

Trails of Hope. The Odyssey of Freedom

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Hanka Ordonówna (1902-1950)

Hanka Ordonówna was a Polish singer, actress, dancer, poet and lyricist.

Real name Maria Anna (Marianna) Tyszkiewicz, née Pietruszyńska, also known by the pseudonym Weronika Hort, born on 4 August 1902 in Warsaw, died on 8 September 1950 in Beirut (Lebanon).

Hanka Ordonówna was a Polish singer, actress, dancer, poet and lyricist, one of the most famous stars of Polish cabaret in the interwar period. Her best known stage names were Ordonka, Kniaginiuszka or Kobieta Wamp [the Vamp Woman]. Yet, for the Polish orphans evacuated from the Soviet Union for whom she organised an orphanage, and about whom she wrote a book entitled *Tułacze dzieci* [*Exiled Children*] published in 1948 in Beirut under the pseudonym of Weronika Hort, she was simply a good lady who sang.

She was born in Warsaw at 68 Żelazna Street, into the poor family of Warsaw labourer Władysław Pietruszyński and his wife Helena, née Bieńkowska. In 1908, Hanka started to attend the ballet school at the Grand Theatre in Warsaw (Polish: *Teatr Wielki w Warszawie*) as the school provided students with one meal a day. In spite of the numerous successes that she achieved as a singer and actress, and the fact that in 1931 she married Count Michał Tyszkiewicz, she did not forget what poverty was like.

From an early age, she performed on stage as a dancer, first at the Grand Theatre in Warsaw, then at the Black Cat Theatre (Polish: *Teatr "Czarny Kot"*) in Lublin. At the age of 16, she returned to Warsaw to start performing at the Sphinx Theatre (Polish: *Teatr "Sfinks"*) in Warsaw. She tried her hand at singing but was not successful. It was then that she began to use the pseudonym "Hanka Ordonówna" which was coined by dancer Karol Hanusz. From March 1923 to 1931, she worked as a cabaret singer at the famous "Qui Pro Quo" in Warsaw. She became highly popular thanks to her appearance in the film *Szpieg w masce* [*Spy in the Mask*] from 1933, in which she boldly performed the song "Miłość ci wszystko wybaczy" ["Love Will Forgive You Everything"]. In the film *Parada gwiazd Warszawy* [*The Parade of Warsaw Stars*] from 1937, she promoted her next hit entitled "Na pierwszy znak" ["At the First

Sign”]. Her concerts, both in Poland and abroad, including in Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Athens, Beirut, Damascus, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Cairo, Riga and the United States, were huge successes.

On the day the war broke out, she sang together with Mieczysław Fogg for soldiers leaving for the front from Gdański Railway Station in Warsaw. On 1 November 1939, Ordonówna protested against the screening of a German propaganda film about the occupation of Warsaw in Polish cinemas. She was arrested by the Gestapo and imprisoned in the Pawiak prison. Thanks to the efforts undertaken by her husband, Count Michał Tyszkiewicz, she was released from prison and moved with her husband to Vilnius. After the Soviet Union occupied Vilnius, the couple were arrested by the NKVD. Count Michał Tyszkiewicz was transported in an unknown direction deep into the Soviet Union, while Ordonówna was sent to a labour camp for women in Uzbekistan.

After the Sikorski-Mayski agreement was signed in July 1941, Ordonka was released from exile and went to the Middle East together with General Anders’ Army. She performed in the soldiers’ theatres of the 2nd Corps. She gave over 50 concerts, some of them in battlefield conditions. She became involved in organising help for the orphaned children of Polish refugees. She described the stories of the children and their guardians’ struggle with the Soviet authorities in her book entitled *Tułacze dzieci* [*Exiled Children*] published under the pseudonym of Weronika Hort in 1948 by the Polish Institute in Beirut.

After the Soviet Union broke off relations with the government of the Republic of Poland (which happened after the Katyń massacre was revealed in 1943), she was evacuated along with the orphanage via Bombay in India to Beirut in Lebanon.

After the war, she settled in Beirut with her husband. She organised patriotic performances, ran a drama club and gave several recitals. She died of tuberculosis in September 1950 in Beirut and was buried there. In 1990, her ashes were brought to the Powązki Cemetery in Warsaw.

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