

Composing Music: In-Between Tradition and Innovation

Abstract. The aim of the article is to share the variety of possibilities of music composition exercises, which correlates in historical and theoretical contexts for prospective acoustic compositions. The present composing methods of musical works rarely determines strictly just one methodological framework. More likely, it can become a supporting or functional point for a prospective composition. Selecting concrete creative preferences (content, genre, purpose, composition), these methods, more or less are already known and are often exploited in the 20th–21st century. The important issue in music the composing process is handling the concept of composition and refusal of dogmatic methods or combination of several different methods (i.e. chorale and sonorism, rhythmic chaos and well-defined modus of a formula, aleatoric and baroque ornaments, etc.). The metaphysical concept of the composition materialization to the unique method of its tangible structural basis can become an effective composition method as well as contextual result of the work.

Keywords: compositional methods, serial, tonal, exercise, transposition, *dice game*, drone, *senza misura*.

The rapid development of the technology and communication in the last few decades has clearly broadened the horizons of musical culture resulting in opening-up informational webs as well as bringing nearer the creative laboratory and its dissemination of diversity in regards to compositional methods and concepts. However, in the artistic creation both technological control of the available data and intuition are equally important¹.

Composers must have in mind that not only choosing the right compositional procedure of the forthcoming composition is significant – the most effective compositional tools are considered the most revealing criteria of the idea, which also determines both the logical and dynamical process of dramaturgy in the piece as well maintaining the vision of the work's sustainability.

Regardless of frequently occurring and used pure compositional examples (serial, graphic, spectral, tonal, aleatoric, minimalist, etc.) or their proclivity to the consistent and recognizable aesthetics and style, today more often than ever, a question of whether one should choose to employ a time-proven traditional way or look for a new, unexplored technique arises. One is always entitled to lean on the pure compositional methods that in many years have become widely used tools, but as long as the innovation has not been discovered in the daily searches postmodern coding² could be resisted by highlighting compositional multilingualism resulting in assurance of a further development of the limits of modernism.

In this article, the term “new” does not stand for “innovative and unheard”, but on the contrary, the novelty effect relates to the correlation principle, the expression of which could be recognizable by the use of the compositional methods mentioned earlier as well as the shapes of genres, forms, musical language and other fields such as natural sciences, languages and so on: Witold Lutosławski's *Livre pour orchestre* (1968) – the structural correlation of the book and musical piece; Antanas Kučinskas' *For Rest* (2011) – the linguistic correlation of the name based on the reflections of the Mikalojus K. Čiurlionis' symphonic poem *In the Forest*; Dalia Kairaitytė's *Poetorio The Flood* (2011) – the correlation of poetry and musical genres; Max Richter's *Maria the Poet 1913* (2002) – the poetry archive of Marina Tsvetaeva and the repetitions of musical phrases, etc.

In other words, it is not the present musical compositions' archetypes that have to be discussed here, but by identifying a well-known cultural memory and its basis, we can try to rediscover³ and recreate tradition. A choice of this kind ensures a socially organized artistic content resulting in both a recognizable and entirely new sound. In this way, the composition becomes more communicative and open to the listener and the principle itself could be reasonably compared to that of the collage.

This way, polarized and dichotomous ideas may be used during the composing process, i.e. comparing different composing methods (e.g. chorale and sonorism, rhythmic chaos and precisely defined rhythmic modules, aleatory and baroque ornaments and so on). On the one hand, these comparisons can influence unique (or at the very least, individual) composing method solutions that may protect from repetition of already created compositions and ideas. On the other hand, it can lead to improvisation while choosing such tools of music language, which defines various stylistic approaches.

¹ Maslow A. H. Creativity in self-actualizing people. In: *Creativity and its cultivation* (Ed. H. H. Anderson). New York: Harper & Row, 1959, p. 83–95.

² Manuel P. Music as symbol, music as simulacrum: postmodern, pre-modern, and modern aesthetics in subcultural popular music. *Popular Music* (1995), Vol. 1412. Cambridge University Press (May 1995), p. 227–239.

³ Beard D., Gloag K. *Musicality: The Key Concepts*, 2005, NY, p. 99.

During the composing process, clearly defined polarization or dichotomy, as the core of a future composition, may be perceived as a balanced, freely reflecting *ratio* and *emotio* result or conveyed at the highest level a conceptual and rational idea as a whole. (In this case, the absolute *emotio* composing method would not be possible, as choosing to compare different composing methods is a link to the origin of rationality.)

How to extend the tradition of music composing and thus update it? Tradition and innovation at all times were more or less apparent or presumed, i.e. more codified, hidden correlation between tradition and innovation. The apparent *idée fixe* context may be reflected in the musical text, consistently arranged, repetitive (scales, therein emerging intervals/intonation segments, rhythm formulas that are used systematically, melodic terrain, etc.) that is included in the composition as a whole or a larger (therefore, clearly apparent) fragment. Such examples may be found in the *Prelude* (1914) of the late Alexander Scriabin, the melody of the upper voice representing the movement of minor thirds⁴ (Ex. 1), Charles Ives 17 bars piece *Hallowe'en* (1906) for string quartet and piano, represented in the score, in the string parts, resulting polytonal, polyphonic *perpetuum mobile* (Ex. 2), or, considering examples from the classical era, the palindromic principle found in the trio in Franz Joseph Haydn (*Symphony No. 47* (1772):

Example 1. A. Scriabin. Five Preludes. *Prelude Op. 74 No. 4*, 1914 (bars 1–2).
© 1953 by Moscow: Muzgiz. A. N. Scriabin: *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii dlia fortepiano*, vol. 3

Example 2. Charles Ives. *Hallowe'en* from "Three Outdoor Scenes", 1906 (bars 5–6).
© 1949 by Bomart Music Publications, N.Y.

Example 3. Franz Joseph Haydn. *Symphony No. 47 G-dur (The Palindrome)*, Hob. I:47, 1772.
Menuet al Roverso (bars 1–22)

⁴ Chia-Lun Chang, B.A., M.M. *Five Preludes Opus 74 By Alexander Scriabin: The Mystic Chord As Basis For New Means Of Harmonic Progression*. The University of Texas at Austin, 2006 (approved version of the following treatise), p. 57.

Meanwhile, in the background of more codified, invisible or barely noticeable compositional innovation, composition may get more articulated with the tradition, whose denominator is a settled style, the normative (apparent) element of the musical language, which is characteristic to the period of the creation of a particular composition. Fragmented elements of an idea acquire semantic features, it may appear, it may disappear, and without the author's comments or the insights of a music analyst, they are less noticeable in the context of music notation (Ex. 4):



Example 4. Maurice Ravel. *Menuet sur le Nom d'Haydn*, 1909 (bars 1–4).
© 1910, Paris: Durand & Cie. Plate D. & F. 7583. Reprinted – Mineola: Dover Publications, 1986

The adaptation of musical composition methods by combining the differences, highlighting one of them, complying with the tradition as a fundamental support for the musical composition, yields a significant number of composing options, and the results of these combinations show unique solutions (most often, after detecting one method, the curiosity to test other methods occurs and thus a unique, non-repetitive sound is obtained. It is possible that this is the reason why, while announcing an author's or a group of authors' work, it is hard to find a laconic denominator for their musical compositions, as in order to name characteristic features, we cannot easily classify them in particular directions, because the result of their sound is achieved by mixing the tradition in pair (identifiable sound, classical genre and form, various musical tools, multi-styles, ideas), which determine the multilayer result and reflect the genesis of postmodernism. An example of this insight may be a short presentation and reference of any of today's authors, or their own description of their music. For example, Linas Rimša, a composer of the middle generation, seeks to combine the established traditions with unexpected acoustic or electronic connections (the Suite *Old Faith*, 2009, inspired by Russian traditional music, *In Pairs*, 2015, a piece where baritone, oboe, cello and piano are connected to a mobile phone or tape recorder, etc.). The idea of unexpected connections has repeatedly been mentioned by the author that his intention is 'to combine elements and things that do not seem to have anything in common', searching for unexpected associations (rigid structures and improvisation, fractal visualization of musical sound (*Leaving*, 2011), tonality and its non-systemic atonal inclusions). The result of such connections is determined by the audible, visible in the context of music notation and therefore clearly perceived traditional background, with new or constantly renewed unique solutions of music composing, which determine the dialectics of musical dramaturgy.

Comparison between different composing methods, i.e. interconnections between traditions and innovations in musical compositions depend on the craft of a composer, the level of mastering the specific tools, certain tendencies of a composer (compositional method, musical style, genre) and the author's ability/intention to innovate: growing the sonorous effect from the tradition of Gregorian chant, and chaos from defined rhythmic formulas and vice versa, aleatory elements growing from the baroque rubato ornamentation, etc.

Some of dichotomous composing ideas – exercises or methods, which could be clearly defined or balanced in the aspect of rationality and intuitivism:

1. Tonality + Series

Principle: the accompaniment remains the same while the melodic line is changed with the twelve-tone series (Ex. 5).

Traditionalism is reflected here by a recognizable accompaniment by Erik Satie, at the beginning (bars 1–16) repeating the step of the harmony $G^{maj7} - D^{maj7}$.

Without altering the accompaniment, a peculiar recomposed result is obtained that still can be extended, e.g. changing pitch to the maximum extent, while at the same time maintaining the texture of the bass and its rhythmic organization. This way, the memorable harmony and chords of Eric Satie may be avoided, i.e. – referral to the sound of the author's work is made more distant, but at the same time, maintaining tonality 'insures' a piece from the radical sound, the dodecaphonic arrangement of the melody allowing us to hear the piece's new/renewed compositional vocabulary.

Example 5. Exercise: after Eric Satie *Gymnopédie No. 1* (bars 1–12)

2. Letters + Sounds

Principle: the sounds are adapted to letters (Ex. 6):

i o u a e i o u
F G a b c d e f
o u a e i o u a

Example 6. Exercise: after Guido of Arezzo and *Musical Improvisation* (bars 1–3)

Letter adaptation to the sound becomes a kind of cryptogram, referring to scale's semantic and structural solutions. Starting from Josquin des Prez's *Missa Hercules Dux Ferrarie* (1480), Edward Elgar uses puzzles in the piece *Enigma Variations* (1898/1899), Elliott Carter, *Réflexions* (2004), Robert Schumann, Mikalojus K. Čiurlionis and other composers encrypted composing solutions; these are just a few examples in the history of music reflecting a variety of encrypted composing methods using letters. This creative approach can lead to the idea of a literary, autobiographical factor (the Romantic era) or a unique way of composition, a system determining safe relationships between the notes in the score. Guido d'Arezzo in his improvisation lessons uses this idea (later a frequently used creative idea): five letters – vowels have their own sound (sometimes one, other times a few), which, in other voices, are set differently. In addition, Guido d'Arezzo provides a significant solution that at the last stage of the creative process, intuitivism should be used to intentionally make certain mistakes or misconduct the system and *fix* mathematically sorted letters, the audio content.

3. Position + Transposition

Principle: transpositional transformation through one of the sustained sound of the chord (Ex. 7).

In this case, the tradition of compositional idea (or template) may reflect on a specific fragment of the musical work, *Turtle Dreams (Waltz)*, 1983 by Meredith Monk, which is adapted while maintaining the same rhythmic and harmonic picture as a programmed ritualistic drawing, through freely migrating pitch in the melody transitioning to other “scales”. This way, *a* sound becomes a transition from *a* → *fis*:

Moderato

Example 7. Exercise: idea after Meredith Monk (bars 1–8)

The principle of the varied ostinato figure in this example is reflected by a diatonic melodic voice, statically repeating rhythmic, intonational pattern of the accompaniment, thus creating an impression of ritualism and infinite musical flow. Shaping the dynamics of musical composition, differentiating models are possible to the maximum extent, including scales, textural layout, variations of rhythm, but as well, while using all these models to the maximum extent, the result of the sound would enter a direction towards a collage. Therefore, preserving ritual characteristics of composition, choosing methods of comparing variables may be selected ascetically, i.e. using only one melody of the voices for transposition, allowing the sound to module to brighter or darker zones (major – minor, sharp – flat). This transposition may be treated as *motus*, as opposing to static and may be treated as a distinctive compositional *crescendo* of dynamics.

4. Drone and Recognizable tonality

Principle: the convergence of bourdon and identifiable segment (Ex. 8).

Mozart’s aleatorical *dice game*⁵ is a method for generating 16-bar minuets. For each bar, two six-sided dice are rolled, and the sum is used for a bar number in one of the two tables (one for each half of the minuet). The bar number then determines a single bar from a collection of musical fragments. The fragments are connected together, and the music is composed.

Drone, as a cluster of sound and space, already contains a combination of micro diversities (related to or different by structure and connections of intervals, similar or different rhythmic pedals and so on). However, there is another option: comparing macro composition compounds, such as drone, using principle of pedal bass foundation/accompaniment with another line, which also contains multiple layers, but whose voice hierarchy of melody and accompaniment is obvious, and perhaps based on a historically recognized and memorable (in this case, Mozart) system.

⁵ Musikalisches Würfelspiel [Auth. note].

Example 8. Exercise: after Mozart's *Musikalisches Würfelspiel* (bars 1–9)

5. With and without measure composition (*senza misura*)

Principle: metric and free metric melodic lines (Ex. 9).

A similar example, reflecting the fixed and freely developed, improvised wave patterns, is reflected in Jan Garbarek's and Hilliard Ensemble's recomposed Christophe de Morales' vocal composition *Parce Mihi Domine* (CD Officium: ECM New Series – ECM 1525) and other audio tracks found on this recording. Metric free, classical and jazz, medieval and Renaissance vocal traditions correlate with contemporary elements (timbre, musical text style and technique of music interpretation):

Example 9. Exercise: after Claude Le Jeune's *Psalm 2* (bars 1–8)

In compositions, defined metrics and relative or free metrics are arranged vertically or horizontally. The vertical compositional development, when the upper timbre block is metrical and lower is metric less (or vice versa) and is not in a contrast, not so active dynamically, relating approach may be used. Whereas the horizontal

alignment of metric fragments is combined with metric fewer fragments, it underlines more drama synergy of the composition. Therefore the correlation of metric or metric less fragments, their arrangement depends on the conceived dynamics of composition: if more intense dynamics is needed, selecting 'blocks', i.e. vertical combination of diversities may be used.

Invoking some ideas and the juxtaposition of differences as well as historical and theoretical musical composition provisions, it is possible to temporarily avoid episodes of creative pauses. It should be noted that a very fine example of daily writing exercise presented by Ernest Hemingway could be taken into account and accordingly adapted as a music composing exercise among the composers. To conclude with, in order to find a unique compositional solution and achieve a new sound effect, the iconic exploitation of pure compositional methodology (strictly maintained minimalism, spectral, serialism, etc.) has to be denied in the first place.

The composition of music is historically and structurally influenced by the principle of correlation between tradition and innovation. Based on the previously used methods of composition (based on tradition), as a fundamental material of the future work, including specific elements (updating, innovating), a new, unique result of the work arises. It often cannot be specified in one particular direction, described with laconic characteristic, stylistic image, but rather it may imply the vast resources of the uncovered musical composition ideas and tools.

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Muzikos komponavimas: tarp tradicijos ir naujovių

Santrauka

Straipsnio tikslas – pasidalyti galimų muzikinės kompozicijos pratybų įvairove koreliuojant istorinius ir teorinius kontekstus būsimoms akustinėms kompozicijoms. Dabarties muzikinio kūrinio komponavimo metodus lemiantys veiksniai retai kada turi griežtas apibrėžtis išskirtinai vienos metodologijos ribose, – tai greičiau atraminiai ar funkciniai būsimos kompozicijos taškai, kurių pagrindu pagal konkrečias kūrybines preferencijas (turinys, žanras, paskirtis, sudėtis) daugiau ar mažiau taikomi mums jau žinomi, XX a. (ir dabar) gausiai eksploatuoti metodai. Svarbi muzikos komponavimo proceso problema yra kompozicinės idėjos apvaldymas ir ikoniškų metodų atsisakymas arba jų keitimas derinant kelių skirtybių poras (pvz., choralas ir sonorika, ritminis chaosas ir apibrėžtos modusų formulės, aleatorika ir barokinė ornamentika). Metafizinio kompozicijos sumanymo materializavimas į unikalų metodą ir apčiuopiamą jo struktūrinį pagrindą gali tapti ir veiksminga kompozicinių pratybų mankšta, ir kontekstuali kūrinio rezultatu.

Muzikos komponavimas istoriškai ir struktūriškai veikiamas tradicijos bei naujovės koreliacijos principu. Remiantis anksčiau eksploatuotais komponavimo metodais (tradicijos pagrindas) kaip fundamentaliąją būsimosios kompozicijos medžiagą ir specifinių elementų įvedimu (atnaujinimu), nubrėžiamas naujas, unikalus kūrinio rezultatas, dažniausiai netelpantis į lakoniškas charakteristikas, išgrynintos krypties, stiliaus įvaizdžius, tačiau suponuojantis neaprepiamų muzikos komponavimo idėjų ir įrankių resursus.