

 The interview | **Warsaw**

“I’m just this kid from Poland”

He’s a classical composer who’s obsessed with hip-hop and got his big break remixing Beyoncé: enter the kaleidoscopic world of Jimek

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A look at Jimek’s schedule will have your head spinning. The 30-year-old Pole just collaborated with Germany’s biggest rapper, he’s writing a film score for one of Poland’s most promising new directors and he’s about to visit Kenya to teach classical music in Nairobi’s slums. Right now, he’s on a lunch break from preparing a new concert with the philharmonic orchestra in Lodz.

Producer, composer, orchestrator: it’s hard to know how to describe Jimek, real name Radzimir Dębski. “Everything has started to mix,” he says, “and in the chaos of it all, there’s only good or bad music left.”

Although Jimek is widely seen as a composer who collaborates with rappers, his first claim to fame came courtesy of Beyoncé. In 2012, just →



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after he finished his studies at Chopin Music University in Warsaw (where he still lives) and at the University of California Los Angeles, Jimek entered a competition to remix a track from the singer’s album, *4: The Remix*, along with 3,000 other producers. He then forgot about it for two months, until he got a call on Skype. It was Beyoncé. The world’s biggest pop star was calling to say he’d won the contest.

“It instantly changed my life from one day to the next,” Jimek admits. Suddenly lots of doors opened. Overnight, he went from conducting classical performances with more people on the stage than in the audience to people high-fiving him in the street. “But I stayed the same person, which definitely helped with the exposure and size of it all.”

While his recent musical exploits are diverse, Jimek’s training couldn’t have been more traditional. He was born in Szczecin into a family of musicians: his father is a composer, as was his grandfather, and his mother is a singer. He received a classical music education, which in Poland means that music lessons are core subjects alongside the likes of maths and biology. It was a strict schooling, but one thing set Jimek apart.

“Hip-hop was not really popular back then. People listened to rock and electronic; my parents were into jazz and classical,” he says. “So it was my thing. I was practising Bach at school and listening to Wu-Tang Clan on the way home,” he laughs. The two musical worlds never met, presenting a puzzle he says it took 20 years to solve.

After the Beyoncé remix, Jimek



worked on his first major classical recording, *Crux*. Then he was approached by Reebok for a project putting together contrasting artists; when asked who he wanted to work with, he chose Poland’s biggest rapper, Pezet. Jimek played violin, piano, guitar, bass and drums to emulate an old-school band, then sampled his own recordings like a ’90s hip-hop producer, after which Pezet rapped over the track. It was a huge hit, with four million views on YouTube to date.

These two different projects validated Jimek in both worlds and meant that next he could create something truly unique. In 2015, he began work on a symphonic hip-hop

extravaganza for which he was able to recruit the NOSPR (Poland’s national symphony orchestra).

“It was the biggest dream come true,” he says. “NOSPR is the most amazing symphonic orchestra in Poland.” Ironically, it was hip-hop that had opened this door for him. As for the rapper involved, Miuosh was the icing on the cake: he hailed from what was once the roughest district in Poland, a hotbed of Polish hip-hop, which happened to be just 100m from the NOSPR’s brand new philharmonic concert hall in Katowice, where the collaboration was based.

Although the project was a big deal in Poland, it was the encore of the performance that brought Jimek his next brush with international



JIMEK CONDUCTS his live symphonic rap project with MoTrip

fame. Called *Hip-Hop History*, the 10-minute-long medley featured classic rap tracks that Jimek reinterpreted as classical music. A video of it went viral. Nikki Minaj reposted it. And then Jimek's childhood rap heroes such as Mobb Deep, MOP and Pharoahe Monch got in touch. "They were the artists I listened to as a kid. When they praised it, that was incredible," Jimek says.

At a recent Mobb Deep concert in Poland, Jimek got to meet his heroes. "Prodigy [from Mobb Deep] came out and said 'That was you?'" Jimek beams. "He remembered me, which was amazing. I'm just this kid from Poland..." Sadly, Prodigy passed away in June.

Since then, Jimek has been working on another symphonic rap project with MoTrip, Germany's biggest rapper. Later

in 2017 they will perform at the stunning new Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg, currently Europe's hottest classical music venue. Then? "A symphonic rap project in English," Jimek says. Watch this space.

Meanwhile, visitors to Warsaw might even catch a glimpse of him busking. Apart from working with kids from the Ghetto Classics programme in Kenya, Jimek is also working with students in Warsaw from the Young Polish Philharmonic. "I really want to play with them in the streets," he says. "So if you come walking around the city, you never know – you might just see us."

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Jimek's Poland

Szczecin

"Growing up, we lived right next to Jasne Błonia, the most magical park in Europe. Szczecin is a beautiful city, built on the same blueprints as Paris. It's a little bit forgotten, but it's becoming this really cool, awesome place. And if you see the new philharmonic, you'll be blown away. We shot my solo video debut *Prologue* there."

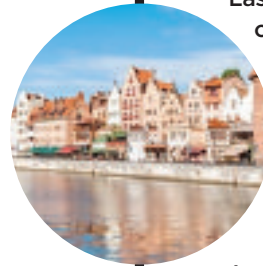
Warsaw

"I live in the area that was the Jewish Ghetto. It's become a cultural centre, with great cafes – don't miss Poznańska for bars and food, and Próżna street. One side still hasn't been rebuilt since World War II, while the other is glamorously restored. Above it is the Cosmopolitan, an amazing skyscraper designed by Helmut Jahn."



Gdansk

"Last year I was the headliner of a festival in Gdansk called Solidarity of Arts – we played on a river island in front of 18,000 people and in my favourite old town in Poland. Gdansk is absolutely beautiful. And nowhere near as famous as it should be."



Katowice

"Katowice is another of these slightly forgotten places that are just way cooler than you'd expect. I've played concerts there, gone out for one drink and ended up at a rave in an old coalmine, barely making it back in time for a live TV interview at 11am the next day, so you have to be careful..."



Wrocław

"Recently several new concert halls have been built in Poland, and one is in Wrocław (NFM), where we played outside the Forum for 11,000 people. There's an awesome student crowd in Wrocław."