



Mazurek Dąbrowskiego (1797)

Dąbrowski's Mazurka | Poland Is Not Yet Lost

Music: author unknown, based on mazurka motifs

Words: Józef Wybicki

Classification of the piece: National anthem of Poland

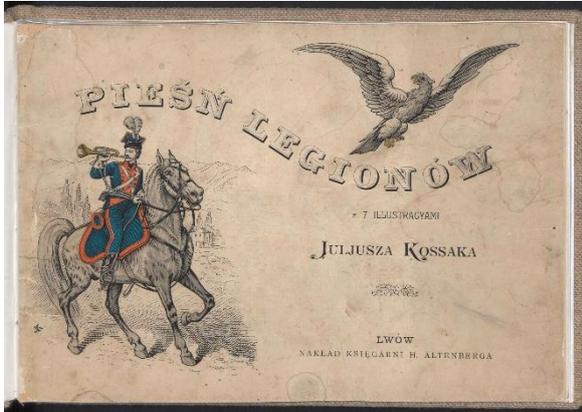
Song description

“Dąbrowski's Mazurka” (“Poland Is Not Yet Lost” or “Song of the Polish Legions”) – a Polish patriotic song from 1797. The words to music composed by an unknown author were written by Józef Wybicki, a Polish independence activist. The song was inspired by the formation of the Polish Legions under French patronage in northern Italy. “Dąbrowski's Mazurka” gained great popularity in the 19th century, becoming one of the most important national songs. Since 1927, it has officially been the national anthem of the Republic of Poland.

The Polish Legions, formed in Lombardy, were the first Polish military formation after the collapse of the Polish state in 1794. They were commanded by General Jan Henryk Dąbrowski, a participant in the war with Russia in 1792 and a hero of the Kościuszko Uprising. Polish legionaries fought on the side of the French, including at the battles of Rimini, Magnano, Trebbia and at Novi, and in the defence of Mantua. In 1807, the Vistula Legion was formed from the remnants of the Legions that reached liberated Warsaw. Veterans of the Legions later formed the senior officers' cadre of the army of the Polish Kingdom and the anti-Russian November Uprising (1830).



Historical note



"Song of the Legions." Publisher H. Altenberg, Lwów 1900.
Source: Polona

The author of the text of the "Mazurka" is Józef Wybicki ¹ (1747-1822). He was a lawyer by education, but he went down in history primarily as a politician and journalist. His protest against the acts of the "Repnin Sejm" (1767-68) is considered the last attempt to positively apply the *liberum veto*. He served as a diplomat for the Bar Confederation² (1768-1772), in later years he was associated with the reformist party. In 1794 he took part in the

Greater Poland expedition of General Jan Henryk Dąbrowski ³, and after the fall of the Kościuszko Uprising he found himself in Italy. According to Wojciech Podgóski, in mid-July 1797, he visited the camp of Polish legionnaires in the city of Reggio di Emilia (then the Cisalpine Republic). It was there, between July 16 and 19, moved by the sight of the Polish army, that he wrote the words of the song which is today our national anthem⁴. According to Wojciech Biliński, the song was written between 10 and 14 July. It was sung for the first time by Wybicki himself during a meeting of legionary officers on the anniversary of the Bastille's demolition. In turn, according to Juliusz Willaume⁵, the premiere of the "Song of the Polish Legions in Italy" took place during a parade on July 16. Other historians point to July 20, when General Dąbrowski solemnly planted the Liberty Tree in the Piazza in Reggio. We do

¹ Józef Rufin Wybicki (1747–1822) – Polish writer and politician, chamberlain of King Stanisław August Poniatowski, close associate of General Jan Henryk Dąbrowski. [Wikipedia page](#)

² Bar Confederation (1768–1772) – an armed union of the nobility, directed against the guardianship of the Russian Empire, King Stanisław August Poniatowski and the Russian troops supporting him. Some historians consider it the first Polish national uprising. [Wikipedia page](#)

³ Jan Henryk Dąbrowski (1755–1818) – Polish general and statesman, participant in the Kościuszko Uprising, founder of the Polish Legions in Italy, general of the Duchy of Warsaw and the Kingdom of Poland. [Wikipedia page](#)

⁴ "...between July 16 and 19, 1797 – under the influence of the first emotion that moved Wybicki at the sight of Polish uniforms, eagles and banners – verses of the soldier's confession of faith were written: Poland is not yet dead." From the history of the Polish hymn song, *Studia i rozprawy* (Studies and Discussions), ed. Wojciech J. Podgóski, Warsaw, 1987, p. 125.

⁵ Juliusz Willaume (1904–1980) – Polish historian and political activist. [Wikipedia page](#)



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not know exactly who wrote the melody. Initially, its author was considered to be Michał Kleofas Ogiński⁶. It is now assumed that Wybicki most likely used a folk mazurka by an unknown author.

Notes of the national anthem in the variant of the title
“Poland has not yet perished” from 1934. Source: Polona

“Dąbrowski’s Mazurka” very quickly gained great popularity. Within a year it had gone far beyond the Legions and was known in all three partitions. It was first published in Mantua in February 1799 in the *Dekada Legionowa* (Legionary Decade) newspaper. The “Mazurka” was sung on November 3, 1806 during the entry of General Dąbrowski and Józef Wybicki to Poznań. It carried on with the Poles through all the Polish battlefields, wars and uprisings of the

19th century. In the next century, “Dąbrowski’s Mazurka” was already a national sanctity, accompanying Poles in World War I, in the battle for the borders and in World War II. Only the song “Boże coś Polskę” (God save Poland) was equal to it.

Since February 26, 1927, “Dąbrowski’s Mazurka” is officially the national anthem of the Republic of Poland.

Influence on the Culture of Poland and Lithuania

The “Song of the Legions” very quickly began to be reworked to adapt it to the current situation. During the November Uprising, the “Skrzynecki March”⁷ was sung with the words “March. March with your all young ones, Skrzynecki is in charge!”⁸. In turn, during the January Uprising, the Czachowski March was created, with the refrain “March, march Polonia, our brave Nation. We will rest after our work in our homestead.” At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, this song gained great popularity as the “March of Polonia.” During World War I, Polish legionnaires fighting against Russia on the side of Austria-Hungary, sang their own version of “Dąbrowski’s Mazurka” – “March, march Piłsudski! Lead towards the

⁶ Michał Kleofas Ogiński (1765–1833) – Polish composer and music theorist, writer, independence activist. [Wikipedia page](#)

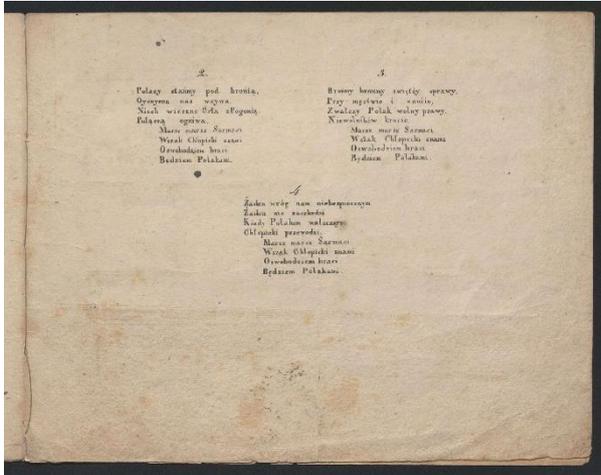
⁷ Jan Zygmunt Skrzynecki of the Bończa coat of arms (1787–1860) – Polish soldier, participant in the Napoleonic wars, general in the army of the Kingdom of Poland, Commander-in-Chief during the November Uprising. [Wikipedia page](#)

⁸ Gabriela Puzynina, née Günther. *W Wilnie i w dworach litewskich. Pamiętnik z lat 1815-1843* (In Vilnius and in Lithuanian courts: Diary from 1815-1843), Vilnius 1928, pub. J. Zawadzki, p. 143.



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bloody battle! Under your lead we will enter Warsaw.” World War II brought another version, when soldiers of the Polish Armed Forces in the West sang the “Mazurka” with the words “March, march Sikorski!”



*National song to the tune of “Poland has not yet perished”:
offered to J. W. J. Chłopicki, Dyktator [Commander of the
November Uprising]. Music print from ca. 1831. Source:
Polona*

Regional versions of “Dąbrowski’s Mazurka” were also created. In Upper Silesia, the text of Father Konstanty Damrot “Long beloved is our Silesia...,” was sung to its melody. In turn, the Kashubians sing their anthem to a similar melody with the words of Hieronim Derdowski in the adaptation of Feliks Nowowiejski from 1921: “There, where the Vistula from Krakow flows into the Polish sea , Polish faith, Polish language, will never disappear .” The Samogitians also created their own version of the Mazurka, who, during the November Uprising, sang the “Song of the Samogitians of the Telszew

Powiat in the war of 1831” to its melody. Its first verse in the Polish translation reads: “Poland has not yet perished while the Samogitians live and the Samogitian begins to fight when they are fighting in Poland. Poles with Ruthenia, with Samogitia and Lithuania will win their liberties with such a holy battle.”

The melody of “Song of the Legions” was also used in instrumental pieces. Karol Kurpiński was the first to use it. In 1821, he wrote a fugue about it. Historical scenes immortalized in the “Mazurka” frequently inspired 19th-century Polish painters. Examples include Juliusz, Wojciech and Jerzy Kossak. Juliusz’s series of graphics, created especially to illustrate the editions of the “Mazurka,” was particularly popular.

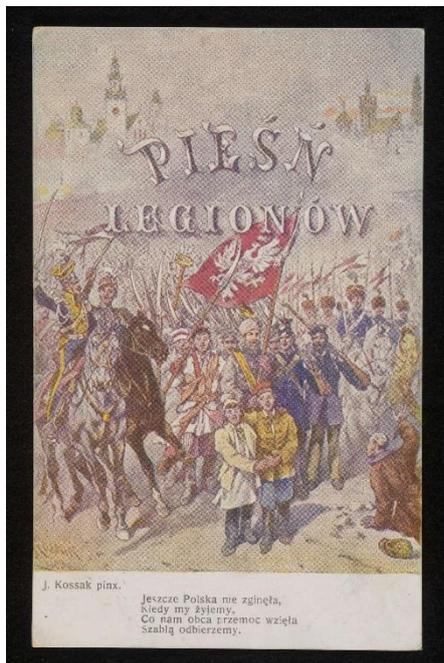
Influence on World Culture

“Dąbrowski’s Mazurek” has been translated into 17 languages – including German, French, Russian and Hungarian. When, in 1831, the participants in the November Uprising emigrated through the German lands, in many places they were greeted enthusiastically, triumphal gates were erected to greet them and the “Mazurka” was sung with the German text “Noch ist Polen



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nicht verloren!” (Poland is not yet lost!). Shocked by the fall of the Polish uprising, the German composer Richard Wagner used the “Mazurka” melody in the “Polonia” overture. During World War II, when the public performance of the Polish anthem was forbidden during the German occupation under strict restrictions, Wagner’s overture was played in place of “Dąbrowski’s Mazurka.” The Germans, who recognized Wagner as their national composer and a favorite of Adolf Hitler himself, being unaware of the true inspiration of Poles, usually did not react.



A patriotic postcard with a quote from “Dąbrowski’s Mazurka” according to Juliusz Kossak. Source: Polona

The “Song of the Legions” was very popular during the Spring of Nations in 1848. It was then practically the unofficial anthem of this upheaval of nations oppressed by empires. It was sung in various translations, including on the streets of revolting Berlin, Prague and Vienna.

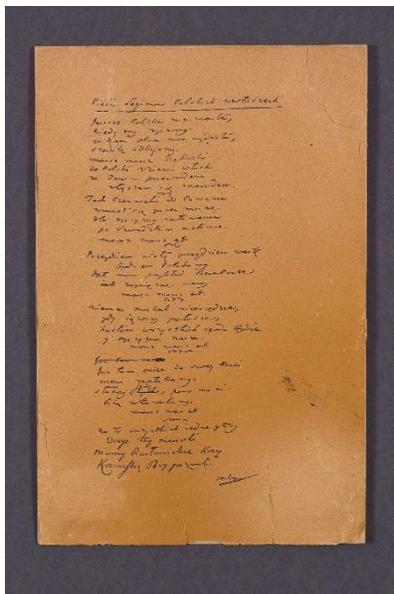
“Dąbrowski’s Mazurka” also inspired the songs of liberation movements of various Slavic nations. In 1633, Ferdo Livadić wrote the Croatian song “Još Hrvatska ni propala” (“Croatia is not yet gone”). A year later, the Slovak Lutheran pastor Samo Tomasik wrote “Hej, Slováci, ešte naša slovenská reč žije” to the tune of the Polish song, and in 1845 the Czech version “Hej, Slované” was created. In 1848, at the All-Slavic Congress in Prague, this song became the anthem of the Slavs. In 1845, the Sorbian poet Handrij Zejler, inspired by “Dąbrowski’s Mazurka,” wrote the song “Hišće

Serbstwo njezhubjene” (“Lusatia is not yet lost”). In 1862, the Kiev poet and ethnographer Pavlo Chubynsky⁹, inspired by the Polish song, wrote the poem “Ще не вмерла Україна” (“Ukraine has not died yet”). A year later, the music for this text was composed by Mykhailo Mykhailovych Verbytsky – a Greek Catholic priest and social activist. In 1917, this song became the official anthem of Ukraine. Banned during the times of the Soviet Union, it returned in 1992.

⁹ Pavlo Chubynsky (1839–1884) – Ukrainian poet, folklorist and ethnographer. [Wikipedia page](#)



Analysis of the text of “Dąbrowski’s Mazurka”



Facsimile of the manuscript of “Song of the Polish Legions in Italy”. Source: Museum of the National Anthem

The first verse of the song is a national manifesto of faith and hope. Faith that Poland lives within Poles (“Poland is not yet lost while we live”) who, despite losing their country, are still a community ready to fight to regain independence. Steadfast hope that we will regain freedom, even if we have to fight for it (“What foreign violence has taken from us, we will take back with a saber”). This simple message (we live, we fight, we will win) contains the power of the Polish song, which became an inspiration for the Slavic nations fighting for freedom. Adam Mickiewicz summed it up perfectly: “The famous song of the Legions begins with words that open modern history... These words mean that people who keep within themselves what constitutes the essence of Polish nationality, are able to extend the existence of their homeland, regardless of any political conditions and they may strive to restore it.”

The chorus refers to the dreams of Polish legionnaires who, gathered in northern Italy by General Jan Henryk Dąbrowski (1797), fought alongside France for an entire decade in the hope that they would regain a sovereign state.

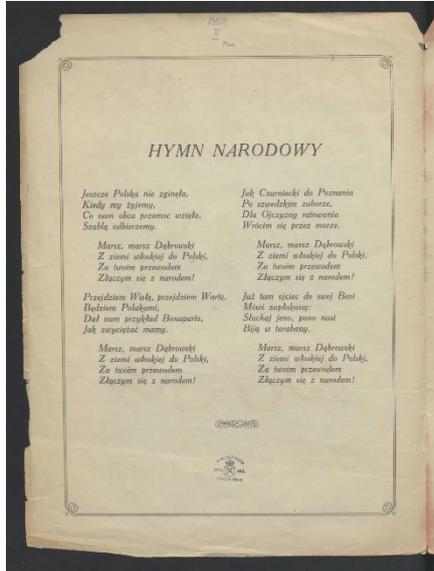
The second verse is a description of the path that Polish soldiers have to proceed along as they return to the country (“We will cross the Vistula, We will cross the Warta, we will be Poles”). The second part is a political manifesto of alliance with France (“Bonaparte showed us how to win”). In the second half of the last decade of the 18th century, only republican France was a hope for Poles to regain the Commonwealth divided by three empires (Russia, Austria and Prussia). Napoleon Bonaparte¹⁰ was just beginning his great career, but he had already shaken up Europe with a series of victories during the Italian campaign of 1796-97. He was the enemy of our enemies and those who did not accept the collapse of the Polish state saw him as a natural ally. For the legionnaires, the “example of Bonaparte” was not only a geopolitical issue, but also a purely military one. We must remember that General Bonaparte was also a great reformer, masterfully applying new rules of fighting (columnal-tyralier tactics, mass

¹⁰ Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821) – French statesman, military commander, political leader and emperor. [Wikipedia page](#)



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artillery fire), thanks to which, with small losses of his own, he beat enemies who outnumbered him, but who adhered to outdated line tactics.



Music print “Polish national anthem” from 1921, in which the text of the piece and sheet music were published. Source: Polona

The third verse is a reference to the history of the second half of the 17th century – “Like Czarniecki to Poznań, After the Swedish annexation, We will come back across the sea to save our Homeland.” It should be noted, however, that Wybicki combined several events here. Stefan Czarniecki¹¹, one of the most outstanding Polish commanders of the 17th century, commanded Polish troops during the Deluge that took part in the Brandenburg-Polish-Habsburg expedition to Swedish-occupied Denmark (1658-59). It was then (December 14, 1658) that the famous crossing of the Strait of Alssund took place, after which Czarniecki threw the Swedes from the island of Als and captured the Koldynga fortress in Jutland. This undoubtedly great feat was remembered by posterity and immortalized by Wybicki in the “Song of the Legions.”

The interpretation of the last stanza of our anthem has always been a problem for historians. “Father says to his tearful Basia: ‘Just listen, it seems our people are beating the drums!’ ” The easiest way is to take it as a description of the moods in a divided and occupied country, in which fellow countrymen await the arrival of General Dąbrowski’s legionnaires. Some researchers believe, however, that both this “father” and his daughter “Basia” are specific, real figures – Ksawery Chłapowski and his daughter Barbara Florentyna. They were certainly known to both Wybicki and Dąbrowski. It was Barbara who became the general’s second wife in 1807. The *tarabany* mentioned in the text are the large, oblong drums of Janissary bands, also used in the Polish Army at the end of the First Polish Republic. One may consider the beating of these drums as a symbol of the news of the Legions’ struggle coming to Poland. There were two more verses in Józef Wybicki’s manuscript.

The fourth, in turn, is a simple call for national unity: “A German, a Muscovite will not settle down, after having eaten a broadsword, our Homeland and unity will be the battle cry of all.” This verse is sometimes sung in the version “The Muscovite will not possess Poland...

¹¹ Stefan Czarniecki of the Łódzia coat of arms (1599–1665) – Polish military commander, Kiev voivode, field hetman of the Crown, participant in battles with the Swedes during the Deluge, battles against the Bohdan Khmelnytsky’s insurgents and the Russian Empire. [Wikipedia page](#)



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The conviction that it is necessary to act in unison against the partitioning powers was very strong in the generations remembering the decline of the First Polish Republic and the disastrous effects of the internal conflicts tearing it apart.

The same thread is contained in the last verse of this version of the text: “At this, everyone in one voice: ‘Enough of this captivity, We have Raławice scythes, Kosciuszko, God will allow it.’” Wybicki wrote these stanzas only three years after the Kościuszko Uprising and certainly among the veterans of that uprising. “Raławice scythes” were a symbol of national unity for them and the joint struggle of all lands of the Republic for freedom. Of course, this line should not be taken literally. Wybicki did not advocate the use of scythe-bearers. He knew very well the importance of a modernly trained and well-armed army... and this was undoubtedly what the Legions were. The appeal to Kosciuszko was the only obvious choice in 1797. At that time, Poland did not have another leader with such authority as the former *Dyktator* (Commander). Unfortunately, the hopes to incorporate him into the fight to regain the Homeland turned out to be in vain. Kościuszko did not trust Napoleon and did not support those who attached their hopes to him.

The last two stanzas from Wybicki’s manuscript did not enter the official text of the anthem, and in the times of the Polish People’s Republic, their official performance was forbidden due to the domination of the Soviet Union. That is why today this part of the piece is very rarely performed and practically forgotten.

Interesting facts

Who cried?

It is customary to present the verse about the father and Basia in such a way that she is the one crying (for example in Juliusz Kossak’s graphics). However, according to Professor Roman Kaleta, such an interpretation is incorrect. He believes that Wybicki was born in Będzin in Pomerania, in a region where in the 18th century the Masurian dialect was spoken with the characteristic so-called “short e” – also confirmed in 19th-century literature and present to this day in the colloquial speech of Mazovia. This was also emphasized by the journalist Rafał Ziemkiewicz – “Whoever is not from Mazovia, does not understand the Polish anthem correctly.” That is why Wybicki, in writing... and probably also in speech... “mazured.” It consisted of the fact that he inserted some phonetic words into his texts and the result was, for example, Dobrodzi instead of Dobrodziej (benefactor), boży instead of bożej (of God), dali instead of dalej (farther), królowy instead of królowej (of the queen)... and zapłakany instead of zapłakanej (tearful). In the opinion of Professor Kaleta, we can therefore take it for granted that “Father says to his tearful Basia.” Besides, “...tender emotion manifested by tears is more



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characteristic of female rather than male nature. As for Basia, she represented many girls awaiting the return of their boys to the country.” The professor also believed that “there is no doubt that the crying girl must have made a greater impression on legionary youth and more effectively stimulated them to fight, which in fact Wybicki intended, rather than her father being softened to tears.”

Common mistakes

While singing “Dąbrowski’s Mazurka,” even on official occasions, we make several mistakes. Perhaps the most common is “When we live” instead of “While we live” in the second line of the first verse. In turn, in the fourth verse, you can sometimes hear as many as two mistakes. The first is “After the Swedish Partition” instead of “After the Swedish Annexation.” It also happens to “Throw oneself across the sea” instead of “Come back across the sea.”

The lost manuscript

Until 1944, the manuscript of the “Song of the Polish Legions in Italy” was in the collection of Johann Rożnowski, who was a descendant of Józef Wybicki. In early 1944, he deposited his entire collection with the Bank of the Third Reich in Berlin. In May 1945, the bank was captured by the Red Army, which shipped out its entire contents to the Soviet Union. In 1992, the Association of Enthusiasts of the Tradition of “Dąbrowski’s Mazurka” (Stowarzyszenie Miłośników Tradycji „Mazurka Dąbrowskiego”) asked the then President Lech Wałęsa for help in finding the manuscript of the Polish anthem. The case was officially included in the Polish-Russian talks... but so far there has been no positive resolution.

In Prussian service...

A tragic episode in the history of “Dąbrowski’s Mazurka” was the French-Prussian battle of Gravelotte-Saint Privat, fought on August 18, 1870. At the critical moment of the battle, seven Prussian regiments, in which many Poles from the Prussian-partitioned territories served, attacked the French positions. General Karl Friedrich von Steinmetz, who was commanding the attack, ordered the military orchestra to play “Dąbrowski’s Mazurka” for them in order to raise their morale. Of course, this did not achieve anything. The French were superbly entrenched, supported by strong artillery and grapeshot, and their infantry had good rifle training. The attack to the sounds of the Polish “Mazurka” ended in a massacre...

Compiled by Piotr Pacak

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Ministry
of Foreign Affairs
Republic of Poland

Public task financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland within the grant competition „Public Diplomacy 2022”.

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not reflect the views of the official positions of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland.