truth about the music of the epoch, but such a convention may be accepted as an attempt to revive old notations using the rules of a tradition we are familiar with nowadays. A much more complex and controversial problem is posed by cases of reaching for the canonical Chopin’s repertoire – the mazurkas, which represent the sublimation of the ideas about what is Polish, national, and most sacred in our culture.

Chopin’s *Mazurkas* are always and inevitably discussed in the context of the composer’s love for his mother country and for Polish folklore, which he not only knew (although not as well as we would like to believe), but also performed, “fiddling” a primitive double bass.¹³ Therefore, the current attempts to perform Cho-

¹² An example of this trend is the band Quadrofonik/Kwadrofonik, which received the Grand Prix at the ninth edition of the “New Tradition” Radio Festival of Folk Music in 2006; the members are professional pianists and percussionists, who currently apply their experience of playing and performing artistic music in experiments in which they make use of transformed genuine recordings of folk music.

¹³ This refers to the frequently quoted description of the harvest festivities (the so-called *okrężne*) in which the young Chopin participated during his holiday in Szafarnia; in a letter to his family dated 26 August 1825, he included the following account: “It was already almost 11pm, when Frycowa brought the double bass, worse than the fiddle and with only one string. Having grabbed the dusty bow, I began playing; I fiddled so hard that everybody gathered around to watch the two Freddie’s, one sleeping on his fiddle, the other sawing

pin's *Mazurkas* in a (more or less) traditional folk style, using the (more or less) traditional folk instrumentarium are in fact an attempt to prove a thesis for which no scholarly evidence can be obtained: that although *Mazurkas* are not a reproduction of the original village dance, they are so steeped in the traditional folk music that they can serve as dance music to folk dancers, provided that the performance is sufficiently raw, in imitation of the village manner of playing. Thus the aim here is not to achieve an artistic effect, which is necessarily diminished compared with the perfection of the original and its typical convention of performance, but to surprise and in a sense provoke the listeners, as well as to recreate the non-existent traditional prototype.

The "folklorisation" of Chopin's *Mazurkas* is possible owing to the characteristic which they share with the most popular group of Polish folk dances: the triple meter, and in particular the triple-meter descendent rhythmic – ranging from the simplest iamb, through *ionicus a minore* (known as "the mazurka formula"), to measures of greater density, representing the polonaise type.

Many scholars emphasize the influence that Chopin's teacher Józef Elsner exerted on the composer's attitude to rhythmic; Elsner, himself keenly interested in rhythm-related issues, was the first to "evaluate Chopin's rhythm, the unique character of which he was able to discern and explain by pointing to its origins in Chopin's 'native country'"¹⁴. Without questioning his role, however, it has to be assumed that the crucial factor was the young composer's above-mentioned personal encounter with the village repertoire of songs and dance music, as well as – if not predominantly – his familiarity with the repertoire played in the manor houses and with the popular repertoire, at the time strongly permeated with the triple meter of the mazurka dance.

A comparison of the rhythmic of Chopin's *Mazurkas* with the rhythmic of folk dances¹⁵ leads to the conclusion that the essential differences between the two repertoires result in large measure from:

1. the specific features of the different means of performance (Chopin's *Mazurkas* were originally intended as piano pieces, whereas folk dances were usually performed on a violin and such are the transcriptions available for analysis);
2. the fact that the two repertoires belong to different layers of culture¹⁶, which results – among other things – in different textures: a simple one in the case of traditional repertoire and a complex one in *Mazurkas*;

away on a dusty, one-string, monochordic double bass". See *Korespondencja Fryderyka Chopina* [The Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin], 1816-1831, eds. Zofia Helman, Zbigniew Skowron, Hanna Wróblewska-Straus, i (Warszawa, 2009), 114.

¹⁴ Demska-Trębacz, *Rytm Chopina* [The rhythm of Chopin] (Warszawa, 1981), 66.

¹⁵ Ewa Dahlig, 'Z badań nad rytmią polskich tańców ludowych: mazurek, kujawiak, chodzony a *Mazurki* Chopina' [On the rhythmic of Polish folk dances: mazurka, kouiaviak, walking-dance and *Mazurkas* by Chopin], *Muzyka* 39/3 (1994), 105-130.

3. a different function.¹⁷ If reduced to the lowest common denominator (e.g. the same instrumentarium) the two repertoires certainly would not have been so divergent.

If we leave the differences of harmonic and melodic patterns out of consideration and focus on rhythm, in Chopin's case we can observe complexity consisting in the employment of a wider range of rhythmic formulas and greater density of impulses within a measure.

The limited reliability of comparative studies into the rhythmic of folk dances and Chopin's *Mazurkas* is a consequence of not only the above-mentioned incompatibility of musical worlds, but also of the fact that the source of folklore inspirations in the composer's oeuvre is clearly vocal, not instrumental. The composer's choice seems understandable considering both the greater availability of vocal repertoire (always more widespread than instrumental) and its potential lyrical charge. Admittedly, traditional dance-music in its most basic layer also stems from vocal repertoire, but its far-going transformation (caused by a combination of – among other things – individual creativity, the performer's technical skills, local musical tradition and the characteristics of the particular instrument) results in its (often quite considerable) remove from the vocal prototype. In the field of rhythm, a direct consequence is the violation of the descendent character of the rhythm¹⁸ by numerous fragmentations.¹⁹

According to Mieczysław Tomaszewski, the rhythmic of *Mazurkas*, drawing on three traditions: folk, popular and artistic, was becoming more and more refined over the years; one of the consequences was the gradual blurring of differences between the various genres of dance-music. The rhythmic content of the mazurka itself was becoming more varied: only isolated pieces feature the "pure" rhythmic qualities of a particular type of folk dance, e.g.

¹⁶ If we adopt Antonina Kłosowska's triple division of culture into the elite, popular and folk layers, Chopin's music obviously belongs to the first one, while traditional folk music – to the third. Antonina Kłosowska, 'Kultura', in Kłosowska (ed.), *Encyklopedia kultury polskiej XX w.*, i [Concepts and problems of knowledge about culture in The Encyclopaedia of Polish culture in the twentieth century, i] (Warszawa, 1991), 42.

¹⁷ "Although Chopin's mazurkas are without words, they are not intended for dancing. It is singing without words, but not without thought or feeling. They are an apotheosis of the mazurkas danced by the nobility. Secondly, they have many features of the *oberek* (Chopin deserves credit for introducing the folk element to the mazurka) and are more an expression of the poet's dream than an accompaniment to words or dance." Karol Czerniawski, *Charakterystyka tańców przez...* [Characteristics of dances by...], (Warszawa, 1847), 58.

¹⁸ I define descendent rhythm as characterized by decreasing density of rhythmic impulses within a measure.

¹⁹ See Ewa Dahlig, *Ludowa gra skrzypcowa w Kieleckiem* [Folk fiddle-playing in the Kielce Region] (Kraków: PWM, 1991) for musical examples.

mazurka (*Mazurka in F major* National Edition 25, *B major* Op. 7, *D flat major* Op. 30), *kujawiak* [kouiaviak] (*Mazurka in F major* Op. 7, No. 57–72, *A minor* Op. 17, *C major* National Edition 47, *A minor* National Edition 59, *F minor* National Edition 65) or *oberek* (the trio of *Mazurka in F major* National Edition 25), whereas most pieces feature a combination of rhythmic patterns typical for at least two dances, e.g. mazurka and *kujawiak* [kouiaviak] (*Mazurka in F major* Op. 7, *B major* and *A minor* Op. 17, *D flat major* Op. 30, *C major* Op. 33, *A flat major* Op. 50), mazurka and *oberek* (*Mazurka in D major* Op. 33 and *F major* National Edition 25), or *kujawiak* [kouiaviak] and *oberek*.²⁰

Since *kujawiaki* [kouiaviaks] are the most lyrical among folk dances, it was this dance that Chopin drew on with particular eagerness; the traces of this preference can be easily identified in his mazurkas, e.g. as juxtapositions of rhythmic structures with opposite contours (ascendant and descendent), as well as lower and upper arch-rhythms.²¹

In comparing the two repertoires, a useful reference can be made to Tomaszewski's division of expression into two types: relaxed and tense.²² The rhythmic typical for relaxed expression is characterized by simplicity, resulting from using rhythmic values that stand in simple relations based on the octave ratio (1:2:4, etc.) or the fifth-fourth ratio (2:3:4). Analyses have revealed that such relations, especially the octave ones, are typical for the folklore repertoire.²³ Tomaszewski compares this type of rhythmic to diatonic melody: just as the "gentle" diatonic is opposed to "sharpened" chromatic, so the "gentle" relaxed rhythmic is opposed to the "sharpened" tense rhythmic. The latter is characterized by the presence of punctuated rhythms, whose accumulation over longer passages leads to particularly strong tensions that do not exist in the traditional repertoire.

In the *Mazurkas* the "folk" rhythms characterized by gentle expression are overridden by the punctuated rhythms of the so-called national mazurka, with its typical "mazurka formula" of a strongly tense expression.²⁴ The "folk" and

²⁰ Mieczysław Tomaszewski, *Chopin. Człowiek, dzieło, rezonans* [Chopin. Man, oeuvre, resonance] (Poznań, 1998), 350–351.

²¹ For definitions and examples see Ewa Dahlig, "Rytmy polskie" w muzyce XVI–XIX wieku. *Studium morfologiczne* ["Polish Rhythms" in the music of sixteenth to nineteenth centuries. A morphological study] (Warszawa, 2006).

²² Tomaszewski, *Chopin*, 280–281.

²³ Dahlig, 'Z badań nad rytmiką'.

²⁴ Particularly strong tensions are created by "obsessive" repetitions of the punctuated formula *ionicus a minore*, a rhythm employed in abundance that is unnatural for the folk instrumental repertoire, but perfectly natural for the "national" mazurka (in its various forms as stage music, dance music or patriotic song), which serves to construct fairly long passages (e.g. *Mazurkas* Op. 33 No. 2, Op. 41 No. 1, Op. 50 No. 2, Op. 56 No. 1–3, Op. 68 No. 2 and 3).

“national” passages complement each other occurring alternately, or overlap (occurring simultaneously in two layers of rhythm), or merge, e.g. by introducing punctuation to the *kujawiak* [kouiaviak] rhythm.

Rhythmic phenomena characterized by tense expression, basically non-existent in folk dancing melodies, make it difficult to adapt Chopin's *Mazurkas* for the needs of FOLK arrangements, which of course limits the number of pieces suitable for this purpose.

Despite the above remarks and reservations, it should be assumed that rhythmicity remains the main factor connecting *Mazurkas* by Chopin with folk dances, in spite of the differences between the genres. Therefore, it might seem that performing the melodic line of a mazurka by Chopin with a pulsation typical for folk dance-music is sufficient to transform the piece into a folk dance and thus prove that it is firmly rooted in Polish folklore.

In fact, the process of adaptation is fairly complex.²⁵ Its stages include:

1. the choice of rhythm, i.e. selecting a mazurka with the longest passages of descendent relaxed rhythmicity;
2. the choice of melody, i.e. selecting passages possibly dominated by the passages of seconds and thirds, without larger intervals;
3. the choice of convention: *oberek* or *kujawiak* [kouiaviak], which later determines the tempo of performance and the type of accompaniment;
4. the elaboration of accompaniment, usually combining typical folk elements of the rhythmicized drone of the drum and the double bass with a harmonic filling (e.g. the violin and/or the dulcimer), which draws on the original harmony of the piece and often contradicts the simplicity of patterns applied by genuine folk ensembles²⁶;
5. completing the composition with elements in the style of contrived “folkishness”, aimed to complement and join the “Chopinist” passages.

Modern listeners, accustomed to the beat of global hits, need works from beyond the circle of pop music to be “translated” into a language they are able to comprehend; music transformed into a version closer to their experience is more digestible and therefore easier to accept. This remark refers to both the authentic folk music and Chopin's work. Musicologists presumably cherish no illusion that the music composed by the bard of the piano has gathered wide popular audience, which can be explained by the fact that schools do not list *Mazurkas* among obligatory “readings”. However, in the form proposed by

²⁵ The author participated in the selection of material for the album *Muzyka nizin* [Music of the plains] by “Zespół Polski” (MTJ 1995) which included, among others, “folklorised” Chopin *Mazurkas* Op. 7 No. 5, Op. 24 No. 1&2, Op. 33 No. 2, Op. 56, Op. 67 No. 1&3, Op. 68 No. 1&2.

²⁶ In the case of the oldest repertoire the harmony of the accompaniment is not correlated with the melodic line at all, whereas in the newer repertoire we have that emergence of thinking in tonal terms, although limited to the chords of the harmonic triad.

Polish FOLK bands these days²⁷, Chopin's *Mazurkas* become attractive to mass audiences *despite* their original authorship, even if elites consider these adaptations a profanation (precisely *because* of the original authorship).

When one ponders over the role that folk music plays (or can potentially play) in the transmission and assimilation of artistic and folklore genres, the ambivalent character of the phenomenon becomes evident. From the perspective of tradition, FOLK music should basically be regarded as a negative development, because it leads to irreversible modifications and changes of awareness and perception, even in the traditional circles, for whom commercial success often becomes an aim justifying the means. On the one hand, it has to be admitted that traditional folk artists benefit from the expansion of FOLK music, because it generates positive attitudes towards authentic music, winning them greater acclaim than ever, which in turn enables them to preserve tradition. On the other hand, some performers paradoxically depart from the authentic material and conform to new circumstances in order to explore commercial opportunities offered by the phonographic market.²⁸

The market responds to the unrefined preferences of the audience and at the same time reinforces them. On the other hand, adherents of FOLK music, exposed to two sources: authentic performers of genuine folk music and the non-authentic interpreters of folk (or folksy) music, become – even if unconsciously – recipients of contents they would probably reject in a different context.

For musicians whose background is not rural, traditional folk music is a rich source of inspiration, drawn either from direct contacts with village performers, or indirectly from published sources, including records.

The quest for rarities which can surprise the listeners leads to such positive trends as the exploration of the rich traditional instrumentarium (including reconstructions of historical instruments²⁹), dances and performance styles, as well as quasi-scholarly interest in folk culture in itself. It is not rare

²⁷ Attempts to arrange Chopin's pieces are made primarily by Maria Pomianowska. Nevertheless, a mazurka has figured incidentally in the repertoire of the band Trebunie-Tutki, but since the triple meter is completely non-existent in the music of the Podhale region, the effect was at best disputable.

²⁸ Clear examples are the band Trebunie-Tutki, collaborating with a reggae group, or the Kurpie singer Apolonia Nowak, who once performed with Jacek Urbaniak's old music band *Ars Nova*.

²⁹ It is the FOLK movement that deserves credit for bringing back to life the instrument known as *suka biłgorajska*, which has puzzled several generations of musicologists and of which better and better reconstructions have been produced (with a modest contribution by the author) to be exhibited in museums. A similar restitution occurred in the case of the reconstructions of the excavated chordophone from Płock, originally produced in the middle of the sixteenth century. Currently, both instruments are played during stage performances by Maria Pomianowska (Zespół Polski) and Sylwia Świątkowska (Kapela ze wsi Warszawa).

nowadays for young amateurs to conduct field research just like ethnomusicologists (albeit with a different aim and methodological background). On the rising tide of interest in FOLK, the archival recordings of traditional Polish music preserved in the unique collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences, which until recently had interested only scholars studying folklore, are now a subject of heightened fascination of the FOLK and “purist” circles. The increased demand has enabled the launching of a phonographic series presenting the most valuable recordings, which document the picture – preserved only in the sources – of Polish musical folklore, vanishing irretrievably forever.

The year 2010 is special: the massive character of the celebrations of the bicentenary of Chopin’s birth, consisting of scholarly and especially cultural events of varying significance, accessibility and value targeted at the entire society, has moved the figure of the great composer from the field of elite culture to the realm of popular culture. If in the 1990s FOLK music served as a vehicle for “selling” Chopin, in 2010 it is Chopin’s persona that “sells” both folk music and FOLK music.³⁰

A second look at the division of culture into three layers: elite (E), popular (P) and folk (F), pinpointing the musical phenomena under discussion under appropriate labels, leads to the discovery of the following complex correspondences:

- F->P – elements of traditional folk music penetrate popular music (example: present-day FOLK music);
- P->F – elements of popular music penetrate folk music (examples: formerly ballads, more recently “Schlagers” that found their way from cities to vilages);

³⁰ An example of an undertaking that united the above-mentioned phenomena, belonging to different layers of culture, was the exhibition *Chopin in Love: Mazovian Inspirations*, organized in the National Museum of Ethnography in Warsaw. According to the organizers, the aim of the exhibition was to “show the connections existing between three elements: Polish folk tradition, Chopin’s music and traditional folk music coming from various corners of the world and featuring motifs that can be found in the works of the Polish composer” [Katalog 2009, 6]. The world of traditional folk music was represented by field recordings from the collections of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences, while the music “from various corners of the world” – by works from the album *Chopin na pięciu kontynentach* [Chopin on Five Continents] (Maria Pomianowska and friends, CM Records) with Pomianowska’s compositions, recorded specially for the occasion; the album was a collection of variations on themes taken from Fryderyk Chopin’s works, e.g. *Chopin na Dzikim Zachodzie* [Chopin in the Wild West] (*Waltz* Op. 64 No. 1, or the *Minute Waltz*), *Chopin w Persji* [Chopin in Persia] (*Prelude* Op. 28 No. 4), *Chopin w Bułgarii* [Chopin in Bulgaria] (*Mazurka* Op. 33 No. 2), *Chopin w Brazylii* [Chopin in Brazil] (*Nocturn in E flat* major Op. 9) and so on, from Andalusia to Siberia, Japan and China.

- E->P – elements of elite music penetrate popular music (examples: formerly opera songs gaining widespread popularity, currently FOLK arrangements of Chopin's *Mazurkas*);
- P, F->E – elements of traditional folk and/or popular music penetrate elite music (example: formerly and currently artistic music inspired by folklore).

Reconciled with the "leakage" of cultural layers and having accepted the inevitability of their convergence, a musicologist who observes the contemporary musical scene is not obliged to welcome the resulting artistic effects with unquestioning acceptance, but can nonetheless notice positive consequences for the field of musical culture he/she studies. A Chopinologist, dismayed at the FOLK arrangements of *Mazurkas* by Chopin, may be pleased to observe the interest in the great composer's oeuvre aroused by those realizations, even if the trend is only temporary and stimulated by a one-off jubilee. An ethnomusicologist who prefers the raw beauty of the authentic folk performance to the professional artistic productions that reduce folk intonation to well temperament, will be delighted by the fact that the acceptance for tradition *in crudo*, which emerged as the result of these productions, saves the tradition from oblivion.

Let us therefore take the combinations of Chopin's work with FOLK music with indulgence, instead of condemning them as a sacrilege.

Translated by Paweł Gruchała

