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At the Intersection of Musical Culture and Historical Legacy: Feminist Musicology in Poland

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At the time when feminist critique has been present in Poland in both literary and art history studies for at least 20 years, feminist perspectives in the field of musicology are still not only very rare, but also hold a highly problematic status. As it will be shown in this essay, the problem within Polish feminist musicology is two-sided. On the one hand, there is a great disregard for the study of intersections between sex, gender and music, and, on the other hand, significant controversy over the appropriate approach to the subject that has actually been acknowledged. I will argue that the reasons behind that issue are deeply immersed both in Polish musical culture and in the recent sociopolitical history of the country. Different historical, political and social factors, reaching back as far as the communist era, will be discussed in order to present how they have influenced the discourse upon women and gender in Polish musicology and rendered its status problematic. As a result, I am going to provide a critical reflection on the state of Polish feminist musicology, which could be useful for the future development of this field in the country.

In *The Grove Dictionary of American Music*, the influence of feminism on musical culture¹ is identified by Suzanne G. Cusick as:

(...) sparking historical and cross-cultural research on women's participation in musical culture; spurring a body of critical texts that analyze gender, sexuality, and embodiment in relation to musical practices; and instigating the emergence and implementation of compositional, performative, and institutional strategies that interrogate or transform hierarchical relationships based on sexual difference.²

More specifically, the feminist scholarship in musicology, music theory and ethnomusicology is characterized by Ruth A. Solie in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* as:

- dedicated to the understanding of women's roles, experiences and contributions as well as the various ways in which gender as social construct has defined those roles in different cultural settings (...),
- concerned with the retrieval of women's compositions and the study of their activities as composers, performers and users of music (...),³

as well as

- a body of scholarship that sees music as both product and promulgator of a gendered social order.⁴

During my research, I have aimed to involve and examine all available Polish literature focusing on any of the problems mentioned above.⁵ It

1 In the context of the United States.

2 S. G. Cusick, *Feminism*, in: *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online* [online] <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/A2240908> [accessed: 7.07.2017].

3 R. A. Solie, *Feminism*, in: *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrell, vol. 8, London 2001, pp. 664-667.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 664.

5 It should be noted here that the vast majority of available relevant literature discusses the field of classical music (which is also the focus of this paper). This might be a very meaningful fact itself, revealing another challenge within Polish contemporary musicology which would be to direct more attention towards both world and popular music.

should be noted that, while the amount of adequate literature within Polish musicology is quite small, most positions focus solely on the first two points (they aim to expound the knowledge about female composers, their works and their role in the music history or current musical culture and only occasionally include references to their private lives). Taking a critical stance with regard to the interplay between music and social order is still almost non-existent in Polish literature.

The subject is generally very young in Poland. The best-known major work discussing links between music, sex and gender—Danuta Gwizdalanka's *Music and sex*—was published in 2001 and is considered to be the first work in this field.⁶ The undeveloped state of feminist studies is also visible in the context of musicology departments and limited attention given to these issues during university classes and conferences. Furthermore, the subject is very often discredited as unnecessary, non-scientific or unserious. The existing literature also reveals several weaknesses, such as: methodological confusion of the scholars (unfamiliarity with feminist theory), miscomprehension of the feminism itself and a significant reluctance towards it, or (very often unaware) perpetuating gender stereotypes when addressing gender.⁷

Despite this fact, certain works should be mentioned here as the examples of a successful and insightful contribution to expanding our knowledge and raising the awareness with regard to the importance of female artistic activity in both Polish and global history of music, as well as the existence, roots, role and aim of the feminist perspective in musicology studies. For example, between 2003 and 2005, Magdalena Dziadek and Lilianna M. Moll organized three exhibitions (followed by post-exhibition publications) dedicated, respectively, to Polish female classical music composers between 1816 and 1939, women in the life of Fryderyk Chopin and female music criticism in Poland between 1816 and 1939.⁸ The publications mention many—usually forgotten—female

6 In fact, the first reflection on women in music comes from the article published in "Ruch Muzyczny" in 1997 where Anna Maria Harley—living in North America at that time—comments on International Congress for Women in Music in Los Angeles.

7 A. Brzezicka-Kamińska, *Polskie kompozytorki na Festiwalu Warszawska Jesień*, MA thesis, Uniwersytet Warszawski 1998, pp. 126-129.

8 See: M. Dziadek, L. M. Moll, *Odrodźmy się w muzyce! Muzyka na łamach polskich czasopism kobiecych i "kobieca" krytyka muzyczna 1881-1939*, Katowice 2005; *ead.*, *Oto artyści pełnowartościowi, którzy są kobietami...* *Polskie kompozytorki 1816-1939*, Katowice 2003.

artists, composers, musicians, critics and other active participants in the Polish musical culture in the 19th and 20th centuries. Another valuable contribution to cataloguing important female figures of musical culture is Anna Brzezicka-Kamińska's master thesis *Polish Female Composers at the "Warsaw Autumn Festival"* from 1998, in which the author provides an exhaustive overview of all female composers' output in the Festival between 1956 and 1997. Unfortunately, the work did not resonate in Polish scholarship as any point of reference and remained unknown to the wider audience.⁹

Furthermore, the person who has so far done the most to familiarize Polish audiences with feminist musicology as it is in the West is a young scholar Karolina Kizińska. Her merits to Polish musicology are twofold. First, thanks to the knowledge she gained during her scholarship program at the University of California, she was able to provide a Polish reader with a comprehensive overview of the roots and aims of the field and its most important representatives (such as Susan McClary, Ruth Solie or Marcia J. Citron).¹⁰ Second, she is an author of a mini-guide called *The female side of music*, published in a Polish online magazine *Meakultura*, where she briefly presents the history of music created by women, from the Ancient times up to nowadays.¹¹ Moreover, in her 2015's doctoral thesis, she discusses the problem of a composer's voice *vis-à-vis* gender using Francesca Caccini as her case study.

Finally, one should not overlook the importance of Danuta Gwizdalanka's aforementioned book *Music and sex*.¹² It is the first mainstream musicological work in Poland discussing several dimensions of how music, sex and gender intersect throughout history. It provides a condensed yet quite thorough overview of the emancipation move-

9 The work has never been published and most probably the author did not proceed with an academic career.

10 K. Kizińska, *Rola płci kulturowej w badaniach muzykologicznych – zarys pola badawczego muzykologii feministycznej*, "Kultura i edukacja" 94, No. 1 (2013), pp. 22-41.

11 *Kobieta strona muzyki*, parts 1-7 [online] <http://meakultura.pl/tagi/kobiety-w-muzyce> [accessed: 2.06.2016].

12 The translation of the original title, "Muzyka i płeć", is problematic. While the Polish "płeć" for the most part means biological sex, it might also indicate gender, as there is no particular word in Polish that would signify gender understood as a culturally constructed identity (instead, one can say "a culturally constructed sex" or simply use the English term "gender"). This is important to note as the book discusses gender identities as much as it discusses sex.

ment in music in the West during the 19th and 20th centuries, which has a great value for Polish readers, unfamiliar with Western literature.

However, major controversies connected with the work should be pointed out. For instance, the author claims that feminism in musicology is no longer needed, since the contemporary classical music scene does not experience any sort of gender inequalities. At the same time, the arguments she proposes to support this statement remain rather inconsistent. For example, she attempts to answer the well-known question of why there have seemingly been “so few female composers”. On the one hand, she recognizes historical determinants such as inaccessibility of professional music education for women, social constraints, class factors and internalization of gender stereotypes. On the other hand, some statements she makes reveal a reserved, not to say reluctant, attitude towards feminists pointing out a systematic nature of social and musical exclusion. For example, she writes: “For an unprejudiced reader, the monographs of female martyrdom are as much interesting as they are deterring, as usually regardless of the abundance of documents, they are hampered by an ideological corset”.¹³ She continues by bringing up the arguments suggesting that feminist scholarship is no longer necessary for musicology: “Perhaps the very phenomenon of female creativity’s discrimination is already a historical phenomenon?”¹⁴ Later, she contradicts herself once more by stating that “The repertoire canon (...) is almost exclusively male, but is this mono-gendered character even recognized?”¹⁵ Recognized by whom? By men? By women? Artists? Audience? This is something she does not explain. Not to mention that if it is indeed not recognized, would it not make the need for feminist scholarship anything but historical?

All in all, while the merits of Gwizdalanka to the field of women’s (and gender) studies in Polish musicology should not be discredited, the controversies marking some of her statements are crucial for understanding the main issues that feminist musicological studies face in Poland.

As mentioned previously, I will present here that both low interest in the subject of women in music and the problematic nature of some scientific attempts made in the field trace their roots back to the complex and very often ambivalent way in which classical music culture

13 D. Gwizdalanka, *Muzyka i płeć*, Kraków 2001, p. 126.

14 *Ibid.*

15 *Ibid.*

and feminist discourse have been shaped during the communist era in Poland. Three intertwined and equally crucial issues should be investigated in order to fully understand the problematic status of feminist musicology in Poland: 1) the challenges Polish musicology has had to face due to communist propaganda; 2) the way in which communist reality has shaped the attitude to feminism in everyday society; and 3) the way in which history of Polish classical music is influenced by the figure of Grażyna Bacewicz. In the following sections, I will characterize each of these phenomena, and present the ways in which they may have contributed to the problematic status of feminist musicology in Poland today.

Sociologizing Music

It is common to date the beginnings of feminist musicology in the West back to the second-wave feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, with its noticeable rise in late 1980s and early 1990s.¹⁶ Among other events, the 1988 annual meeting of American Musicological Society (AMS) featured a significant amount of feminist contribution,¹⁷ while Susan McClary's groundbreaking book *Feminine Endings* was published in 1991. Ever since, both musicological and ethnomusicological Western research have been regularly influenced by women's studies and feminist, gender and queer theory. The fact that musicologists started to shed light on intersections between musical culture and women/gender/sex/sexuality in this particular epoch seems to be a result of the development in women's studies (and later in postmodern feminist and queer studies) since 1960s. Moreover, the phenomenon inevitably became, next to other critical approaches, an integral part of the sprouting New Musicology.

During that time, the musicology field in non-Western academia, including Poland, was following its own path. In general, Polish musicologists recognized the most important trends and shifts taking place in the mainstream Western musicology. Nevertheless, the state of

16 However, *The Grove Dictionary of American Music* mentions Sophie Drinker's book *Music and Women* from 1948 as an example of a pre-second wave contribution to the field. See: S. G. Cusick, *Feminism*, *op. cit.*

17 M. Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon*, Cambridge 1993, p. 15.

Polish musicology and its attitude towards addressing non-musical contexts were inevitably marked by communist propaganda, which is particularly conspicuous in musicological literature written in the post-war period (especially in the 1950s¹⁸). Under the communist regime, it was required to interpret reality—including music history, aesthetics, musical styles etc.—through the lens of class conflict and Marxist rhetoric. The abstract dimension of music was disassembled in official scholarship and any evaluation of a musical work was subjugated to strict rules of socialist realism aesthetics. This resulted in the problematic status of the increasingly sociological nature of the twentieth-century musicology—due to a certain backlash in musicology, scholars started to specifically avoid referring to any non-musical aspects of interpretation. Mieczysław Tomaszewski described this situation in his article *Musicology vis-a-vis contemporary times* from 1979:

The sociological aspect (...), despite all the reservations, can (and should) be included in the scope of an artwork's interpretation. The situation both here and in the East seems to resemble the "better safe than sorry" attitude, due to the memory of the years when the sociologizing was vulgar and all-embracing. It is however difficult to imagine the history of music and the theory of the work without the sociological aspect. Social function is, obviously, a directly constitutive element of musical genres and types. It simply creates them (...). We live in the age when the mainstream musicology's scope of interest still encompasses music dominated by only one function: the aesthetic one. Other aspects come to the fore of the research rather accidentally and marginally. Of course, sociology of music—and above all ethnomusicology—are developing very well, but they are usually practiced as separate disciplines, not methodologically coordinated with the mainstream.¹⁹

What is crucial to emphasize, this call is unfortunately not an outdated one in Polish musicology. The deep wariness with which Polish scholars approach the sociological aspect of music, despite their alleged awareness of its importance in musicology, is still very much existent in contemporary scholarship. Karolina Kizińska addresses

18 For instance, works by Zofia Lissa.

19 M. Tomaszewski, *Muzykologia wobec współczesności*, in: *Intepretacja integralna dzieła muzycznego*, ed. W. Berny-Negrey, H. Oleschko, Kraków 2000, p. 14.

this general reluctance to acknowledge sociological factors in Polish musicology by saying:

I get the impression that the New Musicology is generally treated with scepticism in Poland, whether it is about the connection between music and political matters, or it is for instance about music and women's studies. Generally speaking, we are traditionalists, and most musicologists in Poland are closely related to the mindset typical for music theory (...). They usually like to lean solely on "music itself" and have an allergic reaction to any attempts to explain music through its cultural context, gender, politics or anything else that is not purely musical (...). It is caused by the allegedly "soft" character of these non-musical factors, but interestingly it is not such a big problem to address them in other artistic fields. I have the impression that most of the issues that could be categorized as New Musicology are taken with a grain of salt, they are perceived as a sort of light, and not necessarily serious, "humanizing music" (...).²⁰

The citation clearly shows how omitting non-musical context, first as a kind of a backlash reaction to communist propaganda, has transformed into an internalized distrust towards New Musicology perspectives among musicologists in Poland, although not necessarily an explicitly acknowledged one.

Whose Feminism?

Another crucial factor that influenced the state of feminist musicology in Poland is the specific historical context through which feminism has been interpreted in the country. As I mentioned above, the 1970s were the time when women's studies in Western scholarship flourished. During this time, the way of approaching issues of sex, gender equality and feminism was utterly different in Poland, again, mostly due to the influence of communist propaganda. While the Western world witnessed the second-wave feminism, Polish women lived under the dictatorship of an official, institutionalized, yet deeply delusory, gender equality rule.

The policy of communist authorities resulted in a mass entrance of women into the labor market. The assumption that both men and women should have equal rights as workers was inseparably linked to

20 K. Kizińska, interviewed by the author, April 2016.

the communist definition of citizenship—all citizens should contribute while building the great new communist state. In that sense, the policies aiming to level out the position of women were very remote from what motivated Western feminism. In fact, the very notion of feminism was denied in the communist reality, as a product of “capitalist degenerated West”, a phenomenon specific to capitalist societies.

During the communist times the emancipationists got forgotten because their views were bourgeois and had nothing to do with the class conflict. (...) According to the party, feminism only had a *raison d'être* in capitalist—not socialist—societies, because in the latter equal rights have already existed for a long time.²¹

At the same time, the official political line was no guarantee of real-world emancipation. While having their rights on the labor market, women's roles in the family still remained very traditional. Moreover, their actual agency in the public sphere was limited:

The experience of realist socialism shows that what legalizing emancipation postulates is not a clearly unequivocal emancipatory action. It may even influence emancipatory discourse in a constricting, repressive way. This was the case with the common labor rights, but without the possibility to get promoted on an equal footing with men (...); abortion rights not complemented by sexual education (...); legal prohibition of discrimination against women, but without the possibility of grassroots forms of protest in cases where the ban was being breached.²²

Furthermore, the trap that women were caught into was two-sided, as the main alternative space within this society was anti-communist Catholic church. And it was the church that attributed traditional family roles of a wife and a mother to women.

It was a symbol of freedom manifestation, (...) it created the opposing pole in relation to the official system. It was close to its walls where the political opposition was based. (...) This tradition, however, carried the pathetic image of the “Polish Mother”, a guardian of the Polish home and national values. The Church, with its profound impact, perpetuated the pattern of a passive women (...).²³

21 M. Ksieniewicz, *Specyfika polskiego feminizmu*, “Kultura i Historia” 6 (2004), p. 98.

22 *Ibid.*

23 I. Kowalczyk, *Wątki feministyczne w sztuce polskiej*, “Artium Quaestiones” 8 (1997), p. 136.

The consequences of this situation for feminism in Poland were twofold. First of all, both communist system and the traditional gender roles promoted by the Catholic church did not leave the space for feminist awareness to emerge—not only due to the fact that the political regime generally disabled most of the grassroots activity, but also because feminism in its Western incarnation simply was not applicable to the situation and needs of women trapped between the communist regime and the prominent Catholic tradition.

The general absence of feminist movements in the country obviously also found its reflection in the realm of art.²⁴ Magdalena Dziadek and Lilianna M. Moll have pointed it out by writing:

The principles of socialism, carried out in Poland after 1945, required both creators and interpreters of the art to keep up the appearance of gender equality; in the communist period it was not in good taste to differentiate art according to gender—after all they were both doing great, and this is why no single initiative analogous to the Western “women’s movement” in music appeared between 1945 and 1989.²⁵

Furthermore, the described situation resulted in a deeply problematic attitude towards feminism in Polish society, which is still present nowadays. The common, stereotypical approach to the second-wave feminist movement, women’s rights, or even to gender equality in general, is a combination of two different, partly contradictory patterns of thinking inherited from the communist era. The first one is a legacy of the communist imposed “obligatory” gender equality and is built on the conviction that feminism is a part of a communist ideology and, as a symptom of the past era, should be avoided or even suppressed. This pattern also strongly leans on the opposition between the foreign, imposed, enforced communist regime and the national, familiar, “our”

24 Analogies can be traced between music and visual arts in this matter. Izabela Kowalczyk in her article *Wątki feministyczne w sztuce polskiej* from 1994 describes similar conditionings as a source of a late appearance of feminist critique in visual arts in Poland. She mentions for instance that for the most part art critics treat feminist art as a harmless oddity rather than a serious artistic expression and that in their utterances feminist artists cut themselves off from feminism or even sabotage it fully.

25 M. Dziadek, L. M. Moll, *Oto artyści pełnowartościowi, którzy są kobietami...*, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

Catholic order. This opposition, deriving directly from the past political situation, clearly presents the traditional role of women as the right one. The second pattern is in turn a legacy of the long-lasting propaganda proliferated by communist authorities, saying that feminism is an irrelevant and unnecessary invention coming from the degenerated West. It is built on a conviction that “we”, Polish people, do not need it.

In brief, the subliminal message about feminism presents it as an invention that is above all alien, external, not “ours”, and therefore should never be trusted.

As a result, two attitudes usually emerge when taking a position towards women and their roles in society, both of them present in the field of musicology. One of them is a great reluctance or even hostility towards feminism and, at the same time, a fear of being called a feminist and the urge to reassure the reader that the attempt to address “women’s subjects” is not a part of any radical and dangerous ideology (usually it results in an obligatory disclaimer “I am not a feminist, but...” before making any feminist statement). The second attitude is a trivialization of the field of women’s studies and arguing that feminism is outdated, irrelevant and unnecessary, at least in our country. Anna Maria Harley wrote in 1997:

The feminist movement or the matter of women in music is often, especially in Poland, acknowledged by a shrug or a sarcastic smile, not to mention an outright hostility. In Poland, the reluctant attitude toward Western feminism is the heritage of socialist ideology: in the communist state media used to mock the excesses of aggressive and funny Americans, stressing that only in the communist movement a woman has all the rights and full equality.²⁶

There are several cases in Polish musicological literature that these two attitudes are expressed. For instance, there is a very common practice to address the role of women in music, but at the same time to cut oneself off from the term “feminism” very explicitly. A very evident example of how some writers feel the urge to literally excuse themselves for addressing questions about female contribution to musical culture is the following fragment from the article by Agnieszka Nowok, reviewing female compositions performed during Warsaw Autumn Festival in 2012. The author writes:

26 A. M. Harley, *Po polsku i po babsku*, “Ruch Muzyczny”, September 21, 1997, p. 15.

The question I encountered was: How did female composers mark their presence in the program of this year's "Warsaw Autumn"? (...) What images (including the images of themselves) did they create through their works? (...) I emphasize that I have not graduated from any sort of gender studies and I am far from a feminist radicalism. That is not what interests me and not what I want to address.²⁷

As if it was not enough for the author to emphasize her non-feminism in the beginning of the article, she makes sure it is clear once again in the course of her text by writing:

When *Krikku* [a piece by Kaija Saariaho] was floating across the stage carried by a wave of thunderous applause, one of the listeners noticed with genuine enthusiasm: "No man would write something like that". I do not know whether it is true, because, as I indicated at the beginning, I have no intention to practice any feminist critique (...).²⁸

Another scholar who expresses a clearly ambivalent attitude towards feminism is Danuta Gwizdalanka. One can clearly see that this fact may not be separated from the generation she represents. She writes about feminism in music:

The martyred image of women can be easily (and not accidentally) associated with the Marxist rhetoric, which depicts the exploitation of the working classes in a similar way. What equally wakes up the ghosts of the past is a ruthlessly negative evaluation of music from patriarchal past, a rejection of any aesthetic evaluation for the sake of the sociological one.²⁹

Moreover, in response to one of her book's blog reviews published in 2011, where the reviewers accused her of a reserved attitude towards feminism, she wrote:

Let me explain the source of this declared distance towards feminism. My generation was studying history of the world as the history of class conflicts; even the literature classes would serve the purpose of debating the injustices

27 A. Nowok, *Warszawskiej Jesieni portrety kobiece*, "Klucz" 12 (2013), p. 20.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 26.

29 D. Gwizdalanka, *Muzyka i płeć*, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

experienced by peasants and proletariat. We would laugh at it, but these sorts of accents were popping up even in the music history (just take a look at some books about Bach, Beethoven and other musicians published in the 1950s). Do not be surprised then that later on so many of us felt reluctant to use another conflict, this time the gender one, as a basic tool of interpretation.³⁰

Much harm has also been done by scholars continuously trivializing any feminist endeavors. Those who address feminist issues in music very often experience a significant lack of understanding from their colleagues. Gwizdalanka writes: “(...) by some colleagues, my attempt to look at the history of music from a gendered perspective was acknowledged by a sceptical and clearly disavowing question: *You are not going to become a militant feminist, are you?*”³¹

Karolina Kizińska recalls how she felt when she discovered feminist studies in musicology during her scholarship in the United States and compared it to what she had experienced during the education in Poland:

After many years of music education and so many music history classes you wouldn't question the shape of curriculum, you take it for granted. Yes, I remember that I was shocked when I realized that no curriculum, either at school or at university, included female composers. Even the most famous ones, even Barbara Strozzi... No one would say that it was she who created cantata. This was partly why I wrote two master's theses and then my doctoral dissertation on this subject. (...) I had the impression that this is an unpopular subject in Poland. (...) I remember how my speech about female composers was considered terribly controversial... For me it was so different from what I experienced in the States (...). It is a problem coming from, I don't know, from such little understanding of this topic's importance? I still don't know where does it come from... Apart from a few people who were aware that the subject is not in any way controversial, that it is just another important topic to explore (...), most people really treated my interest as made up, enforced. (...).³²

30 D. Gwizdalanka, June 22, 2011 (12:26 p.m.), comment on P. Szkudlarek, *Danuta Gwizdalanka*, “*Muzyka i płeć, Dwie poważne damy*”, May 28, 2011, [online] <http://dwiepowaznedamy.blogspot.nl/2011/05/danuta-gwizdalanka-muzyka-i-pec.html> [accessed: 1.05.2016].

31 D. Gwizdalanka, *Muzyka i płeć*, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

32 K. Kizińska, interviewed by the author, April 2016.

In the light of these words, it becomes clear that general lack of interest in the feminist standpoint among musicologists is only self-perpetuated by their noticeable unreadiness to open up for new perspectives that they are perhaps not yet familiar with.

Last but not least, in some writings focused on female musicians one can observe a great confusion in terms of how the scholars are trying to achieve their goal of shedding light on female composers. They make women the object of their studies, but in the end only serve to perpetuate pre-existing, detrimental gender stereotypes. I believe that this is a result of lack of the adequate methodological tools and very often unfamiliarity with feminist theory and women's studies. These scholars seem to widely ignore that in order to do justice to women it is necessary to not only shed light on them, but most importantly to discard patriarchal perspectives and patriarchal categories of analysis.

The Legacy of Grażyna Bacewicz

The lack of will to critically reflect on female contribution to the musical culture of the country seems to have one more reason. Paradoxically, it is possible that the relatively good conditions for female composers' professional activity after 1945 have assured many musicologists that the feminist perspective on music history would prove useless in Poland.

For example, Danuta Gwizdalanka admits that she only became interested in the topic of women in music when she moved to Cologne, Germany and noted a great masculinization of musical academia there, unlike what she was used to in Poland. She suggests that living in a communist country made the composer's profession much more accessible to women than it was to their colleagues from across the Iron Curtain. In her book *Music and sex* she wrote: "The gender equality rule declared by the communist regime fostered Polish women with artistic aspirations".³³ She also recalls that Polish women composers professionally active at that time were generally reluctant to identify themselves through the prism of gender.

At the same time, one figure that is inevitably evoked by Polish scholars and women composers whenever the topic of gender emerges as

33 D. Gwizdalanka, *Muzyka i płeć*, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

someone who “set certain standards” is Grażyna Bacewicz. Paradoxically, she might be the reason why the evident masculinization of the post-war Polish composers’ canon is not addressed as problematic and the feminist perspectives in music are being overlooked. Grażyna Bacewicz, who was already a fully-fledged artist and composer in the postwar period, continued her career during the communist times and is considered to be one of the most important twentieth-century creators, next to the prominent male composers such as Henryk Mikołaj Górecki, Krzysztof Penderecki or Andrzej Panufnik. While initially her figure might appear as a perfect take-off point for a discussion about gender in Polish musicology, it seems that instead it has become an excuse for not addressing it at all.

Taking the above into consideration, two crucial arguments are usually given by Polish representatives of the feminism-sceptic approach in music. One of them is that successful Polish female composers always emphasize the unimportance of their gender in their professional life. The other one is presenting the splendid compositional career of Grażyna Bacewicz as a self-explanatory proof for gender equality among composers in the country. As a result, some writers (like Kłaput-Wiśniewska or Gwizdalanka) risk statements like this:

It is simply a characteristic of Polish musical culture which, in the sphere of the participation of women in such an exceptional field as composition, has special position amongst European countries (...). That is why the artistic activity of women is treated here as self-evident. (...) In the 20th and 21st centuries, Polish women composers were fully acknowledged as participants in many spheres of musical culture (...).³⁴

OR:

Talking about the need for women’s emancipation in music might seem incomprehensible to a Polish reader³⁵ (...). Nowadays the presence of female composers in the official artistic life is only surprising to those who are also surprised that the composer is not a dead “classic” from a distant past.³⁶

34 A. Kłaput-Wiśniewska, *Artistic Work of Women – Female Works in Self Reflection of Grażyna Bacewicz*, Krystyna Moszumańska-Nazar and Agata Zubel, in: *The Musical Work and Its Creators*, ed. A. Nowak, Bydgoszcz 2015, p. 58.

35 D. Gwizdalanka, *Muzyka i płeć*, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

This way of thinking—taking the statements of successful female composers as an ultimate truth about the accessibility of the profession to women—is unfortunately very misleading. The relatively good situation of female composers in Poland (or to be more specific, of a few of them, as we do not really know any testimonies from those who did not make it to the top) should not free musicologists (especially the ones already interested in the subject of women in music) from the responsibility to ask certain questions. For instance, representatives of the discussed approach do not make an effort to ask themselves why the alleged lack of discrimination is in no way illustrated by the proportions between female and male composers in Polish and international classical music canons. And the Polish canon is very clearly masculinized, to the point that Grażyna Bacewicz is indeed the only woman included in the “top of the top” group.

“Women who themselves are in a great professional position usually completely overlook the problem, because they believe that, equally to how they managed to do it, any other woman can. This is absolutely not true”.³⁷ While the group of elite classical music composers might indeed be seen as inclusive once a woman is in it, further questions need to be asked about what was there to overcome on the way to get there.

There is another reason why the example of Grażyna Bacewicz is not so self-explanatory after all. If one takes a closer look at the “standards set by Grażyna Bacewicz”, as something that allegedly redefined the perception of female composers in Poland, one can easily see that this idea is to some extent a construct rather than a fact. For instance, in 1950, Stefan Kisielewski, one of the leading figures of musical life in post-war Poland, reviewed the premiere of her *Concerto for String Orchestra* by writing:

One can say with a clear conscience that this time the dignity of the Polish composers was saved by a woman, Grażyna Bacewicz. Her *Concerto for String Orchestra*, written with gusto and energy, brimming with fluent inventiveness and excellent instrumentation ideas, has finally woken us up from lethargy. (...) Here we have at last tasted a “red-blooded piece” of healthy and tasty music written with a male-like creative power.³⁸

37 D. Gwizdalanka, interviewed by the author, April 2016.

38 Grażyna Bacewicz, “Koncert na orkiestrę smyczkową” [online] <http://culture.pl/pl/dzielo/grazyna-bacewicz-koncert-na-orkiestre-smyczkowa> [accessed: 2.06.2016].

It is probably not necessary to add that what Kisielewski intended to achieve through these words was undoubtedly his great appreciation for the piece and its composer. But paradoxically, he attempted to express it by reassuring that all the creative power to compose actually comes from men. I particularly like to think about this quote whenever I encounter statements about how in Poland the musical activity of women has always been “self-evident” and “obvious”³⁹ and therefore the feminist perspective has never been relevant to the interests of Polish musicology. I am not questioning Grażyna Bacewicz’s immense role in the shifting of attitudes towards female composition in Poland, or her position as a great inspiration to the following generations of young female composers. Instead, I am arguing that her phenomenon might have unfortunately made Polish musicology wash its hands of the responsibility to take a critical stance towards the shape of the musical canon from the gender perspective.

A Look into the Future

The essential question is of course not only how to get away from this impasse we found ourselves in, but perhaps even more—why to do it in the first place. Or, to put it more bluntly—why do we, Polish musicologists should care about incorporating feminism into our studies.

First of all, by perpetuating the silence, we deprive ourselves of the opportunity to create a space for debate about how we want to place the issues of feminism and gender in Polish music scholarship. It seems that it is time to finally open this closet full of demons of the past—as much for the sake of all forgotten and omitted female musical activity, as it is for the contemporary musicology to be insightful and capable of keeping up with most recent questions. I believe it is time to start addressing feminism and applying feminist perspectives, and it is not about just unreflectively copying Western scholarship. The sociological aspect of music, women’s studies, the post-communist legacy—they are all charged in a particular country-specific way—and the variety of meanings they hold is an integral part of Polish musical and political culture. Those meanings need to be faced instead of being systematically

39 A. Kłaput-Wiśniewska, *Artistic Work of Women...*, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

ignored. Only in this way can our musicology provide a perspective to effectively explain contemporary musical culture.

But it is also something we simply owe to composers. Another generation of young composers is about to start their careers, many women included. I believe it is our obligation to influence the way they perceive gender and the narrative they choose to describe their professional life, as well as to make them challenge the role models they follow and choose consciously what they include into the field of their inspirations. Susan McClary's words from 1990 seem particularly valid here:

For women writing and performing music today, the impact of feminist critical methods is invaluable. Simply being able to identify where gender difference has been located in music (past and present) facilitates the development of other modes of composing. I do not believe in essentialism, and thus I do not think that women compose differently automatically by sheer virtue of being female. But it seems desirable to me that at least occasionally women negotiate within their inherited discourses differently—that they have the information with which to make choices and to explore alternative strategies.⁴⁰

Finally, musicology is not solely accountable to the musical realm itself. It is a part of the humanities and in that sense it needs to take the responsibility for how it influences society. Scholarship holds the potential to subvert and redefine social orders—and if social justice is being threatened, all scholars, musicologists included, become responsible for acknowledging it.

In 1997 Izabela Kowalczyk stated:

I believe that (...) feminist art can play an important role in Poland because it can arouse interest into women's issues among wider audience. *Vis-à-vis* the discrimination against women by Polish patriarchal culture, it can contribute to the deconstruction of meanings generated within it. It can also lead to breaking the modernist categories, still valid in Poland, through undermining the prevailing categories of art, images about the universality of art, and the myth of the artist standing above the society.⁴¹

It is already 2017 and I truly believe it is high time Polish musicologists take these words to heart.

40 S. McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality*, Minneapolis 1991, p. 16.

41 I. Kowalczyk, *Wątki feministyczne w sztuce polskiej*, op. cit., p. 137.

Abstract

In Poland, feminist perspectives in the field of musicology are still not only very rare, but also hold a highly problematic status. Both an overview of relevant Polish literature and scholars' experiences reveal a two-sided problem within Polish feminist musicology, where there is on the one hand a great disregard for the study of intersections between sex, gender and music, and on the other hand a significant controversy over how to approach the subject once it is acknowledged. The challenges which today's feminist musicology in Poland needs to confront, are connected with complex and very often ambivalent way in which classical music culture and the feminist discourse have been shaped since the beginning of the communist era (1945-1989). Reaching back to that period, various historical, political and social factors have influenced the study of women and gender in the contemporary Polish musicology. Three equally crucial issues are investigated in order to understand the status of feminist musicology in Poland: 1) the challenges Polish musicology has had to face due to the communist propaganda; 2) the way in which communist reality has shaped the attitude to feminism in the society; 3) the way in which history of Polish classical music is influenced by the figure of Grażyna Bacewicz. The essay characterizes each of these phenomena and presents how they may have contributed to the problematic status of feminist musicology in Poland nowadays.

Keywords

Feminist musicology, Polish musicology, women composers, communist regimes, politics and music, gender, Grażyna Bacewicz

Abstrakt

Pomiędzy kulturą muzyczną a dziedzictwem historycznym: muzykologia feministyczna w Polsce

Przyjmowanie perspektyw feministycznych w badaniach muzykologicznych nie tylko jest w Polsce nadal wielką rzadkością, ale też ma głęboko problematyczny status. Zarówno istniejące w Polsce prace

naukowe, jak i doświadczenia badaczek i badaczy, ujawniają podwójny problem istniejący w polskiej muzykologii feministycznej: z jednej strony powiązaniom pomiędzy muzyką a płcią biologiczną i kulturą poświęca się niezwykle mało uwagi, a z drugiej strony, gdy temat już się pojawia, uchodzi za bardzo kontrowersyjny.

Wyzwania, przed którymi stoi współczesna muzykologia feministyczna w Polsce, mają swoje źródło między innymi w złożonym i często bardzo ambiwalentnym sposobie, w jaki kultura muzyczna i dyskurs feministyczny w Polsce kształtowały się już w czasach PRL (1945-1989). Sięgając aż do okresu komunistycznego, można zaobserwować jak rozmaite czynniki historyczne, polityczne i socjologiczne wpłynęły na badania nad statusem kobiet i płcią we współczesnej polskiej muzykologii. W celu wyjaśnienia statusu muzykologii feministycznej w Polsce omówione zostały trzy istotne zagadnienia: 1) wpływ propagandy komunistycznej na polską muzykologię; 2) wpływ rzeczywistości komunistycznej na recepcję feminizmu w polskim społeczeństwie; 3) sposób, w jaki na historię polskiej muzyki wpłynęła postać Grażyny Bacewicz. Artykuł charakteryzuje każde z tych zagadnień i omawia, w jaki sposób każde z nich mogło przyczynić się do aktualnego stanu muzykologii feministycznej w Polsce.

Słowa kluczowe

muzykologia feministyczna, muzykologia w Polsce, kobiety-kompozytorki, komunizm, muzyka i polityka, gender, Grażyna Bacewicz

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