

Andrzej Korzyński (1940-2022)

During Easter 2022 Poland lost one of its most famous composers of film music: Andrzej Korzyński (b. 1940). Korzyński scored six Andrzej Wajda films, including two of his most successful films internationally: *Człowiek z marmuru/Man of Marble* (1976) and *Człowiek z żelaza/Man of Iron* (1981). Others included *Polowanie na muchy/Hunting Flies* (1969) and *Brzezina/Birch Wood* (1970). Korzyński also composed music for almost all films by Andrzej Żuławski. His other achievements include scoring an adaptation of the Henryk Sienkiewicz young adult novel *W pustyni i w puszczy/In Desert and Wilderness* (1973), directed by Władysław Ślesicki and three movies about the adventures of Mr. Kleks/Mr Blob, based on a popular book by Jan Brzechwa and directed by Krzysztof Gradowski, made in 1983, 1985 and 1988. Gradowski's films broke records of popularity in the 1980s thanks to attracting families to Polish cinemas. Korzyński also composed for films produced in Italy, France and East and West Germany. He was a prolific composer, able to work on as many as three films at any given time and finish them within a month.

Korzyński was a classically trained musician with a university degree in composition. However, rather than pursuing a career in classical music, he decided to turn to popular and electronic music. In his own words, his fascination with electronic instruments came early, when as a child his parents gave him an East German 'Smaragd' tape recorder which allowed its user to play recordings at two speeds, as well as backwards. This encouraged Korzyński to experiment on this instrument with his then school friend, Andrzej Żuławski. During his studies Korzyński became involved in music journalism, which put him in contact with a radio journalist and a fellow pioneer of electronic music, Mateusz Świącicki. Thanks to Świącicki he also helped to organise the first festivals of Polish songs in Opole in the early 1960s. In the same decade he started writing popular music for multiple purposes, including songs and film music. As a songwriter, his first achievement was discovering the talent of the then student and amateur singer from Lublin, Piotr Szczepanik, for whom he wrote such hits as 'Żółte kalendarze' (Yellow Calendars) and 'Kochać' (To Love). A record with these songs, released in 1967, was most likely the best-selling Polish record during the entire period of state socialism. Many years later, when he was working on the first film about Mr. Kleks, *Akademia Pana Kleksa/Mr. Kleks' Academy* (1983), inspired by the voice and personality of actor Piotr Fronczewski, Korzyński invented the character Franek Kimomo. Franek Kimono is typically described as a mockery of disco culture popular in the 1980s, but in my view he is more a reflection of many facets of Poland's transitional period (from state socialism to postcommunism), such as an interest in karate (thanks to Bruce Lee films, imported to Poland at the time), consumerism and a penchant of showing off by the Polish nouveaux riches. Again, it proved an instantaneous hit amongst audiences.

A large part of Korzyński's output can be classified as electronic music. One effect of using electronic instruments both in soundtracks and in songs, was a sense of contemporaneity. This is especially noticeable in *Man of Marble*. On this occasion Korzyński showed Wajda the recordings of the track 'Baby Bump' by the electronic band Arp Life, which he set up with Mateusz Świącicki. The director liked it so much that he asked Korzyński to write music in this style for the entire film. Appreciation of this score had much to do with the fact that it adds considerably to the film's atmosphere. It conveys the speed and

nervousness of the 1970s, a desire to make the country a success, to build, to expand, to travel, to see the world, which not only pertained to political and economic elites but to ordinary people as well, as suggested by the titles of the tracks, taken from the names of industrial sites, visited by the protagonist: 'In the Shipyard' or 'The Katowice Steelworks'. At the same time, much of this music, including 'Baby Bump', is over the top, maybe having to do with the fact that, as the composer put it himself, 'the synthesiser played incredibly low sounds'. As a result, it works on both levels: as an illustration to and celebration of Polish industrial might of the 1970s and as an ironic take on these achievements.

Another effect of Korzyński's electronisation of soundtracks was adding to the exoticism of the narrative. This is the case especially in the films made for children, such as *In Desert and Wilderness* and in stories about Mr. Kleks.

Largely thanks to his friendship with Żuławski and his reputation earned as Wajda's collaborator, Korzyński got the opportunity to work abroad, scoring music for films produced both in the West and in the East. He signed contracts with Warner Bros and 20th Century Fox and composed music for several East German cinema and television films. However, his foreign career was halted by the authorities who confiscated his passport at the time when his foreign career was blooming.

Korzyński not only composed music for film, but also arranged it on different instruments. On some occasions, he worked just with synthesisers, on others, with an entire orchestra. One of his more 'monumental' projects as an arranger was the soundtrack for the Polish-German series for children, *Janka* (1993), directed by Janusz Łęski, which illustrates Korzyński's fascination with both classical Hollywood and Gustav Mahler.

Korzyński also electronised Polish songs, in this way also updating the image of several Polish singers, such as Maryla Rodowicz, Irena Jarońska and Zdzisława Sońnicka. Subsequently all these singers found their way to Polish cinema, playing in popular films such as *Motylem jestem/I Am a Butterfly* (1976), directed by Jerzy Gruza and the *Mr. Kleks* franchise. In this way he played a role in bringing together the world of Polish cinema and popular music, as it was the case in Poland before the Second World War.

Despite his immense achievements, Korzyński received few awards for his works and generally was not pampered by the Polish cultural establishment. This can be explained by the fact that he positioned himself as a commercial musician, a professional, who fulfilled a given task to the best of his abilities, rather than a navel-gazing, tormented Romantic artist. In Poland, unfortunately, the latter is celebrated while the other is looked upon with scorn or at best suspicion. Nevertheless, the status of Korzyński, especially as a film composer, is growing. This is largely thanks to the British label Finders Keepers and to the Polish record company GAD Records, which together are releasing Korzyński's scores, proving that they function well as works in their own right.

I had the pleasure of meeting Andrzej Korzyński in the summer of 2021, when he told me about the less known facets of his work, most importantly on the Polish radio and his methods of scoring films and experiences in working under different political regimes. He came across as being in good physical and mental form and keen to continue his work, even if at a slower pace. It is a big surprise and loss, that this would be no longer possible.

Ewa Mazierska

School of Arts and Media, University of Central Lancashire, UK

ehmazierska@uclan.ac.uk