

IF OSKAR KOLBERG HAD HAD THE PHONOGRAPH... OR HOW TO READ THE OLDEST ARCHIVAL NOTES OF POLISH TRADITIONAL MUSIC THROUGH THE PRISM OF PHONOGRAPHIC EXPERIENCE

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Abstract: The article explores the value of different types of sources (written, audio) of traditional music in the context of contemporary Polish folk music research and practices. The military twentieth century rendered a large gap in the records (especially in the sound recordings) of traditional music and in order to obtain a more coherent and complete picture of the essence and development of traditional music, it is necessary to combine all the bits and pieces in different types of recordings. The most recent research has allowed us to study the first notations of traditional music made by Oskar Kolberg in the nineteenth century in quite a new context – via audio experiences after listening to archival recordings. The “phonic age” delivered additional data about traditional music – not only lyrics, melody, intervals and formulaic notation of rhythms, but also every detail that could not have been captured and saved with the use of traditional musical notation. The appearance of new techniques of sound recording has a particular meaning and influence for the reconstruction of the ancient sound of village music and for styles and manners of performing. It is important not only for musical performers but also for theoreticians who often face the problem of how to interpret historical descriptions of music or how to truly perform historical reality (e.g., ethnomusicologists, ethnographers, film and radio-audience producers, etc.).

An experimental study was conducted in collaboration with contemporary musicians on how they interpret the acquisition of a new piece written down over one and a half centuries ago. The results revealed notable differences between the musicians with academic education, younger generation revivalists, and traditional musicians in terms of acquiring the style of performance but also in shares of improvisation. In addition, the notation is not able to describe the nuances of performance and therefore the audio recordings or live models are of extreme value in the practical learning and researching of traditional music.

Keywords: traditional music, archival sound recordings, Oskar Kolberg

INTRODUCTION

Modern ethnomusicology observes significant transformations of culture, traditions and musical practices in the rapidly changing world. This discipline as a humanistic branch of science increasingly asks questions about the subject of contemporary fieldwork, repertoire, and musical practices (what is traditional, what is new, what is local, what is from outside, what is becoming part of the culture and what is forgotten, etc.). Through the prism of archival, documental heritage (sounds, films, pictures) we try to see, research and evaluate reality. This rises many questions, for example:

- To what extent should we record contemporary manifestations and performances of traditional musical practices that still exist? Nowadays there are many different frameworks for performing traditional songs and music – from old, preserved and still cultivated rituals up to stage performances or revitalised (reconstructed) performance situations.
- To what extent and how should we collect sound and audiovisual documents that present traditional musical repertoire today? There is an opportunity for developing methods of gathering and describing filed materials (Jackowski 2023).
- Can traditional music be considered as still alive or can the performances be considered as the relics of the past? Is the traditional old repertoire performed today (revived or reconstructed) just a manifestation of the still alive musical culture, a kind of continuation in modern, quite a different world, or is it only a romantic comeback of the past as an antidote to the developing civilisation, longing for the old lifestyle?

These and other similar questions have been often discussed in recent years.

In this paper I would like to present the problem of the present state of the musical folklore archive and ask whether completed collections (which could be dated back as far as almost 150 years ago) should be closed and presented in a form of simply a “sound museum” or should they still serve as a continuing part of the documentation of traditional music in contemporary contexts. From the author’s point of view recordings from various generations and decades could be a proper foundation for research of the vivacity (what has been preserved, what has gone by, and what new has appeared) as well as variability of living representations of musical folklore. There is also one more important context for presenting the article: to view and research non-recorded materials (in the case of Poland the oldest available musical transcripts/notations were made in the nineteenth century) in comparison to sound recordings made later, as the next and new stage of documentation in the “phonic age”. The latest research allowed us to look at these first notations of traditional music in quite a new

context – via audio experience after listening to archival recordings. The “phonic age” brought about additional data regarding traditional music – not only lyrics, melody, intervals and formulaic notation of rhythms but also all the details that could not have been captured and saved with the use of traditional musical notation. Thus, the existence of sound recordings has a particular meaning and it influences the contemporary reconstruction of the ancient sound of village music as well as styles and manners of performance. It is important especially for music performers but also for theoreticians who often face the problem of understanding historical descriptions of written music or historical sources of repertoire. The report aims to show how the oldest written transcriptions of Polish traditional music can be deciphered and understood in the later context (after almost 100 years of the existence of phonographic sources) and how important is ethno-phonographic experience and historical knowledge for the contemporary performers grown up in villages, towns, and cities. For all of them the historical sound recording could work as a missing link in traditional, oral direct transmission of the repertoire and style of performance.

Founding, setting up, managing, and preserving folklore archives are obvious activities for archivists, scientists, ethnographers, musicologists, etc. But many people (non-specialists, outside the field) could simply ask: what for to collect written (“silent”) manuscripts of old traditional songs, why gather recordings of folk music and additional information about them, to spend time and money on these non-profitable activities?¹ The researchers struggle with questions about how to make this heritage interesting and attractive for the contemporary people, especially the young generation of potential musicians, composers, scientists, and teachers. There could not be one answer to these questions: from the general, monumental and obvious statement about the special importance of preserving tradition, history, heritage, and so on to service various groups of people with academic and personal interest in these questions (historians, ethnographers, ethnologists, dialectologists, musicologist, literaries, etc., as well as regionalists and tradition lovers). In addition, there are people who want not only to research, analyse, measure, and catalogue, but also to bring back to life the songs and music in many contexts. It should be stressed that using traditional repertoire as a source of inspiration or citation for composing works of classical music has been very popular from the nineteenth century (especially in Romanticism) until today (e.g., Chopin, Bartók, Kodály, Dvořák, Grieg, Szymanowski, Sibelius). A contemporary modern manifestation of this musical inspiration in Poland is the so-called folk music movement, which could be generally understood as a new sound of traditional music or citation of folk melodies and songs in modern arrangements (Rokosz 2009; Trembaczevska

2022). It is not traditional music in effect, but quite a new musical quality, style and genre based more or less on traditional repertoire.

Another important issue is to try to preserve in practice the living traditional repertoire in its original sound, and the purpose of this article is to focus on this particular aspect. In contemporary Poland – similarly to many European countries – traditional musical repertoire exists in both contexts – primary/original (as a historical relic, still alive generally in its ancient form) and new, modern (as a way of continuation in a new form, revival or reconstruction). The border between these contexts is not clear but the first sphere (conservative) is rather elderly people's domain and the second one is rather open to the new generation. Due to the lack of events, such as traditional weddings or other celebrations, especially the ritual repertoire disappeared from real life, but instrumental music still accompanies dance parties organised by a part of the young generation (especially from the cities) who want to learn to play and dance in the traditional style and who are lovers of folk tradition as a lifestyle and an antidote to the developing civilisation. In this case the general context (dance) has partly survived, but the society has changed from a small (relatively enclosed) village group to a mixed one composed of mainly city people. Also, a part of traditional musical culture – folk piety (mainly catholic, but also orthodox and protestant) – and sparsely preserved rituals and customs celebrated mainly by the older generations, with some participation of children and the youth, have survived in the living practice (Jackowski 2012). Quite a new context that appeared in the twentieth century is musical folklore as a stage performance (e.g., during festivals, competitions, etc.).

The purpose of the article is to show how archival documents can help the abovementioned groups in the preservation, continuation, revitalisation or reconstruction of the fading musical tradition. The documents preserved in archives are necessary for the context of musical activity, which seeks to keep original, traditional musical repertoire in its original context (e.g., prayer, ritual) or in its original function (e.g., dance). There exist also other aspects of old songs and music performances, for example, reconstructions for artistic reasons (stage performances, film, theatre). For all these groups the documentation of traditional performances is a starting point for further artistic, reconstructive or cultural activity.

Many of the contemporary soloists and musical groups who try to preserve traditional music in the living practice (revival, reconstruction) and play old traditional repertoire remind us of groups of people who reconstruct history (historical reenactment of battles, events, historical weaponry, etc.); they are (usually) amateurs (which means they are not academically educated in music or history), lovers of tradition or history, and they pursue it as a kind of hobby, subculture in modern time, as a pastime or even lifestyle (e.g., wearing specific

clothes every day). It is difficult to compare these musical reenactment groups with ancient or early music ensembles because the latter ones were usually created relying on long musical, historical, and musicological studies and after in-depth practical studies at music schools. Many of the newly created revival groups performing traditional music repertoire in Poland (except for a few cases of bands consisting of classically educated musicians and singers) present their music in public almost immediately after being formed and even achieve popularity a few months after starting their activity. In some cases – according to interviews with their members – they start learning to play an instrument (fiddle, folk-accordion) and after two to three months start playing at folk dance events.

The abovementioned way and method of self-learning, oral learning or learning under the wing of an older master of instrument playing or singing in traditional style states a significant difference between traditional and early music ensembles. The contemporary circles of younger-generation urban folk musicians are mostly oriented towards historicism and reconstruction valuing the more archaic layers of tradition. They have good knowledge of the historical tradition and have their clear preferences as to what parts of traditional music they consider valuable, and what they prefer not to convey. Their masters – often still active musicians – accept the changing cultural context (what has contemporary value is what allows them to stay in their profession). This way of transmission cannot be considered as a full continuation of tradition but a revival of a chosen part of the repertoire acknowledged as valuable because it is old and historical. Contemporary ethnomusicological research should consider the changing musical culture observing also new melodies and modern dances played in traditional style by older musicians approved by them and the community in which they act (they earn money by playing both for the elderly and young wedding guests, though). The reconstructive attitude (correct in a way) – as a guard of the old repertoire, old corpus of the tradition – is typically historical, closed and inhibiting traditional musical practice at a certain point of its development. This attitude also brings the new generation of performers closer to ethnomusicologists who often prefer historical and not ethnological observation of the researched object. Despite the criticism of especially the second half of the twentieth-century changes, transformations, disappearing or even killing the traditional culture (when festivals, competitions or folkloristic groups became popular also as manifestations of politics or when old, pre-Second Vatican Council devotional practices in churches disappeared), the newly created traditional music groups sooner or later get on stage themselves. They also start running various workshops and trainings, using modern (unknown in ancient traditional culture) methods or digital tools (e.g., the Internet) in order to find space for their activity in quite another world devoid of the old

ritual and small social context. This is a new challenge for ethnomusicological research to examine these movements but also help them to find, read properly and understand historical sources. I have purposefully skipped here the problem of infrequent relic cases of direct oral transmission between generations in situ, for example, when the grandfather who is a traditional fiddler, who formerly used to play at old traditional weddings, teaches his grandson.²

When users of the archival collections are looking for music for their needs, they presently have two corpuses of archival materials: the oldest written corpus (materials dating back to the middle of the nineteenth century) and the corpus of audio and audiovisual materials. The latter one is formed of very few records from the first half of the twentieth century (because the sound recordings made during the interwar period were almost totally destroyed during World War II) and of a significant collection of sound recordings made from 1945 until today. The oldest, monumental sound recordings of traditional music registered in the Polish area were made very late in comparison to other European countries because of a very difficult political situation in the country (lack of independence until 1918). The first known audio recordings of the Polish repertoire were made in 1904, 1906, and 1913–1914, and they were rather individual scientific experiments with a phonograph than systematic registration in the field. All these pre-World War I episodes as well as the beginning of the first sound archives in Poland, which were founded starting from 1930, have been described and published almost completely (Jackowski 2014a). Due to the loss of recordings made during the interwar period and the small number of early pre-war sound documents (and lack of information about these recordings), the new postwar Polish musical ethnography as a scientific discipline had to be based on the nineteenth-century works of Oskar Kolberg, which at that time (immediately after World War II) had not been completely published and were preserved as manuscripts.

THE OLDEST WRITTEN SOURCES OF ETHNOMUSICOLOGY: OSKAR KOLBERG'S WORK

Oskar Kolberg (1814–1890) was a Polish ethnographer, folklorist, and composer. He was the first to start writing down Polish folk songs and melodies during field excursions. His predecessors (e.g., Zygmunt Gloger), mainly literaries, usually wrote down only lyrics without notes. Early pre-Kolberg written records of music were compiled by composers, very schematically and not always directly from the authentic performer. Oskar Kolberg was the first who, as a musician, began the systematic notation of notes and lyrics and took into consideration

the main feature of musical folklore – its variability. Oskar Kolberg remains known as the one who did titanic work – he wrote down about 35,000 songs and melodies. During his life only 8,000 were published. Most of the rest of the materials (except for some parts published before 1910) were not published until 1962. Today the publication series of all Oskar Kolberg's works consists of 85 volumes (Antyborzec 2015).³

Oskar Kolberg's work methods (pencil, clear card⁴ and ear) that were common at his time as well as the work itself were criticised from the very beginning but especially in the twentieth century when the phonograph was already known but not used on a regular basis in Polish science. The first wave of criticism (from F. Chopin and Karol Libelt) concerned the earliest editions of Kolberg's records (Kolberg 1961 [1857]) in which the author added piano accompaniment to homophonic melodies. Further on Kolberg published melodies without his own creative additions – without accompaniment and without composed instrumental preludes. But the imperfection of his work was still a topic of criticism and discussions. Critics made the accusation that Kolberg's records missed folk polyphony and instrumental music and that his work was not precise enough in dialectological and phonetic aspects.⁵ The twentieth-century folklorists and musicologists accused Kolberg of making the initially complicated original folk melodies simpler in his records. They also blamed him that he missed and did not take into consideration free tempo and mixed double and triple meter in his notations, that he did not note down numerous alterations, ornamentations and intonation details as very important aspects of traditional live performance (Sobieski 1961b: 107–108).

Adolf Chybiński (1880–1952), a famous Polish musicologist, was one of the first scientists who regularly stressed in his works (beginning 1910) the significant importance of using the phonograph for creating new kinds of sources for Polish musical ethnography. He compared European experience (especially Austrian, German, and French) with the undeveloped situation in Poland. Chybiński mainly criticised the lack of sound sources in Polish musical ethnography which at that time was only based on the imperfect written sources provided by Oskar Kolberg and Zygmunt Gloger. Chybiński postulated starting field documentation, using a phonograph, to set ethnographical sound archives and completion and verification of Oskar Kolberg's work on the basis of sound recordings. His argument was that written materials were not of sufficient cognitive value in the twentieth century, when in other countries the Edison phonograph was a regular scientific equipment for research. Béla Bartók asked Chybiński in his letter written before 1937: "Is Polish musical ethnography still based on Kolberg's works?" (Chybiński 1937: 105). Both Bartók and Chybiński were aware that in Poland many traditional singers and musicians existed at

that time, the musical folklore was still alive, and should have been preserved in sound recordings. It should be stressed that Chybiński criticised neither the person of Kolberg nor his titanic work. He focused on the almost total lack of sound recordings in Poland from the beginning of the twentieth century and treated Kolberg's written records as the only source for research and publications. He also understood and justified Kolberg's imperfect sources, stressing that the author was making his transcriptions in very difficult conditions. Kolberg sometimes noted down the music immediately, in a hurry, in original live contexts of inns, during rituals, work processes, etc. Not always could he count on the possibility of a few repetitions of difficult melodies. So simplifications were inevitable in these conditions. The topic of documenting traditional melodies by Oskar Kolberg, difficult conditions of this work and the quality of written recordings resulting from these circumstances were discussed by Danuta Pawlak (Pawlak 1990). In commentaries to his transcriptions Kolberg himself wrote about many difficulties and great problems in making proper records (Sobieski 1961b: 110).⁶ In Chybiński's opinion only the phonographic method of recording melodies could have created a reliable and full-value source for scientific analysis and research (Chybiński 1910: 8–9).⁷ As it was stressed above, although starting from 1930 the first Polish sound archives were founded and the initial research using new phonographic sources was carried out,⁸ almost all the interwar collections were destroyed or lost during World War II.

In this situation the problem of the lack of sound sources for research on Polish traditional music reared immediately after the war. At that time the disproportion between Poland and other European countries in terms of sound documentation of traditional music increased. After the war, Marian Sobieski wrote that many Polish sound documenters still worked using a pencil and five-line stave instead of electro-acoustic recordings on plates or even magnetic tapes. He compared them to “walking on foot during the era of cars, planes, and trains” (Sobieski 1949: 194; Sobieska & Sobieski 1973: 531). Sobieski, along with his wife – as creators of the postwar sound archive of Polish traditional music (which is still the largest and oldest sound archive in Poland) – were aware of the very difficult situation and poverty after the war. Their first recordings were made by using homemade electro-acoustic equipment and only from 1945 onwards the systematic sound documentation of Polish traditional music was carried out. Despite creating rich sound collections after the war, Jadwiga and Marian Sobieski valued Oskar Kolberg's work as the first level of documentation and the oldest source of repertoire. They stressed that in spite of many difficulties, Kolberg took into consideration – as much as possible (without the phonograph) – many details and characteristic features of folk music, e.g., melody variants, distinctions of tempo, melismatics (Sobieski 1961a).

WAYS OF MUSICAL UNDERSTANDING OF KOLBERG'S NOTES: AN EXPERIMENT

In order to imagine and understand what kind of difficulties Oskar Kolberg had during his fieldwork, experimental research was carried out.⁹ A few old-generation traditional musicians, also classical professional musicians and new-generation non-classical educated performers of traditional repertoire were invited to take part in the research and documentation.

The first stage of the experiment consisted in working in a way similar to that of Oskar Kolberg. Meetings of musicians educated in higher music schools and traditional musicians were organised in order to try to record the performances of traditional melodies played in traditional style (having all specific elements, e.g., non-equal intonation, rhythm changing, *tempo rubato*, ornamentations, etc.) in real time by ear, using only pencil and stave, that is, cards with five-line system for musical notation. According to the general opinion of the students of higher music schools, writing down the melody by ear – especially a traditional homophonic melody – is not very complicated due to the typical school exercises based not on original live performance (or field recordings) but on artificial, simplified versions of traditional melodies (in effect devoid of the characteristics of traditional performance features and context) performed by a professional, classically educated singer, that is, sung according to the manuscript of normative character.¹⁰ It is not very difficult, especially when the students can hear several repetitions of the record (the same record, not a live performance), which is normal practice during musical dictation exercises. But in the framework of the experiment the situation was different: during the meeting with an authentic traditional performer it was not possible to make a sound recording as in Kolberg's time. According to my observations, the different setting entailed many difficulties: when the traditional performer was asked for subsequent repetitions, they were able to do it, yet the repetitions were never an exact copy of the original version, but different variants of it; some elements were added and some disappeared during new performances. The participants of the experiment were able to write down only the general sketch of the melody, but in order to make a detailed transcription of variants (including e.g., ornamentation, changing of tempo and its features) the best way would be having audio recordings at the transcribers' disposal. A recording is, nevertheless, a copy of a singular (individual) version – one among many variants which together create a real image of the melody and its variability in the player's individual musical style. If the traditional performer was asked to play in a slower tempo – in order to make grasping and writing down the details as well as more difficult parts and shorter notes of the melody possible

or to remember the shape of the melody better – it was very strange, uncomfortable and abnormal for the performer. In this situation they felt like a fish without water and would very quickly get back to the normal tempo and style of improvisation. The experiment showed how difficult writing down melodies performed in a traditional folk style can be, how important and helpful sound recording is for written documentation of such kind of music and how imperfect a written source can be in comparison to the audio one.

The second part of the experiment consisted in the comparison of various ways of performing of a few melodies chosen from Kolberg's work. This part of research was supposed to demonstrate how many various musical performances are possible based on one written (not audio) historical source.

There were a few melodies chosen from Oskar Koberg's works. The selection was dictated by the availability of parallel sound recordings of variants (which was the main difficulty) almost identical to those noted down by Kolberg. Moreover, I tried to find the melodies and the corresponding recordings from the same region of Poland or from a nearby area.¹¹ It was also important to find such historical melodies and songs that are not popular and known today (variants of some pieces recorded by Kolberg are very popular today in the repertoire of folk ensembles of song and dance or remembered by the older generation of musicians).

1. "Biegła Marysia" – wedding song (written source: series *Dziela Wszystkie Oskara Kolberga*, vol. 18: *Kieleckie*, part 1, no. 158 (handwritten manuscript of Kolberg: file 43, sign. 1352, c. 12r); audio source: *Gdyby Kolberg miał fonograf* (Jackowski 2014b), CD 1, tracks 74–77 – 4 singers born between 1879–1889, rec. between 1952 to 1953).
2. "Czyje to koniki" – popular song (written source: series *Dziela Wszystkie Oskara Kolberga*, vol. 25: *Mazowsze*, part 2: *Mazowsze Polne*, no. 540; audio source: *Gdyby Kolberg miał fonograf* (Jackowski 2014b), CD 1, track 14 – fiddler born in 1880, recorded in 1966).
3. A dance without a name (*Oberek*) described as: *od Sochaczewa* (written source: series *Dziela Wszystkie Oskara Kolberga*, vol. 25: *Mazowsze*, part 2, *Mazowsze Polne*, no. 452). "U nasego pana" – a harvest song (written source: series *Dziela Wszystkie Oskara Kolberga*, vol. 18: *Kieleckie*, part 1, no. 12; audio source: Phonographic Collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences, sign. T0380_28 – singer born in 1928; T0457_09 – singer born in 1918; MZamoj_MC0107A_01 – singer born in 1923).
4. "Tańczuj ze mną" [*Od Skierniewic*] (written source: series *Dziela Wszystkie Oskara Kolberga*, vol. 25: *Mazowsze*, part 2: *Mazowsze Polne*, no. 275; audio source: "Szałamacha" Polish Radio Archive, fiddler born in 1905).

At first, written melodies were transcribed in music notation software and played electronically (MIDI). It was an example of how literally, in a mathematical way (only pitch and rhythm), the information saved by Kolberg can be read and played. According to the listeners' opinion, it sounded very schematically and synthetically. The MIDI player reproduced all the information contained in the graphical notation. But the notation was prepared by man for man and in the next stages I tried to find out what various musicians could find "between notes", how important was human imagination, knowledge and experience in the process of reading historical musical notation.

The next stage was to ask classically educated singers (e.g., a soprano) or instrumentalists (e.g., piano or violin players) to sing or play the same melodies from Kolberg's notations. They were informed about the songs/melodies that were noted down by Kolberg in villages in the nineteenth century. After the observation of the process of reading and playing and after comparison of performances it was found that this group of musicians tried to play or sing very literally (like from the score), according to written notes without changes or additions. The most noticeable creative contribution was that they added a human touch to the performance: a simple differentiation in agogics, dynamic elements, phrasing according to lyrics or the shape of instrumental melody (creating a sense of acoustic space). In the case of professional classically educated musicians yet another feature was also very clear: all musicians tried to keep their performance within the framework of the written notes and lyrics, which meant that ornamentation and improvisation factors were not the most important for them. They wanted to play well, correctly and aesthetically¹² and treated the written source record as a kind of score, pattern, or prescription very carefully, doing everything possible not to exceed the frame of the source notation. Only a few of them were not so disciplined and tried to add some tempo changes. It was probably due to the fact that they were aware of the folk provenience of the source. Yet, their weak aural and practical experience in village music (in Poland, until today there has been no systematic theoretical or practical course in traditional music as a frame subject at music schools¹³) caused the trials to be something slightly different than the written pattern but still far from being typical village music (lack of characteristic "white voice" singing or playing the instrument and the sound of violin usually used for playing classical music; e.g., Polish village fiddlers use mainly the upper part of the bow when playing short rhythmic units; the way of the grip of the bow; using the upper range of the violin (usually A, E strings) which causes very specific sounds).

The third stage of the research was to ask contemporary singers and instrumentalists to perform traditional songs or melodies in a traditional way. The performers of this part of the experiment were selected from a group of

performers of contemporary generations, living mainly in cities, not educated in a classical way (familiar with music notation as it was of a great meaning for the project), but – to revive traditional music – trying to sing and play in a traditional style. To familiarise them with old, traditional manners, their experience and education was based on listening to archival recordings and – when possible – learning orally, directly from the oldest generation of traditional performers who were still alive. This way they were more competent to interpret Kolberg’s transcriptions in the proper style. The question was: how similar will their performances be to the sound of archival recordings? Their way of performing sounded very interesting, similar in its character to the original roots and – according to common opinion – closer to the village sound and character of the music than in the case of the first group of musicians. What was interesting was the fact that none of the performers (singers and violinists) asked about the regional provenience of the written source and played it according to their own regional experience (e.g., a song written down by Kolberg in Kieleckie region, which is the northern part of Małopolska, was sung in the style of Mazovia region – central Poland). Several performers of this group presented even more than one variation of the performance. The written records were treated by the performers of this group fairly freely and singing or playing could be characterised as more free-rhythm, with longer final notes in phrases, *tempo rubato*, characteristic natural timbre of voice or characteristic “village way” of playing the fiddle. It could be said that their performance made this schematic, historical, over 150-year-old Kolberg’s record more vivid. Moreover, the result can be understood as a reconstruction with some elements of creativity. The written notes were treated by musicians more as a sketch or a general theme for free improvisation. Free attitude was heard more in the rhythmical dimension than in the melody, which is the biggest difference between “classical” and “revival” attitude. The new folk musicians embedded the written melody in a more flexible (*tempo rubato*, accents appeared, many rhythmical changes were applied during instrumental performance) rhythmic progression. In comparison with “classical” performances they felt in the first place that Kolberg’s rhythmical level was the only normative simplified record of something elusive and could not be read literally. In the “revival” case nearly the whole pitch and shape of the melody were saved and included during the performance with only a few changes in the ratio between lyrics and certain notes applied. Even when the performers were asked to base literally on the pattern written down by Kolberg (which was typical for the classically educated performers from the first group), live performance forced them to modify (or maybe verify?) the record at certain points so that the singing or playing would sound naturally. The phrase layout also underwent some performance changes

in regard to bar lines used in the historical record. This in turn led to changes and shifting stress accents. The more the process was intensified, the faster the melody was becoming similar to dance.¹⁴ Slight changes to the intervals in relation to the written record can also be noticed. Especially fiddle players changed the character of the written source almost totally, and it was the only (sufficient) factor to start improvising based on the written theme. “Classical” performances were very literal in terms of rhythm and melody range and ornaments were added only “accidentally” by the group of musicians who were aware of the village provenience of the melodies. The first example was treated by one of the “revival” musicians in both ways – as a ritual, slower song, and as a couplet of a dance character. This means that the written record saved by Kolberg without clear information about the tempo could be understood in many ways. Different performers had different approaches and one performer used even more than one approach.

The next and the smallest group of performers were traditional musicians (fiddle players and singers) chosen from the oldest generation of village or small city inhabitants. Both features were important for the project: they had to be experienced traditional musicians which meant that formerly they had played during, for example, traditional weddings and custom events or, at least, had the experience of playing at traditional dance meetings. They also had to know the music notation on a basic level (which was not typical and popular/usual in the case of traditional musicians), but they had to acquire their musical skills by oral transmission. The character of this group’s performances was similar to that of the “revival” group, especially in one specific aspect: for them the written document was simply an impulse for improvisation. But, unlike the first and second groups, they did not care about fidelity to the musical notation presented to them. Playing according to notes was very difficult and tiring for fiddlers and in many cases they just could not play the written melody or they found no associations. But after playing or singing the melody to them, they very quickly (sometimes after a few bars) recalled and played from memory some pieces that were already familiar and more or less close to the original. Moreover, some of them claimed – after listening – that the melody was not properly noted, and it was easier to play by ear. This attitude of the performers (that was very engaging for them because of the need to “decipher” written notes) was initially surprising for the researcher (ethnomusicologist or musician) who was simply expecting to listen to music according to the written, original source. After long and difficult trials to read and understand¹⁵ Kolberg’s written notation, at some point the last group of performers could find or even create a piece similar to the written theme and play it in the original style. Their final performances were usually the most different ones from the original written

source and as compared to the other groups of performers because traditional musicians rather created new melodies or variants than “reconstructed” the original, Kolberg’s notation. For authentic traditional musicians it was more important to find some piece similar to the written source (e.g., some known variant at best) or to play whatever similar than to play literally written notes. They had no need to enrich their repertoire with a written melody. To compare the effects of the project we can state the following:

1. The first group (classical musicians) – accurate reading of the written source as a score and only little creativity (reconstruction);
2. The second group (musicians playing in the traditional style, “revival”) – quite accurate reading of the written source and significant element of creativity (reconstruction + strong creativity, ornamentation, improvisation);
3. The third group (traditional musicians) – treating the written source as an association with a variant or another similar melody known to the performer (no reconstruction or creativity, looking for associations with familiar repertoire).

In the case of songs the singers, after having had a look at the lyrics, sang the variant of the written song known to them (“Oh, we know this but we sing it in our way”, and then they sang their own variant) or claimed that they did not know the song at all.

The project indicated and confirmed that Kolberg’s work was meant for classically educated musicians (like Kolberg himself) and in a way translated the traditional music language into the quite different language of classical music, thus forming a kind of a glossary. The question for whom Kolberg wrote down thousands of melodies is still open. From the contemporary point of view the answer may be: for the future. Already in the nineteenth century Kolberg was aware of the passing and disappearing of many traditional customs, rituals, songs and melodies and he did everything he could to save the repertoire. His work and methods constituted a pattern for further sound archives which gathered sound recordings containing more information than written notes. Oskar Kolberg created a written version of ethnomusical sources for reading (which requires certain competence), but sound archives gathered audio versions of sources for listening. Today, the sound recordings could therefore be treated as a missing link in direct (oral) transfer.

Finally, as the last stage of the project, some of the oldest documental audio examples were chosen from the sound archive according to similarity to Kolberg’s written examples used in the experiment. The oldest available, on a larger scale, audio recordings of Polish traditional music are the post-war records in which the singing and instrumental performance of the generation of perform-

ers born in Kolberg's times have been embalmed. Kolberg collected songs from the people whose children and (perhaps) grandchildren were later recorded on the phonograph and who, most probably (maybe even during Kolberg's visits) were listening to their grandparents performing the songs. Thus, taking into consideration the preservation of oral transmission of the repertoire, they undoubtedly took over the style and repertoire of their ancestors, often almost in the unchanged form. Although chosen sound examples are not exactly the same as the transcriptions written almost a century earlier (which is expected due to the change and variability characteristic of folklore), they still present what Kolberg was not able to grasp, either precisely or in sketches, in his notes: the style, the manner, the ornamentation, the real sound and pitch, the timbre, the dynamics, the tempo, metrical changes, rhythmic latitude, etc. The sound recordings help us in terms of correct interpretation of specific notes and indications made by Kolberg, which came into existence much earlier than the possibilities of traditional music transcription from recordings and the principles of notation of traditional music (Sobieska 1964). The chosen sound examples were finally compared with the above-described performances of Kolberg's transcriptions. None of the performances was very similar to the variants recorded 70 years ago. Moreover, it seems (after a comparison with archival recordings) that the second group of performers approached contemporary reconstruction too creatively. So maybe the truth is somewhere in between the first and the second group. The chosen archival audio examples were presented on a CD album published in 2014 (Jackowski 2014b). Archival sound recordings could therefore be treated as an audio supplement to the abovementioned Kolberg's work as a glossary similar to the ones commonly used in foreign language learning: a handbook with a glossary and added audio recordings that are helpful for practising.

IF KOLBERG HAD HAD THE PHONOGRAPH

Oskar Kolberg died in 1890, 13 years after Thomas Alva Edison constructed the phonograph, which immediately became a helpful equipment for ethnographic research on traditional speech and music (Kominek 1986: 34–42; Janczewska-Sołomko 2000: 8–20). The first documental “ethno-recording” was made exactly in the year of Kolberg's death. Three months before Kolberg's death, Jesse Walter Fewkes recorded, in the State of Maine, the repertoire of Indian Passamaquoddy (Fewkes 1890a, 1890b, 1890c, 1891a, 1891b; Gilman 1891, 1909; Densmore 1927). Two years later the phonograph was used for recording folk music by Béla Vikár for the first time in Europe.¹⁶

So, we may wonder if Oskar Kolberg knew about the phonograph or even possessed one. If he had had a phonograph and eventually used it and the potential recordings had survived until today, we would have in our possession recorded music performed by people born as early as at the end of the eighteenth century.¹⁷ It is almost certain, however, that this did not happen due to the following reasons:

1. The first news about this novel invention appeared in Polish popular newspapers quite quickly; the first records can be found in February 1877, in the year when the phonograph was patented by Edison (Anonim 1878). Then, increasingly, papers (especially the technology-oriented ones) informed their readers about the phonograph and its potential use in offices, industries, language teaching, artistic music, etc. One of the authors asked in his paper if sound recordings would be the same for music as photographs for art painting (Bodyński 1880–1881: 89–90). In 1879 the phonograph was presented in Warsaw (Sienkiewicz 1879) and the second show took place in 1890 (J. 1890). Of course, opinions about the new device and about the quality of the first recordings were diverse.

In 1890 newspapers also informed their readers about the first use of the phonograph for ethnographic documentation by Fewkes. But it was the last year of Kolberg's life (Anonim 1890).¹⁸ The next news contained information about Franz Boas's expedition (Anonim 1896), dialectological research based on sound materials conducted in Collège de France (Krček 1899), and Béla Vikár's activity in Hungary (Eliasz-Radzikowski 1900). Reports of the International Folk-Lore Congress in Chicago, where the recordings of the Navajo Indians' singing were presented, are of great value (Żmigrodzki 1894: 637). After the Congress in Paris in 1900, Polish readers were informed about documentation and research led by B. Vikár and Leo Azoulay from France (Żmigrodzki 1901a: 83; 1901b: 122).

2. Even though Oskar Kolberg was interested in technical news of his time, the technique was not at the centre of his interests. He knew about photography used for book illustrations, he was even persuaded to use chromolithography for saving pictures of traditional clothes, but he remained faithful to traditional drawings made by Wojciech Gerson.¹⁹

3. In comparison to Kolberg's very skilful and fast work ("ear-pencil method") the new technology of recordings could seem very complicated and time-consuming to him; for example, recordings made by Juliusz Zborowski in 1913–1914 are really imperfect due to technical problems of the pioneer use of equipment by an inexperienced documentalist (Szurmiak-Bogucka & Jackowski 2015). In addition, the heavy equipment and the need to possess back-up wax cylinders would have been complicated for the old-age

scientist in the field. Kolberg noted down about 35,000 songs and melodies during his career as a researcher (in the field and through correspondence). In comparison, the interwar sound archives recorded about 10,000 items less during the nine-year period. It should be stressed (as mentioned above) that the quality of the sound recordings was thoroughly discussed at that time. 4. The last reason for the late use of the phonograph in musical ethnography was reluctance and aversion of scientific, conservative environment towards the novel technical inventions. Despite the efforts of several scientists to buy a phonograph and equip a laboratory with it, the directorial body of the Academy of Learning in Kraków²⁰ was still afraid of the “devilish machine” or “magical ventriloquist” as they called the phonograph at that time (Scheminzy 1943 [1935]: 288; A.M. 1878: 358; Szarlitt 1929: 354; Dahlig 1997: 62).

CONCLUSIONS

Summarising, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Even though the last years of Oskar Kolberg’s life were lived in the “phonic age”, he had no possibility to use Edison’s phonograph in his documentation. So, the oldest corpuses of manuscripts of Polish traditional music are only written and “silent”, yet still very important and primary for ethnomusicological (and multidisciplinary) research and musical activities.
- There are almost no recorded sources of Polish traditional music in the archives from the prewar and interwar periods (due to the war losses); this part of history (sound sources immediately after Kolberg’s times) is almost a “black hole” in Polish ethno-phonographic history – it means we are able to compare nineteenth-century written materials only with the sound sources from after 1945.²¹
- Due to the (nearly) complete lack of audio materials from the interwar period there is no continuity between Kolberg’s sources and currently available audio sources recorded after 1945. We can assume that in the most active time of Kolberg’s life (when the researcher was about 40 years old) he noted down the repertoire of young and mature performers (those 20 years old and older). These performers would have been over 90 years old when systematic and large-scale sound documentation started in Poland in the interwar period. Even if the performer survived World War I and could be recorded, the recordings (the final phase of his/her musical activity which is of no value for the reconstruction) did not survive. If Kolberg had noted down a 20-year-old performer, that

person could have been recorded after two world wars, for example, in 1950, as an 80-year-old performer.

- Today the work of Oskar Kolberg – as a still priceless historical source – should be studied afresh and verified by researchers, artists, performers, etc., based on phonographic sources. This work adds further questions about the real quality and historical truth of the contemporary revival or reconstruction of music, which are rated positive and very often described as “he/she plays/sings just like one hundred years ago”.

In 2014 the CD “If Oskar Kolberg Had Had the Phonograph...” was published by the Sound Collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (Jackowski 2014b). Two CDs present vocal and instrumental sound examples recorded after World War II, which were chosen according to their similarity to some manuscripts prepared by Oskar Kolberg over 150 years ago. These chosen sources could help us imagine how this handwritten music really sounded. Based on phonographic documentation we could make more reliable reconstructions of style, manners, and sound. Written historical transcriptions were and still can be played or sung by various groups of performers. Thanks to contemporary technical methods everybody (even those who do not know the notes or cannot play an instrument) can listen to a chosen melody written down by Oskar Kolberg. Those who can play an instrument, for example the piano, can play the melody according to the transcription. The melody can also be sung by singers – both artists and amateurs. Probably, such edited transcriptions sounded in many bourgeois flats in the nineteenth century even if Kolberg published pure melodies (as a source) without piano accompaniment. The conclusion is that merely a musical manuscript and classical music education are not sufficient for the performance of written traditional music in its proper style. A comparison of “classical” performances of traditional music transcriptions with stylistic ones could help us understand the importance of the performer’s good and balanced experience (theoretical and practical). The basic element of the experience is knowledge of the regional style which could be learnt through a personal contact with a master or, eventually, by using the historical audio sources. Recording and comparing how various contemporary performers read and play old manuscripts was one part of the project. The second part was searching the archive for sound recordings of variants of older handwritten transcriptions, comparing them and making them available to young performers as a source of learning. The experiment demonstrated how different oral transmission is from the written one (educated transmission) and how strange and unfamiliar musical notation is for traditional musicians even if folk music is written down.

As the last generation of traditional performers is gradually disappearing, sound recordings become a substitute for real meetings with humans and their music. Maybe in the twenty-first century, when the old traditional repertoire is still performed, but usually in the context other than the original one, we should slowly change the known, “oral transmission” to the “audio recording transmission”.

NOTES

- ¹ These are the very first and most fundamental questions we (ethno-archivists) must respond to when presenting our work to pupils, students, etc.
- ² The conference organised by the Polish National Seminar in Ethnomusicology (Warsaw, 14–15 April 2018) was dedicated to musical tribes in Poland (see <http://www.etno.imuz.uw.edu.pl/vi-krajowe-seminarium-etnomuzykologiczne/>, last accessed on 21 November 2023).
- ³ See also <http://www.oskarkolberg.pl/pl-PL/Page/64>, last accessed on 21 November 2023.
- ⁴ Kolberg sketched the staves himself.
- ⁵ Contemporary to O. Kolberg, philosopher Karol Libelt underlined the schematic character of musical transcription in comparison with live performance (Michałowski 1999: 18; Kolberg 1961 [1857]: VIII). F. Chopin in his letter to his family, written on 19 April 1847, expressed a critical opinion of Kolberg’s early published works. However, with time, the great Polish composer started to appreciate the great work of Kolberg (Kobyłańska 1972: 161, 164). Another, anonymous critical opinion was published in the periodical *Dziennik Domowy* (Anonim 1842: 174). In the first decades of the twentieth century and during the interwar period – when musical ethnographers began to record with a phonograph – Adolf Chybiński and Karol Hławiczka, among others, resumed the undermining of the worth of Kolberg’s transcriptions (Chybiński 1910: 9; Hławiczka 1936: 4; Chybiński 1947: 16–17).
- ⁶ He also mentioned in his letters some problems and difficulties appearing during his fieldwork (e.g., O. Kolberg’s letter to Józef Ignacy Kraszewski, written on 6 June 1857 (Kolberg 1965: 74). The possibility to replay sound recordings many times, and possibilities of instrumental analysis (e.g., measuring tones) have had an influence on developing more detailed musical transcription methods.
- ⁷ Despite such an opinion, Adolf Chybiński based his work on Kolberg’s transcriptions in a number of his scientific works (e.g., Chybiński 1907; 1937; 1951). Based on Chybiński’s abovementioned work, Piotr Dahlig explained in 2014 that Kolberg fully understood folk performances (thanks to his experience and long fieldwork practice) and made them complete when possible under contemporary conditions. Dahlig called Kolberg’s records musical frescos with a musical sense of added non-acoustic projection. It means that Kolberg’s records were not only a “graphical copy of an acoustic phenomenon” but interpretations of many musical elements presented in transcription (Dahlig 2014a: 11; 2014b: 7). We do not know if Kolberg used a similar method that the later Bulgarian researcher Wasyl Stoin practiced. Stoin, during his field excursions made in the 1930s, first listened to the melody a few times and after he had studied it completely, he presented the song to its original traditional performer and after acceptance, he noted it down.

- ⁸ The creator of the first Polish sound archive in Poznań, Łucjan Kamiński, was a defender of Kolberg's work and methods. Kamiński regarded the sound document as "musical photography" and his musical transcriptions reached the limits of detail (Kamiński 1934, 1936; Sobieska 1964: 73–75).
- ⁹ Only the first stage of a more advanced analytical project was carried out but even these results are very helpful in presenting the difference between understanding classical music and traditional music. Audio examples of the research were presented during the conference *Archives as Knowledge Hubs: Initiatives and Influences*, and are available at <https://www.uttv.ee/naita?id=26251#>. They are also available with commentary in Polish at <https://www.polskieradio.pl/8/478/Artykul/1247537/>, both last accessed on 22 November 2023.
- ¹⁰ For example, audio recordings made as educational materials for ear training (aural skills) present traditional songs at the basic level of difficulty. It is worth stressing that the recorded songs were sung by classical singers – very rhythmically.
- ¹¹ The comparison of Kolberg's notations with very similar variants among the sound recordings made almost a century later was the idea for a 2CD-album *Gdyby Kolberg miał fonograf* (Jackowski 2014b). The album is available online at <https://etnofon.pl/plyta/gdyby-kolberg-mial-fonograf/>, last accessed on 22 November 2023.
- ¹² In the case of music performed by a pianist or a soprano during this stage of the project we could imagine how Kolberg's published recordings could be sung and played by, e.g., young upper class girls learning music at courts. What could be interesting is that there are records of some "artistic" performances even in historical recordings, which could be a proof of some songs functioning in various styles.
- ¹³ This situation is slowly changing and this article describes the situation in 2017.
- ¹⁴ It is worth recalling that in Polish traditional music many melodies function as song and dance melodies, which is why both singers and instrumentalists took part in the project.
- ¹⁵ Which was also a typical element for this group of performers.
- ¹⁶ In 1900, during the Congress of Folklorists in Paris, members of the meeting were informed about 500 wax cylinders recorded by B. Vikár in Hungary (Anonim 1901).
- ¹⁷ It is possible to imagine when we analyse the survived recordings of the Sound Collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences; e.g., performers born in 1899 were recorded in 1990.
- ¹⁸ O. Kolberg died in Kraków on 3 June 1890.
- ¹⁹ See B. Hoff's letter to O. Kolberg written on 17 December 1867 (Kolberg 1965: 224–225; Turczynowiczowa 1948).
- ²⁰ The Polish Academy of Learning bought the first phonograph only in 1914 (Kaczmarek 1953: 22; Zborowski 1934: 9).
- ²¹ After World War II, from the second half of the twentieth century until today, collections of audio and audiovisual recordings of traditional music have been gathered. Among them, the collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences is the oldest and the largest one (ca 150,000 records from 1945 until today).

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