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MUSIC FROM SILESIA

The quarterly journal "Polish Music" regularly lists all performances throughout the world of works by Polish composers and it is very distressing to observe how seldom Polish music is played in this country. (The situation has been partially remedied this year when Polish works were a special feature of the 1972 Edinburgh Festival). Yet, considering the tremendously important role which Polish music has played in recent developments, a disproportionate amount of listening time still seems to be accorded it in Britain, even though two of Lutoslawski's finest works (Paroles Tissées and the Cello Concerto) were commissioned by this country and first performed here. But Lutosławski and Penderecki apart, Polish music is frequently misunderstood in Britain.

I remember reading a review of Tadeusz Baird's Four Essays for Orchestra after a concert in London last December, and how shocked and angry I was when the critic wrote, "I should have felt happier had one of the Four Essays presented a faster and tougher line, but, by the standards of Eastern European proletarian music, these pieces were both adventurous and imaginative." Anyone who has even the slightest knowledge of Poland (an Eastern European country?), with its post-war culture and post-Stalinist freedom in the arts, not to mention an understanding of the individual composers, could never have written those words - the complete antithesis of Polish achievement. Such is the state of understanding in Britain at the moment. Perhaps it will improve after Edinburgh.

There is also the equally wrong assumption that the most widely known Polish composers in Britain - Lutosławski and Penderecki - are still totally representative of modern Polish music. So they are to a great extent, as well as being responsible for a great many recent developments. Because of these men, and others like Serocki, we can speak of a Polish 'school' of composition. No other country has such a modern national school. But within this national unit are many diversified trends and styles - and yet their ultimate goal seems to be one and the same: a Polish sonority. What I aim to do in this article is to put forward the names of three composers as representatives of the middle generation in Poland and as artists working along quite different lines from Lutosławski, Penderecki or Baird.

After the Nazis tried ruthlessly to wipe out all traces of Poland's culture and cultural heritage, the Polish people made fantastic efforts to re-establish its respectability on all levels. The building of primary and secondary schools and academies of music in many provincial towns and cities helped to re-establish a musical culture throughout Poland. While Warsaw remains the chief centre there are many others with considerable power and achievement behind them. One of the most dynamic centres is Katowice where there is a very active academy - and the best Polish orchestra I have heard. This is where Witold Szalonek, Wojciech Kilar, and Henryk

Mikołaj Górecki are working and in comparison with other composers living outside Warsaw these three form a very impressive group indeed.

Katowice is situated in Silesia, an industrial area of Poland which has always been renowned for its music-making - a particularly famous and popular outcome of which is the native folk music, spread by the Slask Song and Dance Ensemble. Szalonek and Kilar both studied at the Academy of Music (or to give it its official title, the State Higher School for Music) with Bolesław Woytowicz, and Górecki studied there with Bolesław Szabelski.

In his more recent works, Szalonek (b. 1927) has been occupied with using a new kind of sound material, particularly in relation to wind instruments. He felt that in most Polish contemporary music the new and very Polish string textures were not matched by a similarly revolutionary sound material for the wind. He has always been attracted by 'sound', especially that used by non-European cultures, and found the solution to his problem in experiments with sound-possibilities of wind-blown instruments. This was not until after 1963 when he had finished working on the Concertino for Flute and Orchestra, in which he wrote whole sections of the second movement to be performed on the mouth-piece and pitch pipe of the flute separately. His researches were extremely extensive and the techniques employed include special blowing methods, altering the fingering for certain notes and providing new combinations of fingering (producing combined tones), and the different effects of using side trill keys to produce combined tones. The latter is used particularly on the clarinet where the main note is held, and either one, two, or three side keys are trilled simultaneously, giving vibrations of different qualities.

A work which aptly demonstrates these techniques is Proporzioni (1967), for harp trio. The flute player is asked at times to enclose the mouth-hole tightly with the lips, to blow with such a pressure as to produce the highest overtone, and then to stop the mouth-hole quickly with the tongue. Another indication is a diminished blowing pressure and a loosening of the lips to produce a non-mechanical lowering of the sound, which is used in conjunction with the 'combined-tone-technique'. Szalonek's raw material is sound itself, and his new technique has been incorporated into Les Sons for symphony orchestra (1965), Quattro Monologhi per Oboe Solo (1966), Mutazioni per Orchestra (1966), Proporzioni and Improvisations Sonoristiques for clarinet, trombone, cello and piano (1968). The latter illustrates Szalonek's work very well, but is not as successful a work as Proporzioni, where musical invention, sonority and form are admirably woven together with none of the stitches left showing. The progression of the music through time is intensified by the plan: introduction, followed by sections one to five, with distinct ideas from all sections projected forward, anticipating the next section and at the same time giving added perspective and relevance to the climax.

Replying to a criticism that he uses unnatural or degenerate sounds, Szalonek quoted Webern's definition of music - "Tone, music, is the reflection of natural laws in their relation to the sense of hearing." "Thus," says Szalonek, "every sound may be used in certain specific conditions to express musical substance."

Wojciech Kilar (b.1932), in his more recent works has concerned himself with an extraordinary simplicity of material. His principal early works include Riff 62 for orchestra (1962), Générique for orchestra (1963), Diphongos for choir and orchestra (1964), Springfield Sonnet for orchestra (1965) and Solenne (1967), which together form one distinct part of his output. Kilar believes that the musical expression of his compositions is weakened if they repeat what has gone before. For this reason he regards Training 68 (1968) as the first work to result from fresh ideas since Riff 62. Not having written chamber music for ten years, he saw the composition as an exercise (training). The sound material is evolved from the opening cello motive C sharp, D sharp, C sharp, in its lowest position, with matching durations of semibreve, minim and dotted semibreve. This uneasily static material on one plane, and the exactly measured pauses on the other, presents a two-strata sound-structure similar to that which we will find in the music of Gorecki.

After the interruption on his work of Alleluia (for huge forces), and the discovery of the powers of simple material (cf. David Bedford), Kilar began his Upstairs-Downstairs for soprano and orchestra which he completed in 1971. It is in this work that Kilar's thesis is fully presented....." a kind of continuation of my efforts to make music out of nothing, out of elements that are frequently considered as secondary and minor in importance, as a 'background' ". The musical drama in this work arises from an almost emotional regard for the diminished triad which is approached, confronted and eventually transformed by other single notes into a minor triad, and ultimately into a major triad.

By taking this stand, Kilar is not fighting against the present musical situation, but trying to reflect his own personal condition. His current ideas are not in line with many other Polish composers but may be superficially compared with more Western trends (e.g. Stockhausen and Bedford). Yet, at the same time, his work is constructed into one sonorous whole with the emphasis on the progression of sonority, and in this respect Kilar is in direct line from the developments of Polish music in the late 50's and early 60's.

Henryk Mikołaj Górecki (b.1933) is the most remarkable and prolific member of this group of composers, and perhaps, the most outstanding of the younger-middle generation of composers working in Poland at the moment. His first important compositions, which appeared in

1955, are Four Preludes for piano Op. 1, and the Toccata for two pianos Op. 2. In 1958 he was awarded the Local Artistic Prize for Young Composers, and in 1960 he took part in a competition sponsored by the Youth Circle Association of Polish Composers and was awarded first prize for his Monologhi Op. 16, for soprano and three groups of instruments, set to his own words. I'm not sure if there is any connection between this work and Berio's Circles (also 1960), but the two works are strangely similar in the forces employed and in the instrumental textures.

Górecki's first really significant work after the Concerto for Five Instruments and String Quartet (1957) is Scontri (Collisions) for large orchestra (1960). From his earliest works Górecki's music is composed, like much post-Webernian music, of very emphatic features, and in Scontri the extreme expressions of dynamics give the work an almost granite-like quality. The orchestra is divided into four groups of instruments: woodwind (12), brass (12), percussion (52) and strings (30.12.10.8). These are operated through two kinds of sound disposition. The first is a sound complex (on the horizontal or vertical) of a varied number from 1-12, and the second, of a varied number from 1-88. Górecki tried to break away from the traditional division of sound in space by specifying a particular seating arrangement. The music is then written in a literally stereophonic manner through the construction of twelve collision courses. These are then followed through triangular movements in space so that sounds travel toward one another from various parts of the orchestra, collide, and then break away (cf. Monologhi and Genesis II). Spatial sound-division such as this has been widely used in recent years, and particularly by Poles such as Górecki, Serocki (Epizody for strings and three groups of percussion (1959), and Dobrowolski (Music for strings, two groups of wind instruments and two loudspeakers (1967)).

The form of Scontri is difficult to grasp at first, but running through the inter-related blocks of sound is a determined internal symmetry. Górecki decides on the kind of symmetrical plan he wants for these blocks and the conclusion is then a logical outcome of the beginning, in the same way that Messiaen's non-retrogradable rhythms are self-constructing.

In his trilogy Genesis (1962-63), Górecki's musical style is much less complex than in Scontri. Genesis I - Elementi per tre archi presents sectionalised ideas, but uses a more direct minimal notation and leaves the rhythm of some repeated ideas up to the performer. In this way the composer aims at a more natural kind of complexity and can concentrate on a more direct expression and juxtaposition of his ideas. In Genesis II - Canti strumentali per 15 esecutori, the same directness of expression is seen but with a further departure. As a contrast to the sustained string writing of the opening (the extension of a note), Górecki introduces the piano (two performers) whose material consists of tone-

clusters. The idea is insistently repeated (the extension of an idea) with only subtle changes. Genesis III - Monodram per soprano, metalli di percussione e sei violbassi follows a similar line to that taken in parts I and II.

Choros I - per strumenti ad arco (1964) marks yet another new departure in Górecki's music. The repeated ideas in Genesis were of a rather aleatoric nature. Now, in Choros, the composer is quite specific, notating exact notes in an audible register. From this point Górecki's argument is concerned with intervallic relationships as well as colour relationships, and this fact is greatly aided by extreme simplicity and an almost ceremonial repetition of, and insistence on, his ideas. The opening is clearly written in triple metre, one strand of sound (violas) playing consistently 'pp' with one note per beat, and the second strand (violins and cellos) playing sustained crescendo clusters which act against the regularity of the violas. The large middle section is more free, yet from the graphic spacing of notes within the bar lines it is quite clear to the performer where the notes must be placed in the bar. The section consists of repeated two-bar units whose notes remain the same for great stretches at a time. The interaction and opposition (collision?) of repeated ideas on different planes fading in and out of focus is extended to the end of the work whose conclusion gives maximum justification to the techniques involved.

In Refrain for Orchestra (1965), Górecki's ideas of simplicity, varied repetition, symmetry, insistence and the exploration of the qualities of intervallic relationships are even more evident. The first section of the ABA structure begins with the strings playing in unison: C, C, D flat, C, C, (in the rhythm - dotted minim, minim, dm., m., dm., (crotchet equals 26 - 28)). This totally symmetrical unit foreshadows the whole constructional logic of the work. To each successively longer appearance of this unit a major second is added until the augmented fourth (C-F sharp) is reached, thus providing a series of parallel whole-tone chords. The second section destroys the hypnotic calm of the first with wind and strings playing whole-tone chords 'marcatissimo' (crotchet = 132-138), and the brass and percussion chipping bits out of the main body of sound. The whole of this rhythmic structure is worked out beforehand and the groups of repeated chords (1, 2, 3 or 5 times repeated) form a large unit whose rhythm and pitch is non-retrogradable. This severe application of symmetry makes Refrain even further removed from Choros, and from this work extended sections are self-contained and not faded into succeeding ones.

Later works such as Muzyczka 2 for four trumpets, four trombones, two pianos and percussion (1967), or Old Polish Music for orchestra (1969) also exhibit a preference for clear-cut sections, but with small groups of notes taking over from long sustained sounds. Yet Canticum Graduum for

orchestra (1969) uses only sustained writing, which suggests that even though Górecki has made a decidedly clear progression from his works of the late 50's and early 60's, he has as yet neither found his style nor reached the peak of his artistic output.

While a lot of Polish composers can sometimes be accused of using clichés, Górecki has, from the very start, been outstandingly original. At the early age of 27 he produced Scontri which in many ways was far ahead of the music being written by his mature contemporaries. What has marked the Polish school is their outstanding originality, and Górecki, even as a young man, was one of the very first original Polish composers. Through simplicity and insistence his art has a directness and purpose which only the greater composers possess.

It is quite a feat when a country can boast more than one major centre of musical composition. Witold Szalonek has said, "Silesia stands not only for coal and steel, but also for culture and art". If only Britain could boast centres of composition in its industrial areas.....

JOHN CASKEN.