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Polish choral music during the course of the nineteenth century developed rather modestly and haphazardly due to varying forms of political and cultural repression imposed by the partitioning powers. Early in the century, music societies were established either to support the performance quality of sacred music, or more generally to improve musical life in urban centers of former Poland: most notably Warszawa (Warsaw); Cracow or Kraków (then as now the terms have been used interchangeably) and Lemberg (Lwów, Lviv) in the Galician region of the Austrian Empire; and Prussian-ruled Danzig (Gdańsk), Posen (Poznań) and Łódź. These efforts, however, were characteristically isolated and at times short lived.[1] With the rise of choral societies in numerous urban and provincial locales across the territories in the second half of the century, however, and especially in its last two decades, concerts of religious music increased not only in churches, but also in other venues, as did the performance of secular vocal music, bringing a more vibrant musical culture to many parts of the dissolved Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.[2]

Throughout the century, Warsaw, Poland's former capital, maintained its status as the center of Polish musical life. There, already during the first half of the century, composers such as Józef Elsner (1769–1854; Chopin's teacher) and Karol Kurpiński (1785–1857) made valuable contributions to Polish opera, as well as to other vocal genres, including choral music. Among Elsner's more noteworthy sacred choral works is his ambitious oratorio, *Passio Domini Nostri Jesu Christi*, Op. 65 (1835–37) for fourteen solo voices, three mixed choirs, and orchestra; it was intended to replace the *Stabat Maters* of Pergolesi, Haydn, and Peter von Winter that were frequently performed on Good Friday.[3] Arranged in four parts, with Latin texts taken from the gospels of Saint Matthew and Saint Mark, the Book of Psalms, and religious hymns, Elsner includes twenty-seven musical numbers, using one women's and two mixed choirs to represent angels, Christians and Jews, respectively. A late-classical style prevails, though there are moments, especially the Marsz żałobny (Funeral March) to begin Part IV and the operatic Finale, that display early Romantic musical sensibilities.[4]

Like Elsner, Kurpiński wrote a number of secular cantatas, often to nationalist texts meant to preserve a sense of Polish identity by underscoring the nation's more illustrious past. He also wrote numerous patriotic songs, among them *Warszawianka* (The Song of Warsaw, 1831) and *Marsz Obozowy* (Camp March, 1831), both battle cries composed in response to the November Uprising of 1830–31. Originally scored for soloist, mixed choir, and orchestra, these songs exist today in various choral arrangements, a testament to their unwavering popularity as expressions of Polish nationalism.

Stanisław Moniuszko's (1819–72) vocal compositions dominated the second half of the century. Though his choral works remain overshadowed by his operatic achievements, Moniuszko himself preferred to compose cantatas: "The most tempting form for me is not opera but rather the cantata, which has over opera an incalculable superiority on every account. It is time to examine the extent to which opera is nothing but a resolute absurdity."[5] Of particular note are his secular cantatas *Widma* (The Phantoms) composed sometime before 1859, and *Sonety krymskie* (Crimean Sonnets, 1867), both settings of texts by the important nineteenth-century Polish poet Adam Mickewicz for solo voices, mixed choir, and orchestra. Active in the Roman Catholic religious life of Vilna (Wilno, Vilnius), where he lived before taking up post as director of Polish productions at the *Wielki* Theater in Warsaw in 1858, Moniuszko also wrote the four cantata-like *Litanie ostrobramskie* (The Ostra Brama Litanies, 1843–55), settings of Latin Marian texts for solo voices, mixed choir, and orchestra in honor of the Ostra Brama Madonna.[6] Though designed for the small scale of the chapel in which the shrine is housed, and composed with amateur performers in mind, the Litanies nonetheless impress by the richness of their musical invention, notably Litany III (dedicated to Gioachino Rossini) and Litany IV where they adopt a more dramatic tone, ambitious harmonic language, and a cohesive design. And while Litany II alone reveals a folk-inspired directness, all four strike the listener as intimate confessions of Moniuszko's deeply held religious faith. Given their beauty and accessible style, they certainly merit wider performance outside of Poland.[7]

Moniuszko also wrote numerous songs for mixed, women's and men's choirs that achieved widespread popularity. But it was the songs he wrote for voice and piano accompaniment, published within a twelve-volume series titled *Spiewniki domowy* (Songbooks for Home Use), that frequently served in various choral arrangements as the basis for repertoire performed by Polish choral societies across the Russian, Prussian, and Austrian territories.[8]

Such choral music societies did much to popularize ensemble singing. The first Polish choral organizations, modeled after German singing societies and decidedly of a patriotic character, were formed in the 1860s in the Prussian-occupied Wielkopolska region including Posen, but these efforts were variously limited by inadequate skill, repertoire, organization or public support.[9] By the last quarter of the century, however, a substantially greater number of societies sprang up in the region and, indeed, in other parts of former Poland. In the Grand Duchy of Posen, amateur Polish church and secular choirs served as a defense against Bismarck's *Kulturkampf* campaign begun in 1870.[10] Among secular choral organizations, arrangements of folk songs, real or invented, were highly favored. Also programmed were compositions by Moniuszko, Kurpiński, and lesser-known Polish composers such as Bolesław Dembiński (1833–1914), Ignacy Feliks Dobrzyński (1807–67), Stanisław Niewiadomski (1859–1936), and Zygmunt Noskowski (1846–1909). Men's, women's, and mixed church choirs, like their secular counterparts, often performed Polish repertoire alongside compositions by foreign composers, most often Haydn, Rossini, Mendelssohn, and Mozart. Significantly, there were also many German Protestant church choirs, which until the last decade of the century were more numerous and skilled than virtually any Polish Catholic church choir.

In Austrian-controlled Polish Galicia, Lemberg and Cracow were major centers of choral music activity. Lemberg in particular boasted the men's "Lutnia" society founded in 1880. Its success inspired numerous imitations, most notably in Warsaw in 1886 under Piotr Maszyński's direction, where a women's choir was also formed and, with the men's, occasionally performed mixed choir repertoire.[11] Russian-controlled Łódź was home to the Jewish Hazomir Choral Society founded in 1899 and successfully directed first by Joseph Rumshinsky, then Zavel Zilberts and others. Modeled after secular Polish choral groups and established to strengthen a secular Jewish cultural identity, the mixed choir performed a wide-ranging repertoire of Handel, Haydn, and Mendelssohn oratorios; Mozart's and Cherubini's Requiems performed either in the original language or translated into Yiddish; arrangements of Jewish folk songs; and at least one work by Moniuszko.[12]

In summary, Poland's status as a partitioned country greatly hampered musical development of any sort, especially after 1830. What music-making there was, therefore, was invariably dominated by concepts of nationalism. In the realm of choral compositions and arrangements, this meant that regardless of whether or not texts could communicate patriotic sentiments unequivocally, folk-inspired musical elements such as lydian fourths and mazurka and polonaise dance rhythms further marked works as distinctly Polish. Moreover, the desire to sustain Poland culturally motivated the creation of Polish choral music societies that promoted works by Polish composers. Thus despite the challenges of lost independence, one can find noteworthy contributions to a distinctly Polish choral music tradition, one born of revolutionary and patriotic songs arranged for choirs,[13] religious works written in Latin and the vernacular, and secular cantatas giving voice to rousing nationalist sentiments penned by some of Poland's most famous nineteenth-century poets.

Notes

1 See Jolanta T. Pekacz, *Music in the Culture of Polish Galicia: 1772–1914* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2002), 124–43; Barbara Zakrzewska-Nikiporczyk, "Działalność wielkopolskich chórów kościelnych w latach 1870–1918" [The Activities of *Wielkopolska* Church Choirs During the Years 1870–1918], *Muzyka* 22, 3 (1977): 62; Halina Goldberg, *Music in Chopin's Warsaw* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 257–73.

2 No comprehensive study of nineteenth-century Polish choral music in either Polish or English exists that encompasses all of the partitioned territories. For a detailed examination of choral music in the Prussian territories see, Barbara Zakrzewska-Nikiporczyk, "Działalność wielkopolskich chórów kościelnych w latach 1870–1918," and Barbara Zakrzewska-Nikiporczyk, "Z dziejów polskiego świeckiego ruchu śpiewaczego w Wielkim Księstwie Poznańskim" [On the History of the Polish Secular Choral Movement in the Grand Duchy of Poznań] *Muzyka* 24, 2 (1979): 95–112. For a very fine summary of music-making in Polish Galicia see, Pekacz, *Music in the Culture of Polish Galicia: 1772–1914*; and for a thorough treatment of the activities of choral music societies in Russian-controlled Poland, and specifically Warsaw see, Irena Chomik, "Warszawskie Towarzystwo Śpiewacze 'Lutnia' w latach 1886–1914 [The Warsaw Choral Society '*Lutnia*' During the Years 1886–1914], *Szkice o kulturze muzycznej XIX w.* [Essays on Nineteenth-Century Musical Culture], ed. Zofia Chechlińska, (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1971), 163–317.

3 Alina Nowak-Romanowicz, *Józef Elsner*, (Kraków: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1957), 227–28.

4 Nowak-Romanowicz, *Józef Elsner*, 229–39. Nowak-Romanowicz argues that the Marsz żałobny is stylistically modeled after the "Marcia funebre" of Beethoven's Third Symphony. When the piece was first performed on 20, 22 and 25 June 1838 in Warsaw's Lutheran Church of the Holy Trinity (the church was among the most musically active sites in the city at the time), the piece involved no fewer than 400 musicians and was directed by Kurpiński. Later, the piece was dedicated to Tsar Nicolas I. In addition to this most monumental work, Elsner wrote three modest oratorios, and over 80 offertories, graduals and hymns. Of his 33 masses, nine are written in the vernacular, including a folk mass. The composer also wrote numerous secular cantatas, mostly for state and private celebrations, but the vast majority of these compositions are now lost. For a catalog of works see, Nowak-Romanowicz, *Józef Elsner*, 265–326.

5 Letter from Moniuszko to Józef Ignacy Kraszewski as cited in Józef Reiss, *Najpiękniejsza ze wszystkich jest muzyka polska: szkic historycznego rozwoju na tle przeobrażeń społecznych z licznymi przykładami muzycznymi i z 50 ilustracjami* [The Most Beautiful of All is Polish Music: A Study of Its Historical Evolution against the Backdrop of Social Transformations with Numerous Musical Examples and 50 Illustrations], (Kraków: T. Gieszczykiewicz, 1946), 147.

6 The Ostra Brama icon of the Virgin Mary, which dates from the seventeenth century, is housed in a small chapel located in the last remaining city gate of Vilnius; it is one of the most important symbols of the city. The cult of the Ostra Brama Madonna, begun after the partitions, lives on among Poles, Lithuanians, and Belorussians, and is venerated by Roman and Greek Catholics and Orthodox alike.

7 Scores for this and other works of Polish choral music can be obtained through *Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne* (PWM) in Kraków: http://www.pwm.com.pl.

8 Zakrzewska-Nikiporczyk, "Z dziejów polskiego świeckiego ruchu śpiewaczego w Wielkim Księstwie Poznańskim," 109, and Chomik, "Warszawskie Towarzystwo Śpiewacze 'Lutnia' w latach 1886–1914," 293–310.

9 Chomik, "Warszawskie Towarzystwo Śpiewacze 'Lutnia' w latach 1886–1914," 167. Of course, societies for the performance of sacred music, such as the St. Cecilia Society, already existed in Warsaw earlier in

the century, and more ambitious performances during Holy Week of works by Haydn and Mozart, involving both amateurs and professionals, were not uncommon. There were also numerous choirs in existence before this time. But choral music societies organized by Poles for the express purpose of singing not only well-known Classical repertoire but also secular Polish repertoire did not arise until the second half of the century.

10 The term *Kulturkampf* (cultural struggle) was first applied in Bismarck's Prussia to efforts to suppress the Catholic Church. The policy soon after came to embrace the struggle against the Polish minority in Prussian Poland, with Poles becoming subject to ever-greater socio-cultural repressions.

11 Chomik, "Warszawskie Towarzystwo Śpiewacze 'Lutnia' w latach 1886–1914," 168–77.

12 See Joseph Rumshinsky, *Klangen Fun Mayn Lebn* [Sounds from My Life] (New York: Biderman, 1944), 194–98; Joshua Jacobson, "Choirs," in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, ed. Fred Skolnik and Michael Berenbaum (Detroit: Thomas Gale, 2007), 2nd ed., vol. 4, 662.

13 See Jan Prosnak, "Powstanie styczniowe w muzyce 1863–1963" [The January Uprising in Music 1863–1963], *Muzyka* 8, 1–2 (1963): 127–69.

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