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## Mira Kubasińska – Career Development and Evolution of the Artistic Image in the Years 1963–1973

### Introduction

Mira Kubasińska is one of the most characteristic female pop singers that appeared during the so-called *big beat* period on the Polish scene<sup>1</sup>. This applies to every aspect that contributes to shaping an artistic image. She had extraordinary vocal abilities and a natural gift for moulding phrases. All of that was combined with her exceptional expression and sense of rhythm, reflected in the original way of moving on stage. She was characterised by an extraordinary naturalism and freedom of the “flower children” generation, which could be seen in the PRL period as “defiant” and “provocative,” especially against the background of static female vocalists of the time. This is evidenced by the reception of Breakout’s performance at the Opole Festival in 1969, which triggered great controversy among journalists as well as some censorship issues stemming from the group’s “western” image<sup>2</sup>. Kubasińska’s behaviour on stage crossed the barriers of the iron curtain and was not burdened with the reality of the “communist sadness,” so there was no question of styling or posing. Her artistic creation perfectly reflected her temperament, philosophy of life and refusal to accept opportunistic attitudes.

The Mira Kubasińska-Tadeusz Nalepa duet appearing on stage since their performance at the Szczecin’s Festival of Young Talents<sup>3</sup> in 1963 was a manifestation of complete symbiosis and complementarity. Perhaps it resulted from the law of attraction of opposite poles, which is a term that could be used to describe this tandem

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<sup>1</sup> The period indicated in the title refers to the most creative period of Mira Kubasińska’s career, from her performance at the Festival of Young Talents in Szczecin (1963) to the release of her last solo album, *Ogień* (1973).

<sup>2</sup> If it was not possible for the other performers to use Breakout’s equipment, the whole event probably would not have happened. The musicians, pressured by the TV broadcast manager, had to put up their hair and camouflage it under their shirts, see Królikowski 2008: 62; Michalski 2014: 745.

<sup>3</sup> The Festival of Young Talents in Szczecin, which at that time had just two editions, proved to be a turning point in the development of many careers. It is possible to arrive at a general thesis about its remarkable role in the history of Polish popular music, cf. Knap 2011: 38–43.

when it comes to stage temperament. Another thing are the mutual emotions and feelings, so visible in many recorded duet songs and parts in which the female artist's voice harmonised with the guitar and voice of Tadeusz Nalepa. As for creating the musical matter, Nalepa was undoubtedly the leader, even the dominator. This factor certainly played a role in freezing Mira Kubasińska's career after splitting with her husband and disbanding Breakout. The singer was unable to find her place on the music scene for a decade. She did not even believe she had a real chance of existing in the music show business deprived of compositions, lyrics and band. Kubasińska struggled for survival in the 1980s crisis and during the political transformation.

The text attempts to reconstruct the career and analyse the evolution of the singer's artistry and stage image in the most creative period of her stage activity. It also aims to answer the question of the influence of Mira Kubasińska's personality on the songs of bands she shaped with Tadeusz Nalepa. The issue subjected to comparative analysis is also the artistic creation of Mira Kubasińska on the background of Polish female rock and rhythm and blues singers who performed on the Polish stage at the same time. Finally, the author intends to highlight the profile of the artist, who to date has no published biography or even a serious publication about her, one that would be more extensive than mentions in articles, published interviews and paragraphs devoted to Kubasińska in texts describing the activities of Blackout and Breakout.

### Career Development and Evolution of Artistic Image

Mira (Marianna) Kubasińska was born on 8 September 1944 in Bodzechów, a small village near Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski<sup>4</sup>. Both her grandfather and father played some music. Kubasińska's musical and stage talent was noticed quite early, as proved by her participation in the "Mikrofon dla wszystkich" competition at the age of 8. She studied at a music school but she was, most of all, strongly involved in the artistic activity of a song and dance ensemble, which operated at the Cultural Centre in Ostrowiec. She also recalls that she had more realistic career prospects in "Śląsk" or "Mazowsze" ensembles than in a *big beat* formation (Szalbierz 2005). The trip to Rzeszów to play with a band from Ostrowiec turned out to be a key moment and a real breakthrough in her life. After the concert, during a meal in the "Przodownik" restaurant, Marianna Kubasińska met Tadeusz Nalepa<sup>5</sup>. The mentioned establishment at Pstrowskiego Street (currently Dominikańska) was one of the places where Tadeusz Nalepa played at the time (Pawlak 2012). During that meeting, they exchanged addresses and established contact, later maintained by writing letters (Dyńia 1999). Mira Kubasińska moved to Rzeszów in November 1962 because she was asked to join the band of Roman Albrzykowski, one of the

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<sup>4</sup> The Kubasiński family cultivated bourgeois and merchant traditions. They lived in Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski, at the junction of Sienkiewiczza and Starokunowska streets. Marianna Kubasińska was brought up there, see Rakoczy 2009.

<sup>5</sup> The exact date of the mentioned concert and the meeting between T. Nalepa and M. Kubasińska is not known. The most likely one seems to be in the first half of 1962, cf. Dyńia 1999.

most renowned *band leaders* for Rzeszów dance orchestras, who agreed to hire a singer recommended by Nalepa (Sufin-Suliga, Wojciechowski). The collaboration with Albrzykowski's band in the "Klubowa" restaurant lasted until the spring of 1963.<sup>6</sup> In the meantime, Nalepa's relationship with Kubasińska developed, which – art-wise – led to a performance at the Festival of Young Talents in Szczecin in July 1963, where the duo received an honourable mention for their version of the song *Let's Twist Again* by Chubby Checker. Following this success, they went on tour with the professional group "Luxemburg Combo" (Knap 2011: 43) and they were hired in "Porfirion," an artistic group operating at the Voivodeship Agency of Artistic Events in Rzeszów<sup>7</sup>. Nalepa accompanied on guitar and Kubasińska quickly rose from stage manager to actress<sup>8</sup>. "Porfirion" gained recognition on the national stage and won many awards<sup>9</sup>. On 9 January 1964, while still on tour with the cabaret in Lower Silesia, Tadeusz Nalepa and Mira Kubasińska got married at the Registry Office in Wałbrzych<sup>10</sup>.

Her achievements on stage made her vocal and stage skills recognisable and Kubasińska was invited to participate in the Second National Festival of Polish Song in Opole (24–28 June 1964) and won an honourable mention there. She also took part in eliminations for the final concert of the Festival in Sopot, however, unsuccessfully (Festiwalopole.tvp). At the same time, during their *tourneé* in Poland, "The London Beats" came to Rzeszów<sup>11</sup> and performed twice in the auditorium of the "Świt" cinema, receiving an enthusiastic response from the local audience ("Nowiny Rzeszowskie": 144/27.06.1964). As Kubasińska admits, the events unfolded rapidly and to her great surprise she was hired within a month by the "Londoners," becoming the band's singer (Dyńia 1999). This cooperation entailed not only performances in Poland during their 1964 tour, but also a several-months-long stay and concerts on the British Isles (1966), along with the production of the first record

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<sup>6</sup> Coming to Rzeszów was a significant moment in the development of M. Kubasińska's career, as was eloquently expressed by the artist herself in an interview given to Jerzy Dyńia: "(...) I was musically born here (in Rzeszów – W.K.). It started with Romek Albrzykowski, Tadeusz Nalepa of course, «Estrada Rzeszów» – the «Porfirion» cabaret", cf. Dyńia 2004.

<sup>7</sup> "Porfirion" was founded by Julian Krzywka in September 1960, Nalepa and Kubasińska joined the band after the season ended in June 1963, see Szarzyńska 2007: 181–188.

<sup>8</sup> There is an interesting story regarding Kubasińska's engagement as an actress, which was a consequence of an unfortunate accident of one of the group's actresses (Krystyna Dziubianka). Kubasińska, who participated in the rehearsals and knew Dziubianka's role by heart, excellently replaced her injured colleague and became the star of the ensemble, cf. Niedzielski: 63 and further.

<sup>9</sup> The success of "Porfirion" at the cabaret festival in Olsztyn (November 1963) was reported in a coverage by Kronika Filmowa, see Porfirion z Rzeszowa; Szarzyńska 2007: 188–191.

<sup>10</sup> During the trips, Nalepa and Kubasińska had problems with renting a hotel room together; their decision to do so was also not approved by the band's director, cf. Nalepa Halina, Nalepa Czesław 2020.

<sup>11</sup> To authenticate their English roots, the band added the word "original" to their name ("The Original London Beats", "The OLB").

in Mira Kubasińska's discography<sup>12</sup>. On 20 April 1965, the singer gave birth to a son, Piotr, which made it easier for her in the following year to obtain a passport to travel to England<sup>13</sup>.

An important outcome of the intensive concert cooperation with The London Beats was the purchase of musical equipment from the English by the band Blackout (Nowak 2019), formed by Nalepa and a singer Stanislaw Guzek (Stan Borys). The official date of establishing this band is 26 August 1965 (Królikowski 2008: 12). However, the band was formed over the summer of that year and the milestone was the "kidnapping" of two musicians, Józef Hajdasz (drums) and Krzysztof Potocki (bass guitar), from the line-up of Jerzy Dynia's orchestra which played at the "Rzeszowska" restaurant (Dynia 2020). Apart from the musicians mentioned above, the band was completed with Andrzej Zawadzki playing the guitar (Niedzielski 2009: 155). At the time, Mira Kubasińska was contractually tied with "The OLB" and was not involved in working on the repertoire. An important moment for Nalepa's newly formed band was taking place in Rzeszów in autumn 1965. Krajowe Targi Piosenki [National Song Fair] resulted in Mateusz Świącicki inviting Blackout to Warsaw for a recording session, as he was highly impressed by the band's musical level and Bogdan Loeb'l's lyrics ("Jazz": No. 11/November 1965). The band was to record in "Studio Rytm" and accompany a Rzeszów-based singer Jerzy Bąk. However, Nalepa did not inform Bąk about the recording session and Mira Kubasińska, who had a break in the tour at the time, appeared in the studio to record Katarzyna Gärtner's song *Nie mam dla ciebie żadnej piosenki*. The next recording session at the "Trójka" radio station was a breakthrough in the band's career, ensured by the great hit *Anna* released at that moment<sup>14</sup>. In 1966, Mira Kubasińska performed with the band from time to time. She sang at the Opole Festival (24 June) as well as at the Wiosenny Festiwal Muzyki Nastolatków [Spring Festival of Teenage Music] (17 July, Lechia Stadium in Gdańsk), where Blackout won third place<sup>15</sup>. The singer was not present during the concerts on the coast and the August shows in Warsaw's "Stodoła" as she left for England for 3 months. Despite many concerts, it was a very difficult time for the band. The drummer Józef Hajdasz recalled that the cost of living in Warsaw consumed almost all of the band's earnings. This was confirmed by Bogdan Loeb'l who, in a conversation with Tadeusz Niedzielski, spoke about literal "misery", "vegetation" and Mira Kubasińska cooking meals "secretly" in the hotel on an electric cooker (Niedzielski 2009: 58, 80). The next year of stage activity was extremely intense for Blackout, which gradually improved the band's financial

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<sup>12</sup> Mira Kubasińska in early 1966 recorded with "The Original London Beats" the so-called "four" which featured the songs *Walking In The Sand*, *You're No Good*, *I'll Crazy* and a Bob Dylan's composition, *If You Gotta Go-Go Now* (voc. Mick Tucker), see Blog The London Beats.

<sup>13</sup> At that time, Tadeusz Nalepa's mother took care of the child, and their son Piotr, after a few months of being away from Mira Kubasińska, reportedly did not recognize her after returning home, cf. Nalepa Halina, Nalepa Czesław 2020.

<sup>14</sup> The song "Anna" won third place in the ranking of the "Jazz" monthly in the category Hit of the Year, see "Jazz" no. 1/January 1967.

<sup>15</sup> The Skaldowie band triumphed at both festivals.

situation. However, the relationship between the musicians started to take a different shape. This concerned both the marital relations after Kubasińska's return and the growing tension between Nalepa and Guzek. The conflicts were largely caused by the ambitions of both Guzek and Mira Kubasińska, with the latter complaining that the repertoire Nalepa was writing for her was not as catchy as the songs performed by Guzek. When it comes to Guzek, Nalepa claimed that he "contracted the stardom disease." The apodictic nature of the demanding leader was an additional burden and in the summer of 1967 Nalepa excluded Stan Borys from the band (Niedzielski 2009: 33; 48–49; 58–59). Yet, he still sang during the band's recording session (25 September – 5 October), resulting in the release of Blackout's only longplay which came out after the group had already broken up (Michalski 2014: 693 ff.).

Blackout recorded six "fours" and one full-length album entitled *Blackout* (1967)<sup>16</sup>. Mira Kubasińska sang a total of eight songs in this period as the main singer, in addition to vocals and back-up in several other compositions, which statistically places her as third when it comes to the main vocal parts in the band. Performing with "The OLB" and devotion to maternal duties surely had an impact on this. The analysis of the songs she performed with Blackout bring to the fore, on the one hand, an extraordinary level of musicality, sense of rhythm, phrasing and a noteworthy interpretation of the lyrics. Excellent examples here are the songs *Spokojnie śpij*, *Nie przechodź obok*, but above all *Wyspa*, probably Kubasińska's biggest hit from that period. In addition to the natural, deep timbre of her voice, attention is drawn to her impeccable voice emission (within the aesthetics of popular music, of course) and simple yet elegant choice of means of expression – her delicate *vibrato*. Unlike other female performers, she did not resort to evident mannerisms, exaggerated expression and the so-called "forced" voice. These features certainly proved her exceptional talent and innate abilities, but also the resulted from working with professional actors and musicians, for example in the "Porfirion." Undoubtedly, the biggest hit by Blackout is *Anna* (voc. S. Guzek – note W.K). When juxtaposing this song with *Wyspa*, so splendidly interpreted by Kubasińska, it is possible to state that the latter is certainly not inferior in quality. The depth and multitude of interpretations of Loebel's poetics contrasts with the simple harmony of the piece. A distinctive feature of this piece is the *bridge* between parts A and B, changing the rhythm (6/8 to 4/4/) and creating for Kubasińska a unique opportunity to build a lyrical phrase, parallel in some sense to the *parlando* in *Anna*.

There is a fundamental methodological problem with comparing Mira Kubasińska to other female vocalists of the second half of the 1960s. Most female singers on the Polish scene at the time were still firmly rooted in the singer-related aesthetics that depended on elaborate arrangements and came from the tradition of swing dance orchestras. The almost childish lyrics of most of the songs of the time remain another matter. An example here may be the songs performed by the excellent singer Helena Majdaniec (*Rudy Rydz*, *Czarny Ali-Baba* and others) and Karin

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<sup>16</sup> In 1994, radio and alternative versions of songs recorded between 1965 and 1967, *Blackout* (2), Digiton, were released on compact discs.

Stanek. Another issue concerns the lack of stylistic cohesion, so evident in the career of Katarzyna Sobczyk (*O mnie się nie martw* versus *Mały Książę*). Ada Rusowicz, singing in the band “Niebiesko-Czarni,” followed an artistic convention similar and comparable to Kubasińska. The comparison of these two singers, who are also of similar age, brings up a fundamental conclusion. Kubasińska’s stage image contained an overwhelming amount of authenticity. Voice-wise, Rusowicz at that stage of her career was very far behind when it came to the basic elements of vocal technique, such as emission, phrasing.

In conclusion, the author wishes to emphasise the element that determines the uniqueness of the artistic creation of both Kubasińska as a singer and of the whole Blackout. It is the resultant of a combination of exceptional individuals when it comes to compositions, arrangements, instruments and, what is extremely important, lyrics.

Breakout, the new band of Tadeusz Nalepa and Mira Kubasińska, was formed in February 1968. Franciszek Walicki played a significant role in its creation<sup>17</sup>. He came up with the name and the stylistic change guided by the debut album of an American band Vanilla Fudge (Walicki 2012: 127). Moreover, as a manager, he organised the band’s trip to Holland, which was a considerable organisational achievement in the reality of communist Poland. Apart from the financial aspect, it gave the musicians an opportunity to directly contact Western performers, which significantly influenced their artistic development. After almost half a year of intense work in music clubs, Breakout returned with a great deal of experience and a lot of musical equipment, which then allowed them to take a great leap ahead of the competition. It was, however, paid for with great sacrifices, as seen in Kubasińska’s memoirs (Szalbierz 2005)<sup>18</sup>.

After their return, the band toured abundantly, presenting their new repertoire to the audience and gathering positive feedback. The first recording session took place in March 1969 and the album *Na drugim brzegu tęczy* turned out to be a great success and “a milestone” for Polish rock music. Composition-wise, the *big beat* influences were still evident, but a few songs like *Poszłabym za tobą*, *Na drugim brzegu tęczy*, *gdybyś kochał hej!* and especially *Powiedzieliśmy już wszystko* clearly suggested a new direction. Mira Kubasińska sang on the whole album, which confirms the thesis on her determination to be the leading figure in the band. Her interpretation of the composition *Gdzie chcesz iść*, originally sung by Guzek, sounded very interestingly. Kubasińska’s voice seems definitely more mature, the phrasing even more confident and the expression featured a greater load of drama and lyricism. This was undoubtedly stemming from the long period of intensive touring and musical

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<sup>17</sup> Franciszek Walicki (1921–2015), manager, author of texts (alias Jacek Grań), the “godfather” of Polish rock. He coined the term ‘big beat’ as an alternative term for *rock and roll*. He played a major role in the formation and development of careers of many bands that are important for the Polish scene. Founder of the legendary “Non-Stop” club (Sopot, 1961) and animator of numerous artistic initiatives.

<sup>18</sup> The band’s strict internal rules and regulations stipulated (in addition to the collectively agreed upon weekly allowances) that all of the funds were to be used to purchase musical equipment, cf. Michalski 2014: 739.

work that preceded the production of the album. The lack of vocal competition fully emphasised the singer's qualities.

In 1969, Breakout performed at two key festivals in Opole<sup>19</sup> and Sopot. Especially the first one was heavily commented upon as the television production focused on Kubasińska's stage movements who, uninhibited, fell as if into a hypnotic trance, cutting herself off from the image and static choreography of the other performers (Królikowski 2008: 61 and further). There were two big events coming up – another trip to Holland (September/October) at the invitation of Paul Acket's agency<sup>20</sup>, with a short break to perform at the Jazz Jamboree, and November performances in Western Berlin and Czechoslovakia (Królikowski 2008: 258). The popularity of Breakout at that time was reflected in their result in the music plebiscite announced by the Polish Jazz Federation (PFJ) together with the Agency of Artistic Events in Sopot. Breakout outclassed the competition, winning with Skaldowie for the first time and Mira Kubasińska taking second place in the female singer category, after Maryla Rodowicz<sup>21</sup>. It was a huge success, which was quickly translated into another album released in 1970 – *Breakout 70a*. There was a shadow of several significant ramifications over its autumn premiere. The band parted ways with F. Walicki; another fundamental problem was the censorship's negative opinion on the band's image which eliminated the band from performing on television and at the Opole Festival. Despite about 400 concerts played in 1970, the band was only ranked 6<sup>th</sup> in the "Musicorama" ranking summing up the year. The same place was taken by Kubasińska in the female singer category (the winners were Skaldowie, Niemen and Rodowicz) ("Musicorama" no. 1(2)/1971). This was a result, on the one hand, of the aforementioned obstructions in media, but also of the increasing complexity of the repertoire, which evidently took on an avant-garde character, containing elements of blues, psychedelia, jazz and rock fusion, which also translated into the length of the performed songs.

Mira Kubasińska did not sing in all compositions on the album *70a*. Her role in the new repertoire, definitely more blues-like and full of improvisation, was significantly diminished. *Przemijanie* and *Zapraszamy na korridę* are the only songs in which Kubasińska was vocally "exclusive." This list should include the equal duets with Nalepa in the compositions *Dziwny weekend* and *Przestroga*. It clearly indicates Nalepa's growing domination and some form of rivalry, which also concerned the aspect of popularity, mentioned by Nalepa in an interview with W. Królikowski: "(...) Mira was mainly singing, and I was already favoured by the audience. We sold photos – mine were bought most often. And although Mira and I were married, there was even similar friction between us..." (Królikowski 2008: 71).

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<sup>19</sup> Breakout and Włodzimierz Nahorny received the Polish Jazz Federation award at the event, festivalopole.tvp.

<sup>20</sup> Piotr Nowak, who played bass guitar in the band at the time, when recalling this "greatest musical adventure of his life and the most important musical lesson," emphasised the impression that the direct contact with performers such as Led Zeppelin, Jethro Tull, The Who, Pink Floyd, Deep Purple and others made on the band members, cf. Nowak 2019.

<sup>21</sup> Breakout was also in 1<sup>st</sup> place in the "Musicorama" poll, with Kubasińska in 3<sup>rd</sup> place, behind Rodowicz and Halina Frąckowiak, see "Musicorama" no. 1/1970.

On Breakout's second album, apart from the appearance of typically blues songs (*Skąd taki duży deszcz, Taką drogę, Nie znasz jeszcze życia*), the composition *Zapraszamy na korridę* inspired by Iberian motifs deserves particular attention. Kubasińska's vocal part perfectly captures the dynamics and dramatic tone of the text. The voice in the parts connecting stanzas contains surprising psychedelic elements, and the character of the song may bring to mind *White Rabbit* by the Jefferson Airplane. Many critical texts also compare Kubasińska and the JA singer, Grace Slick. However, this is an inaccurate comparison as they have completely different means of expression and timbre of voice<sup>22</sup>.

The increasingly noticeable division of roles on the second album and evident blues inclinations of Nalepa resulted in a unique artistic dichotomy of Breakout. The roles and areas of performance aesthetics were divided. Nalepa followed his musical fascinations on albums such as *Blues* (1971), *Karate* (1972) and *Kamienie* (1974). These albums were separated by releases with Mira Kubasińska's name: *Mira* (1971) and *Ogień* (1973). Nalepa explained the indicated division of roles and the dual nature of the activities of Breakout by saying: "(...) Mira did not know how to find her footing in Breakout" and in the formula with sharp guitars into which he forced her (Królikowski 2008: 77). Another issue was the evident tension resulting from working together in a band, multiplied also by personal life and the explosion of popularity which at the time weighed heavily on both Nalepa and Kubasińska (Królikowski 2008, 71, 102; Szalbierz 2005)<sup>23</sup>.

Bogdan Loeb's lyrics dominated the two albums, which is undoubtedly a great asset and a binding material for the musical matter – very diverse, not to say heterogeneous. Nalepa's idea was to maintain "stylistic purity" and to separate Mira's pop fascinations from blues songs. The repertoire he composed for his wife was very eclectic, which can be seen as an asset, but also as a lack of consistency. The *Mira* album features acoustic poetic ballads, losing the atmosphere of "Piwnica pod Baranami" (*Zapytam ptaków, Byłeś tylko we śnie*), in which the singer used her interpretative and acting skills. Against this background, the song *Miałam cały świat*, played in a "western convention<sup>24</sup>," comes closer to the "campfire" convention despite Kubasińska's authenticity. Songs such as *Do kogo idziesz* are closer to the other extreme, as Kubasińska uses the dramatic *ostinato* and monumental guitar *riffs* to presents her vocal qualities: loud, full timbre of the voice contrasted with the enchanting subtlety in dynamically withdrawn and spacious vocals sung in a duet with Nalepa. The tone of the first album was evoked in the song *W co mam wierzyć* which seems to be a perfect fit for Kubasińska, both text- and music-wise, and is the quintessence of her artistic profile. It combines elements of drama and nostalgic darkness with lyricism. The singer also perfectly fits in the soul aesthetics, which in the A part (stanza) of the song *Tysiąc razy Kocham* evokes clear associations with *Chain of Fools* by Aretha Franklin. The variety of vocal challenges Nalepa put in front

<sup>22</sup> An example of this comparison is the text by Paweł Piotrowicz, cf. Piotrowicz 2020.

<sup>23</sup> Years later, Kubasińska described these intentions saying "(...) Tadeusz was pushing me off the stage", cf. Kwiatkowski 2005.

<sup>24</sup> Described as a folk melody, the song was in fact a reworked composition of Marek Seweryn, director of Polskie Nagrania, see Królikowski 2008: 77.

of Kubasińska on the album *Mira* seems to be a dreadful trap; however, she emerged unscathed. She even handled the trance guitar pieces, where the *riffs* and choice of tonality were quite a challenge (*Kwiaty nam powiędły, Luiza*).

In the author's opinion, the album *Ogień* is an exceptional work of this artistic trio: Nalepa, who at that moment reached the climax of his compositional maturity, Bogdan Loebel, who once again confirmed his great literary talent, and Mira Kubasińska, who was at the peak of her vocal form at that time<sup>25</sup>. The whole material on the album is overshadowed by the composition *Wielki ogień*, which is the most extensive musical form that the "father of Polish blues" has ever composed. It is distinguished by increasing dramatism, gradually increased tension in terms of dynamics and sound texture, frequent changes in rhythm, subsequent members of the band slowly falling into a trance, the unison, and finally an exceptional vocal part by Mira Kubasińska, described by Przemysław Rojek in a unique way: "... And when Mira Kubasińska – on the verge of screaming – bursts out with a lyric about the still-burning fire, it gets wild, pagan, we see a Slavic Kybele whirling by the St. John's fire (when no one yet called it St. John's) and singing out all her desires, the mystical, orgasmic unity of spirit and body not yet divided by Judeo-Christianity" (Rojek 2014). The *Ogień* album presents the biggest dose of emotion and drama that the Breakout managed to generate. A lot of credit goes to the singer who, shyly accompanied by Nalepa's guitar in the song *Liście zabrał wiatr* – a prophetic love epitaph – rose to the heights of performance drama. A great load of emotionality and expression is found in vocal lines that are perfectly matching Nalepa's guitar. This is a great asset, noticeable in virtually every song on this album. The climatic blues (*Czarno-czarny film*) elegantly sung by Kubasińska is another gem there as it breaks Nalepa's monopoly on the performance of this musical form, also making Kubasińska a pioneer of female blues singing in Poland.

Mira Kubasińska and the band had a serious accident on the motorway near Arnhem in 1973, on their way to the Netherlands for concerts. The woman sustained the most serious injuries, she was operated on and hospitalised for a long time. As a result of this event, tensions arose and discussions about the division of roles and taking care of the son re-emerged in the marriage (Nalepa 2020). This resulted in a gradual depreciation of Kubasińska's position in the band as she never returned to the role of lead singer. She did not fit Nalepa's artistic ideas more and more as on subsequent albums by Breakout he mainly explored the aesthetics of rock dominated by guitar riffs, using the rhythm section playing in *fusion* style (*NOL*, 1976) and secondarily copying the sounds of a British band called Free (*ZOL*, 1979). The aforementioned albums as well as the band's controversial last album *Żagiel Ziemi* (1980) evidenced an obvious creative crisis. The frequent foreign tours, especially those to the USSR, proved exhausting and destructive, further deteriorating the leader's serious health problems (Nalepa 2020). As for Kubasińska, her gradual vocal regression was especially glaring on the album *ZOL*. The use of drugs and the lack of care for the condition of her vocal apparatus caused irreversible consequences. She

<sup>25</sup> In his characteristic laconic-ironic style, Nalepa commented on Kubasińska's singing form from that period by saying that "(...) Mira was not in the worst shape then, although I always thought she could sing better", see Królikowski 2008: 82.

was a performer relying on her natural qualities and talent. She neither worked on developing her singing techniques nor perfected her craft. Bogdan Loebl summed up Kubasińska's career by saying that she was:

(...) an untapped acting talent. Her voice was distinctive and recognisable and made her stand out because of her originality among other female vocalists of the time. She did not really make the effort, she recorded on the go. She would get the text in the studio and somehow it worked. That was enough for her, she was not particularly excited about it all. She did not work on her skills. In fact, Nalepa complained about it constantly. Piotrek was small, she took greater care of him, singing and recording was done in between other activities (Loebl 2020).

## Summary

The decline in the band's popularity meant that Kubasińska was gradually being left behind by her competitors, both in the popular music category, dominated by Maryla Rodowicz, Irena Jarocka, Urszula Sipińska, Elżbieta Dmoch, and among female vocalists who successfully found their way into more avant-garde genres (Halina Frąckowiak working with the SBB group, Krystyna Prońko, Grażyna Łobaszewska, or those with jazz inclinations, i.e., Urszula Dudziak, Ewa Bem)<sup>26</sup>. The turn of the 1970s and 1980s was a period of crisis and the end of her marriage.

As Piotr Nalepa stated, the father somehow saved himself during the downfall and "(...) immediately, from 1982, became a star with a blues band" (Nalepa 2020). Kubasińska stayed at home, feeling left out, experiencing a double break-up – with the stage and her husband. These circumstances and the fact that her entire career to date depended on Nalepa – composer, manager and, to a large extent, creator of his wife's artistic image – resulted in depression, deepening alcohol addiction and a long break in stage activity.

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<sup>26</sup> As clearly shown by the polls conducted by the "Non Stop" monthly, Kubasińska stopped appearing there at all since the second half of the 1970s, see "Non Stop", no. 2/1975; 3/1976; 3/1978; 3/1979.

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### Abstract

Mira Kubasińska (1944–2005) was one of the most characteristic figures in female pop that appeared in the *big beat* era on the Polish scene. She was recognised because of her outstanding vocal abilities, natural gift for shaping lyrics, exceptional expression and an extraordinary sense of rhythm. Her artistic creation, completely devoid of stylisation,

posing and mannerisms, fully reflected her temperament, philosophy of life and disregard for opportunistic attitudes. The peak of Kubasińska's stage activity falls within the period of 1966–1973 and encompasses cooperation with bands led by her husband Tadeusz Nalepa – Blackout and Breakout. During that period, she released two solo albums (*Mira* and *Ogień*) and climbed to the top. Starting in the mid-1970s, the singer's career suffered a serious blow, which was a result of Tadeusz Nalepa's stylistic turn towards blues as well as the end of their marriage and a resulting personal crisis. This artist has not been the subject of scientific scrutiny as of yet, so this text aims to fill this gap. Apart from the biographical thread, the author attempts to analyse the singer's oeuvre and describe the evolution of her artistic image. The text also presents a broader context of the circumstances on the Polish popular music scene in the 1960s and 1970s.

### **Mira Kubasińska – rozwój kariery i ewolucja wizerunku artystycznego w latach 1963–1973**

#### **Streszczenie**

Mira Kubasińska (1944–2005) była jedną z charakterystyczniejszych postaci żeńskiej wokalistyki rozrywkowej jakie pojawiły się w erze big beatu na polskiej scenie. Wyróżniały ją niepospolite warunki wokalne, naturalny dar kształtowania frazy, wyjątkowa ekspresja oraz nadzwyczajne poczucie rytmu. Jej kreacja artystyczna, pozbawiona całkowicie stylizacji, pozerstwa, manieryzmu w pełni oddawała temperament, filozofię życia i brak akceptacji dla koniunkturalnych postaw. Szczytowy okres działalności estradowej Kubasińskiej przypada na lata 1966–1973 i obejmuje współpracę z zespołami kierowanymi przez jej męża Tadeusza Nalepę – Blackout i Breakout. W tym okresie wydała dwa albumy solowe (*Mira* i *Ogień*) i wspięła się na szczyt popularności. Poczynając od połowy lat 70. doszło do poważnego załamania kariery wokalistki, co było pochodną zwrotu stylistycznego jakiego dokonał Tadeusz Nalepa, koncentrując się na stylistyce bluesowej oraz rozpadu małżeństwa i kryzysu osobistego. Postać artystki dotychczas nie doczekała się opracowania naukowego, wobec czego niniejszy tekst ma na celu uzupełnienie wskazanej luki. Autor podejmuje w nim poza wątkiem biograficznym próbę analizy dorobku wokalistki i opisuje ewolucję jej wizerunku artystycznego, ukazuje również szerszy kontekst realiów panujących na polskiej scenie muzyki rozrywkowej w latach 60. i 70.

**Keywords:** Mira Kubasińska, popular music, big beat, Blackout, Breakout

**Słowa kluczowe:** Mira Kubasińska, muzyka popularna, big beat, Blackout, Breakout

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