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**24th WARSAW AUTUMN INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL
OF CONTEMPORARY MUSIC
SEPTEMBER 19-28, 1980**

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The first-time visitor to the Warsaw Autumn cannot but be impressed by the length, scope and presentation of this well-established 20th-century music festival. The first-time British visitor will long remember the large and committed audiences, the concentration on *recent* contemporary music, and the chance of meeting most of Poland's leading composers and musicians from eastern Europe. The first-time visitor writing about the festival, however, is at a disadvantage in that his experience of Polish music is restricted to that which has travelled beyond the country. Not every composer is represented in each festival, and it is quite possible that a particular bias comes across in one autumn presentation by accident.

Be that as it may, the Polish music for larger ensembles heard in the 24th festival showed again the trends noticed by John Casken in his review of the 23rd: a mellowing in the music of many of the composers who excited in the 1960s and early 1970s, and less of an interest in sonority and texture for their own sake.¹ We heard seven world premieres, six Polish premieres of works mostly heard only once elsewhere, and 14 other quite recent pieces. Nearly all showed a preoccupation with one or other of the following: a return to thinking within classical forms, a basis in tonality or modality, use of ostinati for sustained effect, and a kind of romantic expressiveness; practically none exhibited any of those 1960s Polish characteristics which became world-famous.

There were several examples of what John Shepherd in his Warsaw reviews calls 'colouristic' music.² *Icarus* (1980) by Grażyna Pstronkońska-Nawratil was unashamedly a tone-poem, *Icarus* representing human dreams and desires, according to the composer; the well-judged orchestral writing redeemed it from the charge of over-obviousness. Tomasz Sikorski's *Strings in the Earth* (1979-80) was a strangely attractive work for the excellent Polish Chamber Orchestra (conductor Jerzy Maksymiuk); a sparse string piece of fluctuating but barely moving lines of limited range, romantically intense. I was unable to hear Wojciech Kilar's *Grey Mist* (1979) and it was not recorded on the cassette tapes which could be bought during the festival. It was written especially for the baritone Andrzej Bachleda with chorus and orchestra. The mainspring of the work, as so often in Kilar's music, was a folksong, from the Tatra mountains. Kilar said that he was not intending to follow this line of development any more, but he may not be able to restrain himself.

The one world premiere of a large non-Polish work also really fitted into this category. Stephen Montague's *Varshavian Spring* was written in Warsaw in 1973, but it was performed at the festival in a revised version. Like several of the works played, it experimented with orchestral positioning, having four groups of voices and instruments,

and played the Poles at their own game with its long-held notes slowly and minimally changing. It was particularly well received by the audience who were prepared to enter into its atmospheric sound world.

Two quite different works had religious themes. The charmingly simple *Carmen biblicum* (1979-80), was written by Augustyn Bloch for his wife, the soprano Halina Łukomska, and was performed by her and members of the London Sinfonietta. It impressed by its very simplicity and the well-judged relationship between the voice, singing chant-like psalm settings, and the different tone-colours of the instruments. Górecki's long and intense *Beatus vir* (1979) was obviously written with great emotion. Commissioned by the Pope, while he was still a cardinal, to commemorate the 900th anniversary of the martyrdom of St Stanisław, also once Bishop of Cracow, it was first performed in 1979 in Cracow Cathedral by the Cracow Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir in the Pope's presence. The same forces, with baritone Jerzy Artysz and conductor Jerzy Katlewicz, gave it in Warsaw. Although I missed this piece as well (it was the one concert out of 25 that I didn't attend), I have the tape of the performance, and the emotion still comes through. The rather well-calculated effect is based largely on two constantly repeated chords (C-E flat-C, B-E flat-B), which build up an overwhelming fervour. I would judge that this work, which lasts about 35 minutes, would immediately appeal to English choral societies and their audiences.

A significant number of the new Polish works presented themselves as symphonies or concertos. Nothing wrong with that, but few appeared less than uneasy in both form and style. In fact the surest essays were those of the most senior composers - Kazimierz Sikorski's new Symphony no. 5, an uncompromising statement and strongly realised, and Zygmunt Mycielski's Symphony no. 4 (1972), not symphonic in form but working out austere implications of a particular series of notes. Aleksander Lason's Symphony for Wind Instruments, Percussion and Two Pianos, written in 1976 (and winner of a UNESCO competition), was cast in a more familiar contemporary European mould and created a record for the number of percussion players on stage during the festival - nine were needed for the second movement, not

counting the pianos. Aleksander Glinkowski's *Sinfonia mesta e tranquilla* for alto, choir and orchestra (1979) was back among the *ostinati*.

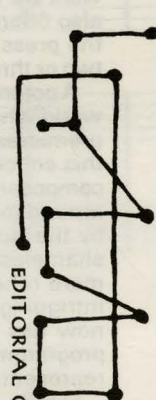
There were three works for violin and orchestra. Zygmunt Krauze's Violin Concerto (1979-80), played by Konstant Kulka and the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra, had an electrifying opening two minutes, an intense and quite romantic statement for full orchestra, which turned out to be the only material used for the whole work, the solo violin interpreting it in an almost gypsy style. The other violin concerto, that by Edward Pallasz written during 1977 and 1978, had as soloist Wanda Wilkomirska. It came in a long and difficult programme given by the Silesian Philharmonic Orchestra who were not originally engaged. This particular work seemed to suffer from lack of rehearsal time and received a performance that became slower and slower; but its quite interesting elements were never integrated. Zbigniew Bujarski's *Concerto per archi* (1979) for violin (Miss Wilkomirska again) and string orchestra was the most backward-looking work in the festival, the composer falling victim to the romantic possibilities of the string instruments.

I rather liked Dobrowolski's offering this year, a *Passacaglia* (1978-79) for full orchestra, a gradual working-out and transformation of a theme heard first on the strings. Others found it overlong, and it was certainly unrepresentative of most of his music known in Britain.

What then of the most well-known of Polish composers, Lutosławski and Penderecki? One of the causes célèbres of the festival was the withdrawal by Penderecki of his Second Symphony from the opening concert. It had already been heard, of course, in New York and Edinburgh, and rumours flew as to why Polish audiences were to be denied the chance of hearing it. Officially all that was said was that Penderecki had withdrawn it for 'revision and extension'. The only Penderecki work played was therefore a slight *Capriccio* for the tuba player Zdzisław Piernik, who must have been disappointed at the unadventurous nature of a piece for which he had been waiting some years.

Lutosławski was received with much respect, the festival offering two works which had had recent premieres elsewhere. The Double Concerto for oboe, harp and chamber

1	Evans on Piano	MARJORIE TICHENOR
2	9/15/1980	DAVID HICKS
4	(a loss too soon.)	J. K. RANDALL
7	GABURO	
11	Competenza Maledetta	WILLIAM BROOKS
49	Surfing is Harder than you Think	HARLEY GABER
99	On Kenneth Gaburo's LINGUA I: POESIES	SUSAN MOTYCKA
107	To One Of Those Who Do In Deed Leave Traces	HERBERT BRÜN GARY MITRO SUSAN PARENTI SAMUEL MAGRILL MARK SULLIVAN ARUN CHANDRA MARK ENSLIN DAVID GROTHE HERBERT BRÜN KENNETH GABURO
	with a response from	
135	On Gaburo as a Teacher	PAUL PACCIONE
137	For Kenneth Gaburo: A Personal Note	ROBERT SHALLENBERG
141	l e t t e r s G a b u r o n	RON JEFFERS
160	ADVT. → REPEAT AFTER ME	J. K. RANDALL
	Brain: ... Half A Whole	KENNETH GABURO



orchestra (1980) has now been heard in Britain, performed, as at Warsaw, by the soloists for whom it was written, Heinz and Ursula Holliger. I find it difficult to write about this three-movement work. A long time gestating in the composer's mind – 15 years, he said – it is beautifully written, shows off both solo instruments, and places them exquisitely against the chamber orchestra, particularly the percussion; but it has just not remained in my mind – not the rhapsodical first movement, juxtaposing soloists and scrubbing strings, the 'night music' middle movement, or the grotesqueries of the final march. Lutosławski's short *Epitafium* (1979) for oboe and piano, premiered in London in January 1980, was also presented to the Poles, by Holliger and Szabolcs Esztényi, and was immediately encored entire.

There is no doubt that the use of brilliant new sounds, the striving after effect, the flashy, have largely gone from the Polish scene. The romantic simplicity that prevails, if I may be so bold as to reduce all I heard to two words, seemed a rather inadequate substitute, and not much of a pointer to the future. It was interesting, in fact, to find how often the name of Szymanowski was invoked and his music cited, and how often his musical ideas actually surfaced in modern works (notably in a string quartet by Andrzej Krzanowski). One felt, however, that the mood was part not only of the world-wide reactionary movement, but also of a particular nationalistic ferment common to all Poland's affairs, not just its music, at present. Composers write out of the society in which they live. Thus the works heard in the 1981 festival may well build constructively on the more tentative ideas of 1980.

It did not help, perhaps, that all the Polish electronic music, and that of other composers, was bundled into 'ghetto' concerts on two afternoons, not even billed in the official programme. Schäffer's only piece in the festival appeared in these concerts, as did works by a number of the younger composers. The early-evening and late-night concerts also turned up some interesting works – there was a worthwhile essay for piano and percussion by Krystyna Moszumańska-Nazar, a percussion work by Zbigniew Rudziński which I liked, and an interesting string quartet by Marek Stachowski.

The whole debate about the paths of Polish music was provocatively opened up by the mischievous presentation by Witold Szalonek of a *Nocturne* for string orchestra, harp and baritone, which he said, in his programme note, had been written in 1953, lost, and reconstructed here from the recently found sketches. I wonder. He deplores the fact that composers are abandoning new techniques before they have been explored and absorbed. The *Nocturne* (which sounded almost Debussyan) – part of what the encyclopedias call, Szalonek says, his 'folk-classical' phase – was happily received, and was not out of place at all in the prevailing sound of the big concerts. I would love to be present at some of the discussions this work should initiate.

Other countries featured were Holland and Britain, and the Soviet Union through performers rather than works. There was very little music from other countries, but a concentration on two seemed to me preferable. It was interesting to see what the local audiences liked of the unfamiliar. They did not take to repetition pieces, for instance, and nor, surprisingly, did Frederic Rzewski's playing of his variations *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!* impress them by its compositional variety, its musical intentions, or the composer's own virtuosity. The piece unfortunately appeared to become an unwitting participant in the Polish debate referred to above.

Holland was represented by Het Residentie Orchestra conducted by Ernest Bour in two concerts of large-scale orchestral music. We were denied the chance of hearing Wim Laman's *Canto infernale*, withdrawn by the composer on the grounds that the orchestra had not prepared it thoroughly enough – a pity, as it could have been instructively compared with all the Polish choral offerings. In the event the orchestra seemed well prepared, with much bright and brilliant brass playing, and the programmes showed two current Dutch preoccupations rather well. On one side we had the social comment of Peter Jan Wagemans's *Alla marcia* (1977) for tuba solo and eleven instruments (a dissection of the elements of march) and Guus Janssen's *Dance of the Malic Matrices* (1976-78) for piano and wind which satirised classical piano concertos. On the other side was Theo Loevendie's smash hit *Six Turkish Folk Poems* (1977), lush settings which were spoilt for me because I could not hear the soprano Dorothy Dorow from my position in the hall. I fear that the work of Matthijs Vermeulen, whose Symphony no. 4 (1940-41) was played, will always be more important to the Dutch than to the outside world. The most exhilarating work

of the whole festival for me was Otto Ketting's Symphony for saxophones and orchestra (1977-78), a joyful piece of extended repetition, building to marvellous brass climaxes, and *not* liked by the Poles. Why, I do not know, for its writing for saxophone quartet and for the brass was brilliant and the piece made its musical statement in unashamed delight. It may pall on a second hearing: I hope I get a chance in Britain to find out.

The English music was generally well received. It was all for small ensemble as the one large piece promised, David Bedford's *Star Clusters*, was a casualty of the change of orchestras for the last two concerts. Both the London Sinfonietta (under Ronald Zollman) and Electric Phoenix, however, gave concerts of a high standard, and showed off the work of six of the younger generation of British composers – Bedford, John Casken, Michael Finnissy, Robin Holloway, Roger Marsh and Nigel Osborne. Between them the works showed a sure handling of the small ensemble, a quite different musical language from that of the Polish works, and yet six individual voices.

Apart from the odd piece here and there, it was left, curiously, to the Russians to provide nearly all of the older music heard in the festival. The presence of Sviatoslav Richter and his playing made a highlight. A solo retrospective of the piano music of Prokofiev from 1913 to 1947 was followed by a recital in which Richter appeared with viola player Yuri Bashmet in Shostakovich's Sonata op. 177, with the soprano Galina Pisarenko in Szymanowski's *Songs of a Mad Muezzin* and with the Moscow Conservatory Ensemble in Janáček's *Concertino*. Incidentally the Szymanowski performance won the prize for the best interpretation of a Polish work in the festival. Finally, Richter appeared with Oleg Kagan (violin) and the Ensemble again in a demanding concert of Hindemith's and Berg's chamber concertos and an arresting Violin Concerto by Alfred Shnitke, written in 1976, which rather showed up the concertos for this instrument heard in other concerts. The Conservatory Ensemble, students and recent ex-students, played impeccably. The playing of the Moscow Symphony Orchestra (conductor, Veronica Dudarova) was disappointingly lacklustre, although last year's find, the cellist Ivan Monigetti, impressed in the Shostakovich Second Cello Concerto. A dreadful 'public' work by Vyacheslav Artyomov, *The Road to Olympus*, was also offered. The composer, interestingly enough, talked in the press conference the next day of his participation, with two or three other composers, in an improvisation ensemble.

A potentially interesting concert gave a lightning tour of the world when Krauze's Music Workshop performed 27 world premieres of dances written especially for the group and for this concert. Krauze apparently wrote to a large number of composers assuming that only about ten or so would ever get around to completing their five-minute pieces. Embarrassed by the number that did get committed to paper, the group shamelessly cut every dance and obviously needed much more rehearsal. The two-hour late-night concert remained intriguing to the end, if one stayed the course, and the group now has a large number of light pieces to enliven future programmes. Michael Nyman was the only English representative.

Finally, I should mention that we had a concert in which one half was billed as 'Live Computer Music'. What, I wonder, is dead computer music? (Some may say, most of that which is being written...) What it was was a world premiere of a work called *Felder* by Roland Pfrengle and performed by him and flautist Eberhard Blum on flutes, synthesizer and computer. The composer realises that his work using computer on stage is still unpolished, but even this imperfect early performance of the piece was promising. Pfrengle, incidentally, has his own studio in West Berlin.

NOTES:

¹ *Contact* 21 (Autumn 1980), pp. 26-28.

² *Contact* 15 (Winter 1976-77), pp. 41-42, and *Contact* 20 (Autumn 1979), pp. 35-36.