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Elements of Russian Orthodox Culture in the Œuvre of Krzysztof Penderecki as Exemplified in *Utrenya* I and II

"In 'Utrenya', the Russian Orthodox chorale is a peculiar 'magnet' that attracts all planes and blocks of the musical material," writes Alexandr Ivashkin in his book *Kzhishtof Pendereckyi.*[1]

1. Introductory remarks

In the various contexts of Krzysztof Penderecki's œuvre, Russian Orthodox culture occupies a distinctive position; it has a visible and highly original presence. It manifests itself in a great number of ways and at various levels of intensity:

– individual works are directly associated with the Russian Orthodox creed and Russian culture (*Utrenya* I and II, *Song of Cherubim*, *Hymn to St. Daniil*);
– certain elements of this culture are visible in works which are not directly connected with it (*Ubu Rex*);
– one can also speak of some features of Krzysztof Penderecki's music that might be seen as rooted in the composer's interest in various cultural spheres, including that of the Russian Orthodox Church.

In the timeline of Penderecki's output proposed by Mieczysław Tomaszewski, the early 1970s – the time when *Utrenya* I and II came to life – have been defined as the time of "the breakthrough and the first synthesis – the phase of Passion." Tomaszewski lists the basic qualities of the works written in that period: a dramatic character, an alternating form with its typical swapping of musical events based on sharp contrasts and a rhetoric (arioso-recitative) idiom dominated by expression and semantics. Also, Tomaszewski describes *Utrenya* I

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[1]Alexandr Ivashkin, *Kzhishtof Pendereckyi*, Moskva 1983, p. 78.

and II as parts of Penderecki's great scores in terms of both theme and size; one could add the "greatness" also concerns the performance means.[2]

In turn, the much later *Song of Cherubim* of 1986 is associated with the composer's sixth phase, under Tomaszewski's heading "At the Threshold of a New Synthesis?" with *The Black Mask* as the most significant work.[3] The *Hymn to St. Daniil* of 1997 has been placed in a yet later period, described by Tomaszewski as "Second Wind – the phase of 'Credo'."[4] Both works are occasional in character, short, with significantly limited means of performance. Yet the main difference that sets the two *Utrenyas* against the Song and the Hymn is that of technique, style, and aesthetics.

2. Elements of Orthodox Culture in *Utrenya* I and II
2.1. The Bipolarity of Russian Culture

It is a truth generally acknowledged that Russian culture, identified with that of the Russian Orthodox Church, with the so-called European East, is clearly separate from that of Western Europe. The influence of the Eastern variety of Christianity is a major element of this idea. Despite various doubts, such as those expressed by Jerzy Nowosielski[5] or Wacław Hryniewicz,[6] this difference is taken for a fact in semiotics of culture; this fact serves to construe certain theoretical models.

The binary model, the timeless dualism, the bipolarity of Russian culture are all concepts typical of cultural semioticians. Yuri Lot-

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[2]Mieczysław Tomaszewski, *Krzysztof Penderecki i jego muzyka. Cztery eseje* ["K.P. and His Music. Four Essays"], Kraków 1994, pp. 98-100.

[3]Ibid., p. 106.

[4]Tomaszewski, *Krzysztof Penderecki and His Music. Four Essays*, Kraków 2003, p. 101.

[5]Zbigniew Podgórzec, *Mój Chrystus. Rozmowy z Jerzym Nowosielskim* ["My Christ. Conversations with J.N."], Białystok 1993.

[6]Wacław Hryniewicz OMI, *Duchowość Katolicyzmu i Prawosławia* ["The Spirituality of Catholicism and the Orthodox Church"], in: *Ateneum Kapłańskie* 3 (1975), p. 440.

man and Boris Uspenski thus describe this problem in their text *The Role of Dual Models in the Dynamics of Russian Culture (up to the End of the 18*th *Century)*: "the culture of the era under consideration [...] is characteristic in the dual nature of its structure. The basic values (ideological, political, and religious) of the system of the Russian Middle Ages are placed within a bipolar field of values" as opposed to the ternary structure of Western Christianity.[7] Manifestations of this duality are multifaceted. The typical oppositions in Russian culture include old/new, or, indeed, Russia/the West, Christianity/paganism, etc.

The binary system of Russian culture is discussed by Toni Huttunen and Pekka Pesonen in their study *Understanding the Third* (in a volume edited by Eero Tarasti). According to the two authors, the sharp dualism of good/evil is a result of that culture's constant necessity to choose between East and West; Christianity came to Russia from the East and it is the Eastern Church tradition that has dominated its culture. All things eastern are indigenous, all things western – alien.[8]

In one of his most recent works, Yuri Lotman develops the bipolar model by pointing to the specific function of explosion in Russian culture. He maintains that explosion encompasses the entirety of being in binary systems, while it does not completely delete the past in ternary ones.[9] It should be noted that he alludes to the present and hopes that the changes in the relations between Eastern and Western Europe at the end of the 20th Century might be a chance for Russia to move over to the European ternary system and abandon its old ideal of destroying the old world and building a new one in its ruins.[10]

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[7]Yuri Lotman/Boris Uspenski, *Rola modeli dualnych w dynamice kultury rosyjskiej (do końca XVIII w.)*, in: *Semiotyka dziejów Rosji*, ed. and translated by Bogusław Żyłko, Łódź 1993, p. 18.

[8]Toni Huttunen/Pekka Pesonen, *Understanding the Third*, in: *Understanding/Misunderstanding. Contributions to the Study of the Hermeneutics of Signs*, ed. by Eero Tarasti, Imatra/Helsinki 2003 (Acta Semiotica Fennica 16), p. 491.

[9]Yuri Lotman, *Kultura i eksplozja* ["Culture and Explosion"], ed. and translated by Bogusław Żyłko, Warszawa 1998, p. 23.

[10]Ibid., p. 233.

Yet looking at culture in its religious/spiritual dimension may also result in opinions such as that of Wacław Hryniewicz, that despite all differences between, say, the Russian Orthodox Church and Catholicism, they are not different visions of Christianity – that both represent a balance of similar elements with differences of emphasis alone.[11]

2.2. *Utrenya* I and II versus the Binary Model of Culture
2.2.1. The Text – Content and Structure

– Two parts
Krzysztof Penderecki's *Utrenyas*: I *Entombment of Christ* (1970) and II *Resurrection* (1971) is a towering, bipartite drama, after the Passion and Death of Christ, the drama of the Entombment and Resurrection of Christ, presented in the cultural convention of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The two parts of the diptych contemplate events directly after the Passion and Death of Jesus between Good Friday and Easter Morning – from the moment when Jesus is taken down from the Cross and covered with a shroud through His burial, the arrival of women with balms until the perception of the empty tomb – possibly the most traumatic experience for eyewitnesses. In the first part of *Utrenya* II, in a sort of Prologue to his work, the composer used the text of St. Matthew:

"And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men."

The content of *Utrenya* includes the outburst of joy of Resurrection, the realization of the fulfilment of prophecies and elated prayers of praise.

– Two layers of text
The structure of the text consists of two layers. It is a mixture of various personae and various modes of utterance. One layer presents what seem to be the participants of liturgy: priest, deacon, choir, the

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[11]Hryniewicz, *Duchowość*, p. 440.

faithful people; the other layer presents the participants in the events: the women, eyewitnesses, the crowd commenting on or participating in the story. Christ, very understandably in the centre of the drama – appears as a persona in only one part, *Ne riday mena Mati*, which is a central moment in the work. For Christ turns to his Mother, as we read in the text of the 9th irmos of the Canon: "Weep not for me, Mother... for I will rise and in My godly guise I shall not cease to elevate those who venerate You in faith and glory."[12]

– Opposition of semantically intelligible and unintelligible texts

This opposition is a result both of Penderecki's stylistic principles of that time, associated with sonorism, and above all of their dramatic function. One could say that there are moments in the plot of the piece where there is no doubt that some individual words must act in the entirety of their semantics, as in e.g. the part *Ne riday mena Mati*. Elsewhere, what counts is not so much the meaning of particular words as the sphere of music and its power of expression. Some of these effects are due to the association of *Utrenya* with Orthodox liturgy, discussed in the following section.

2.2.2. The Music

Two factors seem fundamental among those conditioning the choice of technical and expressive means that served Penderecki to put into music the drama of *Utrenya*: first, the time of the work's creation and its position in the composer's development, within the context of his other works and the distinctive periods of his œuvre; second, the theme itself. The choice of such a powerful theme – the direct association with Russian Orthodox culture – has become, as can be seen, another significant denominator of the musical language used in both *Utrenyas*.

While we speak of the bipartite nature of the text level, its events follow one another in soft transitions – those of Part I being consequences of those in Part II – the music of the piece is clearly bipolar, a result of the sharp contrast between the universes of

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[12]Aleksander Naumow, Introduction to the score: Krzysztof Penderecki, *Utrenya* I, Kraków: PWM 1977.

sound and expression between *Utrenya* I and II. *Utrenya* I is characteristic in its grey, darkish hues, low, deep registers, sound effects closer to hums and murmurs than to tones, a result of the percussion group being dominated by instruments built of various types of wood. In turn, *Utrenya* II is dominated by light sounds, by the colour of metal idiophones and above all by the sounds of all kinds of bells so characteristic for the rituals of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Certain signs of the binary structure can be observed within the two parts alone, especially in terms of the organisation of the musical material. At the most general level, this is tantamount to an opposition of notes of determinate pitch and indeterminate-pitch sound effects. Proceeding further into this distinction, at the level of determinate-pitch sounds, another dualism appears, this time between dodecaphonic, or even quarter-tone music, and the tonal and modal fragments, quotations or stylizations of Russian Orthodox sacred song. This dualism is present in both the horizontal and the vertical dimension, in other words in both melody and harmony.

2.3. Elements of Russian Orthodox Liturgy

This issue has already been raised in the context of *Utrenya* I by Regina Chłopicka.[13] The present text is limited to the most significant considerations, for both *Utrenyas*.

2.3.1. The Text
The text of the two *Utrenyas* is kept in the original Old Church Slavonic language. From the point of view of c o n t e n t, the degree of their relationship to liturgical texts is varied. For *Utrenya* I, the composer has chosen theologically fundamental fragments from Holy Saturday Matins and Good Friday Vespers; Penderecki followed the understanding of the Eastern Rite and concentrated the entirety of events around the Adoration of the Shroud. He also used titles derived from genre terminology of liturgical texts, although with little direct associations to the liturgy itself.[14] In *Utrenya* II, the succession

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[13]Regina Chłopicka, *Krzysztof Penderecki. Musica sacra – musica profana*, Kraków 2003, pp. 53-68.
[14]Naumow, Introduction.

of the text, the titles of its parts and their order are almost identical
with the Easter Sunday celebrations of the Pascha – however, with
significant modifications by the composer. The beginning, with the
already-mentioned insertion of the St. Matthew fragment from Holy
Saturday liturgy – women at the empty tomb – serves as a prologue
to the Pascha celebration itself, to a quasi-constant prayer of praise:
a series of songs of praise addressed to Christ in appreciation, it might
seem, for His Resurrection.

Penderecki has always attached a great importance to the sound
layer of the texts of his works. He made this especially clear in refer-
ence to *Utrenya*: "The very sound of Old Church Slavonic is closely
connected with the music in this work. I would not even think of
translating it into any other language or of writing it without the
text."[15] The composer goes even further than using the text in its
original sound version: he employs effects known from the history of
Eastern Orthodox Church music. Before the 17th Century, this music
displayed a tendency to disperse the meaning of the text by adding
single voice sounds between syllables ("khomonya") and by a simul-
taneous performance of several different liturgical texts.[16] As a rule,
the text of both parts of *Utrenya* – as has already been mentioned –
is treated in two basic ways. It is either operating in both sound and
textual content or deprived of semantic intelligibility in favour of em-
phasizing the elements of sound. Of significance here is the technique
of dispersing separate and successive syllables of the text over several
voices of the chorus, and the technique of simultaneous performance
of different fragments of the text by different yet coincident voices.

Within the sphere of various issues connected with the language of
the work, one is of particular importance for reading the message of
Utrenya and placing it within the cultural context. Namely, the text
of the Troparion in *Utrenya* II is fundamental and central from the
liturgical point of view, being – in the words of Aleksy Znosko – the

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[15]Quoted in Ivashkin, *Kzhishtof Pendereckyi*, p. 78.

[16]Zofia Lissa, *Historia muzyki rosyjskiej* ["History of Russian Music"], vol. I,
Kraków 1956, p. 74.

"exegesis of the very essence of the feast,"[17] and itself a quotation (also in terms of melody, harmony, and rhythm) of an original liturgical Troparion. In Penderecki's work, the Troparion functions as a refrain, appearing at numerous instances in Latin and Greek simultaneously or successively with the same text in Old Church Slavonic.

Another detail should be added here. Also in *Utrenya* II, in its fifth part, the composer has selected a text from Paschal Canon Song No. 8 expressing a symbolic yet timeless conviction of the necessity for unity in Christ: "Lift up thine eyes about thee, O Zion, and see! For lo! Thy children come to thee from the West and from the North and from the Sea and from the East, as to a beacon lighted by God, blessing Christ in thee for ever."[18]

2.3.2. The Music

The music of Penderecki's *Utrenya* makes a wide use of the tradition of Orthodox liturgy, where the role of the p e o p l e and their participation in culture is of an exceptional significance. In the words of Pushkin, "the people become the subject of history."[19] The most important and the most expressive action on the part of the composer is, in this respect, his use of quotations from original orthodox chants and their stylizations (archaizations).

In *Utrenya* I, Part 2 (*Velichaniye*) is the longest section of the work and possibly also the one with the greatest textual and dramatic content. The hymn of Magnification – for such is the meaning of the title – is an individual utterance interspersed with a collective prayer to Christ, itself in a character full of praise, yet ending in fragments of a penitential Psalm. It is also a section with the greatest richness of means of musical expression, bringing together all possible types of vocal music, both choral and solo, with their characteristic wealth of dramatic expression as well as lyricism, conventional and unconventional sound effects and the greatest variety

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[17] Aleksy Znosko, *Słownik cerkiewnosłowiańsko-polski* ["Dictionary Old Church Slavonic / Polish"], Białystok 1996.

[18] *Arimathea*, ed. by David Melling <http://www.church-music.co.uk/PCan7to8. pdf> (6th October 2003).

[19] Quoted in Bohdan Galster, *Aleksander Puszkin*, in: *Literatura Rosyjska*, Warszawa 1976, pp. 258-259.

of instrumentation and articulation. Yet somewhere among all this wealth a fragment appears with much reduced means of expression and, what is more, with the use of stylization and quotation. In the highest possible register (g^2-e^3), with no instrumental background whatsoever, the solo tenor sings the praise: "Blessed art Thou, Lord, teach me Thy statutes." The voice seems to be moving almost imperceptibly in quarter-tones towards the top note e^3 with a fermata. The situational context of the stylization is unclear: it is either the highly expressive song of the deacon in church or a prayer of an individual eyewitness of the events of Good Friday after the death of Christ. The ensuing quotation seems to solve this dilemma: over a standing *e flat* note in the "basso profondo," a chorus of basses and then a chorus of basses and tenors sings (in a syllabic mode) a fragment of Song No. 5 of the Good Friday Liturgy[20] in the original melodic/harmonic version and a comparable rhythmic set-up, alternating with a stylized prayerful recitation of the bass (repetition of a single note, first *a flat*, then *e flat*). The already-quoted Song No. 5, with its syllabic singing, the modality of its diatonic melodic line, and its third/sixth harmony, remains in strong contrast with its musical context (see Music Examples No. 1 and 2).

Between Part 4, central in terms of the drama – since it contains the song of Christ to His Mother, full of dramatic tension – and Part 5, *Stikhira*, there appears a clear association to, almost a quotation of, the original Song No. 7 of the Holy Saturday Liturgy. In general, the role of quotation and stylization acquires, in *Utrenya* II, a much greater dramatic, semantic and, also in a way, symbolic significance.

For Part 3, *Psalm with Troparion*, quotes the original text and music of the Troparion from the Easter Sunday Pascha celebration, once again ushering into the work the typical climate of modal/tonal melodies and third/sixth chords, obviously serialized modally rather than combined as in the major/minor system (see Music Examples No. 3 and 4).[21]

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[20] *Obikhod notnovo cerkovnovo peniya* ["Eastern Orthodox Church Songbook"], Part I, Pinsk 1929, p. 291.

[21] Ibid., p. 320.

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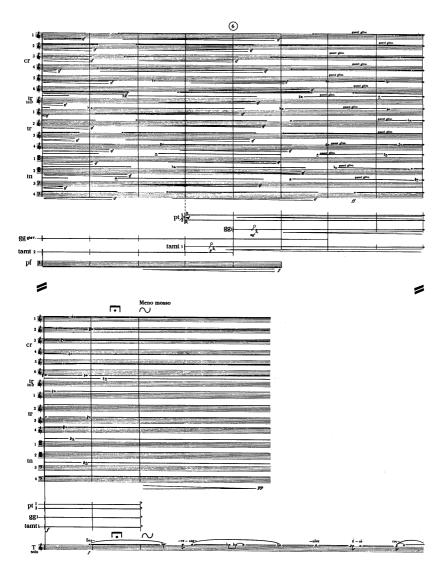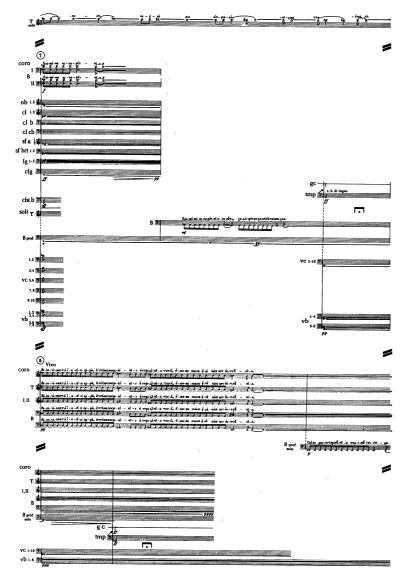

Music Example No. 1: Song No. 5 of the Good Friday Liturgy, in: "Eastern Orthodox Church Songbook," p. 291

In accordance with the tradition, and as has already been quoted, the Troparion is the "exegesis of the very essence of the feast;"[22] it runs as follows: "Christ has risen from the dead, by death he has trampled on death." What is more, the many repetitions of the Troparion make it a veritable refrain in terms of music as well as of text – or, in the words of Ivashkin, "a magnet." The central role of this Troparion/refrain is additionally enhanced and amplified when it turns out that the composer has been clothing it in consecutive or simultaneous language versions – and that the choice of languages is not only not accidental but highly meaningful. As a result, and as has already been mentioned, Latin and Greek join Old Church Slavonic to proclaim the fundamental words of Resurrection.

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[22]See footnote 17.

Music Example No. 2: Penderecki, *Utrenya* I, Part 3: *Psalm with Troparion*, pp. 14-15

Continuation of Music Example No. 2

Music Example No. 3: Troparion from the Easter Sunday Pascha celebration, in: "Eastern Orthodox Church Songbook," p. 320

4. The Problem of Theatricalization

Theatricality or theatricalization is another feature of Orthodox culture to be found in the œuvre of Krzysztof Penderecki.[23] Although Marija Plukhanova remarks that the earliest rituals of the Russian Orthodox Church did not include elements of the mystery play,[24] the persona of Christ played by an actor could appear on stage as early as in the 16th Century.

The concept of theatricality, or theatricalization, has been discussed in the output of Penderecki. Ivashkin writes of *Utrenya*: "[...] the theatrical visuality of image – always so characteristic in Penderecki – not only does not disappear; it assumes specific, almost film-like contours."[25]

As has been mentioned, the text of *Utrenya* displays dramatic features, since apart from the narrator, who describes its events, the other characters appear in our minds' eye: the women, the crowd, the people, who all take part in the plot. The work seems to oscillate between the paraliturgical and the paratheatrical. At times, the audience might have the impression of being part of a ritual; at times, the audience becomes more of an eyewitness to the story. Then Christ appears on stage and becomes a persona of the drama; not some-

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[23]Yuri Lotman, *Teatr i teatralność w kulturze początku XIX wieku* ["Theatre and Theatrality in the Culture of Early 19th Century"], in: *Semiotyka dziejów Rosji*, ed. and translated by Bogusław Żyłko, Łódź 1993, pp. 227-253.

[24]Marija Plukhanova, *Przyczynek do problemu teatralizacji zachowania* ["Reasons for the Problem of Theatralization of Behaviour"], in: *Semiotyka dziejów Rosji*, p. 222.

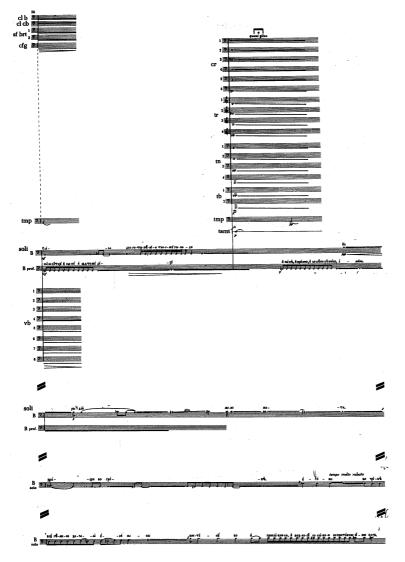[25]Ivashkin, *Kzhishtof Pendereckyi*, p. 78.

Music Example No. 4: Penderecki, *Utrenya* II, manuscript, p. 16

one whose actions are described, but someone who takes an active part in the plot, when He says to his Mother, as has already been quoted, "Weep not for me, Mother... for I will rise and in My godly guise I shall not cease to elevate those who venerate You in faith and glory." From a musical point of view, this dramatic climax brings about a severe limitation of performance means and, what is perhaps even more important, pushes them towards dark hues and low registers (two solo basses, orchestra without violins, violas and flutes, yet with a double bassoon and a tuba). The structure of intervals, both vertically and horizontally, is now dominated by the tritone and the minor second. What is more, the role of the former seems to acquire a rhetoric function, since it appears in the most dramatic moments of Christ's song. Bass I "Weep not for me" resounds at a tritone from the background, the vocal pedal point of Bass II (see Music Example No. 5).

And this song, mainly based on minor third and quarter-tone relationships, connotes – paradoxically – the lament in the *St. Luke Passion*, the plea to the Father: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Christ then turns to His Mother, asking her not to cry. Would this be His answer to Her lament under the cross: *Stabat Mater*? For perhaps, the rising melodic line and dramatic tension utter the promise of glory to those who venerate the Mother of Christ.

5. An Attempt at Interpretation

The elements of Orthodox culture pointed out in *Utrenya* I and II function – quite obviously – in a full coexistence with the universe of general qualities proper to the composer of the time. These would certainly include principles of form creation (catalogue, processual, refrain-like, closed), ways of structuring the musical material (dodecaphony, quarter-tone, acoustic effects), types of articulation (traditional and unconventional), sonorist effects (e.g. clusters) and many other phenomena. All combine to create a natural synthesis of clearly Eastern, Orthodox features with those typical for European music. What is more, the composer significantly introduces elements unifying, or universalizing, the cultural universes. This is evident in the insertion

Music Example No. 5: Penderecki, *Utrenya* I, Part 4: *Nye ryday myenye, Mati*, pp. 56-57

of Greek and Latin – symbols of European culture in its Eastern and Western varieties – into the Old Church Slavonic text in the central Troparion of *Utrenya* II; it is equally striking in the liturgical phrase of "the Divine light from West and North, South and East."

Would this mean that, in the 1970s, Penderecki was a pioneer of ecumenism? Or simply that his work has always had a synthetic, universalistic tendency? Or, finally, is this an attempt to tear down the walls, to build bridges, between East and West?

Appendix: Overview on Krzysztof Penderecki's *Utrenya* I and II

Utrenya (I) – *Entombment of Christ*
for solo voices (soprano, alto, tenor, bass, basso profondo), two mixed choirs and orchestra
1970

Text:
  – liturgical, Old Church Slavonic
  – fundamental fragments from Holy Saturday Matins and Good Friday Vespers

Movements:
  1. *Troparion*
  2. The Velichaniya
  3. Heirmos
  4. Nye rydáy myenyé Máti
  5. *The Stichēra*

Utrenya (II) – *Resurrection*
for solo voices (soprano, alto, tenor, bass, basso profondo), boys' choir, two mixed choirs and orchestra
1970–71

Text:
  Old Church Slavonic liturgical texts:
  1. Text from *The Gospel According to Matthew* (28, 1-6) – fragment from Holy Saturday Liturgy
  2. Fragment from Easter Sunday Celebrations of the Pascha

Movements:
  1. *Gospel*
  2. *The Stichēra*
  3. *Psalm with the Paschal Troparion*
  4. Paschal canon (Songs No. 1, 3, 6, 9)
  6. *Paschal canon* (Song No. 8)
  5. *Kontaktion*
  6. Oiko
  7. Paschal canon (fragments of previous songs)