

“There Are Already Three Hundred Thousand of Us:”

A Self-Referential Look at Fans and Performers in Polish Big-Beat Songs from the 1960s and Early 1970s

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Big beat, which first appeared in the People’s Republic of Poland in the late 1950s and developed in the 1960s and early 1970s, was recognized by the contemporary Polish society as an important phenomenon. This is evidenced by press articles from that period (not only from the music press but also socio-political newspapers and journals), interviews given years later by musicians, fans, politicians — as well as, interestingly, big-beat songs themselves, and especially their lyrics.

Although big-beat songs, like most pop culture products, talk about the everyday problems of teenagers, especially relationship problems and love, many lyrics are, quite surprisingly, self-referential. They talk directly about music targeted at teenagers and young adults, including Western stars, the Polish big-beat scene, performers, and fans. In the present article, I will try to trace the nature of this big-beat self-reflection, i.e., analyze what exactly Polish performers sang about big beat in the 1960s, and how it was related to the ongoing contemporary discussion about teenage music in communist Poland. In order to better outline the context of the era, I will first discuss images of youth in big-beat songs and then move on to actual big-beat self-referential songs, i.e., songs in which Polish performers sang about themselves and the role played by their music.¹

¹ This article contains paraphrased and extended excerpts from the doctoral dissertation currently written by the author at the Faculty of History of the Jagiellonian University.

Self-referentiality will be defined in keeping with Artur Sandauer's original concept, dating back to the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s (although, of course, examples of self-referentiality may be found in much older works). Sandauer and other scholars after him argued that self-referential works reflect on their origin, creative process, author(s), and legacy.²

"A song with a hoop," or an attempt to infantilize big beat

Rhythm & Blues, founded in the Tri-City³, is generally considered to be the first Polish big-beat band (although when the band was founded, the term "big beat" did not exist). The band played their first concert in March 1959 in Rudy Kot [Red Cat], a club in Gdańsk, and quickly achieved great popularity, with thousands of young people starved for modern Western music attending their concerts. At the same time, however, the press and communist party leaders complained about and criticized the music performed by Rhythm & Blues and the behavior of the band's teenage audience. After the band's concert in Katowice, in September 1959, the group's manager, Franciszek Walicki, was summoned to the local Provincial Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party where a "Very Important Official"⁴ reportedly informed him that the Silesian youth would "prefer to spend their time on more cultured pursuits" as they were not interested in "degenerate" rock and roll; respectively, Walicki was told that the concert in Katowice "was the band's last performance [...]".⁵ Indeed, the Ministry of Culture and Art sent out a letter to all local chapters of culture and art national councils prohibiting Rhythm & Blues from performing in concert halls with more than 400 seats, which effectively led to the band's dissolution in the mid-1960s.⁶

At the same time, however, another band managed by Walicki, i.e., Czerwono-Czarni [The Red-and-Blacks], was formed. As Walicki recalled, "it was supposed to be basically the same band, only under a different name."⁷ However, in order to avoid further difficulties posed by the communist authorities, and to please the older generations of Poles, Walicki and the members of the band made a number of decisions which altered the nature of Czerwono-Czarni's music. This is how the term "big beat" was coined; the phrase "rock and roll," clearly associated with Western pop culture, was no longer used to define new music for teenagers. Another of Walicki's "colorful" bands, Niebiesko-Czarni [The Blue-and-Blacks], popularized the slogan "Polish youth sings Polish songs," which was meant to convince the public and the authorities that big beat was an original Polish creation and had little in common with American or British trends. Czerwono-Czarni's and Niebiesko-Czarni's music also began to change in the first half of the 1960s. Although both bands' first EPs were dominated by covers of Western rock-and-roll hits (sometimes

² Joanna Grądział-Wójcik, "Literature's Perpetuum Mobile, or A Few Words on Self-Referentiality", *Forum of Poetics* 2 (Feb. 2015): 86–95; Ewa Szary-Matywiecka, "Autotematyzm" [Self-referentiality], in: *Słownik literatury polskiej XX wieku* [Dictionary of Polish 20th-century Literature], ed. Alina Brodzka-Wald et al. (Wrocław–Warsaw–Kraków: Ossolineum, 1995), 54–62.

³ Metropolitan area consisting of three Polish cities: Gdańsk, Gdynia, and Sopot.

⁴ Band members later admitted that it was Edward Gierek, the then First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party Committee in Katowice. See: Paweł Chmielewski, *Partia, pieniądze, rock & roll* [Communist party, money, rock & roll], part 1 *Ciuciubabka* [Blind man's buff] (Gdańsk: TVP, 1997), documentary.

⁵ Franciszek Walicki, *Szukaj, burz, buduj* [Search, destroy, build] (Warsaw: TRZ, 1995), 97–98.

⁶ Marek Gaszyński, *Cudowne lata. Moja historia rock and rolla w Polsce* [Beautiful years. My history of rock and roll in Poland] (Ożarów Mazowiecki: Wydawnictwo Olesiejuk, 2012), 50.

⁷ Walicki, 107.

with original lyrics,⁸ sometimes translated into Polish⁹), more and more adaptations of Polish folk songs,¹⁰ Latin American,¹¹ and Soviet¹² melodies began to appear on subsequent albums. These songs did not refer to modern trends in teenage music, and instead, as Mariusz Gradowski rightly notices, “drew on the old canon of entertainment for more mature listeners.”¹³

The sound softened and the lyrics became more infantile. Although the term “nastolatki” first appeared in Poland at the turn of the 1950s and the 1960s, popularized by Władysław Kopaliński as the equivalent of the English term “teenagers”,¹⁴ some older people stubbornly did not want to recognize the ongoing generational changes and tried to treat adolescents as children. It is demonstrated by *Piosenka z kółkiem* [A song with a hoop]¹⁵ from Czerwono-Czarni’s first LP released in 1966, with lyrics by Kazimierz Winkler. Katarzyna Sobczyk sang:

Baśka z Irką wciąż bawią się w sklepik	Baśka and Irka play shop all the time
Jolka szyje dla lalek sukienki	Jolka sews dresses for dolls
A ja z kółkiem się bawię najlepiej	And I have the best time rolling my hoop ^{<?>}
I śpiewam sobie piosenki	And I sing songs to myself

Piosenka z kółkiem, piosenka z kółkiem	A song with a hoop, a song with a hoop
Dogoni szybko jak wiatr jaskółkę	It’ll catch up with the swallow as fast as the wind
To wesolutka, to znowu rzewna	It’s jolly and it’s tender
Lecz nie z powodu łez i pożegnań	But not because of tears and goodbyes

Gdy kółko się toczy wciąż dalej przed siebie	As the hoop rolls on and on
Piosenka z radości jest w siódmym niebie	This joyous song is on cloud nine
Lecz kiedy kółeczko przewróci się znów	But when the little hoop turns over
Piosenka zmartwiona zapomni wnet słów	This worried song soon forgets the words
La-la-la-la-la-la-la-la-la-la	La-la-la-la-la-la-la-la-la-la

Czasem idę do parku miejskiego	I sometimes go to the city park
By z ptaszkami podzielić się bułką	To feed some bread to the birds
Spotkać kogoś: „Dzień dobry, kolego”	To run into someone: “Good morning, buddy”
I śpiewać sobie tak w kółko	And sing to myself over and over again

⁸ Cf.: Czerwono-Czarni, *Sweet Little Sixteen*, the 3rd song on the album *Elevator Rock* (Pronit, 1961).

⁹ Cf.: Czerwono-Czarni, *Lucille*, the 3rd song on the album *Twist* (Muza, 1962).

¹⁰ Cf.: Niebiesko-Czarni, *Na swojską nutę* [Familiar note] (Muza, 1963).

¹¹ Cf.: Niebiesko-Czarni, *El soldado de levita*, the 2nd song on the album *Adieu tristesse* (Pronit, 1962).

¹² Cf.: Czerwono-Czarni, *Wieczór na redzie* [Evening at the roadstead], the 2nd song on the album *Cztery mile za piec* [Four miles behind the heater] (Pronit, 1963).

¹³ Mariusz Gradowski, *Big beat. Style i gatunki polskiej muzyki młodzieżowej, 1957–1973* [Big beat. Styles and genres of Polish teenage music, 1957–1973] (Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza ASPRA-JR, 2018), 121–122.

¹⁴ Władysław Kopaliński, “Autentyczny widz” [Authentic spectator], *Życie Warszawy*, 2 May 1959; after: Witold Doroszewski, *O kulturę słowa* [For the culture of the word], vol. II (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1968), 331–332.

¹⁵ Czerwono-Czarni, *Piosenka z kółkiem* [A song with a hoop], the 10th song on the album *Czerwono-Czarni* [The Red-and-Blacks] (Muza, 1966).

Although Katarzyna Sobczyk was over 20 when she performed *Piosenka z kółkiem*, Winkler's lyrics seem to describe what children ten years her junior would do: hoop rolling, playing with dolls, or playing shop. In Polish, the infantile is additionally enhanced by the accumulation of diminutives ("sklepik" [little shop], "wesolutka" [jolly], "kółeczko" [little hoop], "ptaszki" [birdies]) and the fact that Sobczyk's voice is clearly stylized as that of a child. Other songs on the LP are similar; for example, *Czy krasnoludki są na świecie* [Do dwarfs exist?]¹⁶ or *Tato, kup mi džinsy* ["Dad, buy me a pair of jeans"],¹⁷ a song which, on the one hand, refers to a contemporary youth fad ("tato, wszyscy mają džinsy" [Dad, everyone has a pair of jeans]) and, on the other hand, shows a girl who depends on her parents, whom she has to ask to buy her dream jeans ("tato, nie mów, że są za drogie / jak to wytłumaczyć Tobie" [Dad, don't say they are too expensive / how can I explain it to you]).

"Your school shield is no longer on your sleeve," or two looks at
teenagerhood

In the mid-1960s, the question of teenagers began to be discussed more widely and adolescence began to be directly associated with big-beat music. As Witold Pograniczny explained years later, "it was the music of the young; it was truly their own. [...] Before, a young man, after graduating from high school, put on his father's old suit and became an adult. Rock seemed to prolong our youth."¹⁸ The language of the youth also began to change significantly, and the changes were thought to have been brought about by big beat. On the one hand, young people began quoting big-beat songs in their everyday conversations. The musicologist Waław Panek described it, in a characteristic way, as "using musical proverbs from contemporary teenage hits."¹⁹ On the other hand, teenage slang, teenagers, and their problems began to find their way to the lyrics of big-beat songs more often, and some of these songs became, as Krzysztof Kosiński later explained, "musical manifestos" of the young generation.²⁰

However, the perception of teenagers' needs and problems was still very distorted. A good example of this is Czerwone Gitary's [The Red Guitars] hit *Dozwolone do lat 18-tu* [Only for under 18s].²¹ It should be mentioned (and I will come back to this question) that one of the authors of the lyrics was Kazimierz Winkler – the same who had written *Piosenka z kółkiem* a few years earlier. Teenagerhood in Czerwone Gitary's his is described thus:

¹⁶Czerwono-Czarni, *Czy krasnoludki są na świecie* [Do dwarfs exist?], the 8th song on the album *Czerwono-Czarni* (Muza, 1966).

¹⁷Czerwono-Czarni, *Tato, kup mi džinsy* [Dad, buy me a pair of jeans], the 13th song on the album *Czerwono-Czarni* (Muza, 1966).

¹⁸Maria Szabłowska, *Cały ten big beat* [All that big beat] (Łódź: Opus, 1993), 15.

¹⁹Waław Panek, *Jazz, beat i rozrywka* [Jazz, Beat and Entertainment] (Warsaw: Centralny Ośrodek Metodyki Upowszechniania Kultury, 1973), 45.

²⁰Krzysztof Kosiński, *Oficjalne i prywatne życie młodzieży w czasach PRL* [Official and private life of young people in the times of the Polish People's Republic] (Warsaw: Rosner & Wspólnicy, 2006), 337–343.

²¹Czerwone Gitary, *Dozwolone do lat 18-tu* [Only for under 18s], the 7th song on the album *Czerwone Gitary 3* (Muza, 1968).

Nie możemy iść dzisiaj do kina
 Dozwolone od lat 18
 Mówić: „chłopiec mój”, „moja dziewczyna”
 Dozwolone od lat 18
 Czy mi wolno zakochać się w tobie
 W twym uśmiechu i w twych oczu blasku?
 Czy ktoś głosem surowym nie powie
 „Dozwolone od lat 18”?

Taki refren powtarza starszy brat
 „Dozwolone od 18 lat”
 Więc po nocach się śni, już każdy zgadł
 „Dozwolone od 18 lat”

Lecz możemy umówić się z wiosną
 Dozwolone do lat 18
 Śmiać się, śpiewać piosenki zbyt głośno
 Dozwolone do lat 18
 W śnieżną bitwę zabawić się zimą
 Dozwolone do lat 18
 Mówić „serwus” do swojej dziewczyny
 Dozwolone do lat 18

Nowy refren powtarza wszystkim wiatr
 „Dozwolone do 18 lat”
 Znow po nocach się śni, już każdy zgadł
 „Dozwolone do 18 lat”

We can't go to the movies today
 It's only for over 18s
 We can't say "my boyfriend," "my girlfriend"
 It's only for over 18s
 Am I allowed to fall in love with you
 In your smile and in your glowing eyes?
 Or will someone say in a stern voice
 "It's only for over 18s"?

This chorus is repeated by the older brother
 "It's only for over 18s"
 So, you dream at night about, you guessed it
 "It's only for over 18s"

But we can go on a date with the spring
 It's only for under 18s
 Laugh, sing songs way too loud
 It's only for under 18s
 Have fun in the snow in the winter
 It's only for under 18s
 Say "howdy" to your girlfriend
 It's only for under 18s

A new chorus is repeated by the wind
 "It's only for under 18s"
 So, you dream at night about you know what
 "It's only for under 18s"

The lyrics may be divided into two parts: a list of activities for “over 18s” and things suitable for “under 18s.” According to this peculiar guide for teenagers, under 18s are not allowed to go to the cinema, publicly express their feelings by calling their partner “boyfriend” or “girlfriend,” and perhaps they are not even allowed to fall in love with another person. They are allowed to, however, say “serwus” (which was a fairly cool but neutral greeting in the late 1960s)²² to their crush, laugh together, sing songs and throw snowballs at each other. The lyrics to the song by Czerwone Gitary, the leading big-beat band of their time, mark a clear line between childhood and adulthood, and it is simply the moment one turns 18. There is no question of any transitional period, i.e., teenagerhood, nor are the actual actions or desires of teenage Poles described. Back in the 1980s, B. Lee Cooper pointed out that it is important not to look at pop song lyrics only as a reflection of the author’s feelings and thoughts, but also, and perhaps most of all, as a testament to social changes.²³ These changes were not re-

²²“Serwus”, now outdated, can be somehow compared to “howdy”, “ahoy”, or “ciao”.

²³B. Lee Cooper, “A Popular Music Perspective. Challenging Sexism in the Social Studies Classroom”, *The Social Studies* 2 (1980): 71–76.

flected in Winkler's lyrics. Another song by Czerwone Gitary, *Nikt nam nie weźmie młodości* [Nobody will take our youth away from us],²⁴ was also clearly pedagogical. It criticized young people's antics and showed how they should behave: "nie chcemy pić wina" [we don't want to drink wine], "nie warto w karty grać" [we don't want to gamble], "latarni wcale nie chcemy tłuc" [we don't want to break streetlamps], "spędzamy w domu każdą noc" [we spend every night at home].

One can find out just how unrealistic and didactic in nature the image of adolescence presented in the two above-mentioned songs by Czerwone Gitary was by comparing it with the lyrics to a less popular big-beat song from the same period, namely *Osiemnaście lat* [Eighteen]²⁵ by Czarne Golfy [The Black Turtle-necks], a band that ultimately did not manage to win Poland over, even though many thought they could. Roman Stinzing and Andrzej Icha explain that "the band was considered the best in the Tri-City."²⁶ Czarne Golfy were indeed a unique band, as seen in the lyrics to *Osiemnaście lat*:

Znikła tarcza już z rękawa	Your school shield is no longer on your sleeve
Biała bluzka poszła w ką	You don't wear the white blouse no more
Już co wieczór czarna kawa	Black coffee every evening
Kawa – no i on	Coffee – and he
Przesiadujesz u fryzjera	You hang out at the hairdresser
Szminka zdobi twoją twarz	You wear lipstick
Do torebki co dzień rano	Every morning you shove
Dowód osobisty pchasz	Your ID into your purse
Osiemnaście w torcie świeczek	You've blown
Już zdmuchnął	Eighteen candles on your birthday cake
Mama wino, to z porzeczek	Your mother has put
Wyciągnęła	Blackcurrant wine on the table
Maturalny, rozbawiony	High school graduation tune
Przebrzmiał walczyk	Is in the past now
A na płaszczu śladu nie ma	And the school shield
Już po tarczy	Is no longer on your sleeve
Już na filmy dla dorosłych	You can go to the movies
Możesz chodzić również ty	And watch everything you want
I uparcie, choć nie lubisz	And, even though you do not like it
Papierosy możesz ćmić	You can and will smoke cigarettes

²⁴Czerwone Gitary, *Nikt nam nie weźmie młodości* [Nobody will take our youth away from us], the 10th song on the album *Czerwone Gitary 2* (Muza, 1967).

²⁵Czarne Golfy, *Osiemnaście lat* [Eighteen], a song from the CD attached to the book: Roman Stinzing, Andrzej Icha, *Motława-Beat. Trójmiejska scena big-beatowa lat 60-tych* [Motława-Beat. The Tri-City big-beat scene in the 1960s] (Gdański Kantor Wydawniczy, 2009).

²⁶Stinzing, Icha, 31.

Czasem tylko „Filipinkę”
 Czytasz, gdy nie widzi nikt
 We wspomnieniach często wracasz
 Do tych szkolnych dobrych chwil

Sometimes, when nobody can see
 You read “Filipinka”
 And dream about
 Those good old times at school

This vision of turning 18 is much more ambiguous, and therefore more credible. A young girl has just turned 18, as evidenced not only by certain symbols, a school shield that is no longer on her sleeve and her new ID, but also by her actions: drinking coffee, dating (seen as nothing unusual), drinking alcohol, going to the hairdresser, wearing makeup, and smoking. Interestingly, this is not a black and white naive vision: the girl smokes cigarettes but does not like it and does it for show; she also still secretly reads “Filipinka” [Philipine], although she knows that at her age it may be seen as childish.²⁷ It is clear that she is somewhere in-between childhood and adulthood. The lyrics show a significant transformation that took place in the 1960s in the lives of teenage girls. As Katarzyna Stańczak-Wiślicz observes: “Attending high school was becoming the new norm. [...] For girls, growing up began to be associated with going to school or acquiring professional training and not just with entering the matrimonial market. [...] A seventeen- or eighteen-year-old young woman, previously expected to marry right away, became a teenage girl: she studied and worked, wanted to date but not to marry, not just yet.”²⁸

Interesting depictions of teenagerhood may also be found in the works of other less known big-beat bands. For example, in their song *Na wagary* [Playing truant]²⁹ Minstrele [The Minstrels] from Lublin sing about teenagers (“każdy ma 16 lat” [everyone is 16]) who want to enjoy a nice day (“w dzień upalny szkoda słońca” [let’s not waste a warm sunny day]) and decide to play truant (“na wagary chodzisz ty i chodzę ja” [I play truant and you do too]), so that they can forget about everyday problems (“lekarstwo na zmartwienia to wagary” [playing truant is a cure for worries]) and learn new things (“na wagarach możesz poznać cały świat” [you can learn about so many things when you’re not at school]).

In the latter half of the 1960s, teenage big-beat fans could listen to songs that not only met their expectations in terms of music (following current Western trends), but also seemed to address real life problems in the lyrics. In reality, however, the image of adolescence in most big-beat lyrics was distorted. The songs of the most popular bands were educational and didactic in nature: they did not describe how young people truly behaved but rather how they should behave. A more realistic image of teenage life could be found in the songs by less known local bands, which did not get the chance to release many LPs or appear on TV.

²⁷ „Filipinka” was a magazine for teenage girls, and adult women rather tended to read magazines like “Kobieta i Życie” [Woman and Life].

²⁸ Katarzyna Stańczak-Wiślicz et al., *Kobiety w Polsce 1945–1989. Nowoczesność, równouprawnienie, komunizm* [Women in Poland 1945–1989. Modernity, equality, communism] (Kraków: Universitas, 2020), 217–218.

²⁹ Minstrele, *Na wagary* [Playing truant], the 1st song on the album *Kudłaci przyjaciele. Nagrania archiwalne z lat 1966–1969* [Shaggy friends. Archival recordings from 1966–1969] (Kameleon Records, 2020).

"Don't be such a Beatle," or a generational conflict

Big-beat songs about and for teenagers could not ignore a very important part of the teenage life, namely the teenage music itself. This is how real self-referentiality gradually began to be more and more noticeable in big-beat works. However, these songs about foreign and Polish idols and their fans also contained some didactic themes. In 1964, during the international wave of Beatlemania, Niebiesko-Czarni recorded the song *Nie bądź taki Bitels* [Don't be such a Beatle].³⁰ The lyrics were written by the band's manager, Walicki (under the pseudonym Jacek Grań), and read:

„Nie bądź taki Bitels”, mówi do mnie tata	“Don't be such a Beatle,” my dad tells me
A mama, jak to mama: „Do fryzjera idź”	And my mom adds: “Cut your hair”
„Bo za tobą fryzjer z nożyczkami lata”	“Because the barber is chasing after you”
„Zetnij wreszcie kudły, wstydz się synu, wstydz”	“Cut your long hair, shame on you, my son”
A ja na to tacie: „Tato zacofany”	And I say to my dad: “Dad, you're old”
„Tato nawet nie wie, taka moda dziś”	“You don't even know what is fashionable”
A już co do mamy, taką mamy mamę	And as for my mom, it's just who she is
Że o Liverpoolach nie słyszała nic	She's never heard about the band from Liverpool
Zetnij, bracie, kudły i nie rób na złość mamie	Cut your long hair, listen to your mother
Wiemy, że to trudno – sami mamy mamę	We know it's hard – we have moms too
Więc gdy mama gdera, jedna rada na to	So, when your mom complains, all you can do is
Do fryzjera, bracie, do fryzjera idź	Cut your long hair, brother
Zrób to choć dla mamy, zrób to choć dla taty	Do it for your mom, do it for your dad
Przecież z rodzicami trzeba dobrze żyć	After all, you have to get on with your parents

The very title suggests that it is a self-referential song about teenage music. Soon, however, it turns out that it was not about the Beatles, but the Polish fans of the fab four from Liverpool. Moreover, the lyrics of the song describe these young fans in a critical way, suggesting that they blindly follow Western trends (“You don't even know what is fashionable”). A symbolic expression of this obsession with the West is the long hair that the parents do not like. It was a reflection of a real generational conflict which developed in Poland in the 1960s. As Anna Pelka observes, “in the 1960s, the generation of parents watched in horror as their sons grew long hair.”³¹ In one of the episodes of the Polish TV series *Wojna domowa* [War at home], the parents of the young protagonist Paweł, Mr. and Mrs. Jankowski, saw their son's long hair as their parental failure.³² And what solution to this generational conflict is offered

³⁰Niebiesko-Czarni, *Nie bądź taki Bitels* [Don't be such a Beatle], the 3rd song on the album *Czas jak rzeka* [Time like a river] (Pronit, 1964).

³¹Anna Pelka, *Teksas-land. Moda młodzieżowa w PRL* [Texas-land. Youth trends in the People's Republic of Poland] (Warsaw: Trio, 2007), 66.

³²Jerzy Gruza, *Wojna domowa* [War at home], episode 2 *Bilet za fryzjera* [Ticket for going to the barber] (Zespół Filmowy Syrena, 1965).

in the aforementioned song by Niebiesko-Czarni? Walicki's lyrics state it directly: "Cut your long hair, listen to your mother."

A similar look at teenage music (and fashion) may also be found in other big-beat songs from the early 1960s; for example, in Czerwono-Czarni's 1963 hit song *O mnie się nie martw* [Don't you worry about me].³³ Katarzyna Sobczyk sings the lyrics written by Kazimierz Winkler; she is addressing a man who is the embodiment of all evil ("Same zmartwienia tylko przez ciebie mam" [You only make me worry]). One of the reasons for the misunderstanding between the two is that they listen to different music: "Zawsze lubiłam stare piosenki, a ty wolałeś big beat" [I've always liked the old songs and you preferred big beat]. Why would big beat be criticized in songs that were allegedly targeted at young people? If we look at the people who wrote lyrics to big-beat songs at the time, such as Zbigniew Kaszukur, Jerzy Kleyny, Franciszek Walicki, or Kazimierz Winkler, we discover that they were born in the 1920s and, as in Winkler's case, even in the late 1910s. As Walicki observed, "There was a significant age difference between me and my protégés. We belonged to different generations, we had different mentalities, we dressed differently, acted differently, even talked differently."³⁴ The lyricists were a generation older than most members of big-beat bands and their fans; it was difficult for them to understand the needs and problems of young people, so they described them from their own, often didactic, perspective.

"Who can resist us?," or accepting big beat

"Diluted big beat" from the first half of the 1960s, with its softened sound and didactic lyrics, brought about at least one positive effect. In the following years, the acceptance of big beat among older generations of Poles gradually increased. This trend was also reflected in the lyrics, especially in the self-referential big-beat song *Trzysta tysięcy gitar* [Three Hundred Thousand Guitars]³⁵ from Czerwono-Czarni's first LP:

Z początku było nas bardzo mało	At first, there were very few of us
Jak dobrych rymów w piosence	Like good rhymes in a song
Chłopcy, dziewczęta – radio podało	Boys, girls – the radio reported that
Jest nas już trzysta tysięcy	There are already three hundred thousand of us
Chłopcy, dziewczęta, któż nam się oprze	Boys, girls, who can resist us
Aż trudno temu dać wiarę	It's hard to believe
Właśnie sprzedano – radio podało	The radio announced that
Trzystutysięczną gitarę	The three hundred thousandth guitar has just been sold

³³Czerwono-Czarni, *O mnie się nie martw* [Don't you worry about me] (Pronit, 1963).

³⁴Walicki, 128–129.

³⁵Czerwono-Czarni, *Trzysta tysięcy gitar* [Three Hundred Thousand Guitars], the 11th song on the album *Czerwono-Czarni* (Muza, 1966).

Trzysta tysięcy gitar nam gra	Three hundred thousand guitars are playing for us
Żyć, nie umierać	Life's great
Trzysta tysięcy gitar co dnia	Three hundred thousand guitars every day
Żyć, nie umierać	Life's great
O tych gitarach każdy z nas śnił	We all dreamed about these guitars
I forszę zbierał	And we were all saving money
Trzysta tysięcy woła od dziś	Three hundred thousand are calling since today
Żyć, nie umierać	Life's great

The lyrical subject of this song (sung by Karin Stanek) addresses Polish boys and girls, singing on their behalf: "There are already three hundred thousand of us." We soon learn that the number in question is the number of guitars sold in the People's Republic of Poland – guitar being a true symbol of the popular music of that time. The lyrics are not as critical of big beat as the other songs, and they even refer to this musical phenomenon enthusiastically – Stanek repeats in the chorus "żyć, nie umierać" [life's great].

What caused this change? Firstly, it is worth noting that Wojciech Młynarski and Krzysztof Dzikowski who wrote *Trzysta tysięcy gitar* were born at the turn of the 1930s and 1940s; so, they were much younger than, for example, Walicki. Secondly, let us read the lyrics again and analyze how they describe Polish big beat. Młynarski and Dzikowski pay attention primarily to the fact that young people are interested in playing musical instruments. And while big beat received a lot of criticism in the 1960s, getting teenagers to play music was universally praised. The musicologist Paweł Beylin believed that this was the greatest advantage of big beat: "The most important thing in all of this is that we are dealing here with an authentic mass musical movement. It is an unprecedented opportunity to spread musical knowledge; never have we witnessed anything like this in our history."³⁶ Waław Panek observes that parents were also happy: "If they saw that their offspring wanted to play music after school, they readily agreed to it, because it was better to play big beat than loaf about and have no interests at all. Besides, even for the most conservative parents playing music as a form of entertainment is and has been accepted as an important part of education."³⁷ Thus, it is not surprising that Karin Stanek could sing about "three hundred thousand guitars" in such an enthusiastic way.

"This is us," or Czerwone Gitary's self-creation

An equally positive attitude to big beat may be found in another song from the same period performed by Czerwone Gitary [The Red Guitars]. This time, however, big-beat self-referentiality is additionally supplemented by conscious self-creation, which, as we will see, was

³⁶Paweł Beylin, *O muzyce i wokół muzyki. Felietony* [About music and around music. Essays] (Kraków: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1973), 67.

³⁷Panek, 43.

this band's signature strategy. I refer to the song *To właśnie my* [This is us]³⁸ from the band's first LP also titled *To właśnie my*:

Tak, to właśnie my	Yes, this is us
Cała piątka znów przed wami	All five are standing in front of you
Tak, to właśnie my	Yes, this is us
Już zabawę zacząć czas	It's time to start having fun
Kto chce posłuchać nas	Who wants to hear us
Kto chce się bawić tak jak my	Who wants to have fun like us
Jak właśnie my	Just like us
Niech odrzuci troski na bok	Should forget about their worries
Czas nie liczy się	As time stops
Kiedy zaczynamy grać	When we start to play
Choć na kilka chwil	Just for a few moments
Zapomnijcie o zmartwieniach	Forget about your worries
Bo możecie dziś	Because today you can
Razem z nami bawić się	Have fun with us

The lyrics, symptomatically, were not written by hired lyricists but by the members of the band themselves; they describe not only the Polish big-beat scene, but also refer directly to the musicians of Czerwone Gitary. While in classical poetics identifying the lyrical subject with the author is at times incorrect, in this case such an assumption seems to be justified. The song is sung together by the whole band – the band is introducing themselves to the audience (“to właśnie my/ cała piątka znów przed wami” [This is us/ All five are standing in front of you]) and inviting them to have fun together. It is not only big beat as such that is positively described but Czerwone Gitary's music itself (“czas nie liczy się/ kiedy zaczynamy grać” [Time stops/ When we start to play]). Similar messages may also be found in the lyrics to the band's other songs: *Baw się razem z nami* [Have fun with us]³⁹ (“kiedy jesteś smutny lub zły, nudzisz się śmiertelnie, to my rozbawimy ciebie prędko” [when you are sad or angry, you are bored to death, we will entertain you]), *Pięciu nas jest* [There's five of us]⁴⁰ (“pięciu może podbić świat, czterech na gitarach gra – czy ktoś ma chęć przyłączyć się?” [five people can conquer the world, four are playing guitars – does anyone want to play with us?]), *Nie zadzieraj nosa* [Don't put on airs]⁴¹ (“już za parę minut będziesz przyjacielem całej naszej piątki” [in just a few minutes you'll be friends with all five of us]).

³⁸Czerwone Gitary, *To właśnie my* [This is us], the first song on the album *To właśnie my* [This is us] (Pronit, 1966).

³⁹Czerwone Gitary, *Baw się razem z nami* [Have fun with us], the 14th song on the album *Nie daj się nabrać na byle co. Nagrania archiwalne z 1965 roku* [Don't be fooled by easy tricks. Archival recordings from 1965] (Kameleon Records, 2016).

⁴⁰Czerwone Gitary, *Pięciu nas jest* [There's five of us], the 9th song on the album *To właśnie my*.

⁴¹Czerwone Gitary, *Nie zadzieraj nosa* [Don't put on airs], the 3rd song on the album *To właśnie my*.

It should also be emphasized that Czerwone Gitary's recordings and live performances (the band would open their concerts with *To właśnie my*; for example, at the "Popołudnie z młodością" [Afternoon with Youth] during the 5th National Festival of Polish Song in Opole in 1967) were closely interconnected. As a result, young people who listened to the band's albums could feel as if they had attended the concert of their favorite group. It helped Czerwone Gitary to create its image even better.

"The big fight is on," or a look at big beat concerts

Simon Frith observes that when it comes to analyzing songs, "performing rites," especially during a live performance, are as important as the lyrics.⁴² Therefore, at the end of this article, let us turn to big beat concerts. I shall focus on the songs by a less known band, namely Neptuny [The Neptunes] from Szczecin. In 1966, the band played at the Gliwice big beat festival, where they performed the song *Zabawa w Gliwicach* [Party in Gliwice],⁴³ which was probably written specifically for this event. The song was not only performed live, but also its lyrics referred to big beat concerts in an extremely self-referential (and, as will soon become clear, a bit self-ironic) fashion. Particular attention is paid here to the lines which describe the reactions of the audience:

Ktoś wspomina dawne czasy, miły	Someone remembers the old days, the sound
skrzypiec ton	of the violin
Nie podoba mu się zespół: „Chałturnicy,	He doesn't like the band: "Go away, you're
won!"	cheap!"
Drugi znowu na ten temat inne zdanie ma	Someone else has a different opinion
W rękę pała i po plecach rhythm and blues	With a baton in his hand, he's playing
mu gra	rhythm and blues
Z okien pryska szkło, wielka bójka trwa	He's breaking windows, the big fight is on
Dużo zwolenników zespół bigbeatowy ma	The big beat band has a lot of fans

Neptuny never achieved national fame, and the song in question only after many years found its way onto the compilation album *Ze szpulowca bigbeatowca* [The big-beat reel]. In the booklet, Mariusz Owczarek suggests that the words "w rękę pała" [a baton in his hand] refer to policemen pacifying riots during a big beat concert. It seems, however, that Neptuny are talking about a conflict among audience members, namely those who are fans of older music ("the sound of the violin") and those who love modern sounds. It is the latter (and not the police) who use force, "playing rhythm and blues on their opponents' backs" with a baton.

⁴²Simon Frith, *Facing the Music* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 107.

⁴³Neptuny, *Zabawa w Gliwicach* [Party in Gliwice], the 8th song on the album *Ze szpulowca bigbeatowca* [Big beat reel](GAD Records, 2019).

This image engages in an interesting dialogue with the images of youth music concerts described in the communist press. In his article about Rhythm & Blues' concert in Mirowska Hall in Warsaw, Daniel Passent writes about "the police who illuminated the hall with floodlights, escorting the fans who had taken their shirts off, with the rest of the audience protesting vocally;" Passent was surprised that the concert was organized "in the biggest hall in Warsaw and not in the woods."⁴⁴ Ludwik Erhardt in *Ruch Muzyczny* [Musical Movement] called the audience gathered at Czerwono-Czarni's concert "a crowd of young barbarians;" while he could not recall any reprehensible antics by audience members, he lamented the very fact that such a concert was organized at the Philharmonic.⁴⁵ Polish and foreign band members were also accused of hooliganism. *Jazz* magazine conducted an opinion poll, asking ordinary Poles who the Beatles were. One of the respondents was supposed to answer: "They used to sing in the streets and somehow made their way onto the radio. I know, because before the war we also had some street musicians, however, they weren't hooligans."⁴⁶

The lyrics to big-beat songs usually did not address such allegations. Therefore, the evocative and, at the same time, ironic nature of *Zabawa w Gliwicach*, especially considering Neptuny's rather heavy guitar sound, confirms the thesis that local less known big-beat bands show this musical phenomenon in a different light, one that cannot be found in the songs written and performed by the most popular big-beat bands signed by the Polish national record label Polskie Nagrania [Polish Records].⁴⁷

"We will not go down in history," or the decline of the big beat scene

The turn of the 1960s and 1970s was both a period of interesting musical explorations and, unfortunately, the beginning of the end of big beat in Poland. Katarzyna Gärtner's *Msza beatowa "Pan przyjacielem moim"* [The Beat Mass "The Lord is my friend"], performed first by Trapiści [The Trappists] and then by Czerwono-Czarni, successfully combined the form of the Mass with big-beat sound. Skaldowie experimented with the folk (Goral) music of Podhale and classical music, the best example of which is the song *Krywaniu, Krywaniu* which opens the album *Krywań, Krywań*.⁴⁸ The so-called "awangarda beatowa" [big-beat avant-garde] bands, in turn, experimented with psychedelic rock, playing long compositions inspired by the hippie movement, in which they tried to answer existential questions about man's place in the world, such as, for example, in *Pytanie czy hasło* [A question or a slogan] by Romuald i Roman [Romuald and Roman]. They also allusively referred to the use of drugs,

⁴⁴Daniel Passent, "A rachunki odrobione?" [Did you do your math homework?], *Polityka* 39 (1959): 2.

⁴⁵Ludwik Erhardt, "Niesmaczny przekładaniec" [Tasteless medley], *Ruch Muzyczny* 12 (1963): 7.

⁴⁶Tadeusz Matulewicz, "Wyniki prywatnej ankietki" [Results of a private opinion poll], *Jazz* 4 (1966): 7.

⁴⁷More on the benefits of researching lesser-known local big-beat groups cf. Patryk Mamczur, "Big beat z domów kultury. PRL-owski garage rock lat 60." [Big beat from community centers. Garage rock in the People's Republic of Poland in the 1960s], *Piosenka. Rocznik kulturalny* 8 (2020): 186–195.

⁴⁸Kriváň is a mountain in the High Tatras, Slovakia (translator's note).

as, for example, in Romuald i Roman's *Towarowy rusza do Indii* [Train rides to India], whose title refers to Tri, a drug popular among Polish hippies.⁴⁹

At the same time, criticism of big beat music intensified in the press. In 1969, in *Jazz* magazine, Lech Terpiłowski wrote about the "overbearing dictates of young people, which set the tone for" the nation's musical interests.⁵⁰ In 1970, Mirosław Dąbrowski, the head of programming of Polish Radio, admitted that the music of big-beat bands was "broadcast on the radio with too much tolerance" and that "the choice of songs should be better coordinated," expressing the hope that "a stricter selection would allow more more space for songs from other people's democratic republics" (as "everyone knows that these songs are very nice").⁵¹ At the 7th Congress of the Polish United Workers' Party in November 1972, Edward Gierek concluded that "a socialist state cannot be neutral as regards content targeted at our youth, as regards anything that shapes the worldview and ideological attitudes of young people."⁵²

On February 28, 1973, Polish Radio broadcast the last program prepared at the Młodzieżowe Studio "Rytm" [Teenage Studio "Rhythm"], which played a huge role in the big beat scene, and the studio itself was closed. In March 1973, the last of the so-called big-beat avant-garde festivals in Kalisz took place (namely the III Festiwal Młodzieżowej Muzyki Współczesnej [3rd Contemporary Teenage Music Festival]). On the Radio and Television Committee, Włodzimierz Sokorski, who was a fan of big beat, was replaced as chairman by Maciej Szczepański, and the Department of Theater, Music and Stage was established at the Ministry of Culture and Art in order to control the popular music scene even more closely. As Andrzej Korzyński concluded years later, "a completely different model of the song became dominant then. [...] You had to make sure that the miners, steel workers and farm workers were happy; you had to march in step and wave your hands. Songs for teenagers were a problem."⁵³ In 1973, the big-beat scene *de facto* ceased to exist.

The feeling of the impending end may be found in the last self-referential big-beat song which I will briefly analyze in this article, namely *Nie przejdziemy do historii* [We will not go down in history]⁵⁴ by Krzysztof Klenczon and his band Trzy Korony⁵⁵ [Three Crowns] (founded after he left Czerwone Gitary):

⁴⁹Tri, containing trichloroethylene, was inhaled — somehow resembling "sniffing glue".

⁵⁰Lech Terpiłowski, "Co nam zostanie z tamtych lat?" [What's left from the good old days?], *Jazz* (3 (1969): 9.

⁵¹"Mniej giełd i plebiscytów w radio" [Fewer popularity contests on the radio], *Jazz* 9 (1970): 16.

⁵²Edward Gierek, *Jesteście wielką szansą. Wybór przemówień 1971–1972* [You are our future. Selection of speeches 1971–1972] (Warsaw: Młodzieżowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1978), 55; quote after: Bogusław Tracz, "Powstrzymać dywersję moralną Zachodu. Partia komunistyczna wobec przemian kultury młodzieżowej w Polsce lat 60. i 70. XX wieku" [Stop the moral subversion of the West. The communist party and the changes in youth culture in Poland in the 1960s and 1970s], in: *To idzie młodość. Młodzież w ideologii i praktyce komunizmu* [This is youth. Youth in communist ideology and policies], ed. Dariusz Magier (Lublin – Radzyń Podlaski: Libra, 2016), 435.

⁵³Maria Szabłowska, *Cały ten big beat* (Łódź: Opus, 1993), 18–19.

⁵⁴Krzysztof Klenczon and Trzy Korony, *Nie przejdziemy do historii* [We will not go down in history] the 6th song on the album *Krzysztof Klenczon i Trzy Korony* (Pronit, 1971).

⁵⁵Trzy Korony is a summit in the Pieniny Mountains, Poland.

Nie przejdziemy do historii
 Szumni jak w piosenkach
 Nie będziemy stali w glorii
 Z gitarami w rękach
 Rozedrgane nasze cienie
 Żółty kurz otuli
 Jak toczące się kamienie
 Z niebotycznej góry

We will not go down in history
 Pompous as in songs
 We will not be glorified
 With guitars in our hands
 Yellow dust will cover
 Our trembling shadows
 Like rolling stones
 From a sky-high mountain

Nie przejdziemy do historii
 I literatury
 Nie będziemy stali strojni
 W brązy i marmury
 Świat się nagle jak kołyska
 Wokół zakolebie
 I znajdziemy naszą przystań
 Nim zgubimy siebie

We will not go down in history
 And in literature
 We will not be made
 Into bronze or marble statues
 The world will suddenly rock
 Like a cradle
 And we'll find our haven
 Before we lose ourselves

The lyrics were written by Andrzej Kuryła (who also wrote songs for Romuald i Roman), who imbued them with interesting references to contemporary rock music. “Rolling stones” is a fairly obvious reference to the Rolling Stones, and in the original version the second verse ended with the words “i znajdziemy cichą przystań w diamentowym niebie” [and we will find a quiet haven in the diamond sky], which, in turn, was supposed to be a reference to The Beatles’ *Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds*. Above all, however, the song in question envisions the impending end of an era in popular music and in the lives of artists. Klenczon sings that he and others like him “will not go down in history and literature” – it is an anti-manifesto of the big-beat generation, apparently convinced that their work would not withstand the test of time. Particular attention should also be paid to the lines “nie będziemy stali strojni w brązy i marmury” [we will not be carved into bronze or marble statues]. The fact that Klenczon sings that no one will erect a monument to honor him in a very interesting way corresponds to one of the oldest known manifestations of self-referentiality in literature, i.e., Horace’s poem from 23BC and his conviction that he built “a monument more lasting than bronze.”⁵⁶ This observation may act as a framing device for this article. And although in the end Klenczon, like other stars of the big beat scene, found a prominent place in the history of Polish popular music, the song *Nie przejdziemy do historii* remains a fascinating testimony to the decline of Polish big beat at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s.

Conclusion

The above analysis, concerning over a dozen selected big-beat songs, draws attention to an interesting finding. Songs, whether recorded live or in the studio, have long been the main subject of research for popular music studies scholars but researchers who want to trace the

⁵⁶Odes III: XXX, translated by Sarah Powell.

reception of music in society still refer to other sources: articles, press releases, reviews, interviews. Meanwhile, as can be seen, it is also worth examining the lyrics, as artists, in a clearly self-referential way, address in them themselves, their music and their fans.

While this is not a new observation, since the self-referential aspect of other, especially foreign, performers has already been described, the fact that such a high level of self-awareness may be found in Polish big-beat songs is somewhat surprising. This proves that although the big beat scene appeared almost out of the blue and disappeared just as quickly, the people who created it felt that big beat was a really important phenomenon in the wider musical history of the People's Republic of Poland.

Respectively, an in-depth analysis of the lyrics shows that the image of adolescence presented in them is distorted, and the opinions about big beat music are not as positive as one might expect, especially when compared to the lyrics of American or British songs from the same period. This is due to the fact that although big beat was originally music for teenagers, it was subject to strict control by adults. As Joanna Sadowska writes, "The People's Republic of Poland was a kind of gerontocracy."⁵⁷ Decision-makers who controlled national cultural policies, managers, as well as composers and songwriters were, in most cases, people one or even two generations older than big beat fans and band members. That is why songs about the lives of teenagers often turned out to be didactic. The situation changed somewhat in the latter half of the 1960s, when younger people, including band members, began to write lyrics, but, as we know, the big beat scene *de facto* ceased to exist in the early 1970s.

This notwithstanding, what Krzysztof Klenczon sang about did not come true and big beat ultimately went down in history. Although our knowledge about big beat is still far from complete, as new archival recordings are still being found and research on this genre began to be conducted only recently, we can say that the belief in the unique nature of big beat self-referentially expressed by some artists back in the 1960s and 1970s turned out to be absolutely true in retrospect.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

⁵⁷ Joanna Sadowska, "Młodzież polska lat 60. i 70. Próba charakterystyki postaw, dążeń, obszarów zainteresowań i aktywności" [Polish youth in the 1960s and the 1970s. A study of attitudes, aspirations, areas of interest and activities], *Spółeczeństwo PRL. Historia, kultura, pamięć* [The society of the Polish People's Republic. History, culture, memory], vol. 1, ed. Stanisław Jankowiak (Poznań: Instytut Historii UAM, 2011), 155.

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KEYWORDS

big beat

R O C K

p o p u l a r m u s i c

ABSTRACT:

The author focuses on Polish big-beat music from the 1960s and early 1970s. He analyzes the lyrics of selected songs from that period, pointing to their self-referential nature and explaining how big beat performers described their fans, themselves, and teenage music in their songs. Songs by both popular and less known local bands are analyzed. The analysis functions in a broader social and political context, and the study of lyrics is further supplemented with quotations from the contemporary press and statements by politicians, journalists, and managers. The author shows that the self-referentiality present in the lyrics of big-beat songs proves that Polish artists in the 1960s and early 1970s were aware of their lyrical and musical strategies.

history of the People's Republic of Poland

Polish music

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