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ARCHITECTURE IN LYRICS 1950–2015

ARCHITEKTURA W TEKSTACH PIOSENEK 1950–2015

Abstract

There are three links between architecture and music: buildings designed for music; comparing the structures of works of architecture and music; architecture as the subject of lyrics. This paper, which deals with the third link, discusses references to particular building materials, buildings, cities, architects. Architectural themes in songs usually help to express particular values or feelings and are a kind of games and play.

Keywords: architecture, music, song, lyrics, link

Streszczenie

Pomiędzy architekturą a muzyką istnieją trzy grupy związków: obiekty projektowane dla muzyki; porównywanie struktury dzieła architektonicznego i muzycznego; obecność architektury w tekstach muzyki popularnej. Artykuł, poświęcony trzeciej grupie związków, omawia odwołania do określonych materiałów budowlanych, budynków, miast, architektów. Tematy architektoniczne w piosenkach służą zwykle wyrażaniu idei lub uczuć oraz są formą gry i zabawy.

Słowa kluczowe: architektura, muzyka, piosenka, tekst, związek

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Introduction

There are three groups of links between architecture and music:

1. Some public architecture is buildings designed for music – played (concert halls), taught (music schools), recorded (studios).
2. Attempts have been made to compare the structure of the work of architecture and the work of music, and to search for inspirations [3]. That concerns mainly the former inspired by the latter during the process of creation [2].
3. Lyrics may be part of a piece of music – e.g. of pop music. Any field of life can be the subject of the text, most often there are impressions, feelings, memories. A building or a cityscape may be background for those events or emotions and they sometimes play a role in the lyrics.

This paper concerns the third group of links between music and architecture. It results from the extension of the topic the author dealt with for the purpose of publication in an architectural monthly years ago [1]. Extracts of lyrics, mostly Polish and English, translated by the author, were used in the paper.

The architectural themes within the lyrics have been divided into four groups:

1. Building materials and construction
2. Buildings and structures
3. Planning and cities
4. Architects

1. Building materials and construction

Among building materials whose names appear in lyrics, timber, brick and concrete are the most popular. They are usually meant to emphasize, literally or metaphorically, some positive or negative connotations.

1.1. Timber

Among the materials, timber has the best associations. It symbolizes comfort and safety. Wojciech Bellon dreamt:

*If I have a house,
It has to be of beechwood,
Smelling and sunny*

Wolna Grupa Bukowina, *Pastoral on Home*, 1975, lyrics W. Bellon

Jan Kaczmarek recalled a past form of a wooden hut, devoid of chimney, as an oasis of the simple, good life.

*What I dream about is a smoked cottage,
An ordinary room made of simple planks,
To cut off from the whole world,
Its receipts, catches and notices*

Kabaret Elita, *Chimneyless Hut*, 1971, lyrics J. Kaczmarek

1.2. Brick

For its modularity, brick expresses uniformity. The most famous brick in music is the one in Pink Floyd's *The Wall*. Roger Waters' song warns pupils that in school their personalities are transformed by teachers so as to become identical like bricks in the wall; and that they need neither wall nor teachers:

*Hey! Teacher, leave them kids alone!
All in all it's just another brick in the wall,
All in all you're just another brick in the wall*

Pink Floyd, *Another Brick in the Wall*, 1979, lyrics R. Waters

The Wall was popular in Poland, too. While Waters referred to individual pupils, Grzegorz Bukała and Rudi Schuberth presented the construction of Great Wall of China as a multi-generation experience:

*My father used to carry clay,
Felt on the wall with his basket
Wall! we're building a wall!
Hard work, he could work no more,
just another brick in the wall
Wall! we're building a wall!
When the time would come
My son will take over in a row*

Wały Jagiellońskie, *China Wall*, 1983, lyrics G. Bukała and R. Schuberth

Against the walls as symbols of oppressive regimes, protest songs were sung. A piece by Catalan bard Lluís Llach (*L'Estaca*, 1968) was followed by Polish singers with slightly different lyrics (e.g. stake was replaced with wall):

*Rip the bars off the walls, broke the chains, break the whip,
And the walls will fall down, fall, fall and bury the old world*

Jacek Kaczmarski, Przemysław Gintrowski, Zbigniew Łapiński, *Walls*, 1978, lyrics J. Kaczmarski

*Can't you see the wall? The wall keeps us all,
If we don't defend, it'll block any road*

Zespół Reprezentacyjny, *Wall*, 1985, lyrics A. Rurarz

The process of construction was referred to, too. Łukasz Golec and Paweł Golec emphasized the importance of preparing the project as well as appropriate professional and ceremonial skills for effective enterprises:

*I'd spent a nice couple of years on the model,
But the whole world is going to visit the miracle I built,
I have a flair for work and I'm strong like a horse,
I can haul the cart of CMUs, even a wheelless one,
I had cut all bush to bring gravel now
I'm not stupid, I have building skills,
And let the mayor open the place*



- III. 1. *The Wall* by Pink Floyd (label EMI)
- III. 2. *Gaudi* by The Alan Parsons Project (label Arista)
- III. 3. *Polin* by Tomasz Stańko (label MHPJ).
- III. 1–3. Covers of albums referring to works of architecture
- III. 4. Clock on the wall of a house in the Mariensztat Market in Warsaw
- III. 5. Parts of the L'Étoile and the Avenue des Champs-Élysées in Paris
- III. 6. Pont Saint-Bénézet in Avignon
- III. 7. Hotel Victoria in Warsaw
- III. 8. Statue of Koniev in Krakow (being removed in 1991)
- III. 9. Towers of St. Elizabeth Church in Lviv
- III. 10. La Sagrada Familia Church in Barcelona. Photographs Maciej Motak
- III. 4–10. Works of architecture commemorated in lyrics

During his visit to Poland in 2001, in a speech complementing Poland on its successes in 1990's, President George W. Bush quoted a part of the lyrics in Polish:

*It's stubble here now,
But it's going to be San Francisco,
And instead of that molehill,
My bank will stand there*

Golec uOrkiestra, *Stubble*, 2000, lyrics O. Golec and R. Golec

Peter Gabriel pessimistically presented the effects of construction. A wish to create an absolutely safe house turns against the residents:

*Brick by brick we're building,
The workers digging underground
Feel the building all around me
Like a wrap of armoured skin,
But the more we are protected
The more we're trapped within*

Peter Gabriel, *The Tower That Ate People*, 2000, lyrics P. Gabriel

1.3. Concrete

Among building materials, concrete suffers from a poor opinion. Initially it did not tend to get that. Around 1950 construction using concrete was a sign of progress:

*Let the walls rise upwards,
When the hands are eager,
We're building a new concrete home*

Chór Czejanda, *We Are Building a New Home*, 1951, lyrics W. Stępień

In the 1970's the attitude towards concrete changed. The housing projects of typical buildings, constructed of precast reinforced concrete elements, had left a mark on the Polish cityscapes:

*Over a vast concrete village
The sun bulb slowly goes out,
To the vast concrete village
The twilight nears silently*

Małgorzata Ostrowska emphasized the alienation of residents. The black-and-white TV-set was the main attraction for many of them:

*Glass weather!
TV-sets make panes blue!
The lifts hush a lullaby*

Lombard, *Glass Weather*, 1983, lyrics M. Dutkiewicz

Martyna Jakubowicz noticed how non-romantic a building of concrete is:

*In houses of concrete
There is no free love,
There are marital or paid intercoursés,*

Casanova is not a guest here

Martyna Jakubowicz, *In Houses of Concrete*, 1983, lyrics A. Jakubowicz

To Urszula a lack of concrete was noteworthy when enjoying the time of her life:

Dandelions, kites and wind,

The world of concrete so far away

Urszula, *Dandelions, Kites and Wind*, 1983, lyrics M. Dutkiewicz

In the early 1980's those lyrics expressed the beliefs of most of the Polish society. The word "concrete" meant backward convictions and their hardened exponents.

2. Buildings and structures

Buildings of different functions are mentioned in lyrics. Hardly ever are they particular objects. Types of objects are placed in lyrics mostly to express certain basic values.

2.1. Residential buildings

Home, in various versions, is a symbol of stability:

Between the loft and cellar

In an old tenant house

Pod Budą, *Ballad about Aunt Mathilda*, 1979, lyrics A. Sikorowski

Home is also a point of reference when it is missing. That is what the hero sang about when he planned to get settled:

I kept an eye on a hacienda,

A great one, I tell you

Dżem, *Whiskey*, 1979, lyrics R. Riedel and K. Gayer

Leaving home is a bad decision; however, one could mend it:

Jojo left his home in Tucson, Arizona

For some California grass,

Get back! Get back!

Get back to where you once belonged

The Beatles, *Get Back!*, 1969, lyrics J. Lennon and P. McCartney

Towers are safer than regular houses but they are also more separate:

I live in a tall tower surrounded with a moat,

I have an umbrella which protects me against the night

Szytwny Pal Azji, *Tower of Happiness, Tower of Loneliness*, 1987, lyrics J. Kisiński

Not all residential buildings enjoyed good opinion. The big multifamily buildings got a worse one:

I live in a block, in a crowd,

Amidst falls and few surges

Jacek Ziobro, *I Live in a Block*, 1992, lyrics J. Ziobro

A critical attitude towards large housing estates brought feedback from two musical albums: *Blokowisko* of hiphop songs (2002) and Jacek Kowalski's *Blokomachia* of ballads (2012).

2.2. Public buildings

Particular buildings are not mentioned for their architecture, but for other values: symbolic, patriotic, or sentimental. St. Elizabeth's Church in Lviv was built in 1903–1911 next to where the roads to the railway station and Krakow parted. Leaving Lviv for war, soldiers sang:

From so far you see alas

Elizabeth church towers

March of Lviv Children, 1914, lyrics by an unknown

The Hotel Victoria in Warsaw, built in 1973–1976, was once a symbol of luxury beyond the reach of most of Polish citizens. The group Kombi caught also the feature of its neighbourhood – the vast Victory Square:

You'll sail across a great, alien plaza,

Neon lights will show you to a shining edifice,

Victoria Hotel, hotel of your dreams

Kombi, *Hotel of Your Dreams*, 1980, lyrics M. Dutkiewicz

A building which is part of a work of music is the Museum of History of Polish Jews in Warsaw, built in 2009–2013. The instrumental jazz album by Tomasz Stańko, named *Polin* like the museum, was dedicated to it in 2014.

2.3. Other structures

Among engineering structures, bridges are most often sung about. They are a symbol of connecting people:

I'm on your side when times get rough

And friends just can't be found,

Like a bridge over troubled water

I will lay me down

Simon & Garfunkel, *Bridge over Troubled Waters*, 1970, lyrics P. Simon

An exception from the rule is Pont Saint-Bénézet in Avignon. Built in the 12th century, the bridge was damaged and reconstructed many times. Since 1668 it has not been reconstructed and its spans the end in the Rodan River. A romantic poem on the bridge is sung by Ewa Demarczyk:

Dancing are invisible gentlemen on the bridge of Avignon
Dancing are ladies' leafy dresses on the bridge of Avignon
Ewa Demarczyk, *Sur le pont d'Avignon*, 1963, lyrics K. K. Baczyński

Famous statues appear in songs: the Statue of Liberty in New York (Simon & Garfunkel, *American Tune*, 1973), statue of King Frederic in Berlin (Andrzej Garczarek, *Nobody Will Choose My Friends*, 1981), the statue of Koniev in Krakow (Jacek Wójcicki, *Marshall Koniev*, 1987).

3. Planning and cities

Cities are quoted in songs quite often and in different meanings. A famous city's name is sometimes used as a one-word message of particular features and values.

3.1. Cities

A city can be a subject of admiration:

City my city, I love you when sun shines,
City my city, I love you when I can't sleep

Marek Jackowski, *City My City*, 1994, lyrics M. Jackowski

A city can be a place of getting lost:

In the city trams are like fish,
And the city is like bottomless well

Wolna Grupa Bukowina, *Night Song about the City*, 1973, lyrics W. Bellon

Traditional city space is valued:

Narrow streets of cobblestone
'Neath the halo of a street lamp

Simon & Garfunkel, *Sound of Silence*, 1964, lyrics P. Simon

In a song by Dire Straits one can find a brief description of a city development, which followed first settlers' action:

Then came the churches, then came the schools,
Then came the lawyers and then came the rules,
Then came the trains and the trucks with their loads

Dire Straits, *Telegraph Road*, 1982, lyrics M. Knopfler

Some cities are the subjects of entire albums. Such albums were dedicated to Paris by Malcolm McLaren (*Paris*, 1994) and Zaz (*Paris*, 2014), and to Warsaw by Aga Zaryan (*The Beauty is Dying*, 2007) and Warszawskie Combo Taneczne (*Do Admit*, 2009).

3.2. Districts and streets

The construction of both houses and entire housing projects and even cities were sung about in the mid-20th century. Mariensztat, one of the first post-War residential neighbourhoods in Warsaw, built in 1948–1949, featured its own public space and original detail. Young residents were glad to cut expenses by not buying a clock:

*We won't buy a clock,
Cause there's a clock in the market,*

Mieczysław Wojnicki, *Little Apartment in Mariensztat*, 1950, lyrics W. Stepień

The construction of Nowa Huta since 1949 (a district of Krakow since 1951) was a great project:

*This is a song on Nowa Huta,
On Nowa Huta are words,
It's so simple and beautiful
And new like Huta is New*

Song on Nowa Huta, 1951, lyrics S. Chruślicki

Districts of cities are sang about, too. Bulat Okudzhava called Moscow's Arbat, both a district and street, his destination, religion, motherland:

*You won't free from the love to it,
Even loving forty thousand other streets*

Bulat Okudzhava, *Песенка об Арбате*, 1967, lyrics B. Okudzhava

Joe Dassin's song recalls the most famous urban composition of Paris – the Baroque axis of Champs-Élysées with its two plazas:

*Et de l'Étoile à la Concorde, un orchestre à mille cordes
Tous les oiseaux du point du jour chantent l'amour*

Joe Dassin, *Aux Champs-Élysées*, 1969, lyrics P. Delanoe

4. Architects

Particular architects very seldom appear in lyrics. The examples are Antoni Gaudí and Frank Lloyd Wright.

4.1. Antoni Gaudí

The Alan Parsons Project created a suite *La Sagrada Familia* – named after the most outstanding work by Antoni Gaudí – the Church of the Holy Family in Barcelona, built since 1882 and still unfinished. The track, which opens the album *Gaudi*, starts with sounds that could be heard in Barcelona in various situations and periods: wind blow, hoof clatter, ringing bells, helicopter whirr. The narrator explains:

*In recent times, there is no one at all
Who can approach Antonio Gaudi
He started a new cathedral, in Barcelona*

*It is called La Sagrada Familia or the Holy Family
The sad thing is they could try to finish it
But I don't think they will do it*

After gentle beginning the track gets more dynamic and the sounds pile up like the church's architecture. The subtle sounds of piano and guitar become increasingly accompanied by drums. In somewhat Biblical verses vocalist John Miles refers to the emotions of creators, aiming at the fortunate end:

*La Sagrada Familia, the night is gone, the waiting's over!
La Sagrada Familia, there's peace throughout the land!*

The Alan Parsons Project, *La Sagrada Familia*, 1986, lyrics E. Woolfson and A. Parsons

4.2. Frank Lloyd Wright

Frank Lloyd Wright had a farewell in a romantic ballad by Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel. The gentle sounds of flute and guitar are accompanied with poetical verses:

*I can't believe your song is gone so soon
I barely learned the tune
I'll remember Frank Lloyd Wright,
Architects may come and
Architects may go and
Never change your point of view,
When I run dry
I stop awhile and think of you*

Simon & Garfunkel, *So Long, Frank Lloyd Wright*, 1970, lyrics P. Simon

Conclusions

Among the subjects of lyrics that draw upon architecture, the most popular are references to materials (timber, brick, concrete, glass), buildings (house, wall, bridge, statue), cities and their parts (district, street). Particular buildings are rarely mentioned, while particular architects – hardly at all. Architecture finds limited reflection in lyrics. However, some lyrics stand out for their literary value, e.g. pieces of sung poetry.

Architectural themes in lyrics are a way of expressing particular values or feelings; they are also a form of GAMES and PLAY that are inseparable features of popular music.

References

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