

Cultural Conditions of Professional Carriers of Japanese Musicians in the International World of
Classical Music

Institutional Affiliation: Warsaw University

Name: Beata Kowalczyk, doctoral student

This paper examines professional trajectories of Japanese musicians on the international market of classical music. On account of its universal language, which is largely based on musical notation as well as French and Italian terminology, we tend to imagine that this environment encourages cultural exchanges and is open for all musicians regardless of social, cultural or personal characteristics be it language, education, nationality, race, religion or value system etc., provided that s/he has an excellent command of the musical instrument (technique, expression, interpretation, aesthetical taste or sense of music etc.). This representation is often accompanied by a myth of cosmopolitan artist, who constantly crosses boundaries between countries, arts, regulations etc.

In order to verify and deconstruct this cliché I have carried out almost 20 semi-structured interviews with Japanese pianists, conductors, sound engineers, professors as well as members of Polish orchestras. I have also conducted observations during rehearsals and international musical projects, concerts as well as other performances or piano lessons asking myself the following questions: are good musical technique and proper understanding of musical language sufficient conditions to become an artist, who can compete on the international market of classical music? What are the objective (relatively independent from an individual such as education system, labor market, immigration law etc.) and subjective (resulting from the person's individual choices), factors in biographies of Japanese musicians, which influence professional orientations followed by these musicians in the course of time? Ultimately, what does it tell us about the rapid progress of globalization and standardization at least in the domain of art?

Referring to the theory of creative professions in the sociology of work developed by interactionist researchers, I define the very *career* as a set of stages coming one after another, of which artist's professional trajectory is composed, which differentiate from one another in terms of the quality of the interpersonal relations. In my research I found out that good musical technique and proper understanding of musical language are insufficient conditions to become an artist, since there are various objective obstacles (labor and migration law, network of relations, language and cultural barriers, conditions on the local labor market etc.), which hinder the development of career in the first place. These are followed by private decisions related to family issues, cultural distance, inability to adapt oneself to the new environment, etc. My findings actually undermine the conviction about artists, who can freely present their art, wherever they want to. Contrary to the saying that talent opens all the doors, the more because we live in a globalizing reality, the world of art is very much inclusive, as Howard Becker argued, in a sense that it privileges only those, who have already found their place inside its structure and keep good relations with a certain group of people. The more influential and powerful the group is, the more successful the musician becomes in this world.