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## Neoclassical Ideas in the Works of Michał Spisak

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Michał Spisak (1914–1965) was a representative of the so-called “French and Polish school of composition” (Helman 1972: 93). After completing his studies (1933–1937) at the Silesian Music Conservatoire in Katowice (with degrees in violin and composition), in 1937 he was granted a scholarship to study in Paris, where he spent the rest of his life and where his artistic personality became fully crystallised. He was a member, a secretary (in 1938–39), and subsequently the vice-president of the Association of Young Polish Musicians in Paris, which contributed to the propagation of Polish contemporary music in France.<sup>1</sup> Although Spisak settled in Paris for good, he maintained contacts with his country. This was possible because he did not have an official status as an émigré in Poland,<sup>2</sup> and hence was not an object of interest of the censorship, which was often the case with regard to the numerous Polish composers, who, in the aftermath of war, were dispersed around the world, and whose music was for many years either absent or “wrongly” present in Polish musical life.<sup>3</sup> Spisak appeared several times at

<sup>1</sup> The Association of Young Polish Musicians established in Paris in 1926 was very active with regard to concert life, which resulted in the performance of works by, amongst others, Grażyna Bacewicz, Feliks Łabuński, Michał Kondracki, Tadeusz Kassern, Szymon Laks, Zygmunt Muciński, Roman Palester, Piotr Perkowski, Michał Spisak, Antoni Szałowski, Tadeusz Szeligowski, Karol Szymanowski, Aleksander Tansman, Bolesław Woytowicz. Cf.: (Helman 1972), (Kaczyński 1978).

<sup>2</sup> In 1955, Spisak married a Frenchwoman, Andrée Thibault.

<sup>3</sup> The fate of the émigré composers is presented by, amongst others, Zofia Helman (1992: 209–227); Cf. also (Tarnawska-Kaczorowska 1989).

the Warsaw Autumn International Festival of Contemporary Music,<sup>4</sup> and also participated in the concert life and activity of the Polish Composers' Union (from 1947 he was a full member of the Union), which commissioned many of his works (in 1964 he received an award for lifetime achievements).<sup>5</sup> Most of his compositions were written in France, mainly in Paris, and during the wartime, in Voiron.

Spisak's works testify to him developing an individual composer's idiom and also adopting ideas associated with the Parisian environment, particularly the school of Nadia Boulanger (Jasińska 1998: 129–134). With rare persistence, the composer remained faithful to once adopted artistic poetics; hence his works, if viewed from the perspective of style, are representative of neoclassicism. During the interwar years, the advocates of this trend departed from the legacy of the previous era, rejecting the unbridled tone of Romantic expression, renouncing illustrative and programme music and symbolic meanings, and instead searched for new expressive devices, where an objective element could replace the subjectivity of expression. According to Zofia Helman, the main principles of the neoclassical programme included:

treating music as an autonomous art; emphasising the importance of knowledge, intellect and craft in the creative process; returning to the classical balance between the emotional and the structural factor, and to *serenitas* as a desired category of expression; presenting the act of perception as a purely aesthetic impression, unrelated to experiencing the emotions evoked by the music itself (1985: 16).

The concept of an artist as an iconoclast was alien to neoclassical composers – much closer to them was the concept of an artist as an artisan, who perceived art in line with the classical ideals of moderation, proportions, balance and perfection. The neoclassical breakthrough was based on the an-

<sup>4</sup> The following works of the composer were performed at the Warsaw Autumn festival in his lifetime: *Suite for String Orchestra* (1st WA – 1956), *Concerto for Bassoon and Orchestra* (1st WA – 1956), *Concerto Giocoso* (2nd WA – 1958, 8th WA – 1964), *Symphonie Concertante No. 2* (3rd WA – 1959), *Suite for Two Violins* (3rd WA – 1959), *Sonatine for Oboe, Clarinet and Bassoon* (3rd WA – 1959), *Allegro de Voiron* (5th WA – 1961), *Concerto for Two Pianos* (7th WA – 1963).

<sup>5</sup> Earlier he had been a winner of several prestigious awards, including twice the first prize in the Queen Elisabeth International Music Competition of Belgium: in 1939, for the *Serenade* for orchestra, in 1957, for *Concerto Giocoso* for orchestra; first prize for the *Olympic Hymn* in the International Composers' Competition for an Official Olympic Hymn in 1955; an honourable mention for the *Improvvisazione* for violin and piano in the 2nd International Henryk Wieniawski Competition in Poznań in 1962.

tithesis of the aesthetic categories promulgated by Romanticism, but it was also an opposition against dodecaphony and the works of the Second Viennese School. The neoclassical “reaffirmation” of the past, which was one of the leading postulates of the movement, meant a return to traditional rules and the idea of the form – for Stravinsky, the one and only foundation of music. No one else but Stravinsky wrote in his *Musical Poetics* about the need for order and discipline in art, about “making” music, which requires established principles and a perfect command of the composer’s craft. Since music in its “pure” form is “free speculation”, the role of an artist is to act; to choose and eliminate; to search for unity in a multitude. “Form arises from matter,” (Strawiński 1970: 208) and its order is regulated by technical devices. Among the basic devices, Stravinsky enumerates organising sounds according to their interval relationships and organising musical time. Drawing upon tradition does not mean, however, reconstructing old patterns, but rather – using them in a creative way in a contemporary work. According to Zofia Helman:

The traditional architectural models and stylistic conventions adopted from the past received a new quality when combined with modern devices related to tonality and harmony, rhythm and sound. The essence of neoclassicism is not the presence of past conventions and rules but the way they are transformed and included in the new overall system of the composing technique( 1985: 16).

Staying in Paris, familiarising himself with Stravinsky’s works and studying under Nadia Boulanger – all of these factors gave Spisak a creative impulse that directed him towards neoclassical poetics, which, in turn, became so important and close to him that it in effect dominated his entire musical legacy. The neoclassical idiom of Spisak’s works resulted, first and foremost, from him becoming part of the ideological atmosphere of his times. It was in Paris, starting from the 1920s, that the neoclassical movement became very strong. And it was Karol Szymanowski who discerned and promulgated the artistic role of this centre of European culture amongst young Polish composers with a flair for modernism; he wrote about the need of modernising and developing Polish music or stated that the works of Stravinsky, whom he perceived as “the greatest of living musicians”, “[...] have become

a magic formula, showing suddenly and with great certainty the direction of evolution.” (Szymanowski 1984: 139) In Zofia Helman’s opinion, the Polish composers who studied at the Schola Cantorum or the École Normale de Musique

adopted [...] to a lesser or greater extent, the characteristics of the French craft – the logical and well-thought-out structure of form, the simple and clear texture, the lightness and finesse of sound. At the school of Nadia Boulanger they received knowledge about the history of music, and from there too they derived anti-Romantic ideals, aversion to pathos and sentimentalism, as well as to expressing feelings and illustrating literary programmes with music (Helman 1985: 55).

Spisak highly regarded the artistic personality of Nadia Boulanger – one of the most eminent pedagogues of the time – whose importance he thus assessed:

With regard to the Polish composers of my generation, Nadia’s school has this invaluable merit that it liberated us from the anachronous influence of the German School. Nadia’s school is as a matter of fact a very broad notion, including tens of composers, sometimes outstanding individualities – even Igor Stravinsky is in a sense Nadia’s student (Kaczyński 1964: 7).

Just as the studies under Nadia Boulanger contributed to Spisak mastering his composer’s craft, he manifested in various statements his great enthusiasm for Stravinsky’s music, expressing his admiration for the greatness and perfection of his art.<sup>6</sup> “As far as I am concerned, I was and I am an admirer of Stravinsky. I admit openly – and please let me use big words here – that I love his music” (Kaczyński 1964: 7). “[...] Stravinsky’s aesthetics is closer to me than, for example, the aesthetics of other great contemporary masters” (Spisak 1957: 8). In this regard, Spisak shared Nadia Boulanger’s view that the mastery of Stravinsky’s music, this embodiment of the classical idea, was a measure of the ultimate artistic value.<sup>7</sup>

Spisak, who remained mainly in the domain of instrumental music, which by nature is devoid of extra-musical senses, emphasised – like other neoclassical composers – the role of the composing technique. A perfect command

<sup>6</sup> This is testified by, amongst others, mentions in Spisak’s letters to Stefan Jarociński and Adam Mitscha. The correspondence was published in: Markiewicz (2005: 117–380).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. (Boulanger 1925: 195). More on this subject: (Jasińska 2004: 545–553).

of this technique was required for the logical structure of a work. However, this requirement did not preclude a conviction that in a work of music an objective (rational) element should be balanced with a subjective element. These are clearly Nadia Boulanger's views, particularly the premise that intuition and imagination are equally important for an artist as his craft and intellect. A harmonious combination of both factors – that is, the classical balance between *emotio* and *ratio* – is the best and the clearest example of this. If an emotion is stirred, from which subsequently a creative thought arises, its transformation involves the devices of the composer's craft. Only perfect command of the musical language and its rules, assisted by a sense of order, allows for freedom of action, thanks to which the composer will follow his own path and leave his mark on the work. In Spisak's opinion, emotion is fundamental for artistic work, which, besides knowledge and technical and formal discipline, preconditions the ability to create and experience a work of art. In a letter to Adam Mitscha he wrote:

There is no true music without the true heart. Everything is artificial today, or it will be artificial tomorrow. [...] Purely intellectual combinations interest me only so long as they can find their way to the heart.<sup>8</sup>

In a letter to Stefan Jarociński, in turn, he declared: "It is frankness and simplicity that I keep fighting for. Nothing that is coerced can be good, nor can it speak – and after all, this is what it is all about."<sup>9</sup>

Being a typical neoclassical composer, Spisak adopted an approach that was in opposition to the achievements of the Second Viennese School and was critical of contemporary avant-garde, whose activity he perceived as mere technical speculations, which – in his opinion – had nothing to do with real art. Similarly to Nadia Boulanger, he believed that without the assistance of emotion and idea, technique and intellect are merely a means and not the goal of a composer's statement. In a letter to Adam Mitscha from 1956, Spisak wrote:

I am interested in purely intellectual combinations only so far as they can find their way to the heart. Therefore, I am very distant from the 'explorations' of the dodecaphonists,

<sup>8</sup> Spisak's letter to Adam Mitscha, postmarked in Paris, 16th February 1956 (Markiewicz 2005: 314).

<sup>9</sup> Spisak's letter to Stefan Jarociński, postmarked in Paris, 9th August 1950 (Markiewicz 2005: 246).

or the composers of *musique concrète* and electronic music. [...] Among the composers that I would willingly call ‘combinators’ because they are fond of combinations and have a purely intellectual approach to music, I value Alban Berg. You could find the soul there [...] I am wondering why my fellow composers in Poland are becoming so interested in dodecaphony, [...]. We had poor Koffler – that is enough.<sup>10</sup>

In another letter, Spisak noted:

Of course, one must know dodecaphonists, but (in my opinion) they have no future – you need the heart in music... Chopin, Mozart, Monteverdi, Stravinsky. [...] What they do today in France or Germany are merely poor imitations. Maybe crowned with greater command of technique and all those combinations but – to my ear – having nothing in common with art.<sup>11</sup>

Being a supporter of Stravinsky’s and not Schönberg’s music – which Nadia Boulanger once described as “tormented and romantic art” (Kendall 1976: 70) – Spisak was not interested in the experimental approach, connected, for example, with electronic music, in which he perceived no expressive quality. He highlighted this in one of his letters:

[...] there are so many “composers” who cannot grasp their own music even with their own ear. There are many examples of this in the so-called electronic, concrete and similar kinds of music. The experiment itself is very interesting but the effects have little to do with real art. [...] I am right so far as the successes of these composers are mostly related to the whims of fashion and not real spiritual needs.<sup>12</sup>

Spisak’s aversion to dodecaphony and contemporary avant-garde is understandable, because as an advocate of the idea of neoclassicism, he did not approve of the phenomena that went beyond the stylistic poetics that were close to him. In his opinion, true art depended not only on craft but first and foremost on the spiritual and moral value, conveyed by a composer in his work. In this regard, Spisak’s approach was in line with Nadia Boulanger’s views: in her opinion, musical language was common to everybody; however, it became unique when marked by an individual thought, which should be united with a universal idea. (Monsaingeon 1980: 113) According to Nadia Boulanger, “music only retains the highest and purest substance of the idea,

<sup>10</sup> Spisak’s letter to Adam Mitscha, postmarked in Paris, 16th February 1956 (Markiewicz 2005: 314).

<sup>11</sup> Spisak’s letter to Adam Mitscha, postmarked in Paris, 12th June 1956 (Markiewicz 2005: 315–316).

<sup>12</sup> Spisak’s letter to Adam Mitscha, postmarked in Paris, 17th January 1956 (Markiewicz 2005: 312).

since it has the privilege of expressing all, whilst excluding nothing" (Cf. Kendall 1976: 130). She saw this feature, first and foremost, in Stravinsky's music, which, although it may have seemed "impersonal" from outside, by expressing "motion and life" had in fact a timeless quality, associated with classical music, with its perfection and unique beauty. When speaking of the qualities that he valued most highly, Spisak emphasised that "[...] simplicity, frankness and the heart were [...] the true and the greatest qualities [...] of art."<sup>13</sup> Since Spisak wished to express "himself" in music, his own truth that he professed, he opted for *serenitas* – the values of the neoclassical poetics that carried such expressive qualities as lightness, clarity, moderation, a sense of order and balance, cheerfulness, serenity and brightness. The composer's words confirm this: "[...] music gives me true joy – and if in addition my music can give someone a moment of pleasure, I am truly happy."<sup>14</sup> In one of his letters, he succinctly defined his musical *credo*: "[...] to make people cheerful – this is my goal."<sup>15</sup> Towards the end of his life, he conveyed a similar message:

I always want to be and remain a simple artist and, independent of technique or style, write music that could bring some joy and some understanding [...]. I am still not able, and I still cannot find this simplicity that is close to me and that one day would be as clear as saying "good morning" or "good-bye". I sense it, however, perfectly, and it is my measure of optimism.<sup>16</sup>

The homogenous stylistic idiom of Spisak's music results from him adopting a particular artistic approach and cultivating and implementing the principles of neoclassicism. A constructive reference to tradition becomes a starting point for developing a new formal, sound and expressive concept of a work. The composer uses technical devices and formal models of more baroque than classical provenance; however, the latter (for example the sonata form) are also present in his works. With his preference for instrumental forms of music (including orchestral, soloist and chamber) such as symphony, concerto, concerto grosso, concertino, sonata, sonatina, suite, serenade, toc-

<sup>13</sup> Spisak's letter to Witold Friemann, postmarked in Paris, 12th August 1961 (Markiewicz 2005: 356).

<sup>14</sup> Spisak's letter to Adam Mitscha, postmarked in Paris, 10th January 1958 (Markiewicz 2005: 318).

<sup>15</sup> Spisak's letter to Adam Mitscha, postmarked in Paris, 27th July 1959 (Markiewicz 2005: 323).

<sup>16</sup> Spisak's letter to Adam Mitscha, postmarked in Paris, 20th February 1963 (Markiewicz 2005: 334).

cata, and divertimento, and an extensive use of such techniques as concertante, polyphony, figuration, variation, and ostinato, Spisak fulfils the neoclassical postulate about the importance of craft, discipline and clarity of musical structure. One of the important elements of craft, distinctly visible in Spisak's works, is a new way of organising sound material, where (despite the reminiscence of some elements of the traditional system) a modal scale-based order, interval-based structuring and sound centres become particularly significant. The relics of functional harmony, if present (e.g. third motifs or chords, including those with interchangeably treated minor and major thirds), occur within short sections of music, but since they are shifted and combined (e.g. with a modal scale), they lose their functional hallmarks, and a particular interval structure or particular sound centres become the main regulators that organise the linear and vertical relations. The central role is achieved by, for example, sound repetition (e.g. in the initial fragment of the *Humoresque* for piano), a pedal point (e.g. in the 4th movement *Intermezzo* of the *Symphonie concertante* No. 1), but most frequently by ostinato figures based on figuration or creating homorhythmic "blocks" of chords (e.g. in the *Concerto Giocoso*). The centres, combined with interval-based structuring, attain a new structural meaning, also from the point of view of the logical plan of the form. Usually, in the final fragment of a given movement of the cycle or work, the initial formula of the centre returns, which encompasses the entire work like an arch (e.g. the main theme of the *Allegro* built on an opened chord "A-C-E" – later modified by modal courses, counterpointing lines and a concertante technique – is played by the tutti, in the quasi-reprise section that crowns the first movement of the *Symphonie Concertante* No. 2).

The establishment of stable systems, typical of the oscillation around a centre, is defined by the static character of the harmonic phenomena. A melorhythmic factor, combined with a concertante technique, is the principal factor that gives the course of music its dynamics. Quite characteristic is the simultaneous reduction of sound, which is connected with the idea of instrumentation that involves treating instrumental groups like a chamber ensemble taking up a concertante part. The continuous motion of the sound combined with the motive force of the rhythm give Spisak's works a typ-

ically neoclassical colouring, shimmering like a colourful mosaic arranged against a bright and distinct texture and form. On the other hand, the turn towards modality and polyphony shows that linear thinking is fundamental for composition. Also in this regard, Nadia Boulanger's views turned out to be inspiring for Spisak – she mentioned many times the issue of linear hearing and the idea of music based on the so-called *grande ligne*, for which she valued both Bach and Stravinsky so highly. She believed, inter alia, that in order to achieve clarity of composition one should follow a linear development and emphasise it by harmonic and instrumental intentions (Kendall 1976: 52). She associated the so-called *grande ligne* with the natural development of a melodic phrase and the existence of a musical sense, which becomes sensitised and activates itself in the act of creation, performance and perception of a work. In her opinion, music should be listened to and heard not as a “vertical” but a “linear phenomenon” (Monsaingeon 1980: 62). She found this linear character of a composer's thought in Stravinsky's music in particular, and like him, had a wide concept of the role of tradition, which she viewed as a creative power that safeguarded the continuity of musical work.

A turn towards the past, this combination of the old with the new, the meeting of which creates a new stylistic quality, is a distinctive feature of Spisak's works. Hence the typical meetings in his works of, for example, interval-based structuring and modal figuration (e.g. *Grave* and *Allegro* from the 1st movement of the *Symphonie Concertante* No. 2. Compare also the modal foundation of the slow movement of this cycle), ostinato-centralising formulas with a concertante technique (e.g. 2nd movement of the *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra*, as well as the *Concerto Giocoso* and *Symphonie Concertante* No. 2), a variation technique with a polyphonic motif evolution (e.g. in the *String Quartet* No. 1 and the *Concerto for Two Pianos*), a figuration with contrapuntal devices (e.g. *Toccata, Suita for String Orchestra*), a multi-sectional structure and an arch form (e.g. *Allegro de Voiron*, 1st movement of the *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra*), a concerto form with elements of a rondo and a sonata form (e.g. the opening and the final movement of the *Concerto for Bassoon and Orchestra, Allegro de Voiron*), and a monothematic musical pro-

gression with a quasi-reprise pattern (e.g. the slow movement of the *Sonata for Violin and Orchestra*). The modal lines do not only favour going beyond the functional system but permeate the interval structures that shape motifs and themes, modified mainly by a concertante technique, and influence the form of a given centre, which determines successive, symmetric and usually short sections of the musical progression as a reference point. Hence the modal material (fragments of scales and their various combinations) fits into the organisation of the sound language well, gaining a structural and sonic quality. The examples include, amongst others, the *Concerto Giocoso*, where, especially in the first movement, the material that orders the course of the music is derived from the Aeolian and Lydian modes. The elements of the Lydian mode serve as building material for the centres and figuration lines of the first movement of the *Suite for String Orchestra*. The *Symphonie Concertante* No. 2 has similar features. The chords initially derived from the Dorian mode (*Grave*), and subsequently from the Aeolian mode (*Allegro*) in the first movement (in the second movement, apart from a sound centre, lines based on a diatonic scale, especially the Lydian mode, are developed) do not remain in a functional relationship but follow the principle of interval-based structuring and sound centres. In combination with the continuous presence of the concertante idea, the resulting form resembles to some extent an “assembly” – it is assembled from many contrasting sections.

An interesting research problem is brought up by Anna G. Piotrowska, who claims that

[...] the way Spisak treats the form of the works that allude in their titles to past music eras, [...] is manifested in the way he constructs his works – by putting into sequences audibly recognisable particles (2007: 118).

This characteristic “mosaic-like” structure is achieved by the repetitiveness of units – contrasting and similar (or identical) “motifs” that occur in a modified or unchanged form. The author notices similarities between the structural principles on which Spisak’s and Stravinsky’s works are based, and believes that this similarity results from “[...] mutual relationships between basic and audibly isolated sound wholes,” (Ibidem) which, following the idea of Alicja Jarzębska, who analysed the works of Stravinsky (2002:

260–384), Piotrowska defines as *partons*. According to Piotrowska, “while creating form, Spisak does not only show his predilection for specific systems that Jarzębska calls *partons*, but also shows a tendency for contrasting melodic *partons* (that prevail in his works) with timbre *partons* in an explicit way” (Piotrowska 2007: 118). While analysing Spisak’s *Symphonie Concertante* No. 1 from this perspective, the author characterises both types of *partons*, their distribution and structure in the five individual movements of the symphony, the scope of their mutual relationships, and their functions (amongst others, maintaining symmetric, parallel or frame systems within one movement and an entire cycle; the colour function connected with instrumental and sound layers; the thematic function; the function that constitutes the form by dividing it into sections, with a predilection for putting melodic and timbre *partons* into pairs or contrasting them, with a tendency to keep the same sets throughout an entire work). In Piotrowska’s opinion, the neoclassical inclination in Spisak’s works, explicit, say, in their relation to tradition, references baroque techniques (concertante and polyphony), or the attempts to overcome conventional norms involve rebuilding the composer’s technique and as such have modernist features, marked by a creative approach towards musical language. Sound centralisation and independently treated non-functional sound structures, juxtaposed on the basis of similarity or contrast, which contribute to creating a new sound (sensitised to sonorism), and the form of the work, are important features thereof.

The structural role of intervals (with emphasis placed on a second and third, sometimes a fourth, treated independently from functional relationships, especially so that the second structures derive mainly from a modal order, for which the third and other intervals are a contrasting counterbalance), which manifests itself in the melodic motifs, the structure of chords and the role of a given centre, is present in all of Spisak’s works, irrespective of whether the heading says it is a symphony, sonata or suite. For example, in the *Toccata*, a typical way of shaping the course of music is manifested, which, derived from a chosen interval structure, repeated, contrasted and sequenced, plays the role of a motif, a theme and an ostinato centre, respectively. It is characteristic of Spisak to start with a microstructure and

then expand it gradually, which leads to a diversified macrostructure. This way, the composer attains consistency of the material, emphasised by the interval relationships that occur despite the changeable systems of the form-constituting units. This feature manifests itself especially in the cycles, and also concerns the relationships between various works. Another common feature of the works is a rhythmic pulse, characteristic of neoclassical composers, with a vivid and therefore cheerful tone, attained due to the homorhythm of figuration patterns coupled with various modes of the concertante technique that have an impact on the continual motion of the sound. Examples are: the *Toccata for Orchestra*, or the *Suite for String Orchestra*, as well as both symphonies concertantes. In chamber music works (e.g. the *Suite for Two Violins*, *Sonatine for Oboe, Clarinet and Bassoon*, and *Duetto Concertante for Viola and Bassoon*) the concertante idea is supported by the polyphonisation of the thematic lines, and sometimes variation technique devices (e.g. the *String Quartet No. 1*, the passacaglia in the *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra*).

The idea of concertante, used universally in Spisak's works and adopted from the music of the past, testifies to the "baroque" vein in his neoclassical idiom. The composer uses chamber line-ups in imitation of a "family" of instruments, favouring stringed instruments, and in solo parts, often the violin (*nota bene*, being a violinist himself, he knew very well the performance possibilities of this instrument, which he used in his compositions). The reduced chamber music sound of an ensemble can also be found in Spisak's symphonic works (he usually introduces a reduced line-up in the slow movements of a cycle), where he treats the orchestra as a concertante chamber ensemble (e.g. in both symphonies concertantes, and the *Concerto Giocoso*).

A similar idea pervades the form of a concerto for solo instrument and orchestra (e.g. the *Concerto for Piano*, the *Concerto for Bassoon*) and chamber music works. By using a successive and simultaneous concertante technique, as well as a concertante technique that results from the accumulation of both types (with regard to solo and ensemble settings, and the division into different instrumental groups playing in concert with one another), Spisak achieves a "kaleidoscopic" liveliness of the sound, which is particularly distinct in his composing idiom. It consists, inter alia, in the gradual brighten-

ing of the timbre with “terrace-like” entrances of instruments (which is often connected with modal material) or is based on simultaneous or alternating concertante of homogenous groups, chamber ensembles or opposed groups of instruments. In the latter case, a melodic line usually emerges in the highest register, usually in counterpoint, and in the lowest register, a centre becomes stabilised over a short section (which usually changes in successive sections), derived from a basic interval structure and enhanced by a figuration, ostinato or a chordal homorhythmic pattern.

The idea of concertante also means a certain sense of balance in the architecture of the work, including arch-based references. In fast movements, all types of concertante techniques occur; in slow movements, solo instruments dominate the concertante parts. The composer uses a three-movement pattern in concertos but also in his *Symphonie concertante* No. 2. On the one hand, in the *Concerto for Bassoon and Orchestra*, a virtuoso or soloist element prevails, which is a traditional device, and on the other, the remaining instruments take on the concertante function, which means that both an alternation and simultaneity of concertante in the opening and final movements is connected with a multi-movement concerto of a rondo type, whilst the middle movement, frugal when it comes to instrumentation, is characterised by a monothematic pattern.

While using the music of the past, manifested in the techniques and forms of instrumental music, Spisak leaves a new mark on them by assimilating into them 20th century technical devices (interval-based structuring, sound centralisation and the aforementioned melodic and timbre *partons*). Drawing upon historical forms does not mean that they function in line with a traditional model. Combining different elements contributes to transforming these models; moreover, each of them comes closer, to a greater or lesser extent, to the concertante form. The *Sonata for Violin and Piano* and the *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra* can serve as examples; there, the concertante form, with its “assembly” structure and new structuring of sound material, is constructed on the classical model. Sometimes orchestral works are so strongly pervaded by the concertante idea that the title of a given work does not, in fact, reflect the form. This form becomes *de facto* a concerto for orchestra with

the attributes of a 20th century form (as with Bartók or Stravinsky) and not a traditionally understood suite, serenade or symphony. Although the title of Spisak's *Suite for String Orchestra* suggests a reference to a historical model, it is closer to the idea of a concerto grosso (compare the alternating virtuosity of the soloist and the ensemble) and the form of an orchestral (here chamber) concerto. In the three-movement *Symphonie Concertante* No. 2, the very division of the instrumental ensemble into *solī* and *tutti* points to the reference to baroque patterns; on the other hand, however, it is a concerto for orchestra, where one finds independently treated units of form and a modern idea of sound that in some fragments has sonoristic qualities. (Jasińska 1980: 61–74) The juxtaposition of traditional and new elements, characteristic of neoclassicism, is often manifested in combining or mixing forms, as, say, in the *Concerto Giocoso*, which bears some features of a symphony but at the same time makes use of the ideas of a concerto grosso. The juxtaposition and modification of both models results in a form related to a new orchestral concerto.

Spisak's works have their place in the neoclassical movement that developed in Polish twentieth century music, both in the works of the composers who were active abroad (after the Second World War in emigration circles) and at home. In contrast to other Polish composers, who drew upon folklore, were interested in archaicising devices or moved towards the so-called "Romantic-style" neoclassicism, or even dodecaphony, Spisak's idiom represents the features of the so-called proper neoclassicism that developed in France, in the circle of Nadia Boulanger's school. The composer, living away from his country, with which he however maintained contact at all times, and living in Paris, where – as one can guess from his extensive correspondence and contacts with his musical compatriots – he felt himself a Pole, chose a poetics that brought into his illness-ridden life harmony, joy and peace; that is, the values of *serenitas*. According to Zofia Helman:

This word meant more than a cheerful and bright mood; it pointed rather to the kind of moral conduct that embodied a humanist ideal [...]; a cheerful spirit that resulted from a moral victory over passions, defeats and suffering (1985: 199–200).

One can believe that this approach gave Spisak an important anchor that proved right also in his musical work.

In 1972, Nadia Boulanger described the artistic personality of the Polish composer in the following words:

Spisak was a perfect and complete artist, not in the sense of looking for originality at all costs but due to the distinctiveness and individuality of his style. His artistic thought, although it manifested itself in a way that was generally adopted in his time, had its individual character, which originated in the kind of man he was. If one is a great artist of true quality, one always adopts the style that is the most popular in a given era [...] and which, nevertheless, is individual for every artist, although it does not distinguish itself from others by any “peculiarities.” There are no peculiarities [...] in Spisak’s music. It has something I cannot define [...] – an outstanding personality of an artist. [...] The music of every country has its own distinct features. Spisak lived in Paris; however, his national sense of belonging was deep and sincere. [...] France only helped him to know himself better. [...] The strictly Polish features of Spisak’s character did not prevent him from being more than a Polish musician – from being a Musician. [...] An artist never expresses himself through protesting. [...] He is made up of the resources that exist in his consciousness, in his intellectual and musical background, which results from the continuous, evolutionary development of an artist. There is always something that attracts the mind – and this was so natural about Spisak. He knew, of course, what he had to know to create a work of art (he mastered all the secrets of the composer’s craft). But the very artistic idea derived from his personality [...]. The memory of Michał Spisak is still alive today [...] through his wonderful music – the music that secured him a secure and stable position in history. And this is this great – the only real – value [...] (quoted in Skobała (1976: 61–63)).

Neoclassicism played an important role in the development of Polish music, starting from the interwar period when, associated with the Parisian artistic centre and the fascination provoked by Stravinsky’s music, it became the movement that showed a modernist and pro-European path to the young generation of Polish composers – at that time more attractive than dodecaphony, connected with the Second Viennese School. After the Second World War, neoclassicism was still continued and, judging by the works of the Polish composers who were active in the country, its role did not diminish greatly until the late 1950s – the time when the composers turned towards new composing techniques, which had even earlier been strongly represented by the representatives of the avant-garde behind the Iron Curtain. It is characteristic that some of the Polish composers who worked abroad, such as Aleksander Tansmann, Antoni Szałowski, Szymon Laks, and Michał

Spisak, and who were still connected with the French circle, remained faithful to neoclassicism. It seems that irrespective of the individual achievements and new quests of particular composers, and the continuous development of their work, neoclassicism contributed an important message to Polish music – the need for identifying oneself with European cultural tradition – a value that today, despite the changes that have taken and are still taking place, is still relevant.

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