
Educating Audiences, Educating Composers: The Polish Composers' Union and *Upowszechnienie*

Lisa Cooper Vest

In the years directly following the Polish October in 1956, the Culture Department (Wydział Kultury) of the Party's Central Committee (Komitet Centralny) was primarily concerned with drafting a new cultural politics that would reflect the new environment ushered in by the Gomułka regime. A predominant issue in these discussions was that of *upowszechnienie kultury*: the propagation or dissemination of culture throughout the nation.¹ The matter of *upowszechnienie* had also been an important component of Stalinist-era cultural politics, but the Culture Department and the Ministry of Culture and Art (Ministerstwo Kultury i Sztuki) reaffirmed their commitment to this mission, even as they scrambled to determine what *upowszechnienie* would look like under the post-1956 conditions of 'decentralization' and 'democratization.' The outcome of all of these attempts to situate *upowszechnienie* within a new ideological environment was a general confusion of pronouncements and rhetoric. Rarely did the Culture Department or Ministry issue any kind of practical statement about the actual means by which *upowszechnienie* of culture might be achieved. Rather, officials focused on repackaging the notion to reflect a new commitment to cultural freedom, while still retaining

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its propaganda functionality.² This resulted in vaguely defined imperatives, blending a quasi-*Bildung* commitment to enriching the nation through cultural education with a renewed desire to shape that education according to the tenets of Party ideology.

However, the concept of *upowszechnienie* also had a life outside of the vortex of government ideology. Those who worked in cultural institutions, such as the Polish Composers' Union (Związek Kompozytorów Polskich), recognized the importance of cultivating both a cultural elite and a broader, culturally-educated audience. In his keynote speech at the Union's 1955 General Congress (Walny Zjazd), music critic and composer Zygmunt Mycielski spoke at great length about Polish composers' responsibility to meet the needs of all audiences, including amateur performers, schoolchildren, and untrained music-lovers:

The first ice has been broken. It is not possible today to claim that Polish musicians have closed themselves in a haughty Parnassus. I repeat: our composers do not only write symphonies and concertos, or difficult stage works aimed at only the highest technical level.³

The rhetoric of *upowszechnienie* was not simply a matter of theory or ideology within the Composers' Union. It was a practical injunction to action. One of the mechanisms for such action within the Union was the Composers' Commissions Committee (Komisja Zamówień Kompozytorów), which cooperated with both the Union's Governing Committee (Prezydium Zarządu Głównego) and the Ministry of Culture and Art to initiate and finalize commissions for compositions. The Union archive has preserved more than two hundred internal reviews written between 1955 and 1960; these reviews represent an important step in the commission process. The composers' initial

² For example, the Culture Department sponsored a nationwide conference on *upowszechnienie* in December of 1958. The motto of the conference was 'Polska krajem ludzi kształcących się' ('Poland as a country of people who aspire to education'). Despite the optimistic thrust of the speeches, interdepartment memos reveal that even the organizers themselves were frustrated with empty slogans and lack of practical solutions. Archiwum Akt Nowych 237/XVIII/175.

³ '[...] pierwsze lody zostały już przełamane. Nie można już dziś twierdzić, że muzycy polscy zamknęli się na wyniosłym Parnasie. Kompozytorzy nasi powtarzam – nie tworzą tylko symfonii i koncertów, czy też trudnych, na najwyższy tylko poziom techniczny obliczony utworów estradowych.' (Mycielski 1955) Note: all translations are my own.

interaction was with the Commissions Committee, but obtaining a commission did not automatically ensure that the resulting composition would receive the total payment from the Ministry of Culture and Art. Finalization of the commission and disbursement of honorarium depended upon the judgment of prominent composers and critics, who were charged by the Governing Committee to write reviews of the works, determining whether or not Union standards of merit and quality had been met.⁴ The reviews were discussed at the regular meetings of the Governing Committee, and copies were also sent to the composers. This collection of reviews therefore reveals a great deal about power relationships between the Union and its members, about the specific works under consideration, and about the practical functioning of the Union itself. Perhaps most significantly, they provide a 'way in' to the Union's internal discourse. Many of the authors conceived their reviews as a medium for general comments about Polish musical culture, and their comments were directed more towards the Union leadership than they were to specific composers. These assessments are useful in scrutinizing the Union's practical strategies for achieving cultural *upowszechnienie*. In the reviews, there are three levels on which reviewers envision the responsibilities of the Union leaders: they should shape Polish musical culture by cultivating specific kinds of compositions, by cultivating or educating the young composers themselves, and, finally, by cultivating progressive aesthetic ideals as a foundation for a strong music culture.

On the first of these levels, the reviewers' vision most nearly resembled the more general understanding of *upowszechnienie* espoused by the government: as a popularization initiative, a commitment to the propagation of music to all sectors of Polish society, specifically through the encouragement of music written for amateur performers and music students. Many of the pieces sent for review between 1955 and 1960 were pedagogical works or pieces intended for amateur ensembles or soloists. These types of compositions were considered very carefully, assigned for review to some of

⁴ If a composition received a positive review, the Union would notify the Ministry that the remainder of the honorarium should be paid and that a performance should be arranged. After a negative review, the composition would be sent for a second and sometimes even a third opinion; if the final verdict remained negative, the full honorarium would not be paid.

the most prominent composers in the Union; Zygmunt Mycielski, Grażyna Bacewicz, Tadeusz Szeligowski, Witold Rudziński and Stefan Kisielewski were frequently asked to write reviews.

An excellent example is Grażyna Bacewicz's September 1955 review of *Mała Suita na dwoje skrzypiec lub 2 grupy skrzypiec* (Little Suite for two violins or two groups of violins) by Maria Dziewulska:

Of all the easy works for violin or two violins written in the past decade, I put Dziewulska's suite in first place as a particularly successful piece. Although musically very simple, it has flavor – it is not banal. Each movement (there are five) is well-constructed; they are fresh in terms of melody and rhythm. Dziewulska already operates with her own language, which is not an easy accomplishment... she developed it through folklore and a fondness for polyphony.

It is puzzling that [Dziewulska] has such a good feel for the instrument, even though she is not a violinist. Even fingering and bowing, which cause difficulty for most non-violinist composers, are acceptable in the Dziewulska. The Suite will be a very useful item in our pedagogical literature. The second violin part is harder than the first, but I do not judge this as a weakness, as usually the teacher plays the lower voice in a lesson [...]

Because each of the individual movements is in itself a complete little work, the Suite does not have to be played as a whole. They can be treated as [instrumental] miniatures, each taking up a different technical problem.

Because Dziewulska has done so well with this duet form, I propose that there be a commission for a second cycle from her for the same ensemble, as we still do not have too many of this kind of work.⁵

⁵ 'Spośród wszystkich łatwych utworów na skrzypce lub dwoje skrzypiec, które ukazały się w ciągu dziesięciolecia stawiam Suitę Dziewulskiej na pierwszym miejscu, jako utwór szczególnie udany. Muzycznie choć prościutki, a niebanalny i ze „smaczkami”. Każda część, których jest pięć,—świetnie zbudowana,—świeża pod względem melodycznym i rytmicznym. Dziewulska operuje już swoim własnym językiem, co jest osiągnięciem niebylejakim. Doszła do tego w oparciu o folklor i zamiłowanie do polifonii. Zastanawiający jest fakt, jak dobrze kompozytorka „czuje skrzypce,” mimo, że nie jest skrzypaczką. Nawet opalowanie i smyczkowanie, które większości kompozytorom—niesmyczkowcom przynosi pewne trudności, u Dziewulskiej jest do przyjęcia. Suita będzie bardzo pożyteczną pozycją w naszym repertuarze pedagogicznym. Drugie skrzypce są napisane nieco trudniej niż pierwsze, co jednak nie uważam za minus, gdyż zwykle na lekcji niższy głos gra nauczyciel. . . Ponieważ każda z poszczególnych części jest sama w sobie skończonym utworem, Suita nie musi być grana w całości. Można ją także traktować jako drobne utwory, z których każdy ma na celu inny problem techniczny. Wobec tego, że forma duetu wypadła u Dziewulskiej tak dobrze, stawiam wniosek o zamówienie u niej drugiego cyklu na ten sam zespół, gdyż ciągle jeszcze mamy tego rodzaju utworów nie za wiele.' (Bacewicz 1955)

Bacewicz speaks here as an authority – composer, violinist, pedagogue – and she finds that the composition has merit as a piece for young violin students in their teachers' studio. To a certain degree, though, this review acts more as a dissection of a successful pedagogical work, and as a prescription for further works along these lines, than it does as a critical commentary for Dzewulska. Bacewicz indicates that there is a need for *successful* works of this category. In the course of the review, she mentions a number of qualities that make the *Mala Suita* successful: it is idiomatically written, its movements are self-contained and present a variety of challenges to the young performer, its musical language is unique and fresh, and the distribution of parts has been conceived in terms of the performance practice of the teachers' studio.

The comments about Dzewulska's musical language are particularly illuminating. Bacewicz is not satisfied that a pedagogical piece would simply offer technical exercise for young students; rather, there is a sense that the piece should also impart lessons in musical taste. The student should not have to perform pieces whose language is devoid of the composer's voice. The composer of pedagogical works should thus strive to develop his or her own musical language ('not an easy accomplishment') and to instill that voice into the fabric of the work.

Bacewicz's review is one of the few that are completely positive. Many of the reviews of pedagogical, amateur, or 'popular' compositions are either lukewarm or negative, although they seldom deny the composers the complete commission payment, citing the sheer necessity for such works in Polish society. However, like Bacewicz, they use the review as a medium through which to present their own beliefs about particular genres, performing ensembles, and audiences.

Critic and composer Stefan Kisielewski was frequently asked to write reviews for solo and chamber works. In his 1955 review of Aleksander Marczewski's *Obrazki wiejskie* for chamber ensemble, Kisielewski first judges the work as primitive and overly conventional in its thematic and harmonic development, and monotonous in its instrumentation. 'Should Marczewski's work thus be disqualified completely?' he asks. 'Probably not. I believe that it might be useful as a very easy piece written properly for the repertoire

of amateur ensembles – ensembles that include beginning instrumentalists. There exists, after all, such a “social demand.” However, without completely negating the usefulness of Marczewski’s work, it is necessary to implore the composer to present more ambitious works in the future, with a more cohesive form and more diverse texture.⁶ Kisielewski is unwilling to reject the composition outright, as he recognizes its social use-value for unskilled amateur groups, but he is simultaneously exasperated with its quality. He implies that even pieces written on such a basic level should strive to achieve interesting musical results.

In May 1957, Włodzimierz Kotoński, a young composer who would later be associated with the Polish avant-garde movement flowering in the 1960s, makes an even more pointed observation about Czesław Aniołkiewicz’s set of songs *Pieśni Gruzjińskiego*. While he affirms that the work should receive its full commission payment, and that the songs are successful in reaching ‘even the least musically educated listener’ (a primary goal of *upowszechnienie*), Kotoński points out that they ‘have not the smallest aspiration to contemporaneity’ and that they never stray from the harmonic and melodic conventions of the 19th century. Although the songs would likely be successful in a popular concert, Kotoński chides Aniołkiewicz for ‘underestimate[ing] even this simplest listener, who through modern dance music has become used to perceiving more sophisticated harmonies and complicated instrumental textures.’⁷ Kotoński argues for a more informed approach to *upowszechnienie*. Composers should recognize that even their most untrained audiences have already gained a certain level of musical sophistication and expertise through a general exposure to music produced in the current era. Even if they would not be able to explain or analyze their experiences in a special-

⁶ ‘Czy więc należy utwór Marczewskiego zdyskwalifikować całkowicie?—chyba jednak nie. Sądzę, że może on się przydać jako bardzo łatwiutki a napisany poprawnie punkt repertuaru dla jakichś całkiem amatorskich, początkujących zespołów instrumentalnych. Istnieje przecież i takie “zapotrzebowanie społeczne”. Nie negując więc całkowicie przydatności utworu Marczewskiego, trzeba jednak zaapelować do kompozytora, aby prezentował na przyszłość utwory ambitniejsze o bardziej jednak spójnej formie i zróżnicowanej fakturze.’ (Kisielewski 1955)

⁷ ‘[...] melodyka trafi z pewnością do najmniej nawet muzycznie przygotowanego słuchacza. Wydaje mi się jednak, że Aniołkiewicz nie docenia trochę tego nawet najprostszego słuchacza, który chociażby poprzez nowoczesną muzykę taneczną przyzwyczajony jest do percepcji bardziej wyszukanych harmonii i bardziej skomplikowanej faktury instrumentalnej.’ (Kotoński 1957)

ized musical vocabulary, these audiences have 'become used to perceiving' modern harmonies and musical ideas. It is the composer's mission to recognize his or her audience's competencies, to meet them where they are and to stretch them, rather than to drag them backwards into overly simplistic and anachronistic musical styles.

When presented in the light of these reviews, the task of writing 'easy' works for amateur performers and audiences is not an easy one at all. These critics demand an informed and nuanced *upowszechnienie*, different from the vague pronouncements from the political center. While the act of propagation itself is important, Bacewicz, Kisielewski and Kotoński demand that not just *any* music be propagated. Commissioned composers who wanted to write music for a general audience were tacitly writing under the Union's educational imperative. This imperative demanded not only technical knowledge of instruments and of compositional craft, but also forward-looking aesthetic views and an appreciation for current musical trends. To compose otherwise would be to reaffirm the mistakes of the recent socialist-realist period.

The second educational initiative arising from the reviews is directed not outwards to Polish society, but inwards towards the composers within the Union itself. In their reviews, the composer-critics constantly try to impart an appreciation for compositional craft to their fellow composers.⁸ Their commitment is manifest not only in their detailed advice about partwriting, harmony, orchestration, text-setting and other technical issues, but also in their frequent insistence that composers should have an opportunity to learn through hearing their successes and their mistakes in performance. In such instances, the composers themselves are the audience that needs to be educated and stretched. The recommendations for public performance – even of works in which the reviewers perceive numerous compositional missteps – signify a willingness to expend limited Ministry funds and per-

⁸ The power relationships between the reviewers and the composers of the works under review are complex. These relationships were not simply articulated in terms of generational conflict, but they also were filtered through many other competing binary oppositions: center (Warsaw/Kraków) vs. periphery, high art vs. popular/utilitarian art, genius vs. craft. The discursive nuances stemming from these interactions cannot be fully explored here, and deserve future consideration.

formance resources in the service of education. For example, composer Kazimierz Sikorski, who was also the rector of the Warsaw Academy of Music, recommended a performance of Juliusz Łuciuk's 1957 cantata 'Dzikie Wino' (Wild Creeper Vine), even though he felt the work showed the young composer's inexperience with the genre:

In my opinion, this work not only can, but should, be performed. The author, and not only the author, should hear his work in a faithful and good performance. If he has something to say, and everything indicates that he certainly has a lot to say, [Łuciuk] will draw the best conclusions for himself.⁹

Occasionally, reviewers felt that a work was too fault-ridden for public performance, but still believed that the composers should have a chance to hear their compositions. In these cases, they sometimes called for a special hearing of the work, to be performed only within a closed meeting within the Union, a *przesłuchanie* (hearing, audition).¹⁰ Or in other cases, they might simply invite the composer to speak personally with some of the more experienced Union composers, ensuring that the criticisms were clearly understood. For instance, in 1957, Szeligowski wrote a negative review of Aleksander Marczewski's *Suita na małą orkiestrę symfoniczną* (Suite for small symphony orchestra), chastising the composer for his apparent unfamiliarity with 20th-century repertoire in this genre. At the end of the lengthy critique, Szeligowski softens his tone, but suggests further action:

Certainly, [my review] does not arise out of a desire to hurt this likeable composer. Not long ago, we saw his piano-vocal score for an opera. The same criticisms are repeated here. Did Colleague Marczewski take note from these comments? Judging from the work, I would say not [...] I propose to invite Colleague Marczewski [to the Union] to discuss the issues raised by the reviewers on the basis of 2–3 scores. It seems to me, that

⁹ 'Według mojego zdania utwór ten nie tylko można, ale trzeba wykonać. Autor, i nie tylko autor, powinien [sic] utwór swój usłyszeć w wiernym i dobrym wykonaniu. Jeżeli ma coś do powiedzenia, a wszystko świadczy o tym, że ma na pewno wiele do powiedzenia, wyciągnie sam najlepsze dla siebie wnioski.' (Sikorski 1957)

¹⁰ *Przesłuchania* had been used during the earlier part of the decade as a forum for discussing the implementation of socialist-realist aesthetics in composition, but, in 1955, the practice was discontinued. In this post-1956 environment, the term was laden with a certain degree of negative connotation, implying an attempt to exert artistic control. However, the reviewers continue to suggest *przesłuchania*, reclaiming the practice as an educational tool.

this is the **obligation** of the Composers' Union in relation to the composer [...] who fully deserves such collegial help and advice.¹¹

Szeligowski argues that it is the Union's responsibility to nurture Marczewski, to help him to understand the criteria against which his work has been judged, and to steer him in a new direction.

The mission of the Commissions Committee and the Governing Committee was therefore much more complicated than simply deciding whether or not a particular composition should receive its full honorarium or a performance. Each review represented an opportunity to initiate a fruitful relationship between a composer and the Union, to foster a dialogue about composition, about aesthetics, and about musical life. The interest expressed by the reviewers is often very personal, even impassioned. Kazimierz Serocki makes his feelings particularly transparent, for example, in his review of young Wojciech Kilar's *Sinfonia concertante*. He begins with the acknowledgment that, in general, the music is very expressive and emotional. However, Serocki is not satisfied with simply delivering a positive judgment on behalf of the Union committees. He reaches out to the composer, asserting:

This [work] was written by Kilar, who I believe to be one of the most talented composers of the youngest generation [...] From him I demand more. And in relation to that [expectation], I was disappointed... I carried away the feeling, that, for Kilar, this is a work of little ambition.¹²

After assessing various specific problems in the piano texture and harmonic development, Serocki justifies his critique:

If I have written at length about this, it is because [...] I very much value Kilar's talent, and I wanted to plead with him to have more ambition. Maybe he will take offense with

¹¹ 'Napewno nie wypływa ona z chęci szkodzenia temu sympatycznemu kompozytorowi. Nie dawno widzieliśmy jego partyturę (wyciąg) opery. To same powtarzające się zarzuty. Czy kol. Marczewski wyciąga z tych recenzji konsekwencje? – Sądząc po utworach, raczej nie. Ale tak dalej być nie może [...] Proponuję konkretnie: zaprosić kol. Marczewskiego i na podstawie przywiezionych 2–3 partytur przedyskutować z nim omawiane przez recenzentów problemy. Wydaje mi się, że to jest **obowiązek** ZKP w stosunku do kompozytora, który. . . w pełni na taką radę i pomoc koleżeńską zasługuje.' (Szeligowski 1957), emphasis original.

¹² '[...] to pisał Kilar, którego uważam za jednego z najbardziej utalentowanych kompozytorów najmłodszego pokolenia [...] Od niego wymagam więcej. I w tym względzie rozczarowałam się [...] Odniosłem wrażenie, że jest to utwór "mało ambitny" – jak na Kilara.' (Serocki 1956)

me, and maybe he will consider this and escape [these criticisms] in his next works. I am writing in every sense out of affection and not out of malice.¹³

Whereas in a different situation, with a different composer, Serocki may not have felt the need to qualify his judgment of the work, his faith in Kilar was such that he encouraged the young composer to push himself, to move forward. The tone of this review suggests that, even when the Union directed its *upowszechnienie* project inward, there was a dual purpose – both the intention to educate a broad composer base and to cultivate a cultural elite. ‘It is important,’ he reminds Kilar and committee members, ‘that the composer seek his own means of expression, that he strive to say something of substance.’¹⁴ Serocki felt that it was his duty, as a reviewer, as a Union member, to cultivate this aesthetic impetus within the young composer—and particularly within *this* composer, whom Serocki esteemed as a Polish composer of great talent.

Aesthetics play such a significant role in the reviews that they must be considered a third dimension of the *upowszechnienie* program: *upowszechnienie* as the cultivation of aesthetic values and ideas. This impetus stretched simultaneously outward and inward, targeting both audiences and composers. The aesthetic program, which was being crafted in these transitional years directly following the end of the socialist-realist period (roughly 1949–53), is certainly a complex topic unto itself, and cannot be explored fully here. However, there are several concerns that become evident in their frequent appearance in the reviews. Two that arise repeatedly are the questions of contemporaneity and of compositional inventiveness and creativity.

The reviews provide a lens for observing the fluctuating conception of modern music during the second half of the 1950s. In the middle part of the decade, the dominant aesthetic script promoted ‘modernism’ over ‘romanticism.’ Many of the reviewers, who had come to compositional matu-

¹³ ‘Jeżeli się o tym tak rozpisałem, to dlatego, że – jak już na wstępie zaznaczyłem – bardzo cenię talent Kilara i chciałem do niego zaapelować o więcej ambicji. Może się na mnie za to obrazi, a może się nad tym zastanowi i uniknie tego w swoich następnych utworach. Piszę to w każdym razie z sympatii, a nie ze złośliwości.’ Ibid.

¹⁴ ‘Ważne jest jednak to, że kompozytor szuka swojego wyrazu, że usiłuje powiedzieć coś ważkiego.’ Ibid.

rity in the interwar period, responded to the freer creative atmosphere after 1956 by reengaging with their neoclassical vision of modernity. Discursively, they juxtaposed this neoclassicism against an anachronistic 'Polish national style' deeply entrenched in 19th-century compositional techniques and expressivity, which had been championed by some members of the previous generation. If contemporary composers chose to adopt any of the signifiers of this earlier aesthetic (tonal harmonies, melody-dominated homophonic textures, thick orchestration with heavy reliance on strings), the reviews were almost unforgiving, accusing the composers of lacking ambition, maturity, or imagination. The negative critiques act as negative prescriptions: the Union should not cultivate epic, romantic aesthetics, often characterized as simplistic, uninteresting, and, as in the Kotoński review cited above, as neglecting a responsibility to educate the audience.

Composer Tadeusz Szeligowski, in his 1955 review of Borys Lomani's *Concertino na wiolonczelę z fortepianem*, op. 124 (Concertino for cello with piano), observes that the work is 'primarily of an "ambient" character, using language from sixty years ago.'¹⁵ His next breath, however, delivers the real condemnation: 'apparently Lomani feels comfortable with this. In my opinion, there does not appear to be any attempt to escape from the state of "impasse."' Thus, not only does Lomani write with weak rhythmic ideas, 'tiresome' accompaniment, and 'banal harmonies,' but he also shows no desire to escape from his outdated aesthetic choices or to reinvent himself in response to newer compositional trends. Although Szeligowski recognizes that the work may receive performance, he argues that here 'we are passing unintentionally – or we are "falling" – into a different category of music, namely that of popular music (*muzyka rozrywkowa*).'¹⁶ The reviewer's parenthetical aside ('or we are "falling"') is revealing; Szeligowski shoots a sideways glance at his readers, including them in his alarmist language, and implies that Lomani's aesthetic is not only regressive but also damaging, with the potential to drag its listeners into the entirely separate world of popular music.

¹⁵ 'Jest to utwór o charakterze "nastrojowym" w stylu czy też języku muzycznym z przed lat 60 [...] Nie widać tu żadnych prób wyjścia z tego, mym zdaniem, "impasowego" stanu.' (Szeligowski 1956)

¹⁶ 'Mimowoli przechodzimy tu, czy też "wpadamy" w inne kategorie muzyki, a mianowicie w muzykę rozrywkową.' Ibid.

In Stefan Kisielewski's positive review of younger composer Tadeusz Baird's *Cassazione per orchestra* provides a useful counterpart to Szeligowski's negative one. While the reviewer uses neither the word 'romantic' nor 'neo-classical,' the terms of his praise are clearly mapped upon this binary opposition:

Cassazione [...] is somewhat different than the Baird to which we have become accustomed in his previous works. This is more joyful music; it is less compulsory, less tragic and lyrical, more objective [...] the instrumentation is thinner, more soloistic, and persistent rhythmic movement plays a bigger role, constituting an organizational principle in movements I and III, and imparting to them a lively and energetic character.¹⁷

Kisielewski's assessment privileges broadly neoclassical traits (objectivity, thinner textures, motoric rhythms) over romantic ones (the tragic, lyrical element). The last sentence cements the positive reinforcement: 'In sum, the score is good and interesting, proving that our still-young composer is developing further.'¹⁸ As opposed to Lomani's stasis, Baird is evolving in a favorable direction, towards the neoclassical aesthetic values cherished by many of the members of the Commissions Committee and the Governing Committee.

With the approach of the new decade, a new aesthetic binary construction emerged: neoclassicism vs. the avant-garde. Experiments with new compositional techniques and ideas proliferated, and the reviewers noted this shift as they considered works by the younger generation that was coming to compositional maturity in this post-1956 environment. The response of Union leadership to the new binary seems to have been much less unanimous than to the previous one, and the reviews reveal just the very beginnings of conflicted reception that would greet the Polish avant-garde in the early 1960s.

Kotoński, who leaned towards the avant-garde aesthetic in his own compositions, first mentions the avant-garde in a 1958 review of Władysław Słow-

¹⁷ 'Charakter muzyki 'Cassazione' [...] jest nieco odmienny, niż to, do czego przyzwyczaili nas Baird w swych utworach poprzednich. Jest to muzyka weselsza, jakby mniej obowiazujaca, mniej tragiczna i liryczna, bardziej obiektywna [...] instrumentacja jest cieńsza, bardziej solowa, większą rolę odgrywa również uporczywy ruch rytmiczny, stanowiący zasadę organizacyjną części I i III i nadający im charakter żywości i energii.' (Kisielewski 1956)

¹⁸ 'W sumie partytura dobra i ciekawa, dowodząca dalszego rozwoju młodego przecież ciągle kompozytora.' Ibid.

ński's *Kwintet na instrumenty dęte* (Quintet for wind instruments). He gives the work a positive review, but curiously offers the negatively-framed comment that the quintet 'does not belong with certainty to avant-garde works.'¹⁹ After naming the aesthetic orientation that does *not* describe the work, Kotoński moves on to clarify:

in spite of strongly marked dissonances and a move away from tonal combinations, this work sits strongly in the conventions of neoclassicism, which shows itself above all in rhythm and in the treatment of thematic motives.

Discursively, Kotoński's distinction is interesting because it is not obviously intended for the composer. He is not criticizing Słowiński for writing in this manner, but is rather constructing, in negative terms, a definition of the avant-garde aesthetic. Dissonance and lack of tonal references alone do not constitute avant-gardism; on the contrary, particular rhythmic and motivic characteristics suggest an orientation towards neoclassicism.

In the same year, composer Piotr Perkowski wrote an ambivalent review of Eleonora Grządzielówna's *Suita bułgarska na fortepian* (*Bulgarian Suite* for piano). In the body of the commentary, Perkowski notes that the piece treats Bulgarian folk material too freely, and that there are several flaws in the partwriting. At the conclusion, however, he issues a surprisingly passionate positive verdict:

I believe that the commission has been fulfilled, and – in the face of the hegemony that reigns among us of dodecaphony, of genius, of wallowing in 'knowing-it-all' (*besserwiserstwie*) by musicologists – I congratulate the composer for her bravery.²⁰

These final comments were certainly intended for his colleagues (a point made all the more clear when, for the official copy, the Governing Committee excised everything following the affirmation of the commission). Perkowski was using his review of this piece, with which he seemed little impressed,

¹⁹ 'Kwintet Słowińskiego nie należy w pewnością do utworów awangardowych. Mimo mocno zaznaczonej dysonansowości i uciekania – od zestawień tonalnych utwor ten siedzi mocno w konwencji neoklasycznej, co zaznacza się przede wszystkim w rytmice i w traktowaniu motywów tematycznych.' (Kotoński 1958)

²⁰ 'Zamówienie uważam za wykonanie a kompozytorce – wobec panującej u nas hegemonii dodekafonistów, genjuszów i pławiących się w "besserwiserstwie" muzykologów – winszuję odwagi.' (Perkowski 1958)

in order to make a bigger statement about the new aesthetic trends being cultivated and promoted by the Union. This act of protest indicates that, for better or worse, Perkowski believed that his colleagues wielded a degree of influence upon the aesthetic direction of Polish composers and musical life. The barely concealed contempt reveals the frustration of a man who clearly felt that the wrong path had been chosen.

The second of the aesthetic debates, the question of inventiveness or creative ambition, suffuses the reviews. The majority of negative judgments cite a lack of invention on the part of the composer, even if he or she exhibits an acceptable degree of technical knowledge, and the positive reviews often flip the terms around, praising the composer for creativity and for avoiding banality. One of the most eloquent discussions of the issue arises in Zygmunt Mycielski's January 1956 review of Włodzimierz Późniak's *Suita Orawska*. Towards the end of the review, the critic turns away from the particular composer and composition in question and instead addresses his colleagues directly:

Późniak's score reveals musical culture, good taste, a certain tone [...] however, I must emphasize here something that arises in many works – the issue of musical imagination [...] With the passing years, it is becoming ever more difficult to quiet this demand. I believe, also – in order not to create too many – that we should turn particular attention to this rarest characteristic in an artist, although it is not clear, if a professor or critic is in a position to offer here a clear judgment, especially if it relates to young [artists]. Our climate is not sympathetic, anyway, to the development of such a fundamental characteristic, as is imagination in art.²¹

Mycielski proposes that this question of invention or imagination is more than just a problem – it is an epidemic, begotten by the Polish cultural climate. Almost painfully ambivalent and unclear, Mycielski exhorts his colleagues to seek out and foster the seed of imagination in young artists, while,

²¹ Partytura Późniaka wykazuje kulturę muzyczną, dobry smak, brzmienie pewne, do skorygowania tu i ówdzie – jednakże muszę w niej zaznaczyć to, co uderza przy tyłu dziełach – sprawę fantazji muzycznej. Jest ona zresztą udziałem tylko bardzo nielicznych wyjątków – i tu, z latami, staje się coraz to trudniejszy do zaspokojenia tego wymagania. Sądzę też, że – aby nie produkować zbyt wiele – powinniśmy zwracać szczególną uwagę na tę najrzadszą cechę u twórcy, choć nie wiadomo, czy profesor lub krytyk są w stanie wydawać tu wyroki pewne, zwłaszcza gdy chodzi o młodych. Klimat nasz nie sprzyja zresztą rozwojowi tej zasadniczej cechy, jaką jest fantazja w sztuce.' (Mycielski 1956)

in the same breath, he undercuts his own agency. He expresses doubt that a critic, such as himself, would be in a position to recognize this characteristic in the younger generation.

Although it was written two years earlier, Mycielski's uncertainty is evocative of the same unsettled aesthetic atmosphere that engendered Perkowski's negative comments about contemporary Polish musical life. Those in Union leadership clearly shared a desire to encourage young composers to evolve and to develop in new directions, but there was also a lack of consensus about the correct directions in which they should go. Particularly as the new decade approached, some of the composer-critics, Mycielski among them, were acknowledging that this younger generation needed exposure to various avant-garde ideas that were emerging in other parts of Europe and the United States. Young Polish composers had access to these new musical trends via the Warsaw Autumn Festival for Contemporary Music, established in 1956 and held annually after 1958, and they quickly began to experiment with electro-acoustic music, total serialism, and chance techniques. Mycielski's review reveals his doubt that critics of his generation would be able to recognize and promote the best of these new aesthetic possibilities, or to guide the younger composers in their experiments. However, even in the face of such doubt, Mycielski and other reviewers returned again and again to the question of imagination and creative ambition. Perhaps in the latter half of the 1950s, the period that was the immediate successor to the strict cultural controls of the Stalinist period, some of these critics felt that the cultivation of creative freedom and progress must supersede their own personal aesthetic agendas.

The reviews by Mycielski and Perkowski raise the question of the true recipients of the authors' educational initiative. While the intended beneficiaries might be the audiences, the composers, or Polish music culture writ large, the reality suggests that the reviewers were often trying to educate their colleagues within the committees themselves. They advocated, warned, cajoled and explained, campaigning all the time for greater awareness and action for the issues that they felt to be the most pressing. Occasionally, as we have seen, the reviewers would turn from the task of opining about the work

at hand, and direct their speech to their colleague-readers in order to diagnose general problems in the Union and to suggest action. Towards the end of the decade, also, there are reviews that are more concerned with explaining new compositional styles than with assessing particular compositions. For example, in 1959, Józef Patkowski, musicologist, composer and founder of the Studio for Experimental Music at Polish Radio, wrote a lengthy review of Andrzej Dobrowolski's tape composition *Passacaglia na 40 z 5*, devoting the majority of his prose to an explication of Dobrowolski's procedures. His review (Patkowski 1959) functions not as an evaluation, but as an apology for a new compositional practice and also for a new musical institution on the Polish cultural scene. The *upowszechnienie* impulse here is directed inwards and upwards, towards Union leadership, as the reviewers promote issues and, in essence, lobby for funding and valuable performance and publication resources. Thus, the reviews record not only the outreach attempts of the Union, but also the subtle (and sometimes not-so-subtle) attempts of individuals to influence the objectives and to steer the direction of this very powerful cultural institution. These reviews from the end of the 1950s provide a window into the debates that laid the discursive foundation for the 'Polish school' in the early 1960s. As such, they represent invaluable context for that period of creative ferment and experimentation, and they offer many opportunities for further consideration and study.

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