

Musical communities of sexual minorities

The music of rebellion during the 10th Wrocław Equality March

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Abstract

Wrocław, one of the largest cities in Poland, is full of events taking place in public space, including protests. Using examples taken from the 10th Wrocław Equality March in 2018, it can be shown that specific musical works become a weapon in the struggle for recognition of the proclaimed values. The study traces the auditory dimension of protests, the role of music in creating a community and the place of such events in the soundscape of a contemporary city. Then the study presents these mechanisms on selected musical examples. Particular attention is paid to the musical communities, because the sound not only accompanies the protests it strengthens the sense of solidarity between the participants.

The event is interpreted as a kind of spectacle that constitutes a space for self-expression and the articulation of the postulates of its participants, accompanied by a characteristic soundtrack. It consists mainly of popular music performed by artists either belonging to sexual minorities or being recognized as icons of the community. The study presents the role of disco music and club culture as well as the aesthetics of the camp as crucial for LGBT+ people seeking space for their expression, which is oppositional to the dominant system of values based on gender dualism. Seemingly simple or silly songs can have a deeper meaning and are a key element in shaping a certain community.

Keywords: Pride parade, protest, soundscape, popular music, camp

Poland has a long history of protests, most notably the strong mobilization of the population in the 1970s and 1980s. The trade union Solidarity initiated nationwide strikes by workers, which contributed to the overthrow of the communist regime in Poland, as well as the collapse of the entire Soviet Union. After regaining independence from the USSR in 1989, Poles began to take to the streets more willingly and often both on important and trivial issues, in a way erasing the subversive meaning of protests. The ideas of solidarity were not lost, however. Echoes of the events of the late 20th century continued to resonate in the Polish society. Pride parades have invariably polarized Poles for years, dividing them into total supporters and ruthless opponents. These parades began appearing in the calendar of annual urban events in 2001, with the first Equality Parade in Warsaw. Their legitimacy has been incessantly questioned, leading to cancellation of the Warsaw parades in 2004 and 2005, or to pacification by the police, as in Poznań in 2005 (Nowak 2013:255). However, this has not dampened the enthusiasm of the organizers

and participants, but rather the opposite. Similar marches began to appear in other large Polish cities, starting with the Tolerance March in Krakow in 2006.

Marches, parades, and festivals of equality are opportunities to manifest opinions, make demands, and above all, to claim one's identity publicly by means of dress, behavior, words, and music. The aim of my article is to demonstrate, using the example of the 10th Wrocław Equality March held in October 2018, how participants united in their common goals and the peculiar rituality of the actions undertaken, and how they became bound together in a community by the sounds of culturally specific music, a unique soundtrack.¹ In my opinion Wrocław, the capital of Lower Silesian voivodeship and one of the largest cities in Poland, is an excellent example of these processes. I emphasize the role of the March in the noisy soundscape of a modern European city and its relation to other types of parades. Furthermore, I introduce disco and camp as two notions characteristic of the LGBT+ [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender +] community and in the empirical part I discuss how they were used and played out in the Wrocław Equality March.

Wrocław and the LGBT+ community

Wrocław is located in southwestern Poland, about 100 km from the Czech border and 150 km from the German border. It is the third largest city in Poland and one of the most important business, academic, and cultural centers in the country. The incorporation of the city and the whole of Lower Silesia region in Poland after the end of World War II resulted in an almost complete replacement of the population. Because of this, Wrocław became known for its multiculturalism and openness, which opened the way for a reinterpretation of cultural heritage, and an identity built on dialogue and tolerance. Today, Wrocław, officially promoted as “Wrocław – the meeting place”, attracts a large number of students, who not only enthusiastically enjoy the local amenities, but also contribute to the vibrancy and multiculturalism of the city. Wrocław is a well-promoted city, thanks to which it enjoys great interest from Polish and foreign tourists. The breakthrough moments for the city were 2012 UEFA European Football Championship (Euro 2012) and European Capital of Culture 2016, which attracted numerous tourists from all over Europe (Kędzior 2019:72–78).

Wrocław also offers numerous opportunities for nightlife – pubs, bars and dance clubs. However, access to LGBT+ clubs is very limited, especially considering the city's population of over 630,000 people.² There are two large gay clubs in Wrocław, HaH Art & Music Club and Surowiec, both located in the city center. Many LGBT-friendly venues were closed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the Coffee Planet café and the techno club Das Lokal. This may be one of the reasons for the popularity of the equality marches in Wrocław – there simply isn't enough safe, conventional places to party. The LGBT+ community can however count on the support of the Kultura Równości [Culture of Equality] association, which organizes numerous events, training sessions, and workshops and provides

1. I took part in the full course of the march as a participant and therefore my main method of research was participant observation. In addition, I kept photographic and video documentation and conducted short interviews with random participants of the event. The audiovisual material recorded, and the field notes I took were used to prepare this section of the article.
2. Data from 2020, provided by Statistics Poland. <https://demo-grafia.stat.gov.pl/BazaDemografia/Tables.aspx> (last accessed 24 May 2022).



psychological, legal, and material help to LGBT+ people in Wrocław. In addition, the Wrocław Equality March has for several years enjoyed the honorary patronage of the Mayor of Wrocław, Jacek Sutryk, who has spoken positively about sexual minorities on numerous occasions. He is not an isolated example. The presidents of many other major cities, including Warsaw and Krakow, have also given their patronage to pride parades there. Such behavior can be seen as an expression of disagreement with the actions of politicians from the ruling political party.

Figure 1. The Wrocław Market Square. Source: Sławek Ilski, CC BY 3.0. No changes have been made to the image.

Current situation of LGBT+ community in Poland

Although this article is about the Wrocław Equality March in 2018, it must be emphasized that equality marches continued also in following years, gathering many thousands of attendants. In 2020, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, over 10 thousand people took part in the March, a record number in the history of the event. Thanks to the report *Sytuacja społeczna osób LGBTA w Polsce. Raport za lata 2019–2020* [The social situation of LGBTA people in Poland. Report for 2019–2020] prepared by the *Kampania przeciw homofobii* [Campaign Against Homophobia foundation] and the Lambda association, one can learn the reason for the growing interest in these events in recent years. Although they concern a more recent period, they represent phenomena that have been growing for many years, including in 2018, when the 10th March in Wrocław took place.

Since autumn 2015 the right-wing, fundamentalist *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (Law and Justice) party is in power in Poland.³ 2019–2020, the period covered by the abovementioned report, there were three national election campaigns in Poland, for the parliament, the European Parliament, and the presidency. In the campaigns one could observe an increased use of hateful language and demands directed against LGBT+ people. Politicians, public figures, and representatives of the Catholic Church were involved in the discourse. Polish national television carried out a particularly intense campaign. From 2019 onwards, increased activity by fundamentalist organizations could be seen, resulting in the creation of so-called LGBT-free zones and an attempt to ban sex education. The effects of these actions soon became visible. The steady trend of increasing public acceptance of LGBT+ people and equality was broken in 2019. There have also been increasingly drastic examples of violence that were not present before: the attempt to place explosives at the Equality March in Lublin, the detention of a knifeman at the Equality March in Wrocław; or attacks by organized radicalized groups on participants of the March in Białystok (Wiśniewski & Świder 2021:7–9).

As many as 12% of LGBT+ people planned to leave the country in the coming months after being interviewed for the aforementioned report, with more than one-third citing the experience of discrimination in Poland as the reason (Makuchowska 2021:14). According to the abovementioned report, over half of those interviewed (53%) had experienced a hate crime based on sexual orientation or gender identity (Makuchowska 2021:37). 44% of the informants reported severe symptoms of depression in 2019–2020 – a period of particularly intense vilification of LGBT+ people (Makuchowska 2021:49). Compared to a 2015/2016 survey (Świder & Wiśniewski 2017:26–27), there was a decrease in trust in the government, police and courts and an increase in trust in LGBTQIA [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual] organisations, other NGOs and the European Union (Makuchowska 2021:81).

October 2020 also saw the largest protests in Polish history after 1989. They were caused by the tightening of the abortion law, which in effect almost completely restricted access to abortion in Poland. About 100,000 people passed through Wrocław October 28, 2020, the most intense protests of all Polish cities (Kopaniecki 2021:68). The protests united most of the groups discriminated against or harmed by the government – including the LGBT+ communities, whose large presence was symbolized by rainbow flags flying above the marching crowd.

What is a pride parade?

Marsze równości, parady równości, equality marches or equality parades, are the Polish equivalents of pride parades. The terms are used interchangeably to describe the same kind of events. Their main aim is to fight for equal rights for sexual minorities, as well as equality in treatment by society. In Poland it is accepted that only the Warsaw Pride Parade is called a parade, since it was the first such initiative, taking place almost every year since

3. The President of Poland, Andrzej Duda, represents this party.

2001. In other cities the events are called equality marches, although their basic form is almost identical. Marches in Poland were inspired by similar events organized in cities in the United States and Western Europe, starting with the Stonewall Inn riots in New York 1969, considered the origin of modern pride marches.

A protest is constituted by a public, formal, and solemn declaration of dissent. It is a demonstration, an appearance in a public space (Stevenson 2010), carrying with it an extrajudicial and performative imperative of putting things to right. According to Dariusz Kosiński, Polish theatre scholar, the participants of a protest:

oppose the radically dominant discourse [...]. They are usually defined by concepts related to the act of entering the performance: manifestations, demonstrations, marches – all these terms refer to the same movement of emerging from the twilight and bringing into the field of view what was not there before (Kosiński 2010, no paging. Author’s translation).⁴

As such, a protest is therefore a performative act of public communication that aims to challenge existing power relations and the “rules of the game” dictated by those in power (Hayward & Komarova 2020:63). Importantly, such activities set in motion large groups of people who get a chance to take over the social scene in order to introduce forces that have been absent or insufficiently clear so far. Protests are not only about seeking recognition; protests try to disturb the existing political order. In this respect equality marches stand out and even specialize in “political performative battle”, by parodying conventions of marches or protests, by provoking and showing in full splendor what is considered unwanted, and by being grotesque and carnivalesque in their own way (Kosiński 2010). The ‘march’ or ‘parade’ of equality is in fact a party of the LGBT+ community members transferred to the streets.

According to the American performance theorist Richard Schechner (Schechner 2020) the social codes of ordinary daily life are more or less commonly adapted and that it is these codes that revolutionaries seek to break in order to achieve lasting change. Equality marches are revolutionary in this sense since they stand in opposition to the practices of everyday life and are ceremonial in nature. While the participants, the LGBT+ communities, perform themselves publically, in the context of culturally established norms they become rebels. By bringing their own music and soundscape out to streets and squares, they also break the ordinary course of sound events and challenge the sonic identity of the city’s public spaces.

Spaces, sounds, and values. Acoustic communities of modern cities

The physical space in which a protest takes place can be used as a tool for gaining visibility that shapes the audience. The visibility allows certain types of social activity to take place in certain locations and as such have a major influence on how power relations work (McGarry, Erhart, Eslan-Ziya, Jenzen

4. “[Uczestnicy marszu] przeciwstawiają się radykalnie dominującemu dyskursowi [...]. Zazwyczaj określa się je pojęciami związanymi z aktem wkroczenia w przedstawienie: manifestacje, demonstracje, wystąpienia – wszystkie te terminy odwołują się do tego samego ruchu wyjścia z półmroku i wniesienia w pole widzenia tego, czego wcześniej w nim nie było”.

& Korkut 2020:23). Cultural spaces are an accumulation of institutions; they concentrate the symbolic practices of urban communities, are functionally defined and are the subject of interaction between material, aesthetic and symbolic values and community (Rewers 2014:26–27). Cultural spaces are a record not only of the inhabitants' wealth but also of their cultural and social identity. According to Pazder (2008:22), cultural spaces that are the product of long social development are considered the most attractive. In Poland and other Western countries, the city center is in many cases the most important urban space, as it creates the framework for social life in which individuals can feel the individual character of the city, its scale and the rhythm of life (Pazder 2008:22). It enables the realization of leisure time, which plays a significant role in the context of creative class theory (Florida 2002).

Urban spaces can be organized by sound. The sonic quality of the space lasts over time, which allows us to recognize and remember it, but it is also not fully controlled and cannot be fully planned (Fischer-Lichte 2008:175, 201). The basis of the soundscape is event-related, by which it entails a certain unpredictability and dynamism, corresponding to the dynamic character of city life (Tańczuk 2015:19). Wrocław is considered one of the most creative cities in Poland, next to Warsaw, Poznań and Katowice (Florida 2002, Wojnar 2016). Its old town is considered by Robert Losiak, Polish musicologist and cultural scholar specializing in soundscape studies, to be the most representative and significant space, due to among other things, a high concentration of musical events and almost round-the-clock sonic activities, which are well-known and recognizable (Losiak 2008:261). Here's where the Equality March took place. Noise may be a problem in the human-environment relationship. To make a lot of noise is to make other sounds inaudible and meaningless, but also to draw attention to the intentions of those who emit the loud sounds.

In the spirit of the actor-network theory developed by Bruno Latour, French anthropologist, sociologist and philosopher, sounds can be treated as active non-human actants, fully fledged elements of a community that establish relationships between people and various non-human factors (Losiak & Tańczuk 2015:193). By sharing space, people co-create an acoustic community, which Raymond Murray Schafer, Canadian composer and soundscape researcher, defines as a human community inhabiting a certain space centering around the sound that dominates that space. This sound defines the nature of the community, its needs and preferences, and regulates its activities. Acoustic information plays a positive role in the life of a community, and its members are repeatedly linked by sound sentiment – pleasant sound associations as a result of certain stereotypes or memories (Schafer 1982:310).

A special kind of acoustic community is the musical community. Music and the social ties expressed through it is central in the everyday life of the community, generating a shared sense of belonging (Shelemay 2011:363–364). Scholarly discussions of musical communities are also focused on solidarity.

“Musical solidarity” can refer to music's ability to be a kind of a mediator of togetherness, or the existence of shared music in the absence of social unity.

The term captures optimism among the listeners who invoke it and the notion of solidarity resonates in analyses of protest anthems as catalytic sparks for unity against oppression (Bohlman 2020:4).

Is there queer music?

“Queers have used, and continue to use, Western popular musics and extra-musical style to express their gender and sexual differences, empower and transform themselves, form queer social alliances and mobilize social protest”, states Jodie Taylor in the introduction to *Playing it Queer* (Taylor 2012:3). Music can be queer. Through a sophisticated system of subcultural meanings, music creates a sense of belonging to a community. Music’s ability to situate the individual in society can provide marginalized people, such as queer people, with the means to transcend the public/private dichotomy that has long operated as a means of sexual repression (Taylor 2012:45). Music has become a platform for marginalized voices to be heard and provide them with opportunities to seek definition. Perhaps, to non-queer ears and eyes, this is difficult to see, but it is fair to say that there is no style or genre that does not contain elements of queerness (Taylor 2012:45–49) or that can be attributed to queerness.

A genre that is invariably associated with queer culture is disco. In the early 1970s in New York, queer people of African American and Latin-Caribbean descent, drag queens and heterosexual allies began to form small communities where they could be themselves, feel safe and do things that were not allowed in the patriarchal world. Music was an essential part of their gatherings – the soundtrack of these events eventually developed into disco (from discotheque, nightclubs dedicated solely to playing recorded music). Since then, disco music has seen a surge in popularity, infiltrating mainstream discotheques and gaining an international audience (Garcia 2018:4). After the spectacular popularity in the second half of the seventies, it nearly vanished as a genre, but had then already affected almost all popular music. Disco then and today is not only music, but also types of dances, fashion, movies, and a historically and culturally specific sensitivity.

Richard Dyer distinguishes eroticism, romanticism, and materialism as the qualities that constitute the essence of the genre (Garcia 2014:3). Disco’s romanticism is especially interesting. Dyer found in the musical texture an aesthetic figuration of emotional intensity, a romanticism that is primarily the result of the use of strings, emotive voices, intense expression, and textual layers of songs that focus on the experience of the moment. This means, in a sense, legitimizing, but not trivializing, fleeting relationships. This aspect of gay culture – deriving joy and excitement from fleeting love affairs, living in the moment, being aware of the impermanence of many relationships and exquisite pain associated with it – is legitimized by disco music. In the 1970s homosexual sex was still illegal in most US states. Long-term same-sex relationships still have no legal recognition in many countries, Poland included. Romanticism in disco can therefore open up the

divide between the banality of alienated life and something that transcends it – an utopian space (Garcia 2014:1–3).

Club culture is an area of experience in opposition to everyday life, a space of alternative experience that functions outside the system of social legitimization, as stated by Samuel Nowak, polish cultural and media studies scholar (Nowak 2010:55). “Disco is a hotbed of homosexual resistance. In the abstract space created by disco music, forbidden love and unspoken desire enjoy absolute freedom” (Gregori i Gomis 2006:1, author’s translation).⁵ Also, contemporary dance music, which draws heavily on disco, plays this liberating role, because when night falls and we enter a club, “the naked scene of our subconscious desires” appears (Gregori i Gomis 2006:1). It is a potential space of freedom for the ‘misfits’, queers.

Returning to Dyer, eroticism derives from the simplicity of the songs, focused on the dance rhythm and thus on carnality. The structure of disco music compositions is rarely closed. Often a phrase is looped endlessly, allowing you to “drown in the frenzy of sounds” and to experience a kind of ecstasy. “Disco music releases rhythm, plays with it, allows it to become the dominant organizing force of the disco experience. This is achieved by several means: delaying the rhythm, its sudden changes, the wealth of percussion instruments used” (Nowak 2010:55). The body is completely independent of the cultural division into masculine and feminine – it throws itself completely into the current of music. Also, the lyrics rarely camouflage a sexual subtext with sophisticated metaphors. Of course, this does not mean that disco songs are vulgar, quite the contrary. But they are not afraid to speak directly about the delights of the body (Nowak 2010:55).

Since around 2010 there has been a resurgence in the popularity of disco and early house music worldwide. Both styles are historically and imaginatively associated with racialized queerness in the Western culture. This brought a strong sense of nostalgia for the golden age of these styles, and this yearning for a charmed past has brought with it images (and imaginings) of the queer, racialized clientele that filled clubs in American cities (Garcia 2018:2).

Why do gay icons have to be camp?

For almost 60 years ‘camp’ has been researched, discussed, and analyzed, starting with the groundbreaking *Notes on the Camp* by Susan Sontag (1964). Instead of being a way of communing with popular culture, it has become a part of it. Camp’s relationship with the culture of homosexuals (especially gay men), as well as other ‘othernesses’ is undeniable. The phenomenon of camp is not only closely linked to homosexual circles, but actually derives from them. It is a form of aesthetic engagement on the side of indeterminacy (Mizerka 2016:28), an ironic distance towards the dominating popular culture, which, however, undertakes its criticism in a funny, exaggerated, and light way. Because popular culture, by using simple codes readable by the general public, is definitely a culture more lived than thought, it has a huge power to simplify and consolidate cultural dualisms, such as female–male or good – bad.

5. “Disco jest ostoją homoseksualnego oporu. W abstrakcyjnej przestrzeni kreowanej przez muzykę disco, zakazana miłość i niewypowiedziane pożądanie cieszą się absolutną swobodą”.

Camp is a tool of gentle emancipation and playful nonchalance intended to integrate queers into a 'healthy' society. It is also a way of dealing with the hostile dominant culture, allowing it to tighten the ties between the members of the subculture. It harmonizes with the queer project of going beyond one's own sexuality while undermining the hegemony of heterosexuality. Camp is characterized by theatricality, excessive splendor, irony and over-aestheticization. It is an undermining of certain norms, and the more given norms are stretched to the limits of good taste, the better. Therefore, homosexual circles, facing intolerance and patriarchy, adopted this aesthetics as a tool for their self-presentation, and at the same time as a specific code for them.

Gay communities are fond of big stars in popular music and film. The artistic creations of Madonna can be seen as "embodiments of the key assumptions and postulates of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) – confusing and blurring the cultural identity of gender, fluid sexuality, transgressing the stereotypes of femininity and masculinity" (Nowak 2010:78, author's translation) The pantheon of 'gods and goddesses' of gays was included by, among others, the imperious and masculine Marlene Dietrich, the expressive Freddie Mercury, and in Poland the stage legends Maryla Rodowicz and Beata Kozidrak, whose exaggerated, lavish, dynamic image more than often was regarded as kitschy. There is the cult of gay divas with whom homosexuals identify themselves through their expressiveness and rebelliousness, but also the sensitivity, sense of humor and camp character they present.

Camp and the cult of divas are mainly associated with gay men in the Western world, while lesbians more often refer to women's music, created "by women, for women and financially controlled by women", eliminating the male factor. As Belgian scholars in Communication Studies Alexandra Dhoest, Robbe Herreman and Marion Wasserbauer have pointed out, alternative, independent genres (punk, folk, rock), although often described as more masculine and oppositional to the mainstream, are more readily chosen by lesbians. Their camp is a celebration of total femininity, without a male context, while gay camp is satire, a play on the mainstream (Dhoest, Herreman & Wasserbauer 2015:207). Although gay camp has entered pop culture for good (*RuPaul's Drag Race* TV show is a great example), lesbian camp still remains a niche.

10th Wrocław Equality March – songs that bind people together

The 10th Wrocław Equality March, organized by the Kultura Równości association under the slogan "Together in the name of love", began October 6, 2018 at 3:00 p.m. It was announced as an event for everyone, regardless of sexual orientation, age, race, or religion. Around 7,000 people attended the event. In addition, there were about 60 participants in the countermarch organized by the Rosary Crusade and a small group of counterdemonstrators from nationalist groups and fans of the Śląsk Wrocław football club. The groups were separated by a police cordon.

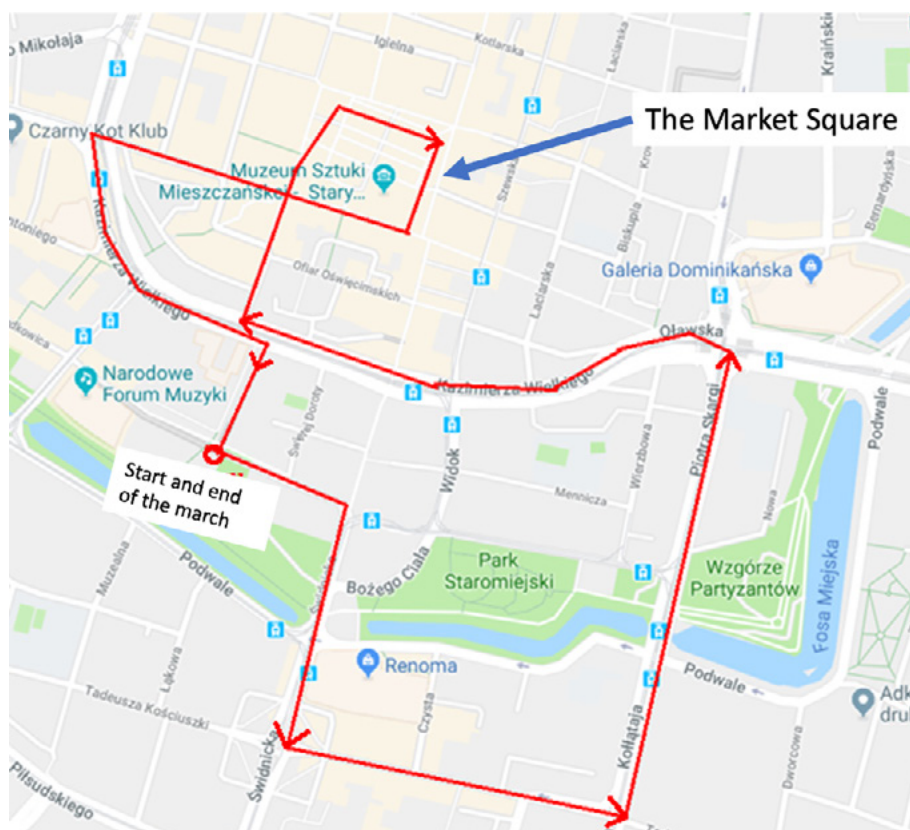


Figure 2. The 10th Wrocław Equality March route with start and finish marked. Source: Google Maps.

Music was played throughout most of the event, emitted from two vehicles in which the playback devices were placed. The first vehicle, located closer to the front of the march, was a van with two large loudspeakers mounted on the roof, playing popular music, mainly disco and pop hits from the 80s and 90s, as well as works by contemporary artists spreading content with which the LGBT+ community identifies, and which the community can identify as gay music. The second vehicle was a covered platform sponsored by the HaH Club, from which dance music was played.

Due to the much lower power of the speakers, the sounds in higher frequencies were drowned out by the songs played from the first vehicle and the prevailing noise. The songs from the platform were difficult to identify, less known dance music or significantly changed remixes of songs. The music played from this vehicle did not cause a stir among the participants. The assembled people danced and swayed to the rhythm of the songs, but none of the compositions led to euphoria, as was the case with the first vehicle. When asked about it, participants argued that the compositions were “too aggressive”, “not gay enough”, “not too joyful”, and “gloomy”. They also missed dance hits like those played from the first vehicle. This sometimes led to ‘scuffles’ – many marchers wanted to get closer to the first vehicle at all costs, believing that the music played there would guarantee better fun and be more of their taste. I therefore concentrated on the music presented from the first vehicle. Here, I will take a closer look at selected moments in the course of the march in chronological order, focusing on the songs presented, the reactions to them and their causes.

The route of the march covered the city center, the most significant space in Wrocław. For a few hours, sounds foreign to it, belonging to the usually muted acoustic community of gay clubs and discos, were included in its soundscape. Among the numerous songs, some evoked extraordinarily lively and specific reactions. These pieces clearly evoked a specific sonic sentiment, certain positive associations indicating the existence of a bond between the participants. Being recognized by and embedded in the culture of LGBT+ people, their presentation strengthened the solidarity between the participants, among other things by dancing, shouting, and singing together.

One of the first songs played was “Locomotion” by Australian pop star Kylie Minogue.⁶ It is hard to find a better song to start such an event – the hit released in 1988, sung by the then twenty-year-old singer, is a very cheerful, dance-pop composition, an invitation to have fun together. Her very girlish, infantile even, image in the early years of her career is not only reminiscent of, but simply camp. Minogue is also one of the leading LGBT+ icons, thanks to her open support for sexual minorities. The tune was accompanied by dancing, singing and the cheers of a group of about 100–150 people gathered in the square. This is usually a quiet, walkable area of Wrocław. The square occasionally hosts concerts or fairs, but is usually filled with the sound of strollers’ footsteps, the rustle of trees and the distinct noise of skateboarding. As the march began, none of the venue’s usual sounds were audible, due to the music and the escalating noise of conversations.

After 3:20 pm the march started to the rhythm of “I’m So Excited” by The Pointer Sisters. This 1982 hit song has strong disco influences, discernible in the expressive bass part and dance rhythm, as well as the song’s content about living in the moment and committing to feelings. It fits in well with the qualities of romanticism as well as eroticism in disco. The song not only encouraged the participants to dance, it also perfectly emphasized the prevailing moods. In line with the song title the excitement of the crowd was evident, expressed by cheers, shouts, singing and waving objects, especially rainbow flags.

The song “Like a Virgin” by Madonna caused euphoria among the marchers. Madonna is considered one of the most important figures not only in the history of pop music, but also in the history of the struggle for the rights of LGBT+ people. The artist has repeatedly supported sexual minorities, and also based her songs on elements of gay culture. In this particular song Madonna draws on the virgin–whore dichotomy. These are typical, yet oppositional, expectations of the heterosexual white woman as the object of male desire. In the case of the first role, desire has not yet been embodied; in the case of the second, the subject is fully absorbed and characterised by already embodied desire. Even though Madonna places herself in a patriarchal division of roles, she is the central object of visual attention, and it is around her that the narrative of the music video revolves. This seeming objectification is an important marker of postmodern feminism, according to which Madonna chooses to be an object of desire, thus having full control over the gazes directed at her (Kopaniecki 2022:227–230). The

6. A cover of Little Eva’s hit song “Locomotion” released in 1962.

over-exaggerated image of the singer in the accompanying music video, as well as her very high-pitched, mannered tone of voice, could be considered exaggerated, kitschy and thus camp.

Despite its rather multi-layered meaning, the song's dance-pop, carefree sound, especially the expressive bass part and clear pulse, effectively encourages people to play and dance. The song was presented on Świdnicka Street, a very busy street filled with the whirr of car engines, the noise of passing trams and the hum of moving people. Thanks to the complete stoppage of vehicular traffic, the music echoed clearly from the historic townhouses surrounding the road.

Another significant incident occurred at the intersection of Kołłątaja street, another of the main streets in the Old Town dominated by traffic sounds from cars and trams. The road crosses the Wrocław Moat, a popular walking route where conversations are usually heard from both sides, as well as the crunch of gravel underfoot and the laughter and sounds of children playing. This time a 'sonic warfare' came to the fore. A large group of counterdemonstrators with offensive banners shouted messages through a megaphone. In response to the provocation, the song "Testosteron" [Testosterone] by Kayah was played, and the crowd loudly cheered and invited spectators to participate. Kayah is one of the most popular singers in Poland who openly supports sexual minorities and opposes the current government. The song is a confession of a woman suffering from the cruel deeds of her man, and its key moment is the chorus that begins with the words "I accuse you":

I accuse you of tears, loneliness, betrayal and anger,
I accuse you of this suffering, of war, flames, of blood shed,
Testosterone.
(...)
You told me that fear is better than respect,
So you put your gun in his hand,
And keep telling him to run. (Author's translation)⁷

In a symbolic sense, the marchers accused the assembled men of the discrimination they experience, while demonstrating the courage to express their feelings in the face of the assembled men. This message was given an extra burst of energy by the sound of the track, which combines balladic stanzas with intense, danceable choruses containing elements of house music.

Kazimierza Wielkiego Street is the main street of The Old Town, encircling the south and west of the area. It is very noisy. In addition to numerous cars and trams, there are car horns, bicycle bells, the noise of moving people, and the sound of traffic lights. Half way down this street the song "Biała armia" [The White Army] by the Polish band Bajm caused a stir. A lot of people started to sing and squeeze themselves towards the van to hear the song better. Beata Kozidrak, the vocalist of the band, is one of the most popular Polish female artists among homosexuals due to her bright image. The singer is famous for 'predatory' styling, high-heeled boots, leather miniskirts and

7. Oskarżam Cię o łez strumienie,
osamotnienie, zdradę i gniew,
/ Oskarżam Cię o to cierpienie,
wojen płomienie, przelaną krew,
/ Testosteron. (...) Ty mówiłeś,
że strach lepszy jest niż szacunek,
Więc mu broń wkładasz w dłoń,
/ I wciąż każesz mu biec.



costumes emphasizing the female figure which, as I mentioned earlier, leads to think of it as camp. The song begins with the words "This is your flag, our young friend", which drew attention to the numerous rainbow flags waving over the crowd of 7,000. This is a high-energy song, combining rock with pop and an even, marching pulse that somehow metaphorically turned the crowd into marching "soldiers". In the song, Beata Kozidrak displays the full potential of her voice, singing primarily in loud dynamics and in the high register, thus further "warming up for battle". Its lyrics concerns the struggle for one's values, against all unfavorable circumstances:

This is your flag our young friend,
 You don't have to love its colors, oh no,
 It's your army and your life in constant rush,
 You'll never be alone again.
 (...)
 You are the rudder, white soldier,
 You wear pants, so fight,
 You are a sail, crazy wind,
 Your strength is treasure. (Author's translation)⁸

Figure 3. The moment when the song "Biała Armia" was played. Numerous rainbow flags are visible in the photo. Photo: Author.

8. To twoja flaga nasz młody przyjacielu, / Nie musisz kochać jej barw, o nie, / To twoja armia i życie w ciągłym biegu, / Nigdy nie będziesz już sam. (...) Jesteś sterem, białym żołnierzem, / Nosisz spodnie, więc walcz, / Jesteś żaglem, szalonym wiatrem, / Twoja siła to skarb.

Wrocław's Market Square and Plac Solny, the most significant and most sonically recognizable inner city spaces, are filled with the sounds from the numerous restaurants and pubs, the hum of conversations and the movement of pedestrians, the Town Hall bell that rings every quarter of an hour, and the music of street performers. The western frontage of the square is defined by the noise of a fountain, while Solny Square is defined by the slow movement of cars driving over the cobblestones and the sounds of conversation from the florists located there. But now, during the final part of the march, the Wrocław Market Square and the Solny Square were almost swarming with hits, among them "Let's Have a Kiki" by Scissor Sisters. This is a song about gay people, for gay people, by gay people, performed by a band of four homosexual men and one heterosexual woman. Moreover, the song was played as an invitation to a "Kiki", a social meeting especially for homosexuals, aimed at exchanging the latest rumors. The band has often been openly supportive of sexual minorities in their work and in interviews. Last, but not least, the song consists of rhythmically recited lyrics against a backdrop of techno and house fusion. This combination of sounds also makes it an excellent track for vogue dancing – a style of dance developed by sexual minorities in the United States in the second half of the 20th century. Some of the participants started doing vogue-inspired movements or simply started singing. During the march, this was perhaps the clearest example of 'transplanting' a soundscape into a new space, as well as breaking the cultural rules of the space.

Kylie Minogue's early work was presented once again. This time it was a song entitled "I Should Be So Lucky", which is an expression of the joy and fulfillment of experiencing love. By playing with the song and singing it, the participants expressed how joyful love is and how much they would like to enjoy it in an equal way to heterosexual people. Its cheerful, innocent, frivolous character acquires a bitter meaning in light of the situation of sexual minorities in Poland.

Non-musical sounds were also an important element in the soundscape. A special role was played by the drag queens, who interacted with the crowd through a microphone that they passed to each other, asking questions that the participants answered out loud. The drag artists were entertaining throughout the march, in the meantime willing to take pictures or converse with the gathered people, usually in a humorous manner. The crowd cheered loudly, almost deafeningly, and waved paper flags that had been handed out earlier, which gently rustled in response to their words.

The participants in the March can be placed within two distinct sound spheres. The participants walking behind the van spent most of the time singing, playing and dancing to the hit songs, while those walking behind or next to the HaH club platform were entertained by drag queens and other people on the vehicle. At their commands, the crowd cheered or chanted specific slogans, including "love, equality, tolerance", "thank you" directed to the police, and "come with us – we are the same" to the onlookers and counter-manifesters gathered along the route. Drag queens made sure to regularly

stir up noise with commands such as “Are you having fun?”, and “Show how many of you there are”. These are slogans and calls specific only to this march, present in public space just once a year, but which can regularly be heard in queer-safe spaces, clubs and pubs. The participants of the march wanted to bring the atmosphere of these venues to the streets, through the music played and the reactions it stirred.

Concluding discussion

Every year, the streets of Polish cities are filled with numerous demonstrations. They serve to proclaim views, celebrate, postulate, or express one’s opposition. Rebellion in public space seems particularly interesting if we consider its sound, as expressing dissent is primarily associated with noise and sonic aggression. There is an abundance of examples from events such as the annual Independence March in Warsaw or the Women’s Strike. In this context, it is tempting to refer to the Polish tradition of protest songs and their impact on social mobilisation, as Marek Payerhin (2015) and Andrea F. Bohlman (2020) have written about more extensively. However, a difference lies in the choice of songs. While in Poland many songs, especially rock songs, have been intentionally written as protest songs in specific political contexts, during the Equality March non-protest songs are attributed to a protest meaning in their new context.

It is also worth asking whether sonorous aggression and “forcible invasion” of urban space is the only way to reach one’s goal and manifest one’s views. The participants in the Wrocław Equality March, most of whom are members or allies of sexual minorities, undoubtedly demonstrated their power by their loud behavior, but they did not resort to aggression or violence. Instead of shouting vulgarities or resorting to physical force, they expressed themselves through slogans, colorful costumes, gadgets, dancing, and most of all – music. Observers, both supporters and opponents of the event were invited to participate, thanked for their presence, and were urged to change their thinking about “othernesses” and minorities, not just sexual. The entire march can be treated as a kind of spectacle, a performance, because its participants rejected the templates into which they are inscribed by everyday routine and social norms and gave themselves over to common fun. Out of the multitude of sonic phenomena filling the 10th Wrocław Equality March manifestation, music played a leading role – diverse and, as it turned out, not accidental, music with which participants could identify, music that evoked specific behaviors and reactions, music that participants enjoyed themselves to very consciously by readily choosing one of the two vehicles.

“Noise” [*hałas*], “commotion” [*harmider/zamieszanie*], or “hum” [*szum*] were the most common phrases used by participants to describe the sound phenomena around them. It is worth bearing in mind that the noise can be treated as a manifestation of power, a sound symbol of the Equality March, intended to have a specific effect, in this case to guarantee equal rights for sexual minorities. In addition, the emission of a wealth of sounds at high

volume during a structured event unites the participants, organizes them, and sometimes even elevates them.⁹ The hustle and bustle of modern cities, which also includes this type of event, should not be treated as a form of unpleasant noise, but rather as a kind of audio message that testifies to the specificity of the metropolitan soundscape (Gradowski 2004:58–61). Thus, the participants of the Wrocław Equality March became an acoustic community, or more precisely, a musical community. Music played a key role and determined the uniqueness of the acoustic expression of this community. It consisted of disco songs, or songs based on disco aesthetics, combined with free, expressive dances of the participants. The repertoire also included English-language and Polish songs that may not be directly related to disco but could be re-interpreted as addressing sexual minority issues ("Testosteron", "Biała armia"), or directly related to LGBT+ culture ("Let's Have a Kiki"). There were also compositions by artists considered as icons of the LGBT+ community (Madonna, Kylie Minogue). As a result, the songs played provided easy identification for marchers and symbolically represented their identity in the city's public space.

Music is played during many types of protests and parades, but it is the repertoire that distinguishes them from each other. The Wrocław Equality March is a specific sonic enclave. It is the sonic space of nightclubs and LGBT+ events transferred to the streets of the city, for nightlife provided and continues to provide queer people with a sphere of activity that is different from everyday life. It opens the imagination to play, experimentation and self-creation. "Partygoers invest time, energies, and resources into seeking out experiences that provide them with consolation, empowerment, validation, distraction, relief, ecstasy, or simply an escape from the difficulties of everyday life" (Garcia 2020:337–339). Thus, the specific soundscape with which the participants of the March identify themselves is transferred for several hours to an open public space with a usually different sound atmosphere – the old town of Wrocław. Of course, it should be kept in mind that the collective emission of loud sounds, including music, also creates spaces of separation. The city becomes, as it were, a sound battlefield, which evokes a sense of inclusion or exclusion – thus introducing a division between others and us. Sounds that unite some separate others, even if this is not the goal.

However, if one takes into account that Wrocław is a modern, creative city, gathering people of different cultures, nationalities, religions and beliefs, an event such as the Equality March may be expected, as it proves the social activity of the inhabitants, ready to express their opinion and take a form of protest for which this type of parade can be considered. The growing interest in participating in the Equality March and the increasing need to resist oppressive authorities will perhaps allow elements of LGBT+ culture hitherto less present in public space to emerge, such as lesbian camp and others. Perhaps we will once again see how powerful a weapon music can be.

9. Cf Kapelański 2016, on the use of noise during student demonstrations in Montreal in 2012.

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