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THE SOUND CHRONICLE OF WARSAW AUTUMN 2005

The 48th International Festival of Contemporary Music on Compact Discs
Publishers: Polish Composers' Union and Polish Music Information Centre

The international festival *Warsaw Autumn* represents half a century of both continuity and discontinuity.¹ On the one hand, sufficient time has passed to enable the simple initial strategy, the creation of a window to the world of topical music tendencies in an Eastern bloc country, to be fully recognized and promoted, and for the production and development of the most efficient instruments for shaping and fostering the selective culture of memory. On the other hand, the festival represents discontinuity; having been initiated in the midst of the Soviet Empire and the Cold War as a challenge to totalitarian society and the socialist regime and as proof that, in spite of everything, a dialogue between the cultures of the East and the West was possible, the festival faced a completely different set of issues after the fall of the Berlin Wall. These ranged from new political and cultural global redistribution to new discourses of contemporary music(s) and changed relations in the sphere of financing culture.

After some vacillation regarding quality, concept and the search for a new meaning of existence, *Warsaw Autumn* (September 16-24, 2005), being a 'national cultural institution', as stated in the catalogue, decided to advocate a high level of creation and interpretation and the establishment of a creative music dialogue based on new realities, primarily globalisation, including a dialogue with Russian composers and composers from former Soviet republics. The 2005 festival was recorded in a seven-disc album, and released two years later. In keeping with the wisdom, skill and adaptativeness developed over the past decades of communist government, the Programme Board chose *The East* as the central theme of the 2005 festival, which allowed it to include not only a large number of Polish, Japanese, Korean, Malesian, Thai, Syrian and Chinese composers, but also Russian, Belarus and Ukrainian composers, without entering into any ideological debates from the past. Moreover, with the clear intention of initiating new interpretations of the avant-garde from a

¹ The only years in which the *Warsaw Autumn* festival was not held were 1957 and 1982.

postmodernist perspective and reaffirming and assimilating the festival's past, the Programme Board selected compositions from its holdings that had become emblematic over the previous decades and presented them in new performances.

As in previous discographical festival 'chronicles', every disc in the Sound Chronicle 2005, is an autonomous entity, so that the contents of the discs (around fifty works in total) do not follow the concert festival programmes, but rather their own dramaturgy. The fact that more than half of the composers and performers included are Poles testifies not only to an attempt to reconcile the national and the international character of *Warsaw Autumn*, but also to the impressive and extremely active Polish compositional and performing scene, and the pluralism of music discourses, from the still vivid reminiscences of the *Polish School* to postmodernism. Furthermore, the absence of a greater number of recordings of foreign composers might be due to the compulsory fees for performing rights and copyrights, which often exceed the festival's budget.

Thus, Poles of different generations are the sole composers of the symphonic works on the first disc and the chamber pieces on the last. One of the most famous Polish composers, Henryk Mikolaj Górecki (1933-) is represented by his early work *Choros I* for strings, written in 1964. It is a disciplined, structural and, for its time, innovatively minimalist composition for four instrumental groups, whose pleasing repetitive structures flow out of a reduced core. *Sonorous Poem* (Poème sonore) by Marek Stachowski (1936-2004) from 1975 is a mature, expressive piece with a pronounced climax in the middle section, exhibiting aspects of early Penderecki, with whom Stachowski studied. Zbigniew Bargielski (1937-), a one-time student of Nadia Boulanger, who currently works in Vienna, is represented by an easily accessible work of a postimpressionist tone, *It's still Night, it's still Sound* for mezzo-soprano and orchestra (1980). Although not based on a specific text, *It's still Night, it's still Sound* resembles a ballad because of its narrative structures. The first two works were recorded live by the Symphonic Orchestra of the Slovakian Radio and the third piece by the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra, establishing continuity with successful episodes of the festival from three or four decades ago. The two remaining works provide insight into the present situation in Polish music: Tadeusz Wielecki (1954-), who also promotes contemporary music as a double bass player, advocates the ludic, improvisational principle in his work *Surfaces* for orchestra, while the young Wojciech Ziemowit Zych (1976-) announces his fragmentary, skillfully theatricalized image of the world in his piece *Hommage à Tadeusz Kantor*.

The last disc of the *Chronicle of Warsaw Autumn 2005* is symbolically reserved for the members of the *Young Circle* of the Polish Composers' Union, mostly in their twenties, who gave a concert within the fringe programme.² These are seven 'tame' student pieces for small chamber ensembles and/or tape, whose presentation rarely goes beyond a decent performance and which will probably, as the first steps of fledgling composers, provide an incentive for future research into the sound archives of the festival. Judging by this disc, female composers dominate the younger generation, particularly Barbara Kaszuba (1983-) with her condensed, effective achievement in *Suoni per sei violinisti*, performed by *Transensemble* from Warsaw.

The work that stands out among the world and Polish premieres on disc no. 2, the common denominator of which is acousmatics, is *Minotaur* for horn and surround sound by Ewa Trębacz (1973-). The disc also features works by Krzysztof Knittel (1947-), related to film music, and Vladimir Nikolaev (1953-). Trębacz, who completed her studies with Bogusław Schaeffer and then received her doctorate at the Centre for Digital Arts and Experimental Media (Dxarts) in Washington, specialises in the study of classical instruments as historical and artistic objects that evolve in specific sonic landscapes, an interest which is evident in this work. Multimedia artist Jarosław Kapuściński (1964-), who teaches at universities in California, admits that in *Enso*, his concerto for percussion, computer projection and orchestra inspired by zen philosophy, he 'examines the paradox of the simultaneous coexistence of movement and stasis' and of the inability to stop. This moving sound image, which circles through space eschewing recognisable melodic and rhythmic patterns and repetitions, is one of a dozen works commissioned by *Warsaw Autumn*.

Surprisingly, of the twenty or so Russian compositions, which were performed by chamber ensembles from Moscow and Seattle (*Seattle Chamber Players*), only those performed by American musicians feature on the fourth and fifth discs of the Sound Chronicle. Completely different works by three authors born in 1953, and therefore of the same generation, testify to individualisation as the driving force of today's contemporary music scene and the disappearance not only of 'compositional schools', but also of divisions between East and West: Alexander Raskatov uses elements of Byzantine and Orthodox music, Vladimir Nikolaev toys with the fascination with Jimi Hendrix, while Yuri Krasavin finds inspiration for his composition *Sango* in the rituals of the Nigerian people of Yoruba. Unlike them, Nikolai Korndorf (1947-2001) and Pavel Karmanov

² The opera *Landscape with Distant Relatives* by Heiner Goebbels was the most significant fringe event at *Warsaw Autumn 2005*. The opera was not included in the *Sound Chronicle* due to copyright problems.

(1970-), with their respective works *Get out!* for four or more performers and *Get in!* for flute, violin, clarinet and cello, make interesting forays into instrumental theatre and, on this disc at least, develop an imaginary dialogue about the vitality of repetitive music today.

In the midst of all the Japanese authors such as Toru Takemitsu, Kazuhiko Suzuki and Toshio Hosokawa, whose compositions-landscapes for the traditional instrument *shô* lend legitimacy to the eastern theme of *Warsaw Autumn*, it is John Cage's (1912-1992) *One*⁹ for *shô* (1991) from the series *The Number Pieces*, that makes the most authentic contribution.

In addition to Cage, the programme of the *Warsaw Autumn 2005* included the works of several great representatives of 20th-century avant-garde such as Edgard Varèse (1885-1965), Pierre Boulez (1925-) and George Crumb (1929-), as well as original contributions of Heinz Holliger (1939-) and John Tavener (1944-), but these were not included in the recording.

One of the few significant European names included in the Sound Chronicle is the Swiss composer Klaus Huber (1924-), with his work *Intarsi* from 1994, which is characterised by the now almost defunct utilisation of quotation. Namely, in this chamber concerto for piano and ensemble, dedicated to the memory of Witold Lutosławski and excellently performed by the Zurich ensemble *Collegium novum* and pianist Stefan Wirth, a transparent shadow of Mozart's last piano concerto emerges from the complex movements of linear polyphony and a forest of spectral analyses, disappearing just as suddenly. It is an amazing moment that stays with us long after listening to all seven compact discs.

The enormous abundance of organised sounds, the simultaneity of options and the impossibility of predicting future developments of contemporary music are the imprints left by *Warsaw Autumn* in the first decade of the new century. In addition, we are left with a sense, albeit vague and unreliable, of opposing trends of opening-closing, outside-inside. After decades of investing enormous energy into the internationalisation of Polish music, which has moved from the periphery of music events to their centre, we can observe a regressive trend toward nationalism,

though not nearly enough for us to agree with Mitja Velikonja's statement that 'the more national identity is lost on the outside, the more it is strengthened – even violently so – and obsessively affirmed on the inside'.³ And, yet...

Translated by Jelena Nikezić

³ Mitja Velikonja, *Evroza*, Biblioteka XX VEK, Beograd, 2007, pp. 14–15.