25TH WARSAW AUTUMN INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

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Poland in the hot sun of last September was in a surprisingly robust frame of mind. For all the shortages and uncertainties, there surfaced time and again that spirit of determination and resilience which has so characterised this country over the centuries. The 25th Warsaw Autumn was no exception, for it mounted as varied a programme as was financially possible (no large-scale opera this time) and survived last-minute cancellations with rueful smiles. Unfortunately the absence of the Georgian State Symphony Orchestra from Tbilisi deprived us of the world premières of the second version of Alfred Shnitke's *Cantus perpetuus* (1981) and of *Mountains* (1979-80) by the young Polish composer Aleksander Lasoń (b. 1951). Similarly, the first Polish performance of Krzysztof Meyer's *Interludio drammatico* (1980) failed to materialise when the Gruppe Neue Musik Hanns Eisler from Leipzig decided not to cross over from East Germany.

Among the remaining non-Polish participants, there was a disappointingly unrehearsed Ensemble 20. Jahrhundert from Vienna, conducted by Peter Burwik, in two programmes of Webern and Reich, although the group's leader gave an excellent account of Webern's op.7 and it was a joy to hear Franz Schreker's rarely performed *Kammersymphonie.* I missed an apparently superb performance of Messiaen's *Visions de l'Amen* by the Turkish duo Elif and Bedii Aran, and also a female students' chamber choir from Plovdiv, Bulgaria. Of performances by Polish ensembles, one predictably stood out. The Polish Chamber Orchestra under its conductor Jerzy Maksymiuk is undeniably the finest orchestra in Poland; its concert, given by the strings halfway through the festival, was brilliant, and never more so than in Maksymiuk's dramatic reading of Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht.* I'll be returning to the Polish pieces in this programme later. Two other performances rose to the occasion, notably of works that also soared above the general level of musical inspiration: one was the performance by the Polish Radio and TV Symphony Orchestra from Cracow, under its conductor Antoni Wit, of Xenakis's *Aïs* (1980); the other was that by the National Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra of Cristobal Halffter's *Elegias a la muerte de tres poetas españoles* (1975), conducted by the composer.

Aïs, 'the land of the dead', uses fragments of *The Odyssey,* Sappho, and *The Iliad* in a ritualistic evocation of the beyond, demanding great virtuosity from the amplified baritone (Spyros Sakkas) and the percussionist (Stanisław Skoczyński). With its vivid orchestral writing and clear ideas, this was music that spoke directly and naturally through its unaffected return to basic musical impulses. Halffter's *Elegias* shared something of this quality, although by over-extending his ideas he weakened what was otherwise a work of some passion. Of the other 'foreign' pieces in the festival one was particularly impressive—Joji Yuasa's warmly resonant *Scenes from Basho* (1980)—and one particularly boorish—Donald Erb's Cello Concerto (1975).

But for the visitor to the Warsaw Autumn it is the Polish music that provides the barometer of the contemporary Polish musical ethos. I have to say that, with one or two distinctive exceptions and one or two idiosyncratic aberrations, the forecast from the start was 'low and unchanging'. The opening concert was overshadowed by the death two weeks earlier of Tadeusz Baird (b. 1928) and the death earlier in the year of Kazimierz Serocki (b. 1922). These two had been largely responsible for the founding of the Warsaw Autumn Festival in the difficult mid-1950s, and in his foreword to this year's programme Baird touched upon the central reasons for starting the festival, reasons that are as valid today as they were 25 years ago. Baird's *Concerto lugubre* (1975), heard previously at the 1976 festival, had been programmed before his death and provided a melancholic and flawed reminder of the lyrical and fragmented impulses that permeate his music, while Serocki's *Poezje* (1969) came across mainly as a poignant throw-back to the earlier days of Polish post-expressionism.

Each of the relatively well-known surviving members of the generation of Polish composers born in the 1920s and 1930s was represented, with the exception of Augustyn Bloch, Andrzej Dobrowolski (now working in Austria) and Witold Szalonek (working in West Berlin). And a mixed bag of tricks this group proved to be. Włodzimierz Kotoński's orchestral *Sirocco* (1980) lurched from one belch of hot air to another, its featureless ineffectuality meeting with as cool a reception from a Polish audience as I can remember. On the other hand Wojciech Kilar's *Exodus* for choir and orchestra (1981), in his now familiar block-buster vein, received rapturous if cheeky applause (including a bleeting sheep somewhere in the audience). A poor man's *Bolero*/'Mars' with more than a touch of the wide-screen *Exodus,* Kilar's monothematic piece—conceived, so we were proudly informed, in only two minutes—stolidly circumnavigated itself for a full half hour. Kilar claimed later in an interview on Polish

Radio that *Exodus* was written in solidarity with Solidarity, though in the light of more recent events its deliberate martial character could well be ascribed to other forces. Trite though it was, *Exodus* was probably the only piece whose theme the festival audience was humming as it left. The sense of general creative depression was not helped by Zygmunt Krauze, whose *Diptychos* for organ (1981) lacked all imagination and betrayed an excruciatingly naive dependence on chains of primitive suspensions. Krauze's near contemporary Tomasz Sikorski maintained his minimalist posture with *Hymnos* for piano (1979), played with controlled abandon by the composer, but its 20 or so figures with their brief repetitions proved neither entrancing nor dynamically cumulative.

As so often in the past, it was the music of Henryk Mikołaj Górecki and Bogusław Schäffer that succeeded in raising the temperature. Górecki is known for his rigorous economy and restraint which sometimes border on the simplistic. His Harpsichord Concerto (1980), stunningly played by Elżbieta Chojnacka and the strings of the Polish Chamber Orchestra, is quite possibly the jolliest and most flirtatious piece he has written. Only his unpublished *Pieśni o radości i rytmie* (Songs of joy and rhythm; 1956) for two pianos and orchestra shows a comparable élan. The first part of the Harpsichord Concerto also looks back to works like *Refren* (Refrain; 1965) with its rapid repeated figurations, irregular flourishes, and the gradual accumulation of melodic line and harmony. The wrist-fracturing passage-work for the soloist in the second part, however, became a sort of manic pursuit after Poulenc. Quite where this unlikely Concerto is leading Górecki is unclear, but its reception, encore and all, reinforced the impression that the Polish public this year openly favoured the popular end of the market.

Bogusław Schäffer—the Black Sheep of Polish music—continues to surprise. Who else could have kept an audience enthralled from 11 p.m. to gone 1 a.m. with a continually varied sequence of music-theatre pieces such as he devised this year? He showed his loving irreverence for *Tristan* in his jazzy *BlueS I* for two pianos and tape (1972); his *Out of Tune II* (1980), for dead-pan cellist ('What I did do?'), Chico Marx pianist, and straight soprano, was a superb piece of vaudeville; and his more searching *Kwartet* for four actors (1966), which ranged from musical allusions and acrobatic sculpture to intricate word-play and behavioural experiments, was a brilliant hour-long *tour de force* which even those who did not fully understand Polish could appreciate in large measure. Schäffer is clearly supremely confident in cocking a snook at the contemporary conventions taken so seriously elsewhere.

When I was last in Warsaw, in 1976, the names of Andrzej Panufnik and Roman Palester were still taboo. Now the rehabilitation of these two exiles seems secure. Panufnik was represented by his mild but beautifully crafted *Concertino* for percussion and strings (1980), while from Palester we heard the first performance of his substantially revised *Metamorphosen* for orchestra (1966), not a work of great individuality, but chock-a-block with ideas and plentiful echoes of Hindemith.

There was rarely a glint of gold among the dross served up by lesser-known Polish composers, most of them born in the 1940s and 1950s. Of the better works, Marek Stachowski's *Choreia* for orchestra (1980) was typically secure and idiomatic, but the structural imbalance created by concluding this slow ritualistic piece with what was essentially a fast coda remained unsolved. Zbigniew Penherski's *String Play* (1980), a sort of 'Hello' Symphony in one movement, barely survived its incidental humour. One composer who often impresses in his modest way is Zbigniew Bujarski, a contemporary of Penderecki and Górecki. He is probably best known for his music of the mid-1960s, *Kinoth* for chamber orchestra (1963), and *Contraria* for symphony orchestra (1965). On this occasion we heard his *Kwartet na otwarcie domu* (Quartet for the opening of a house; 1980), written for a chamber music festival held at Penderecki's sumptuous residence near Cracow. Although Bujarski calls it an occasional piece, it unfolded as one of the most substantial and persuasive of this year's offerings. Its language is rather Bartókian, but what was refreshing was Bujarski's ability to weld his ideas into a musical argument. Like the String Quartet (1980) by the younger Eugeniusz Knapik (b. 1951), Bujarski's quartet incorporates into a generally non-tonal fabric references to cadential and triadic formulae with a naturalness and purpose absent in other Polish compositions that attempted similar tonal rapprochements.

Four Polish composers were accorded a first appearance on a Warsaw Autumn programme this year: Paweł Buczyński (b. 1953), Georg Katzer (b. 1935), Andrzej Roman Kurylewicz (b. 1932), and Ryszard Szeremata (b. 1952). The younger pair easily outstripped their elders. Szeremeta's *Advocatus diaboli* for symphony orchestra (1980-81) was a worthy attempt at jazz–classical fusion, which emerged as a sort of up-beat Ruggles. The sequences were too obvious, the strings were drowned, but for all its predictability it was at least a lively conclusion to an otherwise tedious concert by the Łódź State Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra under Andrzej Markowski, in which Aurèle Nicolet and Heinz Holliger battled valiantly against compositional and orchestral odds in two double concertos by Edison Denisov (1978) and Paul-Heinz Dittrich (1980). Buczyński's *Muzyka opadających liści* (Music of falling leaves; 1980) came during the concert given by the strings of the Polish Chamber Orchestra. This work won first prize in the 1980 Young Composers' Competition of the Polish Composers' Union. To judge from the music of Buczyński's contemporaries heard at the festival it was a worthy winner, forthright and strong at the outset, moving gradually towards a subtle and gentle lyricism. Buczyński's sense of tone colour and his handling of tonality were masterly.

Buczyński, at 28, was the youngest Polish composer represented in the festival proper, and I had to go to an extra 11 p.m. concert in the Academy of Music to hear pieces by composers in their early or mid-twenties. I can understand the repertory committee being reluctant to risk a 'student' work in a main concert, but at least two of the seven composers in this chamber recital deserved a wider hearing than they got at so poorly supported a fringe event. Marcin Błażewicz's String Quartet was enthusiastically performed by the student players, who vividly captured its concentrated and gutsy imagery. Renata Kunkel's *Penetracje* (Penetrations) for flute and percussion (Skoczyński in fine form again) outshone the works by the four woman composers in the official festival (Bernadetta Matuszczak's *Canticum per voci ed orchestra* (1978-9), Krystyna Moszumańska-Nazar's Second String Quartet (1979), Grażyna Pstrokońska-Nawratil's *Arabeski* for string quartet (1980), and Marta Ptaszyńska's *Dream Lands, Magic Spaces* for violin, piano, and percussion (1979)). Kunkel's finely judged control of sonorities between flute and percussion was matched by a flawless sense of timing.

And what of the two figures who still dominate the Polish image at home and abroad? There were in fact two works each from Lutosławski and Penderecki. Lutosławski's *Grave* for cello and piano (1981) is anything but grave. The dynamically swirling cello writing is strongly complemented by the harmonic support of the piano, and its structure is more adventurous than his other recent work for solo instrument and piano, the oboe *Epitaph*. The *Novelette* for orchestra (1979) received its Polish première in the opening concert with the Polish Radio National Symphony Orchestra from Katowice conducted by Jacek Kasprzyk. Unlike any of his other works since *Jeux vénitiens, Novelette* thunders in *forte* with repeated chords such as those found at the climax of the Cello Concerto. And although Lutosławski integrates this idea early in the piece, the return of the chords at the very end shows a marked departure from his previous works in that the forward momentum created by the favourite Lutosławskian structure of preparation (three Events) and dénouement (Conclusion) is put, as it were, in quotation marks by this final cadence. It sets the seal on a rather light-hearted work which recalls the skittish qualities of the Double Concerto and his rekindled interest in melody in *Mi-parti*. It will be interesting to see how he finally conceives his Third Symphony for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra: it may be some time before we hear it because Lutosławski has spent the last two years on the main movement only to set it aside in order to start afresh.

The talking-point at the close of the festival was the Second Symphony (1980) by Penderecki. Some of us had earlier stood for 40 minutes in a crowded St Anne's Cathedral for his *Te Deum* (1979), with its muddled turn-of-the-century mixture of Verdi, Wagner, Stanford, and Florent Schmitt; there was no denying the effect of its full-blooded choral writing and of the excited use of the orchestra, but the inclusion of a Polish patriotic hymn seemed superfluous to Pole and non-Pole alike. The whole affair had a morose and rancid quality: compared with Schäffer's use of archaic liturgical idioms in his *Missa elettronica* (1976) or Górecki's many recollections of simple choral styles, this *Te Deum* was an ingloriously cobbled artefact. The Second Symphony, postponed from last year's festival, was similarly disturbing,

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although in this instance the unchallenged model for the pastiche was Bruckner. Once again, forgetting that this was 1981, one could occasionally appreciate the power of the orchestral writing, but it was poor-quality Bruckner and the inclusion of the opening phrase of *Stille Nacht* was utterly specious. This Symphony bears no audible resemblance whatsoever to Penderecki's music of the 1960s and 1970s, and many commented on the implausibility of artistic integrity's bridging such a gap. Penderecki's motives may be suspect, but the Polish public lapped it up. No doubt the hard-line arbiters of taste further east will seize upon this Second Symphony as a new, 'acceptable' face of contemporary music, and who knows what that will lead to?

I cannot end this report without mentioning another 'extra' concert of electronic music put on by the doughty Experimental Studio of Polish Radio. Held in the welcome coolness of the underground Mały Teatr, the programme included Krzysztof Baculewski's punchy and raunchy *Quartier latin* (1981), Elżbieta Sikora's rather strident *La tête d'Orfée* (1981), and Bohdan Mazurek's delightfully gentle musings and jazzy dance rhythms in his *Six Electronic Preludes* (1981).

What is going to happen to the 1982 Warsaw Autumn no one can tell. The outlook is grim: on a purely practical level, I was told, for example, that the Studio at Polish Radio had enough tape to last only until December 1981. On its past record, the Warsaw Autumn should resurface with even more determination, but I hope to hear Polish music with more adventure and grit than was evident this time.