

**JAKUB KASPERSKI**

Institute of Musicology, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1495-0421>

# **Sociological and Aesthetic Aspects of Polish Symphonic Hip-hop. The Case of 2015 by Miuosh, Jimek and NOSPR**

**ABSTRACT:** In the middle of the second decade of the 21st century, Polish hip-hop saw a series of projects combining the genre with classical music in various ways: from classical arrangements, through symphonic rearrangements of existing repertoire, to original instrumental works. The author looks at this phenomenon, its genesis and development, focusing mainly on the 2015 project by Miuosh, Jimek and NOSPR, considered the most popular and influential among them. The analysis will be primarily sociomusicological, showing, on the one hand, how the categories of hip-hop and classical music were and are incompatible with each other in terms of social and aesthetic issues (which prevented their previous syntheses), and, on the other hand, how genre-normative listening situations were shaped during public presentations of the work.

**KEYWORDS:** 2015, Miuosh, Jimek, NOSPR, symphonisation, hip-hop, rap, sociology, musicology

## **Introduction**

During the past decade, hip-hop music in Poland has undergone enormous transformations. One of the most important was the generational change and the related conflict between the generation of old-school rappers (also referred to as true school) and new-school rappers, which also had significant implications for the stylistic evolution of this music.<sup>1</sup> The second major transformation was the artistic projects of combining hip-hop music with classical music. In the era of postmodernism, various types of synthesis and hybridisation, tendencies to break genre and stylistic boundaries, should not surprise anyone. Especially as rap has previously been combined with various genres such as pop, soul or

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<sup>1</sup> However, this issue is marginally related to the topic of this article, so it will not be discussed in detail here. Its characteristics can be found, for example, in *Antologia polskiego rapu* [Anthology of Polish rap] in the Interviews section (Cała, Flint, Kleyff, Jaczyński and Węclawek, 2014, pp. 26-56).

rock, with great success.<sup>2</sup> In this case, however, we are dealing with a strongly 'dissonant' combination, with a marriage of apparently completely incompatible repertoire categories, coming from two opposite cultural poles and, in addition, historically burdened with the baggage of social prejudices and barriers.<sup>3</sup>

In this article I would like, firstly, to put in chronological order the successive stages of hip-hop's symphonisation<sup>4</sup> in the world and in Poland,<sup>5</sup> and secondly, to illuminate and systematise the differences between the two components of the synthesis discussed here, referring both to recently published sociological research on the audience of this music, and to the analysis of the aesthetics of both repertoire categories. On the one hand, this is intended to show what kind of social and artistic challenges were faced by artists attempting to combine hip-hop with classical music, and on the other, to answer the question of why such syntheses have not been produced before. In particular, I would like to look at the *2015* project by Miuosh, Jimek and NOSPR, considered by audiences and critics to be one of the most artistically and media successful examples of fusing hip-hop with classical music in Poland. The analysis and interpretation of this case covers musical aspects, (especially the relationship between the original version of the songs and their new, symphonic transformation) as well as the transformation of genre-normative listening situations according to Ola Stockfelt's concept. The text thus generally falls into the field of popular music studies with a dominance of musicological and sociological perspectives.

## Music of two worlds. The social and aesthetic incompatibility of hip-hop and classical music

Referring to the sociological connotations of hip-hop, it is worth recalling that this music originated in the metropolitan African-American ghettos and that at its dawn, i.e. at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, it was mainly asso-

<sup>2</sup> It is significant that the fusion of rap and rock emerged as early as the mid-1980s, essentially in the initial stages of the formation of hip-hop as a genre. Among the most representative examples of this fusion are the debut albums by Run-D.M.C. (1984) and Beastie Boys (1986).

<sup>3</sup> The following section of the text will attempt to characterise hip-hop and classical music. The author is aware that both categories are heterogeneous and internally differentiated, and an attempt to define them always involves strong simplifications. Nevertheless, certain generalisations are necessary here in order to be able to talk about these categories at all and to compare them with each other. This simplification will be apparent in particular with regard to classical music, a much broader and internally more diverse category, as it will be rather society's perception of it through the prism of public institutions such as philharmonics, opera houses or state music schools.

<sup>4</sup> I understand the symphonisation of hip-hop here quite narrowly, as the use within the genre of the performance apparatus of the symphony orchestra and its means of musical expression. In a way, symphonic hip-hop is here an analogy to symphonic (or classical) rock, initiated in the late 1960s and early 1970s, although the latter genre in its rich tradition was a much broader phenomenon, going beyond the use of classical instrumentation. See for example Rychlewski (2011), pp. 99–104 and 123–129.

<sup>5</sup> This topic has not been systematically discussed in academic works so far with the exception of a few contributions. The *2015* project in the context of the marriage of rap and high culture was looked at in Natalia Giemza's article (2017). Besides, Aleksander Rudawski devoted his Bachelor thesis to a concert by Gabriel Prokofiev, the pioneer of symphonic hip-hop (Rudawski, 2012).

ciated with socially excluded groups for racial and class reasons. Moreover, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the gangsta rap trend became mainstream in American hip-hop, it became associated with the criminal world of gangs.<sup>6</sup> Similar associations<sup>7</sup> occurred in Poland at the turn of the century, when rap had established itself on the national scene. At the time, rap was associated with male youths living in big-city tower blocks or poor, neglected workers' districts (e.g. Bogucice in Katowice – Kaliber 44 and Paktofonika, Bałuty in Łódź – O.S.T.R., Jeżyce in Poznań – Peja and Slums Attack, Ursynów in Warsaw – Pezet and Molesta, Piątkowo in Poznań – Paluch, etc.). The label of 'music from the blocks' was attached to rap thanks to popular documentaries from this period, e.g. *Blokersi* (2001) directed by Sylwester Latkowski or the two-episode film *Mówią Bloki, Człowieku [Tower blocks speak, mate]* (2000 and 2001) by Joanna Rechnio. However, to say that rap is exclusively the music of the metropolitan working class or the excluded would be a major misnomer, as the community of creators and consumers of this music is too heterogeneous in terms of social stratification. It is worth mentioning here, for example, famous rappers coming from intelligentsia families or so-called rich or 'good' homes, such as Tede, donGURALesko, O.S.T.R., Fisz, Joka and AbradAb, Sokół, Ten Typ Mes, etc. However, as Karol Kurnicki notes in his study on rap, the class identification of Polish hip-hop artists is 'quite significant', and 'class references appear relatively often' in their work, although they are not articulated directly.<sup>8</sup> For it is worth recalling that poverty, exclusion, marginalisation and problems with the law have been the subject of many classic rap compositions, such as: *Osiedlowe akcje [Housing estate events]* (1998) by Molesta, *Cokolwiek [Anything]* (1998) by DJ 600V, *Glucha noc [Dead of night]* (2001), *Reprezentuję biedę [I represent poverty]* (2005), *Szacunek ludzi ulicy [Respect for street people]* (2006) by Peja and Slums Attack, *Blok* (2003) by O.S.T.R., *Nagapilem się [I gaped my fill]* (2010) by Pezet and Malolat (guest. Małpa), *Raport z rejonu [Report from the district]* (2014), *Innego życia nie znam [I know no other life]* (2014) by Chada and many others. In most cases, the world depicted in the songs was the rappers' authentic experiences, not literary fiction.

The perception of hip-hop discussed here is far from stereotypical. This is confirmed, for example, by sociological surveys conducted in Poland in 2009, 2018 and 2019, showing that rap is, rather, the music of less educated people (cf. Graph 1)<sup>9</sup> and that the audience is dominated by young men coming from families with

<sup>6</sup> In the Polish-language literature, these issues are discussed in detail by Z. M. Kowalewski (2020), among others.

<sup>7</sup> Not counting racial issues, because of racial, ethnic and cultural homogeneity of Polish society after the Second World War.

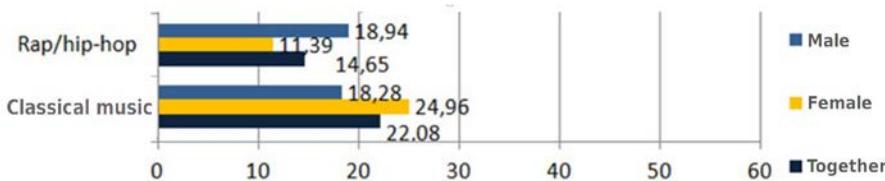
<sup>8</sup> Karol Kurnicki in his study argues rather for an identity stemming from a shared 'experience of urbanity', and – if we already refer to class categories – the author tends to lean towards the rappers' belonging to the 'working class' (Pol. 'klasa ludowa') (Cf. Kurnicki, 2014, pp. 148–149).

<sup>9</sup> However, it should be taken into account that hip-hop is currently the most popular music among teenagers and it is this audience group that underestimates the overall average education of hip-hop listeners here (teenagers cannot have a university education). Besides, more recent CBOS surveys from 2018 do not show such a close relationship between preference for rap and education (Feliksiaik, 2018, pp. 8–9).

less cultural capital<sup>10</sup> and also living in small and medium-sized towns and the countryside, while in metropolises they are less numerous (cf. Graph 2, 3 and 4).



Graph 1. Comparison of music preferences according to GUS (2009) by education: rap/hip-hop and classical music (Kalinowski, Łysoń, Radkowski, Wawrzyniak, 2012).



Graph 2. Comparison of musical preferences according to GUS (2009) by gender: rap/hip-hop and classical music (Kalinowski et alli, 2012)

| Cechy społeczno-demograficzne | Jakiego typu muzykę, jaki gatunek muzyczny lubi Pan(i) najbardziej?* |            |      |                |                      |      |         |       |
|-------------------------------|--|------------|------|----------------|----------------------|------|---------|-------|
|                               | Pop  | Disco polo | Rock | Muzyka poważna | Muzyka elektroniczna | Jazz | Hip-hop | Retro |
| Ogółem                        | 29   | 20         | 17   | 12             | 7                    | 5    | 5       | 6     |
| Płeć                          |  |            |      | w процenbach   |                      |      |         |       |
| Mężczyźni                     | 23   | 19         | 19   | 9              | 10                   | 4    | 7       | 5     |
| Kobiety                       | 31   | 20         | 14   | 13             | 3                    | 5    | 2       | 7     |
| Wiek                          |  |            |      |                |                      |      |         |       |
| 18–24 lata                    | 25   | 13         | 23   | 5              | 13                   | 6    | 17      | 0     |
| 25–34                         | 37   | 17         | 25   | 6              | 14                   | 6    | 13      | 2     |
| 35–44                         | 30   | 21         | 24   | 8              | 8                    | 4    | 3       | 0     |
| 45–54                         | 26   | 24         | 20   | 12             | 6                    | 3    | 0       | 4     |
| 55–64                         | 26   | 21         | 8    | 12             | 2                    | 6    | 1       | 12    |
| 65 lat i więcej               | 19   | 18         | 3    | 19             | 1                    | 1    | 0       | 13    |
| Miejsce zamieszkania          |  |            |      |                |                      |      |         |       |
| Wieś                          | 24   | 27         | 13   | 4              | 7                    | 1    | 4       | 6     |
| Miasto do 19 999              | 27   | 20         | 21   | 14             | 6                    | 3    | 8       | 2     |
| 20 000 – 99 999               | 29   | 12         | 16   | 15             | 7                    | 5    | 5       | 6     |
| 100 000 – 499 999             | 32   | 19         | 13   | 14             | 5                    | 9    | 4       | 7     |
| 500 000 i więcej mieszkańców  | 30   | 6          | 32   | 26             | 9                    | 10   | 1       | 8     |
| Wykształcenie                 |  |            |      |                |                      |      |         |       |
| Podstawowe/gimnazjalne        | 15   | 30         | 7    | 5              | 5                    | 0    | 4       | 9     |
| Zasadnicze zawodowe           | 18   | 32         | 7    | 4              | 2                    | 0    | 2       | 5     |
| Średnie                       | 30   | 16         | 19   | 13             | 11                   | 4    | 6       | 6     |
| Wyższe                        | 42   | 4          | 29   | 20             | 7                    | 11   | 5       | 4     |

Graph 3. Socio-demographic characteristics and musical preferences of Poles. Based on CBOS research release no. 120/2018 'Listening to music' (Feliksak, 2018)

<sup>10</sup> The measure of cultural capital here is the higher education of the parents (cf. Graph 4).

### Parental education and the musical genres listened

| musical genres       | Higher education |        |
|----------------------|------------------|--------|
|                      | Mother           | Father |
| rock                 | 45%              | 35%    |
| muzyka elektroniczna | 37%              | 28%    |
| pop                  | 36%              | 26%    |
| dance                | 31%              | 24%    |
| rap, hip-hop         | 30%              | 22%    |
| disco polo           | 23%              | 14%    |

NCK/IQS 2018 (N = 2069)

Graph 4. Parental education and the musical genres listened to by Polish youth.  
Based on the 2019 NCK report (Kukołowicz, 2019)

While characterising hip-hop in socio-economic terms, it should be noted that it is currently one of the most popular music genres listened to by Polish youth – one can even safely say that it is simply contemporary youth music.<sup>11</sup> What is more, rap is the music most frequently consumed on the Internet. This is reflected in record numbers of views on the most popular streaming services, such as YouTube or Spotify.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, it should be emphasised that for young people it is the Internet and the aforementioned services that have been the dominant source of music consumption in recent years, while consumption

<sup>11</sup> Research conducted in late 2013 and early 2014 indicated that hip-hop was the most listened to music in the 15–30 age group only after rock and pop (Białkowski, Migut, Socha, Wyrzykowska, 2014, p. 57). On the other hand, NCK research from recent years (2019 and 2021), showed that hip-hop is currently the most popular music genre among teenagers, next to pop (Kukołowicz, 2019 and NCK, 2021).

<sup>12</sup> Of the most listened to tracks on Spotify over the past decade, Polish hip-hop takes the top nine spots. Cf. Open.spotify.com, 2023. Meanwhile, on the YouTube platform, of the 50 Polish music videos with the highest number of views, 20 are hip-hop songs. Cf. @AlterEgoPolska (n.d.).

via physical media (e.g. CDs) and traditional media such as radio or television is becoming increasingly marginal (CBOS News, 2018). Thus, digital media are the main trend setter in Polish youth music.

This extraordinary popularity among young people also translates into record sales, as hip-hop was statistically the most popular music genre among Poles in the last decade,<sup>13</sup> and some of the top rappers of that period (e.g. Taco Hemingway, Quebonafide, Paluch, Kekę, O.S.T.R., Miuosh) can boast total album sales of half a million copies, which is a staggering figure for the Polish music market in the 21st century. These results – which is worth emphasising – were often achieved despite scant presence in official, mainstream media.

On the other hand, when it comes to social issues in relation to classical music audiences, the aforementioned studies show that this music is at the opposite end of the spectrum in Poland. It is generally associated with social prestige – it is most often listened to by middle-aged and older people, with higher education and from major cities (see Graph. 1, 2 and 3, M. Feliksiak, 2018; P. Kalinowski et al., 2012), and thus implicitly by people with the highest cultural and material capital. Women are also slightly more likely to prefer it. Despite the presentation of this music on several specialised radio channels (Programme Two of the Polish Radio, Polish Radio Chopin or Classic FM), it is just as rarely featured as hip-hop in mainstream media. Classical music, however, does not manage to achieve commercial success analogous to rap, which is mainly due to its low popularity among young people. It is difficult to find releases from this repertoire category on OLiS lists<sup>14</sup>, and musical works are not among the most consumed compositions on streaming platforms. This music constitutes only a small margin of the revenues of the entire music industry in the country. As ZPAV data from the last few years show, sales of classical music oscillate around 3–5 % of all music sales in Poland (ZPAV, 2015–2024).<sup>15</sup>

To be even more aware of the differences between hip-hop and classical music, it is also worth highlighting the axiological and aesthetic aspects to which these repertoire categories refer. Hip-hop is first and foremost a music of the 'here and now', that tends not to aspire to creating universal messages. Rap very accurately captures the experience of the moment. It is even a kind of musical postcard, describing in detail a micro-space, often limited to a neighbourhood, a housing estate, a staircase or a housing estate bench, or even a flat. As far as the social world depicted is concerned, it is local in character – usually the songs revolve around the neighbourhood community, a group of friends from the yard ('ziomek' – buddy, pal), a family. Personal experience and subjectivity play an important role. If there are wider social references, these tend to be generational, often based on confrontation with other generations (especially parents, and more recently older rappers). The world is seen through the eyes of the rapping subject and his or her immediate environment, and is primarily concerned with the everyday life

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<sup>13</sup> This is evident in the annual OLiS charts, where the dominance of hip-hop records is gradually increasing. Cf. Noizz, 2020.

<sup>14</sup> OLiS charts shows records' sales in Poland.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. annual sales reports of ZPAV: <http://zpa.vpl/informacje/prasowe.php> [access: 22.05.2023].

of young people: peer experience, consumerism, fashion, pop culture, urbanity, hip-hop itself, etc. Local reality is almost sensorially recorded using vernacular language, based mainly on youth slang, colloquialisms, acronyms or metaphors understandable only to a given micro-world (Kurnicki, 2014). There is also no shortage of blunt vulgarisms, which is often a reason for the general public's aversion to this music, and is also a barrier to its presentation in the official mass media. However, the language of hip-hop, which should be emphasised, is shaped in an extremely original and creative way, both phonetically, semantically and graphically, which is demonstrated even by the names of rappers or hip-hop groups, such as Jajonasz, AbradAb, Fisz, O.S.T.R., DonGURALesko, Peel Motyff, Warszafski Deszcz, 52 Dębiec, Wzgórze Ya-Pa-3, etc., or even by the titles of some songs: *Czujee się lepiej* (1994) Trials X, *W góre rence* (2001) Intoksynator, *Wychylybymy* (2003) DJ 600V, *Niebanglasz* (2013) Tede, *Trze'abył* (2014) Ten TypMes, etc. They are all mixture of Polish and English spelling, official and slung language, play with numbers, lowercase and capitals etc. Due to the strong emphasis on the lyrics and its phonographic and stage articulation, one could risk a thesis that in hip-hop music the literary code is more important than the musical one, and in general its attractiveness is based on this code.<sup>16</sup>

Classical music, on the other hand, usually strives for universalism, timelessness, often refers to the heritage of past eras, recognised canons of art and tradition, sacral aspects, and deals with current affairs to a small extent. It is not socially engaged art, on the contrary – it abstracts from these issues, or even, as some claim, it is 'detached from reality', 'devoid of connections with life'.<sup>17</sup> Pierre Bourdieu (1996, p. 19) even claimed that it:

'is the 'pure' art par excellence. It says nothing and has nothing to say. (...) Music represents the most radical and most absolute form of the negation of the world, and especially the social world (...)'.

If we refer to the purely musical layer, hip-hop favours collage, plunderphonics and musical recycling (processing of recordings by other authors), as well as repetition (repetitive percussion beats, looped samples from existing music), although within the musically schematic stanzas and refrains, there is a rich variation of patterns (e.g. by means of scratch, added tracks or additional samples). Due to its strong links with the African-American music tradition of the 1970s, particularly dance funk, the most important and primary musical element is rhythm and the associated groove and flow, while melodic and harmonic aspects are marginalised, to the extent that even refrains are not usually sung but rapped (Kukołowicz, 2014, p. 21–38).

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<sup>16</sup> On values, the link between hip-hop and lifestyle and the content dominating selected texts of Polish street rap, see Lutostański, 2015, pp. 93–121. Interesting reflections on the literariness of rap have recently been undertaken by Mastalski, 2014, pp. 105–123 and Florczyk, 2020.

<sup>17</sup> This is how conceptualist Henry A. Flynt, among others, was to speak about contemporary avant-garde music. Cf. Dariusz Brzostek, 2004, pp. 33–36. However, the origins of such thinking come from *Critique of the Power of Judgment* by Kant (2000).

By contrast, classical music's core values include an emphasis on originality and an avoidance of repetition (not counting minimalist trends). Leaving aside opera and much sacred music, to which symphonic hip-hop does not refer, classical music is mainly purely instrumental, of which autonomous music plays a huge role, devoid of explicitly declared extra-musical meanings, but instead being a 'direct expression of emotion'. In music of a programmatic nature, on the other hand, extra-musical content is veiled by its ambiguity. These features can be seen in particular in the philharmonic repertoire, which is based mainly on classical-romantic works, while marginalising so-called 'contemporary music'. In the philharmonic repertoire constructed in this way, melodic-harmonic and colouristic qualities come to the fore, as well as the question of shaping a unique form (Cf. Cook, 1998, pp. 19–38).

To conclude this part of the discussion, it should be emphasised that hip-hop, in relation to classical music, is at a kind of antipodes. It can be said to be its opposite, both in terms of social aspects (education, gender, age, class, place of residence, origin), cultural and economic aspects (grassroots, commercial street culture vs. official, mainly publicly funded culture), fields of meaning (vernacular and localism vs universalism), but also if we consider the purely musical aspects – in hip-hop, music is primarily a vehicle for words and rhythm is the most important thing, in philharmonic classical music the musical code can be treated autonomously and the melodic-harmonic aspects, colour and form are considered its greatest assets.

### Symphonic hip-hop – historical overview of the phenomenon

The fusion of rap with classical music is a relatively new phenomenon that only began to develop in the second half of the first decade of the 21st century. If one were to look at historically earlier hybrids of other popular music genres with symphonic sounds, it turns out that these syntheses occurred relatively quickly, almost immediately after the genre was established and conventionalised.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, hip-hop, which emerged – as we remember – at the end of the 1970s, had to wait almost three decades for such experiments. This situation is explained by the diametrical genre differences of an aesthetic, social and economic nature I outlined above, situating the two repertoire categories at opposite poles. Let us note, however, that in countries not as ethnically homogeneous as Poland, and with greater social inequalities, class and racial aspects constituted an even more important, additional barrier to such syntheses. Perhaps this is why in Poland – as will be discussed further on – symphonic hip-hop has been so well accepted and developed.

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<sup>18</sup> Applying the nomenclature of Jennifer C. Lena, a researcher specialising in the emergence, transformation and viability of musical genres, this moment would have to be considered the 'industrial grounding stage' (industry-based) of the aforementioned genres. Cf. Lena, 2014, pp. 1–22.

As far as the history of symphonic hip-hop in the world is concerned, the pioneer of this direction should be considered the British composer Gabriel Prokofiev (grandson of famous Sergei Prokofiev himself), who at the beginning of the 21st century began to experiment musically, combining the sounds of the turntablist set (turntables and mixer) with classical instruments. It is worth noting here that Prokofiev graduated in music from the University of Birmingham and York, but disillusioned by the hermetic world of contemporary classical music, he turned to popular music, developing a parallel career as a DJ, creator and producer of dance, grime, electro or hip-hop music. In particular, his output included a number of tracks using hip-hop scratching. The first of these was the chamber piece *Three Dances for String Trio, Bass Clarinet, Piano & Scratch DJ* from 2004, and soon afterwards the composer began working on larger, orchestral forms. Of particular note here are three concertos using a turntablist set. The first and most famous of these was the 2006 *Concerto for Turntables & Orchestra*. It enjoyed a rich reception especially after its performance at the famous *BBC Proms* in 2011. The event was broadcast in the media and on the Internet, and was closely covered in the British music press. The work was later recorded and released by the composer's label, Nonclassical. In 2014 Prokofiev in turn composed *Concerto for Trumpet, Percussion, Turntables and Orchestra* and two years later *Concerto for Turntables & Orchestra No. 2* (Prokofiev, n.d.). In these concertos, virtuosic turntablist techniques used in hip-hop are harnessed within the framework of traditional multi-movement forms drawn from classical music, such as the solo concerto or the concertante symphony. These works are generally part of the postmodern trend due to their polystylistism and rich fields of references and allusions, including baroque music, the neo-classicism of Igor Stravinsky and Béla Bartók, sonorism, ad libitum improvisation and happening, as well as the use of club dance music rhythms (house, reggaeton, grime or disco) (Rudawski, 2012).

Polish achievements in fusing hip-hop with classical music are not that far removed in time from Prokofiev's achievements, as they date from late 2014 and early 2015. Interestingly – several of them appeared simultaneously. Among the pioneers of this type of synthesis is Pawbeats, or Marcin Pawłowski (born 1990) – a Bydgoszcz-based music producer, multi-instrumentalist and composer. On his debut producer album *Utopia* from 2014, to which he invited leading Polish rappers, he made a musical experiment by producing rap not only on backing tracks composed of electronic samples or loops, but from recordings of live acoustic instruments: piano, violin, cello, double bass, viola, drums, accordion, guitars, trumpet and others. The classical instrumentation was an interesting novelty here, but it did not automatically make the compositions classifiable as 'classical music' due to the album's great stylistic diversity – from pop and jazz songs to drum'n'bass or even psychedelic compositions. The album was successful, debuting at number two on the OLiS chart, and two years later it achieved 'golden record' status. The most popular songs *Euphoria* and *Widnokrąg* received multi-million views on YouTube. On the wave of his success, in 2015 the artist began preparations for a new project called '*Pawbeats Orchestra*', consisting of several integral parts: an album, a series of concerts and the final recording of the project

on DVD. Invited to join him were rappers selected by the author, such as Dwa Sławy, Sarcast, VNM, KęKę, Kali, Tau or Mr. J. Medeiros, pop singers Natalia Nykiel and Justyna Steczkowska, as well as the Silesian Brass Quartet and the Opera Nova Orchestra. The premiere of the album took place in February 2016, and the culmination of the whole project was the concerts on 5 and 6 March 2016 at the Pomeranian Philharmonic in Bydgoszcz, where the invited musicians performed with the symphony orchestra under the direction of Marcin Pawłowski and Krzysztof Herdzin (Kancarek, 2015).

Around the same time, in late 2014 and early 2015, a slightly different approach to the synthesis of symphonic music and hip-hop was proposed by a young (born 1990), classically trained pianist and DJ from Toruń, Kacper Nowak, performing under the stage name Steve Nash. He was the originator and main author of an artistic project called '*Steve Nash & Turntable Orchestra*', the aim of which was to write and publicly perform a work for symphonic orchestra and a group of turntablists. The idea of symphonic instrumental hip-hop clearly developed Prokofiev's concepts. The final piece created by Nash was entitled *Composition for piano, 9 turntables and string orchestra*. The best Polish masters played on the turntablist sets: DJ Ben, DJ Chmielik, Falcon 1, DJ Funktion, DJ Haem, DJ Krótki, DJ Paco, DJ Stosunkowodobry, DJ VaZee, and the Toruń Symphony Orchestra conducted by Łukasz Wódecki-Meyger. The project initially assumed only an experimental performance, but eventually the initiative became a series of concerts, including prestigious festivals, and resulted in a documentary film with an eponymous title, recording the process of creating the work and the concert, which took place in Toruń's Artus Court in 2015 (Drozdowicz-Prime Vision, 2017). What's more, the aftermath of the project also resulted in an album entitled *Out of Fade*, released two years later by Polish Radio and awarded with the Music Award of the Third Programme – 'Mateusz' 2017 in the category debut of pop music (Wpolityce.pl, 2017).

Another highly important project, which I would like to take a closer look at, was the collaboration between the young film music composer Jimek (Radzimir Dębski) and the Katowice-based rapper Miuosh (Miłosz Borycki). Radzimir Dębski (born 1987) comes from a musical family of merit to Polish culture – he is the son of Krzesimir Dębski (the famous jazzman and classically trained composer of film and television music) and Anna Jurksztowicz (singer). As a child, he studied violin and percussion in music schools, and later – after some interruption – piano and music production, which stemmed from his personal passion for hip-hop. He graduated in composition from the Fryderyk Chopin University of Music in Warsaw and in orchestral and film music from the University of California in Los Angeles. With the help of his father, he began successfully writing film and television music as a teenager. However, in the Polish popular music world his greatest fame came when he produced the music to the hit song of the Warsaw rapper Pezet *Nie muszę wracać [I don't have to come back]* (2012), but international recognition appeared when he won a competition for a remix of the song *End Of Time* by the American singer Beyoncé (Jimek & NOSPR & Miuosh, 2015).

Miouch (born 1986), although he was only a 29-year-old rapper at the time, could boast a five-record output and already enjoyed considerable recognition in the hip-hop community in Poland, especially in the Upper Silesia region (Jimek et alii, 2015).

The main idea of the joint project was to arrange Miouch's songs for a large symphony orchestra and present them live. And the famous NOSPR (The Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra in Katowice) itself was to take part. The then director of the NOSPR, Joanna Wnuk-Nazarow, was initially rather sceptical about the project, but the circumstances surrounding the celebrations of the 150th anniversary of Katowice, the celebration of the NOSPR's new seat and the fact that the building is located in the Bogucice district, which is the cradle of Silesian rap, overcame her initial resistance. (Jimek et alii, 2015).

It seems that the artist with the most difficult task was Jimek, as it was mainly the quality of his arrangements and his leading of the orchestra as conductor that were to determine the success or failure of the entire project. The final results of the work could be heard at the NOSPR headquarters during two concerts on 6 and 7 March 2015 (Dąbrowski 2015; Potocki 2015).<sup>19</sup> A film recording of the concerts was also made on the occasion. Shortly afterwards, in June of the same year, a double album Jimek x NOSPR x Miouch was released under the title *2015*, which contained both a 'live' CD with the tracks recorded during the event, as well as a DVD with fragments of the concert and a documentary film showing the behind-the-scenes of the entire project. Some of this material was also later made available on YouTube (Dąbrowski 2015; Potocki 2015).

The entire project proved to be an artistic, media and commercial success. The Jimek x NOSPR x Miouch concerts received the title 'Event of the Year 2015' of Programme Three of the Polish Radio, nominations for Radio RMF Classic's MocArt and EMPiK's Bestsellers, as well as many other industry awards (polskaplyta-polskamuzyka.pl, 2020). The album '*2015*' achieved Gold Record status in mid-August and in December it was decided to repeat the concert (Potocki, 2015).

### *2015* by Miouch, Jimek and NOSPR – analysis of selected musical aspects

Jimek's *Hip Hop History Orchestrated by JIMEK*, a composition posted on YouTube and performed as an encore during the concert, received particularly high media attention. It is a medley consisting of thirty fragments of hip-hop productions arranged for a large symphony orchestra, which – according to Radzimir Dębski's subjective assessment – are an important part of the history of the genre. The release of the video resonated not only in the country, but worldwide. The video soon received several million views, as it was widely

<sup>19</sup> The media reported record interest in the event, that all tickets scheduled for the concerts were sold within minutes, and that the box office servers were overloaded and crashed (Dąbrowski, 2015; Potocki, 2015).

shared on social media channels, mentioned in media reports in many countries, and some well-known foreign artists, such as M.O.P., Nicki Minaj, Pharoahe Monch or Prodigy, commented on Dębski's arrangement with great appreciation (Potocki, 2015).

It is worth pausing over this track for a moment. Firstly, medley as a form fits into the aesthetic of the collage so typical of hip-hop. Secondly, the kaleidoscopically changing melodies of the greatest hits were, for rap fans, an extremely interesting and engaging entertainment, appealing to their memory and subcultural capital (*vide* the spontaneous reactions of the audience recorded on the recordings). The value of Jimek's compositions does not lie, of course, in the systematisation of the history of hip-hop. The fundamental value here lies primarily in the pioneering symphonisation of hip-hop, as well as in the approach to instrumentation, which is not an attempt at a literal 'calque' of a studio recording, but rather demonstrates the symphonic potential of a given sample or musical production. And although Jimek showed much more creative invention and originality in his arrangements of Miouch's pieces, this composition too, in many passages, attests to Debski's excellent orchestral skills and colourful sensitivity. It must be admitted that many of the hip-hop hit excerpts chosen by Jimek for his production were already originally quasi-symphonic in nature (use of string orchestra, orchestral samples, or synth imitations of symphonic sounds), which significantly facilitated the composer's task (e.g. Kendrick Lamar's *Swimming Pools*, Wiz Khalifa's *Black and Yellow*, Kanye West's *Flashing Lights*, 50 Cent's *In Da Club*, etc.). In some cases, non-European instruments, synthetic or studio-manipulated sounds seemed untranslatable to a symphony orchestra, e.g. in *Get Your Freak On* by Missy Elliott, *Drop It Like Its Hot* by Snoop Dogg or *Harlem Shake* by Baauer. Jimek occasionally enriched the harmonic (additional voices) and colour layers by adding new instruments or introducing interesting substitutions, e.g. in Kendrick Lamar's *Swimming Pools* (harp and vibraphones instead of hi-hat, timpani instead of bass drum) or Missy Elliott's *Get Your Freak On* (vibraphone and drum kit instead of tumbi and tabla). Often, there was also significant dramatisation through increased volume, density of texture, use of extreme registers and the addition of brass instruments, such as on M.I.A.'s *Bad Girls*, M.O.P.'s *Ante Up* or Wu-Tang Clan's *C.R.E.A.M.* But also the reverse, such as cameralisation of the sound, such as on 2Pac's *Dear Mama* by muting the dynamics and using *pizzicato* strings.

As for Miouch's song arrangements, on the other hand, the rapper commented just before their joint performances as follows:

(...) what Jimek did with my material exceeded any expectations. He destroyed me. Some numbers sound like theatrical performances. And yet I've only heard them in the digital version. When they will be played by 70 people, it's going to be powerful (Potocki, 2015).

A very important idea guiding the artists, who openly admitted that they felt the odium of participating in a unique and historic undertaking on themselves, was the complete abandonment of sounds and instruments typical of hip-hop. So there is no scratching DJ presenting samples and drum beats from a pad

or laptop, no bass guitar or synthesisers. For it was about a real and complete symphonisation of rap, in which the sonic possibilities of the symphony orchestra are exposed, while at the same time showing its potential to adapt under the conditions of a new, unprecedented musical hybrid. Jimek himself put it this way in one of his live interviews:

There's not a gram of electronics in there, not even a bass guitar (...). It's practically a concert symphony, which means the whole band is a soloist. They are the most important thing. (...) Everything is written in the notes (CGM.PL, 2015).

Miuosh, meanwhile, added during the same interview:

Jimek did everything anew, we completely changed the convention of these numbers (...). I had a chance to rap my numbers in a simply unique way, not reheating a chop (...). It's not about pulling out a symphony orchestra, adding to an existing band and playing under the band, it's just pushing the rapper into the symphony. And that's the challenge (CGM.PL, 2015).

Analysing the selected compositions, one can say that Jimek in his arrangements avoids simple copying and schematic translation of the sounds of original productions from Miuosh's oeuvre into the language of the orchestra. Sometimes the originals are only a kind of stylistic or aesthetic inspiration for Dębski (e.g. psychedelia in *Corona*, soul and funk in *Reprezent*), but more often a song is completely recomposed – written anew. However, it does not violate the form of the song, the framework of which is essentially set by Miuosh's arrangements of stanzas and refrains, but it does change the arrangement's musical content. Moreover, Jimek does not fundamentally aim to change the meanings contained in the lyrics of the songs and their interpretations to date, but rather welds and reinforces the existing verbal and musical message. What is more, it is safe to say that the artists' goal was fully realised, namely the symphony orchestra was presented as a fully-fledged and, what is more, attractive instrument in hip-hop music, as an extremely plastic material capable of adapting to ever new artistic challenges. But hip-hop itself as a musical genre has also efficiently adapted to this new, symphonised context.

### Project 2015 from the perspective of genre-normative listening situations

An important result of combining disparate musical categories is also the transgressive aspects of the projects discussed, related to the breaking down of genre barriers that are contained in the social conventions of performative practices. It is worth referring here to the concept of genre-normative listening situations and modes of listening, by the Swedish music theorist Ola Stockfelt. According to it, a musical genre is defined not only by the works, but also by the socially sanctioned situations and modes of its presentation and reception – a certain 'ideal relation between music and listener that were presumed in the forma-

tion of the musical style – in the composing, the arranging, the performance, the programming of the music' (Stockfeld, 2007, 91).

Miouch and Jimek's performance took place – as already mentioned – in the prestigious concert hall of the National Polish Radio Symphony Orchestra, which had opened just a few months earlier. However, unlike typical philharmonic concerts, during this event, the artists activated the audience to co-perform the music, for example by chanting the lyrics together with the rapper (e.g. in *Reprezent*), singing along (e.g. *O mój Śląsku...*), encouraging the audience to get up from their seats, dance, participate in a shouted dialogue (e.g. *Dowód*) or clap out the rhythm (e.g. *Nie mamy skrzydeł*). These situations, with few exceptions, are completely alien to philharmonic concerts, where 'adequate listening' is required, as Stockfelt calls it, in this case, 'autonomous and reflective' reception, full concentration, activating the mind but excluding the body from the process (Stockfelt, 2017, p. 91–92). For the genre-normative situation of listening to classical music presupposes a very strict division between active performers and passive (in the physical sense) listeners, which is one of its most important determinants (Kasperski, 2011, pp. 46–47). A similar situation occurs with regard to the conventions of applauding artists. In classical music performances, applause is reserved for strictly defined moments. It is assigned a place at the end of a piece, so applause during the performance of a composition (which could interfere with the reception of other listeners) is unacceptable, and in multi-movement cyclical works even between movements. Meanwhile, during the recorded concert Jimek x NOSPR x Miuosh, the applause initially appeared only after listening to the entire pieces, but after Miuosh's encouragement – during the performance of the composition. The conventions of a philharmonic concert gradually gave way to those of a popular music concert.

It is also worth mentioning that in the NOSPR hall the audience was seated in armchairs and dressed mostly in a formal or gala manner, although there were some people in more casual attire. So in this aspect, the conventions of a philharmonic concert and the solemnity of the venue prevailed. The rapper himself was, moreover, aware that two different types of audience would meet in this unusual situation. A few days before the concert, he stated:

For the time being, it is unclear whether the majority of the audience will be hip-hop fans or classical music fans. However, I think there will be a large majority of rap fans. Probably older ones, paying more attention to the lyrics and music and less to the party side of the concert. I am also sure that many people will come especially to listen to JIMEK's arrangements and the orchestra itself (Potocki, 2015).

During the artists' performance, the song *Dowód* in particular, maintained in a funky style and danceable character, proved to be crucial in breaking the genre-normative ways of listening, typical of a philharmonic concert. Miuosh preceded the song with a short 'instructional' comment:

If there's hip-hop here, please, everyone stand up and put your hands in the air. That's how you do it at concerts like this. I know this is the NOSPR, I know this is the most beautiful and dignified, but I want to see all hands in the air (MIUOSH x JIMEK x NOSPR, 2020)!

Another transgression of previous conventions concerns the colloquiality of language. In philharmonics, as official cultural institutions, the use of such a style of expression is unacceptable, as the high register of standard language applies here. The convention of the hybrid in the nature of the symphonic hip-hop concert, combining street art with the high musical culture of the philharmonic, has diluted this requirement, recognising vulgarisms as an acceptable means of expression, linked to authenticity of expression, albeit still a controversial means. This is evidenced by the fact that Miuosh, when addressing the audience, used a more official language than at hip-hop concerts, and even 'censored' some of the vulgarisms contained in his songs (e.g. *Corona*), replacing them with more neutral expressions, although he generally insisted on the original versions of his lyrics.

According to Stockfelt, 'genre-normative listening situations are not absolute but are perpetually changing in tandem with the changes in society, in the same way that musical styles change'. Furthermore, there is no single appropriate way of listening, but there are many to choose from in different situations, and audiences are usually 'conscious to different degrees of their own choices of mode of listening and are moreover able to adapt a chosen mode of listening in different situations in relation to different types of sound structures' (Stockfelt, 2017, p.90) This is exactly what happened in the case of the Miuosh, Jimiek and NOSPR concerts, which – by creating an unprecedented performative situation – provoked the listeners to find themselves in this new reality of the performance and adapt the right way of reception. This resulted in a clear broadening of the 'appropriate' ways of listening to the presented music – hip-hop, for example, was listened to in a more autonomous and attentive way, typical of symphonic music, while orchestral sounds engaged the audience somatically.

## Summary

The origins of symphonic hip-hop, outlined in this text, show that after the pioneering achievements of Gabriel Prokofiev, it was essentially Polish rap that became one of the most important sites for the development of this phenomenon worldwide in the second decade of the 21st century. This was due, on the one hand, to the relative egalitarianism of Polish society and the lack of strong tensions of a racial nature, and – on the other – to a genuine fascination with the new phenomenon among rappers themselves and the Polish public. Synthesising the two musical categories was not an easy thing to do, as each of them – as was attempted to be shown – belongs to a different sphere of aesthetic and social values. In fact, they are on the aesthetic-social antipodes. In terms of aesthetics, it is mainly a matter of combining incompatible musical languages, poetics and hierarchies of values, in terms of society it is a matter of tastes and different categories of listeners, and in the aesthetic-social sense it is a matter of transforming genre-normative listening situations.

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