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**Wojciech Gurgul, *Zofia Zdziennicka-Bergerowa.*  
*Wirtuozka cytry, kompozytorka i działaczka*  
*społeczna [Zofia Zdziennicka-Bergerowa.*  
*Zither Virtuoso, Composer and Social Activist]*,  
Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu  
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## Review

Wojciech Gurgul's scholarly monograph entitled *Zofia Zdziennicka-Bergerowa. Wirtuozka cytry, kompozytorka i działaczka społeczna [Zofia Zdziennicka-Bergerowa. Zither Virtuoso, Composer and Social Activist]* is the latest publica-

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tion released in 2023 under the imprint of the Publishing House of the Jan Długosz University in Częstochowa. It should be noted that it is not the author's first publication in this field. Zdziennicka-Bergerowa and her works have been the subject of Wojciech Gurgul's prior research; he has published a bibliography of music prints involving the guitar along with an analysis of two publications for the 6-string guitar<sup>1</sup> and a discussion of the artist's compositions for the 7-string guitar<sup>2</sup>.

Wojciech Gurgul's monograph prompts an analysis of factual and biographical information concerning Polish female artists who were active in the Polish lands in the 19th and 20th century. As is commonly known, musicians in Poland were predominantly fascinated with the piano since the second half of the 19th century. This applied to the compositional process as well. The majority of contemporary works by female composers was also intended for that instrument as a result of drawing direct inspiration from Frédéric Chopin's works. By the end of the 19th century, female composers were writing piano literature or pieces intended for ensembles including the instrument. Such compositions included miniatures, pieces for teaching purposes, songs with piano accompaniment or chamber music for violin and piano. The artistic output of Polish female artists during the interwar period was characterised by simplicity, conservatism and a lack of experimentation, which was dictated by such factors as the political and social situation in the country. As Magdalena Dziadek rightly noted, Polish female artists began to consolidate as early as in the interwar period:

[...] following the example of Western countries, groups of female artists and performers dedicated to promoting their own achievements began to emerge at that time. Associations of female musicians were formed, concerts of music by female composers were held and the past of female music was researched [...] care was also taken to ensure that these efforts were covered in the press [...]<sup>3</sup>.

The most renowned female composers include Grażyna Bacewicz (1909–1969), Wanda Landowska (1879–1959), Jadwiga Sarnecka (1883–1913), Anna Maria Klechniowska (1888–1973), Halina Krzyżanowska (1867–1937) and Irena Regina Wieniawska (1879–1932) – known under the pseudonyms “Poldowski” and “Lady Dean Paul”. All of them – despite obstacles such as social ostracism

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<sup>1</sup> See W. Gurgul, *Polskie druki muzyczne z udziałem gitary wydane w latach 1901–1939. Bibliografia i analiza wybranych publikacji*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Humanistyczno-Przyrodniczego im. Jana Długosza w Częstochowie, Częstochowa 2022.

<sup>2</sup> W. Gurgul, *English and Russian Guitars in Poland. A Summary of Sources Using Open-G Tuning, from the Nineteenth Century to the Present Day*, “Soundboard Scholar” 2022, no. 8, pp. 20–21.

<sup>3</sup> M. Dziadek, *Utwory fortepianowe polskich kompozytorek do 1939 roku. Kontekst kulturowy, strategie wyboru gatunków i środków*, [in:] *Muzyka fortepianowa*, vol. XIII, ed. J. Krassowski, “Prace Specjalne” no. 63, Wydawnictwo Akademii Muzycznej im. Stanisława Moniuszki w Gdańsku, Gdańsk 2004, p. 559.

or family circumstances – were unwavering in their pursuit of careers as composers and artists. It is essential not to forget that the legacy of female composers is marked by a unique kind of beauty and artistic value, and it became an important testimony of the times. Therefore, it deserves an in-depth scholarly consideration.

The protagonist of the monograph in question, Zofia Zdziennicka-Bergerowa (1881–1950), may also be included among these distinguished composers. Her works were unconventional and intended for uncommon instrumentation involving the mandolin, zither, guitar and lute guitar. Wojciech Gurgul's monograph is a very thorough scholarly work devoted to the composer. It is an original publication, containing previously unpublished information about the life and works of this prolific artist, whose activity undoubtedly left a mark on the musical map of the pre-war Poland and certainly deserves attention. As a documentary piece, this book constitutes an attempt at introducing this largely forgotten composer, zither player, mandolinist, guitarist, teacher and social activist to Polish readers. In addition, Zdziennicka-Bergerowa was the author of educational texts (including textbooks and instructional materials for plucked string instruments), as well as popular and concert publications.

In his work, Wojciech Gurgul carried out insightful heuristic research which resulted in the verification and, above all, supplementation of the existing knowledge about the life and work of the composer. As the first researcher to date, the author of the book gained access to previously undiscovered archival materials, fragments of music prints, Zdziennicka's manuscripts, documents and private collections. A thorough analysis of these sources allowed him to reconstruct certain biographical facts of the artist's life. While outlining the current state of research, the author explains that the so far incomplete studies concerning Zdziennicka-Bergerowa have been disseminated in musicological sources. The biography of the Polish artist has been addressed by such scholars as Magdalena Dziadek, Józef Powroźniak, Katarzyna Janczewska-Sołomko, Bożenna Roźniatowska, Joanna Okoń, and mentions of her can be found in articles by Iwona Lindstedt, Magdalena Dziadek and Lilianna M. Moll, or in lexical sources dedicated to the guitar. The author emphasises the fact that this information is selective, incomplete and often incorrect. These circumstances urged him to verify the existing knowledge about Zdziennicka-Bergerowa, who managed to combine artistic and teaching work with social activism as the only female artist of the interwar period. An additional incentive for addressing this issue was the desire to introduce readers to zither and mandolin music, which had not yet been explored in Polish literature. The author examined collections of materials concerning the artist in Poland and abroad (Ukraine, The United States). Owing to a thorough analysis and interpretation of the sources (including an analysis of private collections), he determined the actual date of the com-

poser's birth and completed the timeline of her life. It is noteworthy that the author was able to make contact with the artist's family, making it possible to revise the previously known facts.

The content of the monograph in question is divided into four chapters, preceded by an introduction and characterisation of the existing state of research and concluded with a brief summary. Chapter I, entitled *Youth and Studies in Warsaw*, clarifies certain inconsistencies with regard to the composer's date of birth, and then presents information concerning the period of her studies at the Music Institute in Warsaw.

In chapter II, entitled *Concert Activity in Vienna and Reborn Poland*, the author discusses the artist's performances in Vienna and reborn Poland, as well as her concerts on Polish Radio. The chapter also provides basic biographical information regarding the composer's husband. The following chapter, entitled *Social and Cultural Activity*, concerns the social activity of the zither virtuoso, which was predominantly related to promoting culture – especially the works of female artists in Poland. The author discusses the events that took place in the last years of the artist's life and introduces the history of the Muszka villa in Milanówek, which at that time belonged to the Bergers. The closing chapter *Zither Player, Mandolinist, Guitarist: Teaching, Composing and Publishing activity* includes a discussion of the artistic, publishing and teaching activity of Zdziennicka-Bergerowa. Moreover, the author offers some insight into the zither movement developing in the Polish lands at the end of the 19th century and in the 20th century.

The arrangement, structure of content division and order of chapters are justified by the course of research and the chronology of events from the life and activity of the zither virtuoso. Nevertheless, it is not entirely clear why the author chose to include the subchapter *Marriage to Jan Władysław Berger* (2.3.) in a chapter strictly devoted to Zdziennicka's concert activity, entitled *Concert Activity in Vienna and Reborn Poland*, and the subchapter *Zither Movement in the Polish Lands* (4.6.), which mainly concerns the artistic activity of other Polish zither players, in the chapter *Zither Player, Mandolinist, Guitarist: Teaching, Composing and Publishing Activity*. It is difficult to disagree with the sentiment that these contents, due to their subject matter, deserve to be included in the monograph; however, they should have been placed in a different section. The reader's attention is drawn to the valuable *Appendices*, in which the author catalogued Zdziennicka's publications in the series *From a Mandolinist's Repertoire* (Appendix 1) and included the manuscript of the article *Polish Female Composers* (Appendix 2), authored by Zdziennicka, which comes from the archives of the Mączewski family and previously belonged to the composer. Currently, the document is stored in the collections of the Centre for Historical Documentation of Polish Guitar Music in Tarnów.

The monograph has been enriched with illustrations, photographs, music prints and historical documents, which serve as a testimony to the presented facts and information. The book contains an extensive bibliography, lists of tables, illustrations, music examples and an index of names. It is only regrettable that the author did not attempt to compile an original list of female artists who were active at least during the same time as Zdziennicka-Bergerowa, especially since some of the names were mentioned in Zdziennicka's article, included in *Appendix 2* of the monograph. This would make readers aware of the importance of analysing the achievements of Polish female artists – an issue which has so far been underestimated.

In light of the above, it is impossible not to appreciate the merits of the monograph devoted to the Polish artist Zofia Zdziennicka-Bergerowa. Although not extensive, the book provides new knowledge, and the demand for it in the artistic and music community is enormous. The author's considerable expertise in literature for plucked string instruments and the passion with which he propagates it deserve the highest recognition. The Polish publishing market has not yet seen another publication addressing such an original subject matter – Polish musical culture of the early 20th century, and particularly the artistic activity of women. Its high quality places it among the most valuable publications in this field. Therefore, reading Wojciech Gurgul's monograph is immensely satisfying, and it is worth recommending to musicologists, music theorists and those who deal with researching Polish musical culture from the late 19th century onwards. The publication should also be of interest to artists and performers. It is worth adding that the author wrote the following in the book's conclusion:

[...] there are still a few blanks to be filled in with regard to Zofia Zdziennicka-Bergerowa's life and activity [...] <sup>4</sup>.

This statement suggests that further significant studies are likely to appear in this field. At present, Wojciech Gurgul's monograph on the life and work of Zofia Zdziennicka-Bergerowa is the most up-to-date publication in musicological literature.

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<sup>4</sup> W. Gurgul, *Zofia Zdziennicka-Bergerowa. Wirtuozka cytry, kompozytorka i działaczka społeczna*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jana Długosza w Częstochowie, Częstochowa 2023, p. 10.

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