
Polish Symphonies of the 1980s as Public Statements against Martial Law

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In the twentieth century most composers writing a symphony took into consideration the rich and long tradition of the genre. As observed by Joseph Straus,

twentieth-century composers cannot escape their past – it presses in on them in too many ways. [...]. They know that the lost Eden of the tonal common practice can never be regained in its original fullness. In this postlapsarian world, composition becomes a struggle for priority, a struggle to avoid being overwhelmed by a tradition that seems to gain in strength as it ages (1990: 185).

Straus was thinking here of the various musical genres taken over by 20th-century composers from their predecessors. In the case of the rich and long tradition of the symphony, however, the struggle that composers had to face was one of the hardest. It would scarcely be surprising, then, to find confirmation that during the twentieth century symphonies of great importance and originality were created by composers from various countries and of a different musical orientation. In the second half of the century, for the first time in its history, Polish symphonic music furthermore found a worldwide resonance and recognition.

The symphony as a public statement

As suggested by Michael Kennedy (2004: 718), “there is more to a symphony than its title. It implies an attitude of mind, a certain mental approach by

the composer [...]". This is a very important remark because for a large number of composers in the twentieth century the symphony remained a genre of very special significance, treated as an important statement of significant "weight". This implies a large-scale formal framework, necessary for developing and transforming thematic ideas in a way that can reach the listener. Therefore, it means that the symphony should create some kind of drama understandable to the audience. This meaning of the symphony is emphasised by Alexander Ivashkin, who observed that

[...] the symphony cannot exist as just a musical composition, but becomes a sort of "meta-symphony" and is therefore deprived of any basis as it were, outgrowing its own logical framework. All the composers are actually "opening" the symphony to the world, destroying its seemingly unshakeable foundations, demolishing them in any case conventional boundaries between the music which exists primordially in Nature and what for many centuries was usually called "the work of art" (1995: 258).

David Fanning (1997: 8) pointed out that "high ethical aspirations in the symphony did survive the death of Mahler in 1911" and many composers still treated the genre as the best place for expressing the deepest feelings of humanity, carrying a substantial weight of argument. According to Ivashkin, especially in the Russian tradition, "pure art" or "art for art" have simply not existed, and the musical work was always connected with some symbolic meaning, encoded in music for centuries of its existence (Ivashkin 1995: 269). Hence, the great symphonies of Shostakovich or Schnittke follow this tradition.

A similar ideological attitude is also represented in Polish music, in works such as Panufnik's *Sinfonia Sacra* (1963) and *Sinfonia Votiva* (1981), Penderecki's *Second Symphony "Christmas"* (1980), Krzysztof Meyer's *Sixth Symphony "Polish"* (1982) and even Lutosławski's *Third Symphony* (1983). The important role of the symphony in the Polish music of the twentieth century was stressed by Mieczysław Tomaszewski in his essay devoted to the Polish symphony in the years 1944–94. (Tomaszewski 1996) According to him, in the twentieth century in Poland, and especially after the Second World War, the symphony became an important and representative genre because "if one talks about Lutosławski's Third, Palester's Fifth, Penderecki's Second, about

Górecki's *Symphony of Sorrowful Songs* or Panufnik's *Sinfonia Sacra*, it is clear that it concerns pieces of particular weight and significance" (1996: 13).

Polish public symphonies composed in the 1980s

The post-avantgarde period, which started in the middle of the 1970s, with its tendency to restore traditional qualities, brought the subject of religious faith, as well as the quality of "sacrum" in music, back to the fore. This tendency was deepened by the fact that in October 1978 Cardinal Karol Wojtyła was elected to the papacy and suddenly the Roman Catholic world had a Polish Pope, John Paul II. During the whole period of communism in Poland, the Catholic Church was a natural and powerful opposition to the government and now "the relationship between Church and State, already severely tested at the time of socialist realism, was to prove crucial on all fronts" (Thomas 2005: 253). The situation in which the Catholic Church was led by a Polish Pope not only increased the hope for regaining full independence in Poland but also intensified the popularity of religious music and compositions filled with sacred or spiritual elements. The political circumstances meant that any reference to a religious song or theme in a contemporary work was interpreted as a public statement, especially when combined with some patriotic dedication. The political situation in Poland caused many composers to express their political feelings through their music, either to demonstrate against the policy of the communist government or simply to encourage the audience by filling their works with some patriotic references.

Particularly during the 1980s, marked by both the rise of Solidarity and the time of the Martial Law (1981–83), the atmosphere in the country was extremely vibrant: the hope for regaining more freedom was mixed with fear and political repressions. This resulted in a situation where composers found themselves in a position similar to the times of partition in the nineteenth century. They could react either by stepping back from official life or by openly referring to the political situation in their music. Lutosławski, who refused to take part in any concerts or other official cultural events and

did not appear in the media, opted for the former solution, while latter second way resulted in works which could be understood as public statements by carrying certain messages for the audience, serving as encoded patriotic symbols. These symbols were usually quotations from religious or national songs or dedication of the compositions to key national figures or events.

The most obvious and most elaborate example of such Penderecki's pieces is *Polish Requiem* (1980–84, 1993), composed initially as a series of individual works, each dedicated to an important event in Polish history.¹ Asked about the genesis of the *Polish Requiem* some time later, Penderecki answered:

I would not have created the *Requiem* were it not for the general political situation, for Solidarity, though this theme had interested me for a long time. By composing the *Requiem*, I wanted to take a certain position, to show on which side I stood (Janicka-Słysz 1993: 16).

Apart from the *Polish Requiem*, Penderecki's other works composed in the early 1980s were also seen as public statements, such as the *Te Deum* (1980) dedicated to the Pope, John Paul II, and the *Second Symphony "Christmas"* (1980).

Penderecki's Second Symphony "Christmas"

This symphony stylistically represents the trend of "new Romanticism" and most likely it would have remained a purely abstract work had it not included short quotations from *Silent Night*. The appearance of *Silent Night*'s initial motif in the material of the symphony met with a mixed reception among

¹ The *Lacrimosa* for soprano, choir and orchestra (1980) was commissioned by the leader of Solidarity, Lech Wałęsa, to celebrate the opening of the Three Crosses memorial in Gdańsk, commemorating the tenth anniversary of the Gdańsk and Szczecin protests that had been bloodily suppressed by the government in December 1970. The première of the piece on 16th December, 1980, in the presence of thousands of people, became a political event in itself. The *Agnus Dei* for a cappella choir (1981) was composed after the death of the Polish Primate, Cardinal Wyszyński, and was performed at his funeral. The *Recordare* (1983) celebrates the beatification of Father Maksymilian Kolbe, who offered his life in place of another prisoner in Auschwitz in 1941. The *Dies Irae* (1984) is dedicated to the Warsaw Uprising (1944) and the *Libera me* (1984) to the Polish soldiers murdered by the Soviets in Katyń in 1940. Katyń was a particularly politically dangerous subject in Poland as the Soviets kept claiming that the murders in Katyń's forest were committed by the Nazis. It was not permitted to discuss the subject or even mention it during communist times in Poland.

foreign critics who did not connect it with the Polish context (Thomas 2005: 248–249). Wolfram Schwinger observed that “for a few seconds the quotations may suggest a ray of hope, but they are foreign bodies whose peaceful, meek, idyllic diatonicism does not fit the melancholy chromaticism of the symphonic action”. He also added that “*Silent Night* sticks out like a sore thumb” (Schwinger 1989: 158) in the musical material of the piece. Indeed, the melody of *Silent Night* is different from the material of the symphony but the composer introduces it as an allusion rather than as a real quote: the initial motif of the tune appears as if from afar in the first part of the symphony (see Figure 8.1) and is repeated only two times later in the piece. Therefore, its function is not as obvious as the quotations from Polish patriotic songs in other works of the period, such as Meyer’s *Sixth Symphony*, which will be discussed below.

However, by including this quote, the symphony gained its unofficial subtitle (it is not indicated in the score). Moreover, the composer provided a symbolic element referring directly to the Catholic faith. This was enough for Polish audiences during the time of Solidarity to interpret the piece as a kind of public statement. This interpretation of the quote was particularly emphasised by Tomaszewski, who pointed out that

[...] the song opens up a realm of experience that encompasses equally the rebellion and triumph, the catastrophe and resignation of the funeral march. In Penderecki’s homeland, Poland, the *Second Symphony* was immediately understood as national music, an immediately and subjectively “romantically” affective tone, which gave expression to the painful memory of the struggle, suffering, and hope of the Polish people.²

However, outside Poland the piece was not understood in this way, as Schwinger’s opinion confirms. Moreover, even other Polish commentators did not stress the political meaning of the quote as strongly as Tomaszewski. Tadeusz Zieliński, for example, connected it rather with recalling the atmosphere of childhood, its calmness and happiness, so that the carol worked as a symbol of something totally opposed to aggression, evil and brutality, but without particular reference to the political situation (2003: 48) It should

² Mieczysław Tomaszewski, note in a CD booklet for Wergo, WER 6270–2; also quoted and commented on by Thomas (2005: 248–249).

be added that not only the quotation from the *Silent Night* but also the Romantic tone of the symphony itself deepened the feeling that the piece was a significant public statement. Romanticism was in Polish tradition the time of fighting for the lost independence of the country; therefore, thanks to such an open application of a Romantic musical idiom, the connection between past and present political oppressions may have seemed closer for both the audience and commentators.

The image shows a page of a musical score for Krzysztof Penderecki's Second Symphony, "Silent Night". The score is for a first clarinet (cl 1) and includes parts for other instruments: fl 1, ob 2, fg 1,2, cr 1,3 and 4,5, vn I and II, vl, vc, and vb. The tempo markings are "meno mosso" (with the instruction "quasi da lontano sostenuto"), "poco rall.", and "più mosso". The first clarinet part features a melodic line with dynamics ranging from *pp* to *f*. A trill (tr 1) is marked in the first clarinet part, with the instruction "c. sord." and "f. sub p". The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Figure 8.1 Krzysztof Penderecki, Second Symphony, Silent Night (first clarinet)

Meyer's Sixth Symphony "Polish"

More direct references to the recent political situation may be found in Krzysztof Meyer's *Sixth Symphony "Polish"* (1982). Its subtitle openly indicates the programmatic content of the piece and, although the composer did not want to associate his symphony with any particular programme, he admitted that it "was in specific circumstances, in the first days of Martial Law" ("*Symfonia polska Meyera*" 1984: 12). In the programme book of the Warsaw Autumn in 1984, when the symphony had its Polish première (the world première took place on 25th November, 1982 in Hamburg) the composer added:

Despite the inclusion of some historical melodies (e.g. *Bogurodzica – The Mother of God*), this is a work about contemporaneity, about the present day and problems preying on our minds – the composer's view on everything we witness and experience (Meyer 1984: 181).

The four-movement symphony has a monumental outline and reveals a dark tone close to Shostakovich's pieces (particularly in the second movement), a connection which is not surprising considering Meyer's great reverence for that Russian master of symphonic writing.³ The Polish character of the piece is assured by using quotations from three songs which in Polish history played the role of patriotic anthems: *Boże coś Polskę* (*God, Who Hast Protected Poland*) in the first movement, *Bogurodzica* (*Mother of God*) in the third movement and *Rota* (*Hymn of 1910*) in the finale.

Each time the original melody appears very clearly and is introduced by a solo instrument (or group of instruments). In this respect, Meyer's references are much more obvious than those found in other contemporary or earlier Polish music. An immediate association is one with Penderecki and his allusion to *Silent Night*. Going further back to the period of late Romanticism, quotations from Polish patriotic songs may be found in the symphonies of Zygmunt Noskowski (1846–1909) and Ignacy Jan Paderewski (1860–1941). However, in Meyer's symphony, the quotations are used in a different way. While in the symphonies by both Penderecki and Noskowski (in his *Second*

³ Meyer is the author of a monograph on Shostakovich (1973, 1986), translated into several languages, including Russian and German.

Symphony 'Elegiac', 1875–79) the motifs taken from the song (*Silent Night* in Penderecki and Dąbrowski's *Mazurka* in Noskowski) were short and appeared unexpectedly in the material of the piece, Paderewski in his *Symphony "Polonia"* (1909) incorporated the melody of *Dąbrowski's Mazurka* into his original musical material, which served to create an extended finale movement. In this respect, Meyer remains closer to Paderewski, though he goes further by presenting the original melodies in an obvious fashion and in considerably longer versions. Only after being played *in crudo* are they incorporated into the musical material, forming the basis for that particular section of the piece (Figure 8.2 shows the introduction of *Boże coś Polskę*).

The musical score for Figure 8.2 is organized into three systems. The first system features staves for violin (vi), viola (vc), and cello/bass (cb). The violin part begins with a *pizz.* marking. The viola and cello parts start with a *p* dynamic and include *morendo* markings. A section marked *P.G.* (General Pause) is indicated by vertical dashed lines. Following the pause, the cello and bass parts are marked *espr. tenuto*. The second system includes staves for violin I (vn I), violin II (vn II), vc, and cb. The violin parts are marked *pp*. The third system includes staves for vn I, vn II, vc, and cb. The violin parts are marked *pp*. Numerical markings 6, 4, and 5 are placed below the violin staves. A circled number 28 is located at the end of the first system.

Figure 8.2 *Krzysztof Meyer, Sixth Symphony "Polish", first movement, introduction of Boże coś Polskę (after general pause)*

This is especially clearly audible in the third movement where the first motif of *Bogurodzica*, introduced at the early stage, is interwoven between

instrumental lines and counterpointed by percussion, resulting in an interesting interplay of textures and motifs. Therefore, in Meyer's symphony the quoted songs function as easily readable, strictly patriotic symbols which fill the symphony with a national flavour. The connection between Meyer's symphony and the symphonies by both Noskowski and Paderewski on one hand, and with Penderecki on the other, can also be seen in the musical language, close to the principles of late-Romantic, rotational symphonism, with its slow and continuous development of initial musical ideas.

Panufnik's *Sinfonia Votiva*

A different approach was presented by Andrzej Panufnik in his *Sinfonia Votiva* (1980–81), another symphony composed in the context of the Solidarity movement in Poland and serving as the composer's public statement. Panufnik, who had lived abroad since 1954 but was never indifferent to the situation in his homeland, often referred his works to the political situation in Poland. Besides *Sinfonia Sacra* (1963), dedicated to the millennium of Polish Christianity and statehood, he composed *Katyń Epitaph* (1969), a little orchestral piece commemorating a subject which it was still not possible to mention in his native country (Penderecki, however, referred to it in 1984⁴), and the *Bassoon Concerto* (1985), dedicated to the memory of Father Popiełuszko, a dissident priest murdered by the communist secret police in 1984. In these works Panufnik made clear his patriotic inspirations, either in the dedication or the information included in the programme notes (usually in both). This concerns *Sinfonia Votiva* as well. According to the composer:

This symphony is dedicated to the Black Madonna of Częstochowa, the symbol for all Polish people of independence from invading powers, also of profound religious dedication. At the time that this symphony was commissioned, in the early 1980s, the Black Madonna had become the symbol of the insurgent Solidarity Movement, the non-violent rebellion within Poland against Soviet domination, which led eventually to the end of the Cold War (Panufnik Programme note).

⁴ In *Polish Requiem*, see footnote 1.

In his autobiography he added:

Through the centuries, Poles have prayed to the ancient icon of the Madonna and taken to her a great wealth of votive offerings, especially in times of national crisis when their country was threatened by foreign invasion. [...] I decided to write my new symphony as my own votive offering to the Black Madonna, joining my voice to the strikers' by invoking her aid on their behalf (Panufnik 1987: 339).

Fired by such an emotional inspiration, the composer provided in the symphony a reflection of the turmoil engulfing his country through the expressive intensity of his work, although it is typically controlled by an extremely precise musical structure. Panufnik, always fascinated by symmetry and geometry, decided to design *Sinfonia Votiva* by fitting it into the shape of two large circles combined into the figure of 8 (see Figure 8.3), which represents the two movements of the symphony (this is Panufnik's *Eighth Symphony*).

The first movement, "Andante rubato, con devozione" is slow and meditative, like a prayer. Its religious character is enhanced by the inclusion of the first notes from *Bogurodzica* (*Mother of God*) in the solo instrumental lines of the first movement (e.g. the entrance of the tuba) and an allusion to the atmosphere of Gregorian chorale close to the end of the movement.

The second movement, "Allegro assai, con passione", is a kind of battle, marked by a fast tempo, rhythmical vigour and dynamic intensity, often emphasised by the use of the orchestral tutti. The last, dissonant bars of the movement close the piece on a note of anxiety which, in the composer's opinion, was intended to express a screaming protest against the lack of independence of his native Poland (Panufnik 1987: 339) (see Figure 8.4).

Sinfonia Votiva, despite its political inspiration, remains different from both Penderecki's and Meyer's symphonies, as public statements. This difference is not connected with the symbolic function of the piece but with the type of symphonism it represents. While both Penderecki's *Second Symphony* and Meyer's *Sixth* follow the path of late-Romantic rotational symphonism (based on the idea of continuous development), Panufnik remained more Classical in his symphonic thinking. He planned the structure of *Sinfonia Votiva* with architectural precision and care for detail, according to the principle of dialecticism and tension between two opposing forces, which are repre-

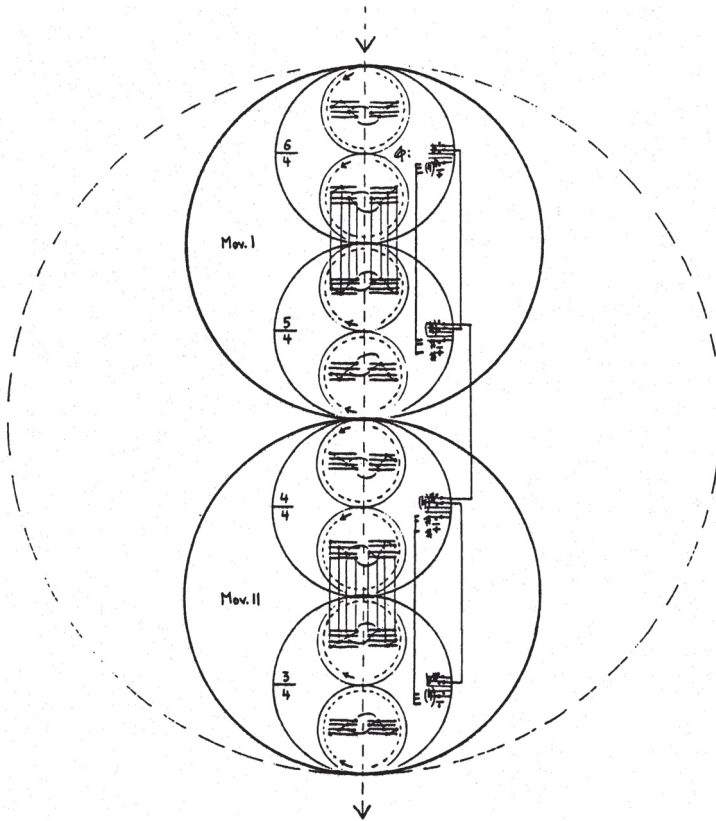


Figure 8.3 *Andrzej Panufnik, Sinfonia Votiva, composer's diagram*

sented here by the two contrasted movements of the symphony, each divided into two minor sections, also serving to create the dramatic framework of the symphony.

The other significant symphony composed in the period of the Martial Law is Witold Lutosławski's *Third* (1981–83). Lutosławski, when asked about the possible influence of political events in Poland on the symphony, answered diplomatically: "I have never written programmatic music but I can-

54

Perc.

Fl. 1

Ob. 2

Cl. 1

Cl. 2

Fg. 1

Fg. 2

Ct. 1

Ct. 2

Tb. 1

Tb. 2

Tb. 3

Vib.

Camp. tub.

Pli

Trt.

Tutti: (in tempo!) *crescendos* *con tutta forza!*

3 Arpe

Vui

Vle

Vc.

Cb.

lingua

perzendosi

Revised, 1984

(c.8')

The bells should be dampened down gradually, leaving the sound of unpecked percussion only for a very long duration.

Figure 8.4 Andrzej Panufnik, Sinfonia Votiva, finale

not deny that some outside events can find their reflection in music."⁵ However, there is nothing in the material, or even in the character of this piece, which would allow it to be interpreted as a public statement in any sense comparable to the other three symphonies discussed in this section.⁶ In this context Lutosławski's *Third Symphony* basically remains an abstract work and as such indicates another line of development of Polish symphonic music in the late twentieth century.

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⁵ Witold Lutosławski in a radio conversation with Andrzej Chłopecki (September 1st, 1981), quoted in Tomaszewski (1996: 15). For more details of the possible connection between the events from the 1980s and Lutosławski's *Third Symphony*, see Rae (1999: 177–178), as well as Gwizdalanka and Meyer (2004: 331–333).

⁶ The interpretation of the *Third Symphony* in the context of the recent political situation was also deepened by the fact that in 1983 the piece was awarded the Solidarity Cultural Prize by the Committee of Independent Culture in Poland.

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