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Modernity in Polish Music: *Mity* by Karol Szymanowski and *Caprices* by Ludomir Michał Rogowski

*Modernizmas lenkų muzikoje. Karolio Szymanowskio „Mity“
ir Ludomiro Michała Rogowskio „Kapisai“*

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Abstract

As we take a look at the history of Polish music, we can see, that the tendencies popular in Western Europe in the beginning of the 20th century, e.g. impressionism, expressionism or dodecaphony, were developed much more lately. This was mostly because of the political situation in Poland but also because of sentimentalism to the Romantic Era and audience's conservatism.

However, there were many excellent examples of the approach to modernism in Polish composers' works. The author of this paper examines two of them. The first one can be seen in a composition by Karol Szymanowski entitled *Mity*, Op. 30 (1915) for violin and piano, in which the composer created a new musical style – violin impressionism. The second one is seen in a musical piece by Ludomir Michał Rogowski, *Caprices* (1922?) for viola, soprano or clarinet and piano, in which the composer tried to break the rules of classical harmony by usage of, as he said, “natural” scales. The aim of the article is to show a new approach to musical material by the aforementioned composers that is – their way of modernizing Polish music.

Keywords: Polish music, new chamber music, music scales, Karol Szymanowski, Ludomir Michał Rogowski.

Anotacija

Analizuodami lenkų muzikos istoriją matome, kad XX a. pradžioje Vakarų Europoje populiarios tendencijos – impresionizmas, ekspresionizmas ar dodekafonija – šioje šalyje pasirodė gerokai vėliau. Labiausiai tai nulėmė Lenkijos politinė situacija, tačiau įtakos turėjo ir romantizmui jaučiami sentimentai bei publikos konservatyvumas.

Tačiau lenkų kompozitorių kūryboje egzistuoja daugybė puikių pavyzdžių, iliustruojančių požiūrį į modernizmą. Šio tyrimo autorė aptaria du tokius pavyzdžius: Karolio Szymanowskio kompoziciją „Mity“, op. 30 (1915) smuikui ir fortepijonui, kuri siejama su kompozitoriaus sukurtu nauju muzikos stiliumi – smuiko impresionizmu, ir Ludomiro Michała Rogowskio „Kapisai“ (1922?) sopranui arba klarnetui, altui ir fortepijonui. Šiame kūrinyje autorius siekė sugriauti klasikinės harmonijos taisyklės pasitelkdamas, anot jo paties, „natūralias“ dermes. Tyrimo tikslas – pasiūlyti naują požiūrį į šių kompozitorių sukurtą muzikinę medžiagą kaip į lenkų muzikos modernizavimą.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: lenkų muzika, naujoji kamerinė muzika, muzikos dermės, Karolis Szymanowskis, Ludomiras Michałas Rogowskis.

Introduction

As we take a look at the history of Polish music, we can see that popular Western European tendencies at the beginning of the 20th century, e.g. impressionism, expressionism or dodecaphony, were developed much more lately. This was mostly because of the political situation in Poland, but also because of a kind sentimentalism to the Romantic Era and the Polish audience's conservatism.

After 1795 Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth no longer existed on the European map. Major and minor social uprisings lead to the forced emigration of many people important to Polish culture. The main cultural problem was that many people were illiterate – around the 20th century 70% of people in the Russian partition were not able to

read or write, in the Austrian partition the number was a dozen or more percent lower. In the German partition, it was said that there were no illiterate people, however, it was the site of the most stringent bans on everything connected somehow with this non-existing country (Kieniewicz 1987: 484; information after: Jarociński 1981: 99).

However, in 1901 the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra was founded. Moreover, there are many excellent examples of approaches to modernism in Polish composers' oeuvres. Musical modernism in the 20th century has in fact its roots in the 19th century. It is such a special period of time, where lots of new ideas were developed. Till the first decade of 20th century Polish music was still ruled by ideas from romantic era. First attempts to modernism can be seen around that time. The most important things that happened were the

new approaches to form, harmony, beauty, consonance and dissonance, paying attention to colors, sounds and chords. Composers used scales that had been present in music for centuries, but in the beginning of the 20th century they were utilized in new and innovative ways.

Karol Szymanowski and his *Mity*, Op. 30

The most important aspect of modernism in Poland was to create new music not based on tonal harmony, nor similar to music from the Romantic era, but to catch up the cultural delay. In Polish music, modernism is connected with the body of work of a group of young composers called Young Poland. This term is in fact a calque of the term used for a group of poets and painters. Young Poland in relation to music was formed by a generation of composers born in the 1870s and 1880s: Grzegorz Fitelberg (1879-1953), Karol Szymanowski (1882-1937), Apolinary Szeluto (1884-1966) and Ludomir Różycki (1883-1953). They were supported by Władysław Lubomirski. They founded so called Publishing Company for Young Polish Composers in Berlin with the aim to create, publish and perform new music. They saw a need of change in music, they wanted to reinvent Polish cultural life. Right away, Karol Szymanowski emerged as the most gifted and recognized composer from the former then group. His trips to such countries as Italy, Tunisia, and Algeria inspired him to write many pieces. In 1915, Szymanowski wrote *Mity* [Myths], Op. 30, from which his travels and Greek mythology were sources of inspiration. Whilst in Zarudzie he was comparing and contrasting ideas that he had written with the great violin player Paweł Kochoński (1887-1934). Tadeusz A. Zieliński wrote that:

Zarudzie became a place of a birth of the most original and new violin music in the first half of the 20th century. (Zieliński 1997: 105)

There are three parts of *Mity*: *Źródło Aretuzy* [Fountain of Aretuza], *Narcyz* [Narcissus] and *Driady i Pan* [Dryads and Pan]. The first of the three poems was performed on 15 April 1915 in Kijów [Kiev, Ukraine]. At the concert young Sergei Prokofiev was present. This part, at that time, was known as *La source enchantée* [The Enchanted Source]. After one of the concerts a newspaper contained the following review:

'La source enchantée' is an elegant and extremely interesting musical, let me express it that way, onomatopoeic attempt, that means imitating by sounds an imaginable phenomenon. Suspended between tonalities and weaved from delicate web, sort of, misty sounds – this piece is filled with the chant of truly Verlaine's poetry. (Zieliński 1997: 105)

The structures in *Mity* are light and there are many delicate colors used. The melodies and harmonies do not fit into frames of the minor-major system, although they sometimes

sound like they were based on traditional tonality, e.g. in the beginning of the *Źródło Aretuzy* (A minor). Also no key signatures are used in these musical poems. This can be seen as a kind of new approach to musical notation (see Example 1).

Example 1. Usage only of accidentals in a piece. K. Szymanowski, *Źródło Aretuzy* from the cycle *Mity*, mm. 45–49. K. Pacholek's reproduction after: K. Szymanowski, *Mythes. Trois poèmes pour Violon et Piano*, Leipzig: Universal-Edition, 1921, p. 8.

Also the meter of the first and second poem is complex. In *Źródło Aretuzy* it is 4/8, 3/8, in *Narcyz* – 6/8 and 2/4 (see: Example 2).

Example 2. Complex meter. In the first movement of the piece K. Szymanowski, *Źródło Aretuzy* from the cycle *Mity*, mm. 1–2. K. Pacholek's reproduction after: K. Szymanowski, *Mythes. Trois poèmes pour Violon et Piano*, Leipzig: Universal-Edition, 1921, p. 3.

Some melodies used in the second poem are based on pentatonic scale. Chords used in poems are sometimes highly dissonant. However, we can see impressionistic lightness and liveliness, the structures are in some way static inside. At the same time, the pieces are full of emotions, the melodies could be called “expressionistic”. The melodies are mostly based on chromatic scales and there are centers of tonality rather than a tonality in general. Cadences are used rarely, that is why the minor-major feeling is blurry.

Separately, the techniques used on violin in *Mity* are not something new. The techniques used included:

- double trills,
- harmonics (artificial and natural, see: Example 3),
- double harmonics (see: Example 3),
- *sul ponticello*,
- tremolo on glissando,
- trills on double stops,
- combinations of double stops and tremolos,
- glissandos,
- quartertones (see: Example 4),
- left hand pizzicati,
- playing with and without a mute.



Example 3. Usage of double harmonics – natural and artificial ones. K. Szymanowski, *Źródło Aretuzy* from the cycle *Mity*, mm. 46–56. K. Pacholek’s reproduction after: K. Szymanowski, *Mythes. Trois poèmes pour Violon et Piano*, Violin part, Leipzig: Universal-Edition, 1921, p. 1.



Example 4. Usage of quartertones. K. Szymanowski, *Driady i Pan* from the cycle *Mity*, mm. 1–4. K. Pacholek’s reproduction after: K. Szymanowski, *Mythes. Trois poèmes pour Violon et Piano*, score, Leipzig: Universal-Edition, 1921, p. 23.

Also in the piano part there are lots of delicate colors used. To create a specific atmosphere in these poems, the composer wrote many sounds in the highest register of the instrument, there are also arabesques. As we take a look at pieces composed for similar ensembles from approximately the same period, *Mity* are totally different from them and unique. Examples can be seen in *Romanian Dances* by Bartok, Sonata for cello and piano by Debussy or First Violin Concerto by Prokofiev, finished in 1917. Let us compare the aforementioned Sonata by Debussy with *Mity*. There are some similarities between these works – size of pieces, both are for string instrument and piano, Debussy’s composition has the annotation “Pierrot fache avec la lune” that suggest a program, there are three parts in each work. But this is where the similarities end. In *Mity* more advanced violin techniques are used more prevalent, they are accumulated, for example in the third poem after almost fourteen bars of playing trills on double stops (mostly of an interval of second) there is a fragment in which harmonics are used and then quartertones. In many places intervals of seventh, second and fourth are used. But the pieces do not seem to be exaggerated. Szymanowski wrote *Mity* in a way that everything fits and helps to create a unique atmosphere which is connected strongly with the main idea of the cycle.

Szymanowski also saw the differences in his own music and musical style in comparison to others and wrote:

Together with Pawełek [Paweł Kochański – K.B.] we created in *Myths* and *Concerto* a new style, a new form of expression in violin playing, something epoch-making significance in that respect. (Szymanowski 2016)

Ludomir Michał Rogowski and his approach to the scales

But modernism in Polish music is not limited to Young Poland, and a narrow understanding of what Szymanowski did. As mentioned at the beginning of this article, there are many of excellent examples of modernity in Polish music. One of the most important transformation that took place in Polish music was connected with tonality. The problem of country’s independence cause the delay in musical transformations. However, a very interesting attempt at something new can be found in the works of Ludomir Michał Rogowski (1881-1954). His idea of creating new music was connected with the usage of scales. From around the 1920s he began searching for new material. In 1922 he published his postulates in a paper called “Muzyka przyszłości. Przyczynki i szkice estetyczne” [The Music of the Future. Contributions and Aesthetic Sketches], where he wrote:

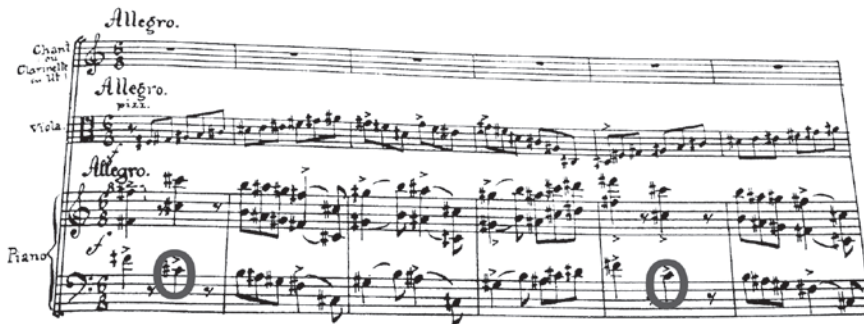
That old, well known material, from which many masterpieces were made of, today can be in service only of a one that does not know these masterpieces and is unaware of loan-words and thefts that he is committing. (Rogowski 1922: 32)

Most of his works in the form of manuscripts are stored in libraries in Warsaw or Dubrovnik (where Rogowski moved to in 1926, after spending his time in such places as Warsaw, Rome, Munich and also Vilnius). In the capital of today's Lithuania he ran a musical school and founded a symphonic orchestra. He did not publish that many pieces. In a library of the University of Music and Performing Art in Vienna I found a piece by Rogowski. There is no information about where the score was published and when (there is just a note "(1922)" written with a pencil under the title of the composition). I consider the possibility of finding a published composition in other places than Poland or Croatia something rare. The score looks like it was written by hand not by a machine. As I found out, there are no recordings of the piece. The only possibility of hearing it was

for analytical use, using midi files or playing it on the piano. Like Szymanowski, Rogowski did not use any key signatures. Instead, he used accidentals (but if a note was repeated in the same bar, he used accidentals again). That, in fact, caused me some problems while editing the score – there are some places, where the researcher had to ask themselves: is the accidental missing or not? (see: Facsimile 1).

The date written by pencil on the first page of the score is 1922 – the same year Rogowski published his postulates. His conception of new music was based on a usage of certain scales that were rhythmical and natural:

- pentatonic,
- *hindshas* – natural hexachord
- whole tone scale (introduced as first in 1915),
- *zirefkend* – known as e.g. octatonic scale, Arabic-Persian scale, Korsakovian scale, Pijper scale or Messiaen's mode,
- chromatic.



Facsimile 1. Missing accidental in m. 5. L.M. Rogowski, *Plesanterie* from the cycle *Caprices*, mm. 1–6. Reproduction after: *Caprices pour alto, chant et piano*, [Place of publication unknown]: Wydanie Sekcji Współczesnych Kompozytorów Polskich, 1922[?], p. 11.

Facsimile 2. Vocalise in soprano part. L.M. Rogowski, *Dance fantasque* from the cycle *Caprices*, mm. 1–8. Reproduction after: *Caprices pour alto, chant et piano*, [Place of publication unknown]: Wydanie Sekcji Współczesnych Kompozytorów Polskich, 1922[?], p. 1.

The scales that Rogowski used were introduced to his works in different times and the times that were used by composer were also different. In the 1930s he expanded the palette of scales he used by adding to it the most important and characteristic one for his work – the *Slavic* scale consisting of: C – D – E – F-sharp – G – A – B-flat – C. For Rogowski, it was the essence of Polish music. It was a combination of the whole tone scale and *zirefkend*. This scale can be also found in Bartok's and Polish folk music from the Tatra Mountains region. It was also used by Szymanowski.

Rogowski called these scales “natural”, because they could be created from a row of perfect fifths. They were also called “rhythmical” if the choice of sounds from the row of fifths was logical, e.g. whole tone scale is created when we use every second tone from the row. However, the composer claimed that the most artificial are major and minor scales, because they are not natural nor rhythmical, it is easy to put notes in such order, that we can create both of these scales.

In *Caprices* we can see the first attempts to write this new material. Rogowski uses scales freely, not as it is in his late pieces. However, it is interesting to see how he used them and which of them can be seen here.

The cycle consists of the three *Caprices* for viola, voice or clarinet and piano: *Dance fantasque* [Eccentric dance], *Rêves* [Dreams] and *Plaisanterie* [Joke]. In the vocal part vocalization and meaningless syllables rather than conventional lyrics are used and the vocal part is sometimes treated like an instrument. Also this part can be easily replaced by clarinet. That is also a new approach to musical material (see: Facsimile 2).

There are lots of places where the minor-major system is still used – in creating melodies as well as building chords, like in first *Caprice* (Example 5), or in the third part.



Example 5. Usage of minor and major scales to create melodies in soprano and viola part. L.M. Rogowski, *Dance fantasque* from the cycle *Caprices*, mm. 8–11. K. Bartos' reconstruction after: *Caprices pour alto, chant et piano*, [Place of publication unknown]: Wydanie Sekcji Współczesnych Kompozytorów Polskich, 1922[?].

Chords are linked sometimes in “non-classical” ways (see: Example 6).

Apart from “traditional” chords, structures are used. They are built of intervals of the fifth and the fourth. Especially in the first *Caprice* that way of building chords is used, the fifth is the most important interval. It is seen not only in the piano part, but also in the vocal part – in the beginning of the piece and in the viola part using double stops mostly on open strings (see: Example 7).



Example 6. Usage of “non-traditional” chords, mm. 7–9 in piano part. L.M. Rogowski, *Plaisanterie* from the cycle *Caprices*, mm. 5–12. K. Bartos' reconstruction after: *Caprices pour alto, chant et piano*, [Place of publication unknown]: Wydanie Sekcji Współczesnych Kompozytorów Polskich, 1922[?].



Example 7. Usage of fifths in viola part. L.M. Rogowski, *Dance fantasque* from the cycle *Caprices*, mm. 1–8. K. Bartos' reconstruction after: *Caprices pour alto, chant et piano*, [Place of publication unknown]: Wydanie Sekcji Współczesnych Kompozytorów Polskich, 1922[?].

Scales like: *zirefkend* (see: Example 8), chromatic scales, and whole tone scales, are used infrequently in the composition.



Example 8. Usage of *zirefkend* scale in piano part. L.M. Rogowski, *Dance fantasque* from the cycle *Caprices*, m. 1. K. Bartos' reconstruction after: *Caprices pour alto, chant et piano*, [Place of publication unknown]: Wydanie Sekcji Współczesnych Kompozytorów Polskich, 1922[?].

In the last part there are two scales used more frequently – natural hexachord – *bindshas* (see: Example 9) and a pentatonic scale (see: Example 10).

Conclusions

In my article I focused on only two pieces, which are *Mity* for violin and piano and *Caprices* for viola, voice and piano. They demonstrate early attempts of Szymanowski and Rogowski to construct modern compositions. However, they also show important characteristics included in

Example 9. Usage of *hindshas* scale in mm. 74–79. L.M. Rogowski, *Plaisanterie* from the cycle *Caprices*, mm. 5–12. K. Bartos' reconstruction after: *Caprices pour alto, chant et piano*, [Place of publication unknown]: Wydanie Sekcji Współczesnych Kompozytorów Polskich, 1922[?].

Example 10. Usage of pentatonic scale in mm. 81–87. L.M. Rogowski, *Plaisanterie* from the cycle *Caprices*, mm. 80–87. K. Bartos' reconstruction after: *Caprices pour alto, chant et piano*, [Place of publication unknown]: Wydanie Sekcji Współczesnych Kompozytorów Polskich, 1922[?].

their outputs which are visible in music of that time in other countries in Europe. Szymanowski later was inspired by Polish folk music from the Tatra Mountain region and used the *podhalańska* scale. Rogowski found the *Slavic* scale which is identical with the *podhalańska*. This is the link between these two composers. Also creativity and breaking the rules of the minor-major system was another feature that they had in common. In both presented pieces we can see modernistic ideas. Szymanowski's piece represents violin impressionism, there is a wide range of extended or advanced techniques used and also the composer used non-minor-major scales. In Rogowski's composition the ideas of modernism are seen in usage of his "natural" and "rhythmic" scales, usage of harmonic structures, in a vocal part where no word is used and the part can be replaced by clarinet. In these creations, the ideas important in modernism were fully realized and developed. The examples that were presented here are one of the most interesting in Polish chamber music from the beginning of the 20th century. These composers wanted to create new music and catch up the cultural delay, and, I think, they both succeeded.

Scores

Rogowski Ludomir Michał, *Caprices pour alto, chant et piano*, [Place of publication unknown]: Wydanie Sekcji Współczesnych Kompozytorów Polskich, 1922[?]

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Santrauka

Naujosios muzikinės technikos Lenkijos muzikoje pasirodė ir asimiliavosi gerokai vėliau nei Vakarų Europoje, tad vietiniai kompozitoriai patys siekė rasti būdų modernizuoti savo kūrybą. Straipsnyje kalbama apie Karolį Szymanowską ir Ludomirą Michałą Rogowską pasitelkiant jų kūrybos pavyzdžių. Remdamasi Szymanovskio „Mity“, autorė parodo, kaip atsirado smuiko impresionizmas. Šiame kūrinyje kompozitorius vartojo tokias išplėstines kompozicijos technikas kaip dvigubos trelės, dviguba harmonija, *tremolo* kartu su *glissando*, trelės kartu su dvigubomis pauzėmis ir ketvirtatoniais. Rogowskio „Kaprisuose“ altui, balsui ir fortepijonui

regime natūralių dermių panaudojimą. Nors šiame opuse plačiausiai naudojamos mažorinės ir minorinės dermės, taip pat esama ir *zirefkend* (vadinamoji arabų ir persų dermė), pilnų tonų gamos, chromatinės gamos, keliuose labiau išplėtotuose epizoduose – pentatoninės dermės ir *hindshas* (natūralus heksakordas).

Straipsnyje analizuojami opusai atskleidžia pirmuosius itin ankstyvus Szymanovskio ir Rogowskio kūrybos bandymus. Tačiau šie bandymai parodo svarbias tendencijas, ryškėjančias vėlesniuose jų darbuose ir kitų Europos šalių modernioje muzikoje apskritai. Szymanowską vėliau įkvėpė lenkų liaudies muzika iš Tatrų kalnų regiono, jis naudojo *podhalańska* dermę, o Rogowskiui atrodė, kad slaviškoji dermė yra identiška *podhalańska* dermei. Tai esminis šiuos du kūrėjus jungiantis elementas. Jiems abiem taip pat buvo būdingas išskirtinis kūrybingumas ir minoro-mažoro sistemų laužymas. Jų kūriniuose svarbios modernizmo idėjos buvo visiškai realizuotos. Straipsnyje pateikiami pavyzdžiai – vieni įdomiausių lenkų kamerinės muzikos opusų, pasirodžiusių Lenkijoje XX a. pradžioje. Šie kompozitoriai troško sukurti naują muzikinę kalbą ir sugauti kultūrinio atotrūkio akimirka – manytina, kad jiems tai puikiai pavyko.