



NEOQUARTET  KOŚCIÓW



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**NEOQUARTET  
KOŚCIÓW**

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**Aleksander KOSCIOW :**

**\* String Quartet no. 10**

\* Kymakome, \*Kalamai, \*Alokes, \*Hymen, \* Myon, \* Khoes, \*Amma, \*Thix

**\* String Quartet no. 9**

**\* String Quartet no. 6**

**\* String Quartet no. 5**

**\* String Quartet no. 3**

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**NeoQuartet :**

**Karolina Piątkowska-Nowicka** – violin I

**Paweł Kapica** – violin II

**Michał Markiewicz** – viola

**Krzysztof Pawłowski** – cello

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**DUX Małgorzata Polańska & Lech Tołwiński ul. Morskie Oko 2, 02-511 Warszawa**

tel./fax (48 22) 849-11-31, (48 22) 849-18-59

e-mail: [dux@dux.pl](mailto:dux@dux.pl), [www.dux.pl](http://www.dux.pl)

**Aleksandra Kitka-Coutellier – International Relations [kitka@dux](mailto:kitka@dux)**

**Aleksander KOŚCIÓW** – b. 1974, in Opole. In 1993-1998, he studied composition under the direction of Marian Borkowski, and in 1994-1998, viola in the class of Błażej Sroczyński at the Academy of Music in Warsaw. In 2007, he obtained the degree of Doctor of Arts in Composition (Marian Borkowski, advisor). Works by Aleksander Kościów have been performed in Poland and abroad (in Germany, England, Scotland, Russia, Ukraine, France, Italy, Japan, South Korea, and the United States). Since the academic year 1998-1999, he is faculty member at the Academy of Music in Warsaw. In addition, he lectured in San Diego (United States), Wickersheim (Germany), and Daegu (South Korea). Since 1999, he collaborates continuously with the socio-cultural bi-monthly *Strony* (Jan Feusette, chief editor).

The **String Quartet no. 10** (2013) is representative of the 'open work' concept: the form as whole consists of eight movements, but their disposition (sequence), as well as number within a single performance is free (i.e. eight as a maximum, just one as a minimum). The decision in this matter is made by the performers, while an important indication is furnished by the idea behind the composition. According to it, the eight movements should be treated as a set of separate images, or 'microscopies' unrelated in content. Symbolically, this shifts the expressional weight from the level of a form whose narrative is closed, to the presentation of units devoid of a common story, where each bears significance only unto itself as a study in a separate texture, just as microscope close-ups of various physical bodies reveal unparalleled attunements of colours, shapes, figures and planes; yet, through the lack of information carried about what they represent, they make us contemplate abstract optic values free of tensions issuing from the awareness of the object's nature ('what it really is', in its natural scale).

The world of microscopy is a separate, parallel universe, and perceiving it involves a number of specificities. We can receive it only in segments, when something small to the nth degree is magnified to a scale that surpasses the confines of the image available to the senses, and is thus always shown as a fragment. The continuations of the shown objects, expected beyond the confines but not exposed, become at the same time suggestions of infinite spaces. In such magnifications, information about the object's nature gets 'thrown out', and becomes, in a way, 'liberated from sense', ready for all interpretations, and most inclined to none at all. A hair, the surface of a gold bar, or a wooden splinter, first reveal themselves uniquely through their material – such as keratin shreds, metal plates, a tangle of xylem tissue – and later, after surpassing the liminal point of abstraction, allow themselves to again be filled with the play of new, ephemeral types of sense, becoming images from amazing dreams – towers of futuristic cathedrals sunken in undulating lava, an artistic map of lightning bolts frozen into woods, a cemetery of mechanical larvae, a cracked desert of glass rings – or anything else, since the interpretations bereft of dictionaries interpenetrate and dispel one another, as well as come together, not seeking form but texture, with the goal of empty ascertainties instead of meaning. Another specificity of microscopic images is the lack of time. Where no scale exists to suggest the distance to be traversed, information also lacks about the time needed for the voyage. In non-temporality, the object is infinitely static, and thus free from narration, the condition of which is the observational measurability of the cause-and-effect mechanism.

The musical material is subordinated to this very concept: each movement (as a separate 'microscopy', or static object image magnified beyond the scale) is usually homogeneous and organized around one idea or textural suggestion. The sonority and disposition of musical elements stem from the simulation of the abstract object's 'matter', and thus are not subordinated to musical thought in the traditional sense, instead attempting to 'translate' the optic mood of a given structure into sonic attunements.

In the composition's 'deep matter', the emphasis shifts from a classical, 'cause-and-effect', thematic-motivic narrative, to the study of various colour and structural configurations excluded from natural perception through the prism of communicational sense, which results in a more static than narrative form, while the expressional means are dominated not by the classical work of ensemble instruments on (and with) the material within traditional space in the triangle between polyphony, homophony and sonoristic patchwork texture, but by types of closed images, musical situations, studied textures, and attunements. Painted seemingly as 'in and of themselves' (and not for formal ends, as is usual), they take advantage of those musical phenomena which are judged appropriate for creating a given image that differs from music understood in its particular meaning, at least in the sense of presenting our perception with more of a space than a line or chain.

It is from such conditions that the String Quartet no. 10 grows out, a collection of imaginary artefacts, a study in structures without appellation, an atlas of dreamscapes titled in Ancient Greek not in the least to the academic satisfaction in taxonomy: *Alokes*, *Kalamai*, *Thix* sound more like spells, word-beings, or entries from archaic

inscriptions, incomprehensible today. On an everyday basis, we seem to ourselves to be masters of words (and those who master the Word, if we trace our culture's fundamental concepts, rein over the Object). Here, relations between the word and the object remain opaque, like a particle in spin: when observed, it changes its properties instead of revealing them. Words and titles may not mean anything, just as images and landscapes may communicate nothing. In the 'microworld', this is not a symptom of dysfunction in form or content. Simply put, the two cease to be active elements of the message.

**String Quartet no. 9** (2009) is akin to an attempt at telling or translating a dream into a passage from a novel; a musical 'stream of consciousness'. The dream structure trembles from the micro-shocks of contrary forces; reality appears both simultaneously or in alternation as phantasmagoric and completely real; the dreamer's being takes control over it at one time and gives in to it at another, transforms it with complete rationality in one moment and rationalizes the utter fantasy in the next. The felt qualities go in tandem with the ones that are evident, only to then exchange places. Reminiscences come from the future, while the past produces what is yet to be expected. The mind – with its navigation based on rationalizing and making inferences – loses its sight in the dream-space and blindly, with wavering gait, now stiff and then dance-like, advances with the trajectory of a blind person whose momentary goals change at every step. Known, transformed, and unknown objects are touched, some ignored without recognition, others clutched in a sudden rush of a drunken persuasion about their even historical significance, still others allowed to pass through the body on the verge of perception. Facts, visions, and events at one moment cumulate into lofty pyramids, wowing us with a seemingly principled character and making promises of form-bearing potential, only to fall apart into dust under the touch of a fictive reminiscence, and at another moment – atomized into seconds, pictures from comic books, slogans shouted or whispered in known or unknown languages – flash by on dust particles drawn behind by an object unworthy of attention, hurtling from nowhere to nowhere. Catalogued and uncatalogued memes in the dreamer's consciousness, either his/her own, or somebody else's, transferred from the real world – which to our knowledge is still their destination – mix, coagulate and spatter without any readable system, not allowing the dreamer to even decide whether to give them weight, or let them free. Sonic artefacts from the past, echoes of known, and yet – just invented melodies, recognizable shapes in columns of chords that fly across in a flock, pizzicatos of children's pebbles, sixteenth-note sequences of looped words or steps: a plankton of objects carried in multi-directional time. The musical act played on the stream of consciousness sinks, surfaces, struggles and does not acquiesce to the invisible current, trying to say more than it means, and to tell more than it says.

The **String Quartet no. 6** (2002) explores territories seemingly mapped-out a long time ago; it makes reference to values that contemporaneity would sometimes like to treat with an indulging tongue-in-cheek with an everyday sensitization to the so-called 'new horizons'; this is because here, both movements build their identity on the obvious, barren expressiveness of the major-minor system served with explicitness, without posing or metaphor. Although both movements, which are variegated in terms of the employed technique (sequences in the first movement betraying a period structure looped in canon form, and then *senza misura*; and the second movement's somewhat evolutionary-shaped narrative circling around the series of chordal motives) are manifest by means of a mood and colour told texturally in a language that while not forgotten today, is rather decidedly archaic. The first movement, deeply rooted in a clear C minor, and the second movement, based on suspensions weighing from key to key, say what they say: "yes-yes", "no-no", quietly and persistently, almost importunately, with deafness to sounds from the outside. But perhaps this difficulty in understanding between the modern languages and the pretensive archaism is an overstatement (or a type of posing), and perhaps they need each other in the discordant but necessary dialogue, as well as justify, or even condition one another.

The **String Quartet no. 5** (1999) was created in the process of overcoming a resistance to writing music that worships the aesthetics of repetitive minimalism. This style, which surely offers a number of attractive musical situations, could at the turn of the twentieth century already be considered as deeply penetrated; thus, truly committing an entire, one-movement composition to its power carried a significant risk in weakening the form. Putting into motion the 'machine' system and orientating the perception to the passive ascertainment of its unwavering work meant the threat of flattening the expressional plane to the minimum, which would hinder another important element: the narration. As a matter of course, we can flippantly consider the manifest unchangeability as the narrative space, either by suggesting to the recipient to independently fill the declared monotony with his or her own play of emotions stemming from an original perception of time, or by forcing the treatment of autotelic material as the plot itself, a story about the 'it and of itself'. It is difficult to say whether the attempt here to reconcile repetitiveness and

narration is or isn't minimalistic or narrational. Motion dominates: as result of weaving a plot from short, repeated motives with a high expressional temperature (in timbre, harmony, and dynamics) that is in effect aggressive and richly sculpted, as well as overflowing as much in planes and slopes as in breakthroughs and thresholds, a story opens that is seemingly amorphous, devoid of recognizable motives, either free of goals, or finding them for a moment and then suddenly abandoning them, weaving itself between content and effect, multi-directional and unsettled.

**String Quartet no. 3** (1997) lets itself be perceived as a composition torn between expressive disparities. The one-movement form divides itself into two antithetical stages: whatever was built in the tumultuous vices in the first stage, undergoes a decomposition precipitated by an unexpected fall from the heights in the second stage. The form is broken. Contrast, our culture's perennial form-bearing factor, changes into disintegration, from which nothing more arises. From the main motive and side elements, born in the relentless gallop of the opening stage, in the final stage not little remains than a distant trace of melodies weaved on the horizon that appears and disappears in the rhythm of a dwindling breath. In such de-sectioning, the story's form seems to do away with sense; devoid of the logic of cause and effect, it slips down into the non-temporality of returns that lead nowhere, already unable to manage the traditional system of narrative, and going barren by 'unthinkingly' stomping out the same, identical steps in a landscape background bereft of humans, left without an ending, without a moral.

**NEOQUARTET** is a string quartet of music academy graduates from Gdańsk, Warsaw, and Lucerne. Its members are: Karolina Piątkowska-Nowicka (first violin), Paweł Kapica (second violin), Michał Markiewicz (viola), and Krzysztof Pawłowski (cello).

The quartet specializes in the performance of newest music, and takes as its chief goal the promotion of works by young composers. The members of NeoQuartet are aficionados of contemporary music eager for groundbreaking explorations and open to collaboration with the most demanding of artists.

The musicians realize their vision of connecting many artistic domains, such as music, projections, electronics, and dance, focusing on the propagation of contemporary music in a wide circle of recipients.

NeoQuartet's repertoire features works by Reich, Crumb, Schnittke, and Penderecki (among others), and its artistic achievements include many world premieres of works by composers from the young generation (including Stulgińska, Czerniewicz, Kościów, Przybylski, Kupczak, and Połaczyk).

In 2009, the quartet participated in one of the most prestigious contests of contemporary music performance: Amsterdam's Gaudeamus, where in the semi-finals they placed in first tenth of ensembles from the world over.

In December 2010, the quartet's debut CD was released by the label DUX. The disc included stylistically varying pieces, from an eclectic quartet by Lasoń, to the sonoric *Floral Fairy* by Hosokawa, to the minimalist *Streepjes* by Janssen. Two of the five recordings are compositions dedicated to NeoQuartet (Stulgińska, Czerniewicz).

In 2010, NeoQuartet received the Scholarship of the Voivodeship Marshall and the Scholarship of the President to the City of Gdańsk; in 2012, it was nominated to the award Storm of the Year 2011, the Pomeranian Artistic Award, and the Fryderyk statuette in the category of record debut of the year.

The ensemble gives concerts both in Poland and abroad (Ukraine, Lithuania, Switzerland). It has participated in festivals such as the Gdańsk Music Festival, Sopot Classic International Festival, Ukrainian Biennale of New Music, Jerzy Waldorff Festival in Radziejowice, the New Music Days, Musica Electronica Nova, and Warsaw Autumn.

In 2014, the quartet recorded and released three CD albums: music by Joanna Bruzdowicz (with the singer Liliana Górka and pianist Tomasz Jocz), a monograph album of the American composer Dossia McKay, and a CD for the label DUX: five string quartets by Aleksander Kościów.

NeoQuartet is organizer of its own festival, NeoArte – Spectrum of New Music, which is celebrated in Gdańsk since 2012.