

*The Mass Song*  
*Seminar*  
*at Nieborów,*  
*June 1950*

**CINDY BYLANDER**

Independent Scholar, Fort Collins, Colorado, USA

Email: [bylanderc@gmail.com](mailto:bylanderc@gmail.com)

## ABSTRACT

The seminar on mass songs held in Nieborów, Poland in June 1950 is notable for what it did not accomplish: Amid a diversity of opinions voiced by poets, composers, and cultural officials, no firm guidelines for this seemingly new type of song emerged. What we can draw from examining the proceedings of this three-day session are an enhanced understanding of mass song as an evolving, not a static phenomenon and fresh insights into the political and logistical complexities that faced composers at this time.

**Keywords:** mass song, socialist realism, Witold Lutosławski, Andrzej Klón, Alfred Gradstein, Edward Olearczyk, folk music

The topic of mass songs created by Polish composers and poets has increasingly drawn the attention of scholars in recent years.<sup>1</sup> This genre, first introduced in the Soviet Union, was unveiled in Poland by Soviet-backed officials in the late 1940s. Although many of these pieces were brought to life within the next few years, most of them failed to become popular and their creators quickly withdrew them from their catalogs of works after the cultural thaw in 1956. Generally speaking, mass songs have retained a negative image in Poland since then.

During the late 1940s and early 1950s, however, the composition of mass songs was a matter of utmost importance for Poland's ruling authorities. Articles on the subject were published and many related conversations, meetings, competitions, and commissions occurred. By the end of 1947, the Polish Workers' Party, one of the country's primary political parties, had already decided that the promotion of this seemingly new type of song would be an essential component of its cultural policies.<sup>2</sup>

Two competitions for mass songs were held in 1948; although the term 'mass song' was not used for either event, it is clear from comments made at the time that the desired submissions were to represent this genre. The first competition, organized by Polish Radio and the

Ministry of Culture and Art, received more than four-hundred submissions. The texts were to 'speak of the issues of today', although some of those selected were ultimately deemed to be too difficult poetically to suit a musical setting. As Zofia Lissa remarked afterwards, the comments made at a conference held in Nieborów earlier that year had proven 'how difficult it is for poets to find their own form in this field'.<sup>3</sup> Most of the compositions entered in this competition were rejected because they were harmonically complex or contained impressions of jazz and undesirable dances such as 'sentimental waltzes or naive mazurkas'. Even what Lissa called 'primitive military marches' were eliminated.<sup>4</sup> In her opinion, composers of the rejected pieces did not understand what a Polish mass song should be. Later that year, the Ministry sponsored another competition to celebrate the establishment of the Polish United Workers' Party.<sup>5</sup> At that time, twenty-four composers were asked to write music to texts that honored the working class and/or the Soviet Union; only fifteen chose to participate, thus revealing a lack of interest in this activity among their colleagues despite the financial enticement offered. According to the guidelines for this competition, these songs were to have three to four stanzas, a four-line refrain, and feature both Polish and march characteristics as well as uncomplicated harmonies.<sup>6</sup> These traits formed the crux of the initial definition – if one ever existed – for a Polish mass song.

In order to guide the expectations for mass songs, poets, composers, and cultural officials attended several seminars dedicated to this topic. Organized by the Ministry of Culture and Art, these were held in November 1947, March 1948 (mentioned above), and June 1950, with the latter two occurring in Nieborów, Poland. The third one (June 7–9, 1950) was organized soon after Jakub Berman and Edward Ochab, two leaders of the Polish United

1 Of particular interest is M. Sulek, *Pieśni masowe Witolda Lutosławskiego w kontekście doktryny realizmu socjalistycznego* [Witold Lutosławski's Mass Songs in the Context of the Doctrine of Socialist Realism], Kraków, Musica Iagellonica, 2010.

2 A. Izdebski, 'Powstanie warszawskiego ośrodka muzykologicznego' [The Emergence of Warsaw as a Centre of Musicological Research], in G.P. Bąbiak and J. Nalewajko-Kulikova (eds), *Trudny wiek XX: Jednostka, system, epoka. Studia* [The Difficult Twentieth Century: The Individual, the System, the Age. Studies], Warszawa, Wydawnictwo Neriton and Instytut Historii PAN, 2010, pp. 172–173.

3 Z. Lissa, 'Sprawozdanie z konkursu na polską pieśń masową' ['Report from a Polish Mass Song Competition'], *Ruch Muzyczny*, vol. 4, no. 17, 1948, p. 13.

4 Lissa, 'Sprawozdanie z konkursu...', p. 14.

5 The Polish Workers' Party and the Polish Socialist Party merged to form the Polish United Workers' Party.

6 Archiwum Akt Nowych [Archive of Modern Records] (AAN), MKiS, 366/1 499 (Konkurs na pieśń Zjednoczonych Partii 1948–1949), Projekt regulaminu i konkursu na pieśń Zjednoczonych Partii [(Competition for a Song of the United Parties, 1948–1949), Draft of the Competition Regulations and Procedures].

Workers' Party, attended an exhibit of mass songs at Polish Radio. Their dissatisfaction with this presentation resulted in invitations to Nieborów being sent rather hurriedly to approximately twenty poets and composers.<sup>7</sup> More than thirty-five songs were evaluated during the meeting,<sup>8</sup> making this session similar to the auditions (*przesłuchania*) of mass songs organized by the Polish Composers' Union that occurred later that year, although unlike these later events, no ranking of compositions was done.<sup>9</sup> We do not know how the songs were selected for this June event or how they were presented (by tape or live performance). We do know that those present did not have the manuscripts or scores for the pieces that were discussed.<sup>10</sup>

Given the amount of formal discussion that had previously taken place regarding mass songs, it might seem surprising that such an event in June 1950 was deemed necessary. Yet a review of the written proceedings (*protokoły*) from this meeting indicates that confusion still reigned over what the characteristics of these songs should be.<sup>11</sup> Complicating matters was the fact that the acceptable qualifications as well as the terminology for these pieces had shifted since they had first been introduced to Polish composers. These archival documents also provide the opportunity to learn what specific composers thought about mass songs at a time when preparations for the massive 1951 Festival of Polish Music, which were to feature such pieces, were ongoing. Among those who attended the Nieborów meeting were

such varied musical personalities as Alfred Gradstein, Roman Jasiński, Andrzej Klon, Witold Lutosławski, and Witold Rudziński. We know little about Gradstein and Klon, although they were active participants in Nieborów. Lutosławski was as well; the fact that he even attended such a meeting may strike some scholars as unusual. No definitive conclusions were drawn by the meeting's attendees, yet the statements they made can enrich our understanding of the evolution of mass songs as a specific type of composition and increase our awareness of the pressures faced by composers and poets as they negotiated the complicated cultural scene that characterized Poland at that time.

## LYRICS

The most important theme of the 1950 Nieborów meeting concerned the quality of the texts and music chosen for mass songs. The appropriateness of these new compositions for the audiences targeted by officials was also a crucial factor. These consumers were not expected to be those sitting in concert halls for presentations of classical music, but workers and students who would memorize these songs and sing them throughout the day.

The lyrics for the songs discussed at Nieborów ranged from those urging Poles to assist in building a socialist Poland (for example, Jerzy Jurando's 'Pieśń ZMP' ['Polish Youth Union Song'], music by Alfred Gradstein) to those describing more idyllic scenes (Roman Sadowski's 'Włóknianka' ['The Textile Worker'] (music by Henryk Swolkién). Overly panegyric topics praising the Communist Party and the proletariat, such as those that had been selected for the late 1948 competition for the Polish United Workers' Party, were not common among the texts of the Nieborów songs; neither had they appeared as part of the competition held earlier in 1948.

As might be expected, poets and composers often disagreed about the suitability of particular poems. While composers wanted 'good' texts that they could set to music, poets did not always wish to change their verses to accommodate them. This came to the foreground during the discussion of Alfred Gradstein's 'Po zielonym moście' ['Along the Green Bridge'], text by Tadeusz Kubiak), one of the first songs evaluated at this meeting. Tadeusz Sygietyński, a composer and founder of the Mazowsze folk ensemble, claimed the song reflected an 'antagonism between the lyricist (*tekściarz*) and the composer. If the composer does not come to an agreement with the lyricist, the music fails. It is not

**7** AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, Seminarium pieśni masowej w Nieborowie 1950 r. [Seminar on Mass Songs in Nieborów, 1950], p. 1.

**8** A list of the songs is given in Appendix A.

**9** These occurred from September–October 1950. A. Thomas, 'Mobilising Our Man: Politics and Music in Poland during the Decade after the Second World War', in W. Thomas (ed.), *Composition–Performance–Reception: Studies in the Creative Process in Music*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 1998, pp. 150–155; F.H., 'Z życia Związku Kompozytorów Polskich' ['From the Life of the Polish Composers' Union'], *Muzyka*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1951, p. 55; ZKP, 12/116, Protokoły przesłuchiwanie utworów komponowanych przez członków ZKP 1950–56 r. [Minutes of Auditions Dedicated to Works Composed by Polish Composers' Union (PCU) Members, 1950–56]: Protokół z II przesłuchania Sekcji Pieśni Masowej [Minutes of the Second Audition of the Mass Song Section] and Protokół z pierwszej Audycji Sekcji Pieśni Masowej odbytej w Poznaniu w dniu 19 grudnia 1950 r. [Minutes of the First Audition of the Mass Song Section, Held in Poznań on 19 December 1950].

**10** AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, p. 20.

**11** AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, *passim*.

possible to force oneself [a composer] to write under an unsuitable text.<sup>12</sup>

Kubiak's poem tells of young boys cutting trees to build houses, which seemingly fits into the politically acceptable reality of rebuilding Poland after World War II, although there are no direct references to the war, socialism, or even to contemporary times.<sup>13</sup> This poem also does not include a refrain, which as mentioned above was often thought necessary for a successful mass song. As Gradstein noted, however (without citing the lack of a refrain), this text was inappropriate because a suitable musical form (i.e., for a mass song) could not be created to match the words.<sup>14</sup> Yet he still composed music to it and admitted that he also wrote songs to undesirable lyrics at other times.<sup>15</sup>

Contradicting Gradstein, however, poet Stanisław Wygodzki praised Kubiak's poem, saying 'he really took aim at what is simple and human.'<sup>16</sup> Another poet, Jan Wilczek, contrasted this text with Włodzimierz Słobodnik's lyrics for 'Piosenka o Warszawie' ['Song about Warsaw'] (music by Gradstein), which had been honored at the 1948 competition co-sponsored by Polish Radio and the Ministry of Culture Art. At Nieborów, Wilczek denigrated the text, saying there was 'nothing pretty' in Słobodnik's poem.<sup>17</sup> Its verses spoke of the Nazi occupation of Warsaw, while its refrain extolled the people who would rebuild the city, referred to as 'our mother'.<sup>18</sup>

If topics about war were not desirable for mass songs in 1950 – admittedly, Wilczek's comment to that effect

was neither echoed nor rejected by others at Nieborów – while more generic words about building houses were appreciated, what else could be accepted as appropriate poetic content? As it turns out, no topic earned automatic approval for poets. Józef Prutkowski's 'Pieśń o Stalinie' ['Song about Stalin'] (music by Edward Olearczyk) did not pass muster despite its seemingly laudatory words describing Stalin as someone whom all Poles admired and associated with peace.<sup>19</sup> Jan Wilczek, however, wanted this poem to be less intimate. Stanisław Wygodzki went further, saying the lyrics represented a 'misunderstanding. . . . We cannot approach Stalin so lightly. . . . Such a simplification and presentation of Stalin in a familiar manner is wrong. For us, Stalin is a revolutionary figure'.<sup>20</sup> He also did not appreciate the varying themes of each stanza, which mention factory halls, women touching Stalin's portrait, and Poles singing praises of thankfulness. For Wygodzki, such topical variations were 'unacceptable'.<sup>21</sup> Everyone who mentioned Olearczyk's musical setting, however, gave it high praise.

In contrast, Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński's poem of the same title ('Pieśń o Stalinie') did receive the approval of his colleagues, as did Władysław Walentynowicz's setting of it. The lyrics describe Stalin as bringing peace, freedom, and joy to Moscow, Prague, and Warsaw. They are more militaristic than Prutkowski's text: 'Under the hail of bullets, the reptile has fallen at Stalingrad, and we are with Moscow today, as with a brother'.<sup>22</sup> Most appreciated by the Nieborów participants was the uniform character of both the text and the music. Władysław Szpilman, Roman Sadowski, and Witold Rudziński all commented on how well the music fit the text. Unfortunately, to my knowledge, Olearczyk's and Walentynowicz's compositions were never published.

In reality, few texts were praised at Nieborów, echoing Zofia Lissa's lament in 1948 concerning the lack of appropriate poems for mass songs.<sup>23</sup> Throughout the archival materials related to this meeting, both poets and composers cited numerous inadequacies in the

**12** AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, p. 1. The page numbering in this archival document is somewhat confusing. It restarts after the first ten pages, which constitute the opening speeches. This citation comes from the 'second' page 1, which indicates the start of the song evaluations.

**13** Kubiak's poem was also used in W. Rudziński, *Po zielonym moście* [Along the Green Bridge], Kraków, Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1951. Gradstein's setting of this text was not published.

**14** AAN, MKiS 366, I/676, p. 2.

**15** Gradstein did this, for instance, using Jerzy Jurandot's text 'Pieśń o ZMP' ['Song about the Polish Youth Union'] even though he thought its stanzas were overly long for a mass song. AAN, MKiS 366, I/676, pp. 27–28.

**16** AAN, MKiS 366, I/676, p. 12.

**17** AAN, MKiS 366, I/676, p. 9.

**18** This piece will be discussed in more detail below. A. Gradstein, *Piosenka o Warszawie* [Song about Warsaw], Kraków, Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1951.

**19** Part of the text and an excerpt from Olearczyk's melody is given in 'Polska pieśń masowa: Pieśń o Stalinie' ['Polish Mass Song: Song about Stalin'], *Radio i Świat*, vol. 43, 1950, p. 4.

**20** AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, p. 23.

**21** AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, p. 23.

**22** M. Cisko, 'Pieśń o Stalinie' ['Song about Stalin'], *Na: Temat*, 31 January 2014, <https://natemat.pl/blogi/maciejcisko/90435,piesn-o-stalinie> (accessed 16 December 2022).

**23** L[issa], 'Sprawozdanie z konkursu...', pp. 13–14.

lyrics conceived for mass songs. If they were too light in mood, they were criticized; if the stanzas or refrains were too long, these were faulted. If they were somehow not inspiring, this was problematic. These poems did not need to be overtly ideological in a political (i.e., socialist realist) sense, but neither should they be reminiscent of interwar popular hits.

The most positive textual quality that can be inferred from this Nieborów meeting is that of contemporaneity: the words for mass songs must speak of something relevant to current Polish life, not to themes from the past. For some, Kubiak's 'Po zielonym moście' spoke of such activities. To give one more example, Krzysztof Gruszczyński's poem titled 'Warkocz' ['The Braid'] (music by Olearczyk) is about girls weaving textiles. One poet, Stanisław Wygodzki, said it was 'excellent'. Roman Jasiński even called this text 'undoubtedly ideological', a statement that is perhaps difficult to reconcile with the poem's non-political nature, although it does refer to textile workers, undoubtedly an essential commodity in the early years of post-World War II Poland. But it was possible to stray too far into sentimentality: Ludwik Jerzy Kern's poem 'Nocny lot' ['Night Flight'] (music by Stanisława Gajdeczka), was derided by Tadeusz Kubiak as a 'typical bourgeoisie, sentimental song. . . . It is not a sentimental song that can appear now – it is tearful and very schematic. This text is politically vague and literarily harmful.'<sup>24</sup> The lyrics describe a pilot flying at night, comparing heaven to his girlfriend's eyes and finally declaring that 'the Polish sky is the most beautiful of all'.<sup>25</sup> It seems that love could not be in the air, musically speaking, in contemporary Poland.

## MUSIC

What about the musical settings of these pieces? For the most part, the music and lyrics of each song were evaluated separately, with the music being given considerably less attention. One of the few times when both were discussed as a unit led to negative comments. Gradstein's music for 'Piosenka o Warszawie' ['Song about Warsaw'] (text by Słobodnik), composed in 1947, moves from a minor key in one stanza (with words about the bombing of Warsaw, as alluded to above) to a major

key in the next (whose text describes Warsaw being restored), with the refrain about 'mother' Warsaw also set in both minor and major harmonies. Andrzej Klon implied that both the words and the music were incorrect, for in his opinion the mood of mass songs should not change from one stanza to the next, but should instead maintain some emotional center. In 1948, Zofia Lissa had praised Gradstein's competition songs ('Piosenka o Warszawie' and 'Od Różana trakt' ['From the Różan Road']) for their optimistic mood and energetic rhythms, despite Słobodnik's verses about the war in the first of these pieces.<sup>26</sup> By 1950, she had changed her mind, saying that 'it is not possible to look for a direct path' if tonalities were inconsistent, implying that a unity of theme and music were lacking in this piece.<sup>27</sup> If Lissa did not care for such harmonic transformations, composers did not heed her advice, for Adrian Thomas has noted that these shifts from minor to major keys were common in mass songs by Polish composers.<sup>28</sup>

The same piece, Gradstein's 'Piosenka o Warszawie', is marked with a 'moderate march' tempo (*umiarkowany marsz*), which fits into the guidelines for mass songs that had been expressed in the late 1940s. As Roman Jasiński noted at Nieborów when speaking about mass songs from earlier years, 'initially [that is, about 1948] everyone rushed to hymns and marches',<sup>29</sup> although his reference to hymns seems out of place in Communist Poland. His statement is not entirely true, since some of the songs given awards at the 1948 competition organized by Polish Radio and the Ministry of Culture and Art did not fit that description. For example, the tempo for Tadeusz Szeligowski's 'Od Różana trakt' ['From the Różan Road'] (text by Tadeusz Kubiak) is given as 'slowly' (*wolno*) in 4/4 time, and for his 'Zielona brzoźzko' ['Green Birch Tree'] (text by Jerzy Zagórski), the stanza is marked 'slowly' (*wolno*), as seen in Example 1, and is in A minor while the refrain, a march, is in A major (a setting that Lissa did not criticize in her 1948 article about that competition). The stanza also includes three fermatas, which lends a rubato feeling to the piece that

<sup>24</sup> AAN, MKiS, 366 I/676, p. 44.

<sup>25</sup> 'Piosenka: "Nocny lot"' ['Song: "Night Flight"'], *Stare Melodie*, [https://staremelodie.pl/piosenka/2436/Nocny\\_lot](https://staremelodie.pl/piosenka/2436/Nocny_lot) (accessed 16 December 2022).

<sup>26</sup> L[issa], 'Sprawozdanie z konkursu...', pp. 13–14.

<sup>27</sup> AAN MKiS 366, I/676, p. 1. Both Klon and Lissa may also have been referring to Gradstein's 'Chłopcy z ZMP' ['Boys from the Polish Youth Union']; this and 'Piosenka o Warszawie' were discussed together. The music of the latter fits the comments made by both musicians.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas, 'Mobilising Our Man', pp. 152, 157.

<sup>29</sup> AAN MKiS 366, I/676, p. 36.





**Example 1.** Tadeusz Szeligowski, 'Zielona brzoźka' for voice and piano, Warsaw, Czytelnik, 1949, measures 1–8, stanza one, melody only. English translation: 'Green birch tree! Gray stream! When the company walks through the forest, songs emerge in the shade of the branches and every tree greets us!'

would have been out of place in a march.<sup>30</sup> This piece, then, was not a straightforward setting but one that was relatively complex musically, indicating that even in 1948 the songs honored at competitions did not quite fit the desired parameters.

It is difficult to claim that there was ever any rigidity regarding the appropriate musical characteristics of mass songs. Yes, some of the songs heard in 1950 at Nieborów (that were later published) were marked as marches (for example, Gradstein's 'Czołgiści' ['The Tank Men'], text by Kubiak),<sup>31</sup> as were other mass songs published either that year or in 1951, but not evaluated in Nieborów (for example, Witold Frieman's 'Pieśń o pieśni' ['Song about Songs'], text by Krystyna Gajewska),<sup>32</sup> and Edward Olearczyk's 'Miliony rąk' ['Millions of Hands'], text by Krzysztof Gruszczyński).<sup>33</sup> But others were not marches or even in 2/4 or 4/4 meter. Among the songs that were discussed at Nieborów and later published, Henryk Swolkień's 'Włóknianka', mentioned above, is in triple meter, while Edward Olearczyk's 'Warkocz', also cited above, incorporates krakowiak rhythms and a brisk tempo reminiscent of that Polish dance,<sup>34</sup> as shown in Example 2. The fact that this latter song was set to krakowiak rhythms undoubtedly helped some of the musicians present

at Nieborów to admire its 'Polishness',<sup>35</sup> which was a desirable trait for participants at this meeting. Although not heard at Nieborów, one of the most popular mass songs in the early 1950s, Gradstein's 'Na prawo most, na lewo most' ['On the Right a Bridge, On the Left a Bridge'] (text by Helena Kołaczowska) is set as a waltz.<sup>36</sup> Those who were expected to sing and appreciate mass songs obviously did not care about the meter of these pieces; most likely they appreciated the fact that they were dances rather than marches. Szpilman, however, at one point asked in Nieborów what a mass song was, for he recognized that some pieces in published collections of so-called mass songs were waltzes or tangos,<sup>37</sup> which he likely knew had been disparaged in recent years.

Although the musical characteristics of most pieces were often not discussed in detail at Nieborów, that does not mean they went without mention. Typically, their positive traits were not enumerated; the adjectives 'good' or 'pretty' were sufficient in most cases to voice approval for a melody or entire song. Negative characteristics were more easily discerned. Clearly, allusions to Russian songs were not wanted by everyone: Lutosławski described Władysław Szpilman's 'Ludzie walki i pracy' ['Fighting and Working People'] (text by Kazimierz Winkler-Augustowski)<sup>38</sup> as a 'lovely song, but it is Russian and so a bit unnatural. . . . The goal . . . is to create

<sup>30</sup> T. Szeligowski, *Zielona brzoźka. Od Różana trakt* [Green Birch Tree. From the Różan Road], Warszawa, Czytelnik, 1949.

<sup>31</sup> A. Gradstein, *Czołgiści* [The Tank Men], Warszawa, Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej, 1951.

<sup>32</sup> W. Frieman, *Pieśń o pieśni* [Song about Songs], Kraków, Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1951.

<sup>33</sup> E. Olearczyk, *Miliony rąk* [Millions of Hands], Kraków, Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1951.

<sup>34</sup> Both pieces were published by Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne in 1951.

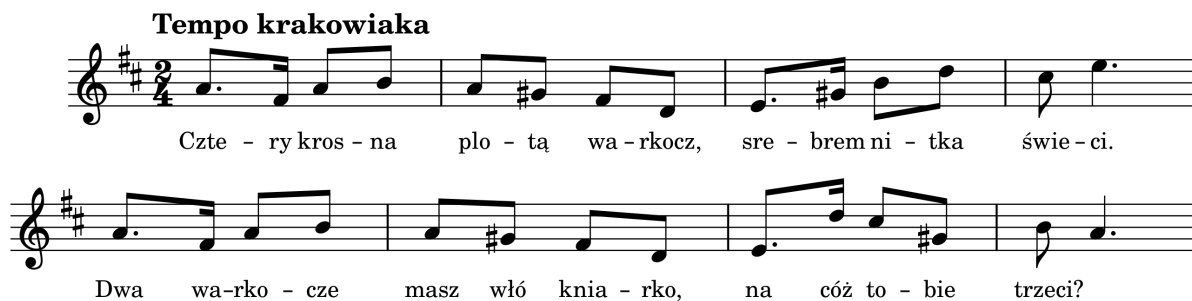
<sup>35</sup> AAN, MkiS 366 I/676, p. 22.

<sup>36</sup> A. Gradstein, *Na prawo most, na lewo most* [On the Right a Bridge, On the Left a Bridge], Kraków, Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1950.

<sup>37</sup> AAN, MkiS 366 I/676, p. 7.

<sup>38</sup> W. Szpilman, *Ludzie walki i pracy* [Fighting and Working People], Warszawa, Czytelnik, 1950.

**Tempo krakowiaka**



Czte - ry kros - na plo - tą wa - rkocz, sre - brem ni - tka świe - ci.  
Dwa wa - rko - cze masz włó knia - rko, na cóż to - bie trzeci?

**Example 2.** Edward Olearczyk, 'Warkocz' for voice and piano, Kraków, Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1951, measures 6–12, stanza one, melody only. English translation: 'Four looms are making a braid, the thread shines with silver. Textile worker, you have two braids, what do you need a third one for?'

a Polish mass song. . . . This is . . . a type of pastiche.<sup>39</sup> Witold Rudziński thought the same piece was well done, however; he described it as 'extremely tasty'.<sup>40</sup>

Other musical influences were also sometimes criticized. Although Alfred Gradstein and Jan Wilczek praised the music for Władysław Walentynowicz's 'Ojczyzny nasz Bałtyk' ['Our Native Baltic'] (text by Edward Fiszer), others, including Andrzej Klon and Roman Jasiński, did not like it. Klon declared it 'rather not lyrical but hymnlike. It has a rather German or English character, not Polish. . . . Besides that it is not original and for that reason will not be a mass song.'<sup>41</sup> Jasiński linked this piece to songs popular before World War I, saying it did not appeal to him at first, although 'perhaps it may catch on in the long run'.<sup>42</sup> Such critiques, of course, were not overly helpful. After all, if a Polish composer wrote music to lyrics in the Polish language, did the resulting composition not inherently have native influences, particularly if it did not incorporate direct quotations from works of foreign composers?

The concept of Polishness in music at that time generally meant the adaptation or direct citation of folk music. At Nieborów some speakers referred to such connections as being favorable for mass songs. Andrzej Klon, for example, declared that mass songs would be 'understood and sung' if these pieces were 'a continuation of Polish folk song'.<sup>43</sup> He even described his own 'Chłopcy z popod Tatr' ['Boys from the Tatra Foothills'] (text by Leopold

Lewin) as a folk song.<sup>44</sup> Roman Jasiński also suggested that it could be advantageous for mass song composers to link to folk traditions, referring to Gradstein's use in his 'ZMP pomaga wsi' ['The Polish Youth Union Helps Villagers'] (text by Helena Kołaczowska) of allusions to songs written about the November 1831 Polish rebellion against the Russians.<sup>45</sup> Overall, this piece, whose lyrics set to repetitive rhythmic motives in a 'rather lively' (*dosyć żywo*) tempo (Example 3) describe Polish youth eagerly dancing and working as they assist villagers with the harvest, was among the few that were praised by everyone who mentioned it.<sup>46</sup>

### PIEŚŃ, PIEŚŃ MASOWA, AND PIOSENKA

The discussion thus far, revolving for the most part around general musical characteristics and somewhat more detailed textual qualities of the songs that were heard in Nieborów in 1950, has neglected an important point about the terminology used to refer to mass songs in Poland. In the original Polish of the Nieborów documents, the terms *pieśń*, *pieśń masowa*, and *piosenka* all appear frequently in reference to these pieces. In English, the only possible translation for *pieśń* and *piosenka* is 'song'. But their meanings are not the same for Poles. *Pieśń* refers most often to a song that can sung on stage, usually by trained vocalists. In English, such pieces are sometimes also referred to as art songs. A *piosenka* is typically a song that is lighter in mood and style and designated

<sup>39</sup> AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, pp. 46–47.

<sup>40</sup> AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, p. 46.

<sup>41</sup> AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, p. 18.

<sup>42</sup> AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, p. 18.

<sup>43</sup> AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, p. 21

<sup>44</sup> AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, p. 21.

<sup>45</sup> AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, p. 39.

<sup>46</sup> A. Gradstein, *ZMP pomaga wsi* [*The Polish Youth Union Helps Villagers*], Kraków, Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1951.

**Dosyć żywo, wesoło**



Ro - zśpie-wa - ło się po po - lach, ro - zdźwię - cza - ło żni - wiar-ka - mi,  
za - ro-i - ły się za-go - ny dzie-wczę ta - mi, chło - pa-ka - mi.

**Example 3.** Alfred Gradstein, ‘ZMP pomaga wsi’ for voice and piano, Kraków, Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1951, measures 5–12, stanza one, melody only. English translation: ‘Singing started in the fields, which resounded with reapers. The fields swarmed with girls and boys.’

for popular usage. In Poland, these might be heard in clubs, dance halls, or on the street. Those at Nieborów also referred to *pieśni masowe* (mass songs) in reference to compositions that they also called either *pieśni* (the plural of *pieśń*) or *piosenki* (the plural of *piosenka*). Although all of these terms were employed to refer to the same song, most participants at Nieborów considered these compositions to be stylistically closer to *piosenki*.

In 1947, Zofia Lissa and Zbigniew Turski – authors of the first articles about mass songs in Poland – had used the terms *pieśń* and *pieśń masowa* to describe these new pieces as they introduced the genre to Polish cultural life. Lissa acknowledged that these compositions needed to be different from both the art songs of Szymanowski, Ravel, and others and the popular interwar *piosenki*, which she described at that time as ‘vulgar’.<sup>47</sup> At Nieborów in 1950, the opening speeches by cultural officials – Minister of Culture and Art Stefan Dybowski and Wilhelm Billig, the head of Polish Radio – also adopted the same two terms and avoided the word *piosenka*. Billig, for example, initially affirmed that mass songs (*pieśni masowe*) were related to folk music as he declared that these new pieces were to be a ‘serious means of influencing the masses’.<sup>48</sup> But he departed from this seemingly more formal terminology when he said later that a *piosenka* could also be a mass song (*pieśń masowa*) if it was appreciated by the general public, but did not have ‘vulgar’ lyrics.<sup>49</sup> In his opinion, Gradstein’s march titled ‘Czołgiści’ was such a piece; he described it as not a particularly striking

piece, although it had a pleasing side in that it ‘links to our traditions. . . . It is a Polish *piosenka*’.<sup>50</sup> (The lyrics describe a girl who walked at night alongside the tanks and tank men; musically it consists of easily memorized melodic and rhythmic patterns, as shown in Example 4.) Edward Olearczyk seemed to agree with Billig at least to some extent, for he said that *piosenki* initially presented on stage could later become ‘mass (*masowe*) pieces – the boundaries are fluid’,<sup>51</sup> implying that as people learned these songs from trained performers, they would begin singing them themselves.

Not everyone agreed with that opinion. Jerzy Jasiński, a music administrator and critic who in 1950 worked in the Ministry of Culture and Art, claimed that *pieśni masowe* (mass songs) and *piosenki* were different types of pieces, with the former being more artistically sophisticated.<sup>52</sup> Certainly these and other officials hoped that the pieces under consideration would appeal to the general populace, but differ from many popular interwar songs; in fact, there were frequent references during this meeting to the disgraceful nature of these earlier pieces.

It is important to realize, however, that Jasiński was one of the few people at Nieborów to make such a distinction and even he did not follow through with it when he discussed individual pieces. For instance, he described Olearczyk’s ‘Warkocz’ as a ‘pretty’ *piosenka* that was ‘one of the best we have’.<sup>53</sup> For Roman Jasiński, the head of Polish Radio’s music department, the same work was a *pieśń masowa*. Yet, following his comment about hymns and marches being characteristic of early

<sup>47</sup> Z. Lissa, ‘O polską pieśń masową’ [‘For the Polish Mass Song’], *Odrodzenie* 29, 1947, p. 3. See also Z. Turski, ‘O polską pieśń masową’ [‘For the Polish Mass Song’], *Nowiny literackie*, vol. 29, 1947, p. 7.

<sup>48</sup> AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, pp. 1, 5.

<sup>49</sup> AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, p. 1.

<sup>50</sup> AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, p. 37.

<sup>51</sup> AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, p. 39.

<sup>52</sup> AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, p. 14.

<sup>53</sup> AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, p. 22.



**Tempo marsza**



Po - szła Ma - ryś z czoł - gi - sta - mi w noc, co by - ła ciem-na, zła,  
o - czy mia - ła jak a - ksa - mit i war - ko - cze ja - sne dwa.

**Example 4.** Alfred Gradstein, 'Czołgiści' for voice and piano, Warsaw, Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej, 1951, measures 13–21, stanza one, melody only. English translation: 'Mary went with the tank men at night, which was dark and evil. She had eyes like velvet and two shining braids.'

mass songs in Poland, Jasiński declared that 'now we are shifting to *piosenki*. It is worth emphasizing . . . that such a *piosenka* [as Gradstein's 'Czołgiści'] is good for the masses.'<sup>54</sup>

Many composers, in fact, used the terms *pieśń*, *pieśń masowa*, and *piosenka* interchangeably. At the same time, however, everyone recognized that mass songs were different than the art songs written earlier by Franz Schubert, Karol Szymanowski, Stanisław Moniuszko, and others. Although they criticized some aspects of the songs they heard at Nieborów, they refrained from recommending changes to make them more evocative of these more complex pieces. During these discussions, the term *pieśń* simply pertained to some sort of generic song and was usually used in conjunction with both *pieśń masowa* and *piosenka*. The usage of *piosenka* at Nieborów also reflected what could be construed as the composers' negative attitude toward composing somewhat simple pieces instead of devoting their time to more complex works worthy of their talent and education.

Szpilman, like many others, used all of these terms. As mentioned above, he noted that some published collections of mass songs (*pieśni masowe*) contained pieces that were, rhythmically speaking, waltzes or tangos – or *piosenki*. He also referred to *piosenki* as pieces to be sung before, during, and after work, which is when mass songs were theoretically to be performed, at least in the opinions of governmental and political officials. Although many published mass songs were arranged for various ensembles, including choirs who performed on stage, they were not foreseen as exclusively stage songs. Instead, officials hoped that these songs would become

popular for ad hoc singing by the general populace, in which case *piosenki* seems to be the more appropriate term.

Andrzej Klon also used these terms interchangeably in Nieborów. He described Jan Ekier's 'Na zielonych bukach' ['On Green Beech Trees'] (text by Tadeusz Kubiak), as both a *pieśń masowa* and a *piosenka*. In this song, each of its five verses is seven measures long, with the last three measures of each stanza being essentially the same as the preceding three. As shown in Example 5, the harmony is exclusively in G minor, the melody has a relatively small range of a sixth presented in a 4/4 meter, the tempo is moderato, and its rhythms are uncomplicated, playable by beginning musicians. This is a very simple piece, then. Its lyrics refer to a boy or man who has gone to some unknown city, which at the end is revealed to be Warsaw. It is not obviously ideological in a political sense or even suggestive of contemporary Polish life. Klon called it an 'excellent *piosenka*. No composer who is not contemporary to us would write such a *piosenka*'.<sup>55</sup> What did he mean? Perhaps that Ekier had achieved the level of simplicity and easy-to-memorize music that fit Klon's own ideas about mass songs for socialist Poland? For Klon, though this piece was also a *pieśń masowa* exhibiting a 'modern approach' (*nowoczesne ujęcie*).<sup>56</sup>

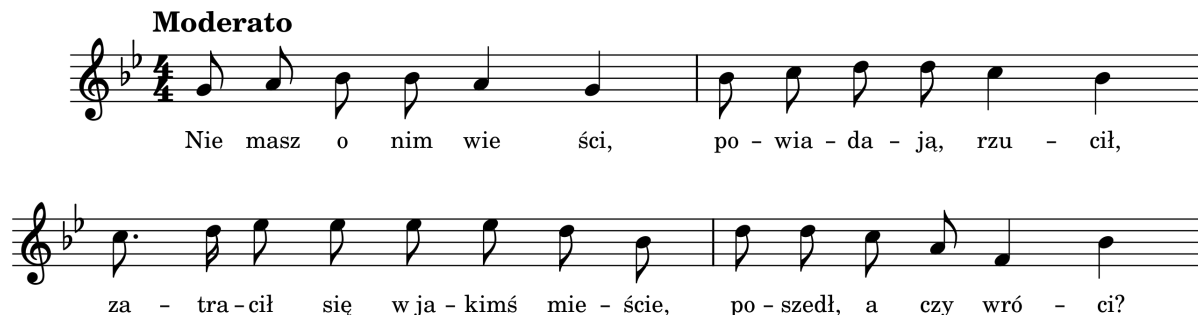
Similar examples of the seemingly fluid usage of the terms *pieśń masowa* and *piosenka* abound in these materials. Yet this apparent ambiguity masks a noteworthy consideration. Nearly everyone used the term *piosenka* at various times during these discussions, particularly

<sup>54</sup> AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, p. 36.

<sup>55</sup> AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, p. 37. The song was published by Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne in 1951.

<sup>56</sup> AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, p. 27.

**Moderato**



Nie masz o nim wie ści, po - wia - da - ją, rzu - cił,  
za - tra - cił się w ja - kimś mie - ście, po - szedł, a czy wró - ci?

**Example 5.** Jan Ekier, ‘Na zielonych bukach’ for voice and piano, Kraków, Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1951, stanza two, measures 2–5, melody only. English translation: ‘You have no news about him, they say he walked out. They say he lost himself in some town. He went, but will he return?’

during discussions of specific compositions. As Gradstein said during the deliberations about Olearczyk’s ‘Skąd taka zmiana’ [‘Why Such a Change’], ‘people . . . like such *piosenki*. . . . If we write artistically excellent songs (*pieśni*) no one will sing them.’ But indicating what he thought of the state of Polish mass songs in general, he went on to say ‘if we had a large selection [of mass songs], it would be possible to reject [this one].’<sup>57</sup> He clearly believed that *piosenki* could be worthy (or at least adequate) examples of what the government wanted to call mass songs. Szpilman also – perhaps deliberately – used the term *piosenka* immediately after Jerzy Jasiński, as mentioned above, had declared that ‘*pieśni masowe* should be artistically more sophisticated than *piosenki*’, which indicates that the composer either perceived *piosenki* to be an appropriate part of the conversation at Nieborów and/or that that he considered every mass song to be a *piosenka* in quality and perceived usage.

Many other composers present in Nieborów, including Lutosławski, Gradstein, Klon, Olearczyk, Szpilman, and Stanisława Gajdeczka, also frequently used the term *piosenka* to refer to the pieces being evaluated; since this meeting was dedicated to ‘mass songs’, these musicians obviously believed that *piosenki* could be equated with that term. To mention just one additional case, Szpilman said about his own ‘Pieśń pokoju’ [‘Song of Peace’] (text by Roman Sadowski)<sup>58</sup> that he had ‘wanted to write an optimistic march-like *piosenka*’.<sup>59</sup> Some of his fellow

composers (Henryk Swolkień and Andrzej Klon) liked the piece, saying it was suitable as a march. Władysław Walentynowicz, however, criticized what he called its ‘jerky rhythms’, which, as shown in Example 6, were less repetitive than some of the other pieces heard at that time. Thus both Ekier’s simple ‘Na zielonych bukach’ (Example 5) and Szpilman’s somewhat more difficult ‘Pieśń pokoju’ could be called *piosenki*.

Perhaps most importantly, since no official decisions were ever made about the suitability for public use of any song heard at Nieborów, the future of these pieces was not affected by such comments. Szpilman’s ‘Pieśń pokoju’ was published by Czytelnik, as was Swolkień’s ‘Zbudujemy nową Polskę’ [‘We Will Build a New Poland’], which at Nieborów was castigated for both its music and lyrics (and was called both a *pieśń* and a *piosenka* by different participants).<sup>60</sup> Similarly, Polish Music Publishers (PWM) printed a series of mass songs in 1951, which included Gradstein’s ‘Piosenka o Warszawie’, with its references to wartime occupation, and Olearczyk’s ‘Warkocz’, both which had been called *piosenki* in Nieborów.

## PERSONALITIES

The names of several composers who are relatively unknown even in Poland have already been mentioned several times. Andrzej Klon is perhaps the most unfamiliar. His name is lacking in such major reference works as *Encyklopedia Muzyczna PWM* [PWM Music Encyclopedia], *Kompozytorzy polscy 1918–2000* [Polish Composers 1918–2000], and Bogusław Schaeffer’s

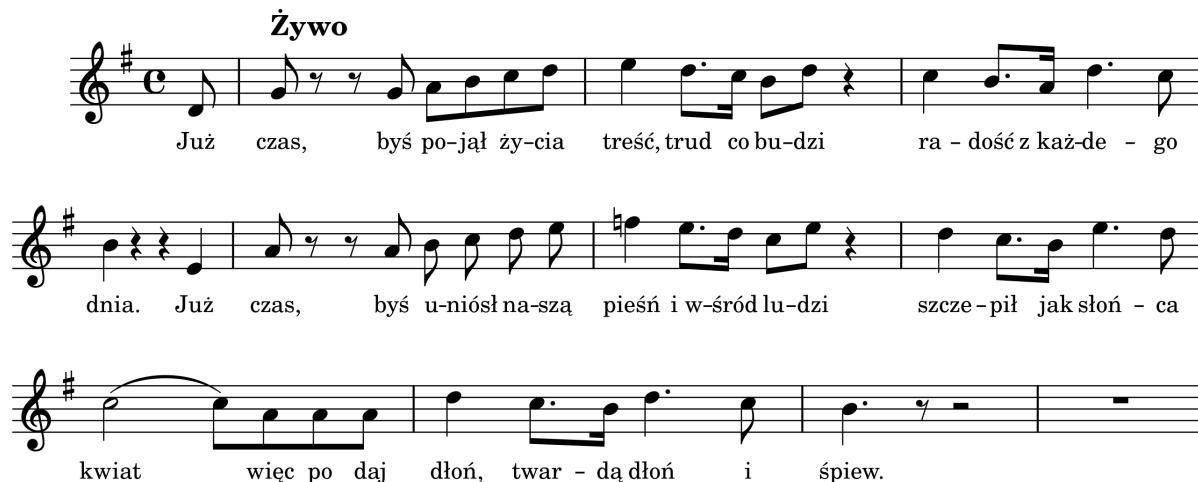
<sup>57</sup> AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, p. 25.

<sup>58</sup> W. Szpilman, *Pieśń pokoju*, Cyfrowa Biblioteka Polskiej Piosenki, [https://bibliotekapiosenki.pl/publikacje/Szpilman\\_Wladyslaw\\_Piesn\\_pokoju](https://bibliotekapiosenki.pl/publikacje/Szpilman_Wladyslaw_Piesn_pokoju) (accessed 16 December 2022).

<sup>59</sup> AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, p. 49.

<sup>60</sup> AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, p. 58. The music publishing sector of Czytelnik specialized in pieces for students and other amateurs, not in more serious art music.

**Żywo**



Już czas, byś po-jał ży-cia treść, trud co bu-dzi ra - dość z każ-de - go  
dnia. Już czas, byś u-niósł na-szą pieśń i w-śród lu-dzi szcze-pił jak słoń - ca  
kwiat więc po daj dłoń, twar - dą dłoń i śpiew.

**Example 6.** Władysław Szpilman, 'Pieśń pokoju' for voice and piano, Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1951, stanza two, measures 1–11, melody only. English translation: 'It is time for you to understand the content of life, the toil that inspires joy from every day. It is time for you to lift our song among people, to graft it like the flower of the sun. So lend us a hand, a sturdy hand, and sing.'

*Almanach polskich kompozytorów współczesnych* [*Lexicon of Polish Contemporary Composers*]. He has been listed as a member of the Polish Composers Union from 1947–1952, although it is not clear that he ever progressed beyond being a 'candidate', or provisional member; he was not named as a full member during deliberations of the Polish Composers' Union's Qualifications Committee and in September 1952 he was not listed even as a candidate member.<sup>61</sup> According to available information, he received only a few performances of his own works; those we know about occurred from 1948–1950. His compositional output consists mostly of songs, along with at least three string quartets.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Polmic.pl gives 1947–1952 as Klon's membership dates, but an acceptance date of June 1948 is given in ZKP archival documents, where Klon is named as a candidate member. ZKP, 12/28, Protokoły z posiedzeń Prezydium ZG ZKP 1945–1950 r., Protokół z posiedzenia Prezydium Zarządu Głównego ZKP z dnia 22 grudnia 49 r. [Minutes of the Meetings of the Presidium of PCU's Executive Board, 1945–1950: Minutes of the Meetings of the Praesidium of PCU's Executive Board Held on 22 December 1949]; ZKP, 12/56, Komisja kwalifikacyjna przy Zarz. Głównym. Protokoły posiedzeń 1947–53 r., Lista osób nowoprzyjętych na członków Z.K.P. od dnia 4 czerwca 1948 r. [The Qualifying Committee of the Executive Board. Minutes of Meetings 1947–53. List of Newly Admitted PCU Members from 4 June 1948]; 12/56, Komisja Kwalifikacyjna ZKP do Zarządu Głównego ZKP 22 września 52 r. [PCU Qualifying Committee to PCU's Executive Board, 22 September 1952].

<sup>62</sup> This information comes from *Radio i Świat*, MKiS, 366/I

Although Klon did not attend the annual congress of the Polish Composers' Union held from June 16–19, 1950, he was an active participant at the meeting about mass songs held earlier that month that is the subject of this essay. At that time, he occasionally referred to his knowledge of mass songs in the Soviet Union, implying that he had lived there for some time, although whether this was before or after World War II is not known. He declared that in the Soviet Union there was almost no distinction between *piosenki* and *pieśni masowe*, but also noted that in Poland mass songs (to use the generic English term) should be more like folk pieces than jazz compositions.<sup>63</sup> He unhesitatingly criticized the pieces heard at Nieborów, claiming that Witold Rudziński's 'Po zielonym moście' (text by Tadeusz Kubiak) was a 'folk song in good taste', but that it was not popular.<sup>64</sup> In his opinion, Szpilman's 'Marsz młodzieży' ['March of the Youth'] was an example of 'bad plagiarism of foreign

499, and ZKP, 12/54, Protokoły z posiedzeń Komisji Zamówień i Zakupów 1948–1957 r. [Minutes of the Meetings of the Commissions Committee]. Klon received a commission for a String Quartet no. 3, but whether it was completed is unknown. He also claimed to have written a cantata about Stalin, but there is no evidence that this was ever performed. ZKP, 15/37, 70-ta rocznica urodzin J. Stalina. Zobowiązania kompozytorów 1949–50 r. [J. Stalin's Seventieth Birthday. Composers' Commitments 1949–50], Letter from A. Klon, 15 December 1949.

<sup>63</sup> AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, pp. 8, 15.

<sup>64</sup> AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, p. 41.

light music'.<sup>65</sup> His colleagues did not compliment his own pieces, which at Nieborów included 'Chłopcy z popod Tatr', 'Zaśpiewali towarzysze' ['Comrades Sang'] (text by Jacek Bocheński) and 'Piosenka marynarska' [Sailors' Song] (text by Witold Wirpsza). According to Jerzy Jasiński, 'Chłopcy z popod Tatr' was 'a negation of a mass song (*pieśń masowa*)' in part because no one could spontaneously sing it.<sup>66</sup> The poet Roman Sadowski called this same piece a stage song, not a *pieśń masowa*, which, in his opinion, should be easy and 'catchy' (*chwytliwa*).<sup>67</sup>

Given Klon's interests in composing songs and participating in discussions about them, it would be interesting to know what happened to him after the early 1950s. Being removed from the Polish Composers' Union would have left him with fewer resources for commissions and grants for composition, not to mention assistance with health care and other amenities. Perhaps this situation led him to pursue a different profession that would provide more financial security for him and his family.

Alfred Gradstein is more well known than Klon, but his personal statements about mass songs have rarely been scrutinized in the past.<sup>68</sup> A prolific composer of songs and piano compositions who had studied in France with Nadia Boulanger in the late 1920s, he remained in that country until 1947, when he returned to Poland. He quickly became active in the Polish Composers' Union, where he served as its secretary from 1948–1950. He was also recognized by the Polish government in 1950 as one of the country's 'most valued creators of mass songs'.<sup>69</sup> He briefly led the union's mass song section the same year, although Edward Olearczyk soon took over that position.<sup>70</sup>

At Nieborów, Gradstein positioned himself as a proponent of mass songs. As mentioned above with reference to Olearczyk's 'Skąd taka zmiana', he believed that these should be less complex than typical art songs. He also warned against introducing too many innovations in them,<sup>71</sup> reasoning that such modifications would lessen their appeal for their intended audience; just what kind of 'original moments' he thought were potentially problematic was left undefined.

Gradstein lamented the progress of mass song composition in Poland, saying his colleagues did 'bad work'.<sup>72</sup> He called for poets to provide lyrics that were short and included rhymes, for he considered these qualities to be ideal for mass songs.<sup>73</sup> He particularly castigated poets for not providing suitable texts. Pointing to his own 'Konstanty Rokossowski', which Billig criticized for its 'ideologically bad' poetry, Gradstein said he had worked with the poet, Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński, to improve the poem. Although he ultimately was not happy with the result, he still set the verses to music, as he had with 'Po zielonym moście' and 'Pieśń ZMP', as mentioned above. He also claimed that the Polish Military House (Dom Wojska Polskiego) had insisted that he compose 'Konstanty Rokossowski', a reminder that governmental authorities pressured at least some composers to adhere to their wishes.<sup>74</sup> If Gradstein was not satisfied with the state of mass song in Poland circa 1950, it is also clear from these Nieborów documents that no one was pleased with the songs that had emerged thus far.

One of the most interesting exchanges to occur at Nieborów developed in response to comments made by Witold Lutosławski. At one point, the composer admitted that he avoided lyrics that did not appeal to him, pointing to a situation where he had been sent an unsatisfactory text by the Polish Youth Union. He asked the union to send a different poem, which was never delivered. Ultimately, he refused to compose music to the original words. At Nieborów, one poet, Jan Wilczek, replied that since the original text had been approved by the youth union, ideological content was to be expected, although there is no indication that Lutosławski's dissatisfaction was with that facet of the poem.<sup>75</sup> In Gradstein's opinion, refusing

<sup>65</sup> AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, p. 50.

<sup>66</sup> AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, p. 21.

<sup>67</sup> AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, pp. 21–22.

<sup>68</sup> For details about Gradstein's life, see N. Taylor-Terlecka, 'Wśród twórców pieśni masowej' ['Among the Composers of Mass Songs'], *Colloquia Orientalia Bialostocensia: literatura, historia*, vol. 45, 2020, pp. 191–222, [https://repozytorium.uwb.edu.pl/jspui/bitstream/11320/12030/1/N\\_Taylor\\_Terlecka\\_Wsrod\\_tworcow\\_piesni\\_masowej.pdf](https://repozytorium.uwb.edu.pl/jspui/bitstream/11320/12030/1/N_Taylor_Terlecka_Wsrod_tworcow_piesni_masowej.pdf) (accessed 16 December 2022).

<sup>69</sup> 'Wśród laureatów nagród państwowych: Alfred Gradstein inicjator pieśni masowych' ['Winners of State Awards: Alfred Gradstein – Initiator of the Mass Song'], *Życie Warszawy*, vol. 216, 1950, p. 3.

<sup>70</sup> ZKP, 12/53, Sekcje ZKP nieistniejące [Non-existent PCU sections].

<sup>71</sup> AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, p. 8.

<sup>72</sup> AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, p. 31.

<sup>73</sup> AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, pp. 3, 7, 28.

<sup>74</sup> AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, p. 40.

<sup>75</sup> Lutosławski did not name the poem or the poet. AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, pp. 30, 32.

to use a poor text was a dangerous thing to do, although he also agreed that quality was an important issue.<sup>76</sup> Roman Jasiński acknowledged that the issue of poor lyrics was pervasive, for he said that ‘if every composer took the same position as Lutosławski, we would have no mass songs’.<sup>77</sup> Lutosławski’s stance, however, aligns with what we understand about this composer – that he believed the quality of any composition was of utmost importance. At Nieborów he pushed for individuality in mass songs, not the formulaic pieces that he believed had been produced thus far.<sup>78</sup> But lest we think that he wanted mass songs to be more complex, we must note that he also said this: ‘I want to introduce an extravagant innovation. I think a song that should be sung by many millions of people – must be simple and absolutely elementary.’<sup>79</sup> Although Lutosławski used the term *pieśń* in that quote, elsewhere he sometimes described mass songs as *piosenki*,<sup>80</sup> indicating that he considered them to be different than those songs intended for concert audiences.

At Nieborów, Lutosławski pushed for appropriate settings of Polish texts and did not hesitate to criticize some of the melodies he heard. Indeed, he was an active participant at this meeting. Gradstein even stated ‘the fact that Lutosławski takes part in all of our meetings about mass songs (*pieśni masowe*) is sufficient proof of his good intentions to cooperate. Everything else we know about him proves that this matter is on his heart’.<sup>81</sup> Wilhelm Billig considered Lutosławski to be one of Poland’s most talented composers; his cooperation at Nieborów and with mass songs in general was, Billig believed, valuable for the future of this genre in Poland.<sup>82</sup>

Why was Lutosławski at Nieborów and why was he so actively involved, when elsewhere he had voiced his displeasure with the state of musical affairs in Poland? He had also declined to participate in the 1948 song competition honoring the creation of the Polish United Workers’ Party.<sup>83</sup> He had worked with Polish Radio since 1945 and even though he did not have a permanent position with them after March 1946, he still accepted their commissions and performed for broadcasts.<sup>84</sup> This gave him a valuable source of income that he did not want to disrupt.<sup>85</sup> It is conceivable that Billig and/or Jasiński, both of whom had high-ranking positions at Polish Radio, pressured Lutosławski into attending the sessions in Nieborów. Given his somewhat precarious financial situation at that time, the composer may have felt that he had little choice but to comply.<sup>86</sup> Jasiński, we should mention, had joined the Communist party in Poland so that he could remain employed at Polish Radio,<sup>87</sup> which meant that he, too, was susceptible for financial reasons to a type of ‘accommodation’ with the government.

**83** AAN, MKiS 366/I 499, Projekt regulaminu i konkursu na pieśń Zjednoczonych Partii, Wykaz kompozytorów zaproszonych do udziału w Konkursie na Pieśń Zjednoczonych Partii, Pieśni nadesłane na konkurs [Competition for a Song of the United Parties: Draft of the Competition Regulations and Procedures. List of Invited Composers. List of Submitted Songs], and Protokół z zebrania sądu konkursowego dla rozstrzygnięcia konkursu [Minutes of the Jury Meeting – Decisions about the Competition Results]; L. Markiewicz (ed.), *Korespondencja Grzegorza Fitelberga z lat 1941–1953* [Grzegorz Fitelberg’s Correspondence from the Years 1941–1953], Katowice, Fundacja Muzyczna Międzynarodowego Konkursu Dyrygentów im. Grzegorza Fitelberga, 2003, p. 118.

**84** D. Gwizdalanka and K. Meyer, *Lutosławski. Droga do dojrzałości* [Lutosławski. The Road to Maturity], Kraków, Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 2003, pp. 141–142.

**85** According to Tadeusz Kaczyński, Lutosławski acknowledged that he was paid relatively well for composing mass songs (Kaczyński used the term *piosenki*) and military pieces. T. Kaczyński, *Witold Lutosławski: Życie i Muzyka* [Witold Lutosławski: Life and Music], Warszawa, Sutkowski Edition, 1994, p. 185.

**86** Privately, however, Jasiński was not in favor of mass songs. As he wrote in his diaries, saying ‘no reasonable person . . . believed in the radiant future of this kind of numb song in Poland, but the Party and the authorities made desperate efforts so that there would be many of these songs and the best, so that people would sing them’. R. Jasiński, *Nowe życie: Wspomnienia 1945–1976* [A New Life: Memoirs from 1945–1976], Kraków, Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2019, p. 110.

**87** Jasiński, *Nowe życie*, pp. 68–70.

**76** AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, p. 35.

**77** AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, pp. 30–31.

**78** AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, pp. 4–5.

**79** AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, p. 8.

**80** AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, p. 4.

**81** AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, p. 35.

**82** Billig also mentioned the three songs Lutosławski had composed ‘in the past year’ for the July 22 holiday, which commemorated the 1944 installation of a Soviet-backed government in Poland. Adrian Thomas has called these pieces a triptych, of which only the orchestral parts for one song survives. Even Billig at Nieborów in 1950 noted ‘no one knows what has happened to them’. AAN, MKiS 366/I 676, p. 78; A. Thomas, ‘Parallel Lives of a Captive Muse (2012),’ *On Polish Music*, <https://onpolishmusic.com/articles/%e2%80%a2-lutoslawski-articles/%e2%80%a2-parallel-lives-of-a-captive-muse-2012/> (accessed 16 December 2022).



Speaking of Lutosławski, Jasiński noted that the composer was uncompromising,<sup>88</sup> a viewpoint upheld by the composer's aforementioned rejection of some song lyrics. Later in 1950, however, Lutosławski wrote six pieces that could be construed as mass songs. Adrian Thomas has pointed out that five of them were nominally on political texts or topics.<sup>89</sup> The composer's participation at Nieborów, the composition of these pieces the same year, and the financial incentives of working with Polish Radio all point, if not to his enthusiastic interest in mass songs, then to his realization that the promotion of this genre by the Polish government was unlikely to wane in the immediate future and that it would be to his benefit to implore poets and other composers to produce high quality pieces. This is what he did at Nieborów.

Lutosławski was correct about the government's plans. Jerzy Jasiński, from the Ministry of Culture and Art, reminded everyone at Nieborów that 'the issue of mass song is so important that if the Creative Department at the Ministry was renamed the Department of Mass Song, there would be no objection'.<sup>90</sup> Governmental resources were to be directed to disseminating as many acceptable mass songs as possible. This 1950 meeting concluded with a lengthy discussion about how to entice the public to appreciate these songs. As Szpilman pointed out, however, publishing mass songs did not mean that anyone would be interested in them.<sup>91</sup> Most likely, all of the participants at Nieborów went home dissatisfied. Few songs had been praised, while many had been criticized. But these discussions in June 1950 did more than forecast what the future might look like for composers. They also exposed the complexities involved in creating what at first glance would appear to be simple, singable songs about contemporary Poland. It would be impossible to integrate all of the opinions expressed at Nieborów into formal guidelines for mass songs. Indeed, few criteria

were established there or in the subsequent auditions organized by the Polish Composers Union.<sup>92</sup> Instead, the fluidity of terminology and song characteristics manifested at these sessions point to the continuing evolution of this short-lived genre in Polish music. Mass songs were not a static phenomenon, nor were they a well-defined or appreciated one.

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<sup>88</sup> Jasiński, p. 109.

<sup>89</sup> A. Thomas, 'The Hidden Composer: Witold Lutosławski and Polish Radio, Panel 3, 1949–42 Socrealizm', <https://onpolishmusic.com/articles/%e2%80%a2-lutoslawski-articles/%e2%80%a2-the-hidden-composer-exhibition-1997/%e2%80%a2-panel-3-1949-53-socrealizm/2>. The five songs were *Zwycięska droga* ['The Road to Victory'], *Nowa Huta*, *Śłużba Polsce* ['Service to Poland'], *Naprzód idziemy* ['We Are Going Forward'], and *Najpiękniejszy sen* ['The Most Beautiful Dream']. The sixth song was *Wysłabym ja* ['I Would Marry'].

<sup>90</sup> AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, p. 71.

<sup>91</sup> AAN, MKiS 366 I/676, p. 68.

<sup>92</sup> For information about these later 'auditions', see F. H., 'Życia Związku Kompozytorów Polskich' ['From the Life of the Polish Composers' Union'], p. 55; ZKP, 12/116, Protokół z II przesłuchania Sekcji Pieśni Masowej and Protokół z pierwszej Audycji Sekcji Pieśni Masowej odbytej w Poznaniu w dniu 19 grudnia 1950 r. [Minutes of the Second Audition of the Mass Song Section, Held in Poznań on 19 December 1950].

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**Cindy Bylander** is an American musicologist and independent scholar whose research focuses on twentieth-century Polish musical life. Her most recent book project is *Engaging Cultural Ideologies: Classical Music and Musical Life in Poland 1918–1956* (Academic Studies Press, 2022). Her previous publications include *Krzysztof Penderecki: A Bio-Bibliography* and articles in *Polski Rocznik Muzykologiczny*, *Czarny pokój i inne pokoje: Zbiór tekstów o SEPR*, *Polish Review*, *Musical Quarterly*, *Musicology Today*, and *Polish Music Since 1945*. A recipient of the Polish Composers' Union Honorary Award and Poland's Gloria Artis bronze award, she also serves on the Executive Committee of the National Coalition of Independent Scholars.

APPENDIX A. MASS SONGS DISCUSSED AT NIEBORÓW, JUNE 1950

Composer	Poet	English Title	Polish Title	Publication (if known)
Czesław Aniołkiewicz	Roman Sadowski	'Hanyś and Barbarka'	'Hanyś i Barbarka'	
Jan Ekier	Tadeusz Kubiak	'On Green Birch Trees'	'Na zielonych bukach'	PWM, 1951
Stanisława Gajdeczka	Ludwik Jerzy Kern	'Night Flight'	'Nocny lot'	PWM, 1955
Stanisława Gajdeczka	Adam Włodek	'Onward, Soldiers of Freedom'	'Naprzód żołnierze wolności'	PWM, 1951
Alfred Gradstein	Tadeusz Kubiak	'Along the Green Bridge'	'Po zielonym moście'	
Alfred Gradstein	Jacek Bocheński (?)	'Boys from the Polish Youth Union'	'Chłopcy z ZMP'	
Alfred Gradstein	Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński	'Konstanty Rokossowski'	'Konstanty Rokossowski'	
Alfred Gradstein	Zbigniew Stolarek	'Our Land'	'Nasza ziemia'	PWM, 1951
Alfred Gradstein	Helena Kołaczkowska	'The Polish Youth Union Helps Villagers'	'ZMP pomaga wsi'	PWM, 1951
Alfred Gradstein	Jerzy Jurandot	'Polish Youth Union Song'	'Pieśń ZMP'	PWM, 1951
Alfred Gradstein	Włodzimierz Słobodnik	'Song about Warsaw'	'Piosenka o Warszawie'	PWM, 1951
Alfred Gradstein	Leopold Lewin	'Song of the Work Leaders'	'Pieśń przodników pracy'	PWM, 1951
Alfred Gradstein	Tadeusz Kubiak	'The Tank Men'	'Czołgiści'	Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej, 1951
Tadeusz (?) Hesse	Roman Sadowski	'Song about the Vistula'	'Pieśń o Wiśle'	
Andrzej Klon	Leopold Lewin	'Boys from the Tatra Foothills'	'Chłopcy z popod Tatr'	
Andrzej Klon	Jacek Bocheński	'Comrades Sang'	'Zaśpiewali towarzysze'	
Andrzej Klon	Witold Wirpsza	'Sailors' Song'	'Piosenka marynarska'	
Władysław Markiewicz	Roman Sadowski	'In Muranów'	'Na Muranowie'	
Edward Olearczyk	Krzysztof Gruszczyński	'The Braid'	'Warkocz'	PWM, 1951
Edward Olearczyk	Józef Prutkowski	'Geography Lesson: A Song about the Vistula'	'Lekcja geografii piosenka o Wiśle'	
Edward Olearczyk	Józef Prutkowski	'Song about Stalin'	'Pieśń o Stalinie'	
Edward Olearczyk	Mirosław Łebkowski	'Why Such a Change'	'Skąd taka zmiana'	PWM, 1951
Witold Rudziński	Tadeusz Kubiak	'Along the Green Bridge'	'Po zielonym moście'	PWM, 1951
Henryk Swolkień	unknown	'About a Bricklayer in Love with Warsaw'	'O murarzu zakochanym w Warszawie'	
Henryk Swolkień	Roman Sadowski	'At the Start'	'Na start'	
Henryk Swolkień	Robert Stiller	'Heart of the General'	'Serce generała'	Książka i Wiedza, 1952
Henryk Swolkień	Tadeusz Kubiak	'Song about Warsaw'	'Piosenka o Warszawie' ['Warsaw' is crossed out in the manuscript]	
Henryk Swolkień	Roman Sadowski	'The Textile Worker'	'Włókniaarka'	PWM, 1951
Henryk Swolkień	Zbigniew Przyrowski	'We Will Build a New Poland'	'Zbudujemy nową Polskę'	Czytelnik, 1950
Władysław Szpilman	Kazimierz Winkler-Augustowski	'Fighting and Working People'	'Ludzie walki i pracy'	Czytelnik, 1950
Władysław Szpilman	Roman Sadowski	'March of the Youth'	'Marsz młodzieży'	Książka i Wiedza, 1952
Władysław Szpilman	Roman Sadowski	'Song of Peace'	'Pieśń pokoju'	Czytelnik, 1951
Władysław Szpilman	unknown	'Waltz'	'Walc'	
Władysław Walentynowicz	Stanisława Fleszarowa-Muskat	'From Elbląg to Szczecin'	'Od Elbląga do Szczecina'	
Władysław Walentynowicz	Edward Fiszer	'Our Native Baltic'	'Ojczysty nasz Bałtyk'	
Władysław Walentynowicz	Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński	'Song about Stalin'	'Pieśń o Stalinie'	