



DUX 1287 / 2016

Kazimierz SEROCKI : Pianophonie

***Kazimierz SEROCKI : Forte e piano**

Szabolcs ESZTENYI - piano, Jerzy WITKOWSKI - piano

Polish Radio and Television Symphony Orchestra in Krakow

Stanisław WISLOCKI - conductor

(1973)

***Kazimierz SEROCKI : Pianophonie**

Szabolcs ESZTENYI - piano

Great Polish Radio and Television Symphony Orchestra in Katowice

Stanisław WISLOCKI - conductor

(1979)

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, www.dux.pl

Aleksandra Kitka-Coutellier – International Relations kitka@dux.pl

In his school days, Serocki was considered a promising pianist. For example, in 1939 a local newspaper critic wrote that the 17-year-old "Kazio's" piano performance at the Bydgoszcz Conservatory's concert night was a resounding success. During the Nazi occupation, the future composer made a living off playing the piano and performing jazz standards in Warsaw cafes and theatres. After the war he pursued his career as a pianist, giving critically-acclaimed recitals at home and abroad. His graduation piece *Concertina* for piano and orchestra (1946) made him confirmed his perception as a promising pianist and composer. Even after forming a "Group 49" with Tadeusz Baird and Jan Krenz, he did not give up the piano. In 1950 Serocki performed Baird's Piano concert for the first time, and a year later he premiered his own Romantic concert for piano with the reactivated Warsaw Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra. After playing the concert several more times, he abandoned piano to devote himself entirely to composing. However, the piano remained one of his favorite instruments. In his mature works Serocki employs the piano, e.g. twice as a solo instrument with orchestra as evidenced by the compositions on this album, *Forte e piano* (1967) and *Pianophonie* (1978). Neither the titles, nor the composer's commentaries point to a traditional piano concerto (according to the title *Forte e piano* is simply "music for two pianos" and *Pianophonie* is "a sort of a piano symphony"). However, Serocki scholars claim that these pieces are indeed concerts, albeit filtered and transformed through the composer's own musical language. They follow the fundamental principle of employing at least two opposing or harmonious forces – solo instrument and orchestra. *Forte e piano* was inspired by the head of the music department of the Westdeutscher Rundfunk in Cologne, Otto Tomek. The composition was included in the repertoire of the Kontarsky brothers piano duo, who became famous for the first performances and recordings of the greatest 20th-century composers, such as Boulez (*Structures I–II*), Ligeti (*3 Objekte*), and Stockhausen (*Mantra*). As Tadeusz A. Zieliński argues, *Forte e piano* is one of "the most powerful manifestations of Serocki's vitality in his entire work." The dominant features of the composition are energy and dynamism. However, as suggested by the title, "forte" elements stand in opposition to gentle, "piano" sounds. The composer uses distinctive sound material and innovative techniques to create contrast. Ever since the '60s Serocki has been searching for new means of expression as a way to overcome the crisis of form in contemporary music. He came up with the idea that the qualities of sound can, by themselves, take over the formative role once played by melody and harmony. His fascination with unconventional timbres and articulations gave rise to the idea of composing with timbres. Timbre combinations determine the coherent form, making it more comprehensible for the listeners. For composers, composing with timbres was an opportunity to restore the traditional forms and to experiment with new approaches, such as "segmented" or "open" compositions, which fascinated Serocki in the last decade of his creative activity. Furthermore, Serocki takes a unique approach to form. He sought to give every component particular characteristics and integrate contrasting elements in a way that facilitate reception. The abovementioned principles discussed at Serocki's unpublished lectures are also reflected in *Forte e piano* and *Pianophonie*. *Forte e piano* gives the listeners a sense of a four-movement form, which is not indicated in the musical score. The first part starts with timpani beats and low-register piano clusters, which are later joined by orchestral textures. Musical progression moves into the upper register and culminates in a cluster tremolo of the pianos. Part two is virtuosic, fast and sparkles with different colors. Swirling, "restless" piano motifs are accompanied by alternating glissando-clusters of the strings and bustling figures of the wind and percussion instruments. In part three the mood turns lyrical and pensive. The musical narrative culminates in the orchestral tutti based on repetitive, asynchronous groups of sounds, which form a shimmering sonic magma. After another break, the final part of the composition begins. The static cluster and the cadences of two soloists lead up to a joyful and lively finale. In composing for an orchestra Serocki employs new, so far unexploited timbres and their mixtures. The solo part is based on two techniques used in other parts – clusters and lively sound figures. The former appear in the "orgiastic" ending followed by timpani beats and low piano tones, which subtly allude to the beginning. The form of *Pianophonie* is rather "traditional." According to some interpretations, the piece contains a

distinctive "thematic" segment, which is presented, then transformed and developed, and finally resolved after the solo cadenza in the quasi-recapitulation of the traditional sonata form. Like *Forte e piano*, *Pianophonie* follows the principle of contrasting formal movements. The first part is aggressive and barbaric, the second one is lyrical, the third is restless and fluid, the fourth one is slow and played inside the instrument, and the last two (after cadence) are dominated by motoric movement. What is unique in Serocki's last composition is the sound material. The piano solo uses not only conventional articulations, but also sounds elicited from the strings, e.g. pizzicato, vibrato, plucking the strings with the fingers, nails, or using sticks with tips of varying hardness and width. Moreover, as a result of electronic transformation and deformation, the piano solo material is extended. It covers a broad sound spectrum, from melodic structures to complex noise, which are combined with no less sophisticated sounds of different instrumental groups. Their timbres are reminiscent of the structures used in Serocki's earlier scores, such as the glissando-clusters of the strings in *Forte e piano*. However, each time they appear in a different context. The "functional" role of timbres is the significant principle of Serocki's authorial conception. *Pianophonie* was commissioned by the Südwestfunk Radio (SWR) in Baden-Baden and the electronic music studio of the Heinrich Strobel Foundation in Freiburg and required a lot of work. Since 1977 Serocki visited Freiburg six times in order to test modern electronic equipment. First of all, Serocki decided to use four sine-wave generators (oscillators). The first two (1. and 2.) are operated by the pianist and allow for a smooth frequency regulation, while the other two (3. and 4.) are controlled with a chromatic keyboard by the sound engineer. Furthermore, the composer used two ring modulators, which change the nature of sound by shifting its spectrum. Finally, two delaying devices, as well as a set of filters and amplifiers were used. Moreover, for the performance of *Pianophonie* the composer employed the so-called halaphone. The halaphone is named after its two designers – the first director of the Freiburg studio, Hans Peter Haller and Peter Lawo (HA(ller)+LA(wo)+PHONE). This technological miracle made it possible to simulate the movement of sound in space. Although the composer created a unique notation, the score of *Pianophone* doesn't give us the idea of how electronic sound transformation would influence the entire piece. Thanks to careful staging the events, which look simple and "innocent" in the score, often translate into quite unusual and complex effects. According to the instructions provided by the composer, the distance between the piano and other instruments makes it impossible for the microphones to collect orchestral sounds. During the concert, orchestral sounds come from directly in front of the listener, while electronic devices send signals to six speakers placed around the audience. Number 18 of *Pianophonie*'s score (about 7'34") demonstrates how sophisticated these effects are. The solo "intervention" of the piano is modulated by two frequencies generated by oscillators (3Hz and 13Hz). As a result, the distinction between "natural" and electronic sounds becomes less and less clear. Let's take a look at the fragment no. 46 (about 11"). The pianist quickly fingers over the strings alternately in convergent and divergent directions making the piano bass strings vibrate (this timbre was first used in *Fantasmagoria*). Generated piano growls are modulated by the sinusoidal tones of the oscillators controlled by a sound engineer. In the score they are written in the traditional staff notation and form characteristic "melodic motifs." At the same time, sound is transformed by two ring modulators. An adequate equalizer (band-pass filter) and double appoggiaturas (9 s and 10 s) give the solo cadence very particular sound characteristics. Appoggiaturas, increasing tempo and volume, as well as the clusters and articulations producing rustle sounds, transform the "natural" sphere of sound. As a result, the original timbres are completely replaced by electronic ones. With its emphasis on the melodic motifs, *Pianophonie* is often considered the musical work opening up new perspectives which Serocki never got to explore due to his untimely death. However, besides its originality, the composition is closely related to the composer's other pieces based on the ideas of "composing with the timbre" and sensually perceived form. The contemporary status of *Forte e piano* and *Pianophonie* is different. *Forte e piano* is one of Serocki's lesser known and acclaimed works, while *Pianophonie* is considered his greatest masterpiece. Moreover, there were attempts made by Cezary Duchnowski and Marcin Rupociński (2008), as well as Adam Kośmiejka and Kamil Kęska (2014) at a computer

adaptation of Pianophonie's electronic portions. However, it's worth remembering that Forte a piano and Pianophonie are interrelated. It's difficult to imagine the latter without the former. In 1965 Serocki ended his lecture in Essen by saying: *It is always better to listen to the music than to talk about music. If the music doesn't speak for itself, no words a composer says can help. I have said many words here. Since words are not enough, before the end of my life I would like to compose a musical work, which would speak for itself. In this hope I live.*

This album proves that the composer's dream came true.

Iwona Lindstedt

Translated by Agata Klichowska