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Concerts and Records

WARSAW AUTUMN FESTIVAL 1975

JOHN CASKEN

The 19th Warsaw Autumn International Festival of Contemporary Music was held between September 20 and 28, 1975. The organisers presented a full and varied programme with three concerts each day and a press conference the following morning. In a relaxed and informal atmosphere composers answered questions about their works, and performers were there to openly discuss with the composers the previous day's concerts. Altogether 82 composers were represented, with a total of 98 works. 25 of these composers were Polish, with 27 Polish works. The list of first performances was impressive, with 16 world premieres (eleven of these by Polish composers) as well as 45 first Polish performances. Very few changes were made to the programme, concerts began on time, and played to large and interested, if not always enthusiastic audiences. In general the programme notes were well prepared, although some translations read rather awkwardly, and the occasional misprint was unfortunately amusing (e.g. "The pleasure of participating in communal slinging is well known").

There was an impressive number of representations from other countries. Eastern European countries represented were Hungary (eleven composers), Yugoslavia (one), Czechoslovakia (one — Martinu!), and a number of Russian composers were presented in a concert given by the Tallin Chamber Choir. Western Europe fared less well, although the Trio Mobile of Copenhagen gave an interesting all-Scandinavian programme.

From Germany there were works by Hans-Karsten Raecke, Josef Anton Riedl and Dieter Schnebel. Raecke's *Raster* (1973) for two prepared pianos with four players is a systemic piece inspired by the principle of raster pictures and sounding like music from West Africa. Riedl is co-founder of the electronic studio in Munich, and he organises fantastic open-air spectacles consisting of pieces marrying sound and visual objects (e.g. *Vielleicht-Duo*, described as Light/Scene/Environment/Action). In Schnebel's *Choralvorspiele III* for organ with accompanying instruments and tape, the possibilities of complementing the organ sounds (pipe sounds, mechanical sounds and motor and wind sounds) are wide-ranging, but were not all used in the performance given by Gerd Zacher. Nevertheless, the music's striving "to reach, through the sphere of sacrum and restraint, the area of freedom" was well captured.

France was represented by Messiaen (organ works) and Francois-Bernard Mâche's *Naluan* for tape and chamber ensemble. Sadly, Harrison Birtwistle was the sole British composer in the festival: Jane Manning sang his *Cantata* with the Ensemble 20. Jahrhundert from Vienna conducted by Peter Burwick. Ton Bruynel was similarly the only Dutch composer, but caused quite a sensation with his *Phases* for quadraphonic tape and orchestra. He describes it as a symphonic piece in two parts, but a piece in which "intonation and figuration has been avoided in order to free the timbre from instrumental habits and usages". The overall impact of *Phases* is of a large sound mass moving in space. The tape part consists of amorphous noise comprising all the audible tones, on to which the sounds of the orchestra are projected and blended. The resultant sound is rich, and although it never goes anywhere it is never still. As usual the PRTV Symphony Orchestra from Katowice played marvellously, and the conductor was the talented Jerzy Maksymiuk.¹

Unfortunately, I was unable to attend any of the concerts including music by Bussotti, Nono and Manzoni, but was able to hear works from South America. I particularly liked *Mein blaues Klavier* (1969-70) for organ by the Chilean Juan Allende-Blin. From Brazil, Almeida Prado's *Aurora* for piano solo, wind quintet and orchestra (given in a version for two pianos) was disappointing, but Marlos Nobre's First String Quartet was thorough and not uninteresting.

As usual, North Americans, both spectators and composers, were there in force. Eleven American composers were heard, and together they spanned more than 60 years of music ranging from Ives to the most recent trends. The Center of the Creative Arts from

Buffalo received a stormy reception with Lejaren Hiller's non-descript *A Portfolio*, and most people found Feldman's *Instruments* very hard to take: both are long and uneventful. But the Wilanów String Quartet who played Ives' Second String Quartet and Crumb's *Black Angels* in separate concerts received rapturous applause. The Ives was well done, and they managed, sensibly, to integrate the quotations without emphasising them. Their performance of the Crumb was impressive but unfortunately spoiled by bad amplification, with too much background noise and high distortion. For this reason the piece's surrealist qualities came over less well. *Dialogues II* (1975) by Dennis Eberhard for percussion solo, tape, lights and projections is a pantomime piece for one performer. This worked well as music-theatre, and as well as being one of the most 'outrageous' works of the festival was also one of the most enjoyable.

Other major pre-war composers represented apart from Ives were Schoenberg and Janáček. Roswitha Trexler (soprano) and Roman Ortner (piano) gave a rather perfunctory performance of Schoenberg's *Das Buch der Hängenden Gärten*: the uplifting sensuality of these songs was hardly present at all. Janacek's *Cunning Little Vixen* and *From the House of the Dead* were performed by the State Theatre Operatic Ensemble from Brno. The presentation of the former was delightful, very simplistic and very colourful. The singing was good and the orchestra excellent. There were nice touches, such as the animals smoking and huge bluebells used as flash cameras at the wedding. *From the House of the Dead* was well produced on the whole but rather wooden in performance. Yet the play within the play (Act Two) was splendid, with a nice contrast between the hopeless desolation of the prison and 'the breath of air' suggested by the entertainment. The soliloquy of the final act, I feel, is too long, and the symbolic freeing of the eagle at the end of the opera was not as effective as it should have been.

The main purpose of the Warsaw Autumn, however, is to provide an international platform for Poland's own composers. Of these, particularly memorable was Włodzimierz Kotoński's *Aeolian Harp* (1972) for soprano (Roswitha Trexler) and four instrumentalists playing an assortment of instruments: three zithers, acoustic and electric bass guitars, lute, psaltery (Hackbrett), two jew's harps, small chimes, recorder and electric organ, all of which undergo slight amplification. This is one of Kotoński's best works and shows great originality in combining these timbres. The music is largely hypnotic and quiet, and the interesting mixture of ethnic sounds is an important part of a movement away from Western European art music as we understand it (cf. Partch's work).

Zygmunt Krauze, a composer some 13 years younger than Kotoński, has emerged recently as Poland's most interesting and progressive younger composer. His new use of folk music (especially Polish) and folk instruments, though not as 'coloured' as in Kotoński's work, is yet another example of a departure from Western post-Renaissance traditions. But Krauze freely uses quotation and collage in preference to original invention and strict notation. *Fête galante et pastorale* (1974-75) is a spatial piece written on commission from the Musikprotokoll 74 Festival in Graz for the Castle of Eggenberg, where the whole floor of the castle (26 rooms) was filled with 13 sound layers from tapes situated in 13 different rooms. Also six instrumental ensembles performed live music. In the concert version performed in Warsaw the piece was reshaped to form a sequence of sound changes, imitating a listener's experience of walking through the rooms. The work, a kind of kaleidoscopic historical anthology, incorporating blurred tonalities and systemic patterns, caused some interesting audience reactions, with some people openly and freely expressing their approval.

Kazimierz Serocki's *Concerto alla cadenza per flauto a becco e orchestra* (1974) shows yet again this composer's incredible technique and his unceasing exploration of the possibilities of new sound-combinations, yet all whipped up into characteristic energy and ebullience. This is a most exciting work, and if over-long, the constant barrage of ideas at least keeps the listener attentive. Again the use of recorder and orchestra (the soloist using six recorders and six separate mouthpieces) perhaps suggests that, more and

more, composers are now looking to instruments outside the orchestra.

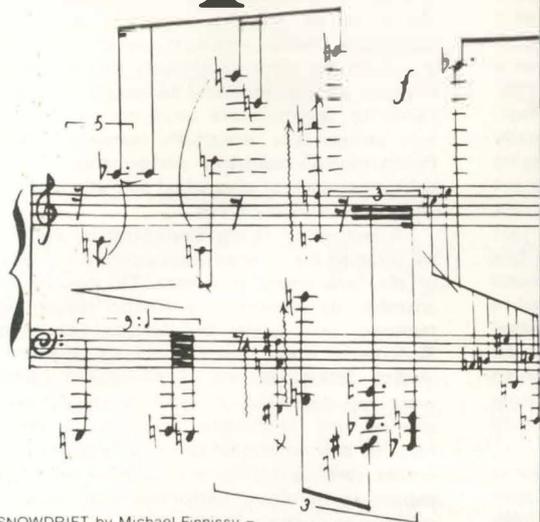
Two lesser-known Polish composers produced quite interesting works. The Katowice orchestra performed three movements from Barbara Buczkówna's seven-movement *Anekumena*, a concerto for 89 instruments. These were characterised by a kind of mezzo-forte busyness with little differentiation of events but a nice sense of colour. The Concerto for percussion by Zbigniew Bargielski was equally active but far more purposeful. Conceived as a block-variation structure, it had some most attractive sounds; coincidentally, the most interesting were orient-inspired (e.g. high oboes with rattling metallic percussion).

The Cathedral of St. John was packed for an all-Penderecki concert. The short *When Jacob Awoke* (1974) I thought very interesting, with plenty of bite, rhythmic drive and engaging (and audible!) details formed into a good shape. His *Magnificat* (1974) was far less concentrated and contained a good number of Pendereckisms. Krzysztof Knittel, as the youngest Pole, was represented by *points/lines* (1973) for clarinet, tapes and slides, showing the influence of American and German ideas. The overall effect, if interesting in itself, was a little thin. Baird, Dobrowolski, Meyer, Stachowski and Bogusław Schäffer, as more senior Poles, produced interesting works, but those presented in this year's festival showed a preference for consolidation rather than experimentation.

NOTES:

1 Bruyner's *Phases* was played later at the ISCM Festival in Paris. For further comment on the piece, see the review that follows. (Ed.)

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