

## **Vilnius Cathedral Cappella:** *activities, personalities and repertoire in the 19th century*

Vilnius, a multinational centre of cultural life, was and is still like an unsolved puzzle in the context of history. The city serves as a link between various European nations and religions. The Lithuanian capital is often described as a bridge between the East and the West, between civilisation and wilderness, geographical fringes and imperial capitals. Vilnius always had more than just one identity, which has marked the polyphony of its name: Jewish *Vilne*, Polish *Wilno*, French *Vilna*, German *Wilna*, Belarusian *Вільня* and the Lithuanian *Vilnius*.

After progressive concepts surrounding the evolution of music were rejected several decades ago, canonical narratives about the lamentable state of 19th-century Lithuanian and Vilnius-based church music were abandoned, with critique turning to the historiographical models on which they were based. Critical musicology promoted researchers to focus their attention on the spread and reception of music from earlier ages, including historical research into church music. As the 19th century fades further back in time, there is growing need to review the general cultural context in Vilnius, which has such a strong influence on the image we have of collectives who played music in churches, their activities and repertoire, to look at the city as a centre for the spread of art, secular music and theatre – everything that in one way or another reflects the church music situation in the period under discussion. For music historians who seek to convey historical processes in as much an objective and unbiased way as they can, it is necessary to look deeper into the social provisions for the existence of separate collectives, the contexts of activity of music creators and performers, as here music

was not just being performed, but also created, reproduced, interpreted and alike.

Single details concerning the history of Lithuanian church music do reach us from the 18th–19th centuries: scrambled musical manuscripts and printed notes, lists of works, an epistolical legacy, testimonials from contemporaries that are not necessarily thorough or accurate, state institution documents, accounts, inventory books, and so on. In many of these sources only slight mention is made of the main participants in musical life – the musicians (performers and composers, amateurs and professionals), their lives and activities. The discovery of these minimal albeit very valuable fragments of music history opens up the possibility of starting a puzzle of great interest to researchers, creating an at first barely visible then gradually ever more colourful and captivating picture of what we would like to convey to our readers.

The 19th century was a unique epoch, one that extended beyond its chronological boundaries. In reality it commenced in 1789 with the French Revolution, and ended in 1914–1918 with World War I. These limits also marked important stages in the history of Lithuania: the end of the existence of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth almost coincided with the French revolutionary wars, while the hopes of liberation and restoration of the independent Lithuanian state coincided with World War I. Therefore, the chronological boundaries of the research conducted for this monograph also extend beyond the factual limits of the 19th century and take in the period from the changes to the historically influenced territory of the Vilnius Diocese to the new wave in church music, associated with nationalism. It is important to understand that in the 19th century, when an independent Lithuanian state did not exist, and when the nation was only on the start of its journey towards modern Lithuanianness, the nature and the content of Lithuania itself also changed. This was a gradual process with no specific end-date. In a review of this considerable period of time, it is evident that this particular period in the history of Lithuanian church music was noted for both high and low points. It was affected and formed by

at times advantageous circumstances, or conversely – unfavourable political and cultural situations, and by the actions of individuals who managed to initiate the improvement of church cappellas to professional levels, as well as changes to dominant West European trends, a changing repertoire, etc.

The absolute majority of 19th-century church documents and musical manuscripts that have survived are currently held in Lithuanian and Russian state archives and library collections. The most important information on this topic was found in the manuscript, rare prints and music departments of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences Wroblewski Library (LMAVB), the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania (LNMMB) and the Vilnius University Library (VU). Material of particular value for the analysis of the activities of the Vilnius Cathedral cappella is kept in the Vilnius Chapter collection (LMAVB RS, F43), where aside from notes and other valuable documents there are also the original and draft protocols of meetings of the Vilnius Chapter.

The monograph consists of three thematic sections. **Chapter 1** is about 19th-century Vilnius: the city and its music-playing inhabitants, the diocese, parishes, churches and monasteries, and the music education offered there and in seminaries. Attention is given to the regular and multifaceted music performance in various spaces around the city – from theatre, concert and carnival events to the organisation of music performance in the churches of various confessions, in monasteries and the seminary.

**Chapter 2** places the main focus on music-playing in churches: under discussion are the most famous 19th-century church cappellas, collectives who performed in Vilnius' churches and the cathedral and the repertoire of church vocal instrumental cappellas. Separate attention in this chapter of the monograph is dedicated to the life and church music works of the eminent composer Stanisław Moniuszko (1819–1872), created when he was living in Vilnius. Moniuszko created around ninety church music themed works (more than half of them were in Polish). Of these, around sixty were created in Vilnius: masses (four), a cantata, *Litanies of the Gates*

of *Dawn* (four), choral works, various hymns and compositions for the organ. The intended performers of Moniuszko's church music works were very varied: from solo compositions (with organ, or less commonly piano, accompaniment) to vocal instrumental compositions. The originality of the performers of some of Moniuszko's works would have certainly astounded contemporaries.

Chapter 3 presents an analysis of the repertoire and creators of the Vilnius Cathedral cappella. Local amateur composers who supplemented the cathedral cappella repertoire, as well as the cappella's leaders and members are discussed, with most attention going to two composers whose works made up the largest part of the Vilnius Cathedral cappella's repertoire: namely, Florjan Bobrowski (ca 1779–1846) and Adalbertus Wojciech Dankowski (ca 1760–after 1814?).

Our knowledge about the life and work of Florjan Bobrowski is very fragmented. Sources indicate that Bobrowski composed only church music. The composer's manuscripts for the vocal parts in his works feature a great deal of re-writing and performance dates – from 1824 to 1875. These inscriptions testify that Bobrowski's works were not only archived but were also performed at the Vilnius Cathedral quite frequently. The volume of surviving musical manuscripts by Bobrowski should offer researchers the opportunity to learn more about the composer's work. However, the majority of the surviving collections of music are in a very poor condition, or they are incomplete, thus it is not possible to reconstruct the compositions for performance. All of Bobrowski's works were created strictly according to the liturgical text and traditional genre composition forms: laconic parts predominate, whose order is based on the principle of contrast (the composition of performers alternates, there are *solo-tutti* episodes, the tempo of separate parts changes, etc.). The compositions were written for small collectives: three- of four-voice choirs, or an ensemble of soloists and an instrumental cappella. The primary melodic line in all these works is *canto primo*, which the first violins replicate and “entwine”. The second violins and woodwind instruments double the *canto secundo* and *ten-*

ore vocal parts; brass instruments (mostly French horns) surround the harmonic axis, while the foundation of the whole composition is the unison of the vocal and instrumental *basso*. Cyclical composition forms are either simple or composite, of two or three parts; more complex forms (such as rondo, variations) are rather rare. In Bobrowski's work, as in that of many other local composers, there are very few polyphonic elements, with imitations only occasionally being inserted into the homophonic structure, a type of voice exchange, or *Stimmtausch*, that was discovered by the author by ear.

Manuscript versions of works by Adalbertus Wojciech Dankowski have spread far and wide through archives in Poland and Lithuania. The productive composer would send manuscripts of his works to various church cappellas himself, so now it is very difficult to say with much accuracy in which cities or towns Dankowski lived or worked, or which cappellas simply received works straight from the composer. He wrote mostly church music based on Latin and Slavic texts. His church music works were very popular in 1823–1850, as confirmed by the lists of notes in the Book of Protocols of Meetings of the Church Music Committee. The collections of parts for most of his compositions are incomplete. The performers of Dankowski's compositions included a four-voice choir and instrumental cappella, consisting of strings and wind instruments. Compared to the works by Bobrowski, Dankowski's compositions are of a larger scale, feature more extended forms and are noted for their more varied texture, they are more dynamic and stand out for the large number of symbols marking performance nuances, there is also a more frequent fluctuation between *solo* and *tutti* episodes. Woodwind instruments feature prominently in the instrumental parts: they not only double the vocal parts but also independently develop the musical material. The vocal *basso* part is also more animated: its melodic line is relatively independent and does not serve just as an accompanying voice or one doubling the instrumental bass. It should be noted that Dankowski's cyclical church compositions are often connected via thematic arcs, consisting of

the same melodic intonations, varied using rhythm, tempo and metre.

In the early 19th century, works by West European composers were not necessarily a rarity in the repertoire of Lithuanian church cappellas. This was partly made possible though the arrival of musicians from abroad, who would bring samples of works by composers from their home countries, also, the more frequent concert appearances of foreign performers, and close links between the patrons of church cappellas with other countries. The repertoires of Lithuanian church cappellas and the collective that played in the Vilnius Cathedral included works by the František Xaver Brixi (1732–1771), Antonio Laube (1718–1784), Giovanni Battista Pergolesi (1710–1736), Luigi Cherubini (1760–1842), Anton Diabelli (1781–1858), Domenico Cimarosa (1749–1801), Franz Joseph Haydn (1732–1809), Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791) and others. Importantly, the behaviour of 19th-century Lithuanian church cappellas with the work of West European classics was particularly democratic, to say the least: note collections of church cappellas from the period under discussion contain works created by little-known composers, yet bear the signatures of Mozart, Haydn and other famous composers. In order to supplement the repertoires of church cappellas with compositions by established classics, note re-writers would sometimes make “minor” sins: they would change the instrument line-up of specific works (adapting them to the existing composition of a given cappella), shorten or expand compositions, change their titles, etc. Such examples exist among the note manuscripts kept in archives in Vilnius.

In summary it can be stated that the 19th-century Vilnius Cathedral cappella repertoire was formed along several different directions, incorporating works by famous and less well-known foreign composers, as well as compositions by local composers. Their level of complexity and development was naturally also different, however this was not an obstacle for all the discussed works to be able to be heard in the vaulted spaces of this shrine. In the second half of the 19th

century, even the smallest Lithuanian cities and towns felt stronger processes of democratisation and nationalism take hold, and at this time Catholic churches were not only homes for the community of the faithful, but also cultural centres and focal points for spreading Lithuanian nationalism. The situation of church music began to change more rapidly when well-trained, professionally orientated Lithuanian musicians started to return from studies abroad: Juozas Kalvaitis (1842–ca 1900), Juozas Naujalis (1869–1934), Teodoras Brazys (1870–1930) and others. These musicians who had acquired a professional musical education in other countries gave a new stimulus to the development of the art of church music in Lithuania.

The book features an extensive **supplements** section based on primary sources: lists of cappella members and instruments that played at the Vilnius Cathedral and other churches in the late 18th–19th centuries and the notes they used.

The monograph appendix boasts a *Thematic catalogue of 19th-century musical manuscripts used by the Vilnius Cathedral cappella*. Its aim is to present the manuscripts of musical works that belonged to the Vilnius Cathedral cappella that have survived to our days. The catalogue has been compiled according to the RISM (Répertoire International des Sources Musicales; International Inventory of Musical Sources) method of describing musical manuscripts, adapted to the particularities of Lithuanian manuscripts. The task was possible due to the author's years-long and continuing experience in archival material research for academic purposes. The process itself was complicated by library collections and catalogue registry systems that were not always carefully compiled initially: a majority of the composition descriptions are inaccurate, some are even erroneous. Another reason that prompted the author to compile the catalogue was the present condition of the manuscripts: a majority require restoration as they are torn, sewn, faded, are barely legible and alike. Any delay in compiling the catalogue would mean the irreversible loss of some of our music history sources.

We cannot forget that the historical material discussed in the monograph and the musical manuscripts that are included in the *Thematic catalogue of 19th-century musical manuscripts used by the Vilnius Cathedral cappella* do not reflect the entirety of the vocal instrumental Vilnius Cathedral cappella's activities or its repertoire of the late 18th–19th centuries. Historical coincidences have determined a unique assembly of the present library collections and their content. In the future, perhaps more manuscripts will be discovered and the authors of anonymous compositions may ultimately be discerned. However, I trust that the information contained in this monograph will be useful to subsequent researchers of Lithuanian culture and musical life.