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## *Moniuszko and Nowowiejski: analogies, contexts and inspirations*

**ABSTRACT:** The music of Stanisław Moniuszko and Feliks Nowowiejski constitutes a crucial element in Polish musical culture. The two composers forged their image on work focussed on national ideas, particularly in their stage works and songs. An important factor shaping their attitudes was the multi-cultural society in which they were raised and their awareness of national identity. Also presented in this article are Nowowiejski's attitude to Moniuszko's music and his presence in the latter's works.

**KEYWORDS:** Stanisław Moniuszko, Feliks Nowowiejski, Polish music of the nineteenth and twentieth century, national opera, song

In 1877, when Feliks Nowowiejski entered the world, Stanisław Moniuszko, who had died five years before, acted in Polish collective memory as a 'musical' national bard – a figure that grew out of the Romantic-era conviction in partitioned Poland of responsibility for the Polish nation, for its existence and its future (Topolska, 2012b). In 1946, when Nowowiejski died, in an age completely alien to Moniuszko, shortly after the Second World War, it seemed that the Polish nation was losing another national bard – the composer of the immortal 'Rota', the unofficial national anthem of Poland, a symbol of the Poles' historical awareness and patriotic attitudes at that time.

Moniuszko and Nowowiejski are significant figures in the landscape of Polish musical culture as composers of Polish songs, operas and other stage works, many of which were termed 'national'.<sup>1</sup> They had a perfect understanding of the need to

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<sup>1</sup> The criterion of nationality in relation to the music of Moniuszko and Nowowiejski grew out of the eighteenth-century concept developed by Johann Gottfried Herder, disseminated in Poland by Kazimierz Brodziński (a distinctive, sentimental and rustic character, national traditions and customs). Also of crucial importance were questions of the artistry, originality and universal recognition of works, which these composers cannot be denied, and also their attitude with regard to the problems of the nation and to the homeland (Chechlińska, 2018; Kisielewski, 1957; Poniatońska, 2005).

It is worth remembering that these two composers both studied in Berlin with outstanding German composers and teachers. Moniuszko trained with Carl Friedrich Rungenhagen in the late 1830s, while Nowowiejski polished his compositional skills with Max Bruch at the Master School for com-

manifest national features in music which, besides aesthetic qualities, displayed equally important social-educational values. The ‘nationalisation’ of music in the output of Polish composers at that time was a widespread phenomenon, of particular significance for strengthening the national awareness of Poles both under the Partitions and during the first years after the regaining of independence.

Moniuszko’s *Halka* and *Straszny dwór* [*The Haunted Manor*], on account of their subject matter, the presence of Polish songs and dances, references to Old Polish traditions and patriotic colouring, represent nineteenth-century national opera, which formed a bulwark of Polish cultural values. These works were written under tsarist censorship (restrictions imposed following the November and January uprisings), ‘in conditions of a particularly stringent extermination policy on the part of a partitioning power aiming to destroy the national identity’ (Dziębowska, 2000, p. 306). Several decades later, the national strand in Polish music was joined by Nowowiejski’s opera *Legenda Bałtyku* [*Legend of the Baltic*], set in a coastal settlement during pagan times (premiere at Poznań opera house in 1924). This work was composed on a wave of patriotic euphoria after Poland regained access to the sea (the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, Poland’s symbolic marriage to the sea, conducted by General Józef Haller in February 1920 in Puck and Władysławowo) (Dulisz, 2018). In a sense, it represented a response to historical events in Poland and the expression of the responsibility assumed by the composer and librettist with regard to their homeland. As we read in a guide to the opera (*Przewodnik operowy „Para”, Legenda Bałtyku, 1924*), ‘For its subject was the battle for the Baltic, for the Polish sea, for that window on the wide world, that key to power and glory, the possession of which is for us a question of existence’. Also worth noting are other stage works by Nowowiejski based on Polish folk motifs (Gmys, 2017, pp. 152–167): the ballet-opera *Malowanki ludowe* [*Folk pictures*], Op. 18, premiered in 1929 at the Poznań opera house as a one-act work added to Moniuszko’s *Verbum Nobile*, and the ballet *Tatry* [*The Tatra Mountains*], Op. 37 (Nowowiejski & Nowowiejski, 1968, p. 138).

Both composers made significant contributions to the development of Polish song, given the number of works (Moniuszko wrote more than 300 songs, Nowowiejski almost 600, including variants for different forces and arrangements of folk and church songs), and the variety of genres and themes. They stood out for their rich, highly inventive melodic writing and their excellent feel for means of expression and for the semantics of the texts. Moniuszko, announcing his first *Śpiewnik domowy* [*Home songbook*] on the pages of the *Tygodnik Petersburski* in 1842, wrote:

I included ‘rural songs’ or ‘rustic songs from the banks of the Neman, convinced that these poetical works displayed the most national character and colour. In addition, I made so bold as to try out a song form that is completely new to us, which in the naïve tale of ‘Dziad i baba’ [An old man and woman] I sought to reveal in a kind of rustic fairy-tale. [...]and that which is national,

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position attached to the Royal Academy of the Arts at the beginning of the twentieth century. Moniuszko and Nowowiejski were also organists, with Nowowiejski even a virtuoso on that instrument, referred to as the ‘Chopin of the organ’.

domestic or local, which is an echo of our childhood memories, will never cease to give pleasure to the inhabitants of the land on which they were born and raised.<sup>2</sup>

Moniuszko's *Home Songbook* was devised to create repertoire for music making in manor houses, townhouses and cottages, and also to popularise Polish poetry, to fortify hearts and sustain the Polish spirit. In a sense, Nowowiejski was an heir and continuator of Moniuszko's idea, especially in the domain of choral music. As the composer's sons (Nowowiejski & Nowowiejski, 1968, p. 82) wrote in their memoirs, 'Moniuszko, Żeleński and Nowowiejski – that would be a line of development to tradition, a distinctive aesthetic current in the history of Romantic and newer Polish music'. Nowowiejski wrote songs for the broad masses of Polish society. Between the wars, when the choral movement was flourishing in Poland, every choir had some works by Nowowiejski in its repertoire. They were both original compositions and arrangements, works of a concert and functional character, of various levels of difficulty. They were dominated by religious, folk (mainly regional!) and patriotic-independence themes. Many of Nowowiejski's songs are infused with the spirit of Moniuszko from *The Haunted Manor*, with the idea of patriotic duty and a readiness to take arms in defence of the homeland. Examples include the works contained in the *Śpiewnik morski* [Sea songbook], Op. 42 for unaccompanied mixed choir, published in 1935 by the Sea and Colonial League, the main aim of which was to develop the country's fleet, marine economy and 'maritime education', with the colonial aspirations of a Polish Republic with ambitions to becoming a global power (incl. 'Młoty Gdyni dzwonią' [The hammers of Gdynia ring out], 'Polska flota wojenna' [The Polish naval fleet], 'Polska bandera' [The Polish flag] and 'Torpeda' [Torpedo]).

The output of Nowowiejski, like that of Moniuszko, to a considerable extent presents a functional model to the existence of Polish music, differentiated with regard to the individual features of composition technique and the conditions of the times. Here is Nowowiejski:

Choral singing has a special mission to fulfil: it lays the foundations beneath the edifice of Polish musical culture. The whole nation should be encouraged to sing, the broadest possible masses should join the ranks of choral societies. May the intelligentsia lead by example in artistic and organisational choral work. May the state and society take the greatest care over the singing campaign. May the societies' artistic progress lead to increasingly valuable musical results, using song to spread forth the glory and might of the Polish Republic (Prejzner, 1936, p. 10).

One cannot overlook the two composers' contribution to the development of Polish religious music, which they wrote throughout their lives. Their works significantly enriched the repertoire of this kind, both in concert music and in functional music. In Moniuszko's oeuvre, we find numerous religious songs, organ settings of church songs, seven masses (including four Polish masses) and also the *4 Litanie ostrobramskie* [4 litanies of the Gate of Dawn] for solo voices, choir and orchestra or piano, the most treasured among his religious works. Nowowiejski's voluminous and varied output (more than 700 compositions) is of

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted after (Jachimecki, 1961, pp. 43–44).

a largely religious character. The biggest group consists of songs and arrangements of church melodies for solo voice, unaccompanied choir or choir and instruments. An important position is occupied by Nowowiejski's monumental oratorios from the early period in his oeuvre, which at the start of the twentieth century made his name in the international arena (incl. *Quo Vadis?* and *Znalezienie św. Krzyża* [Finding the Holy Cross]), nine mass cycles (incl. *Missa Pro Pace* and the *Msza polska „Bogu-Rodzica”* [‘Mother of God’ Polish mass]), as well as his organ works, including pioneering Polish symphonies and concertos for solo organ, inspired by Gregorian plainsong and Polish church song.

An important constitutive element of the creative attitude evidenced by both Moniuszko and Nowowiejski was the multi-cultural character of their native regions. The complicated history of those lands meant that the sense of belonging to a particular nation was not always clear cut. Moniuszko, born in the Russian partition, in Minsk province, felt himself to be a Pole, in his awareness still a citizen of the Commonwealth of Poland–Lithuania, which had not existed in administrative terms since the times of the Partitions. His Polishness is attested above all by his musical output, his attitude towards Poland and what he wrote in his letters. Yet Moniuszko also described himself as a Lithuanian – as Rüdiger Ritter (2008), shows in his research – in the sense of an inhabitant of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and also a Polish-speaking representative of the Vilnius intelligentsia. Examples of works inspired by Lithuanian mythology include the cantatas *Milda* and *Nijola* for solo voices, mixed choir and orchestra, both after Józef Ignacy Kraszewski's *Witolorauda*. Belarusian influences were also of crucial significance in Moniuszko's oeuvre. The composer was linked to that region throughout his life, maintained close contacts with the Belarusian people and drew inspiration from Belarusian culture in his works (the cantata *Widma* [Phantoms], based on part 2 of Adam Mickiewicz's drama *Dziady* [Forefathers' Eve] and the operetta *Sielanka* [Idyll] to a libretto by the Belarusian poet and playwright Wincenty Dunin-Marcinkiewicz), which indicated his need to remain close to and identify with the ethnic group represented by Belarusians at that time.

The historical circumstances of the cultural borderland that was Warmia, where Nowowiejski spent his childhood and early youth, exerted a crucial influence on his life and output. The specific sense of identity among the inhabitants of this region – the Warmians – resulted from the ethnic mixing of the native Prussian population with the Polish and German settlers who came to this territory over the centuries (Szyfer, 1996, 11–15). From the First Partition of Poland, Warmia found itself within the borders of the Prussian state. Nowowiejski grew up during a period of intensifying Kulturkampf policies, designed to achieve the dominance of German culture and to subordinate the Catholic Church to the state. His awareness of belonging to the Polish national community took shape gradually; after all, he was born as a citizen of Prussia and attended German schools. Yet he always felt himself to be a Warmian and repeatedly expressed his attachment to his native land and to his compatriots, as evidenced in his mature output by the numerous settings of Warmian folk songs and dedications. Crucial in this area proved to be Nowowiejski's participation as a musician and lecturer

in the plebiscite concerts of the years 1919–1920 in favour of Warmia, Mazury and Powiśle becoming part of Poland.

Nowowiejski's early works are characterised by elements of Polish-German borderland culture. This is exemplified by his childhood sets of dances for piano, *Reigentänze für die Kleinen*, Op. 1 No. 5 and *Leichte klassische und moderne Tänzen für Klavier zweihändig*, Op. 2 No. 3, which include krakowiaks and mazurs. Among the works which the composer devoted to Slavic themes, highly popular in Germany around the turn of the twentieth century,<sup>3</sup> we find the set of *Zwei polnische Tänze*, Op. 14, a) *Kozak*, Op. 14 No. 1, b) *In der Ukraine*, Op. 14 No. 2 for piano (Berlin: Siegel & Schimmel, 1898),<sup>4</sup> the overture *Swaty polskie / Polnische Brautwerbung* [Polish matchmaking], with elements of the krakowiak and polka (Leipzig: J. Schuberth, 1903), included in the collective edition *Dumka*, Op. 31 No. 1 for organ (Leipzig: Otto June, 1909). Nowowiejski's interest in folklore resulted not only from the current fashion and social demand for works of that kind, but also from the influence of the ideas of national schools, present in music around the turn of the twentieth century.

It is not known when Nowowiejski first encountered the music of Moniuszko, but he certainly came into contact with his works during his studies in Berlin at the beginning of the twentieth century. At that time he worked with Polish choirs in Berlin to propagate Polish songs. Those choirs played a huge role especially in educating young emigrants, since they sustained the spirit of Polishness in exile and turned people's thoughts to the homeland.

Nowowiejski held Moniuszko's works in high regard. He was aware of their significance and the role they played in educating and integrating society around the national idea and patriotic values. Evidence of this can be found in the speech he made at a farewell soirée when he was leaving Berlin, in 1909, to take up the post of director of Cracow Music Society. Here is the account published in the *Dziennik Berliński*:

Mr Feliks Nowowiejski thanked the organisers of the soirée for giving him a farewell which (as he vouched) he would never forget, and having delivered his musical confession of faith, he vowed that he would always strive to work for the good of Polish music, basing his compositional and pedagogic work on traditional song, on the foundations forged for Polish music by Chopin, Moniuszko, Noskowski and Żeleński and by newer musicians who have followed in their wake.<sup>5</sup>

As Nowowiejski's further artistic work came to show, he kept his word. He systematically included Moniuszko's works in the repertoire of the choirs which he conducted. And it was while working on Moniuszko's *Sonetty krymskie* [Crimean sonnets] with the choir of Cracow Conservatory that he met his future

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<sup>3</sup> In his research into the symphonic output of Polish composers who studied in Germany around the turn of the twentieth century, Stefan Keym (2010, p. 278–279) emphasises that there was huge interest in Slavic themes at institutions promoting foreign artists at that time.

<sup>4</sup> Many composers and listeners at that time associated Ukrainian dances with Polish culture, which no doubt resulted from historical references to the times of the Commonwealth of Poland–Lithuania.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted after (Nowowiejski & Nowowiejski, 1968, p. 68).

wife, Elżbieta Mironow-Mirocka (Nowowiejski & Nowowiejski, 1968, p. 19). The composer also arranged works by Moniuszko for choir, and one of his most popular arrangements was ‘Pieśń pokutna (Miserere mei)’. In his *Nowy śpiewnik polski* [New Polish songbook], Op. 40 for mixed choir (Poznań: Księgarnia św. Wojciecha, 1924), aimed at schoolchildren, he included four songs by Moniuszko: ‘Modlitwa w kościółku’ [Prayers in the church] from the opera *Halka*, ‘Piosenka myśliwska’ [Hunting song] from the opera *Hrabina* [*The Countess*], ‘Pieśń poranna (Gdy słońeczko hen, zza góry)’ [Morning song (When the sun there, from beyond the mountains)] and ‘U naszego Pana’ [With our Lord].

The melody of Moniuszko’s Marian hymn ‘Witaj Panno nieustanną czcią’ [Hail, o virgin, with perpetual adoration],<sup>6</sup> traditionally sung during the unveiling of the image of Our Lady of the Gate of Dawn, was used by Nowowiejski in his Concerto, Op. 56 No. 3 for solo organ. That work was written after the year 1937, in which the composer made his only visit to Vilnius. Motifs from the song appear in the outer movements of the concerto. In the opening movement, its presence is signalled by short references to the initial motif. The finale, *Introduzione e variazione*, with the programmatic subtitle ‘Odślonięcie Cudownego Obrazu Matki Boskiej Ostrobramskiej w Wilnie’ [Unveiling of the miraculous image of Our Lady of the Gate of Dawn in Vilnius], consists of four variations played *attacca*, preceded by the presentation of a theme of the character of a solemn bugle call (three trumpets and timpani *ad libitum*). The melody of the song is presented in various ways: from simple harmonisation, through cantus firmus technique and imitation to complex polyphonic structures. It appears in different voices and is tonally modified (Dulisz, 2008, pp. 285–286). In 1929, ‘Witaj Panno nieustanną czcią’ became the official bugle call of Vilnius, replacing Nowowiejski’s ‘Rota’, which had been played in the city during the first decade after Poland’s regaining of independence.

Moniuszko and Nowowiejski enjoyed great public recognition (not always backed by critical favour and acknowledgement). That was expressed in the final farewells given to the two composers, which took the form of national demonstrations by many thousands of people. As many as 60, 80 or even 100,000 Varsovians – according to various sources – attended Moniuszko’s funeral, escorting the composer’s mortal remains to Powązki Cemetery. An account of the event was written several days later in a letter to her daughter by Maria Kalergis, wife of Sergey Mukhanov, president of the Warsaw Government Theatres, who was a great patroness of the composer:

Bishop Baranowski came from Lublin to celebrate the solemn mass, Moniuszko’s *Requiem* was sung, so beautifully and movingly that the artists, who surpassed themselves, cried in rehearsals. The university’s vice-chancellor suspended lectures so that the students could join the cortège of a man who had helped them so much; the young and the old, school pupils, the Music Society, the board of the conservatory, all overcome with emotion, carrying wreaths, led a huge procession, which took four hours to arrive at the cemetery. [...] At Theatre Square, the proces-

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<sup>6</sup> In terms of its melodic-rhythmic structure, this song displays considerable similarity to the eighteenth-century church song ‘Witaj święta i poczęta niepokalanie’ [Hail, o holy and immaculately conceived].

sion halted, and an orchestra played a march composed for the occasion from the most popular motifs from *Halka*. Everyone burst into tears. The bishop, accompanied by 30 priests, walked all the way to the cemetery.<sup>7</sup>

Feliks Nowowiejski was also bidden farewell with the highest state honours. His funeral was organised by the local Citizens' Committee. In Poznań, a period of mourning was declared, the opera house cancelled performances, and the coffin with the composer's body was displayed for three days in the parish church. The funeral cortège numbered thousands of people. Mieczysław Drobner spoke on behalf of the government, and Stefan Bolesław Poradowski in the name of musicians. The crowd bade the composer farewell by singing 'Rota'.

Nowowiejski's final journey was described in *Ruch Muzyczny* by Jerzy Młodziejowski (under the pseudonym Jerzy Korab, 1946, p. 14–15):

Provincial delegations stand separately with their wreaths. There are whole hosts of them! And in the middle of the church, a proud coffin on a catafalque contained the remains of Feliks Nowowiejski, tertiary, papal chamberlain, knight of the Order of the Rebirth of Poland, great musician and the finest man in the world. [...] A red flush around the altar: the Primate has entered, a friend of the defunct. He is serving at the funeral mass. [...] The procession moves towards the Town Hall, damaged in the war, halting there for the principal farewell with the city. [...] and again speeches in order of diplomatic protocol. [...] Finally everyone sings 'Rota' in full voice, for that is the music best known to them all, and the procession moves on [...] towards Poznań's Pantheon of Most Distinguished Citizens.

Nowowiejski, buried in the attire of a papal chamberlain, was laid to rest in the crypt of the Church of St Wojciech, on the 'Poznań Rock', alongside other great servants of Poland and Poznań: Józef Wybicki, Henryk Dąbrowski, Revd Waclaw Gieburowski, Stefan Bolesław Poradowski and Tadeusz Szeligowski.

Moniuszko and Nowowiejski lived at different times and in different historical circumstances. Yet the work of both men displays many features in common: the national and patriotic character of their music, the presence of elements of Polish folklore, the reference to works by Polish Romantic poets. They were marked out by their public spirit, the partly educational character of their output and the edifying mission of their artistic work. Their compositions functioned as supreme values in Polish culture, history and tradition; they aroused widespread enthusiasm among listeners and forged a sense of national identity, also of a regional flavour. Nowowiejski held Moniuszko's work in high esteem and willingly promoted it.

Translated by John Comber

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted after (Topolska, 2012b).

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