

Neoclassicism vs Sonorism: Selected Performance Issues in Edward Bogusławski's Selected Works for Chamber Orchestra

Abstract. The subjects of the article are four compositions by Edward Bogusławski *Concerto classico per archi*, *Concerto-Fantasia per contrabasso ed archi*, *Musica per archi* and *Canzoni d'amore per voce recitazione, soprano, batteria ed archi* in the context of their formal and interpretative analysis. The compositions for string orchestra take a special place in Bogusławski's work, as well as compositions for typical ensembles expanded by single instruments. Understanding the creative process of the composer allows a performer – a soloist or a conductor to offer a more complete, a more in-depth interpretation of the compositions in question. Intuitive search for the best solutions will be supported by a rational analysis of the textural and sound processes taking place in the work.

Keywords: Silesian composers, Edward Bogusławski, composition, chamber orchestra, sonorism, neoclassicism, interpretation.

1. Introduction

The interests of Professor Edward Bogusławski (1940–2003), an outstanding Silesian composer, fluctuated throughout his career around the issue of sound and texture. Bogusławski, who “in the 1960s was at the beginning of his creative path, could discover and soak up the exciting world of sound of Arnold Schönberg, György Ligeti, John Cage and other artists as an observer at the Warsaw Autumn festivals and during lectures at the State Higher School of Music in Katowice, taught by Jan Gawlas, the author of the handbook on contemporary composition techniques, Witold Szalonek, one of the greatest enthusiasts of modernity in Silesia and later the creator of combined tones, and Bolesław Szabelski who at the age of 62 made a shift in his work towards new musical currents. On the other hand, Szabelski, an experienced educator and composer whose domain of interest was symphonic music, sparked in his young student an admiration for the mastery of form construction and an extraordinarily sensitive artistic taste of the works of Johann Sebastian Bach, Johannes Brahms and Béla Bartók” (Anna Stachura-Bogusławska 2009: 22).

In the broad portfolio of compositions for a variety of performing ensembles left behind by Edward Bogusławski, string quintets are definitely in a minority. During the forty years of his creative career, he wrote just three compositions for string orchestra – *Concerto classico per archi* and *Musica per archi*. Another noteworthy piece is *Concerto-Fantasia per contrabasso e archi*, where both in the solo part and the orchestral fabric string instruments constitute the essence.

The first and last of these works, *Concerto classico per archi*, and *Concerto-Fantasia per contrabasso e archi*, were recorded on the album “Edward Bogusławski – dzieła wybrane” (Edward Bogusławski – Selected Works) released in 2004 by Polish Radio Katowice. It was performed by the Camerata Impuls Chamber Orchestra under the baton of Małgorzata Kaniowska and with Aleksander Gabryś on the double bass solo. *Concerto classico* was additionally recorded in 1999 as an archival recording for Radio Katowice, by the Silesian Chamber Orchestra under the baton of Mirosław Błaszczuk.

The two works are characterised by a similar string orchestra line-up, comprising four first violins, three second violins, two violas, two cellos, and one double bass. The prototype for this line-up was the *Concerto Classico*, a piece commissioned by Małgorzata Kaniowska and the Camerata Impuls Chamber Orchestra for its fifth anniversary. Interestingly, the score contains a note that it was composed in 1995, although the professor knew that the orchestra's jubilee fell in 1997. The contract was indeed signed at the end of 1995; whether the piece was actually composed that year, or whether Bogusławski was influenced by the number five in the anniversary date and recorded it also in the score as the year of composition remains a mystery. It also seems interesting that Camerata's actual jubilee year, 1997, was recorded on the score of Bogusławski's second composition for string orchestra, *Musica per archi*. These are the only string orchestra pieces in the composer's portfolio. Is it then just a coincidence, or did he erroneously switch the dates of composition of the two pieces? However, the date and place of the premiere of *Concerto classico* are indisputable. It took place in the Concert Hall of the Upper Silesian Museum in Bytom on 6 March 1997. At that time, Camerata's basic line-up comprised twelve musicians divided into the groups mentioned above and hence my (the conductor's) suggestion to limit the score (for mundane financial reasons) to such a line-up. As the composer himself admitted in the course of common discussions, this for him was an interesting challenge: on the one hand self-limitation resulting from the objective reality, and on the other, obtaining a rich, spatial sound of the strings, both in terms of timbre saturation and harmonic possibilities.

2. *Concerto classico per archi*

Concerto classico per archi comprises three movements. The external movements, where one can sense a greatly chimerical course of rhythm, on the one hand require an extraordinary performance precision in fast passages, and on the other hand, their lyrical fragments, which refer to the music material of the central movement, bring the listener to the dimension of different “temporality”. As they intertwine in the course of the musical narration, the conductor needs to discipline the performers in terms of tempo, and at the same time has to be able to lead broad phrasing, in line with the rhythmically pulsating “time”, imposed by the composer.

The middle movement is, in a way, “suspended outside of time”; the melodic lines of solo instruments led against the background of chord structures emerging from time to time pose for the conductor the task of temporally and spatially moulding the individual melodic and harmonic layers, and merging them into a whole that would be understandable for the audience. In the interpretation of this work, an extremely important role is played by silence – not only the moments of repose between the movements, which are of paramount importance for the process of binding the material of the work as a whole, but also the silence that appears during the development of individual movements. The entire composition is constituted around the silences–pauses of varying energy significance and of different functions. The essential role of the conductor is to interpret them accordingly, to skilfully draw out their meaning from the entire course of the musical narrative.

The importance of time and silence in the correct development of form and the sonoristic qualities of the work becomes clear as early as during the analysis of the introduction to the first movement of the *Concerto Classico*. A six-measure-long sequence that opens the work divides the phrase into three structures, of which the first two seem to be “wrapped” in silence, thanks to which their individual sound quality becomes very clear. It resembles gradual taming of sound emerging from “non-existence”.

The image shows a handwritten musical score for a string ensemble. At the top, it is titled "CONCERTO CLASSICO" with "per archi" written below it. The composer's name "E. Spina 1997" is written in the top right corner. The score is divided into two systems. The first system is marked "I." and contains measures 1 through 6. Above the first measure, there are markings "5", "11x 80=60", "2", "6", "3", and "5". The second system starts at measure 40 and includes the instruction "espressivo molto". The score features various musical notations including notes, rests, and dynamic markings. At the bottom left, there is a logo and the text "© Molnar N.V. Wommervort - Holland". At the bottom right, the number "09 0143 68" is visible. In the center bottom, there is a small page number "- 1 -".

Example 1. *Concerto classico*, manuscript, p. 1

The third structure, centred on a string quartet solo, gradually gathers tensions, which the composer escalates by slowly increasing volume and, towards the end of the sequence by accumulating short, sharp chords and gradually thickening texture. The composer leads the music to a general pause, which is then in a way broken by a chord enhanced by another crescendo in the parts that join in to achieve full *tutti*, interrupted by delicate piano in the string quartet, only to return a moment later to very expressive *tutti fortissimo*. This prelude of an unusual expression leads to a strongly rhythmical passage of diversified metre. This “fluctuating” tempo, volatile texture, alternating *tutti* and solo in individual voices, which gradually build up or disappear, gives the quality of saturation to this mosaic of sounds shimmering with a peculiar colour.

The second movement brings to mind seemingly static, slow movements of Baroque concerti – solo parts that seem to spin off lazily against the homogenic sound of chords made up by the remaining parts; only a short middle episode recalls the violent emotions of the first movement. This is a perverse trick on the part of the composer who is aware that a break is needed after the expressive first movement, yet at the same time gradually builds tension in the listener awaiting the extremely energetic third movement, pulsating with rhythm.

3. *Musica per archi*

Musica per archi, the composition that won Second Prize at the Karol Szymanowski National Competition in Warsaw in 1997, is yet to have its premiere. Perhaps the reason for this is the extended size of the string quintet ensemble, comprising twelve first violins and twelve second violins, ten violas, as many cellos, and eight double basses. It is a one-movement piece, although the formal layout seems to be almost identical with the three-movement *Concerto classico*. It is not just the form that seems to be a carbon copy of the latter composition, but also the series of melodic motifs, rhythmic sequences, as well as harmony and texture solutions. *Musica per archi* seems to be a treasure trove of musical material, whose excess has been perfectly trimmed to create the *Concerto classico*.

Recomposing his own material hardly seems to be an isolated phenomenon in the works of Edward Bogusławski, as in, for example, his *Pieśni Saffony* (Sappho’s Songs) for female reciting voice, flute, percussion, and two accordions, which many years later served as the foundation for composing his *Canzoni d’amore per voce recitazione, soprano, batteria e archi*. Such close links between *Musica per archi* and *Concerto classico* once again provoke the question which of these was created first, and whether the bold thesis about a mistake in dating both works is not, in fact, justified. This conclusion is supported also by the fact that the *Concerto-Fantasia per contrabasso e archi* was written just two years after Camerata’s jubilee for the exact same line-up (apart from the double bass as a solo instrument) as *Concerto Classico*, and not *Musica per archi*, allegedly composed after the *Concerto*. Why was then *Musica per archi*, which doubled in a way the sound material of the *Concerto classico*, written for a much more “expensive” line-up, which could put its performances in question, if the twelve-person string orchestra worked well and was later frequently used by the composer? There seems to be just one answer – the switched dates on both scores.

4. *Concerto-Fantasia per contrabasso e archi*

Concerto-Fantasia per contrabasso e archi was written in 1999. It was dedicated to the excellent double bass player Aleksander Gabryś, who performed the piece at its premiere in 2000 alongside the Silesian Chamber Orchestra conducted by Jacek Rogala, gracing the 9th Silesian Days of Contemporary Music Festival. He also performed the composition a year later with Camerata Impuls during the 83rd Silesian Composers’ Tribune. Until this day, Gabryś had been the only artist to perform the solo part.

Concerto-Fantasia enchants with its succinct form, with three solo cadenzas at its core. It is around them that ensemble parts are built, with the double bass part sometimes blending in, and sometimes emerging to the surface of the orchestral fabric. The spectrum of timbre, expression and articulation of the double bass has been pushed to the limits of the instrument’s design. This is due to the fact that the composer, when writing a piece for a specific artist, took into consideration the level of his double bass virtuosity, which, to anyone who has heard Aleksander play, seems to know no limits. The cadenzas mentioned above in which the composer tried to include the soloist’s suggestions have often been performed by the artist during recitals as independent miniatures. This form of alternative presentation was approved by Edward Bogusławski. Here is what Aleksander Gabryś himself says about the cadenzas: “... while keeping his characteristic ‘play’ with motifs, the composer employed here double, and even triads, which resulted from the physical features of my hand, as I was the potential and then the actual first performer of the piece – we discovered these possibilities during rehearsals, which were always very interesting. Quite unconventional seem to be also the numerous

combinations with major seventh, also in a very low register. ... Next to melodious harmonics-based phrases, there are also “wild” dynamic semiquaver motifs in the low register, and passages spanning the four octaves of the instrument. ... The second cadenza is a natural expansion of the composing ideas included in the first cadenza, interlaced with ‘pensiveness’ and ‘sigh’ poetics. The culmination of this section is continued in a beautiful, intimate “ascent”. In terms of interpretation, the most difficult moments for the double bass player appear in the third cadenza, where the earlier moods – contemplativo and feroce – clash in eight contrasting or resulting sequences ...” (Iwona Bias, Monika Bieda, Anna Stachura 2005: 197–198).

Edward Bogusławski: Concerto - Fantasia

Example 2. *Concerto-Fantasia*, III Cadenza, p. 11

Example 3. *Concerto-Fantasia*, III Cadenza, p. 12

The conductor is faced with the task of keeping the form coherent, and building tensions in orchestral “ritornellos”, which correspond with the solo part based on the principles of co-operation and complement rather than competition. Despite frequent changes of tempo, the inner pulse of the entire composition is determined as a matter of fact by the initial pizzicato of the double bass, which fixes in the sphere of imagination both the pulse and, in the course of a short fragment, the harmonic centre of A minor, which serves as a starting point for the further “fancy” harmonic-melodic narration. Similar to *Concerto Classico*, *Concerto Fantasia* too uses a twelve-note chord – in its full or partial form – in various texture configurations. It is either lead from unison, by superimposing successive layers of instrumental parts and eventually reaching full orchestra, or in a reversed process of “fading away” by “subtracting” individual parts from *tutti*. The use of “micro-phrases” to form broader sound planes and emotional cantilenas, frequent changes of metre resulting from the musical

narration, synchronisation and precision of performance of the broken rhythmic motifs, which accumulate in the orchestra and as the result build a motor drive for solo parts – all these pose challenges for the conductor, who, while letting himself get carried away by the “energy” of the piece, must not forget about the structure of the form, which, contrary to the term “fantasia” used in the title, was very carefully “shaped” by the composer.

5. *Canzoni d'amore per voce recitazione, soprano, batteria e archi*

A different range of performing problems can be found in the *Canzoni d'amore per voce recitazione, soprano, batteria e archi*. It is a special composition, one of the last to be composed before the composer's death, and dated 2002/2003. The piece has its pre-source in *Pieśni Safony* (Sappho's Songs) for female reciting voice, flute, percussion and two accordions. During one of our meetings, Professor Bogusławski mentioned his plans of recomposing the piece, using a slightly modified ensemble. He asked then whether I would agree to premiere it. The final version of *Canzoni d'amore* was written for flute, percussion, two string quintets, reciting voice and soprano. Its premiere, scheduled for the autumn of 2003 to celebrate forty years of Edward Bogusławski's artistic work, did not take place, due to the unexpected and very painful loss caused by the professor's passing. *Canzoni d'amore* first saw the light of day in the form of a phonographic recording. Two years later, in 2006, it was premiered during the Silesian Composers' Tribune in the studio of Polish Radio Katowice with the participation of the Camerata Impuls Chamber Orchestra, a soprano – Ewa Biegas, a reciting voice – Magdalena Gołąb, and a flutist – Grażyna Jursza. The composer arranges the performers on the stage in an interesting way: the two string quintets face each other; behind them, as if in opposition, are the soprano and reciting voice, in the middle of the group is the rich instrumental set of percussion as well as the flute.

The stage arrangement poses a serious difficulty for the conductor in terms of balancing the sound of each group, so as to obtain sound space and, at the same time, maintain homogeneous colour of string instruments which conduct a dialogue between the individual parts of the two quintets. With such a stage arrangement, the instrumental parts have to be introduced with precision and special care, as in considerable sections of the score they are treated individually, both in terms of shaping melodic lines and rhythm, while fast, intermittent rhythmic motifs need to be synchronised with the ever-changing metre. The *ad libitum* section, short but important for the construction of the piece, highlights the importance of the recited text. Soon, however, the metric “bar” structure returns smoothly.

Leading individual parts, thickening or diluting them; a phenomenally beautiful cantilena of the soprano which appears in the form of a recitative as late as in bar No. 163 and is further developed against the orchestra for only 30 bars, but returns in the ending of the piece as a vocalise; a great sense of the timbre of percussion instruments, which complements the sound richness of the piece – thanks to all these features, the piece triggers experiences of a metaphysical kind. It is like a constant balancing act between the worlds of sound and silence. We see such precedence of time over shaping the melodic line in the flute part in the introductory section of the piece. Mutual time references of the melodic segments shaped around the “e” sound and the silence dividing them bring distant reminiscences of “liberating time” in Claude Debussy's *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*.

Despite determining the note values and the composer's suggestions regarding the tempo in metronomic terms, the sound sequences seem to run beyond time, which can hardly be determined with any unit of measurement (e.g. the beginning of the *Canzoni*). Time becomes a truly relative quality, while saturation of the silence with a stream of energy introduces the musical course into metaphysical dimensions, which Saint John of the Cross wrote about as “Music imbued with silence” (Saint John of the Cross 1998: 600). The atomisation of the parts (each instrument treated individually in relation to the melodic and rhythmic line), which mutually permeate and complete one another, creates

Example 4. *Canzoni d'amore*, prelude to the score, manuscript

in a way multiple time dimensions, against which the recitation of Sappho's songs, introduced from time to time, seems to remain beyond any time category. The form of the work results from the text narration, music seems to be coupled with verbal expression, in a way becoming a musical version of an ancient Greek tragedy.

CANZONI D'AMORE
per voce, recitazioni, soprano, batterie e archi

♩ = ca 60-70 (ad libitum) Edward Bogusławski (2002/2003)

Example 5. *Canzoni d'amore*, p. 1

6. Concluding Remarks

In each of Bogusławski's compositions that I have had the privilege to work on quite striking was its hard-and-fast logic in terms of form shaping. Both in the sweeping cantilena, heavily saturated with emotion, as well as in the vividly rhythmical structures there is consistency and a calculated plan of the composer, who tied all the "microstructures" into a compact, harmonious whole. For performers, who are to "satisfy" the composer in their interpretation of his work, this is invaluable information, a clear guideline regarding the direction in which to develop the form, within which they can afford to deepen the emotional structure of the work. At the same time, the extraordinary sensitivity to timbre, the use of broad technical and sound capabilities of individual instruments and groups, allow us to claim that the sonoristic qualities were as important to the composer as the formal perfection of the composition. With regard to Edward Bogusławski's works for chamber orchestra, we can quote Steven Weinberg's words: "... it is beauty of simplicity and inevitability, the beauty of perfect structure, where all elements fit perfectly together and cannot be changed, the beauty of logical rigidity" (Weinberg 1994: 188).

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