Warsaw, 5 June 2024  
Press release

**Who will direct *The Opera about Warsaw*?**

**The team that will prepare the staging of *The Opera about Warsaw. The Best City in the World*, a co-production of Sinfonia Varsovia and Teatr Wielki - Polish National Opera, has been presented. The first opera about Warsaw will be performed in the exact year of the 80th anniversary of the start of the city’s reconstruction after World War II. The libretto was written by Beniamin Bukowski and the music has been composed by Cezary Duchnowski. The production will premiere on September 19, 2025 at the Teatr Wielki - Polish National Opera, and will be directed by Barbara Wiśniewska. The music will be performed by Sinfonia Varsovia under the baton of conductor Bassem Akiki.**

The opera’s libretto – based on the Grzegorz Piątek’s acclaimed and award-winning book ***The Best City in the World. Warsaw in Reconstruction 1944-1949*** (W.A.B. 2021) – was written by Beniamin Bukowski. The main character of the opera is Warsaw – destroyed and rebuilt, seen through the eyes of two women: an architect of the Capital Reconstruction Bureau and an American journalist. The author of the libretto modeled them on the characters of **Helena Syrkusowa** (1900–1982), secretary general of the Supreme Council for the Reconstruction of Warsaw, and **Anne Louise Strong** (1885–1970), an American reporter captivated by communism, who watched the retreat of the Nazis from occupied Poland and reported on the beginning of the reconstruction of the country drawn into the orbit of the Soviet Union.

As a result of a closed competition, the project council entrusted the task of preparing the staging to director **Barbara Wiśniewska**. She is a graduate in directing from the Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Art in Warsaw and currently a lecturer there. She gained experience alongside such artists as Katie Mitchell, Christopher Alden and Ushio Amagatsu. Since 2012, she has collaborated with Mariusz Treliński as an assistant and revival director of his productions at the Teatr Wielki - Polish National Opera, Palau de les Arts Reina Sofía, Theater an der Wien or Narodní Divadlo – Státní Opera Praha.

“Modern Warsaw is a city that, with a thin layer of debris and new buildings, has covered a living, pulsating wound,” the director states in the competition project. “Underneath flows lava, oil processed from the bodies of the fallen and those lost in basements from which they were never able to escape, executed and forgotten. We walk over corpses every day. More than 160 so-called Tchorek plaques commemorating sites of combat and martyrdom attest to this. (...) The harm and destruction were so great that their power still resonates in the residents after almost 80 years.”

For Barbara Wiśniewska, working on the staging of the opera about reconstruction has a personal dimension. “The emanation of this trauma is even more powerful when one has dwelt here since birth, has lived in this city forever,” em phasizes the director. “When your mother tells the story of her grandfather executed on Elektoralna Street in the first days of the war. When your grandmother tells how, as part of her work assignment, she designed electrical installations for the rebuilding of Mokotów. When you hear about your great-grandmother, who took care of the children of the Institute of the Deaf and Dumb on Plac Trzech Krzyży and helped evacuate them from there during the uprising. And they were all from there. You live in the fumes of family stories and secrets, soaking them up from an early age. You carry in your genes these people, this city, this strength. Then Warsaw becomes a point of reference. It becomes deeply personal.”

Under the direction of Barbara Wiśniewska, the following people will work on staging the opera: **Bassem Akiki** (conductor), **Natalia Kitamikado** (set design), **Marcin Cecko** (dramaturgy), **Emil Wysocki** (costumes), **Maćko Prusak** (choreography), **Aleksandr Prowaliński** (lighting), **Bartek Macias** (projections) and **Mateusz Stępniak** (make-up).

Wiśniewska’s opera directing debut was a production of Jan Stefani’s *Cracovians and Highlanders* at the Wrocław Opera (2017). The last major productions she directed were Johann Strauss’s the Son *Die Fledermaus* (Alte Münze in Berlin 2022, as part of the Berlin Opernfest), Giuseppe Verdi’s *Il* *Trovatore* (The Opera at the Castle, Szczecin 2023), and Richard Wagner’s *The Flying Dutchman* –a superproduction under the musical direction of Marek Janowski (The Forest Opera in Sopot 2024, as part of the first edition of the Baltic Opera Festival, now performed as a repertory production of the Baltic Opera). She began her work in dramatic theaters with *Baby Doll*, winning a competition for a debut at the Studio Theatre in Warsaw (2015), and has since realized many theatrical productions, concerts, festival performances and performance readings at institutional theaters in Poland and abroad.

*The Opera about Warsaw. The Best City in the World* is intended to be performed on a grand stage by a large performing cast with electronics and audiovisual projections. The opera is scheduled to be performed at the opening of the 2025/26 season at the Teatr Wielki - Polish National Opera, which will also be the inauguration of the 67th “Warsaw Autumn” International Festival of Contemporary Music, marking the 80th anniversary of the start of Warsaw’s reconstruction.

For more information on the project, visit [Sinfonia Varsovia’s website](https://www.sinfoniavarsovia.org/en/opera-about-warsaw/).

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