

Reviews

Niemen Enigmatic. By Mariusz Gradowski and Ewa Mazierska. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 33 1/3 Europe Series, 2022. 160 pp. ISBN 978-1-501-37266-7 doi:10.1017/S0261143023000193

For the first book (hopefully there will be more) on a Polish record to be released in Bloomsbury's 33 1/3 Europe Series, it was hard to imagine a better choice than *Niemen Enigmatic*, the fourth album in the career of Czesław Niemen (1939–2004). In the narrow circle of the most iconic albums of Polish popular music, this is perhaps the most interesting, owing to the figure of its author, its being at the crossroads of different genres, and the particular relationship between text and music that it proposes. This allows Mariusz Gradowski and Ewa Mazierska to quickly fill the almost 150 pages of the book, leaving the feeling that there would be still lots more to say. The topics covered are very varied and worthwhile for readers and scholars interested in different aspects of popular music 'beyond the Iron Curtain' in the 1960s and 1970s. The pages on producers and production, popular music and politics, and international connections will be particularly interesting as background.

The authors demonstrate competence and objectivity in presenting a musician towards whom there is enormous reverence today, so much so that there appears to be 'an unwillingness or inability of Polish artists to criticise his heritage' (p. 131). Especially in the first chapter, Gradowski and Mazierska pay particular attention to Niemen's public image and the idea of authenticity that the artist tended to convey at different stages of his career. Very acute are the considerations that explain his changes in style, which were always motivated by a personal quest for originality, a sincere tendency to experiment, as well as by precise socio-political conditions and personal situations. Despite the fact that, already in 1967, Niemen was considered the greatest rock artist in Poland and, together with the Hungarian band Omega, one of the greatest acts in the whole of Eastern Europe, it can be said that his path to critical recognition had only just begun. Niemen even became a kind of prophet, 'the first Polish popular music star, who adopted this position of somebody who not only entertains the audience but tries to enlighten it' (p. 24). The authors also address Niemen's relationship with politics: a relationship that can be simplified with the statement that the singer basically kept out of it as much as possible (this was possible thanks to the process of 'depolicitization of private lives' happening in Poland in the 1960s, but on the other hand 1968 was the year of Polish students' anti-communist protests). Regardless of the possible reasons for Niemen's choice, the book exposes and gives a good account of all the ambiguities that the artist's attitude implied and continues to imply to this day. Writing a book on a Polish record released in 1970, one certainly cannot ignore the political situation of the time, but on the other hand *Niemen Enigmatic* is a 'classic' record, therefore in some way out of time. How different does it seem to us today from how it was received by Poles half a century ago? Is it the central song of the album, 'Bema pamięci żałobny – rapsod', 'a march of humanity against tyranny' (Groggia, 2008) that works today as well as it did then? Let's quote some lines

from 'Mourner's rhapsody', the English version of this song whose lyrics (by the romantic poet Cyprian Kamil Norwid) were translated in 1974 by Norman Simon (by the way, too bad Gradowski and Mazierska don't refer to it): 'Striking screams against the gates/Like whistling axes/Making Jericho's wall fall down/Like falling logs/Waking sleeping nations/Lifting darkness from their eyes/Onward, onward'.

The sung text does not always have particular relevance in popular music, but in the case of Polish popular music, poetry and song have often held a special relationship. With *Enigmatic*, Niemen 'decided to enter the realm of seriousness through singing poetry' (p. 72), with a particular predilection for the authors of Romanticism. This happened in the wake of what the band Skaldowie and singer Ewa Demarczyk had done a few years earlier, presenting in the Cracow cabaret Piwnica pod Baranami (and then in the record *Ewa Demarczyk śpiewa piosenki Zygmunta Koniecznego* from 1967) songs based on poems from Polish poets of the past: not lieder in the classic style, nor jazz or rock (Masi 2016, p. 15). Was Niemen 'in line with the dominant way of treating poetry by Polish performers?' (pp. 68–9), ask the authors. The answers to this and other relevant questions are in the second chapter, which retraces the road to the conception and realisation of the disc, while in the third Gradowski and Mazierska make a more technical analysis of the four songs that make up the album. Yes, only four. And naturally, among them, more space is dedicated to the unusually long (16:27) aforementioned 'Bema pamięci żałobny – rapsod', the true starting point of progressive rock in Poland, and to the more approachable 'Jednego serca'. The fourth and last chapter focuses on the legacy of *Niemen Enigmatic* as a whole. While at the time of its release the record was very little reviewed, over the years it has attracted more and more interest from fans and scholars. Gradowski and Mazierska find traces of its impact in multiple cover versions, and in enthusiastic comments on social forums and YouTube.

This study of *Niemen Enigmatic* is a precious contribution to popular music scholarship, and to Bloomsbury's catalogue, especially because it brings closer to non-Polish speakers a record and an artist that Polish academic studies have been examining for several years now (Jakub Kasperski speaks of 'niemenology' as a branch of Polish rockology; Kasperski 2020). Perhaps the bibliography could have been more extensive, but on the other hand the authors have done a great job by complementing their sources with first-hand interviews conducted in 2021 with some of Niemen's close collaborators (the interview of the sound engineer of *Enigmatic* seemed particularly interesting to me), and with a scholar like Jan Blüml, who provided interesting unpublished information on Niemen's reception in Czechoslovakia.

The purpose of this review is not to evaluate the style in which the two authors express themselves in English, especially since, in this case, the reviewer's own level of English is far from that of an educated native speaker. However, the errors in language and style are many, and such that it was hard to overlook them. Whatever the reason for these errors, repetitions and typos, surprising for this collection, they do not detract from the overall achievements.

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***Rude Citizenship: Jamaican Popular Music, Copyright, and the Reverberations of Colonial Power.* By Larisa Kingston Mann. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2022. 242 pp. ISBN: 978-1-4696-6724-9
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One of the key threads that runs through Larisa Kingston Mann's *Rude Citizenship: Jamaican Popular Music, Copyright, and the Reverberations of Colonial Power* is the idea of the original. Beginning with the opening vignette, in which a Jamaican producer, Skatta, criticises a singer for using a backing track he had created himself rather than an 'original' one, saying, 'I wish he use a more original riddim [...] one more established riddim that been tested' (p. 1), it is clear that this is a model of musical creativity that treats reuse as normative, departs from legal notions of originality, and is distinctively Jamaican. As Mann explains, "'Original' signals a collective recognition, a collective relationship to a shared worldview, and – given the root word, "origin" – a shared history and cultural origin among the listening and performing community (p. 2). In this context, the word "original" directly contradicts the legal definition, or more accurately, it translates the concept into local parlance.' The concept of the original thus crystallises much of the important work *Rude Citizenship* does: understanding Jamaican practices of music-making on their own terms; emphasising how, in this context, creativity is understood as relational; and working through the legal tensions that result. The book is of interest to scholars approaching music through cultural studies of law, contextually-specific conceptualisations of creativity, or 20th and 21st century Jamaica. These are the key touchstones of the book's examinations of structures, street dances and songs.

The book's first chapter provides a thorough history of music creation in Jamaica, starting before independence and encompassing genres from mento, ska and rocksteady to reggae, dub and dancehall. Structures are key here, as Mann discusses the uneven institutionalisation of radio, recording studios and street-based sound systems across this historical span. She also attends to the affordances of changing technologies, considering how the advent of multitrack recording allowed the separation of a recording into a vocal and a backing track that could then circulate on its own as a 'riddim' and form the basis of new songs, as well as the role of CDs as an easily (re)produced format in facilitating contemporary informal musical circulation. The third key structure conditioning Jamaican music is, of course, the law, which both under British rule and after independence has been 'a poor fit for practices in Jamaica' that are 'collective, collaborative, and iterative (revisiting and reusing the same musical elements repeatedly over time), as in any primarily oral tradition' (p. 40). As a result, the law devalues the music of poor Black creators both for how it is created and by whom. These musical traditions are in direct conflict with 'a legal system that recognises rights and claims only if they conform to practices and communities defined without respect for local methods