The Warsaw
Autumn:
the Origin and
the Beginnings

ANDRZEJ CHŁOPECKI

Elaboration: Mieczysław Kominek

Związek Kompozytorów Polskich

Email: mieczyslaw.kominek@onet.pl

Below you will find excerpts from Andrzej Chłopecki's extensive booklet essay written for the 10CD "Warsaw Autumn Polish Collection, 1956-2005", which the Polish Music Information Centre POLMIC released to mark the Warsaw Autumn's 50th anniversary (2006), the 50th edition of the Festival (2007), and the 60th anniversary of the Festival's organiser, the Polish Composers' Union (2005), which has operated POLMIC since its launch in 2001. The Collection consists of Andrzej Chłopecki's personal choice of 70 works by 70 Polish composers. The compositions were recorded during the Festival concerts. The essay that accompanies this collection presents the late author's highly subjective view of the history of the Warsaw Autumn. Still, it offers more than a glimpse of the wealth of Polish contemporary music. In the selected fragment, Chłopecki discusses the circumstances in which the Festival came into being and developed in the first years after its inception. Another, 60th jubilee edition of the Warsaw Autumn provides us with a suitable context to recall these events.

Mieczysław Kominek

Minor revisions have been introduced in the original version of the text.

The first Festival was organised on 10th-21st October 1956, in a period of social and political turmoil which is now remembered in history as "the Polish October", and which epitomised the rejection of Stalinism in Poland's social and political life. Both the political events of that time and the chance that then appeared of organising a contemporary music festival in Warsaw originated in the syndrome of the "thaw". *Thaw* is the title of a book by Ilya Erenburg, published in Moscow in May 1954 and soon also in a Polish translation (by the Polish Scientific Publishers PWN in April 1955). The term "thaw" almost immediately became the catchword for all the activities that focused on the necessary liberalisation of political and cultural life. It was on the rising tide of the "thaw" that it finally became possible publicly to express opinions more critically than ever before, and give public speeches that would have provoked political persecution only a few months earlier. It seems worthwhile to attempt a historical overview of the conditions that made the organisation of the first Festival possible in 1956.

It is a paradox that the World Festival of Youth and Students "For Peace and Friendship", organised in Warsaw between 31st July and 14th August 1955 for the purposes of political propaganda, unexpectedly contributed to the "thaw". The atmosphere of this event created a favourable ground for authentic dialogue and friendship, which went far beyond the organisers' doctrinaire assumptions. The thirty thousand young people from 114 countries who took part in the Festival transformed Poland's capital into the site of a great fête, while the decoration of the streets and squares occasioned one of the boldest artistic feats of that time, challenging the monopoly of socialist-realist art. Two events were destined to become the symbols of the "thaw": one associated with the visual arts, the other – with literature. The former was the Youth Plastic Arts Exhibition "Against War, Against Fascism" opened in August in Warsaw's Arsenal. The latter was Adam Ważyk's *Poem for Adults*, printed in "Nowa Kultura" on 21st August, which became a hallmark of the Polish "thaw" and which provoked heated discussions and polemics continuing well into 1957. Paweł Hoffman, the periodical's editor-in-chief, was dismissed for publishing a text which openly criticised the communist party.

On 31st August 1955, the first broadcasting day for Warsaw's new radio station "Kraj" ("Homeland") – the prototype of the Polish Radio's later programme for communities abroad – 48 intellectuals addressed the Polish émigrés with an appeal, encouraging them to return to Poland and assuring them of a warm and friendly welcome. The special issue of "Przegląd Kulturalny" of 22nd July 1955 (a public holiday in communist Poland, commemorating the establishment of Moscow's puppet government for Poland) included Zygmunt Mycielski (1907-1987)'s article entitled *Music Composition in the Postwar Decade*, whose author, rather than praising the achievements of the decade in an occasional eulogy, made a startling confession: "I must state it emphatically that unfortunately we live in a closed world, virtually isolated from the artistic life that surrounds us. The majority of our musicians have never heard Prokofiev's last cello concerto, some of Shostakovich's symphonies, even Janáček's or Bartók's works, or the recent compositions by Honegger, Stravinsky, Britten, Messiaen, Martin. Even at the Polish Composers' Union we have no such tapes." Mycielski's observations, printed in Poland with the censor's approval, struck the same note as Andrzej Panufnik (1914-1991) in the inaugural 1955 issue of the

Parisian “Kultura”, the most influential Polish émigré periodical published abroad. Panufnik, who had left Poland in 1954 and renounced the Polish citizenship, in his article entitled *Musical Life in Today's Poland* wrote: “It seems at times that the slogans of socialist-realism are but a pretext for isolating Poland from Western culture. Our young musicians are in fact quite unaware of those issues that they are expected to reject. They are ignorant not only of Schönberg and the twelve-note music composers, but even of Stravinsky.”

The rise of the “Warsaw Autumn” was in practice a response to these diagnoses formulated by Zygmunt Mycielski and Andrzej Panufnik, even if their authors did not offer any remedies for the situation they were so critically analysing, as in 1955 they had no reason to hope that such remedies might in fact be applied. The diagnosis itself was quite clear: Polish culture (the musical one, but obviously it also well exemplified Polish culture as a whole, and probably not only culture) was cut off from the international dialogue and consequently it withered, held up in Europe’s cultural backwater by the directives of politicians. The cure for this isolation was an opening, and resumption of the dialogue. It was, arguably, that need for an opening and for dialogue that provided the final impulse to seek permission (for an international festival) from Poland’s highest political authorities. Eventually permission was granted during a private conversation which Kazimierz Sikorski (1895-1986), the then president of the Polish Composers’ Union’s Management Board, held with Bolesław Bierut, leader of the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR).

If we are to view the Festival’s birth as not one of history’s whims, but as its logical and predictable development, what then were the intermediate stages that paved the way for that event? One could venture the claim that it was... Karol Szymanowski (1882-1937) who became the Warsaw Autumn’s godfather. He described the contemporary Polish musical culture as “parochial” and set an aim for the Polish composers to pursue: “to catch up with Europe.” This is not the right place to judge whether his idea of weakening the ties of Poland’s music in the first four decades of the 20th century with German-speaking countries, and strengthening the bond with the Latin countries of Europe instead was right or perhaps it was wrong. The fact remains that it was Szymanowski who introduced Polish composers into the space of international culture, and became (in 1924) the initiator of the Polish Section

of the International Society for Contemporary Music, which was then beginning its international activity.

Szymanowski did not live to see those euphoric and dramatic days in April 1939 (14th to 21st April) when the 17th ISCM World New Music Days were held in Warsaw and Cracow. More than ever, the foreign music press praised the Polish music society for “courage” and determination. The Zurich-based *Schweizerische Musikzeitung* reported: “An International Music Festival – in such times? In Warsaw?! Politically oriented readers – which probably means all the readers of today – will shake their heads in disbelief: ‘Is this possible, indeed?’ That is then the country which could rightly be described as ‘fully entering the game’, if, in such difficult circumstances, they organise a festival week partly in their capital, partly in Cracow, not sparing any effort to make this musical week as splendid and impressive as only possible. How easy and convenient it could be for Poland to withdraw now from the responsibilities they took on a year ago: ‘due to unexpected circumstances... we are unfortunately unable’ – no one would question this, everyone would absolve them! But Poland did not choose the simple way, an easy withdrawal. No, quite the contrary: at this critical time they fulfilled their obligations in a respectably serious manner, with evident enthusiasm and with that trustful attachment to European spiritual culture that is so characteristic of the Slavic nations.”

Fear of the inevitable war stopped some performers as well as composers from coming to Poland. Others – those living in the Third Reich and the countries already annexed by Germany – were banned from participating in the festival, as it was organised by an association which the Nazis fiercely opposed, and the Festival’s subject was, by definition, “the degenerate music of the Jews and Bolsheviks”, and in particular the repertoire labelled by Goebbels’ propaganda as “Entartete Kunst”. That festival of April 1939 is well worth recalling when we look today for the origins of the Warsaw Autumn. It was there that Anton Webern’s *String Quartet Op. 28* (completed on 15th April 1938, first performed in Pittsfield, Massachusetts by Rudolf Kolisch’s Quartet in September 1938) was to receive its first European performance. This performance did not take place, though, as the Czech Ondříček Quartet which had prepared the piece could not obtain permission to enter Poland (they were also planning to present Jerzy Fitelberg’s *Quartet No. 4* and Vladimír Polivka’s *Quartet*). Another work, Luigi Dallapiccola’s *Tre laudi*, was performed at the 1939 ISCM World

Music Days in Poland, and then again at the 1965 “Warsaw Autumn”. Many other names link that pre-war festival to “Warsaw Autumn” programmes: Slavko Osterc, Vladimir Vogel, Francis Poulenc, Henk Badings, Eugen Suchoň or Alan Rawsthorne.

One could then venture to say that the 17th World Music Days of the International Society for Contemporary Music were – if we can use a figurative reference to the first battle of World War II (early September 1939) – “a defence of Westerplatte”, a defence of the creative freedom against the menacing political terror which banned such freedom and employed the creative work of artists for its own political-ideological ends. Interestingly, in the same year when Hitler seized power in Germany (1933), in Moscow Maxim Gorki announced the doctrine of socialist-realism. The festival that took place in April 1939 takes on a heroic dimension when we realise that west of the Polish borders the ideology of the “entartete Kunst”, and to the east of Poland – the persecution of “degenerate art” – had already set in for good.

When Wehrmacht troops crossed the Polish borders on 1st September 1939, joined on 17th September by the Red Army attacking from the east, contemporary music in Poland went underground and remained there till the time of the “thaw”, that is approximately till the middle of 1955. It was also at the same time that the Polish jazz officially began to come to light, first sounding with its full voice and without the ideological restrictions in March 1956 during the first festival, later known as the “Jazz Jamboree”, originally held in the seaside resort of Sopot, and later transplanted to Warsaw.

Does this mean that nothing interesting happened in the field of music composition between 1945 and 1955? It would not be accurate to make this kind of claim. On the first four days of September 1945 a “Festival of Polish Contemporary Music” was held, accompanying the founding assembly of the Polish Composers’ Union. The repertoire of this festival was still a reflection of the Polish music scene free of the political-ideological pressures. The iron curtain which isolated Polish musical culture from Western Europe was not drawn until August 1949, when an assembly of the Polish Composers’ Union in the small town of Łagów in former German territory proclaimed the doctrine of socialist realism in music, opposed to tendencies described as “formalist”, and presented an apology of art “national in form, socialist in content.” These directives resulted from decisions taken in the latter part of May 1948 at the International

Assembly of Composers and Critics in Prague. It was also during the 4th National Assembly of Composers and Music Critics in Łagów Lubuski (5th-8th August 1949), the breakthrough point in Polish music history, that the “Group 49” was formed by the then 21-year-old composer Tadeusz Baird (1928-1981), 27-year-old composer-pianist Kazimierz Serocki (1922-1981) and the 23-year-old conductor-composer Jan Krenz (b. 1926). The Group worked under the patronage of the 36-year-old musicologist Stefan Jarociński (1912-1980), who drew up its artistic manifesto, which declared that the undersigned pledge to use their art for the service of the society at the “new” stage of its development, but without resigning from the technical and expressive achievements proper to the high art of composition.

How should we interpret this founding act of the “Group 49” in the context of the Łagów Assembly, in the days of dramatic events in Polish musical culture? The same days when the composer Roman Palester (1907-1989) took the decision to emigrate from Poland, when the composer and writer Stefan Kisielewski (1911-1991) was dismissed from Cracow’s Academy for his polemic with the Minister of Culture, and the magazine “Ruch Muzyczny”, of which he was editor-in-chief, was closed? The manifesto was, undoubtedly, a successful attempt at a compromise with the communist system, which was oppressing the musical society politically and ideologically. In Polish musicology, the members of the “Group 49” are usually viewed favourably because of the ‘buts’ which they included in their programme: but we are against spreading banality, etc. In fact, the communist authorities could not have received a more welcome gift: indeed, the last thing they wanted was to be labelled as “ignoramuses” (Stefan Kisielewski’s term used in 1968), and they by no means intended to promote banality. Be it as it may, the author of *The Metal Tankard Cantata* (about the friendship of Polish and Soviet soldiers) – Tadeusz Baird, the author of the *Warsaw Bricklayer* cantata (about the workers rebuilding Poland’s capital) – Kazimierz Serocki, and the conductor who first promoted in Polish concert halls the flagship product of socialist-realist music, Dmitri Shostakovich’s *Song of the Woods* – Jan Krenz, who also composed the cantata *Two Cities*, extolling the friendship between Moscow and Warsaw (to words by the poet Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński) – were those artists who largely dominated the Polish music scene in 1949-55.

From the point of view of someone then resident in Warsaw, Zygmunt Mycielski’s and Andrzej Panufnik’s

diagnoses concerning the isolation of Polish music from any contact with the contemporary culture of Europe and its 20th-century heritage seem to be obviously true. This, however, is not the whole truth. Audiences from the south of Poland, from Cracow, Katowice, or Wrocław (composers as well) could easily tune into Austrian Radio's Programme 1, broadcast from Vienna. The frequency on which the Viennese Radio broadcast its programme, unlike those of "Radio Free Europe" or the "Voice of America", was not deliberately jammed by the communists (after all, Vienna was occupied by the Red Army till 1954). There was also another reason why Cracow, which had co-organised the ISCM Festival with Warsaw in April 1939 and then the Polish Contemporary Music Festival in September 1945, was not entirely isolated. If Karol Szymanowski was the spiritual patron of the Warsaw Autumn, though he had died nearly twenty years before the inauguration of the Festival (more than 20 of his works were performed at the Warsaw Autumn, some of them – several times), then the pioneer artist responsible for preparing the Polish musical scene for the Festival was the legendary conductor Bohdan Wodiczko (1912-1985), a figure tragic and heroic at the same time.

As director of Cracow Philharmonic in the politically 'cursed' years, he introduced into concert programmes the works of those composers who could not be heard in Warsaw or other cities, or on the Polish Radio. Ignoring all political prohibitions and directives, he kept an iron grip on his staff and orchestra, earning both a group of great fans and a bigger crowd of mortal enemies – and he took care to include the works of Stravinsky, Bartók, Messiaen, Britten, Hindemith, Janáček, Roussel or Milhaud in his concert programmes. In those years, he was the only one to defend musical modernity against indoctrinators who saw good reasons to ban that music from Poland's cultural life. In the autumn of 1955, as a result of the "thaw", Bohdan Wodiczko was appointed director of Warsaw Philharmonic, then renamed the National Philharmonic, and it was he who won the day for contemporary music – not in Cracow, the 'formalist' city, where deviations from political orthodoxy in art were to some extent tolerated, but in the country's capital. This eminent conductor and musical visionary would programme only three National Philharmonic concert seasons: 1955/56, 1956/57 and 1957/58 – the hatching period for the Warsaw Autumn. It was during those three short seasons that Bohdan Wodiczko introduced the "great opening" into the repertoires featured

on philharmonic posters and in concert programmes.

These three seasons allowed Warsaw's audience to gain an entirely new perspective on contemporary music. They heard the already perfectly familiar Shostakovich *Symphony No. 5*, but in the interpretation of Philadelphia Orchestra conducted by Eugene Ormandy, and extended their knowledge of this composer's art to include such works as the *Symphonies Nos. 9 and 10*, *Cello Sonata* and *String Quartet No. 3*. Sergey Prokofiev's *Piano Sonata No. 7* and *Piano Concerto No. 3* had already been performed in Warsaw; now the audience also heard his *Symphony No. 5*, *Piano Concerto No. 2*, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, *Sonata for Solo Violin* and *Scythian Suite*. The scope of this revolution was most evident, however, in the reception of Western European music. During those three seasons, Wodiczko presented compositions by Bartók (*Divertimento*, *Concerto for Orchestra* twice, *Violin Concerto*, *Music for String Instruments*, *Celesta and Percussion*, *Cantata Profana*, *Sonata for Solo Violin*), Bohuslav Martinů (*Symphony No. 4*, *Double Concerto*, *Concerto Grosso*, *Camp Mass*, *Trio* and *Sonatina for Two Violins and Piano*), Paul Hindemith (*Symphony "Mathis der Maler"*, *Four Temperaments*, *Metamorphoses on a Theme by Weber* and *Nobilissima Visione*), Frank Martin (*Petite Symphonie*, *In Terra Pax*, *Concerto for 7 Wind Instruments*, *Percussion and Strings*, *Etudes for String Orchestra* and the oratorio *Golgota*), Albert Roussel (*Suite in Fa*, *Evocations* and *Symphony No. 3*), Olivier Messiaen (*Les offrandes oubliées* – the work which, three years after its Polish premiere in Cracow, opened the first Warsaw Autumn under the title *Symphonic Fragment*, changed because of the religious connotations of the original; as well as other pieces: *L'ascension*, *Chorale* for organ and *Trois petites liturgies*), Benjamin Britten (*Sinfonia da Requiem*, *Four Sea Interludes* from the opera *Peter Grimes*, *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge*, *Illuminations*), Igor Stravinsky (*Symphony of Psalms*, *Violin Concerto*, *Les Noces (The Wedding)*, *The Rite of Spring* and the suite from *The Firebird*), Carl Orff (*Carmina Burana* and *Catulli Carmina*), Arthur Honegger (*King David*, *Violin Sonata No. 2*, *Symphony No. 3 "Liturgique"*, *Symphony No. 5 "Di tre re"*, *Symphony No. 2 for strings and trumpet ad libitum*), Darius Milhaud (*The Creation of the World* and *Sonata for Two Violins*), Alban Berg (*Violin Concerto "to the Memory of an Angel"*), Rolf Liebermann (*Concerto for Jazz Band and Symphony Orchestra*), André Jolivet (*Concerto for Ondes Martenot and Orchestra*, *Transoceanic Suite*), Alfredo Petrassi (*Cori di morti* and *Concerto per orchestra*), Alfredo Casella (*Concerto* and *Italia –Rapsodia*

per Orchestra), Boris Blacher (*Variations on a Theme of Paganini*) as well as works by Alois Hába, Francis Poulenc, Georges Enescu and Jacques Ibert. As this list demonstrates, the 1st and 2nd Warsaw Autumn did not emerge out of a musical void, but in the context provided by Bohdan Wodiczko's concert activity.

Bohdan Wodiczko's tenure as director of the freshly established National Philharmonic – a rather brief period between Witold Rowicki's two terms of office – was nonetheless a very special time. The above outlined list of composers and works testifies to the romantic spirit and the scale of this opening to the European West. The above listed repertoire does not include the works performed at the first International Festival of Contemporary Music in 1956 and the 2nd Warsaw Autumn of 1958 (after that year, it became an annual event, with the exception of 1982 – the martial law) – the list was compiled from the programmes of regular subscription concerts in the Philharmonic. This fact ought to be emphasised: never before in European philharmonic tradition, and, for that matter, never in our times, have the standard philharmonic concerts addressed to “average” music lovers been so suffused with the element of the contemporary. These programmes, presented with extraordinary expertise and determination, aimed to restore to Warsaw's audience that 20th-century repertoire with which it had lost touch in 1939 and which had no chance to reach those listeners in the years of doctrinaire activity determined by the directives of the Assembly in Łagów. It is commonly believed that the Warsaw Autumn prepared the Polish audiences for the reception of European contemporary music. This is certainly true: it should be remembered, though, that the 1st Festival was organised in a cultural context programmed by Wodiczko's seasons, without which, most likely, both the establishment and the future life of the Warsaw Autumn would have been precarious.

Wodiczko's promotion of the contemporary during his directorship in Warsaw's National Philharmonic came already after Stalin's death, but still before the 20th Assembly of the Soviet Communist Party, at which Nikita Khrushchev made his historic speech attacking the cult of personality and exposing the so-called “errors and perversions”. He promoted the contemporary not only by familiarising audiences with a wide aesthetic spectrum of 20th-century music on a par with musical tradition, but also by inaugurating regular jazz concerts in Warsaw's Philharmonic. Jazz, which had until recently remained underground, was from January 1958 widely publicised and commented upon, both from the concert stage

and in programme notes written by Leopold Tyrmand, Stefan Kisielewski, Roman Waschko and Adam Ferch. The series of jazz concerts, featuring Poland's top soloists and bands, such as Janusz Zabiegliński Quartet, Krzysztof Komeda Trio, Andrzej Kurylewicz Trio and Quartet, Hot Club Melomani, Foksal Semi-Dixieland, Traditional Jazz Makers, Modern Combo and New Orleans Stompers, Jan “Ptaszyn” Wróblewski and Zbigniew Namysłowski, as well as a visit and lecture by Willis Conover (11th June 1959) – laid the foundations for the establishment of the “Jazz Jamboree” Festival, originally held at the Philharmonic, which was also the venue for jazz concerts throughout the first few seasons after the first festival.

Thanks to Bohdan Wodiczko, the National Philharmonic in Warsaw rose to a European status, boasting one of the most extraordinary artistic profiles on the continent. The time was now ripe for contemporary music to have its own festival – the Warsaw Autumn, closely associated from its very beginning with the National Philharmonic which provided the concert venue, the orchestra and the choir for the Festival concerts. The creation of the Warsaw Autumn was, then, a response to Karol Szymanowski's testament to posterity, but also, to a very large extent, its founders were expanding on the artistic vision of one man, the true hero of the complicated period of communist indoctrination and the tyranny of socialist realism: Bohdan Wodiczko.

All the same, no sources to date point to Wodiczko as the *demiourgos* who created a new situation in Polish music at the time of the Festival's beginnings. Why? He only features twice in the Festival programmes, and only in his capacity as director of the Philharmonic and its performing ensembles, not as an artistic personality. At the opening concert of the 1st Festival, on 10th October 1956, as the (short-time) director of the National Philharmonic he indeed conducted a concert featuring the above-mentioned work by Messiaen (*Les offrandes oubliées*), Szymanowski's *Stabat Mater* and Shostakovich's *Symphony No. 10*. As a result of schemes and intrigues in the musical milieu, in 1958 he lost his conducting and managerial posts at the National Philharmonic, and the undivided control over this institution was restored to his rival Witold Rowicki (1914-1989). Wodiczko appeared in Warsaw Autumn programmes only once more, briefly, in 1963. He was appointed director of the Opera House, which was then preparing to move back to the Grand Theatre – National Opera seat, rebuilt after the war. Still in the temporary opera venue he prepared the Warsaw

Autumn programme: Luigi Nono's *Der Rote Mantel* suite, Luigi Dallapiccola's *Il Prigioniero* and Igor Stravinsky's ballet *Orpheus*. He was then dismissed from his post and had no chance to direct the opera crew in Warsaw's rebuilt Grand Theatre. Formally, he is not considered as a founder of the Warsaw Autumn, but his contribution to the promotion of 20th-century music and contemporary art in Poland can hardly be overestimated. This is why his name ought to be included on the list of the 'authors' of the Festival, as he was the first to attempt to execute Szymanowski's 'last will' in practice.

As for his participation in the foundation of the Festival itself, there is no historical evidence to bear it out. History has it that the initiators of the Festival were Tadeusz Baird and Kazimierz Serocki – the same composers who had co-founded "Group 49" during the infamous Assembly in Łagów, where the minister of culture Włodzimierz Sokorski proclaimed socialist realism in Polish music. Was it an attempt to save some of Szymanowski's artistic ethos in a lamentable state of affairs when this heritage lay in ruins, or a self-interested initiative aimed at grabbing influence, power and profits? It could probably be both of these. The group's members had quickly established their artistic position: they had two concerts dedicated exclusively to their works held at Warsaw Philharmonic (1950 and 1952), and their works were performed at foreign concert tours by the Philharmonic orchestra conducted by Witold Rowicki. They had attained enough status and legitimacy to start negotiating with the political powers the possibility of holding an international contemporary music festival in Warsaw.

There were two circumstances that proved favourable to this initiative: the first was the need to respond to the 2nd Festival of Polish Music, quite curious from the artistic point of view, but heavily advertised by the official propaganda. It took place between 17th January (the anniversary of the 'liberation' of Warsaw's ruins by the Red Army in 1945) and 22nd July (the communist national holiday) of 1955. This mega-festival featured all kinds of artistic ensembles, from professionals to amateurs from local clubs, and was held simultaneously in Warsaw, the capitals of provinces, as well as small towns and villages. It culminated in a central international event in Warsaw between 2nd and 18th May, which was modelled on the "Prague Spring" in character. The political and cultural authorities were intent on establishing in Warsaw a musical event that could seriously compete with the Prague festival. Still, they were probably aware of the

fact that the 2nd Festival of Polish Music, organised as part of 'party-volunteer' activity, despite its grandiose claims brought only meagre and dubious results as far as both the artistic achievements and the propaganda effect were concerned. For these political reasons, it was about time someone presented an initiative of founding an international music festival in the spirit of a "Warsaw Spring".

The other fortunate circumstance was the opening of the Warsaw Philharmonic Hall, rebuilt from wartime ruins, and renamed the National Philharmonic in 1955. The authorities hoped to enhance not only the national, but also the international prestige of this place. The inaugural concert of the National Philharmonic was held on 21st February 1955 as part of the 2nd Festival of Polish Music, and it was at the same time the opening concert of the 5th International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition, which was to start on the following day. The concert featured Witold Lutosławski's *Concerto for Orchestra* and was conducted by Witold Rowicki. Interestingly, the inaugural concert of the freshly formed Orchestra of the State Philharmonic in Warsaw (held in its temporary venue on 12th January 1951) also included a contemporary Polish work: Kazimierz Serocki's "*Romantic*" *Piano Concerto* with the composer as soloist.

Historical sources do not determine whether the two composers, prominent though quite young personages of musical life in Poland at that time, should take all the merit for the creation of the "Warsaw Autumn". In fact, their role in this enterprise has never been questioned and it is common knowledge, passed down by word of mouth in the Polish music society, that it is to these two, first and foremost, that we owe the foundation of the Festival. We could, however, venture the claim that in their struggle with communist Poland's political authorities they acted as emissaries of a wider group, represented by the authorities of the Polish Composers' Union, especially by Kazimierz Sikorski, Andrzej Dobrowolski (1921-1990), Zygmunt Mycielski (1907-1987) and Grażyna Bacewicz (1909-1969), as well as others. The communist state system had no place for individual initiatives signed by, say, two citizens, even if those two happened to be well-known music composers. They had to act on behalf of an organisation whose opinions were respected by the political authorities (naturally, only as long as its activity did not justify a ban, in which case any discussion became obviously impossible).

Significantly, the NGO "alternative" to the Polish Composers' Union – the Polish Section of the

International Society for Contemporary Music – set up in 1924 by Karol Szymanowski and reconstituted as a legal entity in 1949, was soon made illegal by the communist authorities (the ban imposed on its activity in 1950 was followed in 1960 by liquidation of the Polish Section by the Home Office of the local government in Warsaw in 1960). The line of succession from the 1939 “World Music Days” was officially broken, but the Management Board of the Polish Composers’ Union informally claimed that inheritance. In the years which decided about the start of the Festival, the PCU Management Board included: President - Kazimierz Sikorski (composer, lecturer, music theorist; had 7 of his works performed during the Warsaw Autumn), Vice-President - Grażyna Bacewicz (composer-violinist) and Treasurer - Andrzej Dobrowolski (composer and lecturer). It is probably to this group that we owe the realisation of the idea brought forward by Serocki and Baird – but not only to them, because the milieu of persons in the Polish music world actively involved in this project was in fact much wider.

Eventually, then, the first Festival took place at a time of historic events in Poland, when as a result of the stormy 8th Plenary Session of the Polish Communist Party power was handed over to Władysław Gomułka, then released from prison, while armoured divisions of the Soviet army concentrated around Warsaw, ready to march in, and Nikita Khrushchev himself, Secretary General of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, arrived in Warsaw much concerned about the course of events. At the same time, nine participants of the June 1956 Uprising in Poznań, suppressed with much bloodshed by the army, were tried, and the parliamentary Justice Committee began to investigate the terror of the Security Office in the previous decade. On 29th October, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, the Primate of Poland, head of the Catholic Church in Poland, arrested back in 1953, was released. On 1st November, the Soviet army invaded Hungary.

*

The aims and principles of the Festival were presented in the form of introductory texts in the programme books of the first five Warsaw Autumn editions. The programme of the 1st International Festival of Contemporary Music, held in Warsaw on 10th-21st October 1956, was signed by the Festival’s ‘Organisational Committee’, and the programme book, whose editor was Tadeusz Marek, contained a preface presumably written by the editor, but signed by the Polish Composers’ Union. Tadeusz Marek

(pseud. of Tadeusz Żakiej, 1915-1994) was a music writer and journalist, author of the majority of concert notes for the National Philharmonic in the 1950s, founder (in 1966) of the bilingual quarterly “Polish Music – Polnische Musik” and long-time director of the PCU Library. He wrote:

“Had it not been for the tragic years of World War II, festivals dedicated to contemporary music would probably have established by now a fine tradition in Poland. When the Festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music was organised in Warsaw in 1939, we believed it would be the start of a new splendid era of contacts between Polish contemporary music and the music worldwide. The years of war and occupation brought such severe damage, such painful and irretrievable losses, that it had to take many years for Warsaw, now rising from the ruins, to be ready again to host excellent ensembles from abroad, guests and observers, as well as Poland’s best orchestras, for a Festival of Contemporary Music. During the last dozen years, Poland has frequently organised performer competitions on an international scale, such as the International Chopin Competitions in 1949 and 1955, as well as the International Henryk Wieniawski Competition for Violinists. In addition to two Festivals of Polish Music (in 1951 and 1955), which provided a nation-wide review of contemporary Polish music, we had the festival of Slavic Music in Cracow and the Festival of Polish Folk Music, an unforgettable experience for both the composers and the audience. Today, the newly rebuilt National Philharmonic Hall and the concert hall in the Palace of Culture open their doors to foreign and Polish performers and ensembles for the concerts of the 1st International Festival of Contemporary Music, to be held on 10th-21st October 1956 in Chopin’s city – Warsaw. For centuries, Warsaw has been a well-known European music centre. In the first half of the 17th century, it hosted the famous Italian composers Asprilio Pacelli and Marco Scacchi, who wrote their works here. Mozart’s *The Abduction from the Seraglio* was staged here only one year after the world premiere in Vienna, and *Don Juan* – two years after the world premiere in Prague. In the Romanticism, in the “age of the virtuosos”, the greatest concert masters performed in Warsaw: Paganini, Chopin, Liszt and Wieniawski. It was also from this city that, in more recent times, famous Polish conductors and virtuosos – to mention only Ignacy Jan Paderewski, Bronisław Huberman, Józef Hoffman, Artur Rubinstein or Artur Rodziński - set out to conquer the world.

Thanks to the present Festival, musicians from abroad will have the chance to familiarise themselves with a number of outstanding contemporary Polish compositions, whereas the composers of the “Polish school”, which has already notched up remarkable international successes, will gain the precious opportunity to confront their achievements with those of composers from other countries. We hope that this confrontation of numerous trends in contemporary music composition, the first such large-scale survey in Poland, will give the Festival participants a chance for free and direct exchange of experiences and views, tightening the cultural bonds between the Festival artists.

We are all aware of the fact that contemporary music does not easily find its way to the audiences. We know that only the regular and friendly co-operation of musicians of all nationalities, both composers and performers, can accelerate the dissemination of contemporary music and help this music reach a wide audience worldwide. A large-scale confrontation of performers will also create the much desired atmosphere of noble rivalry between ensembles and individual performers. We have no doubt that the orchestras participating in this Festival, as well as the individual performers and conductors, united by the solidarity that has always distinguished true artists, will not rest satisfied with this one moment of contact, but will strive to deepen and refresh the new artistic relationships and enrich their repertoires with the excellent compositions presented at this Festival. We all realise that the only way in which the culture of our time can become widespread is - through cultural exchange between countries.

The organisers intend to hold Festivals of Contemporary Music on a regular basis in the future; the experience of this year's Festival will provide directions as to the frequency and character of those Festivals. Still even today, as we greet our guests, we are sure that this new platform for international meetings dedicated to contemporary music will contribute to its development and promotion.”

Just as in 1956, the programme of the 2nd International Festival of Contemporary Music (Warsaw, 27th September – 5th October 1958) was signed by an Organisational Committee. Though no specific names were given, this Committee overlapped in practice with the PCU Management Board. The preface in the programme book was written by its editor Tadeusz Marek, who signed

the text with his name and gave it a title which in 1960 would appear on book covers, prints and posters – giving the Festival its official name, and informing that it would thereafter be held annually:

“‘The Warsaw Autumn’ is the youngest international festival dedicated to contemporary music. It is held only for the second time, but it already has its ‘place on earth’, its friends and supporters at home and abroad. The irreparable loss and irretrievable damage that Poland suffered during the Nazi invasion and occupation need not be reminded here: it took years for new life to triumph over death and ruins. It was for this reason that the 1st International Festival of Contemporary Music, named ‘The Warsaw Autumn’, could not be held until 1956, when it was organised in Warsaw, Chopin's city, rebuilt from the rubble.

The topic of ‘Warsaw Autumn’ concerts is contemporary music. As evident, however, from our concert programmes, the festival brings together works by composers who represent many different trends, techniques and directions of musical exploration. The ‘Warsaw Autumn’ concerts will undoubtedly present a vast and complex picture of contemporary music. This task is facilitated by the fact that the Festival programme is conceived as a kind of anthology. True enough, in some countries audiences are more familiar with contemporary music than in Poland. The organisers, therefore, attempted to present to our musical society a possibly most comprehensive overview of the achievements of their foreign colleagues, and to familiarise the Festival guests with the works of contemporary Polish composers. Still it seems that already our first Festival to some extent managed to live up to the high expectations. The coming editions will, it seems, fulfil those hopes even better, especially since now, owing to the magnanimous support and patronage of the state, the ‘Warsaw Autumn’ International Festival of Contemporary Music will be held every year.”

The programme book of the 3rd International Festival of Contemporary Music, organised on 12th-20th September 1959, still failed to reveal the names of the members of the Organisational Committee. The preface was, as before, drawn up by Tadeusz Marek:

“It is already for the third time that we can heartily welcome musicians flocking from all over the world to our annual Festival of Contemporary Music in Warsaw, popularly called ‘The Warsaw Autumn’.

This youngest of the international festivals dedicated to contemporary music, founded on the initiative of the Polish Composers' Union has turned out to be (if we may judge by the interest growing year by year, as well as worldwide critical reception and press coverage) a valuable event, the benefits of which are felt not only in the musical life in our country.

We would like warmly to welcome the Festival participants: composers, performers, guests, observers and the audience and, to begin with, briefly remind everyone what aims have motivated the organisers since the beginnings of the Festival. First of all, the task we set for ourselves was to create in Warsaw a ground for regular meetings of the various schools and trends in contemporary music composition, the confrontation and exchange of ideas, and establishment of contacts between musicians of many nationalities. Thanks to this formula for the Festival, we gained the opportunity for an ongoing comparison of contemporary Polish music in its many aspects with the achievements and objectives of foreign musicians, both in socialist and capitalist countries. Polish performers can now directly compare their accomplishments with those of performers from abroad, which provides a valuable stimulus for continual improvement of their own standards. We are particularly happy to note that the Polish performers appearing at the Festival have been highly praised by foreign critics, composers and organisers of music life. The two previous Festivals have greatly contributed to establishing the proper position of Polish compositions and performers in the international music life and the music environment.

As concerns the Polish music world and the wide audience in our country, it can and it should be stated that the 'Warsaw Autumn' has already played a particularly important role in the promotion of contemporary music, providing the Polish society – which had already earlier had the chance to become acquainted with the directions and accomplishments of Polish and foreign artists working in other artistic disciplines – with invaluable 'lessons of musical modernity'.

The above listed aims and objectives of the International Festivals of Contemporary Music in Warsaw are completely different in character from those of other European music festivals. What is more, it has generally been claimed that the 'Warsaw Autumn' is *the only* [preface author's emphasis] festival in the world whose concert programmes reflect the actual state of music composition worldwide, presenting the widest possible spectrum of its various directions and trends.

We have no intention to pretend that the implementation of the organisers' objectives has

been an easy task. Many obstacles have been overcome, and we are in for many more. Our achievements so far, however they might be assessed, have been possible first and foremost thanks to the magnanimous support and patronage of the state, to which we owe our gratitude also for making the 3rd Festival possible.

A display of the performers' skills is not a central aim for the 'Warsaw Autumn'. Despite the objective neutrality which we believe to be our principle in the selection and arrangement of Festival material, ours is definitely a Festival of ideas, which results directly from the accepted objectives. This effort to combine a presentation of many various trends in contemporary music with the highest possible level of performance is definitely not an easy task from the logistic point of view. Our possibilities of employing ensembles and soloists are limited, so the vivid, convincing and possibly comprehensive picture of the musical modernity must somehow be contained in the limited number of concerts. Have we succeeded in achieving this, and if yes – to what extent? The response of the Polish and foreign press confirms at least one thing: the 'Warsaw Autumns' have not gone unnoticed.

The critical commentators, whose remarks we have carefully collected and attentively studied, do not speak with one voice. Some are very supportive, even enthusiastic, but there are also highly critical and negative judgments. All of them are very important for us, because they will be of great assistance in our work on the repertoire. They also reflect the extremely varied responses to, and appraisals of, contemporary music in general: its preoccupations, directions, techniques and areas of exploration.

We admit, in fact, that provoking and maintaining a debate has always been our intention. We believe that unconstrained and matter-of-fact discussion is highly welcome and valuable for contemporary music authors and their audiences alike, especially if it develops in direct contact with specific works and problems.

The present, 3rd Festival of Contemporary Music in Warsaw is, like the two previous ones, based on the formula of an anthology. The boundaries of 'modernity' in music are fluid and vary from one musical environment to another. We do not propagate, we merely present what is currently taking shape in composers' scores throughout the world, hoping to make the picture as broad and complete as possible, and to eliminate more and more gaps in our overview. We are convinced, as evident also from the idea of the 'Warsaw Autumn' festivals, that Warsaw – a city nearly completely wiped off the surface of the earth by Hitler's Nazi barbarians, smugly parading their fanaticism, intolerance and hatred for

human beings, but now rebuilt with love and fervent patriotism by the nation, the flourishing capital of the People's Republic of Poland – is the most suitable place for the pleasurable encounters of musicians from all over the world with contemporary music.”

The programme book of the 3rd Festival further presented a collection of press reviews about the previous two Festivals, with the following note: “We did not include any of those critical commentaries which contained demagogical political allusions presented in a vulgar sensational fashion, but which only briefly and marginally dealt with the musical contents of the Warsaw Festival.”

On 2nd October 1958, Zygmunt Mycielski wrote in “Przegląd Kulturalny” (“The Cultural Review”): “The world is divided and reunited again; there is confusion and struggle, not only in politics, but also in the cultural world: and this is something that we cannot really adequately follow or keep up to date with. We are limited to one small point in which some current ‘technical’ or social issue always makes us blind to the perspective of art’s overall development, the true scope of the question: ‘how? For whom? And what for?’ Warsaw’s location should help us in this respect, should make it easier to grasp such issues at the time when we organise in this city presentations of contemporary music – which is but another stage in the development of a thousand-year-long tradition. It still remains to be seen if such an accumulation of freshly written works will bring us closer to that art, or will only result in some familiarity.” A week later in the same magazine Mycielski noted a surprising fact: “I am amazed by the audience at this Festival, by its reactions, which every musician must accept as ‘appropriate’, according to even the most discriminating musical taste. We have not only lived to hear excellent orchestras, performers and soloists, the best artists from abroad, but we have also earned a sizeable group of true music-lovers and connoisseurs of great art, which has swiftly formed here. It struck even our foreign guests, already during the previous edition of the Festival, that twice a day there are enough people to fill up the whole, or almost the whole, Philharmonic Hall, at concerts whose programmes are difficult to say the least.” We should recall at this point that it was Bohdan Wodiczko who sparked the interest of Warsaw’s audience and laid the foundations for its musical competence.

On 16th October, Zygmunt Mycielski continued his reflections on the Warsaw Autumn in “Przegląd Kulturalny”: “The importance of our Festival lies primarily in the fact that we are becoming familiar with

a repertoire which in other places has an exclusive character and does not tolerate the company of works stylistically removed from it. I believe that this kind of Festival profile must be maintained; it is only because of this that the Warsaw Autumn has grown to be something special, not to be found anywhere else. We should become even more open to whatever new things appear on both sides of the mainstream formed by the ‘20th-century classics’. This confrontation, or struggle if we prefer this term, ought to take place here, in Warsaw; discussion as well, and all that we can derive from this constellation of styles, talents and artistic forces.”

Referring to the topics most distinctly highlighted during the 2nd Festival, the musicologist Michał Bristiger (1921-2016), observed (in “Polityka” weekly on 8th November 1958): “The Festival audience owes its most significant musical experiences to the Viennese dodecaphonists, the music of Schönberg, Alban Berg and Anton Webern. The audience has learned to accept the music of these composers emotionally as they overcame the greatest obstacle – the barrier of classical-romantic sensitivity, that historical boundary which must be crossed, since the twelve-tone type of expression lies beyond it. Even if we conceive of Schönberg and Berg’s expressionism as the last manifestation of the Romantic worldview, it was still astonishing to witness such a favourable reception of Webern, the proverbially hermetic music, written on the brink of silence. It was, after all, the experience of a thousand or more listeners, in other words: a reliable sample reaction of the wide concert audience, which bodes well for the future reception of the Viennese school works in day-to-day concert repertoires. The public success of Schönberg’s aesthetics proves that the arguments deployed against dodecaphony from the moment of its appearance, especially those which questioned the future life and the communicative qualities of works composed in the twelve-note technique, were definitely wrong.”

Having pointed out in a later section of the article that musical language cannot develop in isolation from the developments in modern science and technology, the author brings forward one more reason why “the music of the avant-garde is the necessary stimulus which animates musical thought. In our music life at home, we are very much in need of this kind of inventiveness which characterised English fishermen in the past (the 17th century, I believe). They observed that if they sailed too far into the sea they suffered great loss of profit, because the fish went off on the way back. Salting did not solve the problem, nor did the transport

of live fish in huge vats, as the fish stayed motionless at the bottom of the vat and so died quickly. Then one of the fishermen threw a shark among the fish in the vat – and it worked! This technique caught on: though many fish were obviously devoured by the shark, it could only eat a small fraction of those in the vat. The others could no longer fall asleep at the bottom, as the situation itself forced them to move all the time, and so they stayed alive to bring profit to the fishermen. So it works also with experimental music and the life of musical milieux.”

Stefan Kisielewski commented (in the “Tygodnik Powszechny” weekly, on 12th October): “The proper line for the Festival is that of the East-West confrontation, both in the area of composition and in music performance. We have Prokofiev and Shostakovich, Svyatoslav Richter and Leningrad Philharmonic, ensembles and composers from the German Democratic Republic, as well as numerous guests from democratic people’s republics [i.e. the communist bloc, translator’s comment]. Poland lies at the intersection of two worlds, and is by nature predestined to act as an intermediary. Poland has the ability to synthesise. [...] The country lies half way, in the middle, and this results in a kind of obligation. I therefore praise the Festival with all my powers: I believe that its importance reaches far beyond the domain of music. A bridge between Webern and Shostakovich or Palester and Cilenšek, between an American quartet and a Leningrad orchestra, is not only an artistic, but also a psychological, political, and historical bridge.”

Tadeusz Marek himself also published a commentary on the 2nd Festival in the magazine “Orka” of 9th November, observing with reference to the reception of Webern that “his compositions, which call for a completely different way of listening than what we till now used to regard as music, not only attract us, but also move us and touch us. In the sound of Webern’s music, in those solitary notes not combining into a melody, separated from one another by whole worlds of tense silence, and in the oscillations of bright and pure colours that form hitherto unknown constellations – in all that music ruled by the laws of nearly ascetic discipline – there is such concentration and purity of poetic expression that, in confrontation with these ‘musical aphorisms’ or ‘metaphors’ the multi-storey symphonies of the craftsmen advertising their shoddy, second-rate, epigonic merchandise with the noise of a hundred instruments and thunderous percussion – fade and fall to pieces.” Strong words!

Of the foreign observers, the ‘confrontational’ aspect of the Festival was emphasised in Britain by “The Observer”’s

Peter Heyworth: “The listener was made to leap from Webern to Dessau and from Luigi Nono’s (extremely impressive) *Il Canto sospeso* to the monumental banality of Yanis Ivanov’s *Symphony No. 6 ‘Latgalskaya’*, which portrays ‘the life and strife of the Lithuanian people suffering under the capitalist yoke, and their struggle for the liberation of their country with the assistance of the Russian people, their brothers.’ And in this way Warsaw offers what no other festival can provide: a confrontation of two worlds and a panorama of musical trends in the eastern and western parts of our divided continent.”

Praise from the leading Polish music journalists, as well as favourable reviews in the West, added legitimacy to the Festival and were valuable support for its organisers. For political reasons, however, the most important opinions were those presented in the so-called ‘sister countries – people’s democracies’, which from 1955 were grouped in the military Warsaw Pact. The “thaw” sent the directives of socialist realism, proclaimed at the assemblies of all the artistic associations in Poland in 1949, into virtual oblivion, and in music it was the Warsaw Autumn and Jazz Jamboree festivals that eventually buried that ideology full fathom five. This is not the right place to discuss how and when socialist realism was pushed into oblivion in other countries of the Soviet bloc, but in none of those countries did the doctrine yield and surrender in 1956, 1958 or 1959 under the pressure of a wave of artistic innovation, a forcible ‘changing of the guard’. Perhaps the closest parallel could be drawn with Czech music in the mid-1960s, when an extremely interesting and intriguing avant-garde group appeared on the music scene (Rudolf Komorous, Jan Rychlík, Josef Berg, Zbyněk Vostřák, and others), but this group was soon wiped out from artistic life when the Warsaw Pact armies suppressed the “Prague Spring” movement. Be it as it may, the Warsaw Autumn found itself in a kind of crossfire: on the one hand, crowds of visitors from the musical environments of those ‘sister countries’ flocked to the Festival, and the reactions of those delegates were, as a rule, enthusiastic. On the other hand, the musical press in those countries propagated politically biased opinions about the Festival dictated mostly by Tikhon Khrennikov, Secretary General of the Composers’ Union of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic, appointed in 1948 by Stalin and holding this post even after the Soviet Union ceased to exist. (He lost this position in 1992 only because the Union he had presided over for more than 40 years was dissolved as a result of the dissolution of the empire; however, he is still the head of the Composers’

Union of the Republic of Russia.) How, then, was the Warsaw Autumn AD 1958 reviewed in the East?

Yuri Vsevolodovich Keldysh (b. 1907), a music historian and prominent Soviet musicologist, wrote about the Festival in the first two 1959 issues of the “Sovetskaya Muzyka” monthly: “It is of fundamental importance that this kind of Festival is held in one of the people’s democracies. It could become a counterbalance for the music festivals in the West, which are mostly dominated by extreme modernist trends, and in could help form an alliance of the world’s leading musical forces in their struggle for true significance of music for universal progress, for realism and for the folk character of art. To what extent did the programme of the 2nd Warsaw Autumn accomplish this task? It must be stated at the very start that, notwithstanding the presence of a number of interesting and meaningful works in the Festival concert programmes, the general profile of the Festival gives rise to profound objections. [...] If any of the festival guests wished, on the basis of the works presented there, to prepare a representative survey of the most important developments in contemporary music and the actual weight of the various trends, the resulting picture would be extremely biased and far from objective. [...] For reasons which escape me, the musical art of people’s democracies was poorly and inadequately represented at the Festival. We heard not a single Romanian piece, or Hungarian, though the music of the latter country is in its heyday. Of Czech contemporary music, only one brief piece was presented. [...] Nor did the successes of the flourishing contemporary music art from the People’s Republic of China find any reflection in the Festival programme. Undoubtedly, if these countries had been given their due place, the overall impression of the Festival would have been radically different.”

In a Polish radio interview for Józef Kański, Yuri Keldysh said, among others: “The idea is naturally highly welcome and fortunate: I must warmly congratulate my Polish colleagues who proved able to take initiative in this field, because thanks to them Poland is now the first and still the only country in this part of Europe which holds Festivals of Contemporary Music. Musicians from many different countries are establishing contacts here, and we are becoming familiar with the musical arts of these various nations – this kind of activity is definitely worth continuing.” He did not, however, speak equally favourably of the Festival programme: “The programme was certainly extensive, took into account many trends and a wide temporal span, but I still find

it biased. The issue is how we are supposed to conceive of the ‘contemporary’ in music. If composers pursuing one definite trend are represented at the Festival even by works written 50 years ago (Berg), then, to remain impartial, others should be treated in the same fashion. One composer whose works were omitted at the Festival in Warsaw is Sibelius, who from the chronological point of view was in fact a contemporary composer. Another absent one was Rachmaninov, who wrote his last works already after Alban Berg’s death [...]. The organisers of the Warsaw Autumn see Schönberg’s school as the most characteristic direction in contemporary music, and this is something I can hardly come to terms with. It would not be a good thing if we rejected all the dodecaphonic music as ‘formalist’, but numerous issues in that music are debatable. For instance, Schönberg’s cantata *A Survivor from Warsaw* certainly makes a huge impression – one could even discern a kind of communist idea in this work – and yet, on the other hand, it is the philosophy of pessimism, human helplessness and insignificance, and fear of the horrors of life, that underlie this otherwise beautiful composition. [...] As for the Soviet music at the Festival, it would be unbecoming for me to say anything about these works, since I myself took part in their selection.”

Jaroslav Jiřánek, a reviewer of the Czechoslovak “Hudebni Rozhledy”, commented in November 1958: “I am not intimately familiar with the topic of the development of Polish music during the last decade, but the atmosphere of the Festival brought to the forefront one, definitely most characteristic feature: exploration. Polish composers, especially the young ones, intensively search, but not always make a choice. The concepts of ‘experimentation’ and ‘system’ have become a sort of buzzwords, which in extreme cases may turn into self-satisfied fetishism. [...] One of the first who had the courage to follow this path to the most extreme conclusions was Anton Webern. Music appeared to him as some kind of logical game of sound forms, with no social or psychological function whatsoever – formalism in the strictest sense of the word, a purely aesthetic ideal, and – for this reason – dialectically speaking, the antithesis of music and of art in general. [...] I found a deep truth in the words of one West German music journalist who, when I asked him about his most powerful impression from the Festival, said that it was the confrontation of the world of Schönberg, Berg and Webern with that of Prokofiev and Shostakovich.”

I. Grigorescu reported in the Romanian periodical "Contemporanul" of 24th October: "It is to be regretted that some of the significant aspects of contemporary music, represented by such composers as Skryabin, Szymanowski, Myaskovsky and Georges Enescu, were missing from the Festival programme." The writer found the music of Schönberg "full of hopelessness and humility, with strong mystical accents", as exemplified by *Modernes Psalm*, which opened the Festival: "a mature work of the father of twelve-note music, containing questions which express both protest and lack of hope, addressed to some highest and omnipotent one, invented by the composer, deeply tragic questions which shock – but he finds an answer in absolute obedience to mysticism, the infinity of the almighty which is beyond comprehension. This is a work abounding in physical and spiritual suffering, the work of an artist, who cannot find his place in the struggle for life, because his idea of life was simply wrong." Further on, he observed: "The 'originality' of this Festival was supposed to manifest itself in concerts of electronic music which, though the audience had looked forward to this experience with great interest, eventually met – quite understandably – with a generally cold reception."

Bojan Ikononov in the Bulgarian "Narodna Kultura" of 17th January 1959 described the Warsaw Autumn in these words: "The programme contained contemporary pieces representing various styles and genres: atonal, dodecaphonic, linear, punctualist, electronic music and *musique concrete*. Apart from these eccentric 'novelties' the Festival also presented real music, realistically innovative, deeply emotional, and composed in a masterly fashion. [...] The delegates present at the Festival, as well as composers and musicologists (with the exception, naturally, of the authors of these works) presented a uniformly negative response to this 'new music'. Romanian composers, Jon Dumitrescu and Alfred Mendelson, told me: 'We strove to fight against degeneration not knowing it very well. We were like a commander who fights with the enemy unaware of how weak and meagre the enemy forces are. This is something one has to experience directly: then the fight becomes all that easier and more effective.' [...] After the concert, I plucked up the courage to shake hands with the maestro who will stay for ever in the audience's memories: Evgeny Mravinsky, though tired, received congratulations from fans with a kind smile. Then it was my turn. 'From Bulgaria,' I said. Mravinsky grasped my palm with both his hands and exclaimed: 'Ah, from Bulgaria! Great thanks!' These warm feelings for our country, so congenially and spontaneously

expressed by the great maestro, drew the attention of all those present. Then I felt again the unshakeability of our friendship."

In an interview for the Polish Radio, conducted by Tadeusz Marek, the West German music critic K. Wörner said: "The compositions performed in Warsaw represent both the Eastern and Western worlds, and they are the subject of an unbiased discussion. Musically speaking, these works are tonal or atonal. [...] Thanks to the juxtaposition in the programme of works by various composers, from different schools and styles, and thanks to the neutrality and impartiality in which this programme is presented, the Polish Festival stands out in the present situation of contemporary music as the mean, a spiritual centre [...] We the professionals are happy that we may hopefully be able to come back to Warsaw's Festival, because it is the only place where we have the opportunity to hear such a variety of compositions and talk to those of our colleagues who we cannot meet elsewhere."

The history of the Warsaw Autumn reception during the first few Festivals can be traced back on the example of one composition, Henryk Mikołaj Górecki's (b. 1933) *Scontri*. We will use the commentary by Krzysztof Droba, printed in the Warsaw Autumn programme book on the occasion of another performance of the composition in 1987:

"Górecki made his Warsaw Autumn debut in 1958 with the cantata *Epitaph*, which immediately earned him the reputation of one of the most radical representatives of the young Polish avant-garde. *Scontri op. 17*, written towards the end of his studies with Bolesław Szabelski, confirmed and enhanced this view. The work had its premiere at the 4th Festival in 1960 and became the most widely and vehemently debated Festival composition in the press. Opinions concerning this piece varied greatly, from highly apologetic to mildly approving to openly negative: 'A work whose immense undeniable merit is evident already at the first listening.' (B. Pocij); 'wonderful sound imagination and sound-forming inventiveness' (Hordyński); 'great talent', 'a combination of technical ingenuity with a strong emotional charge' (T. A. Zieliński); 'an interesting experiment' (L. Kydryński); 'a very risky experiment' (L. Erhardt); 'can it still be called music?' (J. Kański); 'much ado about nothing' (J. Olkuśnik); 'a load of cracks, squeaks and noises scattered higgledy-piggledy' (M. Fuchs); 'ugliness incarnate', 'I have never heard in concert anything equally horrible in sound' (J. Waldorff). It is also interesting to

read the statements of critics from the 'sister countries', for whom the Warsaw Autumn was then a highly suspect enterprise, while *Scontri* were even seen as an act of ideological sabotage. 'During the Festival it turned out that Polish musicians maintain close contacts with centres of the so-called contemporary music in Western Europe», and Górecki's work is particularly nerve-racking' ('Slovenska Hudba'). 'The title *Collisions – Scontri* can be seen as the leitmotif of all this group of recently composed works. It is a music capable only of expressing fear, horror, airlessness. What is more, all individual qualities are quite lost in it.' ('Musik und Gesellschaft'). 'H. Górecki has outdone everyone by using 52 percussion instruments in his piece. In the end, though, the point is not the amount of percussion, but the very essence of music which loses its basic identity and becomes some sort of an acoustic phenomenon' ('Sovetskaya Muzyka').

We recall these opinions not in order to evaluate them, which from the perspective of the last 30 years could be quite easy, but in order to show the reception of the piece at the time when it was written. In the early 1970s, the eminent Ukrainian composer Leonid Grabovsky wrote an extensive analytic study of Górecki's music, which I believe to be the most insightful of all the existing analyses. In that text, he called *Scontri* 'one of the most riveting and dynamic scores, a kind of symphonic western or symphonic whodunit'. *Scontri* was composed in the serial technique, very fashionable at that time, based on pitch, rhythm and volume series, subordinated here to the idea of a 'collision' of contrasted horizontal and vertical sound formations. The composer's individuality reached, however, far beyond any technical assumptions, and manifested itself in the violent expressiveness of this work. It is amazing that serialism can be so expressive!"

The 4th International Festival of Contemporary Music, held on 17th-25th September 1960, already had the name 'Warsaw Autumn' printed on the covers of programme brochures. It was also the first Festival for which there was a printed list of specific persons who formed, as it was stated, "the Presidium of the Organisational Committee of the 4th International Festival of Contemporary Music 'Warsaw Autumn': President – Zbigniew Turski (1908-1979), at that time also President of the Polish Composers' Union; Vice-Presidents – Józef Patkowski (1929-2005) and Kazimierz Serocki, Secretary General – Witold Rudziński (1913-2004); members: Grażyna Bacewicz,

Tadeusz Baird, Andrzej Dobrowolski, Witold Lutosławski (1913-1994), Zdzisław Śliwiński and Wiktor Weinbaum. The brochure with commentaries on the presented works and composer bios was edited this time by Józef Patkowski, while other information, such as performer profiles, was published in a separate booklet with the following note: "part of the materials which were originally meant to be included in the Festival programme have been attached to it in the form of a mimeographed script due to the difficulty of publishing such a sizable book." This script also included the list of works and performers presented during the first three Festival editions. In a modified version, such a printed index included in the programme book became a tradition of the Warsaw Autumn.

Here is the text of the brief unsigned preface to the 1960 Festival brochure:

"The Warsaw Autumn International Festival of Contemporary Music to some extent differs in character from other festivals of this kind. It is designed so as to present the music composed in our time in possibly the most comprehensive manner, taking into account the situation of the Polish listeners and composers. In the concert programmes, therefore, one can find compositions from the latest period side by side with those works by contemporary classics which have not yet been played in Poland. New compositions are represented at the Festival by a great variety of styles, from traditional works by the older generation to the controversial experiments of the youngest composers. The organisers take great care to select the most significant and representative works from each trend or direction. The fundamental difference between the Warsaw Autumn and other contemporary music festivals consists in the fact that this Festival does not attempt to provide any answers concerning the future music developments. The listeners can confront their own judgments and impressions by looking at those selected pages from 20th-century music history. It is a chance to become familiar with new musical worlds upon which other countries have built their contemporary culture. The listeners can hear compositions of already classic status, milestones of music in our age, which were the point of departure for younger generations – but also new works representing the various trends and tendencies that inform the life of the world's great music centres. We believe that this kind of framework will be accepted by both our listeners and the composers also as a proper foundation to develop a view on Polish contemporary music."

The 5th Warsaw Autumn International Festival of Contemporary Music was held on 16th-24th September 1961. The programme was drawn up by the Presidium of the Organisational Committee basically unchanged from the 4th Festival, with the exception of the President (Zbigniew Turski was replaced by the recently elected new President of the Polish Composers' Union, Stefan Śledziński, 1897-1986). The function of vice-presidents was abolished. The programme book was edited by Józef Patkowski, who wrote the following preface:

"The Warsaw Autumn Festival of Contemporary Music is an annual event held already for 5 years. Here is a brief introduction: The first Festival was organised in 1956, and its programme consisted mostly of works from the so-called contemporary concert repertoire (Stravinsky, Bartók, Prokofiev, Szymanowski) as well as Polish compositions. Of great importance has been the participation of ensembles and soloists from the Soviet Union and the people's democracies, which made it possible to perform – at this and the following edition of the Festivals – the works most representative for the music of those countries. The 1st Festival, therefore, gave a (wider than before) survey of compositions significant for 20th-century music, also offering in this context an overview of Polish compositions from that period. The Festivals that followed (1958, 1959, 1960) already encompassed a much wider variety of diverse styles and directions. The contemporary classics still occupied an important place, which is due to their absence in previous years – some classic works are still waiting to be heard – but simultaneously the programmes included more and more music from the postwar years, also works representing the new trends in music composition throughout the world. These programmes were also designed so as to reflect the stylistic transformations of Polish music. Thus, the 1958 Warsaw Autumn included Witold Lutosławski's *Musique funèbre*, Tadeusz Baird's *Four Essays* and Kazimierz Serocki's *Musica concertante*, undeniably compositions of much consequence to the most recent Polish music history, which bear witness to the radical extension and enrichment of those composers' musical workmanship. The debuts of such artists as Henryk Górecki (1958) and Krzysztof Penderecki (1959) brought with them the new musical ideas of the youngest generation of Polish composers.

Can we talk of the Festival's evolution, then? Most likely we can: this is borne out by a comparison of our current programme with that of 1956. This evolution,

however, does not concern the fundamental idea of the Festival: to present the widest possible survey of trends and tendencies in contemporary music. The changes that we have signalled are a natural consequence of the development of Polish musical culture, audience interests and Polish composers' preoccupations. If, then, I dedicated some space to the characteristic features of the previous Festivals, it was by no means an attempt to grasp this complex phenomenon, whose climate and significance depends on such numerous elusive elements as programme arrangements, performance level, first performances, etc. The general symptoms of the said evolution are, however, easy to observe.

It was the Warsaw Autumn Festivals that presented the Polish audience with a comprehensive survey of the works of the Second Viennese School, Varèse and Messiaen. What is equally important, foreign ensembles and soloists introduced elements of their own repertoires, which made it possible to become acquainted with various nations' musical cultures in their authentic form, and to form an idea of the complex situation of music composition worldwide.

As we hand this Programme Book over to the festival audience, we must admit that due to the great diversity of the repertoire performed (from 20th-century classics to most recent music) we have not even attempted to edit the concert notes in any unified form. Both the composers writing about their own works to be performed and critics informing about the works and their authors present their own points of view and their own individual types of expression. The diversity of presented views was, therefore, consciously accepted. We wanted the Programme Book to become a reflection of various views on 20th-century music, from those most traditional to those radical and extreme. We had but a very limited time to prepare the book for print and so it still contains some gaps, and the length of individual texts does not always fully correspond to the relative weight of the presented phenomena. Most incomplete is the presentation of lyrics set to music in the Festival works; some of them have been published in the original versions due to the difficulty of translation."

The first five Festivals were held at a very special time, and the scope of the Festival, though clearly outlined at the start, was subsequently transformed in individual details. Its name, originating as a "colloquial" label and officially accepted in the course of the first few Festivals, stood in

the music festival landscape in direct counterpoint to the “Prague Spring”, a Festival concentrating primarily on the performance of the historical repertoire. The organisers of the “Warsaw Autumn” wrote prefaces to the first five Programme Books not merely in order to greet the Festival audience, as it might be done to-day. This was one of their aims, but the prefaces also functioned as a sort of ideological manifestos directed primarily to the political authorities which gave permission to launch the Festival but could at any time take it back if they decided that the Festival was ideologically useless for their propaganda or even – which is worse – brought unease into cultural and political contacts with other countries of the Soviet bloc, particularly with Moscow. The policy-makers in the Ministry of Culture or in the Cultural Department of the Party’s Central Committee could always draw conclusions from critical articles in the press of neighbouring countries and decide that the experiment with a festival of contemporary music in Warsaw had failed, that it leads to political tension and becomes a factor destabilising the “partnership” of Poland with the music societies of those countries. They had the full prerogatives to erase the Festival from the cultural map of the country. The Festival’s continuity was, then, constantly under threat, not only till the fall of communism, but also later, in the mid-1990s, when political undertones were replaced by financial considerations and the Ministry of Culture and Art openly proposed that the Festival should become a biennial event.

As concerns the political “strategy” developed in those prefaces to the programme booklets of the first few Festivals, we leave this to the judgment of our readers. The readers, now acquainted with the commentaries to, and reviews of, the successive Festival editions printed in Poland, in the East and the West, may also use their intuition to speculate about the ways of thinking and kind of reflection that determined the actions of the Festival organisers and of those who permitted (and financed) the organisation of such a Festival. One crucial element of the Festival’s “philosophy” needs to be emphasised here, though. The organisers insisted on repeatedly using such terms as a ‘meeting’, ‘exchange of experiences’, ‘making friends’, ‘establishing contacts’, etc., while commentators in both the East and the West were evidently fond of using the word ‘confrontation’, which recurs particularly frequently. The phenomenon of the “thaw” should not be interpreted as complete liberalisation of social life – even in the domain of music, that least semantic of all arts. The “thaw” should rather be viewed as a new strategy of

the communist authorities: we shall let our people taste the hitherto forbidden fruit of the degenerate bourgeois culture, so that they can see for themselves its rotten pessimism as confronted with the optimistic message of the works written in the socialist realist tradition, even if they were no longer the only obligatory model imposed by the directives of the state. “The people will make the right choice by themselves,” the decision-makers in the government seemed to hope. And yet, the “people” of Warsaw chose the “pessimistic” Webern and rejected the “optimistic” Paul Dessau, a composer from the communist East Germany whose musical epic *Growing Millet* to texts by Berthold Brecht was performed at the Festival. And it was not only the “people of Warsaw” that filled the Warsaw Philharmonic concert hall to capacity. In that period, interest in the “Warsaw Autumn” was immense on both sides of the “iron curtain”. Reports on the 1963 Festival indicate that the number of listeners exceeded the hall capacity by 20%, so that the possibility of making rehearsals open to the audience was seriously considered. A large proportion of the limit set by the authorities for “foreign exchange” between Poland and the Soviet bloc countries was used up by the Festival guests. In that period, each Festival hosted about a hundred foreign observers, and those guests did not by any means subscribe to the critical views of the Festival enunciated in their own countries by the cultural press.

In the context of this discussion concerning the Festival’s “origins” and “sources”, it is necessary to mention another aspect of the situation, one which was of special significance to the leading Polish composers. During the first six years of the Festival’s functioning, the time of the first five Festivals (in 1957, the Festival was not planned), the political circumstances took a turn for the worse, and this proved to be a permanent trend. The social-cultural periodicals opened during the thaw were now closed one by one, and discussion clubs were being made illegal. Scared by the sheer scope of popular support that he received in the days of the “Polish October”, Władysław Gomułka, the Party’s General Secretary and hence the person number one in Poland announced, under pressure from Moscow’s rulers, a move away from the idea of the thaw. Now the “Warsaw Autumn” Festival could easily fall victim to the Polish “normalisation”, then referred to in Poland as the “little stabilisation”. It could – but it did not. Several Polish composers who submitted particularly interesting works for performance at the Warsaw Autumn had personal contacts with prominent Festival guests, and these contacts, especially those with West German radio

presenters and music publishers, made it possible for the music of those composers to penetrate the Iron Curtain and be performed in Darmstadt, Donaueschingen, at the Venetian Biennale. Having successfully got through the cumbersome procedure of acquiring passports and visas, a group of Polish composers featuring in the programmes of the first few Warsaw Autumn Festivals travelled West and, rather than choosing to emigrate, began to build up their reputation there, paradoxically also strengthening in this way their position in Poland.