Vilnius alternative music scene in the Polish Discussion Club: We sing in Polish because we want to

“Perhaps from the commercial point of view it is not worth to sing in Polish in Lithuania, however, alternative musicians stand out from the rest by doing what they want, not what is needed”, said the representatives of the scene: Filmik, Ernest from the Will’N’Ska group, and artist from the Berserker band, during the meeting in the Polish Discussion Club.

“A year has passed since the premiere of *Muzyczne Rodowody. Litwa* [translator’s note: *Musical-Origins. Lithuania*] record on which there are 10 bands and artists from Vilnius and its region. A mix of ska, punk, rap, metal, poetic rock and modern jazz rebutted the prevailing myth about the Vilnius Region which assumed that it is known only from its folklore. The presentation of the record took place in the Seimas. The Kite Art band, Jańko z Wilna [Jańko from Vilnius] and Jan Maksymowicz played at the presentation. Surely, it was an big honour because until this time no other Polish artist from Lithuania played in the Seimas”, Artur Zapolski, the Polish Discussion Club’s president said at the beginning of the meeting when talking about the process of creation of the record which was released by INC East&West with the financial support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland.

A ticket to big stages

“The beginnings of the Polish alternative music scene reach to the year 2002 in which the Łozowska sisters formed at band named Zimbabwe. Exactly back then in the Kablys community center in Vilnius you could hear *Marchewkowe pole* [*Carrot field*], *Chryzantemy* [*Chrysantemums*]… And the Lithuanian audience liked what they heard and sang together with the sisters. The Zimbabwe sang in Polish and Lithuanian”, underlined Ewelina Mokrzecka, a journalist who moderated the discussion.

“One must notice that after the emergence of the *Rodowody* record many artists could be seen not only in small clubs or on small scenes. A good example is the Will’N’Ska group which played next to the famous Polish punk band Komety [Comets] on several occasions in the legendary Ucho club in Gdynia during the Days of Vilnius. Rapper Filmik proved to everyone that by rapping in Vilnius language one can appear on the Lithuanian pop charts and play on the same stage with the legendary PabloPavo. Black Biceps, the so-called comedy rock band from Nemenčinė played this year on the ethno-festival in Öland. Those artist could also be seen on the big stages in the Vilnius Region. For example, Filmik, and Berserker played in Nemenčinė during Gėla fest. What is more, the dark Berserker band and the charismatic Agnieszka are recognized and invited to various music festivals. The Youth Summer festival in Šalčininkai on which the Will’N’Ska and Filmik gave concerts is also worth mentioning”, listed Mokrzecka.

“It is not easy”

“We are happy, when initiatives that help to promote our work appear. Thanks to the record we got to know each other, because until this time we did not know that besides us there are similar bands. We do not have many concerts in Lithuania, it is not easy from the perspective of the alternative music. If we wanted to play in every bar or on every festival we would have to play some kind of pop. But we work hard and try to find other opportunities. For example, we often play abroad, in Belarus or Estonia”, said Agnieszka Wołczek, the vocalist of the Berserker.

“Hip-hop is a music of word. If someone does not understand the word he does not know how to react. Despite that I have received positive opinions when I rap in Polish from the audience’s side as well as from the beatmakers, that is people who write music for my songs”, underlined Filmik.

The young artists pointed out that the alternative musicians who stay off the beaten tracks of culture have problems of practical nature, for example a limited budget. “Our strength is in unity” without any political subtexts.

“An alternative artist must state something, oppose something, whatever it is, politics or some social phenomenon. Such musicians do not ask for funding, they do everything themselves and with that come big expenses. But somehow we ‘do not raise hand’ in order to ask for money, for example, from EAPL [Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania, pol. AWPL], because if one gets something, later he often has to ‘pay for it one way or another’”, said Ernest from Will’N’Ska.

Agnieszka Wołczek also points out that the musicians want to stay independent and apolitical. She admitted, that when she wrote the song *W jedności nasza siła* [*Our strength is in unity*], which appeared on the *Muzyczne Rodowody* she had no idea that a slogan of a Polish political party in Lithuania sounds almost identical.

“An usual contingent which goes to Opole receives the material support because it is good, interesting and traditional this way. People who declare the support of Polishness are not interested in things that go out of the box”, said Romeo from Berserker. Despite that he admitted that also the alternative groups are open for various forms of cooperation with foundations, investors who would like to support them without interfering with their work.

“Poland tempts us”

“If there are no fans, there is no money. Is it worth singing in Polish in Lithuania then?”, asked Ewelina Mokrzycka.

“It is not about worth. We all do what we feel is right, not worth. This is why we stand out from all of this mainstream and even from those who sign in Polish in Lithuania. They sign because it is needed, we sign because we want to”, said Romeo from Berserker.

All of the young musicians said that they are also interested in the Polish music market.

“We are working on a new record on which all of the songs will be in Polish. Poland tempts us. More people live there, it is a bigger country with more opportunities”, said Ernest.

“When I published a song called *Stare dobre czasy* [*Good old times*] on YouTube all the comments were positive. I received many questions as to where one can buy my music, people sent me their music… It is not like you have no chance to be successful in Poland, you just have to let yourself known”, thinks Filmik.

The musicians announced that they will happily give a concert together or will cooperate in order to create new songs.