

# *Between the Lines:* *Reading into* *Marek Stachowski's* *Self-Reflections*

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## ABSTRACT

Marek Stachowski: composer, teacher, and vice-chancellor, one of cultural Kraków's most outstanding figures, died prematurely in 2004. The tenth anniversary of his death is an occasion to review the works he left behind as well as his extensive reflections on his own output and on the state of art in general. Reading into the numerous opinions regarding his own activity as a composer, we have found significant statements that confirm three distinctive qualities of Marek Stachowski's artistic personality. First and foremost, his deep conviction of being predestined for the profession and an awareness of his aesthetic roots; secondly, the ability to analyse his own creative achievements; and finally, the rationalisation of the creative act while maintaining a distance towards his own work.

Marek Stachowski's oeuvre comprises 56 catalogued compositions, both small- and large-scale, vocal and instrumental, reflecting the various paths of Polish music in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: from sonoristic avant-garde to the "New Classicism." Throughout these transformations, however, we can perceive some stable individual qualities of his musical language, namely: clarity of structure, sophistication of sound and the leading role of expression.

**Keywords:** Marek Stachowski, Krakow School of Composers, Polish Contemporary Music

## INTRODUCTION

Marek Stachowski: composer, teacher, and vice-chancellor, one of cultural Kraków's most outstanding figures, died prematurely in 2004. The tenth anniversary of his death is an occasion to review the works he left behind as well as his extensive reflections on his own output and on the state of art in general. Reading into the numerous opinions regarding his own activity as a composer, we have found significant statements that confirm three distinctive qualities of Marek Stachowski's artistic personality.

First and foremost, there is his **deep conviction of being predestined for the profession, and an awareness of his aesthetic roots**. "I tried to compose from a very early age," the composer reminisced, though he also added: "I have destroyed much of it, almost everything that I had written before my student times, and even earlier, before secondary school [...] those pieces were really *juvenilia*."<sup>1</sup> After some years he admitted to Małgorzata Janicka-Słysz:

I feel comfortable in a romanticising aesthetic. However, I can move to a different track at any time. Such a change is not necessarily dictated by fashion. I like change and development, even if there is also a certain repetitiveness in my music. Does a composer always have to be *en vogue* at any cost? The music I want to write is always deeply rooted within me and I'm convinced from the start of the relevance of what I want to do. The only problem is how to find the right form and means of expression at a given stage of my creative life. I feel young enough to continue to modify my aesthetic views.<sup>2</sup>

Two distinct elements may be inferred from these words. The first is a classical standpoint resulting in an "image" of the artist's music often defined as creative elegance. "Because my music is elegant," Stachowski admitted, "it cannot be trivial. If I am meant to explore any ambiguous or suggestive content, then this should be done as it was in the Age of Enlightenment. A little piquancy might be introduced as an allusive erotic undertone, but the whole remained elegant nonetheless."<sup>3</sup> The second attitude – a romantic one – manifests itself in Stachowski's music as the imperative of the superiority of expression:

Deep within me is the imperative of intense expression. It is more important than the choice of expressive means. Language changes, but emotions remain the same. My first compositions reflect all the musical trends of those times: flirting with the aleatory technique, playing with graphic notation and a search for a unique system for each individual composition. But there also, even though I took advantage of all the attributes of that time – a harsh violent sound, extremes of dynamics and expression – the emotions were the same as those present in my music today.<sup>4</sup>

Stachowski's second feature is **the ability to analyse his own creative achievements**. In fact, the composer himself aptly described his personal path of musical development. He would say about his early works: "These compositions were maintained in the style of Lutosławski's *Mala suite* (*Little Suite*), although they had nothing to do with folklore. [...] I started working [on *String Quartet* No. 1 – note by A.D.] even before my studies; one can still hear Neo-Classical tones in it ..."<sup>5</sup>

The sonorist period also appeared in his recollections: "I quickly found myself in the middle of the avant-garde [...]. The most recent musical language simply fascinated

1 A. Woźniakowska, (2005). *Trzeba umieć marzyć. Rozmowy z Markiem Stachowskim* [You Have to Know How to Dream. Conversations with Marek Stachowski]. Kraków: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, p. 31

2 M. Janicka-Słysz, (1994). *Elegancja z pieprzykiem* [Elegance with a Bit of Spice], *STUDIO*. No. 5, p. 24.

3 *Ibid.*

4 *Ibid.*

5 *Ibid.*, pp. 24, 27.

me.”<sup>6</sup> Stachowski admitted to a creative quest: “I tried my hand at all genres,”<sup>7</sup> he said, and added: “After the *Divertimento* I started to search radically and intensely for what I really wished to achieve, though in that process I did not discard all the evident achievements of the sonorist era, which in my opinion are still present in my music.” Still, “I am not a revolutionary type.”<sup>8</sup> He also often signalled his attachment to the traditional rules of composition: formal development, as well as sensitivity to harmony, motoric elements and colour.

Penderecki instilled the cult of form in me. I myself always wanted to create my own harmony, melody and expression... That is why musicologists – noticing my two inclinations: a romanticising streak combined with strict formal discipline – claimed that my aesthetics was the aesthetics of elegant music,”

Stachowski confessed to Adam Korzeniowski.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, the third feature of the composer of *Birds* is **the rationalisation of the creative act while maintaining a distance towards his profession.** “My regimen is based on the assumption that every year I have to write at least two compositions. I manage to meet this objective. However, when illness hit me I learned to maintain some distance...”<sup>10</sup> Indeed, in statistical terms, the composer created an average of one and a half compositions a year, of which only four exceeded 30 minutes. Until the end of the 1970s the majority of his works were about 12 minutes long; later they grew longer, approximating 20 minutes. Perhaps this was related to Stachowski's natural qualities, such as an inclination to postpone things until the last minute (“I always finished everything at the last moment. [...] Be it a composition or a review, one paper or another, I always wrote it in a hurry”) and an inborn economy of expressive means combined with a certain sensitivity to the way listeners perceived music:

If you don't have a clear outline of a plan imposing a certain discipline, if you write spontaneously, you lose control of the passage of time, and music should after all develop in time. The psychology of perception clearly indicates that a listener is tolerant at first and patiently listens to the exposition. Rapid changes in that section result in a sense of being unfulfilled and somehow lost. The listener

must also unconsciously sense the development of the music; music should have a clear direction. You cannot bore your audience equally in the beginning and in the end.<sup>11</sup>

## A REVIEW OF FORMS AND GENRES

Marek Stachowski's oeuvre comprises 56 catalogued compositions, both small- and large-scale, vocal and instrumental, reflecting the various paths of Polish music in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: from sonoristic avant-garde to the “New Classicism”. Throughout these transformations, however, some permanent individual qualities of his musical language can be discerned: clarity of structure, sophistication of sound and the decisive role of expression. Those qualities are undoubtedly the result of the composer's personal interests, his knowledge of ancient culture, advanced mathematics and literature (“I read a lot of poetry!” he confessed<sup>12</sup>) and conscious choices of sources of inspiration, the analysis of which results in a cohesive image of a complete and consistent artist. Thus, three groups of compositions may be distinguished in Stachowski's vocal and instrumental oeuvre: chamber music for special, individually selected line-ups, large-scale vocal-instrumental and symphonic forms for large ensembles, as well as choral music. The majority of his vocal-instrumental compositions were written in the 1960s and 70s, during the period of his youthful fascination with the existing forms and styles as well as already mature attempts to express his own identity. It was in that period that grand cantata forms dominated in his music: *Z księgi godzin* (*From the Book of Hours*), *Chant de l'espoir*, *Słowa* (*Words*), *Śpiewy thakuryjskie* (*Thakurian Chants*), interdependent chamber music cycles: *Pięć zmysłów i róża* (*Five Senses and a Rose*) for voice and four instruments of 1964, and *Ptaki* (*Birds*) – completed twelve years later. The 1980s brought four more compositions: two of a similar, chamber-like character (*Amoretti*, *Madrigali dell'estate*) and two large-scale ones: a cycle of songs with orchestra entitled *Symfonia pieśni tęsknotą uświęconych* (*Symphony of Songs Sanctified by Nostalgia*) and the phenomenal *Ody safickie* (*Sapphic Odes*), which was in fact his last vocal composition inspired by a personal impulse. His later choral compositions are occasional music. In his self-reflection on *Thakurian Chants*, Marek Stachowski admitted that the text was always the starting point for his musical ideas, that it was “the expression

6 A. Woźniakowska, (2005). op. cit., p. 27.

7 Ibid., p. 28.

8 Ibid., p. 36.

9 A. Korzeniowski, (2004). *O edukacji artystycznej. Rozmowa z prof. Markiem Stachowskim, rektorem Akademii Muzycznej w Krakowie* [About Artistic Education. An Interview with Professor Marek Stachowski, Vice-Chancellor of the Academy of Music in Kraków]. <http://www.wsp.krakow.pl/konspekt/18/gosc18.html> (accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2015).

10 A. Woźniakowska, (2005). *Trzeba umieć marzyć*, op. cit., p. 44

11 Ibid., p. 29.

12 *Studiowałem hieroglify* [I Have Studied the Hieroglyphs] (2001). An interview of Jowita Dziedzic and Ewa Cichoń with Marek Stachowski, *Ruch Muzyczny*. No. 11, p. 11.

of the four selected poems that decided about the choice of suitable form and type of musical expression harmonising with the expression of the poems.”<sup>13</sup> The composer would often emphasise selected motifs and symbols contained in the text with corresponding figures of texture and sound, thus forming verbal-musical links. Those figures have structural and dramatic sense as well as semantic significance.

Marek Stachowski's instrumental works – also abounding in meanings, written as if in response to words concealed in the mind of the composer – constitute three-fourths of his entire output. The largest group is formed by several dozen works for a small ensemble, drawing to a greater or lesser extent on traditional chamber genres. These are, on one hand, solo pieces, duets, trios and multi-part string quartets (four, composed in the years 1963–2001) as well as short one-part works for string quartet written for special occasions, such as *Musica per quartetto d'archi* (1965), *Quartetto da ingresso* (1980), and *Musica festeggiante per quartetto d'archi* (1995). On the other hand, the composer wrote a number of works that confirm his interest in unique line-ups, with a distinct preference for the clarinet and string instruments. He once admitted: “The clarinet is my second favourite instrument after the cello. Its colour fascinates me, especially in the low register, as also do its exceptional possibilities of dynamic shading. If we also consider the extent of the clarinet's range and significant technical flexibility, it is an instrument that has always inspired me.”<sup>14</sup> The following compositions should be mentioned in this context: *Pezzo grazioso* for brass quintet (1982), *Tre intermezzi per trio d'archi* (1993–94), *Trio* for clarinet, cello and piano (1999), and *Miroir du Temps* for clarinet, violin, cello, and piano (2002–3). One of the traditional genres readily taken up by Stachowski is the instrumental concerto, represented by three compositions: *Concerto per violoncello ed orchestra d'archi* (1988), *Concerto per viola ed orchestra d'archi* (1998), and *Concerto per percussioni ed orchestra* (2000). *Concertante* writing in the general sense of the word is represented by, among others, *Concertino claricellato* for clarinet, cello and string orchestra (2001), *Sequenze concertanti* (1968), and *Chamber Concerto* (1989). Finally, the composer's output also includes large-scale forms for vast performing forces. Just as his chamber music, Stachowski's symphonic compositions demonstrate his proficiency in contemporary sonorist language, emphasising an abundance of articulations and sound possibilities (e.g. *Irisation* – 1970, *Musique solennelle* – 1973 and *Poème sonore* – 1975, as well as

in traditional types of expression, reflecting a nostalgia for the clarity of melody, harmony and rhythm (e.g. *Choreia* – 1980, *Capriccio* – 1983, and the symphonic triptych *From the Book of Night* – 1990–2000). This attachment to tradition – especially that of the Romance-language world – is instantly recognisable in such titles as: *Musica da camera*, *Musique solennelle*, *Quodlibet*, or *Jeu parti*, or in the headings of individual movements, frequently marked as *preludio*, *prologo* or *sinfonia*, *passacaglia*, *corale*, *canzona*, *intermezzo* or *interludium*.

### DEVELOPMENT OF MUSICAL LANGUAGE

Taking a bird's-eye view at Marek Stachowski's work, we may interpret it in terms of changes in his individual technique and style, from his earliest attempts to his last works. Some, as Leszek Polony, distinguish three significant turning points in the composer's development: his youthful style influenced by the cycle *Five Senses and a Rose*; then the change from pure sonorism to its dramatised form in *Poème sonore*; and a synthesis of musical language, represented by the symphonic triptych *From the Book of Night* and the quartet *Miroir du Temps*.<sup>15</sup> Maciej Jabłoński<sup>16</sup> moves the boundaries of these stages and, including also the early years, he distinguishes three periods. The first was a time of fascination with sonorism, albeit approached in a highly individual manner; its best manifestation is *Poème sonore* of 1975. Later came a period of dialogue with the Classicist and Romantic traditions, as represented by the *Divertimento* of 1978, the new simplicity of *Choreia* (1981), the orderliness of *String Quartet* No. 3 (1988), as well as the revival of the Impressionist aura in *Sapphic Odes* (1985) and the triptych *From the Book of Night* completed in 2000. Finally, his late period integrates stylistic elements from his earlier works, as in *Miroir du Temps* of 2003. These two periodisations, based on the transformations in technique in Marek Stachowski's music, can also be supplemented by one simultaneously taking into account qualities of the musical language and historical-chronological contexts.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in: K. Płoskoń, (2004). *Marek Stachowski. Katalog tematyczny utworów [Marek Stachowski. A Thematic Catalogue of Works]*, Kraków: Academy of Music in Kraków, p. 51.

<sup>14</sup> K. Płoskoń, (2004). *Marek Stachowski*, op. cit., p. 129.

<sup>15</sup> L. Polony, (2004). *Przyczynek do syntezy twórczości Marka Stachowskiego [Towards a Synthesis of Marek Stachowski's Oeuvre]*. In: K. Płoskoń (2004). *Marek Stachowski*, op. cit., pp. 7–12.

<sup>16</sup> M. Jabłoński, (2007). *Twórczość Marka Stachowskiego w kontekście fenomenu polskiej szkoły kompozytorskiej [The Works of Marek Stachowski in the Context of the Phenomenon of the Polish School of Composition]*. In: *Marek Stachowski i jego muzyka [Marek Stachowski and His Music]*, Kraków: Academy of Music in Kraków.



Stachowski's first, early period is a time of school experiments in the **Neo-Classical style**, lasting until 1963, of which only *String Quartet No. 1* remains to our day. The composer explained that the *Quartet* "is a reflection of a certain aesthetic attitude that formed during my years at the secondary music school in Kraków"<sup>17</sup> – where his teachers included Stanisław Czerny and Franciszek Skołyszewski.

In his second period, covering the years 1964–76, Stachowski explores various **aspects of sonorism** from chamber music through vocal-instrumental works to pure instrumental sonorism, whose climax was *Poème sonore* – the composition which the author himself considered as the first major turning point on his artistic path: "critics are right when they see *Poème sonore* as a breakthrough. However, I would not be able to decide whether this composition closes a ten-year period of my work or perhaps it already opens the next stage."<sup>18</sup>

Finally, the third, last and longest period – from 1978 – is one of **dialogue with the past**. Three phases or "times" may be distinguished within this period:

1. the time of "light" (1978–84) – movement, senses and the element of life, as in the *Divertimento*, *Chorea* and *Madrigali dell'estate*;
2. the time of "shadow" (1985–98) – lyrical contemplation of the relation between life and death;
3. the time of "depth" (1999–2003) – attention focused on inner experience in the face of the death of his loved ones as well as his own.

In addition to period-defining strategies, a classification strategy is useful in a synthetic approach to Marek Stachowski's work. Such a strategy distinguishes, within the periods, groups of compositions united by common techniques and stylistic concepts. Thus, sonorism, in Stachowski's interpretation, assumes most frequently – apart from its pure form – **the form of dialogue with other techniques**: serialism, concertante and aleatory; **with media**: with instruments, with the human voice; with a literary text; and **with stage forms**: music of action and instrumental theatre. For example, in his commentary on the composition *Musica per quartetto d'archi* from 1965, the composer admitted: "*Musica* bears all the traits of an early form of sonorist technique, although the echoes of post-serialist techniques continue to be heard."<sup>19</sup>

Initiating a dialogue with the past (in the general sense), Stachowski skilfully combines freshly developed

composition techniques based on sonorism with traditionally conceived elements of melody, harmony and rhythm, and finally with the forms, genres and styles characteristic of certain musical trends. In the composer's reflection on the origin of *Sonata per archi* of 1991, we read:

The title of the composition refers to the original meaning of the word *sonata*, which meant: a cyclical instrumental composition. One should not, however, look in this piece for a sonata form in the traditional sense of the word. Rather, we are dealing here with an attempt to convey the expressive aura of a classical sonata. Hence the associations of the second part of the work with the sonata scherzo, due above all to a clear rhythmic contour and the use of a ternary form with reprise. The third part is an atmospheric nocturne, whereas the finale brings back motifs from the previous parts, especially the first one.<sup>20</sup>

Simultaneously with the main current of his work, Stachowski also wrote compositions for special occasions, representing two types of emotionality: mournful, whose synonym in terms of sound is the cello; and festive, for choral ensembles. A 1999 composition dedicated to the memory of the composer's wife, *Recitativo e la preghiera* for cello and string orchestra, creates an extraordinary impression. Stachowski wrote: "The internal need for reflection on the ultimate things imposed simplicity on this work's composition, which is reflected in the maximum reduction of technical resources, especially in the main part of the composition: a prayer preceded by a recitative introduction."<sup>21</sup>

A comment by Krystyna Moszumańska-Nazar can well serve as a conclusion to our survey of Marek Stachowski's work. His output of compositions forms a coherent whole, she claimed – a kind of monolith dominated by three distinctive qualities: mastery of technique and the nobility and fullness of expression.<sup>22</sup> Similar opinions have been voiced concerning the work of Tadeusz Baird, which was a major inspiration for Stachowski and compelled his undisguised admiration. "What I always find convincing in Baird's music," Sierpiński wrote in 1968, "is the author's ability to reconcile contemporary composition techniques with profound feeling that his music is imbued with, subtly presented to the audience."<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>22</sup> Dyskusja okrągłego stołu [Round-Table Discussion] (2007). In: Marek Stachowski i jego muzyka [Marek Stachowski and His Music], Kraków: Academy of Music in Kraków, p. 84.

<sup>23</sup> Z. Sierpiński, (2<sup>nd</sup> October 1968). Nadzieja i rozczarowanie [Hope and Disappointment], Życie Warszawy. No. 237, p. 4, quoted after: B. Literska (2012). Tadeusz Baird. Kompozytor, dzieło, recepcja [Tadeusz Baird. Composer, Work, Reception]. Zielona Góra: Oficyna Wydawnicza Uniwersytetu Zielonogórskiego, p. 456.

<sup>17</sup> K. Płoskoń, (2004). Marek Stachowski, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

Similar associations can be found in opinions concerning Stachowski's works. What is evident in the statements of his colleagues and students is a certain similarity of language used to define the composer's technique and his personality. For example, they often speak of Stachowski's respect both for the individuality of the student and for principles of form or instrumentation; they mention modesty with reference both to the composer's personality and to a certain emotional restraint in his works. Thus, it is possible to list the qualities of Marek Stachowski's personality and music that appear in those opinions most frequently: liberality, insight into the student's psychology, strong management, a cult of discipline, kindness, culture, avoidance of conflicts, and a certain flexibility in approaching reality; finally – extraordinary erudition, intellectual openness, poise, discretion, and composure. This is musically reflected in his inclination to devote the greatest attention to harmony – its structure and colour, then to instrumentation and form – as well as in his extraordinary care for the clarity of musical notation, which resulted in creating precise manuscripts – masterpieces nearly ready for publication.

In an extensive interview with Stachowski conducted by Anna Woźniakowska shortly before the composer's death, he revealed many elements of his artistic standpoint and attitude to life. He finished with a kind of memorable artistic credo: "If I have any philosophy of the world, I should present it clearly through my music, without any detours or moral doubts. I have tried to fulfil this obligation."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> A. Woźniakowska, (2005). *Trzeba umieć marzyć. Rozmowy z Markiem Stachowskim*, op. cit., p. 127.