

Lira korbowa (Fr. vielle à roue, Eng. hurdy-gurdy)

The hurdy-gurdy is a unique instrument that produces sound through a wheel rubbing against the strings. The wheel is set in motion by turning a crank with the player's right hand, while the left hand presses keys that shorten the melody strings to produce different pitches. Its sound is enriched by drone strings, providing a constant harmonic foundation. Virtually all hurdy-gurdies have low drone strings (Fr. bourdon), and many are also equipped with higher-pitched ones (Fr. trompette), capable of producing a characteristic buzzing, rhythmic effect through deliberate, controlled accelerations of the wheel.

Throughout history, the hurdy-gurdy has served both sacred and secular purposes — capable of evoking deep prayerful states as well as sparking emotions that inspire long, lively dances. It was played by both the nobility and the common folk. In Poland, it was historically known as a beggar's instrument. Its Polish name reflects this role: lira comes not from the similarly named "lyre," but from "lyrics," as the instrument traditionally accompanied sung texts. The word korbowa simply means "crank-operated." Instruments used by beggars were often very simple, usually lacking trompette strings, which limited their rhythmic possibilities.

The Polish tradition of hurdy-gurdy playing was lost shortly before the Second World War. There was no direct transmission from teacher to student, and knowledge of the instrument disappeared. Its presence in Poland had to be rediscovered rather than continued. A key figure in this revival was Stanisław Wyżykowski, who built his first lira korbowa in 1967, opening a new chapter for the instrument in Poland. Although many of his early instruments were made simply — Wyżykowski was a rural, self-taught luthier — they displayed remarkable ingenuity and elegant technical

solutions. His work was later taken up by Stanisław Nogaj, who apprenticed with Wyżykowski and brought inspirations from other European luthiers involved in the wider hurdy-gurdy revival.

Thanks to the dedication of these two craftsmen, the hurdy-gurdy has once again found its place in Polish music-making, though it remains a niche instrument even within the field of traditional music. Today, it offers far greater possibilities than the simple beggar's instruments of the past.

About the Album

This album is an attempt to capture, in a kind of musical "close-up," the creative potential of today's Lira Polska (Polish hurdy-gurdy). The five pieces it contains, while rooted in folk tradition, each open a different door — inviting both the player and the listener to explore the instrument's expressive range. This recording was created especially for Paweł's trip to the Expo in Osaka in 2025, where he will perform with the ensemble Tołhaje, representing the Podkarpackie Voivodeship.



Paweł Płoskoń (b. 1991) – hurdy-gurdy player, composer, and conductor.
Paweł graduated from the Karol Szymanowski Academy of Music in Katowice, where he studied Jazz and Popular Music, focusing on composition and arrangement. In 2015, towards the end of his studies, he discovered the hurdy-gurdy — a traditional instrument once present in Poland and across Europe. He quickly realized that it allowed him to fully express himself, combining his passion for traditional music with modern improvisation. After just three years of playing, he began teaching others in workshops across the country. In 2020, he became the first — and so far only — academic hurdy-gurdy teacher in Poland, leading classes at his alma mater as part of the postgraduate Traditional Music program.

Photo: Przemysław Wachowiak

Paweł is recognized for his mastery of the instrument and is frequently invited to participate in diverse musical projects, valued for his wide skill set and ability to move seamlessly across genres. He is considered a leading Polish hurdy-gurdy player, paving the way for many students and creating a new style of performing Polish music on the instrument, unprecedented until now.

He continuously develops his own musical language, moving between Polish traditional music, European balfolk, medieval sacred repertoire, jazz improvisation, and contemporary extended techniques. Beyond hurdy-gurdy performance, he is an award-winning composer and conductor of sacred music. His greatest passion remains improvisation and pushing the creative boundaries of the hurdy-gurdy.



Tracklist

1. Kazała mi moja mamcia (traditional, arranged by Paweł Płoskoń)

A traditional Polish song about a young girl forced to enter a convent. Her mother tells her to sew a "black dress" — the habit — but she is in love and refuses to leave her boyfriend. After the fourth verse, when she sees her beloved under the window and even the nuns cannot stop her, the piece erupts into a fusion of rock and electronic music. Combined with the hurdy-gurdy, this transforms the melancholic, dreamlike waltz into a rebellious protest song full of energy. The piece concludes with a subdued vocal, yet firm in its resolution: I never went to the convent, and I never will. I loved my boy, and I always will.

2. Qujaviack (composed by Paweł Płoskoń)

The title plays on the traditional Polish dance, the Kujawiak. This original composition references the calm, triple-meter dance, but from the very first notes presents an unusual sonority: the melody is played in parallel major ninth intervals. The effect is heightened by contemporary hurdy-gurdy techniques — tapping, flautando, harmonics, and the use of the dropping wheel. The piece also features an improvised solo with clear jazz roots, showcasing the instrument's versatility.

3. Uber Ober (composed by Paweł Płoskoń)

A tour de force of the hurdy-gurdy's capabilities. While the Kujawiak is slow, the oberek (or ober) is fast, often featuring polyrhythms, improvisation, and extended

passages. The piece presents original oberek-inspired themes crafted from entirely new melodic material. The first theme is based on an octatonic scale, partially inspired by Olivier Messiaen and partially by jazz and progressive rock. The second theme uses the Lydian dominant scale, known in the Polish highlands as the góralska scale, historically not performed on the hurdy-gurdy. The third theme operates in the Lydian mode, leading into a contrasting ambient middle section, seemingly suspended in weightlessness. Each theme is grounded on a different drone, made possible by the construction of the instrument from Stanisław Nogaj's workshop, on which Paweł performs.

4. Bieszczady (composed by Stanisław Nogaj)

One of Paweł's favorite tunes for the hurdy-gurdy, this simple and clear melody evokes the landscapes of the Bieszczady mountains, their open skies, and natural surroundings. At the same time, it shows how the hurdy-gurdy becomes increasingly alive within these spaces, interacting with the environment and inspiring reflection. Given the character of the tune, it is no surprise that instruments from Stanisław Nogaj's workshop have such a rich, resonant sound. Paweł is grateful to Stanisław both for their friendship and for allowing him to perform this piece and include it on the album.

5. Gdzie idziesz, Staszek? (traditional, featuring Master Stanisław Wyżykowski)

This melody comes from the repertoire of the "Stachy" ensemble, in which Master Stanisław Wyżykowski played for many years. It was with this group that he first began using the hurdy-gurdy alongside the violin, which at the time was his main

instrument. The piece was recorded together with the master in his luthier workshop in Krosno. The recording is archival and may not have studio-level quality, but capturing Master Stanisław's laughter at the beginning was far more important, as it perfectly reflects the kind of person he is: radiating joy at every step. Even the lyrics seem uncannily fitting: in the song, Staszek (a diminutive form of Stanisław) is asked where he is going and for what purpose. The answer: he is heading to town, fiddle in hand, to cheer people. This recording was made in 2021, when Master Stanisław was 94 years old. For Paweł, the opportunity to meet the master, sing with him, and learn from him - both music and life - has been an enormous honor.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my family for their tremendous support during the work on this album and throughout the preparations for my trip to Expo 2025 in Osaka.

My sincere thanks go to the band Tołhaje, with whom I have the honor of performing at the Polish Pavilion, and to the authorities of the Podkarpackie Voivodeship for choosing us to represent this region at such an important international event.

I am grateful to the parish priest of St. John's Church in Mikołów for his hospitality and for allowing me to record part of this album there, as well as to my grandparents, in whose family home many of these tracks were captured.

Warm thanks to Gabriela Gorączko, the author of this beautiful graphic design for the album, and to Konrad Jakutowicz from Primedio, who manufactured it – for taking on this work under very tight time constraints.

I would also like to thank the entire hurdy-gurdy community in Poland – your kind reception of my music continues to inspire me to expand both my artistic and educational work.

Special thanks go to Stanisław Nogaj – the maker of the instrument I play and my dear friend.

Finally, I bow with the deepest respect to Master Stanisław Wyżykowski, the Father of the Contemporary Polish Hurdy-Gurdy. We all owe him the revival of this tradition in our country. Master, you remain a constant source of inspiration and a lifelong authority to me. It is to you that I dedicate this album.

Paweł Płoskoń

This album can also be downloaded in digital form by scanning the provided QR code.



I would be truly delighted to hear from you and to read your thoughts about my music. Feel free to write to me at contact@pawelploskon.com.

If you'd like to stay connected, visit my website at www.pawelploskon.com, where you can join my newsletter to receive updates about future artistic projects and events.