

The Polish School of Composition


in 20th–Century Music – A Recapitulation

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ABSTRACT

The present paper concerns the concept of 'the Polish School of Composition', well established in writings on music composed in the 2nd half of the 20th century, but still resisting attempts to define it clearly. I sum up the ways authors have talked about the Polish School of Composition to date, both from the internal (Polish) and external (foreign) points of view. I also examine the musical *differentia specifica* (such as aspects of style, composition technique and expression in works associated with this phenomenon) and the extramusical (mostly social and political) contexts which have determined the evolving approaches to the phenomenon in question. I begin with the origin of the term itself and discuss its subsequent interpretations until the present. From this perspective, the Polish School of Composition appears to be a kind of mythic narrative, a proposed way of ordering and understanding the past realities, transcending the categories of truth and falsehood, and working primarily in the sphere of emotions.

Key words: Polish School', sonorism, sonorisics, avant-garde, music and politics.

INITIAL REMARKS

The concept of 'the Polish School of Composition'¹ has a well-established status in writings on music composed in the 2nd half of the 20th century. The texts and statements that refer to this term range widely from articles considered today as source material to various contributions and syntheses, both academic and popularising, to debates in the music circles and interviews with composers. They span a long period of time, from those captured 'at the moment of birth', in the era of the greatest explosion of avant-garde tendencies in Polish music (the 1960s) – to others, written many years later from a distanced perspective, including texts that appeared in our own century². The authors are far

from unanimous. Their diagnoses differ with regard to the ontological status of the 'Polish School' (its mode of existence and especially the degree to which it constituted a real-life phenomenon), the specific qualities of the music in question, as well as the temporal, personal and generational span of that postulated artistic group³. It is therefore difficult to find, in all that massive body of literature, an unequivocal definition of this phenomenon, nor is any entry for 'the Polish School of Composition' to be found in the existing lexicography: the *MGG*, the *Grove Dictionary*, and the Polish *PWM Encyklopedia Muzyki* (*Music Encyclopaedia*) – not the most recent, but certainly the fullest and most reliable collection of subject entries on music in Poland so far.

The reasons for this state of affairs will be more clear if we accept (following Adrian Thomas's suggestion) that the said notion is one of 'the most elusive'⁴ terms used with reference to Polish music after 1956. The present paper therefore represents an attempt to grasp and sum up all the hitherto narration concerning 'the Polish School of Composition'. We will discuss, among others, the similarities and differences between the ways this topic has been tackled by internal (Polish) and external (foreign) authors, as well as the various circumstances that have determined their evolving approach to this phenomenon. We will also attempt to present its current interpretation.

Die »polnische Schule« in der Neuen Musik. Köln/Wien: Böhlau-Verlag GmbH, based on analyses of 134 texts by Polish and German authors and on an analytic search for stylistic symptoms in 20 pieces by 12 Polish composers. A synthetic presentation of the key results of her research is contained in: R. Seehaber, (2013). The construction of the 'Polish School': Self-perception and foreign perception of Polish contemporary music between 1956 and 1976. In: Eva Manzuorani (Ed.), *Polish Music since 1945.* Kraków: Musica Iagellonica, pp. 49–55.

1 Also in other areas of culture in that period various phenomena have been labelled as 'Polish schools' – of film, cartoon movies or poster art. Cf. e.g. A. Helman, (1998). *Szkoła polska* [The Polish School]. In: *Historia kina. Wybrane lata* [History of the Cinema. Selected Years], A. Kołodyński & K. J. Zarębski (Eds). Warszawa: Kino; E. Nurczyńska-Fidelska, (1998). „Szkoła” czy autorzy? Uwagi na marginesie doświadczeń polskiej historii filmu [A 'School' or Authors? Notes on the Margin of Polish Film History]. In: „*Szkoła polska*”. *Powroty* [The Polish School'. Returns], E. Nurczyńska-Fidelska & B. Stolarska (Eds). Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego; P. Sitkiewicz, (2011). *Polska szkoła animacji* [The Polish Cartoon School]. Gdańsk: słowo/obraz/terytoria; S. Giżka. *Polska szkoła plakatu* [The Polish School of Poster Art]. *Culture.pl*, April 17, 2007. Text available online: <https://culture.pl/pl/artykul/polska-szkola-plakatu> (01.12.2018).

2 Among the latter, definitely the fullest, impressively comprehensive and insightful is the book by R. Seehaber, (2009).

3 These different aspects of the concept will be discussed further on. At this point let me only mention that from the very moment of the term's emergence, authors usually included in 'the Polish school' a rather numerous group of 'eminent talents', including Krzysztof Penderecki, Henryk Mikołaj Górecki, Wojciech Kilar, Włodzimierz Kotoński, Kazimierz Serocki, Tadeusz Baird, Witold Szalonek, and Bogusław Schaeffer, but also composers whose aesthetic preferences were to a large extent different from those of the above listed ones – namely, Witold Lutosławski and Grażyna Bacewicz. Cf. e.g. P. Dickinson, (1967). *Polish Music Today.* *The Musical Times*, Vol. 108, No. 1493, p. 596.

4 A. Thomas, (2005). *Polish Music since Szymanowski.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 159.

ORIGINS AND TIME FRAME

As Adrian Thomas once noted⁵, the term ‘the Polish School’ – as applied to 20th-century Polish music – was by no means the product of avant-garde ferment. It was used, for instance, by Zygmunt Mycielski in his speech delivered at the Assembly of Music Composers and Critics in Łagów Lubuski in 1949. While delineating the ideological and practical aims and achievements of the Polish Composers’ Union (of which he was the president at that time), he linked this notion clearly to the distinctive qualities of Polish national style, including folk inspirations, which made it possible “to distinguish a given piece as belonging to, or creatively developing, the elements characteristic of the Polish School of Composition.”⁶ In this context, it was his response to the slogan of ‘new art’ imposed by the communist party and state leaders, which was to meet the political and social demands at the onset of socialist-realist ideologisation of culture.

In the late 1940s, the notion of ‘the Polish School’ reflected the ambition to create such a phenomenon in all areas of culture. When the same composer used this term again in a speech closing the 2nd Festival of Polish Music (1955), in which he summed up the first decade of communist Poland, it was an attempt to examine whether such a postulated phenomenon had really been successfully put into existence. Mycielski answered this question in the affirmative and declared that for the first time in history one could speak not just of outstanding individualities in Polish music, but of an entire group of composers “who, because of their number and standards, can legitimately to be termed the Polish school of music.”⁷ Among the many elements that justified his use of this term, he mentioned the stylistic features that distinguished Polish from foreign music works, and which were viewed as “distinctly our own” by foreign observers, translating into “a distinctly Polish image and Polish sound, [...] saturated with emotions, but not

rejecting the recent achievements; aiming boldly, though not without difficulty, to express those experiences that our country is now going through.”⁸ At the moment when the pressure of the communist regime was reduced, the Polish character of the music was not tested any more by reference to empirically identifiable national themes, but to the much more general and in fact unverifiable criterion of ‘national character’ or ‘temperament’, which gradually came to dominate the ways of thinking about Polish music.

Mycielski’s speech, which ended with an appeal to incorporate Polish music into the global circulation of art and to confront it with international achievements – provides an excellent starting point for a discussion of the later fate of the ‘Polish School’ concept. Ever since Polish new music made its accumulated appearance on the stages of the International Festival of Contemporary Music (founded in 1956, known from its 2nd edition onward as the ‘Warsaw Autumn’), the idea of ‘the Polish School’ found particularly favourable conditions to flourish and expand, especially in the context of the search for a collective ‘spirit’ and a common ground for the stylistically and aesthetically highly varied outputs of Polish composers. One should therefore accept the opinion, expressed in the mid-1970s by both Polish and foreign critics, that the idea of ‘the Polish School’ was put forward for reasons quite extraneous to the music itself. Detlef Gojowy, for instance, wrote that “in the wake of this sudden manifestation, even areas of diversity may have taken on the appearance of belonging together”⁹, while Ludwik Erhardt stressed the role of the specific historical situation in forming that impression of unity:

That school has a reality to some persons [...] not because of one or another set of stylistic features, but because Polish music was previously virtually unknown to anyone, and suddenly people realised that it actually did exist¹⁰.

Also interesting is the problem of the temporal-chronological connotations of the notion of ‘the Polish School’. We find ample evidence in texts that it was viewed not just in the context of the 1960s’ specific ‘unity in diversity’, but also in various other configurations on the axis of historical change. Two radically different

5 A. Thomas, (2008). *Boundaries and Definitions: The Compositional Realities of Polish Sonorism*. *Muzyka*, No. 1 (208), special issue edited by Zbigniew Granat (*Sonoristic Legacies. Towards New Paradigms in Music Theory, Aesthetics and Composition*), pp. 7–16.

6 Z. Mycielski, (1949). *O zadaniach Związku Kompozytorów Polskich* [On the Tasks of the Polish Composers’ Union]. *Ruch Muzyczny*, No. 14, pp. 9–10.

7 Z. Mycielski, (1955). *O twórczości muzycznej dziesięciolecia* [On the Musical Creativity of the Decade]. *VIII Walny Zjazd ZKP*, 4–6 June 1955. *ZKP* 12/8, p. 16.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 17.

9 D. Gojowy, (1975). *Avantgarde in Polen*. *Musik und Bildung*, No. 12, pp. 618–662.

10 L. Erhardt, (1974). *Trzydziestolecie w muzyce polskiej, periodyzacja, „szkoła polska”, perspektywy* [30 Years of Polish Music: Periods, ‘the Polish School’, and Perspectives]. *Ruch Muzyczny*, No. 18, pp. 11–15.

interpretations of this time framework appeared toward the end of the 20th century. On the one hand, some writers proposed a radical limitation of the scope of the term exclusively to the manifestations of sound and sound colour emancipation in music composition, understood as a reaction to the serialist constructivism of the Darmstadt school. From this perspective, as Andrzej Chłopecki claimed, 'the Polish School' would only consist of a small number of works, or even "2 or 3 pieces from the first editions of the 'Warsaw Autumn'."¹¹ Compositions by such artists as Tadeusz Baird, Witold Lutosławski, Grażyna Bacewiczówna, and Bolesław Szabelski would be excluded, and 'the Polish School' would thus come to be identified with the problematic concept of 'sonorism'¹². On the other hand, the widest possible understanding of the term 'Polish School' is one where it is seen as a manifestation of a 'Timothean force' capable of forming lasting values that manifest themselves in their separate and unique qualities, and cease to function only in the context of the postmodernist freedom of art, multiplicity of solutions and experiences, and the resulting lack of any stable reference points. According to this approach, as Małgorzata Gąsiorowska has argued, the 'Polish School' also includes the 'Stalowa Wola' generation – composers born in the early 1950s who made their debuts in the mid-1970s at the festival 'Young Musicians to the Young City', whose output is "terminologically speaking, one specific manifestation of the notion of 'the Polish School'"¹³. Some interpreters note the appearance of

the 'second wave of the Polish School', or 'the second generation of the avant-garde', and apply these terms to composers born in the late 1930s / early 1940s, such as Krzysztof Meyer, Zygmunt Krauze, Tomasz Sikorski, Zbigniew Rudziński, and others¹⁴. To sum up, therefore, as a mental concept, the term in question is sometimes extended so as to cover the entire second half of the 20th century, at the expense of the sharpness and clarity of this notion.

MUSICAL QUALITIES

Hitherto research concerning 'the Polish School' suggests that its overall perception has been determined by two basic factors. On the one hand, it was the strong expressive power of the music itself, its unusual dynamism and energy, and on the other – a specific style of expression which Krzysztof Droba calls "a dramatic tale in colour about colour, and in sound about sound."¹⁵ Ruth Seehaber's research points to still other detailed qualities emphasised by Polish and German music critics¹⁶, but, apart from expression, it was the prominent role of sound colour that was to testify to the separate and unique character 'the Polish School's' style in relation to the European avant-garde.

Peter Stadlen was one of the first Western critics who noted a trend in Polish music consisting in the exploration of clusters, combined with a tendency to exert impact through the expressive force of texture alone, and in 1963 he deemed it appropriate to look for a

11 I. Szafrńska, (1997). Czy istnieje polska szkoła kompozytorska? Z Pawłem Szymańskim, Stanisławem Krupowiczem, Andrzejem Chłopeckim – rozmawia Iwona Szafrńska [Is There a Polish School of Composition? Iwona Szafrńska Talks to Paweł Szymański, Stanisław Krupowicz, and Andrzej Chłopecki]. *Dysonanse*, No. 0, pp. 41–42.

12 In this narrow sense, 'the Polish school' is a current in Polish music represented exclusively by works in which sound colour plays the primary role, at the expense of the importance of pitch. The term 'sonorism' is linked to the original concept of 'sonoristics', introduced in Polish musicological writings by Józef Michał Chomiński, first as the adjective 'sonoristic'. Cf. J. Chomiński, (1956). Z zagadnień techniki kompozytorskiej XX wieku [Some Problems of 20th-Century Composition Technique]. *Muzyka*, No. 3, pp. 23–48. Chomiński used this term to describe a composition technique in which primacy in shaping the musical work was given to elements hitherto rather neglected in music history – sound colour and timbre as well as texture. Ruth Seehaber analysed Polish critical writings and traced the term 'sonorism' back to 1960. Cf. R. Seehaber, (2009). *Op. cit.*, p. 54.

13 M. Gąsiorowska, (2004). Szkoła polska – koniec historii? [The Polish School – The End of the Story?]. In: K. Droba, T. Malecka, & K. Sz wajgier (Eds.), *Duchowość Europy Środkowej*

i Wschodniej w muzyce końca XX wieku [East-Central Europe's Spirituality in late 20th-century Music]. Kraków: Akademia Muzyczna, p. 130.

14 Cf. T. Kaczyński, (1966). Grosse Aktivität in Warschau und in der polinischen Provinz. *Melos*, Vol. 33 No. 9, pp. 286–289, and T. Kaczyński, (1966). Jesień 66. Pierwsze rozpoznanie [Autumn '66 – The First Reconnaissance]. *Ruch Muzyczny*, No. 22, pp. 11–12.

15 K. Droba, (2005). Sonoryzm polski [Polish Sonorism]. In: Marek Podhajski (Ed.), *Kompozytorzy polscy 1918–2000 [Polish Composers 1918–2000]: Vol. 1. Eseje [Essays]*. Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Akademii Muzycznej im. S. Moniuszki, p. 280.

16 Ruth Seehaber notes that apart from these two elements, the other most common indicators listed as representative of the Polish school in music are: a liberal approach to Western compositional techniques, a synthesis of tradition and innovations, orientation toward the audience, communicative character, and a specific approach to form. Cf. R. Seehaber, (2009). *Op. cit.*, p. 132.

proper term for the ‘noisery’ character of that music¹⁷. In 1966 Ulrich Dibelius observed that, despite the marked individuality of each composer, they seemed to share a need to search for new colours, new technical and formal solutions¹⁸. In the comments of foreign critics, such observations were frequently accompanied, however, by the stereotypical conviction that new Polish music resulted from taking over West European models and ‘translating’ them, so to speak, into ‘Slavic’ categories¹⁹. At the same time, the Polish variants were considered as based on insufficient intellectual foundations. Roger Smalley, for instance, stressed in *The Musical Times* that the structural complexity of Stockhausen’s *Gruppen* is nothing like the “flaccid” endeavours of the “recent school of Polish textural composers”, which – like Penderecki’s *Passion* – prove that the Polish artists abandoned “so-called ‘mathematics’ (i.e. musical thinking)”²⁰. To Karl Wörner, even the clever and effectively planned ‘sound effects’ in Penderecki’s *Anaklasis* were nothing more than “a background of sonority”, and he deemed them more suitable for a movie²¹.

As for the internal narration concerning ‘the Polish School’, it also to some extent cooled the enthusiasm caused by a large number of Polish composers joining the prominent circles of the musical avant-garde by working on their sound and textures. This scepticism is reflected, for instance, in the comments by Zygmunt Mycielski, to whom keeping the wide audience busy with the news of avant-garde activity and “turning the young generation’s first attempts at composition into a national myth” was tantamount to “creating chaos out of things which we are unable to put in the right perspective.”²²

Nevertheless, in debates held in Poland the Polish composers’ specifically ‘anti-intellectual’ attitude to the Western avant-garde was viewed more as an asset than a proof of a certain ‘naivety’ (as in the West). The unique quality of the Polish School was therefore defined in

contrast to the ‘soulless’ Darmstadt avant-garde, in clear opposition to serialist ‘totalitarianism’ and to aprioristic speculations preceding the process of composition, and praised for the depth of its message. Tadeusz A. Zieliński put it as follows:

[...] What is striking is the lack of purely technical experimentation, of technical inventiveness that ignores the aesthetic experience – that is, of those phenomena that we can sometimes observe in the works of Western composers. [...] What makes Polish music unique among the modern musical outputs of European countries is its strong emotional charge, manifesting itself in various ways, depending on the individuality of the composer [...]. To sum up, the combination of modern technique with high aesthetic quality is a great achievement of contemporary Polish music²³.

In turn, Bohdan Pociąg observed:

It would be hard to find one common ‘national denominator’ for the individualities of Górecki, Penderecki and Szalonek (or it may perhaps be too early for that) – unless we accept that a certain degree of spontaneity, anti-speculative attitude, expressiveness, and emotional saturation are the criteria of the ‘national style’²⁴.

Composers commented in a similar vein, as evident, for instance, from this statement by Grażyna Bacewicz, presented here by way of example:

Polish composers do not aim to juxtapose sounds in an original fashion; nor do we rest satisfied with discovering new effects. Our purpose is to create at least some fragments of music that would provide not only us – composers in the process of our work – but also the listeners, with some experience²⁵.

Even in the mid-1970s this perspective continued to dominate, most likely because, among others, it had become clear for at least a decade that ‘the Polish School’ had long lost its ‘monopoly’ on experiments with noises and clusters²⁶, and that the current qualitative changes in the style of Polish music went in a quite different

17 P. Stadlen, (1963). Welcome for ‘New Trend’ Music: Michaux Poems. *London Daily Telegraph* (24 September).

18 U. Dibelius, (1966). *Moderne Musik 1: 1945–1965*. München: Piper, p. 292.

19 Cf. K. H. Wörner, (1962). Current Chronicle (Poland). *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (January), p. 110.

20 R. Smalley, (1967). Stockhausen’s *Gruppen*. *The Musical Times*, Vol. 108, No. 1495 (September), p. 794.

21 K. H. Wörner, (1961). Current Chronicle (Germany). *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (April), p. 243.

22 Z. Mycielski, (1961). Z Nowym Rokiem [For the New Year]. *Ruch Muzyczny*, No. 1, pp. 1–2.

23 T. A. Zieliński, (1961). Nowa sytuacja polskiej muzyki współczesnej [The New Situation of Polish Contemporary Music]. *Ruch Muzyczny*, No. 2, p. 4.

24 B. Pociąg, (1960). Świt awangardy. Na marginesie III “Warszawskiej Jesieni” [The Dawn of the Avant-Garde. On the Margins of the ‘Warsaw Autumn’]. *Ruch Muzyczny*, No. 1, p. 10.

25 G. Bacewicz, (1969). Szkic odpowiedzi na nieznaną ankietę i inne zapiski znalezione pośmiertnie w papierach kompozytorki [Draft of a Response to an Unidentified Questionnaire and Other Notes Found in the Composer’s Archive after Her Death]. *Ruch Muzyczny*, No. 7, p. 4.

26 Cf. e.g. T. A. Zieliński, (1965). Jesień i kryteria [The ‘Warsaw Autumn’ and Criteria]. *Ruch Muzyczny*, No. 21, p. 16, and Z. Mycielski, (1965). Do przyjaciół [To Friends]. *Ruch Muzyczny*, No. 21, p. 13.

direction, which made it impossible to apply unequivocal technical criteria to the evaluation of its specific national qualities.

Tadeusz Kaczyński wrote at that time that the only perceptible element that composers of ‘the Polish School’ had in common was their “fascination with universal human ideas” evident in the topics they took up, the texts they chose, and the dedications which their works bore.”²⁷ He also claimed that the Polish School was characterised by the absence of a purely intellectual, unemotional approach, and of “extreme trends”²⁸. Ludwik Erhardt’s list of the distinguishing qualities of Polish music included “the special attractiveness of its sound; the easy and suggestive expressiveness; and the striking organisation of form.”²⁹ From among the composers, it was Konstanty Regamey, working in emigration and himself an active writer, who spoke of “direct expressiveness” in an interview conducted by Janusz Cegieła³⁰. Other critics, such as Zygmunt Mycielski, saw a tendency to impact the audience by means of strong emotions even in works that signalled a move away from the avant-garde and its sophisticated tools³¹. Since even writers on music did not see eye to eye on the subject of ‘the Polish School’s’ *differentia specifica*, the category of expression (and of a specific type of communicative quality) appears to have been the key characteristic of music discussed under this umbrella term, and this category in fact overshadowed the problems of technical experimentation.

However, there is also another approach to ‘the Polish School’ that can be found in existing writings – one that views the combination of both above-mentioned constitutive factors as the element that distinguishes this school from the outputs of the Western avant-garde composers. Irina Nikolskaya, for instance, links the intensely emotional character of Polish music to a specific technique of composition, which boils down to a play “with the vividness of multiplied or rarefied sounds”, aiming to emphasise musical contrasts and

explore sound space. As a result, Nikolskaya claims, Polish composers managed to overcome the resistance of fundamentally static matter and to create new types of musical dramaturgy, which led to a revival of the ideas of *concertante* and symphonic playing, previously viewed in Western music as anachronistic³².

EXTRA-MUSICAL CONTEXTS

The difficulty of extracting a set of stylistic features that would precisely and unequivocally define ‘the Polish School’s’ music – means that authors look for other, non-technical and non-aesthetic criteria, which could help perceive this phenomenon as a kind of whole. In particular, as I mentioned above, they examine the political, historical and ideological contexts and conditions, which need to be discussed in some more detail.

In his 1958 report on the 2nd edition of the ‘Warsaw Autumn’, Everett Helm wondered how it was possible that in a country which was a “satellite in the Soviet orbit”, “abstract painting and ‘radical music’ are cultivated almost as freely as if Warsaw were a suburb of Paris.”³³ Observers from the so-called ‘people’s democracies’ [the Soviet Bloc – translator’s comment], who had experienced the results of cultural isolation and very limited movement of people, ideas and goods across the country borders – expressed a similar surprise, usually in a critical fashion, though we also have examples of highly positive reactions, such as that of the Yugoslav musicologist Stana Đurić-Klajn, who noted after her first visit at the ‘Warsaw Autumn’:

[...] We were very, very pleasantly surprised not only by the progressiveness and originality in every aspect of Polish music, but also by the basic idea of the festival. I asked some composers how they were able to create such works under the conditions existing until then in their country. I received an almost unanimous answer that they worked and wrote according to their own views, inclinations and inner artistic impulses, independently from outside factors³⁴.

²⁷ T. Kaczyński, (1974). *Polska szkoła [The Polish School]*. *Literatura*, No. 9 (28th February), p. 6.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ L. Erhardt, (1974). *Op. cit.*, p. 13.

³⁰ J. Cegieła, (1976). Konstanty Regamey (interview from 1971). In: *Szkice do autoportretu polskiej muzyki współczesnej [Sketches for a Self-Portrait of Polish Contemporary Music]*. Kraków: PWM, pp. 157–158.

³¹ Cf. Z. Mycielski, (1977). Otwarcie XXI „Warszawskiej Jesieni” [The Opening of the 21st ‘Warsaw Autumn’]. *Ruch Muzyczny*, No. 22, p. 4.

³² I. Nikolskaya, (1990). *От Шимановского до Лютославского и Пендерецкого. Очерки развития симфонической музыки в Польше XX века [From Szymanowski to Lutosławski and Penderecki. The Development of Symphonic Music in 20th-Century Poland]*. Moscow: Советский Композитор, pp. 139–143.

³³ E. Helm, (1959). Current Chronicle (Poland). *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (January), p. 111.

³⁴ S. Đurić-Klajn (1957). Dani muzike u Varšavi [Music days in Warsaw]. *Zvuk*, Vols. 9–10, p. 403.

The composers' responses quoted by Đurić-Klajn, which strongly emphasise the existence of a sphere of genuine artistic freedom in Poland, would not have been possible without the political and cultural 'thaw' of 1956. From that time onward, the 'Polish School' catchword served the communist state's new cultural policy well, since it began to favour a 'progressive' type of music that could improve Poland's international status and demonstrate to the Western world that the avant-garde can flourish just as well in a socialist country³⁵. Warsaw's festival of new music played (as I have mentioned) a tremendous role in this plan. Its foundation was motivated not only by comparing Poland to the West, but also, as Krzysztof Meyer recently reminded us, by a "cunning argument" aiming to convince the authorities "that their objective would be to demonstrate the superiority of our culture and our system over the culture of Western capitalism."³⁶

Krzysztof Meyer also notes that the Polish composers' accession to the most current trends in Western music and thus the emergence of a peculiar "oasis of Western art" on the Eastern side of the 'iron curtain' seemed so extraordinary to the foreign observers that it attracted attention quite impossible to achieve in other circumstances³⁷. One could claim, therefore, that the question of how the Polish works differed from the 'mainstream' models of that day, and what aspects decided about the sense of the unity of Polish music – was secondary to the mechanisms of 'great politics' (as represented by the state authorities and institutions as well as by individual decision makers). It will be interesting in this context to examine why Polish avant-garde music found particularly strong support in West Germany. While Krzysztof Meyer suggests that the sumptuous patronage (composer commissions, performances, broadcasts, recordings and publications) was a sign of appreciation for the 'Warsaw Autumn' atmosphere and of respect for the originality of Polish composers' works³⁸, Lisa Jakelski observes that the transfer of Polish avant-

garde music to Germany also helped solve an important practical problem – that of creating new and coherent concert programmes in the face of the Western avant-garde being on the wane. Jakelski writes:

Polish music, whose whiff of scandal wafted to West Germany from beyond an increasingly hardened Cold War horizon, seemed to promise compositional rejuvenation. Thus, the relationship between Polish avant-garde composers and their West German patrons was one of mutual benefit, in which each side had something to offer as well as something to gain: the patrons offered commissions and exposure, whereas the composers could offer newness and innovation, which were especially valuable assets in a cultural economy that privileged modernist notions of prestige³⁹.

FINAL REMARKS

That the concept of 'the Polish School' was reinforced in the world and gained an international reputation – was no doubt influenced by many different mechanisms. If we follow Ruth Seehaber in her claim that the school is a "construct that does not reflect reality, but rather expresses a certain view of Polish contemporary music"⁴⁰, we must admit at the same time that it was a construct that evolved with time, and whose scope varied depending on whether it was applied by Polish or foreign music critics. Key differences in its perception concerned especially the question of the homo- or heterogeneity of the image of Polish new music, and the degree to which that music was independent from the Western avant-garde.

While summing up 'the Polish School' from a contemporary perspective, we ought to turn our attention to one more, previously insufficiently emphasised aspect of that concept – namely, the fact that the debate about 'the Polish School' catered to a certain kind of social demand. The international recognition of this phenomenon not only served the policy of the Polish communist state, but also corresponded to the dream (present in Polish writings of music at least since the inauguration of Warsaw Philharmonic in 1901) that a "true Polish school of composition, independent of external influences"⁴¹ would eventually emerge. The 'school' also satisfied the composers' need to 'catch up with the backlog' and filled them with a peculiar sense of pride. Tadeusz Kaczyński put it in these words:

³⁵ One of the first comments on this topic was made by Anna Maria Harley (Maja Trochimczyk). Cf. eadem, (1998). *The Polish School of Sonorism and its European Context*. In: P. Broman, N. A. Engebretsen & B. Alphonse (Eds.), *Crosscurrents and Counterpoints: Offerings in Honor of Bengt Hambraeus at 70*. Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg, pp. 62–77.

³⁶ K. Meyer, (2017). *The Impact of the Cold War on the Polish School of Composition*. *Polski Rocznik Muzykologiczny*, Vol. 15, p. 70.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 66.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 75.

³⁹ L. Jakelski, (2017). *Op. cit.*, p. 96.

⁴⁰ R. Seehaber, (2013). *Op. cit.*, p. 49.

⁴¹ T. Joteyko, (1901). *Filharmonia warszawska (Inauguracja) [Warsaw Philharmonic (The Inauguration)]*. *Przegląd Tygodniowy*, No. 45, p. 527.

To use sports terminology, we could say that Szymanowski was trying to catch up with Europe, but he could not, because the distance was too large. Contemporary Polish composers succeeded where he failed, since they are in a much better situation than he was. They have not only reached the same level as their colleagues – the world's masters in the field of music – but to some extent have even overtaken them. For the first time since the times of Chopin again – we not only borrow from the others, but we are also capable of inspiring them. Lutosławski and Penderecki have their 'pupils' in both Europe and America. In this sense, 'the Polish School' has indeed become a school⁴².

The social role of 'the Polish school' was only fully accomplished with the political and cultural transformation after 1989. It was then that the first generation of Polish composers after WWII emerged that could be called "free of any 'obligations with respect to their share in building 'the culture of their fatherland, so that it could play a major role in Europe'." ⁴³ In a world of open borders and free transfer of information, the tale of this unique artistic formation and an object of national pride – was simply no longer necessary.

Taking all this into account, and if we recall that the notion of 'the Polish School' was meant to refer to a unity that in fact did not exist – we could conclude that the narration concerning that school today appears to have been a kind of mythic tale. By offering a way of ordering and understanding the past realities, this tale has impact primarily in the emotional sphere, and exists beyond and above the categories of truth and falsehood. Such a contemporary interpretation of 'the Polish School' confirms, on the one hand, the thesis of its limited relevance presented by some authors⁴⁴, and on the other hand – explains the exceptional topicality of this term, which has won a lasting place in the collective memory.

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⁴² T. Kaczyński, (1974). *Op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁴³ M. Szoka & K. Naliwajek-Mazurek (Eds.) (2013). *Warszawska Jesień w tekstach Andrzeja Chłopeckiego* [The 'Warsaw Autumn' in Texts by Andrzej Chłopecki]. Warszawa: Warszawska Jesień, p. 277.

⁴⁴ Cf. A. Thomas, (2005). *Op. cit.*, p. 160 ("The label remains an entry point for discussion but has little more than a rather confined geographical-historical relevance.") R. Seehaber, (2013). *Op. cit.*, p. 54 ("'Polish School' played a lesser role in the compositional actuality than in the discourse surrounding it.")

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