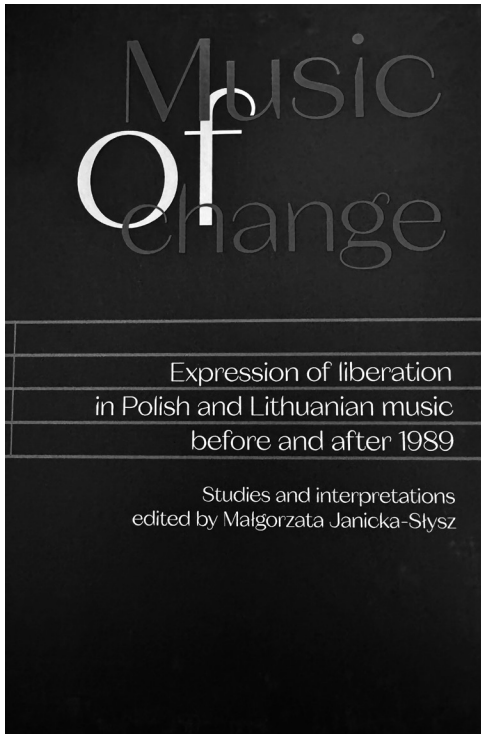


Filip Lech

## Diamonds on the Border



*Music of Change. Expression of Liberation in Polish and Lithuanian Music Before and After 1989. Studies and Interpretations*, ed. Małgorzata Janicka-Słysz. Krakow: Krzysztof Penderecki Academy of Music, 2023. 328 p. ISBN 978-83-7099-250-7

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The Polish-Lithuanian collection *Music of Change* opens with an article by Justyna Miklaszewska, devoted to the concepts of individual freedom and the democratic state in the thought of liberal philosophers (Mill, Taylor, Rawls, Tischner). The desire for freedom has not only social or ethical grounds, but also emotional ones – the researcher notes, emphasizing the role of culture in shaping and expressing feelings. She indicates the works of Penderecki, Górecki and Kilar as examples of artistic expression of grief, anger and communal rebellion. Teresa Malecka’s text devoted to the Polish school of composition concisely presents the diversity of aesthetic tendencies in 20th-century music and

places them against the background of historical events. I suspect that the discussion will prove particularly useful for foreign readers, although a music lover from the Vistula River can also draw interesting information from it – I am thinking, for example, of Krystyna Moszumańska-Nazar and Zbigniew Bujarski’s memories of Luigi Nono’s visit to Kraków in 1957.

It is much more difficult to deal with the thicket of tendencies and attitudes after 1989, as Iwona Sowińska-Fruhtrunk has undertaken, trying to map the achievements of Polish artists according to postmodernist theory. In turn, Małgorzata Janicka-Słysz examines the “poetics of expression” in Polish and Lithuanian music using categories related to the affective turn in the humanities. We follow the paths of spirituality, identity expressed in the composer’s work, emotionality inherent in sound and – constantly hovering over Central Europe – the spirit of Romanticism.

I found the texts devoted to moral imagination (Rūta Stanevičiūtė) and mythological-ideological foundations (Vita Gruodytė) in the music of our neighbours particularly interesting. The first of them describes the breakthrough that took place in the 1990s, when Lithuanian historical memory had its first chance to shape itself sovereignly – experiencing traumas, creating legends, but also deheroising. In the autumn of 1990, the New Music Ensemble conducted by Šarūnas Nakas performed at the Huddersfield Festival – the invitation was an important gesture addressed to a country that, although it had already declared independence, had not yet been recognised by the international community. A large group of Lithuanian emigrants dressed in ceremonial folk costumes appeared at the concert. The mood was uplifting when listening to Kutavičius’s piece referring to Indian music, Balakauskas’s postmodern *Chopin-Hauer*, and Martinaitis’s *Sakmė apie šūdvalįjį* (*The Tale of the Dung Beetle*) based on an 18th-century fable by Kristijonas Donelaitis. The words of the classic of local literature were perceived as vulgar, and the Lithuanian audience left the hall, loudly expressing their dissatisfaction. The composer of this piece combined references to the principles of serialism with scales typical of Lithuanian folklore, which Gruodytė writes about in more detail in her article. “Paradoxically, the language of 20th-century Lithuanian music was formed on the basis

of archaic traditions,” the author states in her analysis of the phenomenon of their revival, anthropological meanings, and the way they influenced 20th-century composers. Gradually, they moved away from stereotypical socialist realist arrangements towards completely original statements, often strongly inspired by the pagan beliefs of the ancient Balts. The most famous example of this phenomenon remains to this day *The Last Pagan Rites*, Kutavičius’s ritual oratorio from 1978 for choir, organ, four horns and tape. “I think I understand the past because I was there,” said the composer about his roots in primeval times.

In the remaining articles, the authors compare the works of Kutavičius and Penderecki using *The Gates of Jerusalem* and *Seven Gates of Jerusalem* (Małgorzata Pawłowska) as examples, compare the achievements of Onutė Narbutaitė and Hanna Kulenty (Ewa Siemdaj), consider the presence

of the theme of nature in the works of the Stalowa Wola generation (Kinga Kiwała), look at the music of Zygmunt Mycielski based on the poetry of Miłosz and Herbert (Dominika Micał), soundtracks to documentaries by Marcel Łoziński and Vita Želakevičiute, and the Lithuanian jazz scene in Soviet times (Daina Urbanavičienė).

Reaching for the reviewed collection of articles examining Polish-Lithuanian musical ties in the face of political changes after 1989, it is worth considering why the music of our neighbours, not only Lithuanians, is so rarely present in our concert halls, media discourse and cultural awareness. In 1975, Stefan Jarociński wrote in #: “And I think that after this year of Čiurlionis, we will probably feel a bit ashamed that we did not bring him to the memory of our cultural awareness with any more lasting testimony.” Will we finally stop being ashamed of our common heritage?