

The Polish Sol

Magdalena Gryszko and Blazej Matusiak OP

In 2008 and 2009 the European Union faced a revolutionary change. Its Middle Eastern and Western part was filled with a new vivid shout created by two new Sacred Harp groups in Warsaw, Poland and Cork, Ireland.

GRANDFATHER ERIKSEN AND MOTHER SCHOFIELD

While singing Sacred Harp in Ireland is not that much of a surprise, one may ask how it happens that this uniquely American tradition is developing in a Slavic country speaking strange Polish language. The answer is love. In 2008 Magdalena Zapiedowska convinced her future husband Tim Eriksen to come to the “Song of Our Roots” Festival in Jaroslaw, Southeastern Poland. At the end of August 2008 Tim gave a six day Sacred Harp workshop at the festival—the first Sacred Harp workshop in Poland. Participants were crazy about Tim and Jesse Pearlman Karlsberg who came with Tim. And, more importantly, they were overwhelmed by Sacred Harp spirit and passion. Already in September 2008 the first Sacred Harp weekly singing was organized in Warsaw by Father Blazej Matusiak, a Dominican and a lover of old music who participated in Tim’s workshop in Jaroslaw. A year later, in October 2009, Allison Blake Schofield arrived to lead a Sacred Harp workshop in Warsaw. Since September 2008 about 80 people came across the weekly Sacred Harp singing in Warsaw. There are also about 6 strong Sacred Harp singers in the central Polish city of Poznan, after Magdalena Zapiedowska introduced Sacred Harp during lectures at Poznan University. Most of Polish Sacred Harp singers participated in Allison’s Warsaw workshop in 2009 or Aldo Thomas Ceresa and Michael Walker’s Warsaw singing school in March 2010. On the average we have about 15 people at our weekly singing.

THE POLISH “SOL”

Polish Sacred Harp has some specific stylistic traits, what could be a subject of a separate article. We have been shaped both by Western Massachusetts/New England pedagogy style, when participating in the Western Massachusetts Sacred Harp Convention and being

taught by Tim and Allison—and by amazing Georgia and Alabama singing communities in Hoboken, Henagar, and Atlanta. In 2011, Several Polish singers attended both Camp Fasola and the workshops and singing schools led by David Ivey and Neely Bruce during the First Irish Sacred Harp Convention. They are all in our hearts and hopefully voices. But if I was to mention just one little Polish thing which makes people who sing with us smile; I would say that we pronounce the syllable “sol” like “soul”, when I think most English speaking singing groups pronounce it “so”. As one of the Cork Sacred Harp singers said, it is “pleasant to the ear”. So we stick to our “soul” and we sing. Aloud for glory!

NEW COMPOSERS

As a remembrance of her singing school, Allison Blake Schofield composed the first Sacred Harp song with Polish text, chosen by Father Blazej. It was not easy to choose the text due to differences between poetic meters in English and Polish. In a classical Polish poet Kochanowski’s setting of psalms (16th century) there were only few which could fit the pattern and it seemed a right choice. The piece was named after the street where we gather. FRETA (see page 33) remains one of our beloved songs, as it is not only a well written contemporary Sacred Harp composition and a sweet memory of our teacher, but also, surprisingly enough, it resembles some of 16th century 4-part Polish psalms. OKÓLNİK is the first Polish shape-note composition, set by two Sacred Harp singers, Zofia Przyrowska and Jacek Borkowicz (see page 47). It’s a thrill to sing such powerful tunes with text in our own language.

THE NEW MARSHALL PLAN

The singing has changed our lives. We all feel a part of a Sacred Harp family. We have been touched so many times by Sacred Harp singers’ hospitality and love. And we want to share it! After Warsaw and Cork, new groups have appeared in France, Germany, and Switzerland. There is interest in Hungary, Italy and the Czech Republic. And this is just the beginning. We are planning the 1st European Camp Fasola, and the 1st Polish Sacred Harp Convention, both to be held at the end of September, 2012! Some say the world will end in 2012—well, perhaps—but what a sound! So please join in and help us to sing!

For more info, look for the Sacred Harp in Poland page on Facebook.