

Aleksandra Skrzypczyk: An Attempt at an Acoustic Biography of Bruno Schulz. Auditory Experiences

The small number of sources on Bruno Schulz's attitude to music significantly hinders research in this area¹. With all that has survived, one can only guess what is now missing from Schulz sources today. The preserved evidence turns out to be insufficient to determine why his prose so often includes metaphorical vocabulary related to music and the world of sounds². If, based on testimonies, it is not possible to determine what he thought about music or what musical experiences he had, an "acoustic biography" may be helpful, understood here as a hypothetical sequence of phonic events Schulz might have participated in. There is no doubt that Schulz was "immersed" in the world of sound. He certainly listened passively, or rather heard and recorded acoustic phenomena. Was he also a music lover (active listener), like his friend, Stanisław Weingarten? What music did he listen to by choice – and what was he forced to listen to? In

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- 1 I tried to determine the issue of Schulz's musicality based on the memories of Maria Chasin, Emil Górski and Ella Schulz-Podstolska in an article for "Teksty Drugie" entitled "Bruno Schulz and Music. An attempt at an acoustic biography of the writer". In short, the arguments for musicality were the following: (1) Górski's mention that Schulz heard music in visual phenomena; (2) two "musical" stories by Schulz, whose main characters were a violinist and an opera singer (the latter survived only in memory of Górski); (3) several years of lost correspondence with Chasin, which stated that Schulz he used "musical language" in letters and in speech; and also (4) several hundred musical terms contained in the stories, musical motifs and the deliberate sound design of the prose. The arguments against were the following: (1) Schulz-Podstolska's memoir in which Schulz contrasted his unmusicality with her father, Lzydor Schulz; and (2) Górski's opinion about Schulz's lack of musical aptitude.
 - 2 The indexing experiment I conducted in *The Cinnamon Shops* proves that in this series of stories the writer uses single musical terms (he uses "musical language" and creates "musical" metaphors) over a hundred times. He also uses these individual lexemes multiple times in each story. This particular way of building artistic expression must have had its reasons – it seems that it would be impossible to refer to musical strategies and techniques while being ignorant and disinterested in this field of art. I included a list of all musical terms appearing in *The Cinnamon Shops* in the form of an appendix "Music and the world of sounds" in the supplement to Schulz's *Dzieła zebrane*. See also: S. Rosiek, "Radość indeksowania (Sklepów cynamonowych i nie tylko)"; and J. Orzeszek, *Ciało / części ciała / wydzieliny. Indeks do "Sklepów cynamonowych"*, "Schulz/Forum" 13, 2019, pp. 155–171; 172–190.

the face of the limited archive, the musical culture during Schulz's "age of genius" can give some idea on the subject. A speculative acoustic biography would allow us to identify the sources of the linguistic shaping of the artistic text. It would consist of the writer's sound experiences – located in a specific historical and cultural moment. To reconstruct how the music of the end of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century influenced Schulz is to see what musical experiences people (not only those artistically talented) might have had at that time.

Defencelessness in the face of the world of sounds

The world of sounds affects a person throughout their life, even before birth. As Anna Chęćka-Gotkowicz notes, in the mother's womb the baby perceives sounds from the very beginning and retains this vulnerability towards acoustic phenomena until death³. If a person can cut themselves off from visual sensations (by closing the eyes), then closing themselves off from auditory sensations is physiologically impossible (at the quietest moment, we hear the "whoosh of blood" or the beating of our own heart)⁴. This kind of "sound violence" means that even if we would like to imagine inspired Schulz writing *The Cinnamon Shops* in silence, or standing among focused students in a soundless (muted) hall, walking around the empty and soundless market square in Drohobych, we know that such a state was impossible. Schulz had to participate in the soundscape of the place. Even if he did not want to.

We also have evidence that he suffered because of noise. In a letter to Tadeusz Breza, he wrote about how tiring his work at school was: "I feel disheartened: I wasn't given the leave I counted on so much. I'm staying at school in Drohobych, where this rabble will continue to frolic and play on my nerves. You must know that my nerves have scattered throughout the entire handicraft workshop, spread on the floor, wallpapered the walls, and covered the workshops and the anvil with thick woven fabric"⁵. We also know that he wanted musical silence, a pause, a relaxation that would be a natural element of work. In a letter to Andrzej Pleśniewicz, he complained: "You overestimate the benefits of my situation in Drohobych. What I miss here is silence, my own musical silence, a calm pendulum, subject to its own gravity, with a clean line of track, undisturbed by any

³ A. Chęćka-Gotkowicz, *Ucho i umysł. Szkice o doświadczeniu muzyki*, Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria 2012, pp. 29–60.

⁴ See also: J. Momro, *Ucho nie ma powieki*, Kraków 2020.

⁵ Letter from Bruno Schulz to Tadeusz Breza of December 2, 1934, in: B. Schulz, *Dzieła zebrane*, vol. 5: *Księga listów*, collected and prepared for printing by J. Ficowski, supplemented by S. Danecki, Gdańsk 2016, p. 53. Hereinafter referred to as: KL.

foreign influence. This silence, substantial, positive – complete – is almost creativity itself. These matters that I believe I want to express happen above a certain threshold of silence, and they are formed in a centre brought to perfect balance. Even the peace I have here, even though more perfect than in that happier era, has become insufficient for an increasingly sensitive, more fastidious vision. It is getting harder and harder for me to believe it. And these things require blind faith, taken on credit. Only after being united by this faith do they agree to struggle to be – to exist to some degree”⁶.

Based on Schulz’s self-characterization, one may conclude that time had a musical character for Schulz. After the sequence of events (sounds) there must have been “stillness”, the silence which could be formed like plastic material which conditions creativity. The moment before creation (of the presented world) was essential to him. In the tension of silence, in the moment before the performance (of a sound or word), the writer became similar to a musician: the longer the silence lasted, the greater the desire was to fill it with sound, to fill the void with content. Finally, Schulz’s confession is a sign of lack of relaxation or rest coupled with work, like silence and sound⁷. A musical work strives for external silence, gravitates towards non-existence, and lasts as long as the artist performs the music. Therefore, there is always more external silence (understood even as the sounds of the world) than organized sound matter. Schulz seems to be saying, however, that there was silence within the composition, a *fermata* or musical pause which co-created the work and organized sound structures and musical thought.

According to Chęćka-Gotkiewicz, the duration of a pause in musical notation varies – it usually depends on the adopted tempo and rhythmic value. It is often colloquially understood as “breath”, “rest”, “hold”, or “a sigh” in French. In silence the sound of a (musical) thought resonates, it coexists inseparably with the sound and becomes present only in its “context”. Musical breath allows you to stop in time and feel your own existence⁸. Musical time – the time perceived by Schulz is therefore characterized by alternating appearance and disappearance, creation and destruction, sound and silence, being and non-being⁹. For Schulz, musical silence was a condition for creation. This need and necessity for silence was perfectly expressed by the Indian mystic Kirpal Singh, who wrote that “the essence of sound is felt in both motion and silence, it passes from existent to

⁶ Letter from Bruno Schulz to Andrzej Pleśniewicz of March 4, 1936, KL, p. 120.

⁷ Schulz repeatedly seeks time off from work, requesting leave. See Bruno Schulz’s letters to the school authorities, KL, p. 228, 232, 234–239.

⁸ An interesting essay is devoted to the issue of musical silence by Anna Chęćka-Gotkiewicz, from whose book I draw inspiration for the interpretation of a fragment of Schulz’s letter. A. Chęćka-Gotkiewicz, “Wymiary ciszy”, in: eadem, *Ucho i umysł*, p. 29–60.

⁹ Ibidem.

nonexistent. When there is no sound, it is said that there is no hearing, but that does not mean that hearing has lost its preparedness. Indeed, when there is no sound, hearing is most alert, and when there is sound the hearing nature is least developed”¹⁰.

In order to be creative, Schulz needed musical silence. With its potential he was perhaps weaving a story about the soundscape of his hometown. Polluting this pristine time of creation with noise – sonic violence – paralyzed his imagination. In silence, the senses could sharpen to new (or old, imaginative) experiences; the “space of silence” enabled an aesthetic experience. He repeated this in a letter to Stefan Szuman, when he wrote about Rilke’s poetry: “It is a very quiet, closed-in world – you have to go very far from the noise and go very deep to hear this poetry”¹¹.

Auditory experiences. Passive hearing – active listening

The impact of sounds on humans has been studied by anthropology of sound (sound studies). Sounds of the world, perceived consciously and unconsciously, contribute to the creation of personality, they have the ability to create emotional states. Audial experiences of a human being include their entire audiosphere, that is, the sound environment perceived by the sense of hearing, including the melosphere (music), the sonosphere (sounds) and the phonosphere (voice)¹². It builds the sonic identity of an individual, shapes their sensitivity and the way they perceive reality. The multitude of such identities in the similar sound space creates entire “acoustic communities”. The sound image of Drohobych reflected the nature of the local community, its needs, features and preferences. The (sound) world of this community consisted primarily of natural sounds, perfectly described in *The Cinnamon Shops*: biophones, for example, swarms of “buzzing” flies, birds flapping their wings, horses clattering their hooves; geophones – the noise of alder trees, the sound of wind during a storm; anthrophones – the performances of organ grinders, the tolling of church bells, the clatter of women’s shoes...

These sensory experiences allowed Schulz to “recreate” the *genius loci*, the sounds of the space; they allowed him to reflect the difference and uniqueness of the sound landscape of the place where he lived. Maybe the sentimental description of the harmony of childhood sounds was for him a response to the sonic

¹⁰ K. Singh, *Naam or Word*, Delhi: Ruhani Satsang 1970, p. 59.

¹¹ Letter from Bruno Schulz to Stefan Szuman of July 24, 1932, KL, p. 36.

¹² They were described in detail by Maria Gołaszewska in the book *Estetyka pięciu zmysłów*, Kraków 1997. See also: R. Losiak, *Muzyka przestrzeni publicznej miasta. Z badań nad pejzażem dźwiękowym Wrocławia*. “Prace Komisji Krajobrazu Kulturowego” 2008, no. 11, p. 253–264.

violence associated with schoolwork, changes and new acoustic landscape (today known as “noise pollution”¹³): ubiquitous noise, technological, industrial, and urban revolutions, the bustle of factories or the roar of gunshots during the war, which announced the disintegration of the world¹⁴. Today, researchers have no doubt that both conscious and unconscious audio experiences related to nature and human activity shape us profoundly. Although at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries field recording did not exist yet¹⁵ (the first such recordings were made in the 1930s and 1940s¹⁶), based on the testimonies and the historical and cultural context, we can collect and “recreate” Schulz’s hypothetical auditory experiences.

Anacrusis. Childhood

Little do we know about what musical experiences the childhood of Schulz consisted of. In his fiction, the sound of creaking floors, snoring of counter jumpers (sleeping on the lowest floors of the tenement house), the rumble of kitchen appliances and banging of tin pots in the attic resonate through the narrator’s house; it sounds of the clatter of servant’s slippers and trills with a high bird’s clangour. One may assume that Schulz’s childhood involved almost exclusively passive listening that was hardly the result of conscious choice. Young Schulz took part in a performance of *Izydor*, eleven years older than him; he went to the opera with his parents and, amazed, he listened to street musicians stopping by the windows of the tenement house – which he would later illustrate and describe in *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*. He played with mechanical instruments and music boxes, which he would soon write about in “The Comet”. In his family home, there might have been a music box or a miniature barrel organ, present in most middle-class houses at that time¹⁷, perhaps even similar to the one he would describe years later in *The Booke*.

13 Raymond Murray Schaffer wrote about noise pollution of the world’s soundscape from the perspective of music ecology.

14 I use the terminology systematized by Sebastian Bernat in *Wokół pojęcia soundscape. Dyskusja terminologiczna*, “Prace Komisji Krajobrazu Kulturowego” 2015, no. 30, p. 45–57.

15 I use a well-established English term meaning practical and technical field recordings, i.e. recording sounds outside the studio space, later saved as digital audio files.

16 Between 1930 and 1960, ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax was the first to do field recording. He recorded the sounds of work in the port and on the coast. In 1940, Ludwig Koch used the phonograph to record bird sounds, later released on gramophone records. See <https://www.irvteibel.com> (retrieved: 21 January 2020).

17 Prószyński was convinced of the mass presence of barrel organs or music boxes in townspeople’s homes at the end of the 19th century. See S. Prószyński, *Blaski i cienie dziejów katarynek*, in: *idem, Świat mechanizmów grających*, Warszawa 1994, p. 205.

It can be assumed that he was taken to klezmer concerts, which made the atmosphere of parks and spontaneously arranged garden restaurants more attractive. He took part in traditional celebrations (such as bar mitzvah) accompanied by Jewish live music. Schulz's family most likely took an active part in artistic events, just like most Jewish families did in the Truskavets-Boryslav-Drohobych district who had access to culture and education. As a junior high school student, he participated in school performances; he also listened to liturgical songs during services to which the students went together. However, he did not recognize a musical talent in himself and remained absorbed in visual arts.

In an essay devoted to the work of Ephraim Moses Lilien, Schulz described his first form-creating contact with art. He recalled the book his brother borrowed for him when he was fourteen. It was *Songs from the Ghetto* with a collection of poems by Morris Rosenfeld, translated from Yiddish into German (*Lieder des Ghetto*), with Lilien's drawings. The book consisted of simple and extremely melodic, rhythmic songs describing the work of Jewish workers, especially tailors (the author of the song spent his youth in exile in America, earning a living as a tailor)¹⁸.

Supplemented with black and white drawings, Rosenfeld's poems cover such topics as work, love, and death. What seems most interesting in the context of music in Schulz's life and work is the way he described the first encounter with Rosenfeld's collection, his "first spring of sensitivity", his "mystical marriage with art". This is what he wrote about that moment: "When I opened the covers with the weeping willow and the harp, I was dazzled. From the solemn silence that suddenly occurred within me, I realized that I was standing at the gate of a great and decisive experience, and I turned the pages of this book, stunned, with a somewhat joyful fear and happy, moving from one delight to another. I spent the whole day reading Lilien's book, enchanted, unable to put it down, I was full of shining black and white chords brimming with pathos, rising from the silence of these cards and ornaments"¹⁹.

The breakthrough that then took place filled Schulz with sounds: thanks to the aesthetic experience, he himself became music – visual impressions evoked associations with the auditory experience, the senses mixed, and Rosenfeld's songs evoked instruments in his imagination; Schulz heard musical compositions in them. His first conscious experience of art thus became a half-(imagined) musical experience. Such events often create an artistic language, which, with

¹⁸ M. Rosenfeld, *Pieśni pracy*, przeł. A.T. i S.H., Warszawa 1906, p. 3. See http://rcin.org.pl/Content/69099/WA248_89676_F-22-472_rosenfeld-piesni_o.pdf (retrieved: 5 August 5 2019).

¹⁹ B. Schulz, "E.M. Lilien", in: idem, *Dzieła zebrane*, vol. 7: *Szkice krytyczne*, edited by W. Bolecki, commentaries and footnotes by M. Wójcik, linguistic ed. P. Sitkiewicz, Gdańsk 2017, p. 128.

references to the art of sounds, allow us to describe different matters such as literature or painting.

A little later, Schulz reviewed Lilien's work. The musical metaphor would remain a constant point of reference for him: "He is immediately characterized by a strong sense of linear rhythm, to which he subordinates all other forms of expression. Almost each of his drawings is based on a rhythm that permeates it and runs unstoppably like a triumphant fanfare, taking in and unifying all the details of the drawing with its wave. This rhythm, this inner melody takes us immediately to a festive and solemn sphere, to the dimension of pure and sublime poetry [...] white and shiny lines rise as a triumphant cantilena on the shining carbuncle of the night [...] it is strong and intoxicating poetry, hypnotizing with its solemn gesture or solemn, incanting dance of slender figures made as if from white silence, accompanied by the humming of night-black chords. From the conflicts of black and white, Lilien extracted the crystalline music of the spheres. He dedicates all the other melodies to this one"²⁰.

This way of writing about drawings persists throughout most of the argument, in which Schulz particularly often emphasizes the importance of rhythm. The ornamentation was – in his opinion – painted with a "decisive rhythm", kept the "same rhythmic character", and the viewer's eye followed the same rhythm of each vignette. The book was "composed", "tuned steadfastly and contrapuntally into an integral whole"²¹. The fourteen-year-old Schulz – at least that is how he described himself more than 30 years later – noticed the melodiousness and rhythm of the Rosenfeld song; he "heard" music not only in the poetic text itself, he also noticed analogies to it in the drawings as such. It is difficult to imagine that constant musical metaphors would accompany a writer who was indifferent to sound matters. What experiences might he have had with the music of his time, then? Was it shaped by a great neo-romantic symphony (Strauss, Rachmaninoff), musical impressionism (Debussy), verismo (Puccini, Moniuszko), or a much earlier tradition (Mozart, Chopin), maybe the avant-garde music of the time, or perhaps American light jazz?

Schulz as a music lover? Musical culture in some European cities in 1910–1940

During World War I, Schulz was in Vienna. One of the most important European opera houses, the Vienna Opera, then known as the Hof-Operntheater, offered world premieres of the greatest works. At that very time, in the cultural centre



²⁰ Ibidem, pp. 132–133.

²¹ Ibidem.

of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Schulz had the opportunity to see *The Knight of the Rose* by Richard Strauss, *Parsifal* by Richard Wagner, *Notre Dame* by Franz Schmidt²². However, considering his poor financial situation (he regularly received aid for refugees²³), most likely he could not afford to actively participate in the artistic life of the capital city. His financial situation had improved slightly when he visited Vienna in 1923. In the years 1918–1939 in the capital of Austria, the greatest works of world music were performed, including *Rigoletto* by Giuseppe Verdi or *Der Rosenkavalier* by Strauss²⁴.

Schulz had many opportunities to see performances in Poland, too. The opera house in Lviv had been continuously offering a repertoire of the highest quality since the second half of the 18th century. At the beginning of the 20th century, on the stages of the Lviv Opera you could watch Italian and French performances, for example *La Traviata* by Giuseppe Verdi, *Carmen* by Georges Bizet, *Faust* by Charles Gounod, *Madame Butterfly* by Giacomo Puccini, *Eugene Onegin* by Pyotr Tchaikovsky. The frequently performed *Halka*, a Polish opera by Stanisław Moniuszko also achieved worldwide fame²⁵.

According to Michał Piekarski, in Lviv before 1918 (Schulz was a student of the Lviv Polytechnic then) one could attend Polish private views, including as many as six Wagner operas (*Lohengrin*, *The Flying Dutchman*, *Rienzi*, *Das Rheingold*, *Siegfried*, *Twilight of the Gods*). Later, the opera house held premieres of great works, including *Eros and Psyche* by Ludomir Różycki and *Salome* by Strauss²⁶.

Roman Jasiński, a pianist, immortalized in the photo with Schulz and Witkacy from 1934²⁷, in the publication *Koniec epoki. Muzyka w Warszawie* reconstructed

22 *Kronika opery*, directed by M. Michalik, Dortmund 1990, p. 339–377; Wiener Staatsoper Archive, <https://archiv.wiener-staatsoper.at/search?since=01.02.1923&until=15.07.1923> (retrieved: 10/09/2019). See also: J. Kański, *Przewodnik operowy*, Kraków 2014; B. Horowicz, *Teatr operowy. Historia opery. Realizacje sceniczne. Perspektywy*, Warszawa 1963; P. Kamiński, *Tysiąc i jedna opera*, Kraków 2015; K. Stromenger, *Przewodnik operowy*, Warszawa 1959.

23 J. Sass, *Kronika uchodźcy*, "Schulz/Forum" 10, 2017, p. 22–40; as well as daily entries by Joanna Sass in the Calendar of the Life, Work and Reception of Bruno Schulz, <http://www.schulzforum.pl/pl/kalendarz/lata/1915> (retrieved: December 17, 2018).

24 Wiener Staatsoper Archive, <https://archiv.wiener-staatsoper.at/search?since=01.02.1923&until=15/07/1923> (retrieved: 10/09/2019).

25 *Kobbe's Complete Opera Book*, ed. and rev. by The Earl of Harewood, London 1989.

26 M. Piekarski, "Życie muzyczne Lwowa od drugiej połowy XVIII wieku", in: idem, *Muzyka we Lwowie. Od Mozarta do Majerskiego. Kompozytorzy, muzycy, instytucje*, Warszawa 2017, pp. 28–29.

27 Jasiński's meeting with Schulz was recorded not only in the famous New Year's Eve photo with Witkacy, but also in the memory of Gombrowicz. After the war, Jasiński himself described this meeting as follows: "[Witkacy] visited Janek [Kochanowski] quite often, and even brought Bruno Schulz, the author of these strange, newly published *The Cinnamon Shops*. This book made a great impression on me, and I immediately felt its uniqueness. So I was very curious about this meeting with Schulz, who turned out to be a man as delicate and discreet as he was unglamorous. After all, Witkacy was able to untangle him, too" – R. Jasiński, *Zmierzch starego świata. Wspomnienia 1900–1945*, Kraków 2008, p. 535.

musical events in the capital in the years 1927–1939 and the situation of cultural institutions at that time. He recalled that many famous artists came to Warsaw at that time: “Those were the times when its [the Warsaw Philharmonic’s] existence was closely connected with usually attractive, frequent performances by foreign artists of world fame. Warsaw had never seen such a galaxy of the greatest virtuosos and composers moving across the Philharmonic’s stage. It is safe to say that there was no such outstanding artist in the world at that time who would not have visited the Warsaw stage at least once”²⁸.

The greatest stars gave concerts at the Warsaw Philharmonic, Karol Szymanowski performed on regular basis²⁹. Schulz visited the capital many times in the years 1924–1938, mainly to establish personal and professional contacts³⁰. We are not sure how he spent his time with the Polish artistic elite. We only know that he went to the theatre with Nałkowska, celebrated New Year 1935 with Gombrowicz, posed for Witkacy’s making a portrait of him, was immortalized in a photo with artists during a party, and often visited Kuncewiczowa³¹. He talked to writers primarily about art, philosophy, and his own prose. Did they go to the philharmonic and the opera? Since attending performances and concerts was part of the social life of Polish artists at that time, that might have been the case. The meetings were often enriched by musical performances. After the war, Hanna Mortkowicz-Olczakowa notes in her memoirs that during a party celebrating the publication of *The Stranger* at Kuncewiczowa’s house in Warsaw, Schulz witnessed the violinist Irena Dubińska playing Brahms’ concerto in D major³².

It is also known that he went to the theatre with Izabela Czermakowa, who would remember his fear and peculiar “sensitivity to sounds”. In her memoirs from 1958, published a few years later in “*Twórczość*”, Czermakowa wrote: “I remember a wonderful evening when Bruno, in a quiet, soft voice, read fragments of his *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*; the book was published much later. [...] Once we went to the neighbouring Truskavets. It was a sunny but cold October. Bright dahlias bloomed in the empty old spa park. That day, Bruno was particularly talkative, he talked about his agoraphobia, his excessive sensitivity to sounds, and the fact that he only lived in depth, not in breadth, like other

28 R. Jasiński, *Koniec epoki. Muzyka w Warszawie (1927–1939)*, Warszawa 1986, p. 5.

29 Cf. H. Swolkień, *Spotkanie z operą*, Warszawa 1971.

30 See <http://www.schulzforum.pl/pl/znaj/warszawa> (retrieved: 10/09/2019).

31 See R. Jasiński, *Zmierzch starego świata*, p. 462; S. Okołowicz, *Śliwka i tacet. O spotkaniach Schulza i Witkacego*, “Schulz/Forum” 8, 2016, pp. 43–64; *Rozmowy z Marią Kuncewiczową*, selected, edited and prefaced by H. Zaworska, Warszawa 1983, pp. 234–235.

32 H. Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, *Bruno Schulz. Wspomnienie*, “Przekrój” 1958, nr 657, p. 8–9. Cf. H. Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, “Wspomnienie o Brunonie Schulzu”, in: eadem, *Bunt wspomnień*, Warszawa 1959, pp. 330–336.

people”³³. Czermakowa came to Drohobych many times and spent long hours with Schulz on evening walks around his hometown. However, she did not elaborate on what Schulz might have had in mind at that time – how he perceived the sounds of the world, how they influenced him, whether he considered this sensitivity to sounds as a burdensome condition, or for the ability that allowed him to “hear more”. She focused on the writer’s attachment to Drohobych, which he predicted would become the place of his death.

A summary of music events in several major cities the writer visited would include these: Vienna (1914–1918, 1923), Warsaw (1924–1938), Lviv (1911–1914, 1923, 1937) and Paris (1938)³⁴, as well as the repertoire of operas and theatres. Still, we cannot confirm the thesis that Schulz actively listened to music and attended performances. The only traces of operatic experiences can be found in his collections of stories. In *The Cinnamon Shops*, Schulz refers to *Twilight of the Gods*, one of the four parts of the musical drama of Wagner’s opera *The Ring of the Nibelungen*: “We often liked to listen at the door – the silence, full of sighs and whispers of this rubble crumbling in cobwebs, this twilight of the gods decaying in boredom and monotony”³⁵. In “Spring”, he recalls Don Juan (following either Molier’s play or *Don Giovanni* with music by Mozart). In his prose, he refers to classical and klezmer music. The narrator listening to a performance in “Spring”³⁶ equates nature with instruments, perhaps travestying musical drama.

Repertoire of the sanatorium

Before World War II, Schulz stayed in several resort towns³⁷. According to the memories of Irena Kejlin-Mitelman, in 1922, he visited the spa town of Bad Kudowa located in the Sudetes. That is where he met her mother. The moment

33 According to Czermakowa, Schulz predicted his death as follows: “He also said that wherever he was, after just a few days he longed morbidly for Drohobych, for heaven, which is only here close and protective. We climbed a hill with a distant view of the entire oil basin, the lights of countless drilling towers twinkling in the early autumn twilight. ‘I can’t live anywhere else’, Bruno said then. – And I will die here” – I. Czermakowa, *Bruno Schulz, “Twórczość”* 1965, no 10, pp. 100–101. Czermakowa did not provide the title of the play that Schulz saw (“Only once did we manage to take him to the theatre, which at that time, under the direction of Schiller and Horzyca, was at a very high level. Bruno Schulz was restless and nervous all evening, and only regained his sense of humour when we returned home and sat down in a quiet room. Ibidem, p. 99).

34 Information based on the Calendar of Bruno Schulz’s Life, Work and Reception, <http://www.schulzforum.pl/pl/> (retrieved: 10/09/2019).

35 B. Schulz, *Sklepy cynamonowe*, in: idem, *Opowiadania. Wybór esejów i listów, wstęp i oprac.* J. Jarzębski, Wrocław 1989, p. 64. Hereinafter as: OP.

36 OP, p. 155.

37 J. Sass, *7 sierpnia – 24 września 1915*, in: *Kalendarz życia, twórczości i recepcji Brunona Schulza*, <http://www.schulzforum.pl/pl/kalendarz/7-sierpnia-24-wrzesnia-1915>; J. Orzeszek, *Bad Kudowa*, ibidem, <http://www.schulzforum.pl/pl/miejsc/bar-kudowa> (retrieved: 18.12.2018).

of the meeting was accompanied by music that could be heard at the bench where Schulz was sitting.

Health resorts, apart from treatments, offered various attractions and activities such as artistic performances, dances or excursions. Some of them were equipped with libraries and recreation rooms. Mitelman's story shows that Schulz was reluctant to leave the spa. The only thing that excited him was the Skull Chapel³⁸. Perhaps the introverted fine artist was not interested in concerts or dances: he was more willing to spend time with friends or alone, drawing or reading.

Marienburg, where he stayed in 1915, had a rich artistic program to offer³⁹. There were, among others, classical music concerts and performances by musicians who were relaxing in the resort. Schulz had the opportunity to go to one of the official dances in Kursaal. Three times a day, the spa guests could enjoy performances by the spa orchestra. String quartets and orchestras played in restaurants. He could listen to classical and popular music performed by dancing bands, as well as folk music played by Gypsy bands⁴⁰. It is difficult to say what his attitude towards music performed in resorts was. It was perhaps just a background for his social life. Based on Schulz's alleged musical experiences, one might say that music performed in the park (in resorts in Truskavets) stimulated musical metaphors, and the restaurant musicians in Marienburg may have inspired parts of "Spring" related to music. Schulz attended (either willingly or reluctantly) chamber concerts. He listened to music performed in informal circumstances, in rooms, small halls and parks. It seems that the intimate atmosphere and the natural environment in which he listened to music inspired him the most.

Musical culture in the Drohobych high school

As a student and later a teacher at the pre-war Władysław Jagiełło High School in Drohobych, Schulz probably also came across several musical genres: classical compositions, folk, religious and popular music (e.g. jazz, popular in the 1930s)⁴¹. He listened to music in church several times a year, assuming that as a teacher he was obliged to participate in masses that inaugurated major school events. It

³⁸ Ibidem.

³⁹ J. Sass, *7 sierpnia – 24 września 1915*, in: *Kalendarz życia, twórczości i recepcji Brunona Schulza*, <http://www.schulzforum.pl/pl/kalendarz/7-sierpnia-24-wrzesnia-1915>, <http://www.schulzforum.pl/pl/kalendarz/7-sierpnia-24-wrzesnia-1915> (retrieved: 18.12.2018).

⁴⁰ *Przewodnik po Marienburgu (Mariánské Lázně) z ilustracjami*, Marienburg 1931, <https://polona.pl/item/przewodnik-po-marienburgu-marianske-lazne-z-ilustracjami,MTU4MTk4Mg/1/#info:meta> data (retrieved: 5.10.2019).

⁴¹ Schulz's school report for 1903/1904 shows that he did not attend singing lessons. There is a slash in this subject field. Perhaps he didn't have such classes in his curriculum at all. A reprint of documents containing Schulz's grades for the school years 1903/1904 and 1908/1909 can be found in *Regions of the Great Heresy* – see J. Ficowski, op. cit., pp. 21–22.

is not known whether religious art was a source of inspiration or, on the contrary, it was a forced part of education and later paid work. High school reports show that, as a teacher, he watched many school performances throughout the year⁴². Student productions included mainly patriotic repertoire. Therefore, Schulz listened to songs and anthems performed by the school choir, as well as compositions reaching back to the folk tradition (for example *Dudziarz* by Wieniawski)⁴³. One of the reports recorded the repertoire in detail, which gives us an idea about musical experiences at the school. The reporter mentions Hlawiak's "Miłość ojczyzny" [Love of the Homeland], Wybicki's "Mazurek Dąbrowskiego" and Żukowski's "Wieniec pieśni strzeleckich" [Wreath of Shooting Songs]⁴⁴.

In the years 1929–1938, Professor Schulz might have listened to an average of two artistic programs a month. There are no sources about his attitude towards the music performed at the school – if we do not count the confessions in letters in which he disapproved of his workplace as such⁴⁵. One can venture to say that the artistic culture of the school in some way shaped its student, and later its employee. Patriotic performances by choirs of boys and men and the school orchestra periodically reminded the writer of the history of Poland; radio broadcasts introduced him to more important compositions and they presented composers (Mozart, Chopin, Schubert). Thanks to theoretical and practical classes, Schulz had the opportunity to learn musical forms and techniques, such as symphony, fugue, sonatina, to which he would refer many times in prose and reviews⁴⁶. However, it is impossible to determine if he took an active part in the artistic life of the school – at least as a teacher. If we assume that he was forced to watch performances that bored him, this type of musical experience also had an impact – it must have discouraged him from music for a long time. Regardless of whether the writer's attitude towards artistic events was affirmative or critical, there is no doubt that the atmosphere of school events influenced him and left a mark on his musical experiences.

Experiencing pop music: klezmer, folk, jazz

Schulz certainly listened to the music of the early 20th century, knew the musical tradition and popular music played by gramophones and barrel organs. He

⁴² See "Sprawozdania Dyrekcji Gimnazjum Państwowego im. Króla Władysława Jagiełły w Drohobyczu za lata szkolne 1929–1938".

⁴³ Ibidem.

⁴⁴ See "Sprawozdanie Dyrekcji Gimnazjum Państwowego im. Króla Władysława Jagiełły w Drohobyczu za lata szkolne 1929/30, 30/31, 31/32", p. 18.

⁴⁵ "List Brunona Schulza do Tadeusza Brezy z 2 grudnia 1934 roku", KL, p. 53.

⁴⁶ See "Sprawozdanie Dyrekcji Gimnazjum Państwowego im. Króla Władysława Jagiełły w Drohobyczu za lata szkolne" 1937/38, p. 31.

attended musical events, saw band performances, heard klezmer music popular in Drohobych and listened to music in restaurants, parks and in the streets. In the interwar period, there was no city whose streets would not be filled with fair, orchestral or klezmer music. The Drohobych region was no exception. At that time, the townspeople were frequently exposed to amateur music. Issachar Fater, author of a publication devoted to musicians of Jewish origin, points to the ubiquity of music among the Jewish community in the interwar Poland: “The Jewish masses in Poland sang everywhere and always. There was no need to look for songs, because they could be heard at every step – maids, tailor’s apprentices, girls sitting at home and Hasidic boys, modest mothers and rude, simple coachmen sang songs. Rich children sang because they were bursting with joy, and poor orphans to express their grief and resentment. And these songs were very different: street songs ‘about the bitter fate of an orphan’, sentimental tangos about broken hearts, songs of the working class calling ‘not to let others drink their blood anymore’, pioneering, encouraging people to build a country and settle in it, Hasidic songs calling for dancing and the cantor’s tear-jerking singing. We could also hear serious classical songs from the world music repertoire”⁴⁷.

Schulz listened to the music of the streets of Drohobych. The Jewish community there was particularly musical. In *The Book of Klezmer. The History, the Music, the Folklore* memories of a Drohobych resident about the performances are presented: “In my town of Drohobych the klezmerim played Yiddish folk-songs as well as swing, fox-trots, rhumba, cha-cha, waltzes, Russian songs, and so on. Many learned how to read music so they could play the tune exactly as it had been recorded. There were klezmerim who had such a good ear that they could write down exactly what they heard on the radio after listening to the tune only once. They not only wrote the melody line but the harmony and rhythm parts for all the instruments. I played in one band where we played a lot of the music from the radio, which came to Drohobych in the 1930s. The leader was Dr. Staszek Vilder. He was very clever, with a great ear. He wrote the parts for saxophone, trumpet, piano, bass, and two violins. I played in this ensemble for weddings, restaurants, and even for the silent films. We used to play ‘Bar Kokhba’ under Tom Mix and Valentino films”⁴⁸.

However, it is not only Drohobych and Poland that bring musical experiences to Schulz. He spent August 1938 in Paris. His guide in the world of French leisure was Georges Rosenberg (brother of Schulz’s friend, pianist Maria Chasin) with whom he had long conversations about philosophy and art. Rosenberg especially remembers going to the cabaret Casanova in Montmartre and the

⁴⁷ I. Fater, *Muzyka żydowska w Polsce w okresie międzywojennym*, przeł. E. Świdorska, Warsaw 1997, p. 12.

⁴⁸ Interview with Mikhle Lepert, Wrocław, 12.03.1984, quoted in: Y. Strom, *The Book of Klezmer: The History, the Music, the Folklore*, Chicago 2011, p. 113.

writer's reaction to the promiscuity of Parisian cocottes⁴⁹. It was in the capital of France that the cabaret was born, dominated by songs touching upon current socio-political issues. In the 1930s, a district of Montmartre already had the status of the artistic centre of Paris. The twenty-three-year-old Edith Piaf performed there, too, at the time⁵⁰. Performances competed with the cinema, so they had to be more attractive to the viewers. The musical and visual impressions that Paris provided Schulz with were much stronger than those he had access to in Poland (he wrote about this to Romana Halpern: "I saw beautiful, shocking, and terrible things. I was greatly impressed by the wonderful women [...], promiscuity, pace of life"⁵¹).

At the end of the 19th century, factories in Łódź and Warsaw produced the first gramophones. At the beginning of the 20th century, the cinematography and phonography flourished, film studios and cinemas were established and became popular. Music publishing houses were founded, and garden theatres were set up. Technical progress allowed for wider access to music. The organ grinders were gradually replaced by actors and cabaret performers, and the place of popular home musical boxes (mini-grinders, music boxes) was taken by gramophones and radios – more modern devices which played not one, but hundreds of songs⁵².

The appearance of the radio in Drohobych in the 1930s provided access to popular and classical music⁵³. Schulz not only read his own works⁵⁴ on the radio, but also listens to hits played on gramophone records. The radio had a very ambitious program. In addition to fragments of prose from around the world, you could also listen to great concerts, recitals, and all kinds of classical music⁵⁵.

49 "List Georges'a Marshaka Rosenberga do Jerzego Ficowskiego z 15 sierpnia 1965 roku", in: *Bruno Schulz w oczach świadków. Listy, wspomnienia i relacje*, edited by J. Kandziora, Gdańsk.

50 See W. Szczotkowski, *Edith Piaf. Życie, mił i legenda*, Łódź 1993. See also: P. Szarota, *Paryż 1938*, Warszawa 2019.

51 "List Brunona Schulza do Romany Halpern z 29 sierpnia 1938 roku", KL, p. 181.

52 More information on this subject can be found in Michalski's book and in Kwiatkowski's publications: D. Michalski, *Powróćmy jak za dawnych lat... Historia polskiej muzyki rozrywkowej lata 1900–1939*, introduction by S. Grodzieńska, Warsaw 2007; M. J. Kwiatkowski, *Narodziny polskiego radia. Radiofonia w Polsce w latach 1918–1929*, Warsaw 1972.

53 According to Jan Onaczyszyn, the radio was made available in Borysław in the mid-1920s: "My uncles, Piotr and Leopold, lived on the floor above the farmers. They were very modern, young people who installed a radio in their home in 1925–1926. What an undertaking it was!" – see W. Budzyński, "Cywilizacja radiowa", in: idem, *Miasto Schulza*, Warsaw 2005, p. 21.

54 See A. Skrzypczyk, *Głos Schulza*, "Schulz/Forum" 15, 2020, pp. 224–230.

55 The detailed radio program was published in the "Biuletyn Radiofoniczny". See "Biuletyn Radiofoniczny dla Użytku Prasy. Wydawnictwo tygodniowe Wydziału Prasy i Propagandy Polskiego Radia", R. 6, no 38, 22 September 1935, p. 4, <https://polona.pl/item/biuletyn-radjo-foniczny-dla-uzytyku-prasy-wydawnictwo-tygodniowe-wydzialu-prasy-i,ODU2MDAyNDc/0/#info:metadata> (retrieved: 30.07.2020).

Soon, Schulz would also be able to listen to music in the cinema. His brother Izydor founded the Urania cinema in Drohobych at the beginning of the 20th century, which Schulz attended as a child and teenager⁵⁶. These experiences are perhaps what he presented later in “Noc lipcowa” [“A Night in July”]: “I spent the nights of that summer in the town’s only cinema, staying there until the end of the last performance”⁵⁷. He probably also went to the cinema in Lviv, Vienna and Warsaw. Małgorzata Hendrykowska wrote: “Due to the universality of the shows themselves and the variety of places of exhibitions, it should be assumed that [...] already around 1907 it was simply impossible not to get familiar with cinema”⁵⁸. What movies did he watch? What did he listen to? Until the 1930s, that is until films got sound, he mainly looked at images in silent films, even though some screenings were accompanied by live music – by pianists and entire bands, later replaced by gramophone records.

In the 1920s, Polish cinema was dominated by propaganda and patriotic repertoire (*Cud nad Wisłą*, *Pan Tadeusz*, *Trędowata*, *Grób nieznanego żołnierza*⁵⁹). With the development of sound film, as a well-formed writer, Schulz could listen to recordings of *The Jazz Singer* by the Warner brothers and *Moralność pani Dulskiej* by Bolesław Nawolin⁶⁰; he could also watch the adaptations of Nałkowska’s *Granica* or Żeromski’s *Wierna rzeka*⁶¹.

Coda

Even though Schulz’s statements about music and titles indicating the connection between the text and the musical work are not as numerous as in the case of Witkacy’s *Sonata Belzebuba*, his prose contains extensive references to music, which allows us to assume that music could have been the subject of unknown metatextual statements that did not survive the war – after all, most of Schulz’s correspondence, several stories, the manuscript of *Messiah*, and also many of his drawings were lost. The references to music in prose inspire us to look for some connections Schulz might have had with the art of sounds – so easily visible in the works of other writers.

⁵⁶ J. Ficowski, *Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice. Bruno Schulz i jego mitologia*, Sejny 2002, p. 130. A discussion of Schulz’s cinematographic imagination can be found in Paweł Sitkiewicz, *Fantasmagorie. Rozważania o filmowej wyobraźni Brunona Schulza*, “Schulz/Forum” 1, 2012, pp. 35–46.

⁵⁷ B. Schulz, “A Night in July”, in: idem, *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, translated from the Polish by Celina Wieniewska, introduction by John Updike, Penguin Books, 1979, p. 83.

⁵⁸ M. Hendrykowska, *Śladami tamtych cieni. Film w kulturze polskiej przełomu stuleci 1895–1914*, Poznań 1993, p. 239.

⁵⁹ *The Cinema of Central Europe*, ed. P. Hames, London 2004, p. 25–33.

⁶⁰ *Historia kina polskiego*, pod red. T. Lubelski, K. Zarębski, Warszawa 2007.

⁶¹ Ibidem.

Recreating Schulz's hypothetical acoustic experiences has also a broader dimension – it provides insight into the sphere of potential musical experiences of interwar writers, who often attempted to describe musical composition. Through the prism of music in Schulz's life and work, one can finally see not only him, but also the cultural context: how popular music was present in the acoustic space in the interwar period, what role school education played in Schulz's musical tastes, what repertoire the operas and theatres had, what could be listened to on the radio and in cabaret, and what those songs were about. Research in this field will make us aware of what was listened to in the “prehistory” of great technological development – it will help us see in the barrel organ the first attempts at making music a mass phenomenon, and to realize how the sound landscape of the world from over a hundred years ago differed from the one we have today.

Given the rich orchestration of Schulz's prose, the question about his voice in the matter of music, about his musical modes of expression and about his attitude to sounds becomes an obvious call for research, even though – perhaps – doomed to weaving an argument from scraps of memories and guesswork. Acoustic biography will therefore be one way of making sense of the author's life, which – like any type of biography – passes selected facts through its filter (sometimes artistically distorting them to suit its needs)⁶². This is undoubtedly a metaphor; nevertheless, there is an important supplement behind it to the so-called comprehensive biography (postulated, but probably never completed). It may turn out that there is no biography, but only biographies, fragments, ideas.



62 Schulz's music-related experiences described here include the activity of the Jewish artistic society “Kaleia”, numerous contacts with musicians, and finally his sound experiences during the Nazi occupation. Schulz's sonic “biography” was certainly much more extensive and research on it deserves to be continued.