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Polish Music of the Second Half of the Twentieth Century as a Road to New Independence (1989)*

Towards history

George Weigel wrote of the historical and political breakthrough of the turn of the 1980s and the 1990s that first happened in Poland and then in Central Europe:

During the 1980s, something had happened in the minds and hearts of the people of east central Europe that had made '1989' not just possible, but irresistible. That 'something' I proposed, was best described as a revolution of conscience.¹

Italian philosopher Rocco Butiglione also noticed Poland's peculiar way of attaining independence: "History and its dynamics look different when viewed from the Vistula River basin than from, say Berlin, Paris, London or Washington D.C."² Weigel expanded on this thesis:

'Vistula Differenc' is best captured in reflecting on how it was that the Polish nation survived the destruction of the Polish state during the partitions of the late 18th century.[...]. Rather, the Polish nation survived through its culture – its language, its literature, its music and above all, its religion, its cult. [...] A nation in possession of its cultural identity cannot be eliminated from history, no matter what the maps may say.³

Further we read:

Culture is the most dynamic element in history; at the heart of culture is moral truth grounded in religious conviction – those twin convictions animated two of the principal architects of the Revolution of 1989, Pope John Paul II and President Vaclav Havel. And in the thought and action of these two men we may see embodied something of the spirituality of central Europe of life under communism: and its impact on our times.⁴

Vaclav Havel

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¹ George Weigel, "The Power of the Human Spirit," in: *Duchowość Europy Środkowej i Wschodniej w muzyce końca XX wieku*, ed. Krzysztof Droba, Teresa Malecka, Krzysztof Sz wajgier (Kraków: Akademia Muzyczna, 2004), 12.

² op. cit., p. 13.

³ op. cit.

⁴ op. cit., p. 14.

in his brilliant 1978 essay *The Power of the powerless* (written the same year as John Paul II's election) peeled back the cover on the dirty little secret of life under communism: that the maintenance of communist power depended on acquiescence – on not enough people being willing to say 'No' to the thick anti-culture of lies that held the whole sorry apparatus of Marxist-Leninist repression together. Havel genius was not simply to recognize this sad fact of life, however. It was to recognize that a critical mass of people capable of resisting the communist anti-culture of the lie could only gather itself on the basis of a higher and more compelling 'Yes'.⁵

Music

For the Polish composers of the latter half of the 20th century, the political crisis after the death of Stalin christened as “the Polish October of 1956” and the accompanying transitory moment of a “thaw” particularly visible in the sphere of art and culture, also became a turning point in their own creative paths. The older among them could jettison the yoke of the doctrine of socialist realism; for the generation of – roughly – 1933 (Krzysztof Penderecki, Henryk Mikołaj Górecki, Zbigniew Bujarski, Wojciech Kilar), the first International Festival of Contemporary Music “Warsaw Autumn” of 1956 coincided with their debuts as composers. This was also a time of fascination with novelty: dodecaphony, serialism, sonorism, a state shared by many Polish composers of the time.

The next turning point in post-war history of Polish music came in 1966, when Krzysztof Penderecki composed his *St. Luke Passion* and thus defined a new paradigm in Polish music. His choice of the Bible was that of what constituted, for him, the most momentous of literatures. Mieczysław Tomaszewski points out that Penderecki was

the first composer in this part of the world to break the (unwritten) rule against expressing sacred themes in art. At that point, he was simply too famous in the world at large for the communist regime to dare contradict him.⁶

He restored the passion genre to culture, a paradigm established in history as a *vehicle* for Christian ideas and, at the same time, for the ultimate values of humanism. The composer later (in 1993) reminisced:

I decided upon the passion archetype – on a 2000-year-old theme – to express not only the Passion of Christ but also the cruelty of our century, the martyrdom of Auschwitz... Today, I would also add: of Sarajevo.⁷

⁵ op. cit., p. 15.

⁶ Mieczysław Tomaszewski, *Penderecki. Bunt i wyzwolenie*. Volume I: *Rozpętanie żywiołów* (Kraków: PWM, 2008), p. 192.

⁷ Krzysztof Penderecki, honorary doctorate acceptance speech at the University of Warsaw (1993), quoted in Mieczysław Tomaszewski, *Penderecki. Trudna sztuka bycia sobą* (Kraków: Znak, 2004), p. 19.

In his *Passion*, the avant-garde meets the re-emerging tradition; this work foreshadows the development of the 1970s: the return to the category of beauty.

Crucifige.

CORI ♩ $\frac{4}{4}$

S
A
I
T
B
S
A
T
B
S
A
T
B
C

ff *mf* *ff*

Evang: Iterum autem Pilatus locutus est ad eos volens dimittere Iesum. At illi succubabant dicentes:

Basso solo *mf* *pp*

vc 1-5 6-10 *mf* *pp*

vb 1-4 5-8 *mf* *pp*

Krzysztof Penderecki, *St. Luke Passion – Crucifige*

A

4/4 2/4 4/4 3/4 5/8 2/4 4/4 3/4

tmp

org
ped

Brt
solo

Pa - ter si vis, Pa - ter trans - fer co - ni - tum o - m - ni - um a me

VC 6-10

1-4

vb

5-8

B

3/4

Brt
solo

Pa - ter, ve - rum tu - men non me - ni - sp - eran - tes, sed Tu - s

Evang: Apparuit autem illi angelus de caelo, confortans eum. Et factus in agonia, prolixius orabat. Et factus est sudor eius sicut guttae sanguinis decurrentis in terram.

1-3

VC 6-10

vb

1-4

3-8

3

Aria

5/4 4/4 2/4 5/4

ar

org

Brt
solo

Deus me - us Deus me - us, qui - a - li - um in me De - us me - us.

VC tutti

vb
tutti

Krzysztof Penderecki, *St Luke Passion – Deus meus*

Passion, performed at Kraków's Philharmonic Hall for the millennium of Poland's adoption of Christianity, has been described by Antoni Libera as "pre-figuring Dejmek's Forefather's Eve." This renowned production of Adam Mickiewicz's Romantic drama premiered at Warsaw's National Theatre in November 1967 and was lambasted by the Politburo of Poland's communist party as "anti-Russian and anti-Soviet"; its leader Władysław Gomułka called the performance "a knife in the back of Polish-Soviet friendship". On 16 January 1968, the Ministry of Art and Culture let it be known to the National Theatre that further performances were to be suspended on 1 February. The crowds in the audience on the final day called for independence. A rally at Warsaw University on 8 March triggered a whole month of unrest, political crisis, student protests, inner struggle within the communist party and a wave of anti-Semitic propaganda.

At this moment it becomes clear that, for the creative minds of art and culture – including Polish composers – of the latter half of the 20th century, the history of their native land is a significant element of their life and work, and that it often serves as their source of inspiration. It should be noted that the history in question is understood in a spiritual rather than a political sense: as a focus on the opposition between captivity and freedom in the understanding proposed by George Weigel when he defined the 1989 liberation of Poland and then that of the other countries of Central Europe as "the final revolution" and a revolution of "the spirit" rather than a revolution of "power".⁸ Very significantly, it should be added that, in its own way, music shapes this history, this road to new independence; that the music of the time was important in the "spiritual" struggle for independence that culminated in the year 1989.

The political events of the 1970s: the emergence of the opposition, the creation of the Workers' Defence Committee, the election of the Polish Pope and his pilgrimage to Poland as John Paul II all very clearly coincide with comprehensive changes of style and ideas in the work many composers. It was a time, in the words of M. Tomaszewski, "of welcoming qualities lost and rejected: religious and moral, patriotic and humanist ..."⁹

This return to formerly rejected values and to tradition both in general terms, e.g. through well-established genres or by reinstating the category of beauty, and at the level of composing technique and musical language, became necessary to fulfil the growing demand to express a message of humanism, spirituality, religious, liberty. A new manner of works appeared, like: Krzysztof Penderecki – *Dies irae* (1967), *Jutrznia I, II* (1969–70), *Magnificat*

⁸ George Weigel, "The Final Revolution. The Resistance Church and the Collapse of Communism", Kindle Edition, Oxford 2003.

⁹ Mieczysław Tomaszewski, "Symfonia polska 1944 – 1994", in: *Muzyka polska 1945 – 1995*, ed. Krzysztof Droba. Teresa Malecka, Krzysztof Sz wajgier, p. 26.

(1974), *Te Deum* (1979) to John Paul II *Lacrimosa* (1980); Henryk Mikołaj Górecki – *Ad Matrem* (1971), *II Symphony* (1972), *Amen* (1975), *III Symphony of Sorrowful Song* (1976), *Psalm Beatus vir* (1979) – to John Paul II, Wojciech Kilar – *Bogurodzica* (1975); Zbigniew Bujarski – *El Hombre* (1969 – 73); Roman Palester – *Te Deum* (1979) to John Paul II; Andrzej Panufnik – *Sinfonia Sacra* (1963), *Katyń Epitaph* (1967), *Song to the Virgin Mary*, Bloch *Anenajki* (1979), Paweł Szymański *Kyrie* (1977), *Gloria* (1979), *Lux aeterna* (1984).

The next milestone in Polish music of this time – year 1977 – the Polish premiere of Henryk Mikołaj Górecki's *Symphony No. 3 "Sorrowful Songs"* during that year's Warsaw Autumn – the premiere of an unashamedly religious piece, a frequent occurrence in its composer's *oeuvre*, built around the relationship between mother and lost child in a human and a divine dimension. Masterpiece important both from the point of view of its aesthetic as well as political and independentist meaning. The stage at a state-run institution, Warsaw's National Philharmonic, resounds with a simple song of soprano, a song and a prayer, the ending or the sequel to *Dearest Mother, Farewell*, a song of Polish defenders of Lwów of 1918; and the prayer is, no less, "Hail Mary, full of grace."¹⁰

Two years later, history enters musical creation or, perhaps more precisely, musical creation makes history. In 1979, Henryk Mikołaj Górecki composes a piece previously commissioned by Cardinal Karol Wojtyła to commemorate the 900th anniversary of the death of St. Stanislas, Bishop of condemned Kraków (1079), known for his opposition to King Bolesław the Bold, and to death by the latter. When Wojtyła becomes Pope, the composer is in two minds as to whom to celebrate with his work; the Saint or John Paul II. The result is the psalm *Beatus vir*, possibly with such a double connotation; it relates not only to St. Stanislas but also and perhaps mainly to the Pope from Poland, to whom the work is dedicated. The authorities did all they could to avoid any connection between the Pope's pilgrimage to his native country and the story of St. Stanislaw, a symbol of opposition to political power. The tension (both political and the composer's personal) that accompanied the writing of *Beatus vir* required considerable spiritual forces, and this is perhaps why the resulting composition was worthy of its *sacrum*. It is a collective and individual prayer (chorus – baritone solo): a plea for mercy, a confession of faith, an entrustment, with a self-explanatory conclusion: "O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him." The prayer has been clothed in music which is both simple – typical for Górecki at the time (modal scales, but also tonal similarities, tonal centre oscillating

¹⁰ The source of Górecki's lyrics was in a short note by Helena Wanda Błażusiakówna, written on the wall of her cell in Zakopane's Gestapo prison: "Oh Mother do not cry – Immaculate Queen of Heaven support me always." The note is accompanied by a cross and the words, "Hail Mary". Górecki learned of the Lwów provenience of the song in letters from the city's former inhabitants, who recognized it in his piece. C.f.: Adrian Thomas, *Górecki*, PWM, Kraków 1998, p. 113.

between C minor, E flat major and C major, significance of the principle of repetition) – and elevated, full of inner tension, leading to powerful climaxes and then retreating away from them. Folk music connotations (tonal instability) are interspersed with allusions of church music. The *quasi*-quotation of a psalmic tone, as it has been termed by Kinga Kiwała¹¹ performed by chorus *a cappella* in the final movement ushers in a different and unearthly re-

Henryk Mikołaj Górecki III *Symphony, part 2*

ality.

In 1980, Bohdan Pocij asked his “surprised” question on the psalm *Beatus vir*:

Why this remarkable appearance of greatness in music? Why is it that the most eminent of religion-inspired works appears at this point in time?¹²

Exactly: that was the time.

¹¹ Kinga Kiwała, *Problematyka sacrum w polskiej muzyce współczesnej na przykładzie utworów związanych z osobą Ojca Świętego Jana Pawła II*, M.A. thesis, Akademia Muzyczna, Kraków 2002, p. 74.

¹² Bohdan Pocij, *Forum kompozytorskie H.M. Góreckiego*, Polskie Radio II, 1980.

2 4 2 4 2

Cl. 1-4

Cr

S.A.

CORO

T.B.

Be-ne-di-cat nos De-us De-us nos-ter

f *ff*

vni

vniI

vi

vc

vb

allargando

Henryk Mikolaj Górecki, *Beatus vir*

The system showed its true colours after the work premiered in the presence of the Pope at Kraków's Franciscan Church. The composer was greeted in his own Academy of Music in Katowice in such a way that he resigned both from his Presidency and from his teaching there. It soon became clear that he also resigned from the main trend of his earlier *oeuvre*. He entered his late style period, dominated by chamber music, by pieces for chorus *a cappella*, mostly religious. It took some time before greater works began to appear (*Kyrie, Sanctus Adalbertus, Symphony No. 4*).

And this was the beginning of a phenomenon that continued for some time in Polish music. It concerns works associated, one way or another, with John Paul II: dedicated to the Pope, written to his poems, composed for special occasions or inspired by his teachings. Several dozen are believed to have appeared during his pontificate.

Equally noteworthy is the particular popularity of the *Te Deum* genre in the work of Polish composers of the time. Between 1979 and 2011, seventeen

Polish *Te Deum* were written; the preceding hundred years only saw fourteen.

Roman Palester *Te Deum (Hymnus pro gratiarum actione)* (1979)

Andrzej Kurylewicz *Te Deum* (1979)

Bogusław Schaeffer *Te Deum* (1979)

Krzysztof Penderecki *Te Deum* (1979/80)

Marian Sawa *Te Deum* (1980)

Marian Sawa *Te Deum* (1986)

Stanisław Moryto *Te Deum* (1995)

Krzysztof Meyer *Te Deum* op. 84 (1995)

Tadeusz Trojanowski *Te Deum* (1999)

Mirosław Niziurski *Te Deum* (1999)

Janusz Jędrzejewski *Te Deum* (2000)

Józef Świder *Te Deum* (2001)

Andrzej Działek *II Symphony "Te Deum"* (2000–2002)

Marian Sawa *Fantazja Śląska "Te Deum"* (2004)

Łukasz Urbaniak *Te Deum laudamus* (2007)

Wojciech Kilar *Te Deum* (2008)

Janusz Stalmierski *Te Deum* (2011)

Significantly, those Polish *Te Deum* written immediately before the imposition of the martial law are not solely laudatory pieces, although these were quite frequent reactions to the election of the Polish Pope and would then be dedicated to him; yet they also include highly dramatic if not tragic works. Anna Wieczorek writes in her doctoral thesis,

While the medieval hymn *Te Deum laudamus* was defined as laudatory and thanksgiving, its interpretation by Penderecki highlights its dramatic, plaintive, almost lamentational idiom. This effect is produced, among others, by the use of rhetorical figures associated with pain (*pathopoeia*) and by musical emphasis of works and lines associated with sorrow and tragedy.¹³

Te Deum by Krzysztof Penderecki – which quotes the melody of a Polish anthem of the time of captivity, *Boże coś Polskę*, sung in the 1970s and the 1980s during masses for the country or anti-communist and anti-government demonstrations – served as that composer's statement on Polish liberty. An additional patriotic effect was achieved by quoting the anthem in its then-forbidden version, with the words "Give us back, O Lord, our free country," and that was how, improbably, it appeared in the score printed by the state-owned PWM musical publishing house (but then that was the time when it was managed by Mieczysław Tomaszewski).

¹³ Anna Wieczorek, *Te Deum w muzyce polskiej przełomu XX i XXI wieku. Gatunek, funkcja, przesłanie*. Ph. D. thesis written under the supervision of Prof. Teresa Malecka, Akademia Muzyczna w Krakowie, 2018, p. 217.

Lacrimosa (Polish Requiem)

The author sees the dedications to the latter parts as “clear-cut expression of opposition, protest and dissent. They were highly provocative in the situation that saw the appearance of *Requiem*.”¹⁶: *Libera me* – to the victims of Katyń, *Recordare* – to Father Maksymilian Kolbe, *Dies irae* – to the freedom fighters of the Warsaw Uprising, *Quid sum miser* – to those of the Ghetto. The power of the historical message of *Polish Requiem* is emphasized by the intertextual combination of the work’s universe of sound with the words and the melody of the supplication *Holy God, Holy and Powerful*, customarily sung in moments of the country’s, of the nation’s jeopardy. Yet, as often in Penderecki, the finale brings words of hope: “O Lord, let them pass from death into life.” According to Regina Chłopiczka, *Polskie Requiem* constitutes “a sign of

¹⁶ op. cit.

Ciaccona

(in memoria Giovanni Paolo II)

$\frac{4}{8}$ Adagio ($\text{♩} = 64$)
con mod.

VI. I

VI. II

Va. div.

Vc.

Cb.

VI. I

VI. II

Va. div.

Vc.

Cb.

Chaconne (Polish Requiem)

Krzysztof Penderecki's deeply personal attitude towards the fate of his country.¹⁷

Polish Requiem is key work from the point of view of its independentist function, and in this context it is worthwhile to bring back the pregnant statement by Andrzej Chłopccki:

The Polish content that lives in the collective subconscious finds, thanks to Penderecki, its powerful form. It opens with *Passion*, it culminates in *Polish Requiem*.

¹⁷ Regina Chłopcicka, "Polskie Requiem", in: *Muzyka Krzysztofa Pendereckiego. Poetyka i recepcja*, ed. Mieczysław Tomaszewski Akademia Muzyczna, Kraków 1996, p. 43.

And he goes on to say: "Polish culture has been able to bear such a significant testimony of that time in music alone."¹⁸

Commentary

Has Poland's achievement of independence in 1989 and the consecutive fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of communism and the Awakening of Central Europe arrested the wave of religious creation by Polish composers? Yes and no. The generations that come after the changes – we would now refer to them as "middle" and "young" – find themselves at a different moment of culture, in the culture of postmodernism in all its varieties, in intertextuality, pluralism, deconstruction, perhaps even in posthumanity or humanity. This does not necessarily preclude significant, at times religious and at times concealed messages in later works. Krzysztof Cyran shows as much in his doctoral thesis *The Canon and Postmodernism in the Religious Oeuvre of Polish Composers at the Turn of the 20th and the 21st Centuries*¹⁹; the title is an obvious expansion of *Kanon i postmodernizm (Canon and postmodernism)*, a seminal text by Maria Piotrowska of 1997.²⁰

The most important from this point of view are: Krzysztof Penderecki, *Seven Gates of Jerusalem* (1996), *Credo* (1998), Wojciech Kilar, *Missa pro pace* (2000), Paweł Mykietyn, *Passion to St. Marek* (2008), Paweł Szymański, *Miserere na głosy i instrumenty* (1993), *In paradysum* (1995), *Viderunt omnes* (1998), Henryk Mikołaj Górecki *Kyrie* (2004–05), *Oratorio Sanctus Adalbertus* (ed. 2015).

The great masters of the earlier times have remained faithful to sacred art, to art with a message, free, this time, from historical and independentist connotations. This is no longer involved music; this is free music; and yet it is still a music of testimony.

According to Mieczysław Tomaszewski, "Polish music saw a relation between works that could be described as *musica libera* and one that deserves to be called *musica adhaerens*."²¹ One could say, then, that the work of Polish composers that led to the breakthrough of 1989 was mainly *adhaerens* (dependent, on a mission from the nation and the society); after the achievement of independence, it became *libera* (free and independent). Coming back to the opinion of George Weigel:

¹⁸ Mieczysław Tomaszewski, op.cit.

¹⁹ Krzysztof Cyran, *The Canon and Postmodernism in the Religious Oeuvre of Polish Composers at the Turn of the 20th and the 21st Centuries*, Ph. D. thesis written under the supervision of Prof. Teresa Malecka, Akademia Muzyczna w Krakowie, 2015.

²⁰ Maria Piotrowska, "Kanon i postmodernizm", in: *Muzyka 42*, 1997/1.

²¹ Mieczysław Tomaszewski, *W stronę interpretacji integralnej dzieła muzycznego*, w: idem, *Interpretacja integralna dzieła muzycznego. Rekonesans* (Kraków, Akademia Muzyczna, 2000), p. 51.

The revolution of 1989 taught us that the fundamental human 'sovereignty' is not political but spiritual: the spiritual sovereignty of the human person, which expresses itself through the creativity of individuals and the culture of nations and gives rise to a distinctive form of power. That is the sovereignty you are called to cherish, guard and ennoble. In doing so you will make an indispensable contribution to the future of freedom in central Europe and throughout the world.²²

²² George Weigel, *op. cit.* (see note 1), p. 16.