

Polish Music since Szymanowski

This book looks at Polish music since 1937 and its interaction with political and cultural turmoil. In Part One, the author places musical developments in the context of the socio-political upheavals of inter-war Poland, Nazi occupation, and the rise and fall of the Stalinist policy of socialist realism (1948–54). Part Two investigates the nature of the ‘thaw’ between 1954 and 1959, focussing on the role of the ‘Warsaw Autumn’ Festival. Part Three discusses how composers reacted to the onset of serialism by establishing increasingly individual voices in the 1960s. In addition to a discussion of ‘sonorism’ (from Penderecki to Szalonek), the author considers how different generations responded to the modernist aesthetic (Bacewicz and Lutoslawski, Baird and Serocki, Górecki and Krauze). Part Four views Polish music since the early 1970s, including the recurring issue of national identity, as well as the arrival of a talented new generation and its ironic, postmodern slant on the past.

ADRIAN THOMAS is Professor of Music at Cardiff University and is a specialist in Polish music. He is the author of monographs on Bacewicz (1985) and Górecki (1997). He also contributed over fifty entries on post-war Polish composers to *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (2001). He is currently writing a study of Lutoslawski’s Cello Concerto as well as carrying out further research into socialist realism and Polish music in the post-war decade.

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in memory of my parents

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Let all streams springing from universal art mingle freely with ours; may they impregnate, differentiate and transform it in accordance with its particular attributes. We ought not to lose organic connection with universal culture, because it is only on such a plane that a truly great, living art, including nationalistic music, can flourish.

Karol Szymanowski, 'On Contemporary Musical Opinion in Poland' (1920), in Alistair Wightman (trans. and ed.), *Szymanowski on Music* (London: Toccata Press, 1999), p. 93

Contents

List of musical examples page xiii

Preface xvii

Acknowledgements xxi

List of abbreviations xxiv

PART I The captive muse

- 1 Szymanowski and his legacy 3
- 2 The Second World War 16
- 3 Post-war reconstruction 26
- 4 Socialist realism I: its onset and genres 40
- 5 Socialist realism II: concert music 59
 Group '49 ♦ Panufnik ♦ Bacewicz ♦ Lutosławski

PART II Facing west

- 6 The 'Warsaw Autumn' 83
- 7 Engaging with the avant-garde 92

PART III The search for individual identity

- 8 The pull of tradition 113
 Bacewicz and Szabelski ♦ Baird ♦ Lutosławski ♦ Serocki
- 9 Sonorism and experimentalism 159
 The 'Polish School', sonorism, and electronic music ♦ Penderecki
 ♦ Górecki ♦ Szalonek ♦ Schaeffer
- 10 A significant hinterland 208
 Seven composers ♦ Krauze and Sikorski

PART IV Modernisms and national iconographies

- 11 Pursuing the abstract 225
 Lutosławski ♦ Penderecki
- 12 Music and symbolism I: sacred and patriotic sentiment 253
 Church and State ♦ Penderecki ♦ Górecki ♦ Kilar

- 13 Music and symbolism II: vernacular and classical icons 271
Kilar ♦ Krauze ♦ Górecki
- 14 Emigré composers 283
- 15 Young Poland 289
The 'Stalowa Wola' generation ♦ Warsaw ♦ Experimental and
electronic music

PART V Postscript

- 16 After Lutosławski 317

APPENDICES

- Appendix 1* Cultural events in Poland, 1953–6 320
- Appendix 2* 'Warsaw Autumn' repertoire, 10–21 October 1956 321
- Appendix 3* 'Warsaw Autumn' repertoire, 1958–61 324
- Appendix 4* Selected Polish chronology (1966–90) 332
- Notes* 335
- Select bibliography* 354
- Index* 366

Musical examples

Ex. 1.1	Koffler, <i>Love</i> (<i>Miłość</i> , 1931), first song (Adagio), bb. 14–22.	page 13
Ex. 1.2	Malawski, Variations (1938), fugue (Allegro Moderato), bb. 6–10.	14
Ex. 2.1	Padlewski, Sonata for solo violin (1941), opening.	20
Ex. 2.2	Regamey, Quintet (1944), ‘Intermezzo romantico’ (Lento), second section.	23
Ex. 2.3	Panufnik, <i>Tragic Overture</i> (1942, reconstructed 1945), fig. 34 (♩ = c.100).	24
Ex. 3.1	Palester, Second Symphony (1942), opening.	28
Ex. 3.2	Panufnik, <i>Lullaby</i> (<i>Kolysanka</i> , 1947), fig. 6.	34
Ex. 3.3	Panufnik, <i>Nocturne</i> (1947, rev. 1955), fig. 7.	36
Ex. 3.4	Panufnik, <i>Nocturne</i> (1947, rev. 1955), opening.	37
Ex. 3.5	Panufnik, <i>Sinfonia rustica</i> (1948), original opening of third movement.	38
Ex. 4.1	Turski, Second Symphony ‘Olympic’ (1948), first movement, opening.	50
Ex. 4.2	Turski, Second Symphony ‘Olympic’ (1948), central movement, bb. 315–17.	51
Ex. 5.1	Serocki, <i>Suite of Preludes</i> (1952), no. 2, opening.	65
Ex. 5.2	Panufnik, <i>Symphony of Peace</i> (1951), opening.	68
Ex. 5.3	Bacewicz, Concerto for String Orchestra (1948), first movement, opening.	70
Ex. 5.4	Bacewicz, Concerto for String Orchestra (1948), second movement, opening.	71
Ex. 5.5	Bacewicz, Fourth String Quartet (1951), first movement, figs. 4–6.	74
Ex. 5.6	Lutosławski, <i>Little Suite</i> (<i>Mała suita</i> , 1950), first movement ‘Fujarka’, opening.	76
Ex. 7.1	Bacewicz, <i>Music for Strings, Trumpets and Percussion</i> (1958), second movement, opening.	96
Ex. 7.2	Baird, Divertimento (1956), second movement ‘Duetto’, opening.	98
Ex. 7.3	Baird, <i>Four Essays</i> (1958), first movement, opening.	101
Ex. 7.4	Schaeffer, <i>Tertium datur</i> (1958), second movement, harpsichord part, variations 4 (closing section) and 5.	104

xiv	List of musical examples	
Ex. 7.5	Kotoński, <i>Chamber Music</i> (1958), second movement ($\downarrow = 88$), fig. 6.	105
Ex. 7.6	Penderecki, <i>Strophes</i> (1959) ($\downarrow = 66$, then touches 48 and settles on 55), bb. 69–71.	106
Ex. 7.7	Górecki, <i>Five Pieces</i> (1959), fifth movement, opening.	108
Ex. 8.1	Bacewicz, <i>Pensieri notturni</i> (1961) (Larghetto), fig. 4.	115
Ex. 8.2	Szabelski, <i>Verses (Wiersze)</i> , 1961), first movement, opening.	118
Ex. 8.3	Baird, <i>Epiphany Music</i> (1963), opening.	123
Ex. 8.4	Baird, <i>Epiphany Music</i> (1963), bb. 24–34.	124
Ex. 8.5	Baird, <i>Sinfonia breve</i> (1968), first movement, bb. 70–3.	128
Ex. 8.6	Lutosławski, <i>Trois poèmes d'Henri Michaux</i> (1963), orchestral full score with choral short score, figs. 127–35.	136
Ex. 8.7	Lutosławski, String Quartet (1964), coda section, fig. 48.	138
Ex. 8.8	Lutosławski, <i>Livre pour orchestre</i> (1968), first chapter, opening.	140
Ex. 8.9	Lutosławski, <i>Preludes and Fugue</i> (1972), fugue, figs. 38a–41.	145
Ex. 8.10	Lutosławski, <i>Les espaces du sommeil</i> (1975), figs. 63–70.	146
Ex. 8.11	Serocki, <i>Episodes</i> (1959), bb. 299–308.	149
Ex. 8.12	Serocki, <i>A piacere</i> (1963), one of three 'panels'.	151
Ex. 8.13	Serocki, <i>Dramatic Story</i> (1970), bb. 72–81.	155
Ex. 8.14	Serocki, <i>Swinging Music</i> (1970), leading up to letter M.	157
Ex. 9.1	Dobrowolski, <i>Music for Tape and Solo Oboe</i> (1964), 4'00"–4'10".	163
Ex. 9.2	Penderecki, <i>Dimensions of Time and Silence (Wymiary czasu i cisze,</i> 1960–61), figs. 14–21.	169
Ex. 9.3	Penderecki, <i>Anaklasis</i> (1959–60), opening.	170
Ex. 9.4	Penderecki, <i>Threnody</i> (1960), fig. 10.	171
Ex. 9.5	Penderecki, <i>Anaklasis</i> (1959–60), fig. 113.	172
Ex. 9.6	Penderecki, <i>Threnody</i> (1960), figs. 62–3.	174
Ex. 9.7	Penderecki, <i>Dimensions of Time and Silence</i> (1960–1), figs. 144–53.	175
Ex. 9.8	Penderecki, <i>Threnody</i> (1960), fig. 26.	176
Ex. 9.9	Penderecki, <i>Dies Irae</i> (1967), 'Apokalypsis'.	185
Ex. 9.10	Penderecki, <i>Magnificat</i> (1974), fifth movement 'Passacaglia', opening.	186
Ex. 9.11	Górecki, <i>Genesis I: Elementi</i> (1962), fig. 25.	189
Ex. 9.12	Górecki, <i>Refrain</i> (1965), sixth refrain (first half).	193
Ex. 9.13	Górecki, <i>Old Polish Music (Muzyka staropolska)</i> , 1969), start of coda.	196
Ex. 9.14	Szalonek, <i>Aarhus Music</i> (1970), part of section E.	198
Ex. 9.15	Szalonek, <i>Mutanza</i> (1968), section B.	201
Ex. 9.16	Schaeffer, <i>Nonstop</i> (1960).	204
Ex. 10.1	Bujarski, <i>Chamber Piece</i> (1963), conclusion.	211

List of musical examples		xv
Ex. 10.2	Krauze, <i>Five Unistic Pieces</i> (1963), start of no. 4.	215
Ex. 10.3	Krauze, <i>Piece for Orchestra</i> no. 1 (1969), beginning.	217
Ex. 10.4	Sikorski, <i>Echoes II</i> (1963), Sequenza III, in which the material is pre-recorded twice and one of the two voices is eliminated, leaving only its resonances.	220
Ex. 10.5	Sikorski, <i>Homophony</i> (1970), fig. 23.	221
Ex. 11.1	Bujarski, <i>Similis Greco I</i> (1979), letter B.	228
Ex. 11.2	Stachowski, <i>Madrigale dell'estate</i> (1984), conclusion of no. 1.	230
Ex. 11.3	Meyer, Seventh String Quartet (1985), opening.	231
Ex. 11.4	Lutoslawski, <i>Epitaph</i> (1979), opening.	233
Ex. 11.5	Lutoslawski, <i>Subito</i> (1992), fig. 6.	234
Ex. 11.6	Lutoslawski, Third Symphony (1983), figs. 81–2.	236
Ex. 11.7	Lutoslawski, Fourth Symphony (1992), opening.	239
Ex. 11.8	Penderecki, First Violin Concerto (1976), harmonic kernel, bb. 6–7.	241
Ex. 11.9	Penderecki, First Violin Concerto (1976), conclusion.	243
Ex. 11.10	Penderecki, Second Cello Concerto (1982), Variation III leading into Variation IV.	244
Ex. 11.11	Penderecki, Second Cello Concerto (1982), opening.	245
Ex. 11.12	Penderecki, String Trio (1991), opening of first movement.	246
Ex. 11.13	Penderecki, String Trio (1991), opening of second movement.	247
Ex. 11.14	Penderecki, Fifth Symphony (1992), Tempo di marcia before fig. 37.	250
Ex. 12.1	Opening phrases of five Polish patriotic hymns and songs: (a) 'Mother of God' ('Bogurodzica'), (b) <i>Dąbrowski Mazurka</i> (the Polish national anthem), (c) 'God, who has protected Poland' ('Boże coś Polskę'), (d) 'Song of Warsaw' ('Warszawianka') and (e) 'Hymn of 1910' ('Rota').	254
Ex. 12.2	Penderecki, <i>Polish Requiem</i> , 'Recordare' (1983), opening, incorporating reference to Polish hymn 'Holy God' ('Święty Boże').	258
Ex. 12.3	Penderecki, <i>Polish Requiem</i> , 'Lacrimoso' (1980), soprano entry.	259
Ex. 12.4	Górecki, Third Symphony (1976), third movement, soprano entry.	267
Ex. 12.5	Kilar, <i>Exodus</i> (1981), bb. 64–77.	269
Ex. 13.1	Kilar, <i>Sparkling Dance</i> (<i>Krzesany</i> , 1974), p. 16.	274
Ex. 13.2	Krauze, <i>Aus aller Welt stammende</i> (1973), opening.	275
Ex. 13.3	Górecki, First String Quartet 'Already it is Dusk' ('Już sięzmierzcha', 1988), opening.	279
Ex. 13.4	Górecki, First String Quartet 'Already it is Dusk' ('Już sięzmierzcha', 1988), bb. 307–18.	280

xvi	List of musical examples	
Ex. 15.1	Knapik, String Quartet (1980), start of second movement.	292
Ex. 15.2	Krzanowski, Study II (1974), start of first movement.	294
Ex. 15.3	Krzanowski, Second Symphony (1984), figs. 60–1.	296
Ex. 15.4	Lason, Third String Quartet (1992), start of second movement.	298
Ex. 15.5	Szymański, <i>Sonata</i> (1982), bb. 37–47.	301
Ex. 15.6	Szymański, Piano Concerto (1994), second movement, bb. 41–3.	305
Ex. 15.7	Krupowicz, <i>Only Beatrice</i> (<i>Tylko Beatricze</i> , 1988), 3'54"–4'10".	307
Ex. 15.8	Kulenty, <i>Trigon</i> (1989), p. 37.	309

Table

Table 7.1	<i>Polish Compositions 1957–9</i>	100
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Preface

In the late 1960s, I encountered two pieces of post-war Polish music: a score and recording of Lutosławski's *Trois poèmes d'Henri Michaux* and a recording of Górecki's *Refrain*. To someone being schooled in Western avant-garde modernism, their impact was immediate, not least because they managed to be both contemporary and communicative as well as sounding totally different from current Western European music. When I visited my first 'Warsaw Autumn' festival in 1970 and spent a short period of study in Kraków on a British Council grant, I discovered that this combination was characteristic of most Polish music of the time. As more scores came to my attention, I began to realise how complex were the cultural and political currents in Polish post-war music. This book is therefore an attempt to encompass those aspects that seem to me to have been central in shaping Polish music of the past sixty years or so.

I have not aimed to be comprehensive. Without resorting to long lists of composers and their works, this would have been well nigh impossible. It would also have been counterproductive, because so few of their names and titles, let alone the music itself, are known outside Poland. I hope that the many composers on whose imaginative and invigorating work I have not elaborated will forgive my concentration on what, for want of a better word, is my personal 'canon'. Over the years, many individual pieces have caught my ear, especially at the annual 'Warsaw Autumn' festival, yet it remains a fact that only a few Polish composers have international reputations. It is therefore inevitable that they should be central to any survey of post-war Polish music. In the 1960s, it was Penderecki and Lutosławski who became especially prominent; in some European countries, notably West Germany, a few other composers were also known, such as Serocki, Baird and Górecki. Only in the 1990s, however, did the music of Górecki rival that of Penderecki and Lutosławski internationally, while the profiles of Baird and Serocki faded (they both died in their fifties in 1981). There is, therefore, a revisionist ambition for this volume, which attempts to broaden the discussion in order to contextualise the music of Lutosławski, Penderecki and Górecki, counterpointing it with that of other Polish composers whose music is also worthy of attention yet which today often languishes on shelves, even in Poland.

Polish music has experienced amazing peaks and troughs in the almost seven decades since the death of Szymanowski, Poland's best-known composer of the first half of the twentieth century. The book is geared to these main turning points. The music covered in Part I, 'The captive muse', for example, is viewed through the lens of overpowering military and political circumstances. It is therefore as concerned with polemics as it is with music. It attempts to reveal how Polish composers reacted to the pressures of the Second World War and the period of socialist realism that followed in the post-war decade. 'Facing west' charts the volte-face of Polish musical culture in the second half of the 1950s as composers engaged with the Western avant-garde; particular acknowledgment is made to the pivotal role of the 'Warsaw Autumn' festival, which began in 1956. Part III, 'The search for individual identity', which covers the 1960s, is a series of composer profiles with detailed discussion of the most significant compositional issues. In some cases, the time-frame has been extended into the 1970s: Lutosławski and Penderecki's music is taken to the mid-1970s, when each showed a shift in emphasis, while the output of Baird and Serocki is considered up to the end of the decade. In their several ways, these twenty or so composers represent the range of individuality in the 1960s; they also helped, to a greater or lesser degree, to create the phenomenon often referred to as the 'Polish School' or sonorism. These profiles are therefore intended to chart the mix of distinctiveness and commonality that each composer developed. Parts IV and V are primarily concerned with developments since the early and mid-1970s, with particular emphases on the significance of continuing modernist ideals, of secular and sacred Polish traditions in the shaping of post-sonoristic idioms, and of the compositional concerns of the post-war generation of Polish composers, including elements of postmodernism and experimentalism.

This canvas is large and the range of works deserving of discussion is enormous. Bearing in mind, however, that much of the repertoire is unfamiliar outside Poland, I have tried, wherever possible, to cite and discuss works that have been published and/or recorded commercially. Fortunately, for several decades after the war, Poland's primary publishing firm, PWM, was led by a determined editorial team headed by Tadeusz Ochlewski and Mieczysław Tomaszewski. They promoted a vast array of music with innovative layouts and cover designs. Unfortunately, access to these materials outside Poland, apart from those few composers with Western publishers such as Boosey & Hawkes, Chester Music and Schott, has always been haphazard. With regard to CD recordings, certain composers have had wide Western releases (initially with reissues of Polskie Nagrania LP recordings

on Olympia, more recently with new performances issued by companies like Argo, Decca, Deutsche Grammophon, Elektra Nonesuch, EMI, Naxos, ProViva and Wergo). Most works, however, have been recorded only on the limited-issue 'chronicle' LPs, cassette tapes and CDs of performances at 'Warsaw Autumn' festivals. And while these never had wide distribution, they are often the only way to hear music by lesser-known composers as well as that by composers as high-profile as Bacewicz, Baird and Serocki whose commercial CD catalogues are woefully incomplete. Regrettably, gaining access to materials outside Poland is still difficult. Some centres do exist – such as the Central European Music Research Centre at Cardiff University (UK) and the Polish Music Center in Los Angeles (USA) – and Polish Cultural Institutes in different countries may also have conduits to recordings, scores and books.

The number of people who have enhanced my understanding of Polish music over many years is legion and I owe them all a great deal. Many composers have discussed their music with me and donated recordings and copies of unpublished scores. Just as importantly, those involved in the promotion and dissemination of Polish music have been unfailingly helpful: Mieczysław Tomaszewski, Leszek Polony, Andrzej Kosowski and their colleagues at PWM, Elżbieta Markowska, Bohdan Mazurek and Józef Patkowski at Polish Radio, Kazimierz Nowacki, Stanisław Czopowicz and Iza Hilmi at the Library of the Polish Composers' Union (ZKP), and Jolanta Bilińska and her successors at the 'Warsaw Autumn' Festival Office at ZKP. Elżbieta Szczepańska and Michał Kubicki have been a constant support over many years and without their help and advice my task would have been much more daunting. I have also, I hope, learned much from my non-Polish friends and colleagues, including Jim Samson, John Casken, Martina Homma, Charles Bodman Rae and Steven Stucky. The unreserved academic support and research funding from The Queen's University of Belfast since the early 1970s, and latterly from Cardiff University, have been crucial factors. I would also like to thank the UK Arts and Humanities Research Board, whose financial support in 2001–3 contributed to the research for Part I.

In bringing this book to its final shape, I have benefited hugely from the sage counsels and eagle eyes of several people who read part or all of the typescript: Beata Bolesławska, Anwar Ibrahim, Michał Kubicki, Nicholas Reyland and the series editor Arnold Whittall, who also witnessed my initial fascination with the music of Lutosławski and Górecki. I have been bolstered by the patient encouragement of Penny Souster, and Michael Downes and Paul Watt have assisted enormously in the final stages of production. Any

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xx

Preface

remaining errors of fact or perception are mine alone; I simply hope that what follows will spur readers to investigate this often extraordinary period of European music in new and divergent ways.

Adrian Thomas
Cardiff–London, Easter 2003

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xxiii

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Abbreviations

AK	Armia Krajowa (Home Army)
ISCM	International Society for Contemporary Music
PWM	Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne (Polish Music Publishers)
PZPR	Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza (Polish United Workers' Party)
WOSPR	Wielka Orkiestra Symfoniczna Polskiego Radia (Great Symphony Orchestra of Polish Radio)
ZKP	Związek Kompozytorów Polskich (Polish Composers' Union)