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On What Was Native in the Music of Karol Szymanowski

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Introduction: premises and definitions

The significance of Szymanowski's compositions, as well as his literary and musical writings and many other achievements, can only partially be interpreted in the light of distinctive periods of creative development. It is also worthwhile to trace his development as a continuous and consistent search for answers to vital questions relating to his identity as a person and as an artist — a national ('racial'), European, as well as a religious identity. He may at times interpret faith in an idiosyncratic way and 'test' it in his own manner, perceiving it as the deepest current of art, culture and life. We should not be surprised by the presence of this current; religion at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was an ever-present motif in historiography (e.g. Polish Messianism), philosophy (Nietzsche's claim of the death of God and Christianity) and art, particularly music, poetry and drama. The metaphysical perspective, arising as a reaction to positivism, had a variety of aspects and influenced art in a variety of ways; however, it always placed art in the highest region of human experience and existence (references to the traditions of antique drama and mythology as substitutes for religion present in many works of art are very telling in this respect). The influence of the ideas of symbolism¹, expressionism and surrealism on Szymanowski's artistic development (particularly prior to 1920) is of special significance here.

This article will attempt to trace a number of currents and trends in Szymanowski's creative development, concentrating primarily on the issue of his sense of what constituted his native art, i.e., defining that which he regarded, at different periods of his life, as his 'spiritual world', with which he identified, and which he attempted to integrate and to express through his work. The aim is to add a handful of remarks (at times polemical) on the subject of what were his — consecutive — interests, the sources of his music, and what he was striving to achieve. Of particular importance is the turning point after 1920, when Szymanowski reached maturity (both artistic and personal, having emerged from a period of intensive search for his own identity), and Poland achieved victory in its struggle for sovereignty. I refer to the last period of Szymanowski's artistic development, which has been called folkloristic-national (Z. Helman), Polish or national (M. Tomaszewski), or Lechitic (Jachimecki)². It reveals a deeper, continuous and consistent current in Szymanowski's endeavours.

As to the interpretation of the main concepts involved, I assume that the native culture is that which 'gives birth' to us as a people belonging to a particular community at a particular time and place. Native art is thus that with which we have a spiritual kinship, which we regard and experience as close to us, which defines our identity. The native character of music is a category with variable dimensions: it may relate to locality, regionality (folklore) or nationality; it may signify belonging to the European cultural sphere, and finally it may carry the mark of universality³. The characteristic of nativeness also has a temporal dimension — it is associated particularly with the art present in our life 'here and now'. This presence may manifest itself in a variety of ways: one may experience as 'native' those works which belong to the Classical-Romantic period (these dominate philharmonic concerts and the basic repertory of music schools), or those ostentatiously national (for example, the musical world of Szymanowski's opponents such as S. Niewiadomski); or those from the culture and music of ancient times, or modern, avant-garde or popular music. Experiencing music as native is different from a preference, or a fashion for a particular kind of music; it is a personal emotional response, and a deeper and more permanent link between music and culture

and life. That link defines one as being a part of particular 'spiritual community', which may have important consequences in one's life. The sense of art being native is subjective, and it may be illusory (as, for example, the Oriental world of Borodin) and selective; it may be independent of membership in terms of temporal and cultural geography, but it does translate into concrete, verifiable data. It is an important issue not only for creative artists (artistic identity), but also for scholars as well as the audiences of art: it may point to the accessibility of various musical codes, explain the attractions of particular artists and their work and the manner in which they are understood (sometimes contrary). It allows one to interpret the complex, communal character of art (what kind of music creates what kinds of spheres). By being multi-dimensional, the category of 'nativeness of music' is useful in considering the evolution of Szymanowski's artistic identity.

I make the assumption that, for Szymanowski, music was linked in an essential way with life and culture, understood as a religious-philosophical foundation which binds a community into a cohesive whole. Szymanowski's works integrate and reveal that which is important (they do so subjectively and honestly, often for important personal reasons) in a culture he encounters, and which aspects of it are to be translated into a way of living for an individual (the ongoing process of maturation) and for a community. For him, music (as well as religion) is to be judged in terms of its explanatory and 'regenerative' power in relation to life — an enormous task.

Native spheres in Szymanowski's music and the stages of his creative development

It is customary to distinguish three periods in Szymanowski's artistic development, which coincide with important dates in history: the first period ends with the start of the First World War in 1914, and the second with Poland regaining its independence and the end of the Polish-Bolshevik war in 1920⁴. These dates mark the changing spheres of his spiritual and musical world. Initially, his identity was defined by belonging to the generation of young, creative continuators of Neoromanticism, absorbing the ideas of decadence

and modernism, criticising the hypocrisy and pedestrianism of the bourgeois culture, and protesting against Poland's backwardness in comparison with musical Europe (which also included ideas about the nature of national music). As a result, Szymanowski became part of the Young Poland in Music movement from 1905.

The second period was no longer one of rebellion, but of the composer's struggle for his own creative and personal identity as a mature artist; it was also a time of discovering the Mediterranean world and the roots of European culture in general. The world into which Szymanowski escaped during the war and the revolution of 1917 seems to have undergone an enormous expansion. The sense of being a native of one's own European culture reached back to antiquity and to the Oriental roots of knowledge, religion, mythology and art. However, this expansion is somewhat illusory. Szymanowski's openness to the influence of antiquity and the Orient may perhaps still have been an aspect of his search for answers to questions formulated at an earlier stage. They concerned the contemporary relevance to the existential issues of mythology, art and antique philosophy, or a 'verification' of the power of faith and its ability to order life and to explain the dilemmas facing a person living at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries⁵. There is also the problem of working out a new musical language, capable of expressing sensory cognition combined with rational and emotional cognition, or contemplation and religious mysticism combined with sensuality, even eroticism, so exquisitely resolved in the 'Song of songs', or in the poetry and music of the Orient.

Here of course we encounter the problem of the reality of that Orient, and the doubts as to the influence of the actual Arabian music⁶, together with the cultures of North-Eastern Africa and the Middle East, on the works of Szymanowski,⁷ as well as the individualistic nature of the impressionism and symbolism in his works from that period. The enormous creative drive and the stylistic and poetic distinctiveness of the works from Szymanowski's second creative period is a significant fact. It is important that their originality resulted from a wide-ranging search for inspiration, and not only artistic at that. The fruits of this search bring an idiosyncratic synthesis of the antique, the Orient and contemporary Europe (Impressionism, Symbolism). The artis-

tic synthesis is convincing, although both the antiquity and the Orient are not only interpreted in an idiosyncratic way, but they are also Szymanowski's creations. He thus created (making use of those elements of the culture and art of the Mediterranean which he regarded as the most fruitful) his own world, to which we are invited. In a sense, we are a community bound together through interpreting his art⁸.

The permanent framework of his first 'musical world', which was also his mental world, was created at his family home, the little manor house of Tymoszkówka in the Polish Eastern Borderlands. It was built by a young man with a receptive mind, living in a most favourable environment; both among his close and more distant family there were many relatives with excellent education and musical and artistic talents. Unfortunately, the second period brought with it the necessity of facing up to the difficulties of life, particularly after the revolution of 1917 and the loss of Tymoszkówka, which also meant the permanent loss of financial stability. The world of art and ideas may have provided Szymanowski with a haven to escape from the horrors of war and revolution; however, being responsible for his family (his mother and to some extent his sisters) forced Szymanowski — composer and pianist — to take the realities of life into account. It is difficult to assess how far this influenced his spiritual world and his creative output. One thing which is certain is that he never pursued artistic compromise. His 'folkloristic-national' period cannot be regarded as a sudden turning towards the form of art which would be approved in his homeland and which would be more generally accessible because of being simplified, as has been done by some. This was a period of the most difficult undertakings and the most strenuous and extensive search.

Discovering the sources: from *Słopiewnie* (Wordsong) to *Harnasie* (The Brigands) and *Pieśni kurpiowskie* (Kurpie Songs)

Szymanowski sometimes spent long periods preparing to compose, as if, in the case of the more important works, he had to become ready for it, to assimilate certain ideas, to integrate and to mythologise them. *Król Roger*,⁹ which has been analysed in depth, is the best example here, but in a sense

it is the final one as far as the manner of composing the content and creating the spiritual ground for a work are concerned. The turning point in Szymanowski's creative development after 1920 manifested itself also in the fact that Szymanowski ceased to create his own spiritual worlds which he expressed in music. Instead, he opened up to the existing culture, the life and music of the Podhale and Kurpie people, with their own mythology and life wisdom which speak through ritual art, mainly songs with their own poetics, symbolism and prosody. The individual, cohesive character of the culture of Podhale or Kurpie (spiritual, social, artistic and material) grew out of the landscapes of the rocky Tatra mountains or the Kurpie forests, from the land, the climate, the kind of economy and local occupations, from the history of the region. This is reflected in the ritual art of poetry, music and dance, whose symbolism usually related to the world of nature (its distinctive feature was to treat nature as a metaphor for human life). All that was needed was to follow this trail carefully, which is what Szymanowski did.

Słowieńnie (Wordsong) (1921) come from the time of transition between two periods. This unusual phantasy by Julian Tuwim on the subject of 'proto-Polish' ('proto-Slavic'?) language and poetry foreshadows the turning point in Szymanowski's approach to inspiration drawn from a world outside music, and to the poetics and the language of music. Although *Słowieńnie* still represent an approach of creating mythologies and a poetical-musical world of some imaginary Lechites, one can discern in them that by then Szymanowski was open to the text, to which he was listening carefully. Tuwim's mythical proto-Slavism speaks with Polish prosody; it calls upon the universal and at the same time realistic folk symbolism, which orders the world along the axis: that which is good, life-giving and sunny (bright, green as grassy sward, lively as flowing water, or neighing, frisky horses, or bees buzzing in the leaves of a tree), and that which is dark, potentially dangerous to life and mysterious (a dark forest, a rustling wicker-willow thicket)¹⁰. These symbols¹¹, which also form the searing drama of *Pieśni Kurpiowskie*¹², graphically summarise the simple folk philosophy of life, while at the same time demonstrating the importance of art. It is only art — poetry and music, dance and ritual — which can sing the wisdom and beauty of life so suggestively and on so many levels,

which can express its drama, and stimulate the life-giving forces¹³. And it is art which binds a community most strongly. The new types of melodies, poetics and prosody introduced by *Słopiewnie* clearly demonstrate that we are dealing with a new quality. In his analyses, Mieczysław Tomaszewski reveals its archaic — ie., original in Szymanowski's understanding — character (lexical, versificational, semantic and expressive), and the nativeness of the poetry and its translation into music. Józef Chomiński,¹⁴ emphasising the innovative tonal and melodic nature of *Słopiewnie*, remarks that 'the modality of folk music allowed [Szymanowski] to overcome the old chromatics [...] and at the same time to enrich the range of means of expression'¹⁵. In particular, the new way of shaping the melodies (inspired by modal thinking) seems significant in the composer's stylistic transformation.

Szymanowski confessed to Iwaszkiewicz in 1921, in connection with making the acquaintance of Jerzy Rytard, co-author of the libretto of *Harnasie*:

I am unable to be simply interested in people, but I always become attached to them [...] I would like to reach closer to his art yet I am afraid that I am too old to capture the atmosphere peculiar to his work [...] or perhaps it is only my own fanaticism of emotion which stands in my way¹⁶.

These words describe well Szymanowski's attitude to people. They also reveal a change in it: his opening to someone else's art and the fear that his 'fanaticism of emotion' may limit his ability to interpret it correctly. And indeed, after 1920, Szymanowski no longer concentrated on the personal approach to various cultural texts, reading them with a view to their usefulness to his art and to himself. Rather, he tried to listen attentively to others and to look closely at the living reality 'here and now'. Indeed, after 1920, Zakopane became Szymanowski's home, and Podhale — his world, although he had visited that area as a boy as early as the late nineteenth century¹⁷.

Szymanowski needed to become attuned to the Podhale community in order to learn to admire their art, which mingled with life so perfectly, expressing their philosophy and lifestyle, the very features which were the objects of his previous search. Jan Kleczyński,¹⁸ in his famous articles from 1883 and 1884¹⁹, which "discovered" the musical Podhale, emphasised the link between the proud, free 'highlander's soul' and the landscape of the rocky Tatra moun-

tains (where the Podhale folk felt themselves to be hosts), with their shrill, 'wild music', so distant from the aesthetic canon of the times. In typical Young Poland style, he wrote about the mysticism of the mountains and claimed that the highlanders' 'communion with lofty nature gave birth to a distinctive poetry and independence'²⁰. He also remarked that 'there are two sources of glory in the highlanders' life – dance and brigandry', which gives us an important clue towards understanding the genesis of *Harnasie*.

Szymanowski's Zakopane world included not only the highlanders, of whom almost each was an artist. The most famous of these was Bartuś Obrochta from Kościelisko, an outstanding self-taught fiddler, leader of the best ensemble, but there were also Wojciech Wawrytko, an excellent dancer, Stanisław Mróz — bagpipe player, or the beautiful, exceptionally musical singer, Elżbieta-Helena Roj, Rytard's wife. That world was also created by the writers, painters, philosophers and musicians who had fallen in love with Podhale, such as Juliusz Zborowski, director of the Tatra Museum who was documenting the local folklore, Stanisław Mierczyński, a violinist who played with the highland bands and who wrote transcriptions of the music of the Podhale ensembles²¹, Adolf Chybiński, ethnomusicologist, author of texts about Podhale's instruments and transcriptions of the Podhale music²², Jarosław Iwaskiewicz, Szymanowski's friend, cousin and librettist, Rafał Malczewski, a painter, Jerzy Rytard, a writer, husband of the beautiful highland girl Helena Roj, and Karol and Zofia Stryjeński²³. Podhale owed that wonderful period, known as the Zakopane carnival, to the contacts between artists who came from all over Poland (divided by Russia, Prussia, and), and the mountain folk. This stimulated creative effort and brought about the 'civilising' of Podhale, which soon became a fashionable resort offering an extensive range of 'folklore for sale'.

Szymanowski, who did not bestow praise easily, was fascinated by the playing of Bartuś Obrochta, an old man 'full of vigour and innate intelligence, one of the few «old-fashioned» peasants'. He regarded Bartuś's music-making, which was a continuous improvisation, as an 'artistry of its own kind'. He was particularly delighted with the tonally original (Podhale scale with Lydian fourth and minor seventh), five-bar phrase and 'Sabała' ditties, high-

lander melodies, and the brigands' dance, a spectacular dance performed by male dancers, usually around a fire (which has its equivalents in the culture of the Karpaty). Szymanowski also looked for the sources of the originality and the creative force characteristic of the Podhale people, and folk communities in general. Rydel quotes Szymanowski saying in conversation with him that 'folk cultures [...] manifest both as the ashes hiding the dreaming embers, the sleeping traces of ancient life, but also as the store of energies which so far have not found access to conscious culture'. What is also important is the wholeness of the folk culture (including its religious-philosophical sphere), out of which grows the integrality of human personalities: there is also a remark about the 'labyrinths, in which rich cultures, which crumble human beings into tiny pieces, become lost'. And finally, the question of the origins: 'schools, universities [...], material and mental technology [...] [are not the most important, because] culture is not an accretion, a mask or ... applied lacquer, — the source which gives birth to culture pulsates within the very essence of mankind, the human spirit, without any preceptors'. It concerns also 'the importance of spontaneously generated elements and links within folk culture and art, flowering from a biological base, from living with nature'²⁴. In these views, we can see the evolution of Szymanowski's attitude towards folklore and towards sources of inspiration beyond music in general. What is particularly significant is the adoption of a universal anthropological perspective, which was to grow stronger with time.

The sources of the distinctiveness of the music and culture of Podhale, which Szymanowski wanted to portray in his planned ballet, were sought in its beautiful and wild rocky landscape, in the strong bonds between the highlanders' life and nature, and in their ethnic distinctiveness. Rytard describes one of the expeditions into the mountains in which Szymanowski participated; its setting was a night, a clearing, the moon, bats, wine and the dancing of the Podhale folk. Szymanowski's comment on that unique mood of pantheistic oneness with the world was: 'such moments lived through by oneself take man to the highest metaphysical regions'. And while the group of artist friends was planning to establishment of the 'Podhale State'²⁵; ('only artists and highlanders'; the idea came from Karol Stryjeński), it was remarked that

‘pure-bred highlanders show no trace of racial kinship [...] with, for example, a country bumpkin from around Siedlce or around Bydgoszcz’, since highlanders were supposed to be ‘descendants of Walachians’, and ‘pastoral settlers’²⁶. Hence the sheep herding which opens *Harnasie*. One should also add the eagerly-listened-to stories about what went on in the local inns, such as that owned by Słowiński, at the entry of the Kościeliska valley, where Father Stolarczyk held confidential talks with the poacher Mateja; Słowiński himself had been known, when the need arose, to tame with a shot from his pistol a customer from the Roj family, known for his propensity for making trouble. All this conveys the atmosphere of Podhale and the spirit of its inhabitants; for this reason, ‘the ballet is permeated with an atmosphere of the bravery of the indomitable highlander character’²⁷. All this tells us a lot about the origins of *Harnasie*, although it does not exhaust the subject.

The fate of the libretto and its title are also significant: the Rytards, as well as Iwaszkiewicz, worked on it with Szymanowski, but it was the composer himself who gave it its final shape. Initially the plot was to be woven around a highland wedding, the idea favoured by Iwaszkiewicz (the authentic, famous wedding of Rytard and the Roj girl — a writer and a highlander — which took place in 1923, was the starting point of work on the libretto; it had important antecedents, in the shape of an excellent Polish drama from the early twentieth century, Wyspiański’s *Wesele* [*The Wedding*], inspired by the wedding of a literary man and a peasant girl²⁸). Initially, Szymanowski wanted to call the ballet *Janosik* [a legendary brigand hero], then replaced it with *Zbójnicy* [*The Bandits*]. Fortunately, he finally avoided the fairly common titles, which bring to mind conceptual and interpretive clichés. The eight years of work (until 1931) on the score and libretto of *Harnasie* demonstrate just how seriously Szymanowski regarded this ballet, its content and the overtones conveyed by the music, the singing, the plot and the dancing.

Iwaszkiewicz was of the opinion that the simplicity of the contents of *Harnasie* demonstrated its lack of ‘dramatic knot’; that the ballet ‘mythologised’ the highland culture, and elevated the customs of a particular region to the status of ‘proto-Polishness — some kind of proto-Slavism’ (in the manner of Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring*). According to Iwaszkiewicz, evidence for this can

be found in, for example, the absence of proper names for the main characters of *Harnasie*; they are: ‘the girl, the shepherd, the brigand’ [in the script: the Groom, the Bride, the Player, the First Brigand Harnaś – JKD-K], and ‘the whole has a mythological significance, such as the kidnapping of Cora by Pluto’²⁹. These interesting comments are not convincing. It is precisely the mythological world which gives us heroes whose names personify certain universal, but also extraordinary situations and actions of the heroes. On the other hand, folk rituals have a Groom and Bride, a Village Elder, a Player. It seems that Szymanowski created something more original. To a degree, *Harnasie* has a ‘mythological’ contour, but the ballet is more accurately viewed as a synthesis of what really enchanted Szymanowski in Podhale’s culture, what he came to regard as its essence, its basic character and colour. Was it really intended as the knell for the disappearing original shepherd culture and the young braves who created it? This was how Iwaszkiewicz understood this work, recommending that the text of the Podhale song ‘Byli chłopcy byli, ale się minyli, i my się miniemy po maluśkiej kwili’ [‘Some braves these used to be, but they passed away, as we’ll pass away in a little while’] should be set to the final phrases of the music³⁰.

However, it is hard to accept that Szymanowski, while creating a monument to celebrate the bravery, pride, creativity and vitality of the Podhale folk, would want to mourn the passing of their best days and people. He was probably aware that the ‘Golden Age’ of Podhale art was passing away under the pressure of civilisation, when more tourists than artists began to visit the region³¹. It was passing away together with the wonderful people for whom art was not only the content and the style, but also a way of living. But Szymanowski was writing an apologia for a free people, perhaps somewhat wild, but with poetic souls, shepherds full of panache, potential outlaws, eager for brigandry, for singing, dancing and loving. It could not have become a drama on the lines of a proto-Polish *Wedding*, as intended by Iwaszkiewicz, although a wedding constituted the central part of the ballet. At the most, it could have been an ‘Interrupted wedding’, since the shot fired by the First Brigand was the culmination of the ballet, interrupting the capping of the bride — the essence of the ritual — and drowning everything in darkness and

chaos. The lyrical scenes in the meadow (the courtship and the dance of the brigand with the kidnapped highland girl) at the beginning and at the end of the ballet represent the essence of the Podhale culture and the lyrical and somewhat wild ‘highlander spirit’ as it was perceived by Szymanowski. In a sense he did mythologise the culture of Podhale, but in the main he synthesised it,³² operating with specific lyrical-dramatic images, and his music, which draws deeply on the authentic highlander features, further increases this impression³³.

Szymanowski could not have invented a better world than that of Podhale. It had to be preserved using the arts of poetry, music and dance, and the aim was not only to use the original music repertoire, but also to capture the performance style of the local ensembles and singers, and to give expression to the enchantment of the highlander spirit, manifesting itself through dance³⁴. Speaking very generally, the musical mastery of *Harnasie* consists both in the selection of melodies, those which are the most interesting and original³⁵, and in capturing faithfully the manner of playing and singing (exclamations) and, in a sense, the dance. This concerns the rich, variable rhythm, which operates with rhythms punctuated in reverse (this emerges from the Podhale dialect, where stress falls on the shorter first syllables³⁶), with the typical Podhale polyrhythmics, i.e., melody triolas against the background of the duple metre of the ensemble-orchestra, or the idiosyncratic musical motorics of the brigand and highland dances. Where polyrhythm is concerned, even musicians (apart from Mierczyński and of course Szymanowski) find it difficult to capture, since the rhythmic richness of the chants performed in tempo rubato needs to be combined with the constant, even pulse of the band, revealing the deep structure of the metrorhythmics (the absence of triple metre is regarded as one of the typical features of the music of that region). Of interest in this context is a comparison of the main melody of ‘Taniec góralski’ [‘Highland dance’] (Tableau II, scene 7) with Kleczyński’s notation published in the article from 1884 mentioned previously³⁷; it concerns both the anacrusis, and the triple rhythm (see figures 8.1 and 8.2).

The rhythmically diverse, variable melodics with their improvisational character and the idiosyncratic sound of this fragment, saturated with string

(Meno mosso)
tenor solo

Ej, wol - ny ja, wol - ny, ja - ko pto - - sek pol - ny !

Choc ja we śle - bo - dzie, jak ryb - ka we wo - dzie !

Fig. 8.1. K. Szymanowski: *Harnasie*, ‘Taniec góralski’ [‘Highland dance’] (Tableau II, scene 7).

Fig. 8.2. J. Kleczyński's notation.

colour, were inspired by Obrochta's band, whose playing Szymanowski always followed with great attention and delight. One of those who mention this is Iwaszkiewicz:

Karol was in such rapture that he could not calm down. These melodies and harmonies penetrated his very being, and the inability to defend himself from them stayed with him to the end of his life, even though he tried [...], when he'd finally had enough of all that folklore and that secondary music which he unleashed throughout Poland by making the Highland culture fashionable³⁸.

Whatever the case, Szymanowski captured the essence of the highland music-making of the Podhale bands through using the connection between the harmonic formulae (the monorhythmic bass part) and the rhythmic ones (violin), important for shaping the metrorhythmic and the form of the dance melodies ('ozwodne', 'krzesane' and marches).

As to the melodic and tonal originality of *Harnasie*, this was primarily the result of an excellent selection of authentic, beautiful melodies. Szymanowski revealed and uniquely intensified their falling contour, their highly intoned, intense sound and above all their tonal individuality. The most characteristic seem to be the falling progressions of melody in the Podhale scale and its segments. One of the best known, and in a sense the flagbearer of the Podhale

melodies, the so-called ‘Chałubiński march’, which constitutes the musical base of ‘Marsz zbójnicki’ [‘Brigands’ march] (Tableau I scene 3) is given in a version with augmented fourth, in spite of transcriptions in major tonality being widespread in music textbooks. However, Szymanowski succeeded in avoiding scale monotony, which is an issue concerning, among other things, the tonal ambiguity of many highland melodies. This may be the result of their distinctive cadencing, moving between the first and second degree of the Podhale scale, which can be heard, for example, in the opening melody of *Harnasie*. That melody — as it was recorded by Chybiński — is a version of Sabala’s melody ‘Ej idzie se Janicek’³⁹. This creates the impression of ‘fluttering’ between the Podhale scale, with Lydian fourth and minor seventh, and Mixolydian scale with minor seventh. Also of interest is the ambiguity, or tonal variability, of melodies which results from their sequential character (the best example is provided by ‘Pieśń siuchajów’ (Tableau II scene 6), or Podhale’s ‘Ja za wodom, ty za wodom’ (cadences on b and e). Dense juxtapositions of tonally different highland melodies (more often their fragments, for example with variable third, alternating between major and minor; at times also major and minor seventh are exchanged in the Podhale scale) also create an impression of ‘modulation’ between various modes. His mastery in combining familiar melodies, and his excellent recollection of them are apparent in the ‘Czarnodunajecka’ melody, entwined in the ‘Taniec góralski’ (Tableau II scene 7) after another entry of the melody ‘Ej wolny ja wolny’; apart from the metrorhythmic, it corresponds almost exactly to Chybiński’s transcription (published in 1951) from the phonographic recordings of Bartek Obrochta’s solo performances, recorded by J. Zborowski in 1913⁴⁰ (see figure 8.3).



Fig. 8.3. ‘Czarnodunajecka’ from the phonographic recordings of Bartek Obrochta.

The music of *Harnasie* has been judged to be insufficiently independent (‘too many quotations’) and showy (‘brilliance and pomposity’; ‘too many currants in this loaf’⁴¹); it is regarded as not being equal to *Pieśni kurpi-*

owskie. However, such comparisons are pointless, since Szymanowski's aims in the two works were different⁴², and *Harnasie* is undoubtedly a ballet which belongs among the leading stage works of the first half of the twentieth century.

As to the melodic of *Harnasie*, its originality (and that of the whole ballet) results, among other things, from the distinctive modal character of the highland melodies used by Szymanowski. This involves musical thinking in original melodic-tonal formulae, differentiated in terms of expression. This thinking was the basis for H. Powers distinction between two modal systems: the 'closed' system, relating to a particular system of church modes and compositions which used them, and the 'open' system, typical of living, changing folklore⁴³, where there is a need for matching tonally and expressively appropriate formulae to particular ritual chants (spring or summer, supplicative or thanksgiving)⁴⁴; these do not always correspond to church mode scales. This comment applies also to *Pieśni kurpiowskie*, although the process of transformation and stylisation of melody in these takes a somewhat different course. This course is also marked out in its metric-rhythmic aspect by the original poetry of the Kurpie songs — their text (sound, structure, meaning) is the basis of form and composition. Here we have an intensification of a fairly objective style of folk narration which is both lyrical and dramatic in its expression. *Pieśni kurpiowskie* (choral 1929 and solo 1932) also capture in a strikingly apt manner a number of melodic-tonal folk formulae with a suggestive musical expression. They carry the marks of musical tonal archetype (characteristic for the oldest layers of Polish ritual chants), built on pentatonics modified in a variety of ways (chiefly 'la', i.e., the Aeolian version, often widened upwards by minor sixth⁴⁵).

The changes in melodic accurately reflect the evolution of style, and Szymanowski's creative development in general (valuable comments about this can be found in the works of Teresa Chylińska, an outstanding expert on the life and work of Szymanowski⁴⁶). Stephen Downes in his article '«Kryzys melodyczny» w twórczości K Szymanowskiego' ['The «melodic crisis» in the works of Karol Szymanowski'] observes that 'Szymanowski's works are filled with the search for a convincing melody'⁴⁷. In his article, Downes rightly

takes issue with the views of Jim Samson, who blurs the difference between works from the second and third periods, seeing in them an ‘ongoing project [...] [i.e.] the conquest of the exotic’. This might apply to the ‘discovery of mystical, Dionysian-Sufic elements in Slavic culture’, as was suggested by Iwaszkiewicz⁴⁸. However, the clearly discernible turning ‘towards ancient folk music’ after 1920 is distinctly different from the creation of musical exoticism (Orient and antiquity) undertaken by Szymanowski during his second period of development. During the last period, his works demonstrate numerous ties with the actual folk music of Podhale and Kurpie and their cultural foundations. Szymanowski’s creativity is limited there to capturing the essence of the style, sense, poetics and form of a living musical tradition (not all of it, but aspects chosen for their archaic beauty and poetry) and intensifying it. Greater simplicity, naturalness and objectivity of his music is a mark of the harmony and mastery which he achieved by discovering the native tradition in all its richness and simplicity. In this way he discovered his roots, his ‘racial’ identity, no longer looking back to the potential (possible) Dionysian or Sufic mystical proto-sources. He was discovering these roots not only for himself; he recommended that other Polish composers should also make this authentic discovery of the ‘barbaric primitivism’ which in ‘its closeness to nature, power and directness of temperament and, lastly, the uncontaminated purity of the expression of the race’ might regenerate ‘our anaemic music’⁴⁹.

The current of religious music, parallel to that of a folkloristic one, is also rooted in the native musical tradition (e.g. modal thinking). This involves masterpieces which Szymanowski himself regarded as particularly valuable, such as *Stabat Mater* (1925–6) or *Litany to the Virgin Mary* (1933). These expressed the last phase (interrupted by his untimely death) of the composer’s search for his artistic, personal, national, universally human identity, and its religious and cultural sources.

Notes

- 1 E.g. Russian idealistic symbolism is important in interpreting *King Roger* — perhaps the most personal of Szymanowski’s works (cf. E. Boniecki, ‘Password ‘Roger’...’) .
- 2 Z. Jachimecki and M. Tomaszewski used these terms in relation to specific works from that period.

- 3 As a rule, true art possess that dimension, and it is sometimes the case that 'local', traditional art may be more universal than national art (this happens with folklore); often these dimensions overlap.
- 4 In view of the maturing of some of his ideological-musical concepts, and the evolution of the musical language, one might also place the caesura after 1910, which marks Szymanowski's third journey to Italy and then, in 1911, his first journey to Sicily. However, the significance of these wanderings in the world of the Mediterranean reached higher intensity in 1914, during the composer's journey to Sicily, Tunis, Algiers and Biskra in the company of his friend and sponsor, Stefan Spiess.
- 5 For example, the idiosyncratic harmonisation of Christian religion and morality with Greek mythology, particularly the Dionysian myth of rebirth and the joy of life, which is one of the themes of *King Roger*, or the Platonic motifs of the androgyny of human nature and the achievement of harmony as a condition of attaining happiness.
- 6 Szymanowski's dislike of the academic 'stylising' of presumably simplified 19th-century notation of Arabian melodies is very characteristic. He did not want to produce cheap imitations of exotic cultures whose depths were not accessible to a European.
- 7 Sławomira Żerańska-Kominek notes that the orientalism in Szymanowski's works is debatable, and describes the whole of Szymanowski's and Spiess's expedition to Tunis, Biskra and Algiers as a tourist, rather than a research, enterprise. She emphasises the fact that the four notebooks containing Szymanowski's handwritten notes about the journey contain excerpts from the texts he read on Arabian civilisation (by Gustav Le Bon and Luis-Amélie Sédillot), she guesses at his reading the Q'ran, but she finds no mention of works, well-known at the time, about Arabian music or collections of Arabian music ('Problem orientalizmu w muzyce Karola Szymanowskiego'), in: *Karol Szymanowski w perspektywie kultury muzycznej przeszłości i współczesności* ['The problem of orientalism in the music of Karol Szymanowski'], in: *Karol Szymanowski in the light of musical culture past and present*, ed. Zbigniew Skowron, 2007 Kraków, Musica Iagellonica, Warszawa IMUW, pp. 105–120).
- 8 At that time, Szymanowski was interested in those cultures ('spiritual worlds') which helped him define his identity at different levels — personal (including sexual) and pan-European, rooted in Greek antiquity and Christianity which came from the East; what he was searching for was the timeless validity of the values they represented.
- 9 Cf. texts by Boniecki and Helman in this volume.
- 10 I purposely quote examples from the text of the song 'Zielone słowa [Green words]', regarded as devoid of dramatic content, in order to propose an interpretation which reveals the hidden plot narrative suggested by the symbols used in the poem.
- 11 An excellent interpretation of the symbolic world preserved in Kolberg's documentation is the two-volume (at present) *Słownik stereotypów i symboli ludowych* [*Dictionary of folk stereotypes and symbols*], edited under the direction of Jerzy Bartmiński (Lublin UMCS 1996 and 1999).
- 12 The lack of dramatic action in the texts of such songs as 'Wysła burzycka' ['A storm has come'] or 'A pod borem siwe kunie' ['Grey horses by the forest'] is only apparent. Their framework is revealed through interpreting the symbols (animals, plants, colours, elements). The richest and most transparent symbolism appears in the song 'A ktoś tam puka' ['And who's knocking there'], representing the stylised chants for

the wedding of an orphan girl, who asks her dead mother, locked away with 'trzy zomecki [three locks]', for a blessing.

- 13 In view of the new type of symbolism in Tuwim's Slavicism, I would dispute one of Tomaszewski's conclusions in his valuable study of *Stopiewnie*. This is the claim that, for example, the poem 'Zielone słowa [Green words]', from which word-symbols are quoted above, lacks the 'dramatic action or lyrical confession, essential in a folk song' (*Nad pieśniami Karola Szymanowskiego. Cztery studia [On Karol Szymanowski's songs. Four studies]*, Kraków AM 1998, p.60). This is because in folk poetry, and particularly in archaic chants, there are a few words which always carry meanings, mainly symbolic. Thus an interpretation purely in terms of sound, which brings in, e.g., Dadaism, seems unconvincing.
- 14 J. Chomiński *Studia nad twórczością K. Szymanowskiego [The works of Karol Szymanowski - Studies]*, op. cit. and 'Problem tonalny w «Stopiewniac»' ['The tonal problem in «Stopiewnie»'] (*PRM* 1936, vol. 2 pp. 53–86).
- 15 J. Chomiński, 'Szymanowski a osobowość twórcza kompozytorów XX wieku' ['Szymanowski and the creative personalities of twentieth-century composers'], in *O Karolu Szymanowskim [About Karol Szymanowski]*, Warszawa 1983, Interpress, p. 26.
- 16 This concerns a letter from 1921 (quoted after: J Rytard, *Wspomnienia o Karolu Szymanowskim [Reminiscences about Karol Szymanowski]*, Kraków, PWM 1982 p. 55).
- 17 When Szymanowski used to visit Zakopane, one had to get there by cart from Kraków (the railway reached Zakopane in 1899). Iwaszkiewicz reminisces about visiting with his mother his aunt Helena Kruszyńska, with whom, in the old days at Tymosówka, he used to play compositions for four hands from Paderewski's volume popular at that time, *Albumy Tatrzańskie [Tatra Albums]* — arrangements for drawing-room performances of popular Podhale melodies.
- 18 A musician, Editor-in-Chief of *Echo Muzyczne i Teatralne [Musical and Theatrical Echo]*, a leading periodical with an artistic profile.
- 19 Jan Kleczyński, 'Pieśń zakopiańska' ['The song of Zakopane'] (*Echo Muzyczne i Teatralne* 1883 No. 1) and 'Zakopane i jego pieśni' ['Zakopane and its songs'] (*Echo ...* 1883–4 Nos. 41, 42, 44, 46).
- 20 J. Kleczyński, 'Pieśń zakopiańska', op. cit. p.9.
- 21 Published: *Muzyka Podhala [The Music of Podhale]* (Introduction by K Szymanowski) Lvov 1930 and *Pieśni Podhala na 2 i 3 równe głosy [Songs of Podhale for 2 and 3 equal voices]*, Warszawa 1935.
- 22 A. Chybiński *Instrumenty muzyczne ludu polskiego na Podhalu [Musical instruments of the Polish folk of Podhale]*, Kraków 1924, *Od Tatr do Bałtyku [From the Tatras to the Baltic]*, 2 vol. Kraków 1950–51.
- 23 Karol was an architect and graphic artist, Zofia painted famous stylised pictures inspired by folklore, such as dancing highlanders; she also provided the stage design for *Harnasie*.
- 24 J. Rytard, op cit, pp. 11–12.
- 25 With its capital at Pięć Stawów [Five Lakes]. Rytard writes that both Karols were content to play the part of eminences grises, while the president would be some 'well-presented, elegant figurehead' (J. Rytard, op. cit., p. 27).
- 26 J. Rytard, op. cit., pp. 22, 24–25.
- 27 As above, p. 19.

- 28 Faithfully filmed by Andrzej Wajda in 1972.
- 29 Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, *Harnasie Szymanowskiego* [*Szymanowski's Harnasie*], Kraków PWM 1979, pp. 24–25
- 30 J. Iwaszkiewicz, op. cit., s. 26.
- 31 Zakopane — the capital of Podhale — was provided with a railway link to the rest of the country in 1899; prior to that one would have to travel there by horse and cart from Kraków, which would take a number of days.
- 32 Zygmunt Mycielski expressed a similar view in: 'Harnasie syntetyzują Podhale' ['Harnasie synthesise the Podhale culture'] (*Ucieczki z pięciolinii*, 1957, p. 179)
- 33 Ludwik Bielawski made a number of important comments on the subject of Podhale inspiration in *Harnasie*. For example, he noted that although the initial Sabala note is performed instrumentally (oboe), one can hear singing in it, with the characteristic exclamation at the beginning. Also of interest are his remarks concerning the ending of the ballet, which suggest that the ending from the 'Paris' production, approved by Szymanowski, was not necessarily the final one ('Harnasie', in: *Tradycje ludowe w kulturze muzycznej*, Warszawa IS PAN 1999, pp.155–159). In fact, the ballet's finale deserves further attention.
- 34 The abundant use of what are perhaps the most interesting highland melodies might have something to do with the fact that the notated record of Podhale melodies available at that time (with Paderewski's transcripts attached to *Echo Muzyczne i Teatralne*, and his compositions at the front) deprived authentic highland pieces of many of their original features; even Kleczyński (1883) wrote about Obrochta's 'strange manner of playing', i.e., raising fourth degree.
- 35 Rytard recalls that Szymanowski listened to the highlanders' music 'listening out for everything that was preserved in it [...] in uncontaminated form. [...] Slowly, Karol began composing [...] with much consideration [...] separating wheat from chaff, of which there is more and more' (op. cit., p.43).
- 36 A distinctive feature is the crossing over of dynamic and quantitative accents, which also appears in the language and folklore of Slovaks and Hungarians.
- 37 Op. cit., *Echo Muzyczne i Teatralne* 1884, No. 44.
- 38 J. Iwaszkiewicz, *O Karolu Szymanowskim* [*About Karol Szymanowski*], op. cit., p. 123.
- 39 Included as No. 2 in A. Chybiński's collection *Od Tatr do...* (op. cit., vol. I, 1950 p. 27).
- 40 It is to be found under No. 9 in A. Chybiński's collection *Od Tatr...*, op. cit., vol II, 1951 p. 19; attention should also be drawn to the change of metre in Obrochta's solo transcript.
- 41 J. Iwaszkiewicz, *Harnasie*, op. cit., p. 22.
- 42 Among other things, this concerns the use of mainly ritual chants in *Pieśni kurpiowskie*, and also making use of dance songs in *Harnasie*.
- 43 H. Powers, entry 'Mode' in: *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol XII, 1980 (this is discussed by D. Frasunkiewicz in *Białoruska pieśń doroczna. System modalny czy tylko jego elementy* [*Belarussian annual song. A modal system or only its elements*], Warszawa 1992, ms. at IMUW).
- 44 Фидор Рубцов, *Стати по музыкальному фольклору*, Leningrad-Moscow 1973, pp. 93–104.
- 45 This is the structure of the melody 'Uwoz mamó roz' (corresponding tonally with the

Sandomierz version of 'Chmiel' ['Hops'] — the main capping song, recorded by Kolberg in the second volume of *Lud* 1865 No. 30 p. 37, with the distinctive exchangeability of minor and major third in the refrain, which may be the older version). Pentatonics might have been the initial tonality for many ritual chants; for example, the pentatonising phrase from the song 'A chtóz tam puka' ['Who's knocking there?']: d', c sharp', d', a, g, b flat, d', c sharp', a, is close to the Sandomierz song for an orphan's wedding recorded by Kolberg 'Wynijdze matko z grobu' ['Come out from your grave, mother']: a, c sharp', d', d', c sharp', a, d', a, c sharp', d', d', c sharp', g, a (Ibid, No. 12 p. 28). Interesting comments about the Kurpie songs can be found in Jan Stęszewski's study 'Dlaczego Szymanowski nie skomponował więcej pieśni kurpiowskich?' ['Why did Szymanowski not compose any more Kurpie songs?'] in: *Muzyka* 1983 No. 2.

- 46 Among them: Teresa Chylińska, *Karol Szymanowski: His Life and Works*, Los Angeles 1993.
- 47 Included in *Pieśń w twórczości Karola Szymanowskiego i jemu współczesnych* [*Songs in the works of Karol Szymanowski and his contemporaries*], ed. Z Helman, Kraków, 2001, p. 192.
- 48 S. Downes, op. cit., p. 197.
- 49 Karol Szymanowski (in: *Pani* 1924 No. 8/9)