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From the Polish Oberek to American Swing. Traditional Music as an Inspiration in the Guitar Works and Pedagogy of Tatiana Stachak

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Abstract

This article is devoted to contemporary compositions for classical guitar inspired by traditional music. The subject of analysis includes two works by Tatiana Stachak's *Variations on the Oberek* and *Variations with Swing*, which represent different musical traditions and distinct approaches to the treatment of folkloristic motifs. The authors present ways in which traditional music is presented in contemporary guitar compositions, attempting also to define and examine its functions,

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particularly within the field of instrumental pedagogy. The incorporation of folklore into contemporary guitar music combines artistic and educational purposes, supporting the development of performance techniques while simultaneously broadening the performers' cultural and aesthetic competencies.

Keywords: traditional music, classical guitar, music education, Tatiana Stachak.

Throughout the centuries, many artists have sought inspiration for their creative work in folklore. This tendency is also evident today, as numerous composers, performers, and increasingly educators refer to traditional music in their artistic and pedagogical practices. As Sławomira Żerańska-Kominek observes, musical tradition constitutes the foundation of cultural continuity and thus serves as a point of reference for both aesthetic and pedagogical reflection.¹ The idiom of traditional music – shaped by its characteristic rhythm, scale, harmony, and specific performance techniques – reflects regional musical culture. Contemporary interest in folk and ethnic music may therefore be understood as a form of dialogue between heritage and modernity. As Jan Szacki notes, every culture is characterised by a dynamic tension between what is inherited and what subsequent generations introduce as expressions of their own identity and innovation.² This tension is reflected both in artistic creativity and in educational attitudes, which draw upon tradition while simultaneously embedding it within the context of contemporary values and needs.

The aim of this article is to present the ways in which traditional music is incorporated into contemporary guitar compositions and to attempt to define and demonstrate its functions within the field of instrumental pedagogy. The subject of analysis comprises two compositions by Tatiana Stachak: *Variations on the Oberek* and *Variations with Swing*, which represent different musical traditions and distinct approaches to the treatment of folkloric motifs. In discussing the composer's artistic output, the biographical method is employed. The analytical framework is grounded in a hermeneutic perspective, focusing on the ways in which Tatiana Stachak's personality, experiences, and values have shaped her artistic identity.³

Tatiana Stachak is a contemporary Polish composer and guitarist. She began her musical education in her hometown of Łódź and later continued her studies at the Academy of Music in Wrocław, where she studied classical guitar under Professor Piotr Zaleski. During her studies, she developed a strong interest in music education for young children, which marked the beginning of her peda-

¹ S. Żerańska-Kominek, *Muzyka w kulturze*, Warszawa 1995, p. 205.

² J. Szacki, *Tradycja*, [in:] *Encyklopedia Kultury Polskiej XX wieku* ed. Antonina Kłoskowska, vol.1, Publisher "Wiedza o Kulturze", Wrocław 1991, p. 208.

³ A. Legeżyńska, *Wystarczy mocno i wytrwale zastanawiać się nad jednym życiem... Biografistyka jako hermeneutyczne wyzwanie*, „Teksty Drugie” 2019, no. 1, p. 14.

gological career. Recognising the lack of suitable teaching materials for beginner guitarists, she decided to develop them herself. Work on her first textbook, *Gitarą pierwsza klasa* [Guitar: First Class], took several years, and the author recalls this period as follows:

The spontaneous reactions of my students were my most valuable source of guidance. After three years of work, I had already accumulated a substantial amount of material. I selected and refined it, which resulted in the textbook "Guitar: First Class", followed shortly thereafter by "Guitar: Extra Class". After some time, it became clear that the youngest group of children, aged five to six, required a textbook with different content. This led to the creation of "The Guitarist's ABC".⁴

Stachak is the author of several books containing compositions for classical guitar as well as instructional method books. These publications are well regarded in many countries, including England, Germany, the Czech Republic, and China, which confirms their universal appeal and high educational value. The significance of Stachak's work is further evidenced by the inclusion of her compositions in the examination programs of prestigious educational institutions such as ABRSM in London⁵ and Trinity College in Dublin.⁶

In her compositional output, which belongs to the domain of chamber guitar music, a substantial group of works is inspired by folklore and traditional music. The issue of the artistic use of folk material in musical composition was repeatedly addressed in 20th-century aesthetic reflection. Among those who formulated important postulates in this field was Karol Szymanowski, who valued such inspirations while simultaneously emphasising that composers should not merely quote folk melodies, but rather engage with them creatively, enriching them with new musical means so that the result is a new work of genuine artistic value.⁷

In Polish guitar literature, one can find numerous compositions referring to Polish and foreign traditional forms, such as oberek, kujawiak, mazurka, polonaise, waltz, tango, milonga, samba, bossa nova, and boogie-woogie. At present, these inspirations are evident not only in the works by Tatiana Stachak, but also in compositions by Marek Pasieczny, Mirosław Drożdżowski, Zdzisław Musiał, Janusz Stanisław Strobek, Marek Walawender, Gerard Drozd, and Michał Lazar. These composers may therefore be regarded as continuators of the tradition of

⁴ Interview with Tatiana Stachak for the online music service *Stretta*, conducted by Katarzyna Uziel. Source: <https://www.stretta-music.pl/magazyn-muzyczny/portret/tatiana-stachak-portret> [access:18.12.2025].

⁵ *Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music* (ABRSM) a British music organisation responsible for examining and certifying musical achievements.

⁶ *Trinity College in Dublin* - an Irish research university founded in 1592 by Queen Elizabeth I.

⁷ B. Mielcarek-Krzyżanowska, *Folklor muzyczny w twórczości kompozytorów polskich XX wieku*, Wydawnictwo Akademii Muzycznej w Bydgoszczy, Bydgoszcz, 2021, p. 63.

creative dialogue with folklore, characteristic of many outstanding Polish composers such as Fryderyk Chopin, Stanisław Moniuszko, Karol Szymanowski, Witold Lutosławski, Henryk Górecki, and many others.

Stachak has developed her own compositional language, in which she creatively transforms authentic elements of ethnic music and adapts them to the technical and expressive capabilities of the classical guitar. She draws inspiration from diverse traditions such as flamenco, Irish ballads, Brazilian bossa nova, American blues, and Polish national dances. Her approach encompasses both faithful renderings of original melodic lines as well as imaginative stylisations and free reinterpretations of well-known musical themes.

This is exemplified by her most recent collection, *Cantabile*, which contains guitar arrangements of songs by Polish composers. Its premiere took place in July 2024 during the International Guitar Festival in Lanckorona. This event represents an important step in popularising the discussed repertoire on the international stage. In this way, her music transcends boundaries, inspires the exploration of shared cultural heritage, and fosters openness to diversity.⁸

In addition to her compositional activity, Stachak is actively engaged in music education. She conducts workshops and masterclasses, publishes articles in professional journals, and serves as a juror at numerous prestigious guitar competitions. Her original concept of guitar pedagogy aligns with contemporary educational approaches oriented toward a “holistic” development of the performer, combining the refinement of instrumental technique with the cultivation of musical sensitivity.⁹ Within this framework, the teacher is understood less as a mere transmitter of technical skills and more as a mentor and guide – someone who supports the student’s artistic growth and gradual attainment of creative maturity.¹⁰ In this context, traditional music constitutes a particularly valuable pedagogical resource. It not only fosters musical awareness in young musicians, but also contributes to the preservation and transmission of regional traditions, while cultivating respect for history and cultural diversity.

Excerpting of the research material made it possible to distinguish two principal groups of works: the first consists of traditional melodies arranged for the guitar while preserving the original melodic line; the second group comprises

⁸ A. Młynarczuk-Sokołowska, *Pedagog, nauczyciel, edukator w zróżnicowanej kulturowo przestrzeni współczesnej edukacji* “Kultura – Społeczeństwo – Edukacja”, no. 11, Poznań 2017, pp. 145–159.

⁹ M. Jasińska-Żaba, *Wybór środków dydaktycznych w procesie kształtowania wrażliwości muzycznej pianisty*, [in:] *Wartości w muzyce. Wartości kształcące i kształtowane u studentów w toku edukacji szkoły wyższej*, vol. 2, ed. J. Uchyla-Zroski, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2009, p. 92.

¹⁰ L. Rudenko, *Wychowanie estetyczne wobec wyzwań współczesnej edukacji*, [in:] *Nauczyciel wobec szans i zagrożeń edukacyjnych XXI wieku. Teoretyczne konteksty szans i zagrożeń edukacyjnych XXI wieku*, ed. H. Gajdamowicz, vol. 1, Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls, Kraków 2009, p. 78.

compositions that include references to melodies derived from traditional music. Examples from the first group were preliminarily classified according to their cultural and ethnic affiliation, assigned to contemporary nation-states, regardless of the often complex and multivalent origins of these works:

Poland: *In the Brick Cellar* (Stachak 2009, p.18), *Once There Was a Little Frog* (Stachak 2009, p. 32) *Old Bear is Sleeping Soundly* (Stachak 2020, p. 9), *We Are the Dwarfs* (Stachak 2020, p. 4), *Here Comes the Train* (Stachak 2020, p. 13), *Let's Go Hunting* (Stachak 2009, p. 42), *Black Ram* (Stachak 2020, p. 7), *Riding, Riding Children on the Road* (Stachak 2020, p. 20), *Variations on the Oberek* (Stachak 2022, p. 6), *Kujawiak* (Stachak 2006, p. 42), *Kurpie Étude* (Stachak 2018, p. 6), *Variations on the Oberek* (Stachak 2022, p. 6), *Mazurka Étouffé* (Stachak 2006, p. 51);

Scotland: *Auld Lang Syne*¹¹ (Stachak 2006, p. 124);

USA: *Jingle Bells*¹² (Stachak 2006, p.127), *Ragtime*¹³ (Stachak 2009, p. 90), *Oh! Susanna*¹⁴ (Stachak 2006, p. 121), *Old MacDonald*¹⁵ (Stachak 2009, p. 27);

England: *Greensleeves*¹⁶ (Stachak 2006, p. 121), *My Boat is Floating*¹⁷ (Stachak 2006, p. 119);

France: *On the Bridge in Avignon*¹⁸ (Stachak 2006, p. 116), *Frère Jacques*¹⁹ (Stachak 2006, p. 117).

Additionally, *Swing - Sunny Day* (Stachak 2008, p. 77) and *Blues with a Surprise* (Stachak 2006, p. 41) reference American blues and swing genres, while *Milonga* (Stachak 2006, p. 49), *Minute Bossa* (Stachak 2006, p. 52), and *Cheerful Samba* (Stachak 2006, p. 39) capture the spirit of South American dance music. There are also other references to tradition, such as the *Sicilian Étude* from the collection "Characteristic Études", published in 2018 (Stachak 2018).

Some of the works discussed above are popular melodies that Stachak has adapted to the timbral and technical possibilities of the classical guitar. Others are original compositions inspired by traditional music from various parts of the world.

Due to the limited length of the article, the discussion will focus on two of her compositions that represent different musical traditions and diverse approaches to the stylisation of traditional musical material. The works come from the collection "Album with Variations", which contains six guitar variations functioning as stylisations of three dances and three distinct musical forms.

¹¹ Traditional Scottish melody.

¹² Traditional Christmas song.

¹³ Musical style, and in Tatiana Stachak's method books, also the title of a musical piece.

¹⁴ Folk song.

¹⁵ Traditional children's song.

¹⁶ Traditional ballad.

¹⁷ Polish version of an English folk song.

¹⁸ French folk song from the Provence region.

¹⁹ Polish version of the French folk song *Frère Jacques*.

Variations on the Oberek²⁰

The Oberek is a triple-time dance, characterised by a fast tempo and mazurka-like rhythm. Its name derives from a dance figure – a spinning motion performed by the dancers. Many folk songs were also performed to Oberek melodies. Both in playing and in dancing, “its performance specificity lies in its rubato character.”²¹ Similar to a folk singer performing a song, “the Oberek requires the instrumentalist to sense subtle rhythmic shifts occurring between the three main beat values of the measure.”²²

Polish dances based on mazurka rhythms (Oberek, Krakowiak, Mazur, and Polonaise) were fashionable “from the early seventeenth century across large parts of Europe.”²³ Today, they form part of Poland’s cultural heritage, and their incorporation into contemporary instrumental music can be regarded as a form of continuation of this historical tradition. In musical practice, these dances typically appear in an instrumental version “detached from the dance element,”²⁴ and it is in this form that they appear in Stachak’s works.

It is worth noting that dances with mazurka rhythms exhibit a variety of names, tempos, and forms depending on the region in which they are performed.²⁵ For example, in the Kujawy region, the dominant form is the *Kujawiak*, whereas in the Sandomierz area, the popular form is the *Światówka*. Regional variation is evident not only in the names (in the Lublin region, the dance is known as *Obertas*, *Obertany*, or *Przewracany*), but also in the different variants of the dance, such as *Suwak* and *Majdaniak*. In the Biłgoraj area, there is the “simple” Oberek, sometimes considered a slower variant of the dance,²⁶ while in other regions one can encounter names such as *Owijok*,²⁷ *Wywijany*, *Okrągły*

²⁰ T. Stachak, *Wariacje z oberkiem*, “Album z wariacjami”, Kraków 2022, pp. 6 – 9.

²¹ A. Kusto, Z. Koter, *Muzyka instrumentalna. Instrumentarium – wykonawcy – repertuar*, [in:] *Polska pieśń i muzyka ludowa. Źródła i materiały*, vol. 4, pt. 6, *Lubelskie*, ed. J. Bartmiński, Instytut Sztuki PAN, Uniwersytet Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, Polihymnia, Lublin 2011, p. 200.

²² Ibidem.

²³ J. Stęszewski, *Muzyka ludowa*, [in:] *Etnografia Polski. Przemiany kultury ludowej*, vol. 2, ed. M. Biernacka, M. Frankowska, W. Paprocka, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich – Wydawnictwo PAN, Wrocław 1981, p. 259.

²⁴ T. Nowak, *Polskie tańce narodowe – emblemat polskości czy zjawisko pogranicza europejskiego*, “Polski Rocznik Muzykologiczny” 2016, no. 14, p. 215.

²⁵ J. Stęszewski, *Muzyka ludowa*, p. 259.

²⁶ A. Kusto, *Stan badań nad folklorem muzycznym Lubelszczyzny*, [in:] *Polska pieśń i muzyka ludowa. Źródła i materiały*, vol. 4: *Lubelskie*, part 6: *Muzyka instrumentalna. Instrumentarium – Wykonawcy – Repertuar*, ed. J. Bartmiński, series ed. L. Bielawski, Wydawnictwo Polihymnia, Lublin 2011, pp. 10–24.

²⁷ *Owijok* is a Sieradz regional variant of the oberek; Narodowy Instytut Muzyki i Tańca, source: <http://tance.edu.pl/tance/owijok/> [access: 11.07.2025].

or *Zawijas*,²⁸ referring to characteristic dance figures – various spins performed by the dancers. Different variants of the Oberek were performed mainly at social gatherings and weddings, usually after the Polish rite called *oczepiny*.²⁹

The same melody could be played for dancing, taking on the characteristics of an Oberek; it could also, when performed at a slower tempo, become a *Suwak*, played for older guests, or serve to enliven monotonous household tasks (such as feather plucking or cabbage pickling).³⁰

Hence the use of dual naming for certain Oberek variants (*Oberek Majdaniak*, *Oberek Zawiaślak*, *Oberek Suwak*, *Oberek Powiaślak*).³¹ Regardless of the local variant or name, the Oberek is primarily danced in central Poland, and less frequently in the north,³² as well as in the Kujawy and Mazowsze regions.

The analyzed composition, *Variations on the Oberek*, combines elements of Polish folk dance with the classical form of the variation. The point of departure and main theme is the melody of a popular Polish children's song, *Jadq, jadq dzieci drogq*,³³ which appears in the opening section of the piece (Theme). In the six subsequent variations, Stachak gives this motif new musical identities, creating diverse and contrasting interpretations that make the composition remarkable for its inventiveness and expressiveness.

The stylisation of the Oberek in this work is multi-layered and encompasses nearly all elements of the musical composition. One can observe a certain similarity to folk practice, in which Oberek dances were often preceded by a short, improvised song, later performed in variant form by musicians.³⁴



Example 1. T. Stachak, *Variations on the Oberek* (melody: *Jadq, jadq dzieci drogq*), bars 1–4.

²⁸ Integrated Educational Platform, source: <https://zpe.gov.pl/a/cechy-oberka-w-piosence-i-utworze-muzycznym/DZcXnTQwr> [access: 11.07.2025].

²⁹ A. Kusto, *Stan badań nad folklorem muzycznym Lubelszczyzny*, p. 18.

³⁰ Z. Koter, A. Kusto, *Muzyka instrumentalna. Instrumentarium – wykonawcy – repertuar*, pt. 6, p. 200.

³¹ Cf. examples of such dual naming (including specific works included in the volume under the following numbers: 4866, 4871, 4954, 4919, 4929, 4951); A. Kusto, Z. Koter, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

³² Cf.: J. Stęszewski, *Muzyka ludowa*, [in:] *Etnografia Polski. Przemiany kultury ludowej*, vol. 2, ed. M. Biernackiej, M. Frankowskiej, W. Paprockiej, Wrocław 1981, p. 259.

³³ Traditional children's song set to the poem *What the Children Saw on the Way* (*Co dzieci widziały w drodze*), by Maria Konopnicka. Composer unknown.

³⁴ Cf. Z. Stęszewska, *Muzyczne zagadnienia tańców narodowych*, [in:] *Różne formy tańców polskich*, ed. I. Ostrowska, Centralny Ośrodek Metodyki Upowszechniania Kultury, Warszawa 1981, p. 171; cited in: Z. Koter, A. Kusto, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

The theme is set in G major and in a 3/4 meter. In this section, the composer employs scordatura on the 5th and 6th strings. This technique not only expands the instrument's range but also allows for a characteristic bass resonance reminiscent of traditional folk bass sounds. In terms of performance technique, *sul ponticello*³⁵ is used, giving the notes a sharp and bright timbre, evoking the sound of folk string instruments. At the conclusion of the theme, the *tamburo* technique is applied, striking the strings with the right hand, which mimics the sound of a small drum – a typical instrument in rural folk ensembles.

The piece has a four-phrase structure, with each phrase containing four measures. The first three measures of each phrase follow an identical rhythmic pattern (two eighth notes followed by two quarter notes), while the fourth and final measure of each phrase consists entirely of quarter notes. This orderly rhythmic structure conveys a sense of stability and regularity, which may be particularly important for pedagogical applications.

The first two variations present a calm, almost lyrical treatment of the melody *Jadq, jadq dzieci drogq*. The marking *tranquillo* indicates a moderate tempo and smooth phrase shaping. In the second variation, emphasising the simplicity of the folk accompaniment and the primitive character of the texture, Stachak applies a regular repetition of the same bass note (D) in eighth-note rhythm.

In the third variation, marked by the composer as *Oberek*, the dance stylisation is realised most fully. The change in meter from 3/4 to 3/8, the increase in tempo, and the accentuation of the first and third beats evoke the characteristic rhythm of the Oberek. The variation begins with a rhythmic introduction typical of this dance. Subsequently, more varied mazurka rhythm patterns appear, such as the sequences: two sixteenths and two eighths / four sixteenths and one eighth / two sixteenths, one eighth, and two sixteenths. These stylistic compositional devices enhance the interpretation of the Oberek and the work's connection to dance practice, albeit without direct movement accompaniment. A stylistic reference to the playing of folk fiddlers can be seen in the monophonic melodic line, devoid of harmonisation. The only chord in this section appears in the cadence.



Example 2. Characteristic rhythmic introduction to the Oberek.

³⁵ *Sul ponticello* – a playing technique in which the guitarist produces sound close to the bridge of the instrument, resulting in a sharp, bright timbre.

VARIAZIONE III - Oberek



Example 3. T. Stachak, Variations on the Oberek (characteristic Oberek rhythm beginning the III Variation), bars 43–46.



Example 4. T. Stachak, Variations on the Oberek (mazurka rhythm variants in the III Variation).

A characteristic feature of the Oberek, its “briskness”, is revealed here through the fast tempo and sudden changes in articulation. The *sul ponticello* technique gives the sound a certain roughness and percussive character, creating an impression of raw timbre. Another reference to the Oberek is the performance marking *attacca*. Stachak’s work should be performed in a manner similar to that of a traditional Oberek, which typically flows seamlessly from one section to the next without distinct pauses.

The fourth variation, the shortest in the cycle (3/4 meter), is based on a repetitive measure structure and provides a tonal contrast to the other sections of the composition. Each measure begins with a single note in the bass line, followed by an “answer” in the form of an arpeggiated chord in the upper voice. Although seemingly simple, this variation is distinguished by its distinctive, peculiar timbre, achieved through the use of two techniques: *sul tasto* and *sul ponticello*.

The fifth, penultimate variation (2/4 meter) contains references to the dance character of the Oberek. The rhythmic figures, consisting of two eighth notes followed by a quarter note, evoke dance movements – stomps and jumps – that are integral elements of the traditional Oberek.

In the final, sixth variation (4/4 meter), Stachak alludes to spinning dancers. This is suggested by the flowing phrases, absence of pauses, and the continuous eighth-note motion present throughout this section. Additionally, the marking *teneramente ma sonore* indicates a loud and sonorous execution, highlighting the tonal qualities of the guitar.

Variations with Swing

The full title of this composition is *Wariacje ze swingiem*, na temat francuskiej piosenki *Panie Janie* [Variations with Swing, on the Theme of the French Song *Frère Jacques*],³⁶ and it was inspired by the musical traditions of North America, specifically the United States. This relatively young country, built upon Anglo-Saxon, Irish, Latin, Asian, and Eastern European³⁷ cultural influences, as well as, from the 17th century, African American culture³⁸ brought by enslaved people, developed highly diverse musical styles. One of the most important of these was the blues, which emerged from work songs and the religious music of African American communities in the southern United States (gospel, spirituals). Interestingly, although traditional Native American music is an important component of the American cultural heritage, it retained primarily a ritual character and did not directly influence the development of mainstream American musical culture.³⁹

At its origins, the blues functioned primarily as a vocal form. Over time, vocal-instrumental and purely instrumental arrangements emerged (performed solo, in duos, or in small ensembles), which in the longer term led to the development of various styles of instrumental blues.⁴⁰ Typical blues performance devices included, among others, *glissando*,⁴¹ *vibrato*,⁴² *false* *falsetto*,⁴³ *blue notes*,⁴⁴ and a descending melodic contour.⁴⁵ Characteristic vocal techniques were imitated by instruments. Initially, simple instruments were used – often homemade – such as the diddley bow, as well as everyday objects employed as sound-pro-

³⁶ T. Stachak, *Album z wariacjami*, Wydawnictwo EUTERPE, Kraków 2022, pp. 10–13.

³⁷ Cf. A. Czekanowska, *Kultury tradycyjne wobec współczesności. Muzyka, poezja, taniec*, Wydawnictwo Trio, Warszawa 2008, pp. 229–247.

³⁸ B. Nettl, *Folk Music in the United States: An Introduction*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit 1976, pp. 13–19.

³⁹ B. Nettl, *Folk Music...*, p. 19.

⁴⁰ M. Pałka, „Rola i możliwości wykonawcze pianisty w muzyce jazzowej. Dobór środków pianistycznych w relacji do zmiennej obsady instrumentalnej na podstawie autorskiej kompozycji «Piano Dialogues»” (computer printout of a doctoral dissertation written under the supervision of D. Wania), Akademia Muzyczna im. Krzysztofa Pendereckiego, Kraków 2024, p. 15.

⁴¹ Glissando (from Italian *glissare*, “to slide”), a performance technique involving a smooth transition between two notes by “sliding” through the intermediate pitches. Description after J. Niedziela-Meira, *Historia Jazzu. 100 wykładów*. Katowice 2014, p. 436.

⁴² *Vibrato* - a vocal and instrumental technique consisting of rapid, slight fluctuations in pitch.

⁴³ *Falsetto* - a high male or female vocal register, produced by strong tension of the vocal folds.

⁴⁴ *Blue notes* are pitches of a microtonal character, used by vocalists and instrumentalists, including guitarists (with the use of slide technique), harmonica players, wind and string instrumentalists. They constitute an important stylistic element of blues, jazz, rock, rhythm and blues, and other genres derived from the African American musical tradition.

⁴⁵ M. Pałka, *Rola i możliwości wykonawcze pianisty w muzyce jazzowej...* p. 9.

ducing tools (e.g. the washboard). Subsequently, instruments such as the banjo and fiddle appeared, followed by the guitar, which began to play a more significant role in the blues only in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Its popularity increased with the spread of phonographic recordings and the migration of musicians to large urban centres, where the blues underwent further transformation, leading to the emergence of jazz, rhythm and blues, and rock. At the beginning of the twentieth century, blues traditions found continuity in formations known as *string bands*. These ensembles, consisting of guitar, banjo, and fiddle, operated at the intersection of blues, ragtime, and early jazz, and based their practice on “oral tradition, improvisation, and communal music-making.”⁴⁶ Within these groups, the guitar functioned as a link between the African American roots of jazz and the later swing style.⁴⁷

Two key elements shaping the American jazz idiom are ragtime and swing. Ragtime, which emerged at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, owes much of its success to the American pianist Scott Joplin.⁴⁸ Swing, on the other hand, developed mainly during the 1930s and 1940s and gained popularity in the so-called “Golden Age of Swing”⁴⁹ (1935–1945). Its flourishing was closely linked to the migration of African American communities from the southern United States to larger cities such as Chicago, New York, and Kansas City, where the big band tradition developed.⁵⁰ A characteristic feature of this style was the principle of *call-and-response*,⁵¹ a dialogue between different sections of the orchestra.⁵² The rhythm section, consisting of piano, double bass, drums, and guitar, was responsible for maintaining a steady, danceable pulse. Meanwhile, the brass and woodwind sections performed ensemble passages interspersed with improvised solos.⁵³ A defining trait of swing style was its specific syncopated rhythm,

⁴⁶ A. Shipton, *The New History of Jazz*, Bloomsbury Publishing, New York 2007, p. 96.

⁴⁷ T. Gioia, *The History of Jazz*, Oxford University Press, New York 2021, p. 15.

⁴⁸ Cf. especially the most famous ragtimes by Scott Joplin, e.g. *Maple Leaf Rag*, *The Entertainer*, *Weeping Willow*.

⁴⁹ Ch. Meeder, *Jazz: The Basics*, Taylor & Francis, New York 2008, p. 61.

⁵⁰ C. Patterson-Carney, “Jazz and the cultural transformation of America in the 1920s”, (doctoral dissertation written under the supervision of Charles J. Shindo,) Louisiana State University 2003, p. 218.

⁵¹ *Call-and-response* technique - a compositional device based on a dialogic arrangement of musical phrases, in which the first phrase functions as a “call” and the second as a “response.” The phrases may be vocal, instrumental, or mixed in character. This technique originates in traditional African music and was later adapted and developed in various musical genres, including jazz, blues, and gospel.

⁵² I. Monson, *Jazz Improvisation*, [in:] *The Cambridge Companion to Jazz*, ed. M. Cooke, D. Horn, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2003, p. 114–132, [DOI: 10.1017/CCOL9780521663205.009].

⁵³ K. Gabbard, Source: *Swing Jazz*, <https://www2.lawrence.edu/library/americasmusic/swingesay-short.pdf> [access: 11.07.2025].

based on “triplet groupings in which the first note is held.”⁵⁴ It was this rhythmic articulation that gave the music its fluidity and characteristic swing feel. Interestingly, the swing beat was not determined solely by the written notation. Performance nuances such as phrasing, articulation, and micro-rhythmic subtleties – developed primarily through collective playing in ensembles – played a crucial role.⁵⁵ Just before the outbreak of World War II, Swing was arguably “the most widespread musical genre in America,”⁵⁶ perfectly suited for dance evenings, social dances, and other festive occasions. Its popularity extended beyond the borders of the United States, achieving international reach.

[...] Swing arrived in Europe. Its energy and horizontal, big-band sound became a source of unrestrained joy and entertainment for the young generation. Movement turned into an explosion of strength and youth. Swing gave rise to many forms: West Coast, East Coast, Lindy Hop, and the most important of them, the Jitterbug. These forms drew on one another, and the constant rotation of elements resulted in the fluidity of each structure. [...] It truly reflected a state of mind, a unique mentality celebrating youth, its wildness, and its fervour.⁵⁷

Tatiana Stachak’s *Variations with Swing* is a composition consisting of five sections (Theme and four Variations), written in changing meters (4/4, 6/8) and in the key of G major. The piece employs scordatura on the 5th and 6th strings (A tuned down to G and E tuned down to D).

The titular melody of the song *Frère Jacques* fills the entire theme of the composition. In 4/4 meter, it has a simple structure based on stepwise and third intervals, presented in canon form, which references the popular sung version of the melody. In the subsequent sections, the theme undergoes various stylisations and transformations, and although it no longer appears in its original form, it remains recognisable. The overall design is based on contrast: the Theme and the first two Variations are calm in character, while the last two are lively and incorporate elements typical of swing.

In the first Variation (*Campane di carillon*), the emphasis is placed on timbral colour, evoking associations with the metallic sound of a carillon. The melody has a cantabile character, with a clearly recognisable main motif. A steady eighth-note rhythm creates a sense of continuous motion. This lyrical character flows seamlessly into the second Variation (*Moderato sostenuto*), in which the

⁵⁴ Zintegrowana Platforma Edukacyjna: Source: <https://zpe.gov.pl/a/okres-swingu-i-jazz-nowoczesny/DwTTm9UbR> [access: 11.07.2025].

⁵⁵ M. Herzig, *The ABCs of Jazz Education. Rethinking Jazz Pedagogy*, [in:] *Jazzforschung heute: Themen, Methoden, Perspektiven*, ed. M. Pfeleiderer, M. Herzig, W. G. Zaddach, EDITION EMVAS, Berlin 2019, pp. 181–198, [DOI: 10.25643/bauhaus-universitaet.3868].

⁵⁶ K. Gabbard, *op. cit.*

⁵⁷ T. Drożdż, “Człowiek i taniec. Systemy choreograficzne jako profile badania kultury” (doctoral dissertation written under the supervision of E. Kossowska), Uniwersytet Śląski, Katowice 2012, p. 63.

eighth-note rhythm is maintained. The gentle nature of this section is highlighted by the use of harmonics (flageolets) in the final part of the Variation.



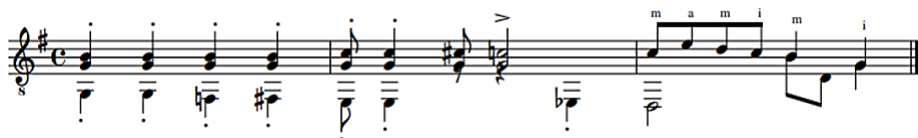
Example 5. T. Stachak, *Variations with Swing* (melody: “Frère Jacques”), bars 1–4.

The third Variation (*Swing*), contrasting with the preceding sections, serves as a kind of “wake-up call.” Its swing character arises from the rhythm, in which pairs of eighth notes are played unevenly, with the first note extended. The jazz style is achieved here through the use of specific articulation and performance techniques such as *staccato*, accents, and *glissandi*. The techniques *sul ponticello* (playing near the bridge) and *naturale* (returning to the string’s natural tone) introduce a varied timbral palette to the instrument.

Characteristic “swinging” elements can also be found in the fourth Variation. The most prominent features are the rhythm, based on eighth-note triplets and a fast tempo, and the dynamics, marked fortissimo (ff). As an element of original compositional creativity and an expressive performance device, Stachak employs two techniques: striking the strings above the sound hole with a closed fist (III Variation) and “lifting the guitar and moving it to make it resonate”⁵⁸ (IV Variation).



Example 6. T. Stachak, *Variations with Swing* (rhythmic indications for II Variation), bars 54–57.



Example 7. T. Stachak, *Variations with Swing* (characteristic articulation elements in III Variation), bars 64–66.

⁵⁸ T. Stachak, *Album z wariacjami*, Kraków 2022, p. 13.

The analysed compositions represent just two examples from the rich compositional output of Tatiana Stachak, all of which were inspired by traditional music. In her source material, approximately fifty such works can be identified. In the Variation based on the Oberek, Stachak employs elements characteristic of Polish folk music Mazurka rhythm, specific meter, ornaments, as well as performance techniques that imitate the sounds of folk instruments. She does not directly quote folk melodies but artistically stylises them, giving them new meaning within the context of the classical variation form. In *Variations with Swing*, she utilises a full palette of rhythmic and articulation devices (eighth-note triplets, *staccato*, accents, irregular accents), performance techniques (*harmonics*, *glissandi*, percussive strikes on the guitar body), and dynamics (*crescendi* and *decrescendi*, *rubato*, dynamic contrasts) to give a swing character to the composition.

It should be noted that Tatiana Stachak is also an active educator and author of guitar method books, which is why her compositions combine artistic value with pedagogical function. In contemporary education, where multicultural aspects are increasingly emphasised, material based on traditional music from around the world is especially valuable. Thanks to the availability of her publications in many countries across different continents, elements of local cultural heritage gain international reach.

Keeping in mind the holistic development of young musicians, Stachak does not limit herself solely to the musical sphere. As she herself admits: "I cannot imagine a guitar lesson without discussing music and its various aspects."⁵⁹ One of these aspects is the visual design of her method books, created by the Kraków-based visual artist Małgorzata Flis. The illustrations included are not incidental; they are an integral part of her concept of music teaching and are intended to enhance its perception through visual associations. The graphics proposed by Flis draw on various painting styles. In the Album with Variations, she is creatively inspired by the work of Paul Klee, using geometric shapes – squares and triangles – in varied colours, which can serve as a visual reflection of the musical structure of the pieces. Meanwhile, the collection *Études* references the Pop Art style, especially the work of Andy Warhol, helping young learners develop sensitivity to contemporary art and explore connections between visual arts and music.

Tatiana Stachak's work exemplifies artistic engagement and reflects the principles of the UNESCO⁶⁰ Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible

⁵⁹ Interview given by Tatiana Stachak to Andrzej Wilkus during guitar workshops at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki in 2025. Source: <http://tatianastachak.pl/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/wywiad123.pdf> [access: 20.10.2025].

⁶⁰ The UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage was adopted in Paris on 17 October 2003. In Poland, it entered into force on 16 August 2011. Source: <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention> [access: 11.07.2025].

Cultural Heritage, as well as the initiatives of the International Council for Traditional Music,⁶¹ which document traditional musical practices and promote their living presence in the contemporary world as an expression of cultural diversity. Stachak's activity integrates pedagogical, compositional, and research aspects, highlighting the interdisciplinary character of her work. An analysis of her teaching methods and compositions reveals interesting pedagogical and artistic strategies that can inspire music educators and researchers. The material she has developed may also serve as a foundation for further studies on the role of traditional music in instrumental and general music education.

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⁶¹ International Council for Traditions of Music and Dance, Source: <https://www.ictmusic.org/> [access: 14.07.2025].

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Od polskiego oberka do amerykańskiego swingu. Inspiracje muzyką tradycyjną w twórczości i pedagogice gitarowej Tatiany Stachak

Streszczenie

Artykuł poświęcony jest współczesnym kompozycjom na gitarę klasyczną, które powstały z inspiracji muzyką tradycyjną. Przedmiotem analizy są dwie kompozycje Tatiany Stachak *Wariacje z oberkiem* i *Wariacje ze swingiem*, reprezentujące odmienne tradycje muzyczne i różne sposoby opracowania motywów folklorystycznych. Autorzy ukazują sposoby uobecniania muzyki tradycyjnej we współczesnych kompozycjach gitarowych, próbują też zdefiniować i ukazać jej funkcje w obszarze dydaktyki instrumentalnej. Włączenie folkloru do współczesnej muzyki gitarowej łączy funkcje artystyczne i edukacyjne. Wspiera rozwój technik gry, ale również poszerza kompetencje kulturowe i estetyczne wykonawców.

Słowa kluczowe: muzyka tradycyjna, gitara klasyczna, edukacja muzyczna, Tatiana Stachak