

miesięcznik

czytelnicтво: b.d.

powierzchnia/pow. efektywna: 1741 cm2/172 cm2

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Something to be proud of



Photo: Igor Kohutnicki

“The orchestra is proof that we Poles are not some martyrs to the world’s defects. This idea, with its tangible, easily-measurable effects, is what we should be proud of. And that is how patriotism should be understood,” says **Jurek Owsiak**, President of the Board of the Great Orchestra of the Christmas Charity Foundation (WOŚP).

PM The European Year of Volunteering is under way. How good, from your standpoint, is Polish civil activity?

When we started the Orchestra, which was almost 20 years ago, it was impossible to speak about any previous experience. Such ideas as “volunteering” or “civil society” were only just entering the Polish consciousness. I believe that voluntary service should be complementary to the state, something extra to it, and, in a sense, even against it. From my standpoint it’s not bad, as we’re doing it great! There’s no doubt that the Orchestra has contributed to creating a certain standard in social activity, and this standard is still current. We’ve become a model to follow, not just in Poland. Many of our very diverse guests from all over the world are very often amazed at the results and the ways in which we achieve them. They even ask us how it has been possible in just 20 years? They think that the Orchestra must be a continuation of something that has decades of history. To look more broadly, time after time someone presents study results showing that Poles are quite passive in various civil activities. I disagree with those studies, and I think that the questions may have been put wrongly. If you ask a young person “are you a volunteer?” not everybody will associate this with their own activities, say, in the Orchestra. And we show that we know what it’s all about and we ask a completely new question – what kind of voluntary service would we like to join? And which would we pick from the great number of NGOs out there? To sum up, in my opinion voluntary service in Poland is very healthy. People are aware that it’s needed and important, they are open. Also, there’s no serious, world-recognised NGO without an agenda in Poland. What is wrong is that the formal knowledge of most of our citizens is still insufficient. Polish schools are still almost silent when it comes to teaching about NGOs and civil activity.

PM We Poles complain that we don’t have a single great brand to boast about before the world. But we

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often forget that we've always had an enormous human, creative capital. Sometimes, when wonderfully united, this capital shines. The Great Finales of the Orchestra are such times...

Yes, the Orchestra is already a recognised brand. If we put it all into perspective, I think we can see that we ourselves are not doing much to support Polish brands, help them grow. Too rarely do we go back to the benefits of the 20-year-long inter-war period in Poland. The work ethos, many pro-country actions, building... after all PKP, Poczta Polska were once synonyms of quality... As a country, we have industries in which we are highly-specialised experts. Our construction products are an example of such a good Polish brand. There are also many producers of so-called "niche" products, where we are considered the best in the world. Like computer-game development, for example, but I'll give you a different one. I'm reading a popular Polish newspaper, and I see a title "Flood in Poland." The flood, of course, affects all – the rich and the poor. Everyone. But the photograph there shows a cottage somewhere in remote Siberia... and the caption is not "See! A curiosity from Poland," but "Flood in Poland." We are sometimes looking for holes in the pavement, but we don't realise that the pavement is 10 km long and actually leads somewhere. We should have some distance. And we should stop showing ourselves in a bad light.

PM We are hardly experts in public relations... and yet WOŚP keeps enjoying the highest public confidence in Poland. And this can't be achieved by the best PR activities...

For me, personally, the most important thing here is to have educated and competent people, who clearly understand the mission of the institution. Management should also be transparent. Everyone, from the President of the Board to the young person standing on the street with a money box, should be aware of striving for one and the same goal. The institution should state its goals and strategy for achieving them very clearly. The role of such foundations as ours is after all the same everywhere. It is complementing the actions of the

State, in places where even the richest states won't take action, or they will, but it will be five times more expensive. On one day, the Great Finale is a party, but 365 days of the year it is work and business. The business of our heart happens every day. Business ideology doesn't change. Lose nothing. Gain. Do. Negotiate as best you can. It's worth speaking about. For 19 years we've been doing many things with great consistency. And nobody told us what this business is about. That's the greatest success. The orchestra is proof that we Poles are not some martyrs to the world's defects... This idea, with its tangible, easily-measurable effects, is what we should be proud of. And that is how patriotism should be understood. We're aware that we enjoy great public support. From the very beginnings of our existence we have been saying that even though we are a foundation, a totally crazy and spontaneous effort, our activity is also a well-managed business. We've received lots of awards – the Order of Polonia Restituta, the Medal of Tadeusz Kotarbiński, and also "Polish Market's" Honorary Pearl. Every such award is a joy, but it doesn't lull us into a sense of security. We are disobedient and we like new challenges.

PM The WOŚP Foundation participates in a series of actions that support Polish medicine... This is – as you say – not just a "party," but something that stays with us... Let's talk about some of these actions...

We've bought over 20,000 state-of-the-art medical devices for the USD110 million we've collected. From the smallest, such as modern pulse oximeters and vascuports, to complex mobile radiography units, ultrasound and MRI scanners. This is a result of taking care of every penny, and the good interest rates negotiated for our money, which lies in a bank for a year. WOŚP is also implementing serious medical programmes for the youngest patients – the Public Hearing Screening Programme, the Retinopathy of Prematurity Programme, the Infant Flow Programme, the Programme for Treating Children with Personal Insulin Pumps, and the Educational Programme "We Rescue and Teach How to Rescue." The foundation does not provide individual help, and



Photo: Paweł Wołochowicz

the Foundation's Board chooses a goal for each year and for its Great Finale, after consultations with experts. We don't give any money to any health-care institutions – we only hand over equipment as a gift from the Foundation. The equipment is bought in a tendering process, which is organised twice a year – in spring and autumn.

PM Business – Polish companies and companies present on our market – is more and more actively participating in the Orchestra's actions. What's your view on this?

We should say thank you to all businesspeople who participate in the Orchestra. I see nothing wrong in the fact that various companies support the Orchestra. If I spoke to the average reader of "Polish Market" and asked him or her to list 10 companies that take part in the WOŚP Great Finale they would name maybe five... Why am I saying this? Because the Orchestra has never had a purely commercial basis. That is to say, if somebody told



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us “We’ll support you, but we want an enormous advertising vehicle that will tell people a lot about us,” it simply won’t work. This requires very focussed advertising campaigns. The fact that I mention 30 names of companies during that one day is only a way of saying thank you to the employees of these companies. It’s not that if I express my gratitude to some bank, the next day a certain number of people will take all their savings to that same bank.

PM For years you had programmes on Trójka Radio (Channel 3), then on television, in TVP2. Do you regret that you don’t have them anymore?

Now I only have my own media channel, which is Owsiak.net.pl. My own portal, which I believe has been doing better than expected. The first portal where you can find my everyday blog, music, and films. It’s a portal of good news. Something that really appeals to me. On television you always have this “sword” of viewership hanging over you. But we have to remember that every business has this aspect of “I spend money on this; I don’t earn.” On public television there are signs that something that got lost there for years is slowly starting to reappear. Besides, public TV must be mission-oriented, and it must have a broader perspective, which is very much against the overriding need to earn easy money. Sometimes the costs of running certain initiatives of this type are considerable. So, “to have” is indeed important, but the main condition is “to be,” and addressing the question “what content does it have?” Quite recently I told a well-known automotive company producing off-road vehicles, “come to our Woodstock Festival and show them!” And they say “those are kids on holiday. They won’t buy our cars – neither today nor next year.” Right, but you’ll be amazed when in five years these people – these extremely sensitive and creative young people – will be in charge of big companies, purchasing these same cars.

PM Over the 19 years of its existence, the Orchestra has created its very own, unpretentious musical atmosphere. The musical way of saying “thank you” to young Polish people involved in the Finale is the



photo Marek Krasowski

Krzysztof Materna, Marek Kondrat, Jerzy Owsiak, Jerzy Bużek

organising by the Foundation of the biggest open-air festival in Europe – the Woodstock Festival Poland... This year it will take place for the 17th time. Who will entertain us this year?

The Orchestra is responsible for a lot of joyful sounds – that’s our philosophy. Doing good through happiness, love, and fun. We’ve also created perhaps the most beautiful festival in the world. Let’s not be too shy to say it! We have shown the world that Poland likes great gigs with high artistic merit. For the people who go there, Woodstock is an incredible experience. You see, it’s a little like in family businesses, like in Lego. People feel they are part of the event. An actual town is created there – with its streets, ATMs, post offices, hospitals, police, prison, courts. There’s a field hospital, a campsite with food and a playground. The festival is organised in Kostrzyn nad Odrą, next to the former German border, near Brandenburg – a place which holds little charm for Germans themselves... And suddenly those Germans come to a great gig in Poland, and see something well organised, where the culture of the event exceeds their expectations... something that’s totally “Made in Poland.” The festival is free to all, but its rules are very strict. First of all – don’t you even try going there with drugs on you. Don’t spoil the fun! We’ve got one thousand people in our peace patrol. And they aren’t security that frowns at your every move, they’re there to help wherever it’s possible. The 17th Woodstock Festival will take place

between 4 and 6 August. Its foreign stars will be Skindred, Dog Eat Dog and the Prodigy. This year, to celebrate the 30th Anniversary of one of the most important Polish rock bands – Republika – and 10 years after the death of its memorable leader, Grzegorz Ciechowski, we’ll have a special concert with the most emblematic songs of the band. Members of Republika will be accompanied on stage by such artists as Kasia Kowalska, Ania Dąbrowska, and Jacek Bończyk. Another interesting event will be the “Projekt Grechuta” concert dedicated to one of the greatest Polish singers-songwriters of the 20th Century – Marek Grechuta – interpreted anew by the young Polish rock band Plateau. Once again we’ll have the Academy of the Most Beautiful Arts – a place for important meetings and conversations, at which Lech Wałęsa, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, and Leszek Balcerowicz have spoken of Poland. This year’s guests will be the President of the National Bank of Poland Marek Belka, the mountaineers Kinga Baranowska and Marek Pustelnik, the actors Andrzej Grabowski and Jan Nowicki and the Director of the Warsaw Uprising Museum Jan Oldakowski. It’s always a place for words of wisdom and people who listen to each other attentively...



Interview by Maciej Proliński

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