

WERONIKA GROZDEW-KOŁACIŃSKA
(POLAND)

FOREPASSED AND CONTEMPORARY FORMS OF MULTI-PART SINGING IN PODLASIE REGION

Introduction

Podlasie is a culturally heterogeneous region, and that is naturally reflected in performance styles. Musical variety in Podlasie results largely from its multicultural traditions (Misiejuk, 2011: 139–140), and the character of the repertoire and the wealth of its stylistic expression from the inter- and transcultural character of which the local population is increasingly aware¹; that is, the existence and coexistence, interpenetration and merging, or mutual supplanting of Mazovian and Ruthenian [traditions, Lublin-region traditions (in the southern reaches of Podlasie) and traditions from the Suwałki and Dzūkija (Lithuania) regions (in the northern extremes) (Juzala, 2010: 273–286). Various traditions evident in repertoire and performance in Podlasie also continue to merge, as they have in the past, in families of mixed religious and national background. The borderland aspect also has a personal dimension². At the same time, a crucial feature of the cultural melting pot of Podlasie is its ‘transitive’ character, concerning different levels and aspects of transcultural communication and existence³. Performance styles in Podlasie can be considered in analogous terms to the ‘multi-layered identity’ observed in multicultural societies (Gordon, 1964, after Nikitorowicz, 1995: 82–84). Hence the style of a singer’s vocal expression may be – without entering into a detailed categorisation – for instance equally Polish and Belarusian or Ukrainian, gentle and at the same time raw, early and modern, of the gentry and the peasantry, rural and urban. Some features of performance, defining a layer of musical identity, may come to dominate, but they can also forge a combination of elements determining (consciously or intuitively) the choice out of the variety available to a singer, which will also be expressive of the ‘Podlasie quality’ of his/her performance style. Anna Czekanowska numbers among manifestations

¹ Traces of the vocal traditions of the communities which in the past were thriving in Podlasie but today belong to relic cultures – Jews, Tatars, Romani, Germans – have either been completely erased or forgotten or are only faintly echoed in the repertoire of some performers.

² „It is impossible to establish a topographic cultural border, let alone an inter-group ethnic border. Borders do not run between groups, but are internalised, running within a person. [...] Cultural contact always occurs within the individual, who, involved in various relationships – social, family, local, religious – presents his/her own individual cultural configuration, used and interpreted in various ways” (Straczuk, 2006: 246).

³ „The borderland is a nebulous zone in which we come across various forms of cultural duality, where the boundaries between contiguous cultures become blurred [...], such that it becomes impossible to ascribe particular features to a specific system” (Straczuk, 2006: 247–248).

of Podlasie culture that unite and foster communication and understanding, regardless of differences of language and religion, part singing (Czekanowska, 2009: 198), so harmonic singing, as musicologically understood, most often in two parts. Collective singing, and not infrequently multi-part singing, constitutes a characteristic feature of Podlasie culture, in musical and also social terms. This fact, familiar from my own experience, is confirmed by the comments of researchers:

For anyone who knows this region, it is obvious that music, and especially singing, carries huge significance and great power for these communities [from the borderlands of Poland, Belarus, Lithuania and Ukraine], that it inspires artistically and integrates socially. In addition, singing is regarded as an effective remedy to life's problems, since at difficult times in life 'you have to sing, and it is best to sing in a group, in parts'. The natural, almost psychophysiological need to sing and predisposition for collective performance are a powerful creative impulse that often leads to artistically excellent creations (Czekanowska, 2001a: 13).

In the east of Poland, when we approach a singer, they will say that they have to invite a neighbour, etc., because singing alone is not enough, one has to help one another. [...] Advanced, deliberate heterophony (sometimes with elements of counterpoint) in the ethnic borderlands of Poland is a property of communities with strong social-territorial ties (Dahlig, 2018: 24–25).

In Poland, it is mainly women who sing collectively (with the exception of highland groups); in Podlasie, however, female-male groups are quite common. It seems that part singing is more concentrated in areas where communities are mixed or close to one another in terms of nationality or religion. In the vocal culture of Podlasie, the sacred and the profane are strongly intertwined: devotional singing and singing related to everyday affairs form a single whole in people's lives and culture. Family and neighbourhood ritual linked to both religious and secular celebration remains very much alive. Carolling, 'Marian' singing by wayside shrine and crosses or in people's homes, christenings, weddings, wakes – those situations are accompanied by spontaneous collective singing. The literature (scholarly, factual, belles-lettres) concerning Podlasie frequently refers to a characteristic spirituality, and even to a sort of mysticism that pervades the culture of this region. Here, it seems, it is still difficult to clearly distinguish secular from religious singing and ritual, although a rational classification sometimes prompts one to ascribe functions unequivocally to particular traditional songs.

Podlasie is a region in which culture is transferred continuously through the generations. Here traditional forms of music, including in the domain of 'reinvigoration' (the term employed by Piotr Dahlig) and reconstructions, exist on an equal footing to modern forms, folklore coexists with 'folk' ('world music'), as exemplified by the work of the ensembles Czeremszyzna, from Czeremcha-Wieś (a district of Hajnówka),

and Żemerwa, from Studziwody (a district of Bielsk Podlaski). For the last few years, workshops in traditional singing have been organised in various places across the region by local rural female singers, and there has been a revival of customs linked to springtime carolling (Gaweł, 2012: 19–22), including by Kompania Wołoczebników from Kalinówka Kościelna (a district of Knyszyn). Winter carolling has been continued in Podlasie without a break (e.g. in Hački, a district of Bielsk Podlaski), like the above-mentioned ‘Marian’ singing by wayside shrine in May.

Polish singing traditions, as Jadwiga Sobieska notes, and her opinion is backed by most Polish ethnomusicologists, are dominated by one-part performance, primarily in the form of individual singing (Sobiescy, 1973: 344; Sobieska, 1973: 574; 2006: 126). Yet Podlasie belongs to those regions where different ethnic groups and nations meet, which results – as in the case of other Polish borderland regions⁴ – in the occurrence of varied forms of naturally formed multi-part singing (Dahlig, 2018: 12, 20–21). In addition, we can still find there relicts/traces of improvised style and heterophony. Polyphonic forms, in the strict understanding of that kind of part singing, cannot be found in Podlasie. As Piotr Dahlig notes: ‘where two- or three-part singing functions in Polish lands, there is no place for the sovereignty of particular parts; it is more about expanding the spectrum of expression with ornamentation, a fuller “volume” of the monody or the introduction of heterophony or parallel intervals’ (Dahlig, 2018: 15).

Phonographic sources

In the archive recordings at our disposal in the IS PAN Phonographic Collection, group singing is dominated by individual recordings, which on one hand offers splendid scope for research into the variety of individual performance expression among Podlasie singers, but on the other prevents a broader look at group (including multi-part) singing, which remains very popular and spontaneous in devotional singing among the Catholic, Orthodox and Uniate communities. That was certainly influenced by the technical possibilities (in the case of the earliest recordings, from the 50s) at the disposal of the recording teams.⁵ Contemporary recordings, meanwhile, are marked by personal limitations: singers representing old styles and a rich vocal repertoire are departing the scene, and the spontaneous communal singing which still towards the end of the

⁴ Traditional multi-part singing occurs in the Podhale, Pieniny and Beskid Żywiecki highland regions, Silesia and Sącz (so regions influenced by Carpathian highland culture), and in Podlasie and the Suwałki region (where Polish traditions cross with Belarusian, Ukrainian and Lithuanian traditions); the part singing in Silesia is linked by musical folklore scholars to the rich choral tradition in that region (Sobieska, 2006: 126–130; Dahlig, 2018: 23).

⁵ It was primarily musical material regarded as Polish that was recorded, which is hardly surprising given the dramatic loss of valuable pre-war phonographic collections gathered under the initiative of Julian Pulikowski in the Central Phonographic Archive at the National Library in Warsaw (Dahlig, 1998: 574–625; Jackowski, 2014: 182–224). As Piotr Dahlig notes: ‘one feature of older folkloristic research was a focus on a single ethnic element and on attempts to define the range of those musical-cultural properties which could be linked to a particular nationality’ (Dahlig, 2004: 298).

1990s could be heard in Podlasie villages⁶ has been replaced by numerous regional folk ensembles, mostly featuring accompanied singing (although singing remains popular during family celebrations in Podlasie). From around the 1970s, spontaneously singing groups of residents of Podlasie villages began to get more organised and form singing groups (incl. in the villages of Dobrowoda, c.1968, and Zbucz, c.1975).

The highly valuable, albeit few in number, archive recordings of collective singing made by Aleksander Oleszczuk date from the 1960s. Recordings from the archive of the Institute of Musicology of the Catholic University of Lublin also contain extremely important sources of (Catholic) devotional singing. Later, from the 1970s to 90s and at the start of the twenty-first century, recordings were made of female multi-part singing (incl. Stefan Kopa and Janina Szymańska, Warsaw University musicology students, under the guidance of Tomasz Nowak and Ewa Wróbel, Barbara Kuzub-Samosiuk, Julita Charytoniuk and others), and also male and mixed carolling groups during festivals in Grabianów and Szepietowo (Piotr Dahlig). The recent recordings made by researchers from the IS PAN in 2013 and 2015–2017 bring us devotional repertoire from the Orthodox and Uniate cultures⁷. One should also mention that both earlier and more recent written (musical) sources mainly fail to reflect the practice of multi-part singing (as Karol Hławiczka pointed out in relation to the records made by Oskar Kolberg)⁸, generally giving only the main melody – as in the case of the notating of instrumental music, when only the melody played by the violins was noted, and not the parts of the ensemble. There may be at least two reasons for this practice⁹.

Variety of multi-part singing

The archive group recordings are dominated by performances in one part or with elements of multi-part singing. Given the dearth of phonographic material documenting Podlasie collective singing, this fact is of qualitative rather than quantitative importance. For the same reason, it is difficult to state whether monophonic performances are predominant in Podlasie. We cannot categorically rule out the possibility that heterophonic and diaphonic forms occurred more widely in former times. Today – due to the unifying practice of singing in regional ensembles, including those whose presentations are

⁶ I had an opportunity to experience such singing myself, in the village of Malinniki, during fieldwork conducted by Warsaw University musicology students in 1998 under the guidance of Dr Tomasz Nowak and Ewa Wróbel MA, who were research and teaching assistants at the time.

⁷ Recordings were made, for example, as part of the Polish–Bulgarian research project ‘Christian culture and folklore in the modern world: Bulgarian–Polish parallels’ (2015–2017).

⁸ “Kolberg does not give, for instance, multi-part traditional music, noting only the melodies” (Hławiczka, 1936: 3–4).

⁹ Some forms of traditional multi-part singing were not treated by the first folklore documentalists as polyphony (or multi-part harmony), which is interesting in that folk performers in some cultures also do not consider the particular parts in multi-part singing to be separate entities (cf. Moszyński, 1939: 1141; Dahlig, 2018: 12; Grozdew-Kolacińska, 2020: 137).

accompanied by accordion and the performance ideal of which is single-variant singing (including singing from a songbook) – it is impossible to determine the intensity in which such harmonies occur. They remain fragmentary and are not particularly well cultivated, since they do not fall within the contemporary major–minor harmonic aesthetic, which – ironically – has become most popular in rural areas.

Generally speaking, we can distinguish two-part singing (in homophonic form) sporadically expanded with a third and fourth part, heterophony (scant) and monophony, while we often encounter a mixture of those types in a single performance, and it is sometimes difficult to classify a particular song, because – as Jaap Kunst rightly noted a long time ago – ‘Who can draw the exact borderline between homophony and polyphony; [...] who can fix the place where heterophony turns into polyphony? Living practice is always richer and more plastic than any scheme-building theory’ (Kunst, 1950: 47). Podlasie heterophony can be situated on the boundary between multi- and one-part singing, though it seems to gravitate more towards the former (to two-part singing in thirds). Homophony, meanwhile, is understood as the accompaniment of a song’s principal melody by one other part or more through its vertical harmonisation (cf. Račiūnaitė-Vyčiniene, 2014a: 267). This type of multi-part singing is defined by scholars as ‘new’ or ‘newer’ and linked to the influence of composed music and to the laws of functional harmony (Sobiescy, 1973: 345; Sobieska, 2006: 127; Juzala, 2006a: 363; 2006b: 374, 377). Nowadays, the most popular form of multi-part singing in Podlasie is two-part in thirds, usually reached after a one-part opening to a song, which in some types of singing assumes the form of a *zaśpiew* (e.g. in the springtime *konopielka*). A *zaśpiew* can be realised both by a single individual – as with the *zapiewajła* sung by *woloczebnicy* – and by a whole group, although usually one member of a group is invited by the others: ‘Naczynaj!’ (‘Start!’). The end of a song is also normally sung in unison or at an octave, and in cadential (or initial) phrases there also appear passing intervals of a fifth, less often a fourth. Also appearing sporadically during the course of a song are parallel fifths. Is this an echo of nineteenth-century Lithuanian multi-part singing or the influence of Orthodox polyphonic singing, or perhaps a relic of faburden practice (cf. Krupowies, 1999: 101; Nowak, 2005: 141)? In religious repertoire, singing at fifths can probably be linked to the laws of harmony in Orthodox chant, as it often concerns songs noted in the *Bohohłasnik* and performed also in church (e.g. Christmas carols or Passion songs)¹⁰.

¹⁰ It is also worth mentioning here the existence of some old forms of Orthodox liturgical singing, including *stroczoje pienije* (from the Church Slavonic language meaning line singing), practised particularly in Ukraine long before the reform introduced by the Moscow patriarch Nikon (1654–1657), and multi-part liturgical compositions known as *partiesnoje pienije* (from the Latin *partes*, meaning parts, partbooks in Western European polyphonic singing); cf. Wołoskiuk, 2005: 26–45, 46 ff.; 2012; Sawicki, 2013). As Wołoskiuk writes, in relation to former Orthodox musical culture in Supraśl: ‘the transposing of melodies contained in the Supraśl Irmologion onto the stave shows that in the Orthodox Church in Poland at that time, awareness was growing of the introduction of new notation into liturgical practice. Having examined the new style and notation, Orthodox chanters “translated” liturgical music books into a new system that was far easier and more convenient. In that way, neumatic, Kyivan, Greek and Bulgarian chant became four-part

Podlasie songs with a characteristic ending on an octave betray a distinct influence from the practice of Belarusian and Ukrainian, as well as Russian, multi-part singing. The interval of a second occurs sporadically, and rather as a passing interval (cf. Juzala, 2006b: 377–378; Kopa, 2008: 134, 146), which may also be tentatively linked to former heterophonic or *faburden* practice, still present, for example, in the Dzūkija region of Lithuania (Račiūnaitė-Vyčiniienė, 2014b). It should be clearly pointed out, however, that no forms of intentionally created *faburden* polyphony have been noted in any available Podlasie sources. There also occurs singing in parallel octaves, when a high part doubles the melody of a song, e.g. in the village of Krzywe, near Bielsk Podlaski (cf. Juzala, 2006b: 372). This is not an isolated practice in traditional multi-part singing, and it may be linked in equal measure to the influence of mediaeval polyphony and to autonomous local practices¹¹. The practice of doubling parts at an octave can be found in the polyphonic singing of Pieniny highlanders (Czastka-Kłapyta, 2015). The doubling of a principal melody an octave above may also be the result of a prosaic occurrence – if a part cannot be matched with the singing group due to the different tessitura of some of the singers, especially when both men and women are taking part in the singing. As already mentioned, the most widespread kind of part singing is two-part singing led in parallel thirds. The second part is most often ‘taken’ from below, which would tally with an analogous practice of two-part singing among Poles in the Vilnius area (cf. Nowak, 2005: 140), but it is also realised above the melody – a practice that is characteristic of performances from northern Podlasie, on the border with the Suwałki region (Ex. 1, 2; PPML nos. 2841, 2844). There are rare instances of songs performed entirely ‘in parts’ (so without an initial one-part *zaśpiew*); interestingly, they come from ritual repertoire with a narrow compass to the melody (PPML Ex. 3, 4; nos. PPML 2784, 2786).

Actually sounding three-part singing appears in Podlasie rarely. It can be heard, for example, in religious songs, like Christmas songs from Orzeszkowo (Ex. 5, 6; PPML nos. 2831, 2833) and Lenten songs from Gorodzisko (audio ex. 1), and takes the form of a harmonic (in thirds) filling of a fifth, most often in cadential phrases, although that is not a rule (Kopa, 2008: 78, 174), and it is sometimes also realised as the lowest voice, so the harmonic ground to two-part singing in thirds (Dahlig, 2018: 21; cf. Kopa, 2008: 28); in the case of mixed male-female carolling groups, a ‘bass’ is added (Kalinowska, 2004: 93). No special local terminology concerning the structure and function of particular parts in part singing has developed in Podlasie, such as are observed and excellently described in

chant. Also created from *irmologions* were four-part scores of functional melodies” (Wołoskiuk, 1999). Of *Supraśl* provenance is another important manuscript, produced in 1638, so at a time when the Monastery of the Annunciation was Uniate: the *Irmologion* of Fyodor Semyonovich of Berezhany. Also noted there were multi-part songs, some displaying a clear influence from music of the Catholic Church (Abijski, 2010: 53–56).

¹¹ Singing in octaves (in two or three parts) can be found in many traditional vocal cultures of the world (cf. Jordania, 2015).

the case of other European vocal cultures: Lithuanian, Russian, Ukrainian and especially Mediterranean cultures (see Ahmedaja, 2011: 235–458). However, singers in Podlasie also identify and call parts ‘lower’ and ‘higher’ (Dahlig, 2018: 15), or ‘thin’ and ‘thick’ (Dahlig, 1993: 132).

From the perspective of the historical character of traditional vocal performance, perhaps the most interesting kind of collective singing is heterophony. It exists in relic form in Podlasie in performances dominated by two-part singing in thirds, and it also – though very rarely – breaks into unison singing, in which it approaches monophony (Jordania, 2006: 28–29). Extremely valuable examples of spontaneous and highly expressive heterophonic singing can be heard on recordings from the village of Malinniki made by Aleksander Oleszczuk (ex. 7; PPML nos. 2820; audio ex. 2), and also minor deviations between the parts in some wedding songs from Czeremcha (ex. 8, 9, 10; PPML nos. 2768, 2769, 2772), which tradition bids us regard as among the most archaic genres of ritual music; hence the conviction of their one-part character¹². Interesting are Podlasie examples of heterophony veering into two-part singing, e.g. well-wishing carols recorded by Janina Szymańska in 1977 in Dubicze Cerkiewne (audio ex. 3: T3497.02) and also springtime *rohulki* recorded by her in Czeremcha in 1989 (audio ex. 4, 5: T4181.01, T4181.04), as well as a christening song written down in the village of Kojły (see Лукашенко, Похилевич 2006, p. 99, no. 73). We also find examples of the combining of heterophonic and homophonic singing (cf. Juzala, 2006b: 378) in two- or three-part singing in thirds, e.g. in a *rohulka* from Orzeszkowo (Ex. 11; PPML no. 2834).

Conclusion

It is extremely difficult to determine how old this practice of two-part (multi-part) singing in Podlasie might be, given that already in the sixteenth century, in chanting of the Orthodox Church in these lands, besides monody, there existed the practice of multi-part singing. Moreover, harmonised singing in thirds (singing in parallel thirds that shape the tonal structure, not passing intervals) does not necessarily signify a ‘new’ type, as is usually thought (cf. Sobieska, 2006: 128; Dahlig, 2018: 23–24). One clue may be afforded here by the melodic material of a song, but it is likely that we can only be certain about ‘newer’ harmonising when a song is unequivocally set in major–minor tonality. It is worth revising the very term ‘newer’, which in the subject literature refers above all to forms of multi-part singing that began appearing in folk practice between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries under the sway of composed music (Jordania, 2011: 24; Dahlig, 2018: 24) and to the choral society movement, which developed dynamically particularly around the turn of the twentieth century. If we are dealing with repertoire performed in

¹² In relation to Belarusian wedding repertoire, Tamara Varfolomeyeva writes that these songs are performed mostly in one-part, ‘although “deviation” into two-part singing does occur: a heterophonic type in Po’ozerye and fourths-fifths and thirds-fifths types in the western region’ (Varfolomeyeva, 2009: 54).

two parts (at a third, a fifth or an octave) with an archaic melodic structure – narrow compass, modality (ex. 12: PPML no. 2786) – then we cannot be sure about (school or church) choral ‘influences’ from the nineteenth century or later. We ought not to rule out the former existence of various forms of multi-part singing in Podlasie, be it only on account of the bagpiping practice that was still alive in regions of Belarus (in particular) and Lithuania bordering on Podlasie around the turn of the twentieth century and in earlier times also in Mazovia (Oskar Kolberg, DWOK 52 Białoruś-Polesie: 119; Przerembski, 2007: 70–80; Nowak, 2005: 153; Račiūnaitė-Vyčinienė, 2006; Dahlig, 2021: 32).

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Audio examples

CD *Ludowe pieśni religijne z Podlasia*, Stowarzyszenie Dziedzictwo Podlasia, 2013, tr. 16

T4115.02 – “Oj, selom, selom, selom malinyckim”, rec. Malinniki voc. unknown women group

T3497.02 – “Oj, tam na przyzbie, tam na zołotoj, koliada”, rec. Dubicze Cerkiewne 1977, voc. Chomiczuk Anna, Siemieniuk Olga, Lewczuk Irena

T4181.01 – “Oj, zajdy, zajdy jasne sonyczko”, rec. Czeremcha 1989, voc. six women from Czeremcha

T4181.04 – “Kuje zazulia kuje sywaja”, rec. Czeremcha 1989, voc. six women from Czeremcha

Example 1. No. 2841 PPML

Oj, do-bry wie - czór mój gos-po - da - rzu, dla cie - bie!

Oj, spo-dzie-waj sie do-bre-go goś - cia do sie - bie.

Example 2. No. 2841 PPML

Pa - da deż - dżyk, pa - da na mo - ja ro - sa - da.

Oj, kie - dy, oj, kie - dy z Ra - ko - wicz wy - ja - (de)?

Example 3. No. 2784 PPML

$\text{♩} = 161$

Swia - ty — Ju - re Ry - ho - re,
puj - dy do Bo - ha po kl'u - czy,
puj - dy do Bo - ha po kl'u - czy,
i o - dom - kny zym - li - cu,
i o - dom - kny zym - li - cu,
i wy - pust', wy - pust' tra - wy - cu,
i wy - pust', wy - pust' tra - wy - cu.

Example 4. No. 2786 PPML

$\text{♩} = 83$

Je w Dobry - wo - dy hru-do - czok, hru - do - czok,

Example 5. No. 2831 PPML

$\text{♩} = 85$

Wos-klik-nij-tie an - hie - ly na nie-bie - sje so - głas-no,
wy, lu - di-je na zie-mli, poj-tie pie-sniu pry - kra-snu.

Wo Wi-łli-je - mie ro-di-łs'ia Spa-si-tiel, wsie-mu mi - ru, mi-ru I-sku-pi - tiel,

Chri - stos roż - da - jeć - cia, sła - wi - tie, Ja - zy - cy, ra -

zu-mij-tie, ja - ko s na - mi Boh, ja-ko s na-mi Boh.

59"

Example 6. No. 2833 PPML

$\text{♩} = 77$

No-wa ra - dost' sta - ła, ja - ka nie by - wa - ła

nad wier-tie - pom zwiez-da ja - sna, swie-tom wo-s'i - ja - ła.

28"

Example 7. No. 2820 PPML

$\text{♩} = 155$

Oj, se - łom, se - łom, se - łom ma - ly - nyc - kim,

ka - li - na ma - li - na, czer - wo - na - ja roż - (a).

Example 8. No. 2768 PPML

$\text{♩} = 118$

Oj, wy - py - ła, wy - chy - li - ła, sa - ma se - be poch - wa - li - ła:

a ja z dob - ro - ho ro - du, pju ho - rił - ku jak wo - du, jak wo - du.

Example 9. No. 2769 PPML

$\text{♩} = 118$

Za - chy - liw - szy - s'ia w ku - tok, po try riu - mocz' - ki w ro - tok,

po try riu - mocz - ki w ro - tok, kob ny bo - liw ży - wo - tok, kob ny bo ży - wo - tok.

Example 10. No. 2772 PPML

$\text{♩} = 110$

Oj, wy - py - ty to to ja, za - ku - sy - ty to to ja,
do ro-bo - ty bo - l'at bo-ki, bo j ny sy-la mo-ja, bo j ny sy-la mo-ja.

Example 11. No. 2834 PPML

$\text{♩} = 140$

Tam za — lie - som, za bo-rom, tam za lie - som, za bo-rom,
za sy - nej - kim o - z'ior (om).

Example 12. No. 2786 PPML

$\text{♩} = 83$

Je w Dobry - wo - dy hru-do - czok, hru - do - czok,