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GRAZYNA BACEWICZ: AN ANALYSIS OF
THE MUSIC FOR STRINGS, TRUMPETS AND PERCUSSION
AND PENSIERI NOTTURNI.

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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Arts,
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ABSTRACT

This research aims to provide insight into two major works of the Polish composer, Grazyna Bacewicz. An overview of her general compositional style is followed by in-depth analyses of The Music for Strings, Trumpets and Percussion and Pensieri Notturni. A short comparative discussion of the two works concludes the dissertation.

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DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Music at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University.
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PREFACE

This dissertation intends to supplement the hitherto sparse literature on the music of Grazyna Bacewicz and to focus on two of her major works, namely, The Music for Strings, Trumpets and Percussion and Pensieri Notturni.

These two pieces have been chosen to highlight a particular shift in Bacewicz's compositional style between 1958 and 1961 when she tried to reconcile avant-garde sounds and techniques with an already established style.

"This unusual dichotomy of style and abrupt changes coming late in her creative life may be explained by the social and political difficulties that Bacewicz, along with most other Europeans, encountered during World War 2, obstacles that continued in Eastern and Central Europe long after the war."

Presentation

A brief account of the social and political climate in Poland after World War 2 as well as a short summary of Poland's musical history at the time constitutes the first two parts of the introduction. The third and main part of the introduction is a general overview of Bacewicz's compositional style. A short biography precedes the introduction.

The main thrust of this study is to provide an in-depth analysis of Bacewicz's use of melody, rhythm, harmony, texture, instrumentation and form in each of the two works mentioned above. Chapters 1 and 2 deal with the stylistic features of each work under the separate headings of the aforementioned components. Subheadings pertaining to aspects of these elements are used when necessary and

are numbered for easy reference. Form however is seen as the interrelatedness of all these elements and as such it is dealt with at the end of each chapter. Musical examples are included to support findings. These are numbered and bar numbers are indicated.

Chapter 3 presents a summing-up of the stylistic elements and the compositional procedures set out in the previous two chapters. It compares the stylistic elements and compositional procedures of the two works and attempts to show to what extent her style underwent a significant change, signifying an expansion or development of features that were already present in her earlier works.

Form of the Discussion

Generally, verbal commentary takes preference over graphic representations of analysis since the latter are not of universal character or use. Technical musical terms are limited to their common definitions, and those expressions known to connote ambiguity are clarified in the body of the text.
BIOGRAPHY

Grażyna Bacewicz was born in Łódź, Poland on 5 February 1909. She received her first musical instruction from her father and from an early age performed chamber music with her two elder brothers. The Bacewicz family quartet became well known amongst friends.

At the age of ten she enrolled for piano and theory classes at Kijenska's private conservatory in Łódź. She subsequently attended the Warsaw Conservatory where she studied composition with Sikorski, violin with Jarzewska and piano with Turczynski. At the same time she also attended philosophy classes at the University of Warsaw.

In 1932 she graduated with diplomas in violin and composition. She subsequently received a scholarship from Ignacy Paderewski to study at the École Normale de Musique in Paris. From 1932 to 1933 she continued her violin studies with Andre Touret and Carl Flesch and her composition studies with Nadia Boulanger in Paris.

She returned to Poland in 1934 and took up a teaching position at the Łódź Conservatory from 1934 to 1935, where she taught harmony, counterpoint and violin.

In 1936 she became principal violinist with the Polish Radio Orchestra. In the same year she married Andrzej Biernacki, a physician and amateur pianist.

Concurrently with her teaching and family commitments she maintained a career as a composer and violinist and achieved notable success in both areas. The Wind Quintet of 1932, won first prize in a competition for young composers, and Bacewicz subsequently won several prizes in competitions in Paris and Warsaw in
the mid-1930's. During this time she toured extensively throughout Europe as a concert violinist and gave several acclaimed performances which also included her own compositions.

She returned to Warsaw from Paris just before the outbreak of World War 2, and remained in Poland during the war years. She and her family sought refuge in smaller cities and rural areas. During this time her creative output was severely diminished.

In 1945 she resumed her lecturing position at the Lodz Conservatory and continued her career as a concert violinist. She also served on the jury of several international competitions.

A severe car accident in 1954 hospitalised her for a considerable time. She was determined to recover and started composing soon after she was discharged. In 1955 she decided to curtail her career as concert violinist and to devote herself to composition. By now she had already established herself as a reputable composer, having won a number of distinguished awards in her homeland and abroad.

Amongst these was first prize in the International Composers' Competition in Liege in 1951 for the String Quartet No. 4.

Between 1951 and 1969, she won several more distinguished awards and prizes for her works, many of which were premiered by major orchestras in Europe and America. Her last work, a ballet, Desire is uncompleted. She died unexpectedly on 17 January 1969. Tadeusz Baird wrote:

"An inexhaustible source of inventiveness, technical virtuosity and a wide breadth of approach suffice for placing the works of her life among those that are most admired. But that is not all. She has been given something more important, more precious found only among the few, a gift of being different and unique."

INTRODUCTION

1. The Social and Political Climate in Poland after World War II

"Poland's artistic community had languished in a curious sort of cultural vacuum under the Stalinist government of Bierut since 1949. Polish musicians, though conversant with recent developments in the music of the Soviet Union and other Eastern European states, were quite literally cut off from the West at the very moment when the most radical changes within the European avant-garde were transforming the nature of new music."  

With the death of Stalin in March 1953, a more relaxed aesthetic dictum ensued, known as 'The Thaw'. Prominent artists and musicians now felt more comfortable about voicing their opinions.

In 1954 the Polish composer Andrzej Panufnik (b. 1914) defected to England. Panufnik was very involved in the affairs of the Polish Composers' Union (ZKP). His defection came as a shock to the Union and further prompted musicians to openly criticise the prevailing cultural policies. These stated that music must be national, i.e., related to folk music. That implied a return to functional harmony and forms that would be accessible to a wide audience.

This growing dissatisfaction with the prevailing status quo was also felt outside artistic circles and the situation reached breaking point in June 1956. Armed protests broke out against government policy. Four months later Poland entered a new political era under the newly-formed Gomulka government. This revolutionary period came to be known as the 'Polish October'.

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with this more moderate government, renewed artistic contact with the West was soon established. Books, recordings and scores from Western Europe were now available.

This new atmosphere of artistic freedom was further entrenched by the inauguration of the first biennial Warsaw Autumn Festival of Contemporary Music in 1956. At these Festivals the works of leading contemporary composers in Europe as well as Poland were heard for the first time by a receptive audience.

This interaction had a decisive impact on Polish composers. At the ninth General Assembly in 1957 Lutoslawski stated:

"Each of us faces the problem of discovering his own place in that chaos which the art of our era represents. The problem is sharply drawn for those of us who, after an interruption of several years, have renewed contact with Western European music. We don't all have here a clear view of what is happening in this music, of where it is leading. But I believe it is only a question of time before we will not only acquire a clear view of the situation but will play a positive and not inconsiderable role in it."

In the ensuing years Lutoslawski grappled with the development of a new musical language, a process that unfolded over a period of at least ten years. Bacowicz was involved in a similar process, but its gradual evolution came to a tragic and abrupt end with her sudden death in 1969. Nevertheless, in these last ten years of her life she did play a positive and leading role in Polish music.


Grzyna Baciecz forms part of a generation of post-World War 2 composers that became known as the Polish School. They were Tadeusz Baird, Henryk Gorecki, Witold Lutoslawski, Andrzej Panufnik, Krzysztof Penderecki and Kazimierz Serocki. Lutoslawski and Penderecki later became the main representatives of this school.

Poland's musical heritage has always been deeply rooted in the European musical tradition. This dates back to the 10th century with the acceptance of Christianity and along with it, Gregorian Chant. Poland's political instability however has precluded her composers from evolving a truly nationalistic style. Many composers left Poland for political and other reasons. Almost all of them however have acknowledged their deeply-felt Polish identity in some form or another in their music. Chopin is perhaps the only Polish composer who has achieved true international status but his Polish identity does not form an integral part of his musical style.

Chopin's successor, Karol Szymanowski (1882 - 1937), modelled his musical style on that of Wagner, Richard Strauss and later Debussy. It was only in his later works that he incorporated some folk elements into his style in the form of melodic and rhythmic elements.

Patriotic and religious feelings are brought to fruition in the extremely expressive and artistically mature works of Andrzej Panufnik (1914). His individual musical style unfolds a powerful emotion, using minimal means, over a complex and intricate design. This individual means of expression is already evident in the Tragic Overture of 1942, which seemed like a musical foreboding of the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, and is brought to greater perfection
in the *Sinfonia Sacra* of 1963, a hymn dedicated to Poland. It is tragic that he defected to the West and that he struggled to find acceptance there.

"Neo-classicism was undoubtedly the trend that had a shaping influence on the development of Polish music quite apart from the weaker or stronger national features or the degree of expressiveness of particular works."\(^5\)

Neo-classicism took root in Poland in 1926, at about the same time as it did in the West. The two main educators for young composers at the time, Sikorski in Poland and Nadia Boulanger at the Ecole de Paris in Paris, both promoted neo-classical aesthetics.

Apart from Panufnik, other composers like Lutoslawski and Szabelski also sought an individual style in their music, and made an effort to overcome the neo-classical trend in Polish music. In Lutoslawski's *Symphony No. 1*, he already transcends neo-classical elements. Ironically this work was accused of being "formalistic" and hence it was not performed for several years.

This search for an individual musical style in Poland was made more complex in the years 1949-1955 with the policy of Social Realism. Poland was virtually cut off from musical activity in the West. The main focus of composers during this time was to synthesize elements of folk music with their style. Bartok was regarded by many as the ideal composer.

Lutoslawski's *Concerto for Orchestra* (1954) was a remarkable artistic achievement at that time. The work is a synthesis of originality and folk melodic characteristics. Folk motifs are integrated in the general body of the work, and as such are not just mere melodic quotations dictating the shape of the music.

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The first Warsaw Autumn Festival of contemporary music in 1956 was a victory for Poland’s composers. The idea was the brainchild of the Polish composer Tadeusz Baird. It placed Poland on the musical map as intermediary in the exchange of ideas between contemporary composers and critics world-wide.

At the Warsaw Autumn Festival of 1958, the music of Spisak, Bacewicz and Serocki was still distinctly neo-classical. However soon afterwards the music of Bacewicz and Serocki showed an adaptation and an assimilation of some new stylistic elements.

Michal Spisak (b.1914) a Polish-born composer, resided in Paris and his music was unknown until after World War 2. His music is distinctly neo-classical in the manner of Stravinsky. The rhythmic elements of some of his pieces are derived from Polish folk music. His musical style remained unchanged.

The music of Szabelski (b. 1896) while neo-classical before 1958, changed remarkably afterwards. In his Sonatas for Orchestra (1958), the Improvisations (1959) and the Verses (1961) he uses serial techniques.

Lutoslawski developed the use of the twelve-tone chord for expressive and colouristic purposes. Tadeusz Baird and Serocki both used the twelve-tone technique in an individual way, for expressive purposes.

Penderecki and Gorecki explored timbre as a form-creating element in their music. Gorecki juxtaposes bands of contrasting tone colours in his Scontri for Orchestra (1960). Penderecki combines delicate tone colours in his music and also uses articulation and dynamics as form-creating elements. Both these composers have received international acclaim and recognition.
In this post-World War 2 era, it is obvious that Polish musicians have developed a musical style that is singular in its working-out of stylistic polemics - be they European, national or individual. Sadly, Bacewicz could only partake of this process of renewal until her sudden death in 1969. However, she was regarded as one of Poland's leading composers in the 1950's, and as such her contribution to Poland's musical heritage is unquestionable.

3. An Overview of Bacewicz's General Style.

"The customary division of Bacewicz's music into four periods (1932-44, 1945-54, 1955-60 and 1961-69) clearly acknowledges the major turning points in post-war Polish musical history. Yet any assessment of Bacewicz's oeuvre has to recognize that her compositional aesthetic remained remarkably stable. Only the last period, which properly dates from the Sixth String Quartet (1960), is clearly defined through her attempts to square her established style with the avant-garde sounds and techniques that were beguiling so many of her younger colleagues."\(^6\)

For easy reference I will discuss Bacewicz's style under the aforementioned periodic subdivisions.

3.1 1932-1944

During this first period Bacewicz establishes her style. Only seven works from this early period have been published. These works are evidence of her studies with Sikorski in Warsaw and Boulanger in Paris. Neo-classical elements are predominant in these works and there is a continuous development of formal structures. Folk elements are also included in the Wind Quintet (1933).

Although Bacewicz did not favour the neo-classical label attached to her work, her music nevertheless has traits commonly associated with neo-classicism. These are the use of formal structures, motivic processes and contrapuntal techniques derived from the Classical and Baroque periods. Furthermore, her harmonic vernacular is individual in its use of expanded tonality.

The idiomatic and virtuosic Violin Sonata No. 1, composed during this time bears witness to Bacewicz's thorough knowledge of the violin. The work abounds in energy and it has a feeling of continuous urgency that is only resolved in the final bars. The thematic figures, contrapuntal texture and multiple stops show 18th century influences. The structure of the work is unique in its application of standard formal procedures. However, Bacewicz uses conventional forms only as a point of departure. Thematic material is continuously transformed and recapitulation sections are often obscured.

The Overture (1943) is similar to the Violin Sonata No. 1 in its absence of thematic repetition, ongoing process of development and in its structural ambiguities.

"Many details of the Overture may be familiar from earlier pieces, but here they are at the service of an unusually emotive urgency. In part this is achieved through the athletic orchestration (swirling strings and woodwinds, stentorian brass, incisive percussion) and more particularly through Bacewicz's unerring sense of how to propel the music toward its final goal. This is crucial for a formal structure in which any sense of recapitulation is submerged under an irresistible process of thematic and tonal development."

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3.2 1945-1954

Works of this period such as The String Quartet No. 3 (1947), the Concerto for String Orchestra (1948) and the Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 4 (1949) are characterized by an emphasis on contrapuntal writing. The Sonata da Camera for Violin and Piano (1945) and the Violin Concerto No. 3 (1948) stand somewhat apart from these works. The Sonata da Camera is a re-working of 18th century material and the Violin Concerto No. 3 is clearly influenced by Szymanowski in its melodic material, bitonality and heavy orchestration.

Folk elements are clearly discernible in Bacewicz's works written during this time. Pressure on musicians to incorporate folk elements in their music was particularly severe during these years. Bacewicz used the Oberek, a fast 6/8 folk dance with Mazurka rhythms in the Piano Concerto No. 1, the Piano Sonata No. 2, the Piano Quintet No. 1 and the String Quartet No. 4. The Violin Sonata No. 4 (1949) has direct thematic quotations from folk music.

3.3 1955-1960

The works of this period are characterised by a broadening of emotional parameters. This is manifest in her use of expressive themes, extended formal developments as in the Symphony No. 4 (1953) and in the use of larger instrumental combinations and an even greater emphasis on contrapuntal writing.

The first Warsaw Autumn Festival of Contemporary Music was held in 1956, and it signified the culmination of several years of cultural isolation.

"Bacewicz's innate conservatism precluded any radical departure during the first years of artistic freedom. Nevertheless her musical language changes perceptibly from as early as the Fifth String Quartet (1955)."
which displays a resilient harmonic and contrapuntal style reminiscent of the middle period quartets of Bartok. The culmination of this process was the *Music for Strings, Trumpets and Percussion* (1958), arguably Bacewicz’s most celebrated composition.  

### 3.4 1961-1969

*The String Quartet No. 6* (1960) which belongs, strictly speaking, in the third creative period, and *Pensieri Notturni* (1961) were the first two works that showed an exploration of material. This often consists of chromatic patterns or figurations anchored only by pedal-points or ostinati. The instrumentation is colourful with novel instrumental combinations and instrumental techniques.

Of the works written during this final period of her career, her chamber works such as the *Incrustations* (1965), the *Trio for Oboe, Harp and Percussion* (1965) and the *Quartet for 4 Cellos No. 2* (1964) are the most successful. Although the *Cello Concerto No. 2* of this period is highly virtuosic, it lacks clearly defined thematic material and the relationship between foreground and background material is often unclear.

"Finally, in 1965, she relinquished neo-classicism. A new attitude is evident in the titles of these late works - *Inkrustacje, Contradizions, In una parte* - which demonstrate a discord, understandable enough in her situation, between a craftsmanship which had not transcended the standards of inter-war Paris and new techniques which could not be"

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acquired mechanically or imitated. With these last compositions her position was alone and independent. 90
CHAPTER ONE


1. Rhythm

2. Melody

3. Harmony

4. Instrumentation

5. Texture

6. Form
1. RHYTHM

1.1 The Rhythmic Character of Themes.

The most striking feature of this work is its energetic drive and vitality. This is engendered primarily by the rhythmic and melodic material. The rhythmic drive and melodic intensity of the introduction set the tone for the rest of the piece.

Ex. 1 First movement, bars 6-8.
This feeling of continuous urgency that is often only resolved in the final bars, is manifest in her pieces from as early as the Children's Suite (1933). Most of the pieces that make up the suite are characterised by perpetuum mobile quaver or semiquaver rhythmic and melodic ostinati patterns that clearly emphasize the beat and the single 2/4, 3/4 or 4/4 metres throughout the piece. These piano pieces establish an aspect of her rhythmic style that reaches its peak in The Music for Strings, Trumpets and Percussion.

Ex. 2 Children's Suite Scherzino. Bars 1-2.

The motoric, driving character of her music sounds perhaps less forceful in her string writing than in her piano works, but it is no less urgent and relentless. In these works, the perpetuum mobile figurations of Baroque string writing effectively accommodate the pulsating ostinati and repetitive note figures of folk origin.

In the Violin Sonata No. 1 (1941), the Overture (1943), the String Quartet No. 3 (1947), the Concerto for String Orchestra (1948) and the Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 4 (1949), the writing clearly shows 18th century influences in its thematic material and contrapuntal writing. These characteristics are common to the Baroque concerto grosso form, namely, motoric rhythmic material, contrapuntal textures and scoring for small groups of instruments. The concerto
grosso style and form was used by several neo-classical composers. It embraced the stylistic ideals that were upheld by neo-classicism, i.e., a general scaling-down of means and an incisiveness of expression.

The string writing in these aforementioned works is particularly virile and idiomatic. The fact that Bacewicz was a concert violinist herself probably accounts for her skilful writing for the instrument, and her love of the string medium.

1.1.1 *Perpetuum Mobile Patterns*

In *The Music For Strings, Trumpets And Percussion*, a relentless driving character is maintained throughout the piece primarily by the virtuosic string writing. Much of the thematic material on the string is a combination of various *perpetuum mobile* quaver and *fer semiquaver* patterns. These patterns form ostinati, scalar and arpeggio figures and where repetitive patterns of larger note-values are used, pedal points. These patterns are characterised by their symmetry and their pulsating and relentless emphasis of the beat. They give the music its underlying drive, pulse and urgency.

The static nature of these patterns is broken by textural manipulation to create virile rhythmic counterpoint. Patterns are juxtaposed and superimposed and in this way thematic material can function as both foreground or background material, depending on register-place, articulation and instrumentation. (see 1.2.2.1, page 21 and *Instrumentation 5.3*, page 55).
1.1.2 Syncopated Patterns

These patterns break the rigidity of the \textit{perpetuum mobile} patterns and add excitement and vitality to the overall rhythmic design. They are usually foreground melodic material. There are two kinds of such patterns:

(a) Slow-moving ones consisting of notes of longer duration. They are usually superimposed on \textit{perpetuum mobile} patterns (see 1.1.1, page 18).

(b) Short rhythmic figures that are interjectory in nature. They represent principal melodic material by virtue of their contrasting rhythmic character. These figures are either superimposed on other rhythmic patterns, as in (a) above, or they alternate with \textit{perpetuum mobile} rhythmic patterns.

Some syncopated patterns remain background material. Their function is two-fold:

(a) They underline the syncopated nature of other patterns in a rhythmically layered texture.

(b) They provide syncopated rhythmic counterpoint to sections where patterns are predominantly metric. They remain background material by virtue of their instrumentation, register-placing and articulation. (see Instrumentation 5.2.2, page 55 and example 31, page 54).

1.2 Rhythm as an Element of Thematic Differentiation

Rhythm is a primary means of creating thematic contrast and variation on both the macro- and micro-structural levels.
1.2.1 Macro-Structure: Dual Thematic Construction

Each section of the piece is characterised by dual thematic construction. The two principal themes are always contrasted rhythmically and melodically. (see Melody, 2.2, page 31).

This contrast is partly engendered by the idiomatic writing for the two contrasting groups of instruments on which the themes are played, namely, the string and trumpet groups and in the third movement, the percussion group. (see Instrumentation, 5.2, page 53).

The periodic and phrase structure is created by the alternation or superimposition of two contrasting themes within each section. (see Form, 6.3, page 57).

1.2.2 Micro-Structure

Thematic material in the linking or the central development sections is often organically derived from the intervallic or pitch germ cells of previous principal or accompanimental themes. These germ cells are frequently rhythmically varied or transformed.

The choice of germ cells to be developed or transformed as well as the process by which this is done is highly individual.
There are three motivic processes:

1.2.2.1 Rhythmic Transformation

A germ cell in an accompaniment or linking theme may be restated in its original form, at irregular intervals, retaining its status as a secondary motive. With the third or fourth statement the germ cell is rhythmically transformed. It is further emphasized, through register-placing and instrumentation to become a principal theme. (see Instrumentation, 5.2, page 53).

An example of this process occurs at the end of the A1 section of the first movement. The syncopated pizzicato on cellos introduced in bar 12 at the beginning of section A1 (example 3, page 22) accompanies the principal theme A1 until bar 26. At bar 35 the identical pitches on B and D are transferred to timpani. The motif is now rhythmically transformed from an initial quaver motif to a continuous semiquaver motif with syncopated accents on B and D. From bars 35-42 the timpani adds dramatic emphasis to the climax phrase (example 4, bars 38-41, page 22).

At bar 43 the motif is again transformed. It retains its minor third character, but it is rhythmically transformed to form ascending minor third triplets scored for the lower strings (example 5, page 22). This motif is featured throughout the A2 section as principal thematic material (see example 13, pages 32).
Ex. 3 First movement, bars 12-14.

Ex. 4 First movement, bars 38-41.

Ex. 5 First movement, bars 43-46.
1.2.2.2 Organic Growth

A rhythmic motive may grow organically from a transitory theme. This often occurs in the beginning of linking or central development sections. The rhythmic character of the theme appears improvisatory until the established form of the motif emerges. It is subsequently featured as a principal theme with almost identical restatements within the section.

Section B1, second movement, introduces a new rhythmic pattern, triplet semiquavers on violas.

Ex. 6. Second movement, bar 60.