Katarzyna Roszak-Markowska
Translated by: Mateusz Markowski

Here flows the blues...

There is no more coal left in Konin. The last open-pit mine is to end its days next year. There is no sugar. Gosławice sugar refinery was decommissioned in 2008. People lost their jobs, and many planters had to pull back from growing sugar beet. The amphitheatre, known from the cabaret derby and the children's festival, is basically gone as well... The music pub "Alaska" in the old town is no more, just like the artistic tea house "Uroczysko", whose owners had an ambitious plan to revitalise the historic part of the town. They all went under. There are definitely fewer and fewer Konin residents as well. Thankfully, different cultural institutions and important festivals remain, Bluesonalia amongst them, which – thanks to the determination of the organisers and substantial support from the city and voivodeship – recently celebrated its thirtieth anniversary.

1st bar. From the end

"Are there any blues lovers here tonight?" Walter Trout shouts from the stage on the second day of the International Bluesonalia Festival, organised by the InArt Social and Cultural Association in cooperation with the Arts and Culture Centre in Konin.

Thankfully, there were. And it was quite a crowd. They filled up Oskard's entire concert hall. They sang, shouted, clapped, danced... And it had nothing to do with a peculiar danse macabre on the ashes of the city, akin to postapocalyptic visions of Stephen King – as critics of the current "Konin's order" could assume. People danced seduced by the groove; they swayed, as if against all the tales of the fall of the industry and depopulation of the city; they sang against the high property prices and A-2 highway tolls. Life hates the void, it hates the emptiness. And I think it's rather good that in Konin it was filled with blues. It's good that the blues found the s p a c e here.

2nd bar. (...)though no one knew, they were hearing an echo

I got there early. I thought it would be empty and I'd have the time to listen to the musicians tuning. Marek Raduli was cheerfully high-fiving Kirk Fletcher in the hallway. Elise from the band FRANK was hiding herself behind her long hair. Józef Skrzek was there

as well, and next to him stood Alba Blanco with a guitar. Quite a crew, but they were not the ones playing on the grand stage today. This time, they were performing only in the photos. Large format ones. The retrospective exhibition of photographs by Mirek Jurgielewicz, *The Colours of Blues,* sparked conversations and made people share different stories.

“I remember that time when Alba finished her performance on just one string. That was fire!” enthuses one of the regulars.

It sounded like a modern-day legend about Polish pilots flying on the barn’s doors. I go to the sources to find confirmation.

“Yes, I remember, one of her strings broke at the end of the concert. She was a real firecracker, that’s for sure,” says Andrzej Adamski, one of the main organisers of the festival.

And now I don't know//What in all that was real.[1]

3rd bar. Witek Łukaszewski, the postmodern romanticist

…I don’t think about it anymore. I enter the NOT club, where Witek Łukaszewski (this time as a part of the *Nalepa Blues Project*) is boldly playing *Oni zaraz przyjdą tu*. Witek is basically a Polish cultural institution. Along with his band, he created an original spectacle – which could be called *A Gothic Castle* – in Konin, offering further evidence for *Posthumous life of Romanticism*. The musician, a fan of Led Zeppelin, who had been considered the most prominent flamenco guitarist in Poland for years, delivered a romantic performance filled with improvisations worthy of the 19th-century poet-prophet. The boys interwove different music and art genres in their performance, mingling together Grechuta, K.K. Baczyński, Nalepa and King Crimson; all of that seasoned with Witek’s intriguing arrangements and compositions. This idea of a gothic castle may be the key to their performance, which, for some, was too electric.

Witek is a shaman, an intelligent master of the ceremony and it is hard to believe that he does anything by chance. Even if it looks like it from the outside. It is also important to remember that he is ALSO a man of the Word. He breathes intertextuality and pastiche. He is capable of reinterpreting the works of the masters in a creative and often ironic way, putting old tropes and motifs in a broader perspective. That evening, everything made sense. Every single song had at least the walls of a gothic castle, if not the thing in its entirety. The artists started with Breakout’s *Oni zaraz przyjdą tu*. They took on one of the most courageous songs filled with romantic motifs of love and infidelity, crime and punishment, and they turned it into a postmodern mystery play laced with The Doors’ *Riders on the Storm*. Witek’s band definitely captured the spirit of Bogdan Loebl’s lyrics better than Breakout. The psychedelic intro to the song alone, with the creaking of the old door or the sounds of the birds of the night, could be used for a staging of Mickiewicz’s

[1] Czesław Miłosz *Tak Mało,* translated by Lillian Vallee.

Forefathers' Eve, Part II[2]. All of the rest would fit that play as well, with Witek and Sambor corresponding with the audience like Guślarz and the Old Man with the peasants' choir in a graveyard's chapel. Amongst the people in the crowd was Andrzej Majewski – a classical guitarist, chief of the Konin Music Society, and an ex-teacher in the National Music School in Konin.

"I am very impressed with how they did it," said the organiser of guitar competitions, captivated by the interpretation of a song from the album *Blues*.

Witek and his band dragged a tragic *Hallelujah* (with lyrics by K.K. Baczyński) to the old castle, followed by their original *Obudź się* (Wake up), where, celebrating the magic of madrugada, they called for action and reaching deep within oneself, like their romantic ancestors. Not by chance. Just a moment after that came the climax of the show: an incredibly moving interpretation of *Modlitwa* (by Breakout). Sambor started his improvisation before he climbed Mont Blanc, that is, before he began to sing. The end result? Tears among some of the gathered crowd. Then, they played Grechuta's *Korowód*, probably to prepare the people for leaving the castle, and they finished with *Epitaph,* where, instead of the dystopia and pessimism of King Crimson, they smuggled in an appeal to the believers to respect the planet so that *its heart would not break*.

"I came here because of Witek and he did not disappoint. It was a great concert, although I'm left wanting more, because I was hoping for more of Nalepa's songs. Ultimately, however, the project turned out to be of a very high artistic quality. Sambor Dudziński is a talented man; he created a new reality on stage and was authentic in doing so," concludes Andrzej Majewski, the author of the book *Na winklu*, which tells the story of the emergence of bigbit music in Konin.

4th bar. The Italian temper and blues

He who visits Italy probably doesn't look for the blues, but those who got to Oskard's concert hall after Witek Łukaszewski's band's performance got it on a platter. Maybe not in its purest form, maybe slightly seasoned with rock and modern curiosities in the Italian kitchen, but it was worth experiencing. Marco Bartoccioni and his band put on quite a show. Marco's lap steel guitar solos could knock you out, or at least make your jaw drop a bit. The performance of the creative multi-instrumentalist, Bartoccioni, Aurora Di Rocco (percussionist also enriching the harmonies with her vocals), and the bassist, Marco Polizzi, was like a hurricane. Some were a little scared by it, others were carried away, and for some, the extraordinary show first raised their dopamine levels, only to calm them down after a while, leaving no lasting traces behind.

5th bar. From America to...

[2] Mickiewicz's dramatic poem stages a folk ritual in a chapel, where Guślarz leads the assembled villagers in summoning spirits and learning moral lessons from them.

A musician born in North Carolina, who worked on cotton and tobacco plantations during his childhood and early teenage years, had his first contact with blues only as an adult... in Germany. Big Daddy Wilson (then Adam Wilson Blount) in the US listened only to gospel and country. One evening, while he was stationed in Germany with the US Army, he decided to go to a blues concert and... lost, or rather found himself, the blues, and a few years later, his wife Anna. In Konin, Big Daddy charmed everybody with his musical prowess, elegance, charisma and a deep baritone voice. Our organist, Barek Szopiński, helped him win over the crowd.

“I’m out, I’m gone. That’s just magic,” said one of Big Daddy’s fans, swept off her feet.

6th bar. The jam session

There was still a jam session to take place that night. Daddy’s fan decided to finish the evening at home with her idol’s records, while freestyle enthusiasts went down to the club. Some were eagerly awaiting what was to come. The musicians from *Bandaż Elastyczny* band made sure that no one left disappointed and quickly helped some of the “receivers” become “senders”.

“I like jam sessions. It’s often the case that the people who usually lurk in their homes, go out on a stage and do great. And it’s really fun. I value improvisation in music; that’s why I come here, even though I’m not a fan of rock music,” confided Ewa Majewska, a pioneer in the implementation and promotion of the art of playing curved-head flutes and co-organizer of the *Music in the Town Hall* concerts.

“I truly admire people who improvise without musical training. The naturals. How exciting it is! There are not many of them; they know how it all should be, they feel it and play even if they can’t name it,” said A. Majewski.

And so the first day of the festival came to an end. And all the people said that it was good...

7th bar. Magda Piskorczyk

The second day starts with Magda Piskorczyk on the small stage. The room is filled up to the brim with people, and for a good reason. Those who have not yet had the chance to experience “la voix noire et au costume blanc” – as the French speak of her – have gathered with those who can’t get enough of music exploring the roots of African and African-American culture. Even before the concert, the albums were selling like hot cakes.

“For me, she is the embodiment of music, musicality. I am full of admiration that her passion so beautifully guides her in life,” says Marta Mielcarek, co-organiser of Bluesonalia, cellist and musicologist, announcing the artist’s performance.

On stage, Magda is accompanied by exceptional musicians: Jacek Jaguś (guitar), Konstantin Goryachiv (keyboard instruments) and Кирилл Шевандо (drums). The

sophisticated arrangements and improvisations of the instrumentalists perfectly complement Magda's "black" vocals, which is no easy feat considering that the artist taps into a variety of musical traditions. And perhaps it was this lack of understanding of the languages of the world and art used by the artist that caused a group of merry gentlemen sitting at the bar to disturb the concert. Magda handled this situation with class as well.

8th bar. A concert for Andrzej Jerzyk

The idea was simple and beautiful: to celebrate the memory of the late promoter of blues in Poland, Andrzej Jerzyk, by playing his beloved standards live. It was a risky endeavour, but talented musicians, led by Jan Gałach, took it on, so it had a chance of working out, and for the most part, it did.

"That's a very difficult song," I hear from Adam Urbaniak, one of the originators of Bluesonalia, and I think I know why the former keyboardist of the Konin band *The Flame* said it.

The stage rang out with songs such as *Never Make A Move Too Soon* by B.B. King (Marta Fedyniszyn), *Old Before My Time* by The Allman Brothers Band (Karolina Cygonek), *I Put a Spell On You* in the style of Joe Cocker (Damian Szewczyk), *Skazany na bluesa* by Dżem (Maciek Lipina) and a brilliantly performed *Whipping Post* by The Allman Brothers Band, in which Janek Gałach proved once again that he was born with a violin in his hands.

9th and 10th bars. Two anniversaries

"We once received a proposal from the Poznań City Hall to move Bluesonalia to Poznań," recalls Filip Wilczyński, a member of the InArt management board and initially the only sponsor of the event. "We didn't respond. This festival was born (and grew up) in Konin, and for years it has been organised by a group of friends who love music and the atmosphere of this city, and I believe that this is the place where it belongs," adds the winner of the "Kariatyda 2014" patron of culture award, before disappearing into the crowd, as he always does.

He disappears, only to pop up on stage alongside the other members of the association, where the mayor of Konin, Piotr Korytkowski, congratulates them on the 15th anniversary of the InArt association and the 30th anniversary of the Bluesonalia festival.

"I would hug all of you, but I don't want to keep the people waiting," he says and quickly leaves the stage, because the audience is already looking for today's star.

11th bar. The audience

Music festival goers resemble the audience in the ancient theatre. They are not easy recipients - they often know the performers' discographies better than the ancient Greeks

knew the myths the plays were based on – but they are also inspiring and motivating partners to the artists. It forces performers to "shake" the audience. If catharsis does not occur, even outstanding instrumentals, the most wonderful chorus and vocals won't drown out the feeling of emptiness among the blues enthusiasts.

Music lovers from all over Poland and beyond flocked to Oskard in Konin. You could find beneficiaries of the PODAJ DALEJ Foundation, artists, cultural animators, entrepreneurs, professional musicians, civil servants, doctors, retirees... Some of the faces have been a constant presence in Konin for years. Unfortunately, there are significantly fewer young people than in the previous editions.

"What I observed in Germany several years ago has now happened here. It's a sign of the times. Young people attend cultural events less often. I don't know if this trend is reversible," ponders Krzysztof Pydyński, principal of the National Music School in Konin.

12th bar. *I can't tell what's real anymore*

"Are there any blues lovers left here?" I ask, paraphrasing Walter Trout.

The last chords of the song from the concert for Jerzyk are still echoing in my head. A 20-minute break has to be enough to silence them and make room for what's to come at the finale of the two-day festival.

"We've had Warren Haynes, Chris Duarte, Robben Ford, Coco Montoya, Doyle Bramhall II, or even Wishbone Ash, play here, so I think Walter Trout will manage too," jokes Filip Wilczyński.

The InArt Association board member won't say that, he doesn't say much in general, but apart from Wishbone Ash, all the biggest names came to Konin largely thanks to his efforts and... (let's not be ashamed to say it) the money he could have spent on a thousand different things.

And there was light! Walter Trout appears on stage. Michael Leasure (drums), John Avila (bass guitar), and Roland Bakker (Hammond organ) walk out after him. The guitarist puts on a hat and plays a solo. It sounds as if he hasn't been doing anything else since morning. After a moment, Avila joins in and he's already j u m p i n g around. (Something tells me that this *gun* is going to make some noise). Leasure and Bakker do their thing with ease. After *I Can Tell,* we know that these are no ordinary people, and they didn't come here to just play around. They are like the Fellowship of The Ring. Each of them is different, but all are equally unique and irreplaceable. We already know that they have enough strength and talent to save, if not Middle-earth, then at least the personal realms of each of us.

I can tell, I can tell, you got another in your heart, baby (...)

I can see it in your eyes, you've got leaving on your mind[3]

[3] Quote from *I can Tell* by Bo Diddley. W. Trout often plays during his performances.

Yes, there are some meetings when we think from the very beginning, that they will unfortunately come to an end. But wait, they're just getting started...

"We have a new album out, for me it's album thirty-two. We're gonna do some songs off that album for you tonight. I hope that's alright with you," Walter Trout thunders from the stage.

No objections, no one abstained. Admittedly, we didn't vote to change the version of *Too Bad*, from the latest album *Sign of The Times*, from the more old-school studio version to live, but there are no groans of disappointment when the raw sound and harmonica are replaced by loud electric guitars and the well-oiled machine that is the band. It rocked! And it was probably meant to prepare us for *Artificial* – Walter's strong stance in defense of authenticity.

„I was watching a video on my phone, and it was some weird shit. I said to my wife, 'What is this?', and she said, 'Walter, that is A.I. Artificial Intelligence.' I told her, 'I can't tell what's real anymore,' do you know what I mean?" asks the former Canned Heat member.

The heavy riffs of *Artificial*, sharp sounds of the electric guitars (John Trout joins the band on the second guitar at this point), Walter's grungy solos, the unsettling pulse of the bass, and shrill vocals leave no doubt that the world created by the bots' algorithms fills the artist with contempt and terror. After a moment – perhaps to make sure that the audience's opinion mirrors his own, or maybe to point out a form of effective resistance against the artificial world – he asks rhetorically if there are any blues lovers in the room. If there weren't, he would certainly not have played *Say Goodbye To The Blues* – a tribute to John Mayall. And at this moment, the concert became a personal matter to Walter. The rest of the musicians humbly tuned in to the touching conversation between friends. In *Hurt No More* (with lyrics by Marie Trout, Walter's wife), the band members can do more. Michael Leasure takes advantage of this and, maybe with the help of the wind blowing his hair throughout the whole show, turns his drumsticks into magic wands. Partially hidden behind the drums, he looks more like Hagrid from *Harry Potter* than a mere mortal. Avila also taps into deeper layers of creativity, enriching the harmony of the songs with his vocals and otherworldly bass. The powerful, sharp sound and energy of *Hurt No More* seemed to have one goal: to seal Walter's return to the living. It worked!

The former member of the Bluesbreakers once again proves his excellent form, tackling hypocrisy and indifference in *No Strings Attached*. He shouts, "your heart turns black and shrivels," but fortunately he doesn't leave us without hope. A true bluesman doesn't dwell in darkness any longer than necessary. Walter doesn't do so either. After a while, he calms us down with a ballad composed for his beloved Marie: *Mona Lisa Smile*. The lyrical confession is impressive and – even though we don't hear the accordion, mandolin or violin from the stage, as we would on the album – Walter's guitar and John's acoustic, with subtle accompaniment from keyboard, bass and drums, are enough to satisfy us all on t h i s day.

And if anyone was left wanting more of the instrumentation, they were quickly served with *We're All In This Together*, a piece recorded together with Joe Bonamassa in 2017. It's no

coincidence that Walter officially introduces his son, John, and asks us to listen to him play the guitar just before this song. And off they went... So many similarities: identical guitars, the same surname, in many moments they even held their instruments at the same (!) angles (as if they were practising synchronised play for the Olympics in front of the mirror), and even more differences. Okay, I'll say it, John and Walter are a bit like Apollo and Marsyas. Their musical dialogue in *We're All In This Together* simultaneously is and is not a duel. Seemingly, they are not competing with each other – they understand each other perfectly, synchronise their movements and sound – and yet, many of us feel like we are witnessing a great clash.

„What a beefy guy! He looks like a Viking," I hear from behind me.

"He's divine. What a voice!" a woman next to me exclaims.

"I prefer Walter. For now, the kid is only a brilliant player," interjects a third dramatis persona of the play unfolding in the audience. If they were Midas, they would already have donkey ears. That was how Apollo punished the ruler for voting for Marsyas.

"That is mister John Trout," announces the proud father after the song ends. "Yeah, 'nuff said. Here's one called *Red Sun."*

Sittin' on top of the mountain

Lookin' out over the sea (...)

Got an angel feather in my pocket[4]

The artists from the pantheon often know how to make room for others. And so, Bakker's Hammond organ solo resounds through the hall. After that, John proves once again that he is in the band for a reason. Leasure also joins the list of virtuoso performances.

„God, how? With what? Stop it," cries the Polish drummer standing in the first row. "Darling, leave," he says to his wife. „Don't listen to that!" he adds. „What? Not this too! I hate you!" shouts a fan after Leasure (Hagrid?) throws his drumstick (wand?) into the air without the slightest disruption to the regularity of the rhythm and cosmic tempo of his performance.

And in front of him, John Avila (a verb is missing here) on a bass guitar (although I am also sceptical about the subject of observation). About five minutes of consternation, madness and pure admiration. I don't think many people even recorded it. In a word: the gun went off.

"This guy is incredible. I like the way he uses the bass. He has some fancy pedals under his feet, but he uses them beautifully. He plays somewhat percussively, and yet there is

[4] *Red Sun* from the *Survivor Blues album*.

something from an electric guitar here as well; he somehow manages to combine it all. He moves around the fretboard with great ease. Obviously, now it's for the solo, but even when he played with the band, it wasn't your typical bass playing. You can see his fingers are itching for more, but he knows how to discipline himself. Well, he has to keep the whole band in time," says a bassist and blues enthusiast.

It turns out that I wasn't the only one subconsciously waiting for Avila to set his guitar on fire... He didn't, but instead at the end he took on the role of the master of ceremonies and announced Walter Trout's solo. And he simply did his thing again. A man who, after a serious illness, learned how to speak and play the guitar again gave musical and (super)human proof that, as he likes to say, miracles *do* happen.

"Leave the lights on, I want to see you all. Everyone who feels like we're gonna rock one more time, come up front! Come up here, don't worry about it!" he shouts from the stage like a speaker at a street demonstration.

Effectively. After a moment, the audience moves down, as if hypnotised, to give back at least some of what they have received over the course of the last two hours. They descend, singing *Going Down* alongside Walter.

And joy ensues, just like when [5]*a crowd with little else in common melts into a communion of souls*. Is this a *sign of the blues*?

And so the second day of the festival was almost over. And people said that it was good.

Katarzyna Roszak-Markowska

Translated by: *Mateusz Markowski*

Photos by*: Wojciech Ziemski*

[5] Quote taken from: *WALTER TROUT Channels Dissonance And Outrage on New Single "Sign Of The Times"* - https://metalshockfinland.com/2025/07/17/walter-trout-channels-dissonance-and-outrage-on-new-single-sign-of-the-times.



Fot. Wojciech Ziemski


HAMMOND XK-4
Fot. Wojciech Ziemski


Fot. Wojciech Ziemski


Fot. Wojciech Ziemski


Fot. Wojciech Ziemski


Fot. Wojciech Ziemski


Fot. Wojciech Ziemski


Fot. Wojciech Ziemski


Fot. Wojciech Ziemski


Fot. Wojciech Ziemski


Fot. Wojciech Ziemski


HAMMOND XK-4
Fot. Wojciech Ziemski


Fot. Wojciech Ziemski


Fot. Wojciech Ziemski



Fot. Wojciech Ziemski


Fot. Wojciech Ziemski


Fot. Wojciech Ziemski


Fot. Wojciech Ziemski


Fot. Wojciech Ziemski


Fot. Wojciech Ziemski


Fot. Wojciech Ziemski


Fot. Wojciech Ziemski


Fot. Wojciech Ziemski


Fot. Wojciech Ziemski


Fot. Wojciech Ziemski


Fot. Wojciech Ziemski


Fot. Wojciech Ziemski


Fot. Wojciech Ziemski


Fot. Wojciech Ziemski


Fot. Wojciech Ziemski


Fot. Wojciech Ziemski


Fot. Wojciech Ziemski


Fot. Wojciech Ziemski