

Moniuszko's *Halka* – a Return to the Sources¹

Grzegorz Zieziula

The Warsaw première of the opera *Halka* by Stanisław Moniuszko on 1 January 1858 was, as is well known, a turning point in the history of Polish music. Three years later, the orchestral score of *Halka* appeared in print. Its publication by the Warsaw publishing house of Gebethner & Wolff set the seal on Moniuszko's enormous success. However the so-called *Umdruck* method employed for this purpose made it possible to produce a small number of copies. Of these, only one has survived to this day in a complete form. After more than 150 years it was recently reprinted in a facsimile edition by the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Association Liber Pro Arte.

The publication of *Halka's* orchestral score in 1861 was also an extraordinary event in the history of Polish music printing. This was for the first time that a full operatic score was published there, using purely local skills. By the way, among more than a dozen stage works composed by Moniuszko, this was the only one which appeared in print in its full version during the composer's lifetime.

Work on it probably began around the middle of 1860. At the beginning of September 1860, the edition was announced in Warsaw music periodicals. A few days later the same information was summarised by the daily press. It needs to be emphasised that the conditions prevailing in Warsaw's publishing industry at that time were not favourable to such a bold undertaking. Despite the objective difficulties, the circumstances which led the composer to take this step had been pressing upon him for a long time.

From Warsaw to Prague

From the moment of its Warsaw première in 1858, general interest in Moniuszko's opera continued to grow. Many of those who could not see the stage production would frequently ask for sheet music. Naturally, efforts were made to meet this demand, initially by preparing the excerpts, the various arrangements and fantasias on themes from the opera, and finally its piano-vocal score. During the century which preceded the invention of the phonograph, the so-called *Klavierauszug* constituted an important, even essential, element in the social reception of operatic works. Hence the publication of the piano-vocal score of *Halka*, which took place not long after its first performance at Teatr Wielki (the Grand Theatre), undoubtedly made a significant contribution to increasing the opera's audiences.

¹ © 2013 by Instytut Sztuki Polskiej Akademii Nauk & Stowarzyszenie Liber Pro Arte & Grzegorz Zieziula

Above all, it satisfied the curiosity of music lovers living far from the Polish capital. Among them were sophisticated music critics, including those outside Poland. One such was Hans von Bülow (1830–1894), famous conductor, who authored perhaps the most professional (but unfortunately full of German chauvinist spirit which we find offensive today) contemporary critical analysis of the work, published in the well-known Leipzig music periodical *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. In order to meet this demand, the piano-vocal score shortly came to be published in a bilingual version, with the addition of an Italian translation of the text by Moniuszko's friend Achille Bonoldi (1821–1871).

Moniuszko, however, realised from the beginning that only the reproduction of the full sheet music material of *Halka* could provide him with a realistic chance of the opera being quickly produced on other stages, not only Polish, but also – and that must have been something he dreamed of – foreign ones. This hope must have been strengthened by a favourable development of events, as enquiries about *Halka* were coming not only from Lwów (Lemberg, today Lviv) and other leading centres of Polish culture, but also from abroad. In early June 1860 Warsaw daily press informed its readers that “A request for the score of *Halka* has been received from Prague”. Another, more extensive mention, published a few months later and probably based on a Czech newspaper, allows us to draw the conclusion that the music material had been sent to Stavovské Divadlo (Estates Theatre).

Even though we know that the Prague premiere of *Halka* was not to take place until seven years later, the endeavours undertaken at that earlier stage were undoubtedly of crucial significance – if only because they prepared fertile ground for the reception of Moniuszko's works among Poland's southern neighbours. However, one may observe in passing that the necessity of borrowing, under such circumstances, of the theatrical, handwritten copy of the score (which the quoted note seems to suggest) must have had a damaging influence on the way the opera functioned on the stage in Warsaw.

Parisian illusions – Successes in Slavonic countries

For Moniuszko, even more enticing than Prague was the prospect of Paris, at that time the Mecca of operatic composers. He visited it for the first time in summer 1858, thanks to the personal involvement of Maria Kalergis (1822–1874), a Polish countess and a patroness of the arts (she was also one of Wagner's patrons). At the end of 1861 Moniuszko returned in Paris again. The Polish composer took it as a good omen that Gioacchino Rossini, to whom he sent the piano-vocal score of *Halka*, responded with courtesy and, as was proudly emphasised by the Warsaw press, sent him his photograph “in recognition of the compositional achievements of Mr. Moniuszko”.

Another attraction which may have drawn Moniuszko towards the city on the Seine at the beginning of the 1860s was probably the appearance on the operatic horizon there of two Polish names. On 9 March 1860 Théâtre Impérial de l'Opéra successfully staged the opera *Pierre de Médicis* by Prince Józef Poniatowski (1816–1873), an amateur composer, politician and diplomat, who was related to the last king of independent Poland. Not long afterwards, on 22 November 1860, the prestigious post of Ministre d'État et de la Maison de L'Empereur was entrusted to Count Alexandre-Florian-Joseph Colonna Walewski (1810–1868), natural son of Napoleon I and a well known Polish aristocratic lady (according to the imperial decree which came into force in 1854, the minister of state was the direct superior of the Opéra's director). Perhaps the composer of *Halka* hoped to approach these two figures, quite influential in Parisian operatic circles, and gain their approval, and perhaps even support, for his enterprise.

However, Moniuszko was not the only one on whom the myth of Paris as ‘the capital of the nineteenth century’ (as it was aptly described at one time by Walter Benjamin) – both then and later – had cast its spell. More or less well known creative artists arrived there in droves, drawn by the magic of that special place and the illusory mirage of quickly achieved European fame. True, it was there that some brilliant composers won the dreamt-of immortal fame (Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, later Verdi). For others, however, although no less brilliant, Paris brought bitter disappointment (Wagner), not to mention the legions of those talented and outstanding individuals who made their way along Parisian boulevards without ever attracting any notice.

Of course, Moniuszko, like everyone, had every right to his dreams. While dreaming of facing the opera audiences of the Second Empire which crowded into the halls of Grand Opéra, Opéra Comique or Théâtre Lyrique, he would have been perfectly aware that, in order to seriously consider any steps in that direction, one should have up one’s sleeve at least one printed full score which could be presented among French musician acquaintances, or boasted about to the management of individual theatres. When, in December 1861, Moniuszko was once again travelling to France, the printed orchestral score seems to have been completed, and we may guess that he must have taken it with him. Although the music was only underlaid with the Polish text (the composer probably assumed that if there was interest in the work, translating the libretto into French would be easier to commission in Paris than in Warsaw, and it could then be copied by hand under the music), the title page was drawn up in French:

HALKA / OPÉRA EN 4 ACTES / Musique / de / STANISLAS MONIUSZKO / paroles de Vladimir Wolski / PARTITION D’ORCHESTRE / Propriété des Editeurs pour tous les pays / VARSOVIE / chez G. Gebethner & R. Wolff.

As the future was to show, the ambitious plans made by Moniuszko’s friends for promoting his work in the French capital finally turned out to be unrealistic. A second journey to Paris, undertaken by the composer at the turn of two difficult years: 1861 and 1862 (marked in Poland by political unrest that preceded the January Uprising against the tsarist tyranny), was almost totally fruitless in this respect. He came back with his scores (the printed version of *Halka* as well as the manuscripts of *Hrabina* and *Verbum nobile*), which did not find sufficient favour with the French.

The obvious question is: just how much effort did Moniuszko put into this enterprise in reality, and just how many essential steps did he take to make himself known to the French? He did make a few courtesy visits, among others to Rossini, Auber, Gounod as well as (and this fact has been missing from his biographies published so far) Prince Józef Poniatowski, whose name has been mentioned earlier.

This, however, was not enough. From the composer’s correspondence, and the descriptions of his biographers, one can get the impression that what he did was done awkwardly, usually without prior preparation, and also without the essential and effective support from influential figures. Much food for thought is provided here particularly by the fact that both the daily Parisian press, and the local periodicals devoted to cultural events – and even music journals – seem to have been almost unaware of his two visits to that city. And yet things could have been very different, as is demonstrated by the example of Ignacy Feliks Dobrzyński (1807–1867), whose battle for a German première of the opera *Monbar czyli Flibustierowie*, fought some dozen years earlier (and also unsuccessful) at least left numerous traces in German periodicals and brought its author a number of tangible benefits: composer’s concerts, which presented fragments of the opera being ‘promoted’, as well as his symphonic,

piano and chamber music and vocal compositions, meant that Dobrzyński's works gained interest both of German publishers and local performers.

Moniuszko's visits to France were also close in time to Wagner's famous battle over the première of *Tannhäuser* at the Grand Opéra in Paris during the years 1860–1861. This case, well known from textbooks devoted to the history of music, demonstrates clearly that promoting one's work demanded more than willingness and artistic talent from operatic composers arriving in Paris from abroad. Of much greater importance were more prosaic skills, such as the ability to attract the favour both of large numbers of members of the local artistic community, and – perhaps primarily – finding influential and generous patrons. We should remember that Wagner could not have stayed in Paris at the beginning of the eighteen-sixties for such a long time without substantial financial backing (unlike Moniuszko's typical 'Parisian' letters, Wagner's correspondence from that period does not contain references to the dreadful state of his accommodation, or to significant financial constraints). Even more importantly, without such backing it would have been impossible to generate the whole propaganda campaign, with its powerful echoes throughout the press, or to organise memorable composer's concerts at the Théâtre Italien, with their lively resonance in the writings of prominent figures like Charles Baudelaire or the most popular opera critics of the day, such as Pierangelo Fiorentino (1811–1864), or Paul Scudo (1806–1864). In a sense, Moniuszko, with his personality so diametrically different from Wagner's Mephistophelian character, and with a more modest talent and scale of artistic ambitions, was from the start condemned to fail in an environment so alien to him. Far from being driven by a reforming zeal, a follower of the 'Auberian' operatic style, Moniuszko was also a representative of a nation deprived of its statehood and actively limited in its cultural development by the partitioning powers (Russia, Prussia and Austria). His chances of making an impact in a place where one had to engage in a long and intense struggle in order to be noticed at all were thus very small – let alone those of achieving fame, even at the price of a scandal (paradoxically, the scandal which surrounded the première of *Tannhäuser* in Paris in 1861 provided Wagner with excellent publicity).

In any case, with time *Halka* came to be appreciated also beyond the boundaries of the three partitions. Disregarded in the West of Europe of the day, Moniuszko soon won renown in Slavonic countries. His opera was admired in Prague (1868), Moscow (1869) and St Petersburg (1870) even during the composer's lifetime, and, soon after his death, in Kiev (1874).

We should remember that these premières undoubtedly would not have taken place had it not been for the publication of the score in 1861. It was this edition of the orchestral score of *Halka* – published in four volumes with a total of nearly one thousand large format pages – which satisfied the need for higher numbers of copies of the work, and made possible its progress along Slavonic stages. As time would show, this edition had absolute reign over conductors' podiums for more than forty years, until 1904, when the so-called 'Jubilee Edition' of the orchestral score of *Halka*, funded by Leopold baron Kronenberg (1849–1937) and edited with great care by Emil Młynarski (1870–1935), talented conductor and Konrad Zawilowski (1880–1952), singer and musicologist, finally made its appearance.

Rara avis alba...

The *Umdruck*, also described by Polish specialists in music editing as 'przedruk' (reprint / overprint), and in archival inventories as 'autolitografia' (autolithography), was a form of simplified lithographic technique. It consisted in

mimeographing pages of the score from a matrix written in a special, slow-drying ink, referred to by Moniuszko as ‘atrament chemiczny’ (chemical ink). The technical simplicity which characterised this primitive printing method meant that one could avoid high costs and the many difficulties involved in creating an engraving. However, it also had the disadvantage – its productivity was extremely low (there was thus no exaggeration in the claim by a Warsaw journalist that the score being prepared for publication would soon become ‘a bibliographic rarity’).

We may guess that a few, perhaps more than a dozen copies of Halka’s orchestral score, mimeographed using the *Umdruck* method, found their way directly to opera theatres, where for decades they were used as performance material. During the many years of use the majority of them came to be totally or partially illegible. At least, this is the likely course of events suggested by the fact that only a few single volumes of that edition have survived in various library collections until now (a separate volume was devoted to each act), while there is only one complete copy which includes all four volumes. Krzysztof Mazur, an undoubted expert on Moniuszko’s first printings, was not aware of the existence of this bibliophile’s ‘white crow’. He referred to the existence of only the first three volumes of the edition, remarking that “so far it has not been possible to find the volume 4”.

It is worth noting that during the 1860s Moniuszko used an identical copy in his work as conductor. Until 1944 this copy was held at the Biblioteka Muzyczna Teatru Wielkiego w Warszawie. Unfortunately, the printed score used by the Polish composer shared the fate of numerous other archives and monuments in Warsaw, burnt down during the Second World War as a result of the barbaric actions of the German troops, so destructive of so much priceless heritage of Poland’s national culture. The loss of that score is all the more acute because it was the only copy containing minor manuscript corrections successively introduced by Moniuszko himself (including – although not exclusively – corrections of the printing errors caused by the hasty execution of the *Umdruck* method of printing). Only a part of these corrections by the composer survived to our day. We owe this to the scrupulousness of Adam Münchheimer (1830–1904), Polish conductor and composer of Jewish origin who, being aware of the enormous importance of manuscript interventions by Moniuszko in a printed score, copied them out in 1896 into a copy of the printed score (unfortunately today also incomplete, consisting of only the first two volumes) held in the collection of Biblioteka, Muzeum i Archiwum Warszawskiego Towarzystwa Muzycznego. These corrections will have to be taken into account in future by those who produce a scholarly, critical edition of the orchestral score of *Halka*. We are deeply convinced that the creation of such an edition is only a matter of time.

From Lwów to Silesia, from Silesia to Warsaw

The unique first print of the orchestral score of *Halka* on which the facsimile edition is based is currently held in the Warsaw collection of Biblioteka Materiałów Orkiestrowych Polskiego Wydawnictwa Muzycznego S.A. (previously Centralna Biblioteka Nutowa Polskiego Wydawnictwa Muzycznego). The imprints on its sheets indicate that it previously belonged to the Biblioteka Opery Śląskiej in Bytom. But how did the Opera of Silesia come to be in possession of this rare orchestral score?

On the one hand, from the beginning it seemed justifiable to suppose that the copy in question could have found its way to Silesia after the Second World War together with the collection of Lwów theatrical memorabilia, a significant part of which is held today at the Biblioteka Śląska in Katowice. The Lwów provenance of this copy is confirmed both by the stamp on its title page (the bookshop Księgarnia Karola Wilda, which imported it to Lwów and sold it), and the stamp of the bookbinders responsible for its first binding (“Zakład Introligatorsko-galanteryjny

J[ana] Kostiuka we Lwowie”). However, the ‘post-Lwów’ collection in Katowice comprises texts only, i.e., manuscript and typescript theatre copies of plays and opera librettos, while the fate of music prints and music manuscripts belonging to the Lwów collection (seized by Soviet authorities in 1944), is still unknown. It was also difficult to establish whether this copy of *Halka* really did come from the collection of the music library of the pre-war Lwów Opera because – as it initially appeared – no imprints or annotations could be seen on it which would confirm this as a fact. The mystery was finally solved only after a more thorough examination of the first print of the score of *Halka* reproduced here. The only surviving imprint confirming that at one time this copy belonged to the collection of Biblioteka Teatru Lwowskiego was found in the third volume of the opera.

There are no other Lwów stamps on it. If such imprints were ever stamped, they may have been removed by later users for a variety of reasons. However, the fact that the copy in question belonged to the collection of the Lwów theatre is also confirmed by the characteristic labels with the title of the work inscribed by hand (these were part of the original cover), which were painstakingly removed by the conservators from the inside of what turned out to be secondary covers of individual volumes. Similar labels can be found on the covers of other volumes belonging to the post-Lwów collection of theatrical memorabilia.

In the autumn of 2010, on the initiative of the Editors of “Monumenta Musicae in Polonia” and thanks to the financial resources allocated to this project by the Instytut Sztuki Polskiej Akademii Nauk (IS PAN – the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences), the unique score of *Halka* held by the collection of Biblioteka Materiałów Orkiestrowych Polskiego Wydawnictwa Muzycznego S.A. – a priceless relic of Polish music printing – underwent a thorough renovation. This work was entrusted to the employees of Zakład Konserwacji Zbiorów Biblioteki Narodowej w Warszawie. Shortly afterwards, at the beginning of 2011, Mr. Piotr Jamski, specialist from the Pracownia Fotograficzna IS PAN digitalised the copy which had been ‘refreshed’ in this way, and made it possible to produce the recently published facsimile edition.

The tendency to ‘correct’ the bard of Polish opera goes back a long way, and in some ways is still active today. It is rooted in our hidden, subcutaneous mistrust regarding the quality and artistic value of Moniuszko’s operatic output. An inclination towards such an attitude characterised many stage directors as well as conductors – one might start with Stanisław Niewiadomski (who experimented with the stage arrangement of *Halka* in Lwów), follow with Leon Schiller (who tendentiously emphasised the ‘revolutionary’ elements in *Halka*, turning it into one of the leading elements of the cultural propaganda of People’s Poland, in line with Marxist ideology), and end with the conductor Marcin Sompoliński (the latter, as we may remember, carried out his own ‘correction’ of the score for the purposes of the Poznań première of the work a dozen years ago).

The facsimile edition of the first printing of *Halka* presents the Warsaw version of the opera which was – a fact that should be strongly emphasised – authorised by Moniuszko himself. The aim of this edition is to make this unique and very inaccessible source available to wider circles of musicologists, musicians and music lovers in Poland and abroad. We would like to ensure that, in this way, the text of *Halka*, both words and music, should be preserved for future generations in a version which bears Moniuszko’s *imprimatur*. It is free of all the later accretions, which were not always in accord with the composer’s intentions, and unjustified interference by alien hands. Here is the Warsaw *Halka*, stripped of ‘polishings’, ‘corrections’ and ‘improvements’. And without the ideological falsehoods imposed under communism in the era of People’s Poland.

We hope that this priceless source material will attract lively interest from researchers, academics, performers, and all those opera lovers who want to see the true picture of Moniuszko's legacy. We trust that this edition of *Halka* will provide the impulse that initiates a number of new performances of our leading operatic work – ones which are faithful to the composer's original. And, after years of dearth of Polish research into the works of 'the father of Polish opera', what a good thing it would be if this edition inspired us to take a fresh look at his creation – a look that is new, free of prejudice, and entanglement in ideological stereotypes.

Translated by Zofia Weaver

Stanisław Moniuszko: HALKA. Libretto Włodzimierz Wolski. Orchestral Score (Warszawa 1861), Facsimile Edition, Introduction and Commentaries: Grzegorz Zieziula, Warszawa 2012: Instytut Sztuki PAN – Stowarzyszenie Liber Pro Arte, vol. 1–4, (= „Monumenta Musicae in Polonia”, ed. Barbara Przybyszewska-Jarmińska, Series D: „Bibliotheca Antiqua”), ISBN 978-83-63877-12-5, ISBN 978-83-92343-80-6