

"Zakopianski" Style: History of Creating

Olga Sobakina^{1,*}

¹Department of Music Theory, State Institute for Art Studies, Moscow, Russia

*Corresponding author. Email: olas2005@mail.ru

ABSTRACT

The subject of the study is dominant feature of the 20th-century Polish culture: the "Zakopiański" style (also Zakopane style) and the main range of phenomena related to it. The idea of creating the style belonged to Stanisław Witkiewicz, who saw in the culture of Podhale (its historical name is the Rocky Tatras) the preserved rudiments of the pra-Polish culture, on the basis of which modern art could be revived. Being an artist and writer, Witkiewicz created a kind of myth of a state rank around this phenomenon: on the basis of the Podhale art, he proposed to revive the modern national Polish culture, which seems to be a certain paradox. The imaginative folklore patterns gave endless possibilities for various interpretations. The followers of Witkiewicz brought their additions to this style, greatly simplifying its original mythical and philosophical content. The aesthetics of the "Zakopiański" style was developed by writers and artists of the Young Poland circle at the beginning of the 20th century. During the interwar period, artists were influenced by expressionism, formism and futurism, however, they were primarily motivated by the idea of creating modern Polish national art. This style found its most vivid expression in composer's works. The neo-folklore direction, convincingly represented by the "new national style" of Karol Szymanowski, became the most promising.

In order to determine the cultural retrospective, the author uses the methods of historical reconstruction and style analysis, presents the main approaches to this phenomenon that are relevant in modern Polish art history.

Keywords: *Stanisław Witkiewicz, the culture of Podhale, the Polish national art, the Goral folklore, Karol Szymanowski, Harnasie, the "Zakopiański" style, villa "Pod Jedlami"*

I. INTRODUCTION

The keen interest in the everyday life of the Podhale region (Rocky Tatras), characterized by the majestic beauty of nature, arose in the 70s of the 19th century and by the end of the century a very active local art community had formed here. And this is no coincidence: the folklore of Polish highlanders (Gorals) attracted with the originality of not only decorative art and architecture, but also with the unusual folk music. The fact that the formation of style took place during the heyday of the art of Young Poland is certainly logical: interest in ancient national cultures has become one of the brightest signs of the Modern. Gradually, Zakopane became "Polish Athens" and "Polish Piedmont" (the Polish elite introduced these definitions in relation to places that were "symbolic" for their culture at the end of the 18th century), discussed the ideas of Poland becoming independent and made assumptions about its mysterious pre-Slavic past. This high status of the recognized art center of Zakopane held until World War II. To visit here was considered not only prestigious, but simply necessary for any self-

respecting Polish creator. Writers and artists have united in the society "Podhale Arts" (Sztuka Podhalańska) and the association "Kilim". It was in this sequence that, along with developing public organizations, sports events and scientific research, Zakopane gradually became the art center of Poland.

II. CULTURAL ASPECTS

The idea of the creating a new national Polish style belonged to Stanisław Witkiewicz – an artist, writer and critic, who first came here for treatment only in 1886. Zakopane was struck by his imagination so much that Witkiewicz began to propagate the Goral culture as Polish "pre-Slavic", on the basis of which, in accordance with the aesthetic trends of that time, contemporary national art could and should be revived. With his inherent passion and dedication, Witkiewicz was actively involved in the development of a new national art for himself. Finding Polish archaic in the art of highlanders-Gorals (primarily in wooden architecture), Witkiewicz brought it into typical motifs and forms of art of the Secession, expressing his vision

of new architecture in the designs of houses built according to his sketches in Zakopane. The most famous of them became the villa "Koliba" (1892–1893) – the first house built by Witkiewicz for his family, and the "House under the spruces" built for Jan G. Pawlikowski and rightfully recognized as one of the masterpieces in the "Zakopiański" style (villa "Pod Jedlami", 1896–1897); the intriguing name in the Goral dialect reminds that on the western side from the house there were three spruces, fortunately, new ones have already grown in their place.

Both houses were built exclusively according to the sketches by Witkiewicz, in the construction of "Koliba", the simplest of all Witkiewicz's projects, the well-known wood carvers participated; in the creation of "House under the spruces", carried out only for nine months with the all decorations, the famous masters of the region Jan Obrochta and Wojciech Roja took part. During the five years separating these two projects, the villas "Pepita" (1894), "Oksza" (1896) and "Zofiówka" (1896) were also built. One way or another, these villas have survived, "Koliba" presents now a museum exhibition dedicated to the works by both Witkiewicz (father and son), the external details of "House under the spruces", including all the interior decoration, have been restored or updated in the last decade, contrasting with the timber darkened with time. The initial appearance of the house can be imagined by looking at modern examples of "villas" in the "Zakopiański" style, sparkling amber shine of lacquered wood against the backdrop of green-blue tones of the surrounding landscapes. "House under the spruces" almost from the moment of its construction became a meeting place for famous guests.

Interest in Zakopane and the Tatras arose long before Witkiewicz, but only he could give them a meaning that no other European mountain resort could repeat. As an artist and writer, Witkiewicz created a kind of myth of a state rank around this phenomenon: he proposed to revive modern national culture on the basis of Tatras art created by the highlanders of the border Slovak-Polish region (Orava–Podhale), very far from the native Polish folklore. The explanation of this paradox can be found in his conviction that in the Gorals' life and work he saw the pre-Slavic principle expressed in visual "catchiness", "fairy-tale" naivety, severe simplicity, which could give a new impetus to modern art. Witkiewicz expressed his impressions without delay in his illustrated editions on "Zakopiański" style [1]. The next volume named *Na przełęczy. Wrażenia i obrazy z Tatr (On the mountain pass. Impressions and Sketches from the Tatras)*, already published in Warsaw in 1891, turned out to be impressive: 123 author's engravings (in the technique of woodcuts) devoted to everyday life, nature, culture, and, of course, the Gorals themselves, occupied more than half of the publication [2]. It is curious that at the

origins of the style, as a result of which a significant layer of Polish culture of the whole 20th century and subsequently brightly defined "zakopiańszczyzna" ("zakopanism"), lies the only brief remark about the essence of the Goral art from Witkiewicz's letter to his sister: 'Legend is a treasure and power, often far surpassing both history and reality' [3].

As Barbara Tondos notes in her monograph *Styl zakopiański i zakopiańszczyzna*, Witkiewicz's followers almost immediately brought their "additions" to this style, greatly simplifying its original mythical and philosophical content. At the same time, the style began to be associated with the nationwide Polish style due to its "archaism" (or rather, its pseudo-archaism), forming a peculiar phenomenon of the "myth around myth" [4]. The researcher supposes that the term "Zakopiański" style is appropriate to use only in relation to the work of Witkiewicz himself and the works created by his closest associates in the beginning of the 20th century. She also means that the term "zakopiańszczyzna" will be more consistent with aesthetic interpretations the Goral folklore after the early 1920s. However, this opinion is quite controversial, primarily because different types of art have assimilated the ideas of this style for several decades: a striking example is the fact that in Polish music the first samples in the aesthetics of the "Zakopiański" style were written only in the early 1920s by Karol Szymanowski, the situation in the literature also does not look so clear. The artistic features of the "Zakopiański" style have been questioned more than once, since this art, especially with its peculiar "artistic" deformation, was distinguished by deliberate simplicity and demonstrativeness, colorfulness of household items and lapidary expressiveness of means in architectural details. However, they left wide scope for creativity based on them, which is why it turned out to be so viable. It must be emphasized that the main meaning of this art was in the content that was hidden behind external simplicity. Witkiewicz saw in the Goral folklore the possibility of a return to the eternal humanistic values that express the archaic folk culture and the nature in which it was formed. The whole atmosphere of Zakopane, in the opinion of the entire Witkiewicz circle, was a kind of fairy tale garden city. Undoubtedly, the views of this small town, which is freely spread out in the mountain valleys with such an original way of life, evoked and still evokes a strong emotional response, penetrating for many years into the hearts of all who then continued to get to know more in detail the local folklore: music, legends, and not only objects of the decorative art.

Witkiewicz himself, being primarily an artist by training, never, in addition to manor projects, developed any standards for this style, the specific artistic impulse of which lay in the imaginative folklore patterns, which provided endless possibilities for various interpretations

in the context of the mythological character of many contemporary art samples of the turn of the century, and then in the context of the acuteness of the art of the interwar avant-garde, constructivist motifs of the middle of the century or kitsch gestures of the last decades. The standard of artistic interpretation by Witkiewicz of a decorative art was his famous estates, telling everyone who was carried away by this style, the path to the embodiment of their emotions and aesthetic ideas. Possessing a variety of talents, perfectly feeling the specifics of the smallest details of the decor, Witkiewicz deliberately imitated in his projects all the characteristic signs of national life.

As mentioned above, a significant role in the formation of the new style was played by the decorative art (and not just wooden architecture), which gained new opportunities thanks to the organization of the School of Wooden Crafts (*Szkoła Przemysłu Drzewnego*). The history of the emergence and development of the School is quite fascinating. In 1874, the recently organized the Tatra Society (*Towarzystwo Tatrzańskie*) was puzzled by how to improve the life of the poor Goral and give them the opportunity to earn money: in the Charter of the Society, one of the goals was "support for the highlanders' crafts". For the sake of this, the School was created, the analogues its leaders found in the activities of workshops in Tyrol and Switzerland. The ministry refused to financially support this undertaking, and the Tatra Society for its money sent Maciej Marduła, a self-taught woodworker, who for six months perfected his skills under the guidance of the famous woodcarver and sculptor Franciszek Witkiewicz, the father of Stanisław Witkiewicz. It was Marduła, who also gained teaching experience in Krakow, became the first teacher in the history of the School of Wooden Crafts, which opened on July 10, 1876. Two years later, the school was reorganized into the Imperial School of Wooden Crafts under the jurisdiction of the Austrian authorities, and the director took the Czech by origin Franciszek Neuzil – an excellent organizer who received an art and teacher education in Vienna. The main focus of training was the production of household items based on the stylization of folk patterns, as well as imitations of the so-called historical styles (primarily Neo-Roman and Neo-Gothic, since the masters in particular carried out orders for churches). Encouraged by Witkiewicz's activities, after 1886 Neuzil significantly expanded the range of motives for styling the arts and crafts using traditional for the Polish Secession floral and Gothic ornaments.

Despite the transfer of the School to Austrian jurisdiction, the Tatra Society continued to support the School with orders and pursue policies aimed at developing the Podhale culture, with the goal of preserving and reviving the national Polish culture as opposed to imperial trends. The propaganda of the School's activities by the Society led to the rapid

recognition of its merits not only by the inhabitants of Zakopane, but also by artists of other areas. Two years after the opening, the uniqueness of this establishment was highly appreciated abroad, for example, the well-known burgomaster of Brussels Karl Bulls recalled: 'To provide for the Goral population, the School of Wooden Crafts was organized in Zakopane. We had a good opportunity to learn about this institution, which we visited on the occasion of the opening of an exhibition of works by young students. Although only two years have passed since the founding of the school, the results achieved deserve attention; drawings were made with great purity and diligence. However, we fear that the choice of models does not distort the originality of native for the Goral art' [5].

Since 1896, for five years, the director of the School was Edgar Kováts, an architect, and subsequently the rector of the Lviv Polytechnic, who was educated in Lviv and Zurich (with Gottfried Semper). This period stands out as a sharp controversy between the School's leadership and Witkiewicz, who accused foreigners of promoting alien art samples from other regions of Europe, especially Tyrol and Bavaria, alien to the Polish Podhale. Kováts's response to Witkiewicz's "Zakopiański" style was the author's article on the ornaments of Polish highlanders *Zakopane samples* (the translation *Die Art Zakopane* and *Maniere de Zakopane* express the meaning of the name more accurately), released in the form of a special portfolio with drawings (Kováts, E. *Sposób zakopiański*. Wiedeń–Lwów: Gubrynowicz & Schmidt, 1899). These samples, reflecting the actual direction of teaching, which deformed the original Goral art, caused a stormy outrage of Witkiewicz and his comrades. And this is not surprising, the architect, painter, art theorist, Hungarian by origin, Kováts expressed in this collection his own concept of a new Galician style. And only Stanisław Barabasz, who turned out to be the only Polish-born director of the School, became a propagandist of the "Zakopiański" style. Over the twenty years of his leadership, the School has earned well-deserved recognition. The following director, Karol Stryjeński, turned out to be a supporter of art pedagogy, which completely reformed the School. He replaced the old teaching staff and began experimenting like a real artist. The Polish press emphasized that it was thanks to him that in 1925 the works by the masters of the School received awards from the International Exhibition of Decorative Arts in Paris for woodcuts, sculptures, and also for teaching methods.

In general, the aesthetics of the "Zakopiański" style was developed by writers and artists of the Young Poland circle at the beginning of the 20th century. The new national style was led by sculptors Wojciech Brzega, Jan Nalborczyk, artist and philosopher Leon Chwistek, artist and historian Podhala Walery Eljasz-Radzikowski. It should be noted that the fact that the

leading role in the approval of the new style belongs not only to Witkiewicz: Wojciech Brzega – a woodcarver, furniture maker and writer – has become a real co-creator of the "Zakopiański" style, and now no less its significant "icon". Before the publication of his materials, *The Life of a Kind Goral (Żywot górala pocziwego)*, in 1969, Brzega was only remembered as the author of works in furniture and wooden sculptures. However, the attitude towards his work has changed since the 1970s: every researcher who turns to the Goral culture can no longer ignore his achievements. Undoubtedly, cooperation with Witkiewicz had a significant impact on the formation of his creative credo, which is expressed in his works and conveys the true spirit and essence of this style. In sovereign Poland, during the period between the two decades of war, the "Zakopiański" style, which most vividly expressed the ideas of a new national art, had not only a vivid concept, but also original achievements, making a significant contribution to the Polish avant-garde in the work of Witkacy (Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, son, 1885–1939), artist and philosopher Leon Chwistek, artists Wojciech Weiss and Rafał Malczewski. In the field of decorative art, the style continued to develop in the activities of sculptors and graphic artists, which was initiated primarily by the head of the School of Wooden Crafts Karol Stryjski. The works by Leon Wyczółkowski, Jan Rembowski, Jan Szostak, as well as carvers Konstanty Laszczka, Stanisław Gąsienica Sobczak, Jan Szczepkowski stand out here; especially worth have the works by Zofja Stryjeńska. All the above-mentioned Zakopane institutions and societies continued their activities in a situation where the influence of avant-garde trends (including expressionism, formalism and futurism) was united by the comprehensive idea of the modern Polish national art.

III. CONCLUSION

In the literature, which traditionally occupies the most important place in Polish culture, this style is expressed in the works by Kazimierz Przerwa-Tetmejer, Władysław Orkan, Tadeusz Miciński. It was Tetmejer who influenced the specific aesthetics of Young Poland's art, in which the "Zakopiański" style was originally formed. Thanks to him, the direction of literature, inspired by the *Tatras*, was recognized as relevant to the great nationwide mission. Admiring the beauty of the mountains, the simplicity and openness of the highlanders, he deliberately sought to imitate folklore patterns, including glorifying the deeds of the famous character of the Gorals' epic, Janosik. It is significant that his texts, reproducing the features of the Goral dialect, became very quickly perceived by the highlanders themselves as if they were written by their great-grandfathers. It is also characteristic that his descriptions of nature in poems are often associated

with the impressionist technique: meaningful handicap, the use of sound colors of numerous and very specific Polish consonants, free rhymes. The most significant of his opuses regarding the Podhale culture are the folk legends *On the Rocky Podhale (Na skalnym Podhalu)* written in 1903–1910 in the Goral dialect, describing the life of highlanders and recognized as Tetmejer's most successful work. In 1912, he continued to develop this trend and published two historical stories *Legend of the Tatras (Legenda Tatr)* about peasant uprisings and wars of the mid-17th century. The activities of another talented representative of the Podhale region Władysław Orkan, who since the late 19th century collaborated with the Krakow magazines *Życie* and *Krytyka*, are also associated with the name of Tetmejer

Unlike literature, painting and architecture, the first example of the "Zakopiański" style in music was the vocal cycle of Karol Szymanowski *Słopiewnie*, op. 46-bis, created only in 1921. The idea of reviving the national style on the basis of the untouched civilization of the Goral folklore became for Szymanowski a magnificent creative impulse. She led him to study new musical material, and as a result to a complete change in style preferences. For several years, living in Zakopane, Szymanowski consistently studied and recorded folklore patterns, the most vividly represented in the music making of the so-called highlanders chapels. The dominant creative search for the composer during this period was the desire for more democratic art, manifested in an appeal to extraordinary folklore and in rethinking the means of composer technique. The vivid and diverse refraction of the folk tradition is evident in all the works of the last period of creativity, written from 1921 to 1937. Following Witkiewicz, Szymanowski considered folklore a "superhistorical" phenomenon, the most direct expression of the spiritual properties of a nation. He appreciated the Goral folklore from his aesthetic positions of creating modern national Polish music; focusing on the achievements of Bartok and Stravinsky, the composer most consistently (among many Polish artists!) embodied Witkiewicz's ideas, directly studying folklore in Zakopane from 1921 to 1927. Four publications of the composer are devoted to the Goral folklore, its features, significance and the need to preserve it. All this testifies to the importance that the composer attached to the development of the artistic means of this music, using which he radically transformed his style.

The appeal to the most diverse folklore forms is noticeable in all compositions created before 1937, but the most striking refraction of the folk tradition is revealed in the vocal cycle *Słopiewnie*, piano 20 *mazurkas*, ballet *Harnasie*, cantata *Stabat Mater*. The ballet *Harnasie (The Robbers)* has become a completely extraordinary monument to the Goral culture in Polish music. His representative purpose (propaganda of the Polish art abroad) was expressed the

most fully Goral traditions, not only in music, but also in the plot (the wedding ritual, decorated with a sharp intrigue drawn from legends), choreography and scenography [6]. This ballet embodies the symbolism of life shown in the wedding ceremony. Szymanowski was able to embody the ritual of the Gorals' wedding, drawn from folk legends and contemporary folk patterns, with sophisticated and actual composer technique, raising the Polish art to the level of world recognition. Neo-folklore direction, convincingly represented in Poland by Szymanowski's "new national style", has become the most promising for the development of the works by young Polish composers in 1930–40s.

References

- [1] S. Witkiewicz, *The "Zakopiański" style [Styl Zakopiański] 1886. Part I: Dining Room [Zeszyt I: Pokój jadalny]*. Lwów: Wydawnictwo H. Altenberga, 1904; S. Witkiewicz, *The "Zakopiański" style [Styl Zakopiański] 1886. Part II: Wood Crafts [Zeszyt II: Ciesielstwo]*. Lwów: Wydawnictwo H. Altenberga, 1911.
- [2] S. Witkiewicz, *On the mountain pass. Impressions and Sketches from the Tatras [Na przełęczy. Wrażenia i obrazy z Tatr]*. Warszawa: Nakład Gebethnera i Wolffa, 1891.
- [3] Stanisław Witkiewicz about the Arts, Art Criticism, the "Zakopiański" Style, Outstanding Artists, National and Social Affairs [Stanisław Witkiewicz o sztuce, krytyce artystycznej, stylu zakopiańskim, wybitnych twórcach, sprawach narodowych i społecznych]. Wrocław: Zakład narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1972.
- [4] B. Tondos, *The "Zakopiański" style and Zakopanizm [Styl zakopiański i zakopiańszczyzna]*. Wrocław – Warszawa – Kraków: Wydawnictwo Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 2004.
- [5] K. Buls, "From Tatras [Z Tatr]," in *Documents of the Tatra Society [Pamiętnik Towarzystwa Tatrzańskiego]*, vol. VIII. Kraków, 1883, pp. 30–39.
- [6] O. Sobakina, "The Mith Interpretation in Karol Szymanowski's Works: from the Modern to Neo-folklor [Интерпретация мифа в творчестве Кароля Шимановского: от модерна к неофольклору]," in *PHILHARMONICA. International Music Journal*, № 1. Moscow, 2016. pp. 9–16. DOI: 10.7256/2453-613X.2016.1.18288. URL: https://e-notabene.ru/phil/article_18288.html