

Slavonic and East European Music Studies

POLISH ESTRADA MUSIC

ORGANISATION, STARS AND REPRESENTATION

Ewa Mazierska



Polish Estrada Music

Polish estrada music dominated Polish popular music throughout the state socialist period but gained little attention from popular music scholars because it was regarded as being of low quality and politically conformist. Ewa Mazierska carefully examines these assumptions, considering those institutions which catered for the needs of estrada artists and their fans, the presence of estrada in different media and the careers and styles of the leading stars, such as Mieczysław Fogg, Irena Santor, Violetta Villas, Anna German, Jerzy Połomski, Maryla Rodowicz, Zdzisława Sośnicka, Zbigniew Wodecki and Izabela Trojanowska. Mazierska also discusses the memory and legacy of estrada music in the postcommunist period. The book draws on Poland's cultural and political history and the history of Polish popular music and media, including television and radio. Mazierska engages with concepts such as genre, stardom and authenticity in order to capture the essence of Polish estrada music and to provide a comparison with popular music produced in other countries.

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Slavonic and East European Music Studies

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Introduction

Mapping Polish Estrada Music

This book is devoted to estrada music in Poland, exemplified by songs of such performers as Mieczysław Fogg, Irena Santor, Irena Jarocka and Zbigniew Wodecki. Estrada music occupied a central place in the entire popular music ecology in Poland of state socialism, including the recording industry, radio and television. Despite that, estrada is an under-researched phenomenon, with the bulk of studies about Polish popular music focusing on jazz and rock. Filling this gap, at least partly, is one reason why I embarked on this project. The second reason is that, thanks to its dominant position, studying estrada allows a good insight into the operation of the entire Polish popular music business of the state socialist period. Finally, I decided to write about Polish estrada music because it constituted a background to my youth. For a long time, I believed that I knew this music well enough, without a need to consult any sources except my own memory. However, a time came when I realised that my knowledge needs expanding and systematising. Writing a book on this subject seems a good way to achieve this goal.

What Is Estrada Music?

To embark on this research, it is important to clarify the crucial term ‘estrada music’ and its relations with similar terms such as ‘popular music’ and ‘pop music.’ The term ‘estrada music’ derives from the term ‘estrada,’ French *estrade* or Spanish *estrado*, which means ‘stage’ or ‘small stage.’ This origin points to the primacy of live performance over recorded music. By the same token, performing for a live audience, rather than a specific style of music, is what initially differentiated estrada from other genres. Estrada music is made up of songs, but these songs were often juxtaposed with other types of performance, such as humorous sketches, dances and productions of illusionists (MacFadyen 2001: 11; Angelov 2019: 80). For a significant part of its history, estrada music was thus a part of larger shows, similar to variety shows in a British context; and their artists were seen as semi-anonymous entertainers, required to conform to this form.

Although ‘estrada music’ bears similarity to music produced and performed in Western Europe, most importantly pop and folk, it is omitted from western considerations of popular music. For example, such terms do not feature in the volumes about popular music written or edited by authors from the English-speaking world such as Richard Middleton (1990), Simon Frith (1996), Stuart Borthwick

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and Ron Moy (2004), Andy Bennett, Barry Shank and Jason Toynbee (2006), Tara Brabazon (2010) and Roy Shuker (2013). Neither do we find 'estrada' in the index in *Key Terms in Popular Music and Culture*, even though under 'e' there are terms such as 'electro-pop music,' 'elevator music,' 'environmental music' and 'ethnic music' (Horner and Swiss 1999: 252). This term is also not included in discussions about Western European stars, such as Dalida, Mina or Joe Dassin, whose work is described by terms such as 'chanson' or 'pop.' We can thus assume that the natural home of estrada music was the Soviet Union and other countries of the Eastern bloc, because there it developed according to its own logic and enjoyed the greatest popularity. This had to do with the fact that in Eastern Europe live music brought artists more income than recorded music, due to the structural weakness of the recording business (which in the West, till relatively recently, dominated over live music) and the way the value of labour was measured under state socialism.

Although in Polish music journalism 'estrada music' was used frequently, often in the context 'on Polish estrada' (*na polskiej estradzie*), which meant both on the Polish stage and in Polish show business at large, I have not found any attempts to define it. In two dictionaries/encyclopaedias of popular music edited by Waclaw Panek (1986; 2000), estrada music does not feature at all. The closest we find to this term is 'entertainment music' (*muzyka rozrywkowa*), defined as all types of music which is easy to access, mass produced and commercial, as exemplified by songs, musicals, operettas and revues (Panek 2000: 306–7).

The most comprehensive analysis of estrada music is offered by David MacFadyen, who devoted to this phenomenon three volumes (2001; 2002a; 2002b). At the beginning of his first book MacFadyen states that this topic is under-searched even in the Russian/Soviet context:

This is the first of three books designed to investigate a subject virtually passed over by English-language scholarship, and very rarely researched in Russia: the performers and texts of the Soviet popular song. Here I have in mind not the two specialized fields of jazz and the so-called bards, both of which have enjoyed serious attention. Instead I mean those considerably more influential and widely disseminated songs broadcast every day on Soviet radio for decades, on occasion garnering sales figures in the hundreds of millions. Songs so frequently broadcast and purchased had a profound social significance in the Soviet Union, yet remain unstudied, save their occasional inclusion in some broader studies of Soviet popular culture as a whole.

(MacFadyen 2001: ix)

Whilst MacFadyen describes estrada music negatively, by differentiating it from jazz and what in the Polish context is labelled 'sung poetry,' here is a more positive and comprehensive description, found on an (unauthored) website:

Soviet estrada, or simply estrada, is a genre of pop music that emerged in the USSR during the early 1930s and encompassed the dominating popular music style composed by government-approved songwriters and the primary

repertoire of likewise professionally trained performers. It is similar in concept to Western or American Traditional Pop, albeit different in its origins and stylistic qualities, noticeably opting for a subtler jazz influence and existing well into the rock era. A great number of estrada songs took the form of ballads – with the (often orchestral) accompaniment relegated to a largely secondary role to the vocal abilities, sentimental lyricism, and catchy, memorable melodies employed by the singers.

Lyrical content – which was subjected to rigorous censorship – predominantly focused on either romance, comradeship, or patriotism, often highlighting or conforming to a certain conservative moral standard set forth by the Soviet ideological apparatus. For much of its history, estrada essentially existed as the mainstream, officially approved, and mass-mediated format of popular music in direct contrast to underground developments such as the more explicit forms of Russian Romance or criminal Russian Chanson, as well as Bard Music and the rock counterculture after the 1960s. Regardless, there was considerable interplay across this dichotomy, especially during estrada's genesis and its latter stages.

The term 'estrada,' otherwise also refers to a much wider concept of popular entertainment. This late 19th-century Russian light entertainment format, which incorporated elements from a wide array of art forms (such as comic sketches, dance, circus acts, and poetry recitals), performed as separate acts connected by an overarching theme; was analogous to Music Hall or Cabaret elsewhere. During the late 1920s, Vocal Jazz was also incorporated into the musical blend pertinent to this format, alongside Russian romances (both bourgeois salon and urban or 'cruel' forms), Russian Folk Music, and a variety of other internationally popular genres, such as French Chanson or Tango.

(‘Soviet Estrada’)

There are several points in this description worth closer consideration. First, the author identifies the beginning of estrada music in the early 1930s, at the time when state socialism consolidated in the Soviet Union, and links this phenomenon with state policy, as confirmed by the term 'officially approved music.' As state socialism was introduced in Poland only after the end of the Second World War, estrada music developed there later. It also disappeared, at least discursively, when state socialism was overthrown. A sense that estrada music was approved by the socialist regime led to its neglect by historians of Polish popular music or, at best, a narrow treatment as a reflection of the 'Party line.' A similar attitude is noted by MacFadyen in relation to the Soviet estrada:

Twentieth-century Russian culture is seen in degrees of compliance with or deviance from Soviet ideology. Politics colours everything. Such an enduring critical approach has led to the dismissal of the most important and vital aspects of Soviet society as either undeserving of attention or, at best, sullied by dogma. Song, it is held, does nothing but reflect policy.

(MacFadyen 2002b: 3)

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MacFadyen disagrees with such a narrow treatment of Soviet estrada music. I follow in his footsteps in relation to its Polish counterpart, arguing that estrada's entanglement in the Party politics was, at best, minimal.

The second aspect of estrada, recognised by the unnamed researcher quoted above, is its status as a meta-genre. After the end of the Second World War, when Poland joined the Eastern bloc, becoming the Polish People's Republic (Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa, hereafter the PRL), there was hardly any popular music other than estrada music; this term encompassed every music offered to live audiences, including jazz, blues, cabaret songs and even patriotic 'mass songs.' Gradually these genres gained autonomy, rendering estrada songs as 'leftovers' from the process of subtraction. In this respect, estrada music is similar to pop music, which Simon Frith describes as a residual category: 'it is what's left when all the other forms of popular music are stripped away' (Frith 2001: 95).

Isolation of new genres and their semi-autonomous status worked to the disadvantage of mainstream estrada musicians, as they were seen as lacking distinctive identities or were associated with 'easy' music, as opposed to allegedly more difficult genres, which gained autonomy from estrada. This process of subtraction gained momentum in the mid-1960s following the emergence of big beat, which was a Polish version of rock music, and sung poetry. In its first stage, till the mid-1960s, big beat music had much in common with estrada music. The first big beat bands, Czerwono-Czarni and Niebiesko-Czarni, operated like small orchestras, accompanying soloists who performed their numbers and then left the stage, making space for another performer. Only in the second half of the 1960s did these soloists break free and start to create their own ensembles. Being a part of a band rendered them more authentic in the eyes of their (usually younger) fans than estrada performers, who did not play instruments and relied on repertoires penned for them by professional composers and lyricists. Sung poetry achieved superior status over estrada on the grounds of using classical poetry, seen as a more respectable source of lyrics. The confusion caused by the liberation of certain genres from estrada is demonstrated by the titles of awards given at the first Festival of Polish Songs in Opole, in 1963. One of the main awards was given to Ewa Demarczyk for performing an estrada-artistic song (*piosenka estradowo-artystyczna*); another to Jarosław Abramow and Agnieszka Osiecka for writing an estrada-artistic song. Other winners were awarded for performing or authoring dance-entertainment songs (*piosenki taneczno-rozrywkowe*); whilst other just for (merely) performing or writing songs (Panek 1986: 59). Creating such categories reflected a desire to be precise, but also edifying certain types of songs (artistic) over others, deemed not artistic or less artistic (entertainment songs).

The perception that estrada productions lack authenticity and high-art ambition was strengthened by the media. In 1960, a well-known Polish music presenter, Lucjan Kydryński (known in Poland as *konferansjer*), started to host the television programme *Muzyka lekka, łatwa i przyjemna* (*Light, Easy and Pleasant Music*). Although this title was not meant to be derogatory, coming at a time when big beat was captivating young audiences, it helped to associate estrada music with the unsophisticated and unfocused taste of older people.

At the same time as ‘higher-class’ popular music genres detached themselves from estrada music, estrada music distanced itself from ‘lower-brow genres,’ which gained popularity outside of the official media circuit, through dissemination on semi-officially produced sound postcards, which were a cheap form of records, and adoption by amateurs performing at social gatherings, such as youth camps, country festivities and weddings. The most popular representative of this phenomenon was Janusz Laskowski, who recorded tens of popular songs in the 1960s and 1970s, circulated on this medium. This type of music can be described, using a term applied to Yugoslav music, as a ‘newly composed folk music.’ Estrada artistes had a sense of superiority over these neofolk stars, resulting from estrada musicians being ‘legitimate,’ as they were awarded specific professional categories by the state during the process of verification, while the composers and performers of these folk hits were typically self-taught amateurs without official diplomas.

Estrada Music as a Type of Popular Music

The differences between estrada and other genres point to the divisions within popular music along aesthetic, political and professional lines. This brings me to the old question of what is popular music and popular art more broadly and how is this term understood in an Eastern European and specifically Polish context. Richard Dyer and Ginette Vincendeau notice in the introduction to their book about popular European cinema that

the term ‘popular’ is notoriously slippery or, alternatively, rich... The productive messiness of the term may be explored through the supposed opposition between two paradigms, one based on the market, the other drawn from anthropology. The popular can refer to things that are commercially successful and/or to things that are produced by, or express the thoughts and values of ‘the people.’

(Dyer and Vincendeau 1992: 2)

The first type of popular art concerns art which is produced with an intention of reaching a wide audience and reaping the benefits of its popularity, unlike elitist art, which appeals to a small group of people. The second type refers to art which happens to be popular, like much of folk art, which is anonymous, copied and disseminated by people not interested in its authorship.

Division of art into light/popular and serious/elitist most likely started in the early nineteenth century and consolidated in its second half. For the contemporary listener, the epitome of popular music of this period was the works composed and performed by the Strauss dynasty: Johann Strauss I (1804–1849) and his sons, Johann Strauss II, Josef and Eduard Strauss. Although stylistically Strauss Sr’s music has much in common with Romanticism, he does not fit the idea of a Romantic musician as an autonomous artist, who composes out of internal necessity. Instead, Johann Strauss was a commercial musician. His music was popular

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not only because it happened to attract many people, but also because it was intentionally made to be popular. Derek Scott observes that Strauss music

was of a type which related little to that which might previously have been considered 'of the people'. It was not music to accompany work, whether milking the cow or making the hay, nor did it function as part of traditional religious or secular rituals... It was for the urban social dance, not the festive village dance. Unlike rural types of music, it was produced for urban leisure-hour consumption. That being said, it had the advantage of being more readily available for audiences elsewhere, since cities were beginning to share much in common in the nineteenth century... The music of the Strauss family was, recognizably, of a certain *place*, Vienna, but its primary purpose was to satisfy expectations in a particular urban *space*, that of the dance hall. The music also had an urban subject position. When folk idioms were evoked, they were being served up for an urban audience... They are what an urban middle-class audience would recognize as rural and not what an Upper Austrian farmer would recognize as such.

(Scott 2008: 122)

The Strausses provided a playbook for producing modern popular music. Such art is directed primarily to urban audiences because the largest number of potential consumers of popular music could be found in cities. It is based on incorporating familial motifs, such as folk melodies, yet not presenting them *in crudo*, but refining and updating them. Furthermore, these Viennese artists perfected a certain genre: the waltz. This provided their audience with the pleasure of recognition, while at the same time allowing artists a margin of experimentation. The Strauss orchestra was also investing in providing entertainment by adding a pyrotechnic spectacle to their performances. Finally, Johann Strauss introduced a system of purchasing tickets before the performance, rather than collecting payment from viewers after the spectacle, which would result in many people watching it for free. He thus showed that popular art is a commercial endeavour.

The Strausses' commercial approach has been seen as a step in the right direction by authors such as Jacques Attali, because it allowed the artists to move from the position of the servant in the house of a rich aristocrat, to a professional with a high degree of autonomy (Attali 1985: 15–20 and 51–5). However, other authors, principally coming from the Marxist school of thought, condemn (commercial) popular music for being of low quality and giving pleasure to its consumers. The main proponent of this view is Theodor Adorno, the leading critic of what he describes as the 'culture industry.' In his influential essay titled 'On Popular Music,' published in 1941, he argues that the main characteristics of popular music are standardisation and the primacy of its parts over the whole (Adorno 1990: 302–3). From that, one can derive other aspects of popular music, all negative in Adorno's view, most importantly, that popular music is inauthentic (pre-digested) and does not demand from the listener any true involvement. As he puts it: 'The composition hears for the listener. This is how popular music divests the listener of his spontaneity and

promotes conditioned reflexes' (ibid.: 306) and in further instances, conformity. The listener fed on popular music is thus unlikely to stand up to capitalist oppression and participate in the communist revolution.

In subsequent years western scholars moved away from the rigid division between commercial and authentic music and the moralistic tone applied by Adorno (for example Middleton 1990; Frith 1996; Negus 1996: 36–65), yet retained some insights from his examination, most importantly the idea of standardisation of popular music. Richard Middleton defines popular music as music with a wide appeal, distributed through the music industry, and which can be performed and enjoyed by people with little or no musical training (Middleton 1990: 3–7). A privileged form of popular music is song, with its verse, chorus and bridge structure. Songwriters favour such pleasurable devices as tonality, melody and simpler rhythms, which serious musicians tend to shun (Goodwin 2000: 223). Simon Frith treats popular music, which he labels 'commercial,' as one of three main categories of music, the two remaining ones being art and folk (Frith 1996: 21–46).

These definitions and categorisations are useful in a Polish context, but postwar Poland, in this respect, also has its specificity, resulting from a different political, economic and cultural history than the West. Most importantly, after the Second World War, Poland rejected commercialism in culture and, indeed, in other areas of the economy. This means that the music charts were not regularly published and even when one obtained some data about sales of records, it was largely unreliable. This was due to the fact that the sale of records was affected not only by their popularity, but also by what was available on the market, with some of the most popular singers not being able to make records or experiencing a lengthy delay in the release of their records. Hence, the concept of 'popular music' was based more on its textual characteristics and its presence in the media (principally radio) than on the profit it generated for the popular music business.

Leonardo Masi observes that the famous essay by Adorno was not published in Polish until 2015 and probably his work remained unknown to the majority of Polish cultural historians, causing them to come up with their own ideas about the meanings and boundaries of popular music (Masi 2020: 261). Masi points to the pioneering work of Czesław Hernas, historian of baroque literature, who in 1975 published the essay 'Potrzeby i metody badania literatury brukowej' (On the necessity of popular literature studies and about its methodology), in which, anticipating western authors critical of Adorno, such as Frith, he divides Polish literature into official (serious), folk and popular (*brukowa*), likening the last one to song. Hernas also defends such literature (and by extension) music, stating,

Let's stop the presumption that [commercial literature] is an awkward, literary wannabe, non-fulfilling the requirements of certain poetics. This kind of reproach comes from the cultured classes, who refer to their own values and tastes and don't approve the immanent poetics which rules that kind of literature.

(Hernas, quoted in Masi 2020: 264)

However, Hernas' view was in a minority. The majority of cultural historians proclaimed the superiority of high art over popular art, arguing, like Jan Stęszewski, that the best of songs cannot match a mediocre symphony (Stęszewski 1976). This approach is reflected in many publications about Polish music published after the end of socialist realism in the mid-1950s, which omit popular music entirely, as if it did not constitute any part of Polish music. For example, in a book titled *Kultura Polska 77–78* which presents Polish culture of this period in its different dimensions, in a chapter titled 'Musical events' there is no mention about any event presenting popular music, while much space is dedicated to serious music events, even if they were parochial (Ekiert 1980).

Polish authors interested in the status of popular arts implicitly took issue with the statements made by Adorno, arguing that art created under conditions of state socialism is of a higher value because its function is not merely entertainment and filling free time, but education and moral development. This view is proposed, for example, by the respected film historian Aleksander Jackiewicz, who points to the educational function of Polish postwar cinema, especially films of the Polish School (Jackiewicz 1976: 122–4). However, such an approach implies that popular culture should embrace values characteristic of high culture, such as textual complexity, and be allowed to sacrifice its mass appeal to achieve its high-arts ideals (*ibid.*). Till this day, Jackiewicz's approach dominates in the studies of Polish popular music. Its presumed 'high end,' the works of Czesław Niemen, Marek Grechuta, Ewa Demarczyk, representing sung poetry, or the television programme *Kabaret Starszych Panów* (*Elderly Gentlemen's Cabaret*), created by Jerzy Wasowski and Jeremi Przybora, attract more attention than the works of Halina Kunicka and Piotr Szczepanik, even though Szczepanik sold more records than Demarczyk and Grechuta put together.¹ Even the Polish yearly, *Piosenka*, published from 2013 onwards, prioritises the 'high end' of Polish songs, publishing in its first issue articles about Jerzy Wasowski and Jerzy Przybora, two authors of cabaret songs, and Jacek Kaczmarski, who writes sung poetry, rather than focusing on mainstream songs (*Piosenka* 1 2013). Its priorities are also revealed in making their cover stars the said creators of *Elderly Gentlemen's Cabaret* and Wojciech Młynarski, all known for their sophisticated lyrics, while dedicating no covers to composers of popular songs.

The opinion that popular music is at its best when it emulates high art is also reflected in the fact that, as Masi observes, the bulk of early scholarship on Polish popular music came from literary historians interested in popular culture, such as Edward Balcerzan (1970) and Anna Barańczak (1983). Although most likely they were not familiar with Adorno's work, ultimately they also judged the value of popular music using high-art criteria and came to a similar conclusion as Adorno, namely that popular music is formulaic and conformist and it becomes art when it moves away from the pattern (Masi 2020: 267–8). That said, there are some new motifs in their writings. For example, Balcerzan claims that the popularity of songs in relation to poetry does not result from songs being less difficult (rather the opposite is the case, given that understanding poetry does not require musical sensibility), but from songs being able to capture the zeitgeist and create constellations

(such as long-playing records) and be incorporated into other media better than poems (Balcerzan 1970: 43–7).

Up until the present day, Polish songs in Polish scholarship have been considered largely from the perspective of lyrics examined as poetry. The focus is on songs which are regarded as containing high poetic value and on authors of lyrics, especially if these authors worked also outside the realm of song. For this reason one can find numerous studies about Agnieszka Osiecka and Wojciech Młynarski (for example Derlatka 2012; Burska and Olejniczak 2018), as well as about authors such as Julian Tuwin, Leszek Aleksander Moczulski, Leszek Długosz, Marcin Świetlicki (Traczyk 2009) and Ewa Lipska (Traczyk 2009; Marciniak 2019). These studies bestow value on songs by virtue of them having poetic lyrics, which are typically considered on their own merit, detached from music, which at best is viewed as the adornment of these literary miniatures. Equally, the role of singers and other music professionals, such as producers of music videos, is practically omitted from the analysis of the value of the songs.

During the period of the PRL there were few voices defending the value of songs, especially estrada songs, from inside the community of popular musicians or journalists specialising in popular music. One exception was Mateusz Świącicki, a jack of all trades (radio and print journalist, impresario, composer and electronic musician) who probably did more to further the interests of Polish popular music and musicians than any of his peers. In 1971 Świącicki published an article titled ‘Krytycy i muzycy a świadomość sztuki’ (Critics and musicians and awareness of art), whose argument, although concerning jazz, can be transposed to other genres of popular music, such as estrada. In this piece, Świącicki states that jazz cannot be judged by the criteria used for serious music, because it has its own aesthetics (1971: 8). Echoing Hernas, he says that what high-art critics ‘label “artistically primitive” can be more difficult to perform than academic art’ (ibid.: 4).

The prejudice against popular and especially estrada music can also be found in the Czechoslovak discourse on home-made popular music, as reflected in a negative assessment of the value of production of its greatest star, Karel Gott. Milan Kundera, probably the most famous Czech writer of the postwar period, in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, describes a letter written by the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Gustáv Husák, to Gott in which the politician pleads with the singer, then living in West Germany, to return home, where he can continue to ‘help’ the normalisation regime. In Kundera’s view ‘[t]he president of forgetting and the idiot of music deserve one another’: Husák and Gott make apt partners given that Gott himself ‘represents music without memory.’ Jonathan Owen, who quotes Kundera in the context of the ‘communist culture industry,’ shares this assessment, writing ‘There is some validity to these references’ (Owen 2019: 100).

Younger Polish scholars, such as the previously mentioned Masi, as well as Grzegorz Piotrowski, author of the first Polish monograph about the meaning of ‘popular music,’ lean more towards Hernas and Świącicki’s approach, believing that popular music should be judged according to its own criteria, rather than those which are applied to serious or experimental music (Piotrowski 2016). However, this realisation is not followed by any serious attempt to analyse Polish estrada music. At the

same time, studies of non-estrada genres, such as jazz, rock and sung poetry attempt to validate these genres by emphasising their links with high culture and, especially, Polish Romantic tradition and classical music. Estrada music is left out because it does not lend itself easily to treatment from this perspective: even when we identify in it high-art motifs, the purpose of their use is not ‘romantic,’ but commercial.

The Polish estrada singers covered in this book rarely used this term to describe their type of music. They preferred terms such as ‘middle of the road’ or ‘mainstream.’ These terms capture well their style and position during the period covered in this book. This is because ‘mainstream,’ as Jason Toynbee observes, ‘is a formation that brings together large numbers of people from diverse social groups and across large geographical areas in common affiliation to a musical style’ (Toynbee 2002: 130). Toynbee identifies three overlapping periods in relationship to mainstream: the first, which he describes as Tin Pan Alley-Hollywood (TiPAH), runs from the early 1920s to the turn of the 1950s. The second mainstream is constituted by rock, beginning in the 1950s and reaching its height in the 1970s. Since the 1980s we have been living in the third moment of plural, international networks (ibid.: 130). Although Toynbee’s essay is over 20 years old, I will argue that his conceptualisation still stands. Polish and Eastern European popular music have a slightly different trajectory to that identified by Toynbee, who focuses on Anglo-American music, but I will argue that Polish estrada has much in common with the first mainstream: TiPAH.

When discussing popular music in Poland, we realise that the understanding of this term has been affected by its history, most importantly two developments: Romanticism and socialist realism, which dominated art production in the Eastern bloc after the Second World War till the mid-1950s. Music composed by Mozart and Chopin was popular in their time, but in due course it has been labelled ‘classical’ rather than ‘popular.’ Yet, in Poland the work of Polish classical composers such as Chopin and Stanisław Moniuszko tends to be presented as ‘people’s music,’ namely music inspired by folk culture and serving people by, for example, encouraging them to stand up to their enemies (Panek 1986: 275; Mazierska 2004: 257–61; Pasternak-Mazur 2020: 32). After the Second World War the state attempted to erase the divisions between serious, folk and commercial music, by rendering all these types of music as ‘popular.’ This resulted in ‘serious’ composers embarking on the task of composing ‘mass songs’ (Tompkins 2013: 2) and even estrada songs, with Witold Lutosławski composing songs for estrada popular singers such as Sława Przybylska and Halina Kunicka. However, ultimately the project of popularising all types of music produced in Poland failed; Poles openly or tacitly accepted that serious, folk and popular music are different, as in the scheme described by Frith. The only remnant of this approach was more porous divisions between specific genres of popular music.

Polish Estrada Music in the Soviet and Eastern European Context

Given that estrada music was born in the Soviet Union before the Second World War and flourished in all countries belonging to the Soviet bloc, it is worth placing

it in this context before ‘zooming in’ on Poland. Looking at what was published on this topic by foreign researchers and drawing on my own memory, it is safe to say that estrada music was always popular in Eastern Europe, in the sense of being genuinely liked by the audience. As David MacFadyen says, ‘Approved by the state or not, these works would mean absolutely nothing in the long run if nobody liked them’ (MacFadyen 2001: x). Drawing on the opinion of Vladimir Maiakovskii’s publisher Osip Brik, MacFadyen tries to account for the reasons why estrada was so popular in Russia after the October Revolution by pointing to a special fit between the transitional time after the Revolution and estrada culture, which met the needs of daily socialist life better than anything else. This was thanks to favouring small, flexible forms, which caught the changes in society and addressed the audience directly (*ibid.*: 14–15). By the same token, they better fulfilled the socialist ideal of art being close to the masses and responding to their taste, rather than addressing them from above. To connect with listeners, they had to be ‘journalistic’ in nature, capturing the everyday experience in a way which was understood by people of different ages and levels of education. MacFadyen does not mention it explicitly, but another reason why estrada songs were so popular was their ‘genre flexibility’ and eclecticism, a fact observed by Aimar Ventsel (Ventsel 2016: 71). When listening to Soviet songs, one could find numerous influences: folk, jazz, oriental rhythms, classical music. Estrada singers and composers were like magpies, happy to bring everything to their ‘nests’ and make new and coherent works of these seemingly disparate fragments.

As MacFadyen observes, once Stalinism established itself in the Soviet Union, with its penchant towards grandiose arts, estrada went out of favour. One reason was its leaning towards smaller form; another was its inclination towards the grotesque, eccentricity, and patent showiness, with its wide use of circus numbers (some of which were foreign) (*ibid.*: 17). This resulted in a tendency towards greater homogenisation and regulation of estrada art, through proclaiming socialist realism as the hegemonic aesthetic style and the formation in 1931 of the State Union of Music, Estrada and Circus (GOMETs), whose purpose was to ensure the proper standard of estrada music. This period was also marked by the closing down of music halls in Moscow, Leningrad and other major towns. Estrada again regained its dominant position after the end of Stalinism, when the authorities recognised that imposing entertainment from above does not guarantee its success even when no other domestic entertainment is available, but brings a risk of turning the audience away from the indigenous product towards more dangerous western productions. On this occasion, it was seen less as a consequence of capturing the ‘liminal times’ (as the situation post-Stalin was rather stable), and more of a social contract, in which citizens accepted the politics of the government and the government left the people in peace, allowing them to choose their own entertainment. This lack of intervention resulted in the richness of Soviet estrada music, as previously noted.

Development of estrada music in Eastern Europe largely mimicked that in the Soviet Union, except that in Eastern Europe the period of Stalinism started only after the Second World War, around 1947, rather than at the end of the 1920s. However, the very term ‘estrada music’ was not adopted uniformly across the

Eastern bloc. For example, in Czechoslovakia, the ‘*estrádní hudba*’ (estrada art) appeared in the 1950s and referred primarily to a specific type of repertoire of brass or mixed military or radio orchestras. There was also ‘estrada’ in the sense of a theatrical ensemble (stage form/show) with magicians, dancers and popular music according to the current fashion (in the 1960s including rock bands), with which various companies toured the cultural halls of smaller towns and villages. By contrast, the concept of ‘estrada music’ in the sense described in this book never took hold in Czech lands and since the early 1960s it has only rarely been encountered in journalism. Instead, what I describe here as ‘estrada,’ such as the productions of Karel Gott and Helena Vondráčková, was described as ‘pop music’ or ‘šlágr’ (Schlager) – the latter used especially in relation to particularly successful hits.

What I describe here as estrada music in countries such as Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia flourished during the periods of ‘thaws,’ when there was no longer a requirement to listen to propagandistic ‘mass songs’ (which, besides, were not the only type of musical entertainment available to the public during this period) and development of semi-autonomous popular culture was the price the government was prepared to pay in exchange for social peace. The fact that its chief function was to entertain allows to see it not only as a conformist or even ‘regime’ music but also as a sign of freedom gained by citizens living under the state socialist regime. How it is assessed depends thus on the overall level of freedom enjoyed by a specific country. Where this level was relatively low, as was the case in the Soviet Union and East Germany, estrada music came across as free and authentic. By contrast, in countries such as Poland, where citizens enjoyed a relatively high level of freedom, estrada music was seen as conformist, especially in the postcommunist period.

These attitudes are reflected in the way estrada music is approached in academic discourse. Research on the Russian and Soviet estrada, most importantly the three volumes by MacFadyen, as well as in a smaller study by Aimar Ventsel concerning Estonian estrada (Ventsel 2016), emphasises its grassroots character. To put it bluntly, according to MacFadyen, estrada music was created in the hearts and minds of the singers, composers and lyricists, rather than at the desks of the socialist bureaucrats. These bureaucrats were merely obstructing or channelling the creativity of these artists. By contrast, in the studies conducted by researchers from Eastern Europe, estrada music is tackled largely from an institutional perspective; it is seen as a product of specific policies and bureaucratic decisions (Bittner 2015; Bittner 2017; Angelov 2019). In reality, estrada music, as any other music, was a product of the negotiation between the state apparatus, which in the socialist context was also the main owner of the music industry on one hand, and the artists and the audience on the other.

When discussing Polish estrada music in the Soviet and Eastern European context, we should also take into account the specific relationship between the Soviet Union and its satellite countries and the relationship among these countries. Although Russia was a coloniser in relation to its republics and other socialist countries, these countries, including Poland, felt culturally superior towards Russia, on account of their history and closer proximity to the West (Wolff 1994). This has

made a number of scholars regard Russo-Soviet colonisation as ‘reverse-cultural colonization’: ‘Mittel-European capitals such as Budapest, Berlin, and Prague were therefore seen in Russia, at least by some, as prizes rather than as burdens needing civilizing from their occupiers. In return, the Central Europeans often saw the colonizing Russo-Soviets as “Asiatics”’ (Moore 2001: 121), as “‘Orientals” unable to assume a position of a colonizer, especially in relation to apparently less Oriental people’ (Knight 2002: 300).

This also meant that productions of Eastern European estrada were often seen in the Soviet Union as a surrogate of western popular music or, at least, as something more daring than an indigenous product, not unlike Estonian artists performing in the Russian part of the Soviet Union, as noted by Ventsel (2016). It might also be the case that such a role was played by Ukrainian artists in Russia, given that some of the greatest estrada stars in the Soviet Union, such as Leonid Utesov and Iosif Kobzen, hailed from Ukraine. Many of the Polish stars discussed in this book were also stars in the Soviet Union and this love was not reciprocated to the same degree. There were Soviet estrada stars, such as Muslim Magomayev and Alla Pugacheva, who were popular in Poland, but it is safe to say that Polish estrada stars were more popular in the Soviet Union than the other way round. Poles tended to appreciate more the ‘dissident’ stars such as Vladimir Vysotsky and Bulat Okudzhava than mainstream Soviet stars.

Many Polish estrada stars were also popular in other Eastern European countries, such as Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Hungary and East Germany. However, on this occasion the relation was less favourable to Polish singers. Even the greatest Polish male estrada stars, such as Jerzy Połomski and Zbigniew Wodecki, failed to achieve in Czechoslovakia the popularity which Karel Gott enjoyed in Poland. Female stars fared better, especially those who started their career in the late 1960s and 1970s, such as Maryla Rodowicz and Urszula Sipińska, being very popular respectively in Czechoslovakia and East Germany. At best, however, they matched the pan-Eastern European popularity of artists such as Helena Vondráčková and Klári Katona. My argument is that Polish estrada music was created with an eye for a domestic audience and rarely promoted internationally.

Approach, Methods, Structure and Sources

It will be impossible to present a comprehensive history of estrada music in its main dimensions in a book of a standard academic size, given the length and breadth of this phenomenon, covering over 40 years, thousands of artists, hundreds of events, as well as a maze of policies and unwritten rules which the artists negotiated, and many institutions with which they collaborated and types of audiences they served. An additional problem in completing such a task lies in the scarcity of research on Polish popular music from a different perspective than aesthetic. Most importantly, unlike Polish film, which has several volumes devoted to its economic history (Zajiček 1983; 1992; 2015), there is no comprehensive economic or institutional history of Polish popular music of the state socialist period; its history is a selective history of artists and genres, rather than institutions, financial

transactions and employment policies. However, to understand Polish estrada, one needs some insight into the ways in which the Polish music business functioned (and malfunctioned). Similarly, one needs to understand the relationship between the cultural policies devised at the highest echelons of the Party and the ways in which these policies were implemented by those on the ground. Therefore, the aspects of estrada I examine in this book include the political and cultural background of its emergence and development, the institutional framework in which estrada artists and other music professionals operated, the careers of the greatest stars and their presence in the media. Finally, I write about the memory of estrada music in the postcommunist cultural sphere. To cover these aspects, I made various assumptions. One is that Polish estrada music was a product of multiple factors, such as operating under the state socialist system in which the state owned the bulk of the country's economy and in which the main purpose of art was fulfilling specific ideological functions rather than making a profit. At the same time, for estrada musicians (as for all commercial artists) the most important goal was to earn a decent living, and it was possible only through creating music attractive to listeners. Hence, they had to negotiate between two pressures: ideological and commercial. My assumption is that they mostly ignored the former or only 'ticked it off' by participating occasionally in some openly political events and focused on the latter. My other assumption is that to assess estrada music honestly, we should do it on its own terms, its popularity and professionalism, rather than according to values which dominate in Polish music history and journalism: authenticity and political (non)conformity. This does not mean that estrada productions were necessarily inauthentic or politically conformist, but that their audience was not interested in such qualities, in common with fans of western pop music. Finally, I regard estrada as a Polish and Eastern European phenomenon. This is because the specific political circumstances allowed it to flourish in this part of the world and circulate in the Soviet bloc. Many Polish estrada stars were major stars in the Soviet Union, East Germany and Czechoslovakia and vice versa, and there were frequent collaborations between artists and institutions from these countries. This points to the fact that, although the Eastern bloc was an artificial entity, its long existence resulted in cultural synergies and exchanges between countries which comprised it. Estrada music is a testimony to the existence of such a shared cultural sphere, which was imposed from the top, yet was genuinely enjoyed at the grassroots level. I will suggest that one reason that estrada has attracted patronising attitudes is that it does not fit the prevailing attitude to state socialism, according to which the state imposed certain cultural norms from the top, which people bravely resisted (Hanáková 2008). On the contrary, what was imposed, encouraged or permitted was greatly enjoyed and still is, as demonstrated by the fact that old songs are frequently covered by younger artists and used in commercials and soundtracks of films, produced after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

In this book I cover postwar years till the end of state socialism in 1989, with a focus on the period from the mid-1950s till the early 1980s. This is because during this time estrada music held a dominant position on the map of Polish popular music and developed in a specific institutional frame, marked by the

state having a monopoly over all aspects of popular music: radio, television, live performance and the recording industry. In this period the term ‘estrada music’ (*muzyka estradowa*) also dominated in debates about Polish popular music. In the mid to late 1980s the monopoly was eroded and ‘estrada music’ was supplanted with the term ‘pop music.’ I will present the reasons for and implications of this shift.

My book consists of three parts, comprised of seven chapters. The first part deals with the political and institutional framework of Polish estrada music. In the first chapter I examine the economic and cultural policies in postwar Poland, their ideological base and their overall effect on the development of popular music. I argue that initially the authorities wanted to integrate popular and ‘serious’ music by encouraging serious composers to engage in creating music for the whole country, including ‘mass songs.’ However, after the end of Stalinism in the mid-1950s, this pressure eased and the serious musicians were allowed to pursue their own path, making space for more clearly defined popular music. This music was expected not to undermine socialist ideology and Polish political priorities by, for example, criticising the Soviet Union, but it mostly operated within a large margin of artistic freedom. After the mid-1950s, the role of cultural politics diminished; much more important was political culture: the way things were done in specific institutions and the personal sympathies of people who were in charge of them. The second chapter discusses the organisation of estrada music. Estrada music was supported by a specific infrastructure, which included an elaborate system of verifying the skills of prospective performers, the recording industry, the network of institutions supporting live performances, named Estrada (with a capital E), and PAGART, the agency facilitating the international exchange of performers. In this chapter I assess how these institutions worked individually and in collaboration with each other, facilitating or obstructing the careers of estrada artists. I argue that they largely operated free of ideological pressures, but were strongly affected by the peculiarities of the socialist system, suffering from fragmentation of the economy and hostility to innovation, reflecting the inability of the socialist system to replace effectively the market.

The second part of my book looks at estrada stars. In the third chapter, which is also the longest in the entire book, I consider estrada stars from different periods of the PRL, beginning with Mieczysław Fogg, who started his career before the Second World War, and finishing with Izabella Trojanowska, who became a star on the threshold of the collapse of the Iron Curtain, presenting their careers, styles and critical and popular reception. I examine the reasons why the appeal of some of these stars was enduring, pointing to their ability and willingness to explore different styles and reinvent themselves. In the fourth chapter I look at the work of star-lyricists Wojciech Młynarski and Agnieszka Osiecka and composers Katarzyna Gärtner and Andrzej Korzyński. My question is, what made these lyricists and composers stand out from the crowd? In this part I divert from a critical mode of writing and adopt what Brian Longhurst and Danijela Bogdanović describe as the ‘celebratory mode’ (Longhurst and Bogdanović 2014: 1), showing appreciation for these talented musicians, who are neglected by academic researchers.

Although estrada singers gained popularity by playing live, they became stars thanks to the media, principally radio and television, and to a smaller extent film. In the fifth chapter, opening the third part of my book, I consider the role of these media in promoting estrada music. I also examine the place of the media in the overall system of the Polish popular music business. As with the earlier chapters, my approach is largely chronological, pointing to the changes the media undertook over the decades. The special places in which Polish estrada music was promoted and performed were music festivals, such as the Festival of Polish Songs in Opole, which were televised, giving the artists access to a country-wide audience and enhancing their opportunities for touring and recording. I devote the sixth chapter to the main Polish popular music festivals, in Opole, Sopot, Kołobrzeg and Zielona Góra. In the final, seventh chapter I write about the afterlife of Polish estrada music, as reflected in cover songs, commercials and biographies of stars. I am interested in how estrada music was recycled and reimagined after 1989 and what the new take on this music tells us about its original incarnations and the hierarchy of value pertaining to postcommunist times.

At different points of this study I treat Polish estrada music as a mirror of Polish postwar politics, history and culture or as a phenomenon in its own right. This affects the methods used in this book. I draw on the history of Polish politics and economy to explain the organisation of Polish estrada and popular music at large, with their supposed absurdities, but also as a specific section of this economy with its own logic, which was slightly different from the Polish macro-economy. I also use Polish history as a key to explain the meanings of Polish estrada songs and other cultural texts in which they are used, such as films. I also draw on research about western, Soviet and Eastern European popular music, to show similarities between music from these regions and Polish estrada productions and to tease out their specificity.

Apart from academic sources, which are scarce in relation to Polish popular music, the main source of my knowledge has been Polish journalistic publications specialising in popular music, *Jazz* and *Non Stop*, because in them one can find up-to-date information about important events, such as festivals, stars and discussions about the state of Polish song and the popular music business. I also looked at cultural imprints, especially *Panorama* and *Przekrój*, as well as *Radio i świat* and *Radio i telewizja*, two magazines devoted to Polish radio and television. I also studied with a growing interest *Nowe Drogi*, a monthly magazine of the Polish United Workers Party (the PZPR), presenting discussions about Polish politics, social life and culture from the perspective of Party intellectuals. Another source of my knowledge are the artists themselves. After the fall of state socialism, and especially after 2000, many stars of estrada published their memoirs or gave extended interviews about their careers, for example Mieczysław Fogg, Maria Koterbska, Irena Santor, Halina Kunicka, Maryla Rodowicz, Urszula Sipińska, Zbigniew Wodecki and Irena Jarocka. They fulfil a triple function in my book. First, they provide information about the careers of these stars. Second, they give insight into the workings of the popular music business during the period of state socialism. Third, these interviews and memoirs present us with the memories of postwar