

**THE KRZYSZTOF PENDERECKI  
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**Witold Szalonek – *Symphony of Rituals* for string quartet  
*Hommage à Szymanowski*  
Implementation and interpretation issues  
with particular emphasis on the viola part**

in proceedings for the award of a doctorate  
in the field of arts, in the artistic discipline: musical arts

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**Krakow 2024**

**ARTISTIC WORK**

**WITOLD SZALONEK (1927-2001)**

**Witold Szalonek – *Symphony of Rituals* for string quartet  
*Hommage á Szymanowski***

Performers:

**Silesian Quartet**

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Arkadiusz Kubica – violin II

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Piotr Janosik – cello

Sound Engineer:

**Przemysław Scheller**

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at 7 p.m. in the Belvedere Hotel in Zakopane as part of the  
46th Karol Szymanowski Music Festival

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## Introductory remarks

The profession of musician brings with it many challenges, for which – understandably – the educational process does not fully prepare. The numerous works of contemporary music, with its wealth of compositional techniques, methods of notation or the expansion of the timbral and articulatory possibilities of instruments, often give rise to doubts as to performance and interpretation, and sometimes to consternation and helplessness. Nevertheless, the necessity to deal with works of ‘our time’ brings with it the need to pay attention to the issues of contemporary music in their broadest sense – from the correct reading of a work's notation to its proper realisation and convincing interpretation. The importance of these issues for a deeper understanding of compositional intentions is, from a performer's perspective, invaluable.

When thinking about the theme of the work, I was looking for a piece that would be in line with my artistic path and at the same time explore the viola part as extensively as possible, both in terms of its placement and role in the string quartet and its technical and timbral possibilities, as well as being an interpretative challenge for the performer. Certainly among such compositions is Witold Szalonek's *Symphony of Rituals*, a somewhat controversial work still waiting to be discovered.

The publication of Witold Szalonek's *Symphony of Rituals* by Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne in 2021 provided an important impetus to attempt to shed as much light as possible on the issues surrounding its performance, especially as I had the honour of editing the viola part in this publication. Over 30 years of cooperation with the Silesian Quartet and numerous contacts with composers have given me the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills helpful in interpreting contemporary music. I have included some of this experience in this work, aware, however, of how breakneck this task is.

The main objective of this work is to present a variety of interpretation and performance issues from the perspective of the viola player, using the work of Witold Szalonek as an example. Perhaps the suggestions contained herein will prove helpful in better understanding the work. Another task was to indicate the arguments for the significance and uniqueness of the *Symphony of Rituals* in Polish music and to draw attention to the work of one of the most outstanding Polish composers, who, although always appreciated, is rarely performed. As a supplement, I also present the main ideas and concepts encountered in the works for string quartet, introduce the composer's profile and refer to the composer-performer relationship.

The work comprises four chapters, preceded by an introduction and culminating in concluding reflections. The first chapter focuses on a general overview of the quartet output of Polish composers of the 20th and 21st centuries, outlining the main ideas, styles and concepts characteristic of this area. It provides a kind of context for considering the main theme of the work. In the second chapter, through an outline of Witold Szalonek's life and work, I introduce the composer's profile and discuss his works for string quartet, which brings a particular picture of the 'time and place' of the *Symphony of Rituals* in relation to the composer's chamber works. The third chapter – essential for the work – is devoted to the title work *Symphony of Rituals* and related performance-interpretation issues according to Mieczysław Tomaszewski's theory of integral interpretation, covering the work from conception to realisation and reception<sup>1</sup>. The circumstances of the composition are presented first, followed by its analysis and interpretation with an account of the work's form, as well as the organisation of time, texture, colour and performance means. Then, the emphasis is on the performance-interpretation aspects (highlighting and discussing) with a special focus on the viola part. In the last section, I address topics relevant to a deeper perception of interpretation through the prism of the composer – work – performer relationship. The fourth chapter presents the *Symphony of Rituals* in the light of selected Polish quartet literature in a synthetic comparison with the (quartet) works of Szymanowski, Lutosławski, Górecki and Penderecki. The choice of these four names is not coincidental: on the one hand, the quartet genre occupies a prominent place in their oeuvre, taking on individual facets, and on the other hand, the inspirations, concepts or techniques there present leave subtle 'traces' in Szalonek's work.

Although Szalonek's oeuvre was often the subject of reflection, this usually involved selected issues (most commonly focused on sonoristics) or specific, individual works. References appeared sporadically in the musical press, usually of a journalistic nature. Among the items covering Szalonek's work more broadly are the *Thematic Catalogue of Works. Texts on Music*<sup>2</sup> and a book by Marian G. Gerlich, Lilianna Moll-Gerlich and Tadeusz Sierny *Witold Szalonek. Portrait of a composer*<sup>3</sup>, which I found to be a valuable aid and a cornucopia of knowledge. Daniel Cichy's work [*Szanując inność. Witold Szalonek, pedagog i wychowawca*]

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<sup>1</sup> M. Tomaszewski, *Interpretacja integralna dzieła muzycznego. Rekoncesans [Integral interpretation of a musical work. Reconesans]*, pub. The Academy of Music in Krakow, Krakow 2000.

<sup>2</sup> L.M. Moll, *Witold Szalonek. Katalog tematyczny dzieł. Teksty o muzyce [Witold Szalonek. Thematic catalogue of works. Texts on music]*, pub. Silesian Music Society, The Academy of Music in Katowice, Katowice 2002.

<sup>3</sup> M.G. Gerlich, L. Moll-Gerlich, T. Sierny, *Witold Szalonek. Portret kompozytora, [Witold Szalonek. Portrait of the composer]* pub. "Śląsk", Katowice 2020.

*Respecting Otherness was an inspiring supplement. Witold Szalonek, pedagogue and educator*<sup>4</sup>. It is also worth noting Ewa Kowalska-Zajac's position on the presence of the string quartet in the works of Polish composers in 20th century music<sup>5</sup>, which captures the development of the genre and its various facets.

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<sup>4</sup> D. Cichy, *Szanując inność. Witold Szalonek, pedagog i wychowawca* [*Respecting otherness. Witold Szalonek, pedagogue and educator*], [in:] *Wartość w muzyce*, vol. 4, ed. J. Uchyla-Zroski, pub. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2012, p. 44.

<sup>5</sup> E.Kowalska-Zajac, *XX-wieczny kwartet smyczkowy w twórczości kompozytorów polskich - przemiany, nurty, idee*, [*The 20th century string quartet in the works of Polish composers - transformations, trends, ideas*], pub. The Academy of Music in Łódź, Łódź 2005.

# 1. Works for string quartet in 20th and 21st century Polish music — richness of ideas, thoughts, concepts

## 1.1. Representatives of chamber music (composers).

### A subjective ear

In Ewa Kowalska-Zajac's invaluable book devoted to the 20th-century string quartet in the works of Polish composers – its manifestations, trends and ideas<sup>6</sup>, we find information on 473 works written. I know quite a few of them from my own performance experience, while at the same time I am sure that not all of them will be included, if only because of the constant discovery of works which are not listed in catalogues or because the composer's nationality is not clearly specified. One example of this is the work of Mieczyslaw Wajnberg, who was born in Warsaw and, fleeing the war (in 1939) with the score of his *String Quartet No. 1* to the USSR, took Russian citizenship there. Another: *Quatuor (à cordes)* (1965) by Grażyna Bacewicz or *String Quartet No. 1* (1930?) by Joachim Mendelson, which was released in a recording by the Silesian Quartet on CHANDOS Records in 2023. Nearly 80 premieres of works for string quartet by Polish composers (by the Silesian Quartet) are already in the 21st century (2000-23)<sup>7</sup>, so, for natural reasons, they do not fit into the research period of the aforementioned position.

Each encounter with Polish music is – through the prism of its 'proximity' – a special experience, not objectively perceived, in which 'here' is closer than 'there' with all the consequences of such a perception. Some of the quartet works (or string quartets understood as a genre) written by established composers are in the repertoire of eminent performers and often feature in the programmes of world concert halls. However, there are definitely more of those that I remember through a kind of emotion given to me for some reason, or – in the words of Paweł Szymański – "resonance in the aesthetic sphere", aesthetic satisfaction<sup>8</sup>. There are definitely more such musical experiences, which I cannot pass by indifferently, which perhaps signifies a 'low bar' or the compositional artistry of native composers, or something else... In

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>7</sup> The total number of premieres (together with works by foreign composers) covering the years of activity of the Silesian Quartet is approx. 150, and premieres of works by Polish composers - approx. 120.

<sup>8</sup> Cit: N. Szwab, *Paweł Szymański's Surconventionalism. Ideas and music*, [Paweł Szymański's *Surconventionalism. Ideas and music*], pub. The Academy of Music in Krakow, Krakow 2020, p. 57.

any case, this is not related to an in-depth analysis, although if it is, it is not crucial, but rather has to do with an immediate, subjective, though perhaps erroneous, sense of understanding.

The following, from a performer's perspective, will signal the quartet works of selected Polish composers, most of whose works – which bring unforgettable impressions – I have had the opportunity to perform.

Two quartets by Karol Szymanowski: *String Quartet No. 1 in C major*, Op. 38 (1917) and *String Quartet No. 2*, Op. 56 (1927)<sup>9</sup> from the first time I heard them, they captivated me with their subtlety, poetics, finesse and colour, but also with their volatility and expression. Nor can I decide which is closer to me – they are completely different and yet so similar. They have a kind of magic and power of attraction in them. The originality of Szymanowski's music means that I have never found anything so sublime and close to me in any of the later works I have come to know. Repeatedly performed and recorded by us, they form the core of the repertoire of not only Polish ensembles. Inspirations for Karol Szymanowski's music can be found in the works of successive generations of composers (e.g. Witold Szalonek, Henryk Mikołaj Górecki, Wojciech Kilar, Grażyna Bacewicz).

The list of string quartets composed in the 20th century opens with three by Marcelli Popławski, dating from 1904-1906. With more attention paid to the work of composers from the first half of the twentieth century, Ludomir Różycki's romantic quartet (1916) has been recorded and performed more frequently. In 1917, Aleksander Tansman's *String Quartet No. 1* was written, which unfortunately has not survived to the present day. Between 1922 and 1956, the composer wrote seven more, as well as *Triptych* for string quartet. These masterworks rarely feature in the repertoire of concert halls today, although the composer achieved worldwide fame before the war. One can still hear *Quartets No. 4* and *No. 6*, which are concise and have received a positive reception from audiences. However, the most interesting seems to be the *String Quartet No. 5* (1940), written with extraordinary panache, textural density and expression, ending with a bravura fugue, challenging as a whole for any ensemble<sup>10</sup>. In the post-war quartets: *no. 7* (1947) and *no. 8* (1956), the fast tempos result in a blurring of harmonic details and individual motifs, creating timbral impressions closer to sonorism.

Szymon Laks' oeuvre includes, among others, five quartets written in 1928-1963, the first two of which did not survive the wartime conflagration. Applause from the audience is

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<sup>9</sup> Szymanowski's quartets have been recorded twice by the Silesian Quartet, most recently: C&P 1997 CD ACCORD, ACD 037.

<sup>10</sup> Set recorded by the Silesian Quartet in 1991 for P&C 1992 Etcetera Records B.V. Amsterdam, KTC 2017.

always aroused by *String Quartet No. 3 "On Polish Folk Themes"* (1945), written in Paris, with numerous quotations from Polish folklore<sup>11</sup>.

It is worth mentioning at this point the other composers whose first quartet scores were written before or during the Second World War: Roman Statkowski, Antoni Szałowski, Jerzy Fitelberg, Roman Palester, Bolesław Woytowicz, Roman Padlewski, Józef Koffler, Stefan Kisielewski, Artur Malawski, Karol Rathaus, Kazimierz Sikorski, Joachim Mendelson or Witold Rudziński.

The years 1929-1965 see the quartet works of Grażyna Bacewicz, which today are gaining increasing worldwide recognition. And although *String Quartet Nos. 3* (1947) and *4* (1951) are the most frequently interpreted, I personally find more interesting *String Quartet No. 5* (1955) with a double fugue, *String Quartet No. 6* (1960) and *String Quartet No. 7* (1965), in which the composer makes use of sonoristic-sounding structures. Another four-movement *Quatuor (à cordes)* was written in 1965, which Bacewicz did not decide to publish, perhaps because of its considerable similarity to *Quartet No. 7*<sup>12</sup>.

One of the greatest personal experiences for me was to become acquainted with Mieczysław Wajnberga's chamber music, most of which was written after he left Poland. Composed in 1937 (in Warsaw) and revised in 1985, *String Quartet No. 1* op. 2/141 demonstrates the young composer's talent, artistry and exceptional imagination. In the 17 quartets Wajnberg probably included all shades of emotion, never going so far as to exaggerate, having a coherent message with his dramatic fate<sup>13</sup>.

Between 1945 and 1960, the first quartets were written by, among others, Konstanty Regamey, Zdzisław Szostak, Ryszard Bukowski, Michał Spisak, Bogusław Schaeffer, Jan Wincenty Hawel and Bolesław Szabelski.

Tadeusz Baird's dodecaphonic *String Quartet* (1957) and the later *Play* (1971) and *Variations in rondo form* (1974-1978) attracted the attention of critics and musicologists – today they are rarely performed, but certainly deserve to be remembered.

Krzysztof Penderecki astonished the musical world with his sonoristic *Quartetto per archi No. 1* (1960) and *String Quartet No. 2* (1968). The later *Der unterbrochene Gedanke* (1988), *String Quartet No. 3 "Pages from an unwritten diary"* (2008) and *String Quartet No. 4* (2016) delight with their narrative, but also with the sublime beauty of phrases facing the

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<sup>11</sup> The surviving quartets were recorded by the Silesian Quartet in 2015, released by the Musica Pro Bono Foundation, FMPB CD 025.

<sup>12</sup> The set of string quartets was recorded by the Silesian Quartet for CHANDOS Records Ltd. 2016, 2023.

<sup>13</sup> A set of string quartets was recorded by the Silesian Quartet for CD ACCORD, 2016-2022.

past<sup>14</sup>. Thanks to the worldwide importance of Penderecki's oeuvre, his chamber works are also frequently performed by the most eminent artists.

While the chamber works of many composers constitute an important but side-stream of the main interests, in Krzysztof Meyer's oeuvre it acquires a special significance, marked by the presence of 15 quartets (as of 2023). A pupil of Penderecki, Meyer dedicated his *String Quartet No. 1*, Op. 8 (1963), alluding to *Quartetto per archi No. 1* through the use of sonorous sounds, to the Master; *String Quartet No. 2*, Op. 23 (1969), combining dodecaphony with sonoristics, to Witold Lutosławski; and *String Quartet No. 3*, Op. 27 (1971), as a result of his youthful fascination, to Dmitri Shostakovich.

Written in aleatoric technique, Witold Lutosławski's *String Quartet* (1964) presents the concept of a closed form in which the first movement is a preparation of the main movement. Premiered by the famous LaSalle Quartet, it quickly became one of the most important works of the 20th century<sup>15</sup>.

Although chamber music was a favourite area of Witold Szalonek's creative activity, he left only three scores using the string quartet: *I+I+I+I* (1969), *Inside?-Outside?* for bass clarinet and string quartet (1987) and *Symphony of Rituals* (1991-1996). In his sonoristic compositions, the composer presented the sound possibilities of string instruments in an extraordinary way, and the *Symphony of Rituals*, in my opinion, belongs to the peak achievements of Polish 20th century music.

Henryk Mikołaj Górecki's three string quartets, composed in 1988, 1991 and 2005, delight with contrasts, dynamic nuances, energy, but also – distinguishing many of the composer's works – with an inspired spirituality.<sup>16</sup>, which makes his music particularly deeply moving.

The extensive catalogue of quartet literature makes it impossible to look at all the works and their authors in this work. Below I have listed those composers whose works for string quartet are important to me, remembered for their aesthetic qualities, and recorded by our ensemble<sup>17</sup>: Marta Ptaszyńska, Marek Stachowski, Krystyna Moszumańska-Nazar<sup>18</sup>, Paweł Szymański<sup>19</sup>, Stanisław Krupowicz<sup>20</sup>, Zbigniew Bargielski<sup>21</sup>, Zygmunt Krauze<sup>22</sup>, Joanna

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<sup>14</sup> Set in a recording by the Silesian Quartet, released in 2021 by Chandos Records Ltd.

<sup>15</sup> Set in a recording by the Silesian Quartet, C&P 1997 CD ACCORD, ACD 037.

<sup>16</sup> Set in a recording by the Silesian Quartet, released by EMI Classics in 2008, 50999 2 3631 3 2 8.

<sup>17</sup> Also radio.

<sup>18</sup> *String Quartet No. 3*, BOX: 100 for 100. *Musical Decades of Freedom*, 2019.

<sup>19</sup> In a recording by the Silesian Quartet, released by EMI Classics in 2006, 0946 3 84393 2 5.

<sup>20</sup> Fundacja Musica Pro Bono 2010, FMPB CD004.

<sup>21</sup> CD Accord, Universal Music Polska 2012, ACD 173-2.

<sup>22</sup> 1994 THESIS PARIS, TH 82059.

Wnuk-Nazar, Andrzej Panufnik<sup>23</sup>, Aleksander Lason<sup>24</sup>, Andrzej Krzanowski<sup>25</sup>, Tadeusz Wielecki, Eugeniusz Knapik<sup>26</sup>, Grażyna Krzanowska, Ryszard Gabrys, Rafał Augustyn<sup>27</sup>. Of the younger generation of artists, my attention was particularly drawn to the works of: Paweł Mykietyn, Cezary Duchnowski, Wojciech Widłak, Roxanna Panufnik, Wojciech Ziemowit Zych, Mikołaj Górecki, Aleksander Nowak, Hanna Kulenty, Marcin Bortnowski, Joanna Szymala, Andrzej Kwieciński and Andrzej Dziadek.

## 1.2. Ideas, styles, directions

The oeuvre of Polish composers in the first half of the twentieth century was for the most part dominated by a classicist attitude, understood as an opposition to individualism, open, processual forms and a conceptual attitude<sup>28</sup>. Compared to the works of Webern, Stravinsky, Bartók – as Kowalska-Zajac writes – it was a bastion of tradition, which does not mean the absence of attempts to modernise the musical workshop<sup>29</sup>. Against this background, the works of Karol Szymanowski, for example, who created an original musical language, and Józef Koffler, active in Lvov in the 1930s, using dodecaphony, are a bright spot.

The obvious delay of Polish composers in relation to Western trends was mainly due to the difficult historical conditions. A classicising attitude can be found in the quartets of Antoni Szałowski or Stefan Kisielewski, among others. A compromise position between radicalism and neoclassicism was present in the compositions of Konstanty Regamey, Karol Rathaus, Tadeusz Baird and Roman Palester.

As a result of the political thaw, it was not until the late 1950s that tendencies to boldly explore the world of sound (sonorism) emerged, and compositional techniques such as serialism or aleatorism became an attractive and intensively explored point of reference. "Abandoning the genre's formal tradition and creating entirely new architectural approaches"<sup>30</sup> were at the heart of the pioneering works of Krzysztof Penderecki (*Quartetto per archi*) and Witold Lutosławski (*String Quartet*), who, in the words of Leszek Polony,

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<sup>23</sup> C&P Polskie Radio Katowice S.A. 2003, PRK CD 056.

<sup>24</sup> Fundacja Musica Pro Bono 2007, FMPB CD001, Polskie Radio Katowice 2006, PRK CD076.

<sup>25</sup> "Pokolenie stalowowlskie" 2011 [*Stalowa Wola Generation*], The album contains 6 CDs of music by Andrzej Krzanowski, Aleksander Lason and Eugeniusz Knapik, recorded between 1983 and 2011..

<sup>26</sup> Recording performed by the Silesian Quartet, released in 2022 by CD Accord, ACD 317.

<sup>27</sup> Recorded in 2010 by CD Accord, 2010 CD ACCORD, ACD 165-2.

<sup>28</sup> According to Raphael Augustine, cit. E. Kowalska-Zajac, *op. cit.* p. 22.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 24.

unites in an artistically homogeneous whole three conceptions of the understanding of music, rarely found in an absolutely pure form: sensualist, constructivist, and expressionist<sup>31</sup>.

In a similar vein are the quartets of Zbigniew Bargielski or Andrzej Panufnik. An interesting example is the separation of a "particular type of stylistic sterility"<sup>32</sup> and striving for the interconnection and interaction of a set of work elements. The potential of avant-garde trends and techniques was exhausted relatively quickly. Homogeneity with its limitations, which resulted, among other things, in a weakening of the dynamics of form and – as a reaction to homogeneity – the pluralistic tendencies of music of the second half of the twentieth century, consequently lay at the root of heterogeneity and diversity. As Witold Lutosławski said,

system is not an indispensable thing for the creative composer... This factor, impossible to describe in a purely scientific way, is an extremely mysterious phenomenon, which, if it exists, guarantees greater uniformity of the work than, for example, the tonal system does. It is the personality of the creator. I believe in the superior unity of this personality<sup>33</sup>.

The modernist trends and related techniques – impressionism, expressionism, futurism, sonorism, serialism or aleatorism – initially formed in opposition to Romanticism, then radicalised and developed in many ways – have had a huge impact on the image of music today. This revolution of sorts, carried out on a huge scale, paradoxically led to the artists' imagination being freed from the restrictive corsets of conventions, styles and forms. Homogeneity gave way to multiplicity and diversity of artistic attitudes. The achievements of modernism, however, were not completely discarded, constituting an important contribution to the development of compositional techniques and ways of moulding creativity. Dating back to the 1970s, the retreat from avant-garde demands was quite radical in some artists, while in others it took milder forms, based on evolution or on a synthesis of the 'old with the new'. The need to 'return to' tradition in the broadest sense of the term, treated in a multifarious and diverse manner, is reflected in the attitude and music of composers born in the 1950s. Paweł Szymański's works – written in the spirit of a postmodern understanding of the world – are determined by the vectors of both tradition and contemporaneity, and are part of the author's concept of surconventionalism. The idea of rejecting the avant-garde (novelty as a value in itself), also characterised the creative stance of the so-called Generation '51 (the Stalowa Wola Generation),

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<sup>31</sup> As cited in: *ibidem*, p. 91.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 25.

<sup>33</sup> As cited in: *ibidem*, p. 26.

represented by Eugeniusz Knapik, Andrzej Krzanowski and Aleksander Lasoń, whose work is associated with "new romanticism"<sup>34</sup>.

The diverse perceptions of the string quartet and its possibilities for a kind of 'communication', understood as dialogue, conversation, epitaph, message, playing, provide further insights into this instrumental medium. The turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, together with the development of technology, fostered the exploration of areas previously inaccessible, bringing about a 'revolution' – be it, again, in terms of sound (created or modified, e.g. by means of electronics) or the form of the work (happenings, instrumental theatre), or in the sphere of references, inspirations (e.g. to computer games, various types of popular music). Forms and even hybrid genres are emerging, the essence of which becomes the bold mixing of ideas or styles in the belief of creating a new, more interesting, alternative reality. As I look at it, the current image of music is getting further and further away from the one that shaped me. Certainly, the reason for this is the difference in the perception of the present by the younger generation, who pay attention to other accents, spheres and aspects, and it is they who will live in the world they are creating.

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<sup>34</sup> P. Strzelecki, *Nowy romantyzm w twórczości kompozytorów polskich po roku 1975*, [New Romanticism in the works of Polish composers after 1975], pub. Musica Iagellonica, Krakow 2006; K. Kiwała, *Pokolenie Stalowej Woli. Eugeniusz Knapik, Andrzej Krzanowski, Aleksander Lasoń. Studia estetyczne*, [Stalowa Wola Generation. Eugeniusz Knapik, Andrzej Krzanowski, Aleksander Lasoń. Aesthetic Studies], pub. The Academy of Music in Krakow, Krakow 2019.

## 2. Witold Szalonek — portrait of the artist

### 2.1. Outline of life and work

#### The years of youth

Witold Szalonek was born on 2 March 1927 in Czechowice-Dziedzice. He spent his childhood and youth in Łagiewniki – later (since 1951) a district of Bytom, bordering on Chorzów and Świętochłowice and the districts of Rozbark and Szombierki.

Although his parents had no musical training, singing was commonplace at home and on various occasions, and from the time of the opening of the restaurant at Franciszek Szalonek's until its closure during the Second World War, music was played there live by local musicians<sup>35</sup>. At the age of nine, Szalonek began to study piano and singing with local teachers, which, to a lesser extent, also continued during the German occupation.

Germans and Poles or Upper Silesians lived side by side in the region, whose life patterns interacted with each other, creating a ‘cultural phenomenon’ that can often be found in so-called border areas. On the streets, alongside German and Polish, Silesian speech appeared, or – as Henryk Borek and Reinhold Olech put it – ‘sprachmischung’<sup>36</sup>.

The worker-peasant culture of Upper Silesia, rich in musical traditions, where – in addition to playing skat and raising pigeons<sup>37</sup> – Making music together, enriched by the sounds

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<sup>35</sup> D. Cichy, *op. cit.* p. 44.

<sup>36</sup> M.G. Gerlich *et al*, *op. cit.* p. 27.

<sup>37</sup> The traditions of music-making, pigeon-raising and playing skat were also present in the mentality of Silesians in the post-war years, especially among the older generation, who, because they attended German schools in many localities, were also fluent in this language, which in the case of multi-generational family gatherings was as follows: grandparents and parents spoke both the Silesian dialect and Polish and German fluently, while the young spoke Polish and Silesian. To this day, especially in smaller towns and villages, only Silesian is spoken, and pure Polish is heard by visitors or used by the youngest generation educated in big cities. After the war, almost every mine or steelworks had its own bands; brass bands were particularly popular and paraded through the main streets on major occasions. In addition to amateurs, they were powered by professional musicians, which had a significant impact on their often high level of musical artistry. The situation was similar, although to a slightly lesser extent, with parish choirs, where professional singers were engaged for more difficult repertoire or solo parts. Homing pigeons (sometimes of exceptional beauty) were bred in gardens or courtyards, sent occasionally to specialist competitions, and after the obligatory mass, family Sunday lunches ended with games of skat over a 'drop' of alcohol. Today, many of these traditions are naturally dying out with the passing of the older generations and due to the restructuring of Silesian industry, although they are still maintained occasionally in some centres. Breeding sheds and cells are used as repositories for redundant items or are dismantled to make room for something more useful, and brass bands are no longer heard. Silesian music-making, handed down in genes from generation to generation and so important for the region's culture, has taken the elite form of professional ensembles: the National Polish Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Silesian Philharmonic, the Silesian Opera or the Silesian Song

of mine orchestras or parish choirs, was part of everyday life, and had a strong influence on young Witold. Despite their complicated history, the Upper Silesians managed to create a strong sense of identity and distinctiveness, based on culture and love of the region, respect for hard work, and values such as family and faith. Into this picture were also incorporated the events which Szalonek recalls as follows:

Here in the region, there was a symphony of machines, tools, squeaks, the scraping of chains, and the cries of the people, and the cries of the injured after an accident in the mine, and the cries of the women when they found out that their son had died, the masses afterwards. Those cries at home, it's like a cry to God and one lament sits in my head now...<sup>38</sup>.

During the years of occupation, forced conscription into the German army became part of the dramatic history of Silesia, and consequently led to the post-war deportations of thousands of Silesians suspected of treason.

After the war, Witold Szalonek enrolled at the State Secondary Music School in Katowice in the piano class of Wanda Chmielowska – an outstanding pianist and highly regarded pedagogue, born and educated in St. Petersburg – from which he graduated in 1949<sup>39</sup>. It was during this time that he made his first attempts at composition, including *Mazur* for piano (1946). He continued his education at the State Higher School of Music in Katowice, spending a year with, among others, Kazimierz Kord and Wojciech Kilar<sup>40</sup>. At the same time, he took up studies in the composition class of Bolesław Woytowicz – pianist and composer, as well as a PhD of Slavic philology, mathematician and lawyer. There is no doubt that an encounter with the eminent personality of Woytowicz, whose broad horizons reached beyond music-related issues, developed the young composition student in many directions. This is one example showing the importance of the role of a good pedagogue, a persistent and caring guardian, inspirer and master in the shaping of creative individuality.

The difficult post-war years and the death of his father in 1950 had a depressing effect on Szalonek's psyche, but Woytowicz managed to revive hope and make the young composer realise his potential and the possession of an unparalleled talent to such an extent that he delved

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and Dance Ensemble. Regional folklore has been replaced by disco polo and convivial songs common to the whole of Poland. However, one element, in spite of the passing time and social and cultural changes, does not seem to have changed - it is the identity, the strong awareness of the connection with this place and its history, its - despite everything - distinctiveness.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 37.

<sup>39</sup> Also graduating from the Secondary Music School in Katowice that year were Kazimierz Kord - later to become the long-standing conductor of the National Philharmonic in Warsaw - and Józef Świder, a composer. Jubilee of the 80th anniversary of the Secondary Music School in Katowice, publ. POSM II st. in Katowice, Katowice 2017.

<sup>40</sup> D. Cichy, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

into music and composing with increasing passion. Early compositions according to Magdalena Dziadek

presented a forbidding approach to folklore stylisation (they were rooted in the tradition of Chopin and Szymanowski), consisting in an attempt to exploit the harmonic and timbral originality of the folk original<sup>41</sup>.

A significant event and his first compositional success was winning the 3rd prize on the occasion of the World Youth Festival in Warsaw for his piece *Pastorale* for oboe and piano <sup>42</sup> in 1952. In his classical *Trio* for flute, clarinet *in b* and bassoon, crossing sonata form with polyphonic forms <sup>43</sup>, Szalonek demonstrated his construction skills with an interesting use of polyphony. A year later, *The Bell* – a ballad for 2 boys' or mixed choirs *a cappella* – opening a cycle of choral and vocal-instrumental works (premiered only 11 years later), brought the composer an award at a competition organised by the Presidium of the Voivodship National Council in Katowice in 1964. In turn, *Silesian Folk Ballad* for solo soprano and mixed choir *a cappella*, awarded in the same year, was presented to the public four years before the composer's death. An important work from his student period is the *Polyphonic Suite* for string orchestra<sup>44</sup>, which can be categorised as a stage in the search for absolute music. Formally alluding to the Baroque suite, it is part of a period of fascination with dodecaphony and the achievements of Western music, quite commonly present in the works of Silesian composers. An example of the realisation of a creative impulse is the *Kurpian Suite* for solo alto and 9 instruments, widely commented on by reviewers, who emphasise the logic and craftsmanship of the composer's technique. Written outside the mainstream of creative explorations, it turns towards folklore, which, however – as Gabriela Kamska-Jonszta emphasises – becomes only a pretext for “linking with the then current achievements of 20th century music, based on full integration in the sphere of musical elements”<sup>45</sup>. The diploma *Symphonic Satire for orchestra*, using Silesian melodies, is the first work for such a large instrumental ensemble in which Szalonek, through

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<sup>41</sup> M. Dziadek, *Witolda Szalonka perypetie z sonoryzmem [Witold Szalonek's adventures with sonorism]*, "Options", no. 5/2001, p. 108; as cit. in: M.G. Gerlich *et al*, *op. cit.* p. 45.

<sup>42</sup> L.M. Moll, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>43</sup> G. Kamska-Jonszta, *Sonorystyka w dziełach Witolda Szalonka [Sonoristics in the works of Witold Szalonek]*, MA thesis. PWSM in Katowice, 1978, pp. 65-66; as cit. in: *ibidem*, p. 24.

<sup>44</sup> Part I of the *Suite* (on which work extended over the years 1953-55) - the *Toccata for Strings* - was Szalonek's compositional debut, taking place at the Silesian Philharmonic in 1954. "Polish Music Library", [<https://polskabibliotekamuzyczna.pl/encyklopedia/szalonek-witold/>], accessed 8.10.2023], p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> G. Kamska-Jonszta, *op. cit.* pp. 56-59; as cit. in: L.M. Moll, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

the use of polytonality, irregular metrorhythm, expressivity, grotesque and parody, alludes to the works of Igor Stravinsky and Béla Bartók.

The path from the first to the diploma piece shows an intense development of musical language and compositional technique. Inspiration from folklore, interest in timbre, experimentation with form, broadening the performance medium, but also acquiring knowledge and skills in implementing the achievements of Western music, placed Szalonek among the most promising young composers.

He graduated in 1956 with honours and was offered the position of deputy assistant at his alma mater, and in the following years: assistant (1957), senior assistant (1960) and assistant professor (1961)<sup>46</sup>. A two-year break in composition (1956-1958) – presumably due to numerous academic obligations – gave rise to a new chapter; the works that followed have a different weight. The composer, turning towards Weberian aesthetics<sup>47</sup>, applied dodecaphonic assumptions, aleatorism, an unconventional arrangement of instruments in which the 'wandering' sound influenced the impression of spatiality, while the timbral formations and their mutual relations clearly tended towards sonorism. The units of time, which replaced the traditional bar formulation, were conducive to unleashing performance invention, while the extended cast enabled the revealing sounds of the wind instruments to be exposed. An important activity of this period was the management of the following choirs between 1952 and 1962: the "Hejnał" choir in Łagiewniki and the "Echo" choir in Chropaczew. This contact with both choirs provided Szalonek vital and creative forces<sup>48</sup>, inspired him and was a springboard from his academic activities. It was there that he found a particle of much-needed appreciation, acceptance, and admiration, but also the satisfaction of participating in the process of propagating culture among the local community, with which he felt a strong connection. As the artist admitted,

this devotion to the singing traditions cultivated in Silesia was significant, although often misunderstood by the academic community... it was this work, this period of interaction with amateur choirs that I found most fascinating for understanding the intuitive need for art in every so-called simple, i.e. educationally unprepared person to participate in art, in music. It may sound pompous, but I learned from these people a love of music.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> One of the listeners to the Shalon lectures was the composer's future wife, Beata Zygmunt (married in 1963).

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 52.

<sup>48</sup> M.G. Gerlich *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

<sup>49</sup> As cited in: D. Cichy, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

In his 1960 *Concertino per flauto e orchestra da camera*, Szalonek filled the baroque form with new content: dodecaphony and sound colours with sonoristic potential. A year earlier, Szalonek wrote *Confessions* – a triptych for reciting voice, mixed choir and chamber orchestra to words by Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna – he made his debut in 1959 at the International Festival of Contemporary Music "Warsaw Autumn". He expanded his activities by writing reviews, which appeared in the local press, and by conducting programmes at the Silesian Broadcasting Station of the Polish Radio, during which he explained the complexities of contemporary music.

### **Free world**

Between 1962 and 1963 Szalonek stayed in Paris to develop his compositional skills in the class of Nadia Boulanger. His fascination with Polish folklore, about which the composer enthusiastically said: "One can talk endlessly about Polish musical folklore!"<sup>50</sup>, after the Paris sojourn, it became muted, only to return towards the end of his life in a composer who was mature and aware of the value of his work. Witold Szalonek assesses the trip to Paris in the following words:

If you look at my life, you'd have to say that there are some very important dates in everyone's life, these are like walls: one ends and the other begins. So I would say that in my life such a wall was the time of my stay in Paris, through some gates or gateway I passed from my old world, that commune, Polish socialism, there was good and a lot of bad, and the worst was the lie, and I entered the new one. (...) Paris, that was the gateway to a new world, I understood something there and my eyes – as a man's eyes – were opened, this «lad boy from Silesia», I saw a different, free world, (...) after that I was different, and my life as a musician, as a composer, also began....<sup>51</sup>.

The contrast between East and West (especially in the times described) did not only involve shop supplies or the quality of life as seen through the eyes of the so-called average person, but showed possibilities in the sphere of access to information, all-round development – without artificial guidelines, orders and restrictions, without constant surveillance. Consequently, Szalonek re-evaluated and defined his musical thinking on the basis of constant development, perfecting his technique, acquiring knowledge, broadening his horizons by learning about and researching cultures, their wealth, diversity and history. He saw that musical inspirations have no limits, one only has to discover their artistic potential. In Paris, he

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<sup>50</sup> M.G. Gerlich *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 51.

befriended Dąbrowa Górnicza-born Michal Spisak, who supported him and introduced him to an unknown environment. After his friend's death in 1965, he dedicated *Les Sons* to him..

### **Towards sonorism**

In the years 1960-1964, between *Concertino* and *Arabesques* for violin and piano, written after his return from Paris, there was another, this time four-year break in the creative process. His subsequent compositions for choral ensemble, dedicated to the Union of Silesian Singing and Instrumental Circles [Pol. Związek Śląskich Kół Śpiewaczych i Instrumentalnych], did not herald a compositional revolution – they were a tribute to regional tradition. Written in 1965, *Les Sons* for symphonic ensemble ("Hommage à Michał Spisak"), in which Szalonek used for the first time polyphonic sounds ('combined sounds') of woodwind instruments and a series of colourful sound planes, growing in waves from *pppp* to *ffff*<sup>52</sup>, was a step towards a fascination with timbre and the essence of sound itself, and at the same time a development of ideas that increasingly excited him.

In his search for new timbres and sonorities, he worked closely with the musicians of the Wielka Orkiestra Symfoniczna Polskiego Radia [Grand Symphony Orchestra of the Polish Radio] in Katowice, collecting them in his catalogue, which he in turn included in his article *On the unused sonoristic qualities of woodwind instruments* from 1968, published five years later in the periodical "Res Facta". The discovery and description of these innovative playing techniques by the Polish composer – independently of the activities of foreign composers, including Bruno Bartolozzi – remains an event of worldwide significance:

Although the search for new possibilities of sound extraction and modification of timbre in playing classical instruments was characteristic of the Polish sonorism of the 1960s, to which Szalonek is credited, yet no one else went so far in exploring and exploiting the sonic limits of wind instruments<sup>53</sup>.

Awarded at the Artur Malawski Composers' Competition in Krakow (in 1966 and 1968), *Quattro monologhi* per oboe solo, *Mutazioni* per orchestra da camera and *Proporzioni* per flauto, viola e arpa, *Improvisations sonoristiques* for clarinet, trombone, cello and piano, or

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<sup>52</sup> W. Szalonek, commentary [in:] *18. Międzynarodowy Festiwal Muzyki Współczesnej „Warszawska Jesień”*. Warszawa [18th International Festival of Contemporary Music "Warsaw Autumn". Warsaw], 21-29 September 1974, ed. J. Grzybowski, G. Michalski, O. Pisarenko, pub. MFMW "Warsaw Autumn", Warsaw 1974, pp. 99-100.

<sup>53</sup> K. Dąbek, *Wycinki myśli estetycznej Witolda Szalonka* [Clippings of Witold Szalonek's aesthetic thought], [https://pisanezesluchu.pl/wycinki-z-mysli-estetycznej-witolda-szalonka/, accessed 29.12.2023].

*Mutanza* per pianoforte dedicated to Zygmunt Krauze are scores in which the composer intensively explores the timbral possibilities of successive instruments. An unrivalled example of the search for a new sound of string instruments – next to *Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima* for 52 string instruments and quartets by Krzysztof Penderecki (I 1960, II 1968) and Henryk Mikołaj Górecki's *Genesis*, movement I: *Elementi* per tre archi Op. 19 no. 1 (1962) – is the *I+I+I+I* dedicated to Mirek Kondracki from 1969<sup>54</sup>.

His intensive work as a composer and pedagogue resulted in him taking over the Chair of Music Theory and Composition at his alma mater (1970-1974) after Bolesław Woytowicz's departure, as well as teaching a composition class. In the opinion of students, Szalonek's lectures, during which they had the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the scores of many Western composers, were among the most interesting; the composer also 'infected' them with humanistic interests<sup>55</sup>, which he used extensively as inspiration in his works. The artist's openness and passion as well as the multifaceted nature of the classes he taught soon became attributes of his pedagogical activity, for which he received an award from the Ministry of Culture and Art in 1973. Between 1969 and 1975, he was chairman of the Katowice branch of the Polish Composers' Union, where he co-founded many musical enterprises, including the Silesian Composers' Tribune.

As a valued composer and pedagogue, Szalonek shared his experience by conducting numerous courses and lectures, also outside Poland. A trip to Aarhus in Denmark resulted in the composition of *Aarhus Music* for wind quintet (1970), about which the composer wrote as follows:

This is my first piece constructed entirely – apart from the introduction and the horn part – from combined multitones. (...) Ex post I realised that the creation of *Aarhus Music* could be explained not only by the exclusive desire to operate with new material – the aforementioned combined sounds. They are the elements that materialise the overarching musical idea – but, like the second movement, they are also the elements that materialise the music. *Concertina* for flute and orchestra is a kind of «Silesian Nocturne» thanks to its undulating pedal points, which are probably a reflection of the vibrating sounds of the huge mine ventilation fans at calm nights, carried by the wave of the air, intensifying and dying, and this piece owes its shape to the atmosphere of the night of the port city, the nights resounding with the warning whistles of the ship sirens, carried by the sea with the sound of the bell buoys, and it must have been this, although not fully conscious, that guided the creative process<sup>56</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup> Premieres: solo version - 1969, quartet version - 1975 (performed by the Wilanów Quartet), for violin and cello - 1979, double-bass version - 1992. As cit. in: L.M. Moll, *op. cit.* p. 89.

<sup>55</sup> D. Cichy, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

<sup>56</sup> L.M. Moll, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

A scholarship from the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst in West Berlin (1970-1971) opened the way for Szalonek to work more closely internationally. Appointed rector of the Academy of Music in Katowice (1972), he nevertheless resigned his post after a conflict with the university authorities, and "in 1973 he became professor at the Hochschule der Künste in West Berlin, where he took over the composition and music theory class after B. Blacher"<sup>57</sup>.

## **Berlin**

For the 46-year-old composer, the Berlin professorship was not only an honour, but above all a sign of appreciation and recognition of his oeuvre, which provided a significant, multifaceted creative impetus. And although it brought more envy than goodwill in the musical community, not only in Silesia, it was a breath of fresh air for many new challenges and opportunities, provided contacts with students from all over the world, and gave hope for wider acceptance and understanding. Szalonek did not, however, sever his links with the Katowice university, where, until 1981<sup>58</sup> he pursued to work in composition class and continued to take an active part in shaping musical life. He definitively left Poland after the introduction of martial law, returning to the country, albeit less regularly, once the political situation had stabilised. He increasingly gave seminars and lectures abroad, including in Denmark, Germany, Slovakia and Finland. He was the artistic director of the Silesian festivals "Rainbow Music" and "Ars Cameralis Silesiae Superioris", during which he presented the idea of equality of musicians from different cultural circles, and the "Mystical-Musical Evenings of Witold Szalonek" became a tradition of the Upper Silesian Chamber Music Festival<sup>59</sup>. On German soil, he popularised the works of Polish composers, including Kazimierz Serocki, Bolesław Woytowicz, Artur Malawski, Andrzej Panufnik and Michał Spisak. In 1982 Szalonek co-founded the Karol Szymanowski Society, and built intercultural bridges, in the spirit of peaceful coexistence, also by inviting Polish performers.

From the mid-1980s, the Silesian Quartet was a frequent participant in Szalonek projects, during which we worked on compositions by his students and performed scores by Polish and German composers. It was an extremely valuable and inspiring time for us, full of new acquaintances and contacts, which bore fruit for a long time, already without the master's tutelage, with numerous concerts, recordings and projects. But the most valuable thing was to

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<sup>57</sup> „Polish Music Library”, *op. cit.*

<sup>58</sup> D. Cichy, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>59</sup> „Polish Music Library”, *op. cit.*

introduce us to the world of contemporary music as a world full of colours and shades, subtleties and a beauty that is still not understood.

The intense pedagogical and organisational activity did not weaken Szalonek's compositional inventiveness, in which he constantly explored and expanded the sonic possibilities of successive instruments, weaving them into artfully designed and demanding scores. Among the most interesting examples of works from this period are: *Concertino for strings*, *Musica Concertante per violbasso e orchestra*, *Proporzioni III* (a version for violin, cello and piano) and the famous *Piernikiana* for solo tuba. They precede the creation of a masterpiece on which he worked for three years and which he held in high esteem. Dedicated to Pope John Paul II, the *Little Symphony B-A-C-H* for piano and variably orchestra is a score in which – as the composer puts it – “each note has its own strictly defined place with a certain individual sound system”<sup>60</sup>. According to Magdalena Dziadek, the *Little Symphony* is “based on twelve-tone sound material precisely structured according to a principle called by the composer «selective dodecaphony»”<sup>61</sup>. The score, considered extremely difficult by performers, was unlucky in concert performances, which, in the opinion of critics, were unable to fully convey its attributes, multiplicity and beauty. In *D.P.'s Five Ghoulish Dreams* for alto saxophone solo (1985), written four years later, the composer combined classical virtuosity with extended techniques, multiphonics and with intensified dynamics, again exploring the performance possibilities of another instrument.

Witold Szalonek's music, although appreciated by a part of the composer's community who perceived in it, for example, precision and discipline of form, was very rarely understood by performers. The extreme exploitation – not only in the layer of playing technique, metrorhythmic complications or dynamic variety, which required a good condition – constituted a barrier for many interpreters, and consequently affected the number of performances and relations with the composer.

### **In search of a synthesis**

*Inside?-Outside?* for bass clarinet and string quartet (1987) is a composition combining the ‘substance’ of the earlier *I+I+I+I* with the technical and sonoristic possibilities of the bass

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<sup>60</sup> As cit. in: L.M. Moll, *op. cit.* p. 107.

<sup>61</sup> As cit. in: *ibidem*, p. 109.

clarinet, enriched with folk and jazz material<sup>62</sup>. The precisely notated score moves towards a synthesis of compositional explorations – tradition and modernity – both in the manner of notation and the playing techniques employed. Premiered at Viitasaari and later at the International Festival of Contemporary Music “Warsaw Autumn” by Harry Sparnaay and the Silesian Quartet, it was appreciated by music lovers and critics.

Another expression of the synthesis of creative experience is *Toccata e corale Bolesław Woytowicz in memoriam per organo*, dedicated to Woytowicz (and in a version for piano), in which the composer again used 'selective dodecaphony', and in the sonoristic layer – references to church bells<sup>63</sup>. It was during this time that the concept for *Symphony of Rituals*, completed in 1999, was born.

### The 1990s

The compositions of the 1990s, as a résumé of many years' experience, are, on the one hand, retrospectives and references to earlier works, and, on the other, bring an openness to new ideas, both in terms of the themes they take up and the solutions they employ. In *Head of Medusa* for 1-3 block flutes or flutes *in C* (1992), the composer turns to mythology, and in *Diptych* for 16-person mixed choir of soloists (1993), dedicated to surgeon Professor Jerzy Zieliński<sup>64</sup> – towards a sacred understanding of music. The choral works written somewhat later (*Greetings, Tres Hymni*) are reminiscent of compositions from his early years. Another version of *Proporzioni* (from 1967) *IV* for oboe, cello and piano (harp) and *Gerard Hoffnung's Six Unpublished Drawings* for saxophone quartet, full of parody and humour, are created. The result of many years of work, leading to the composer's *opus magnum*, is the aforementioned *Symphony of Rituals* (1991-1996)<sup>65</sup>.

Szalonek's multifaceted activities: pedagogical, organisational and artistic, his personality and passion, and above all his compositional technique, were once again recognised and appreciated, "which resulted in the awarding (in 1990) of an honorary doctorate to the

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<sup>62</sup> The dialogue of the violin imitating birdsong is superimposed on the (initially short) timbral structures, which (gradually lengthened) enter into a sonoristic interaction, aiming for a first climax. The next is built up by a swinging clarinet, counterbalanced by a percussively notated string instrument part. The last makes use of the material of the violin dialogue, which reverberates freely in all the voices and then gradually breaks down into smaller and smaller structures.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 117.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 123.

<sup>65</sup> Designed with extraordinary panache, the nearly 50-minute work was premiered one year after the composer's death at the International Festival of Contemporary Music "Warsaw Autumn" by the Silesian Quartet, arousing widely commented enthusiasm.

Polish composer from the University of Münster"<sup>66</sup>. He also received the Polish Composers' Union Lifetime Achievement Award (1994) and the Kulturpreis Schlesien, awarded by the government of Lower Saxony (1999)<sup>67</sup>.

Despite his deteriorating health, the composer continued to devote himself to creative work. Stimulated by the music of Johann Sebastian Bach, Karol Szymanowski and the Tatra Mountains, and dedicated to Wanda Wiłkomirska, he wrote *Chaconne* for solo violin (1997). The mythological triptych about Medusa continued with *Medusa's Dream of Pegasus* for flute and horn (1997) and *Poseidon and Medusa* for 2 piccolo flutes, alto flute, bass flute and crotales (2001). *Agnessissimo Africanissimo* for marimba was written, dedicated to Agnieszka Pstrokońska-Komar, which is – as Krzysztof Baculewski writes – “a tribute of the great composer to the young soloist, endowed with a truly virtuosic temperament”<sup>68</sup>. Szalonek's work is crowned by two *Hejnaty dla Gdańsku* – the first in the rhythm of a kujawiak, the second a polonaise – and the piano *Jubiläumspanfare für das Künstlerhaus Berliner...[sic!]*. He left several unfinished works and projects.

Witold Szalonek died on 12 October 2001 in Berlin and was buried in the cemetery in Bytom-Łagiewniki. Piotr Baron expresses a sad reflection, writing:

How many similarities there were in this burial to the cinematic funeral of W.A. Mozart. A handful of faithful friends escorted him to his resting place in the pouring rain. There was no guard of honour or state authorities. As humbly as he lived, so humbly was he buried<sup>69</sup>.

## 2.2. Pieces for string quartet in the composer's oeuvre

Many composers consider the string quartet to be the most intimate form of expression, and the process of creating it to be extremely demanding. The words of Zbigniew Bujarski are worth quoting:

The string quartet as a genre is a kind of private letter that a composer sometimes writes to a specific addressee and in a similar way other composers' quartet music is received - like a private sound correspondence between individuals<sup>70</sup>.

A statement by Henryk Mikołaj Górecki during a rehearsal of his *String Quartet No. 3 “Songs are Sung”* in Zakopane, in which he recalled a tragic story he had heard from the

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<sup>66</sup> D. Cichy, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

<sup>67</sup> During the ceremony in Oldenburg, the Silesian Quartet performed Part II of the *Symphony of Rituals*.

<sup>68</sup> As cit.in: L.M. Moll, *op. cit.* p. 167.

<sup>69</sup> As cit.in: M.G. Gerlich *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

<sup>70</sup> E. Kowalska-Zajac, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

highlanders of Podhale during World War II, is deeply engraved in my memory. It became the inspiration for the now famous piece, which is dominated by a mood of solemnity, concentration and almost prayerful exultation. He also said: "I like to read scores by, for example, Beethoven or Szymanowski, then I can hear them and no conductor will decide for me how long a given chord should last, everything lasts as long as it has to"<sup>71</sup>. The intimate line-up fosters a feeling of intimacy and clarity, a purity of musical intention in which there is nothing for show. Perhaps this is why some composers approach the composition of quartets very cautiously. Perhaps they place them outside their field of interest for reasons that position the performance medium of the string quartet as outdated, not easily amenable to sonic modifications, or as a medium that does not respond to the challenges of contemporary musical language.

Despite this, Polish contemporary music abounds in string quartets that are part of the history of the genre, as well as works for or using the string quartet. The quartets of Karol Szymanowski, Witold Lutosławski, Krzysztof Penderecki and Henryk Mikołaj Górecki have gained worldwide recognition. The work of Grażyna Bacewicz with her nine quartets is growing in popularity<sup>72</sup>. Witold Szalonek directed his attention towards chamber music in a broader aspect of his oeuvre, initially preferring ensembles with mixed ensembles, which provided an opportunity to show colour contrasts and nuances. It was not until he was an experienced composer that he concentrated on the sonoristic aspects of string instruments, beginning to explore their technical and timbral possibilities in the late 1950s. The works written at the time were: *Sonata* for cello and piano (1958), *Arabesques* for violin and piano (1964), *Proporzioni I* for flute, viola and harp (1967) and *Improvisations sonoristiques* for clarinet, trombone, cello and piano (1968).

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<sup>71</sup> H.M. Górecki's statement is not a literal quotation, but its sense has been preserved (from meetings with the composer while working on his works).

<sup>72</sup> In 2023, CHANDOS released a CD recorded by the Silesian Quartet with works unpublished during the composer's lifetime: *String Quartet* (youth) from 1929-30 and *String Quartet* from 1965.CHAN20181.

### *1+1+1+1 (1969)*

The first piece for string quartet by Witold Szalonek is dedicated to Mirek Kondracki<sup>73</sup> *1+1+1+1* in 1969, although, according to the composer himself,

it can also be performed for any string instruments (e.g. both solo violins and four violabassi, making nearly 60 performance constellations possible). This is made possible by giving primary formative significance to the sound colour possible from any instrument of the violabassi family, through the use of appropriate articulation of the sounds generated by these instruments<sup>74</sup>.

The premiere of the solo version (Kondracki – violin) took place in 1969 at the Łódź Museum of Art. The quartet version was performed only six years later by the Wilanów Quartet during the 19th International Festival of Contemporary Music "Warsaw Autumn" in 1975. The masterly formed macrophases of tension and relaxation, built from structures of sound extracted in an unconventional way, won the praise of critics and audiences alike, to quote a fragment of Olgierd Pisarenko's statement:

...music written, as it were, against the traditional aesthetics of stringed instruments...exploiting all their technical possibilities in a relatively short piece... The attention is drawn to ever new effects – brutal, aggressive, unpleasant, yet fascinating<sup>75</sup>.

Critics have emphasised the significant dissimilarity of Szalonek's earlier compositions, which extended and exposed mainly the sonorous qualities of wind instruments. For many, the sonoristic sounds presented in *1+1+1+1* are richer, more interestingly framed and presented with greater finesse and invention. The work has become a flagship example of non-standard, different notation: without staves and bars (second sections), with graphic notation of countless symbols that maximally convey the sound possibilities of the string instruments<sup>76</sup>. Contrary to appearances, the composition is extremely precisely notated, leaving a narrow margin of performative freedom, e.g. in minimal tempo deviations. All the sonoristic effects and sounds and the ways in which they are performed are described in detail in the score, taking into account the temporal ordering in one-second sections. It is worth mentioning that the composer

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<sup>73</sup> Mirek Kondracki was a violinist who demonstrated to Szalonek the unconventionally articulated sounds subsequently used in *1+1+1+1*. L.M. Moll, *op. cit.* p. 89.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>75</sup> O. Pisarenko, *Z sal koncertowych [From the concert halls]*, "Ruch Muzyczny", No. 22/1975, p. 5.

<sup>76</sup> M. Dziurawiec, *Wyzsza matematyka, czyli 1+1+1+1 Witolda Szalonka [Higher mathematics, or Witold Szalonek's 1+1+1+1]*, [<https://meakultura.pl/artykul/wyzsza-matematyka-czyli-o-1plus1plus1-witolda-szalonka-867/>], accessed 22.09.23].

consciously limited the catalogue of articulatory possibilities of string instruments and selected only those he considered essential (Szalonek, together with Kondracki, invented, for example, 20 ways of playing *pizzicato*, of which he used only a few)<sup>77</sup>.

The greatest difficulty for the performer is to learn a new articulation – completely different from the traditional one – and to perform it in accordance with the composer's expectations, as well as to read the graphic notation flawlessly during the concert. In order to preserve as much as possible of the Szalonek construction, the Silesian Quartet always performs the piece from the score. *I+I+I+I* has been performed many times by the Silesian Quartet and has also been recorded on CD<sup>78</sup>, inspiring interest and admiration for the composer's imagination, both on the part of performers and audiences. Sonoristic compositions for string instruments (especially those involving percussion effects, e.g. tapping), regardless of their ingenuity, innovative approach or historically documented value, nevertheless carry certain risks, which every performer senses already at first contact.

The performance of *I+I+I+I* is exhausting in terms of fitness and energy; in the long passages, the piece runs in *fff* dynamics, while the rumbling consonances (using the intervals of the major septema and nona) are based on an extensional left-hand arrangement. The unconventional ways of making sounds encourage instrumental jitter and other unpredictable occurrences, such as the possibility of breaking or damaging strings, plucking, scratching instruments and damaging bows. For example, the performance of a *premere* requires a lot of pressure of the bow on the string and a slow leading of the bow, which results in a rasping tone, or numerous (different kinds of) knocks on the sound box, unfortunately leaving scratches on the varnish, etc.

Of course, everything can be done with more care, but such 'belaying' limits the achievement of proper, full expression. The Silesian Quartet has always had in mind a maximum realisation of the composer's intentions, through, among other things, a deep 'entry' into the work, a detailed reading of the score, and emotional involvement. These have been acclaimed by the composers themselves and the listeners, and in many cases are regarded as exemplary. Such extreme exploitation, giving rise to fears and causing reluctance on the part of performers (including those playing wind instruments), was one of the reasons why composers realised quite quickly that expanding the timbral possibilities of instruments was a path that was on the one hand exciting, but on the other limited and subject to exhaustion.

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>78</sup> C&P Polskie Radio Katowice S.A. 2003, PRK CD 58.

Years of fascination with pure sonorism were followed by its modification: notation was gradually purged of murmur-percussion effects in favour of a return to tradition, multi-level language, stylistic pluralism<sup>79</sup>. Despite the retreat from experimental music that began as early as the 1970s, which explores and exploits the timbral possibilities of instruments, it has an undeniable historical significance and justification in the time in which it was created. This was a period when Polish composers were particularly prominent and made valuable contributions to the development of music.

### ***Inside?-Outside? (1987)***

This was also sensed by Szalonek, whose *Inside?-Outside?* for string quartet and bass clarinet, written in 1987<sup>80</sup>, admittedly develops the substance and aura of *I+I+I+I* (written 18 years earlier), but, in the composer's words,

it is simply a rigorous composition, deeply rooted in the Mediterranean tradition, and yet it says a new word against what I have written so far and what I think others have written <sup>81</sup>.

The piece, written for Harry Sparnaay and premiered the following year at the Time of Music Festival in Viitasaari (Finland) with the Silesian Quartet and repeated at the 31st International Festival of Contemporary Music "Warsaw Autumn", was enthusiastically received by critics and audiences alike. Adam Rozlach writes:

It was the first time (...) that I encountered a composition of his that possessed a neo-climate so close to us, all the more fresh because it exploited the aura of our folk music in a very warm harmonic setting. (...) he has turned his back on the various experiments that have been carried out so far and so consistently, in favour of music that is clear, natural and transparent in almost every respect<sup>82</sup>.

Ryszard Gabryś adds:

a work of unmistakable innovation, drawing energy from unusual sounds, yet subject to the strict discipline of form, deeply rooted in the sources of European musical culture, but also correlated subconsciously with the sonic and expressive experiences of jazz and the Orient (...), a work of great breadth and emotion<sup>83</sup>.

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<sup>79</sup> E. Kowalska-Zajac, *op. cit.*, pp. 156-158.

<sup>80</sup> Sources and the composer himself date the work to 1987, but the handwritten score shows the date 1986.

<sup>81</sup> L.M. Moll, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-113.

<sup>82</sup> A. Rozlach, review [in:] 'Dziennik Zachodni', 24-25 September 1988.

<sup>83</sup> R. Gabryś, review [in:] "Katowicki Informator Kulturalny", No. 10/1988, p. 17.

The musical notation itself differs significantly from the graphic notation presented in *I+I+I+I*, being a combination of the traditional approach (with a staff and a specific pitch) with graphic notation representing sonoristic sounds, and the aleatorically arranged relationships between instruments are organised in a second pulse, which is grouped into musical modules with different stylistic content and different sources of inspiration (e.g. folklore, jazz).

Witold Szalonek comments: "The compositional process here can be compared to the traditional technique of producing colour photographs by applying colours to a structurally specified outline"<sup>84</sup>. In terms of performance, *Inside?-Outside?*, which lasts twice as long as *I+I+I+I* (26'30"), is 'more enjoyable' to play and more accessible, though not easy, for audiences.

In 2005 the Silesian Quartet, together with Michał Górczyński, recorded a CD with works by Witold Lutosławski and Witold Szalonek<sup>85</sup>; The album also includes the track *Inside?-Outside?*.

*Inside?-Outside?* is another step towards the *Symphony of Rituals*<sup>86</sup>, and in which many similarities to the present composition can be found. The composer's statements suggest that he worked on both works in parallel or alternately; the first mention of the *Symphony* dates from 1984, when it functioned under the name of *String Quartet No. 2*.

### ***Symphony of Rituals (1991 - 1996)***

It is likely that the success of *I+I+I+I*, performed at the "Warsaw Autumn" (1975) by the Wilanów Quartet, was the first impulse to write another composition presenting the sonic possibilities of a string quartet. As late as the 1980s, Szalonek mentioned that he was writing something great for the 'Wilanowians'. Certainly, the meeting with the excellent ensemble had a huge impact on the composer, who saw it as a performer of the *Symphony*, placing the

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<sup>84</sup> According to: R. Gabryś, *Witold Szalonek. Sylwetka kompozytora*, [*Witold Szalonek. Profile of the composer*], "Katowicki Informator Kulturalny", No. 6/1982, p. 25; as cit. in: L.M. Moll, *op. cit.* pp. 112-113.

<sup>85</sup> Polskie Radio Katowice 2005, PRK CDO69. List of compositions recorded on the album: Witold Lutosławski (1913-1994) - *String Quartet* (1964), *Sacher Variation* for solo cello (1974); Witold Szalonek (1927-2001) - *Inside?-Outside?* (1987) for bass clarinet and string quartet, *Chaconne* (1997) for solo violin.

<sup>86</sup> "I have strongly advanced the Second Quartet for 'Wilanowians'. The ideological and sonic content, with some folkloric allusions, leads me towards the title *Hommage á Szymanowski*". "Ruch Muzyczny", No. 2/1984, p. 2; as cit. in: L.M. Moll, *op. cit.* p. 142.

annotation "for the Wilanowers"<sup>87</sup>. However, it disappeared from the subsequent version and is not in the published score<sup>88</sup>. The process of birthing the concept, shaping, modifying and 'making real' the *Symphony of Rituals* took much longer than the nominal years of composition (1991-1996). This is a natural and fully understandable stage in the creation of a work – gathering information, looking for inspiration, taking up ideas that sometimes wait for years to emerge at a given moment and with full force in the final version. There are experiences that trigger a strong impulse or a sudden need to express oneself, one's creative self. Perhaps this was the case with the *Symphony*, but certain events caused the work to mature over a long period of time, and – against the background of many other compositions – it waited for the right tie for it.

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<sup>87</sup> From the collection of the Archive of Silesian Musical Culture, Library of the Karol Szymanowski Academy of Music in Katowice, 3084/KM.

<sup>88</sup> From 1984 comes the *Adagio* under the working title of *String Quartet No. 2*.



### 3. *Symphony of Rituals* for string quartet by Witold Szalonek

#### 3.1. Circumstances of the composition

From my youthful encounters with Witold Szalonek, mainly in the second half of the 1980s, emerges the portrait of a man with whom every contact leaves a deep mark.

He was distinguished by his good looks, elegance and refined language, as well as by his erudition and musical sensitivity. He was a kind of 'differently' shaped person, inwardly rich, thoughtful, with a sense of humour and a kindly smile. In an artistic milieu – seemingly full of individualists – an exceptional personality should not come as a surprise, and yet: even against this background, Szalonek remained for me an unmistakable, inspiring figure. I had the impression that what he was saying had a deeper, multi-layered meaning, was important and well-thought-out, especially in the context of the music he created – music that was perceptually difficult, but which he composed with passion, talked about and presented with passion, remaining faithful to it until the end of his creative path.

Szalonek's artistic choices were influenced by many factors, resulting not only from creative reflections, quests, dilemmas and quandaries, but also from conditions, if only cultural ones. One of the most significant of these was the composer's Silesian or – to be more precise – Upper Silesian origins, whose cultural identity was built on the historically complicated co-existence of Silesians, Poles and Germans. Silesian melodies and songs originating from the local tradition often constituted the material for Szalonek's works (e.g. *Inside?-Outside?*), and Silesian folklore was one of the numerous points of reference. As the authors of Szalonek's monograph write,

his path to composition passed gradually through various styles and directions: neo-classicism, folklorism, dodecaphony, however sonorism proved to be the most important (...). Almost throughout his entire creative career, he searched for ever new sonority solutions, difficult to identify, but which served to accumulate energy, creating tensions in the musical content of the piece<sup>89</sup>.

His interest in folklore understood more broadly stemmed from his interest in culture, all its aspects and shades. Szalonek was, as he used to say, a 'consumer of culture' as well as its creator. His stay in Paris with Nadia Boulanger influenced his perception of himself as an artist in constant development:

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<sup>89</sup> M.G. Gerlich *et al*, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

The creator never expresses himself by protesting. (...) He creates from the resources existing in an artist's consciousness, in his intellectual and musical formation, which is the result of the artist's constant evolutionary development<sup>90</sup>.

So developing oneself – in a creative context – required expanding one's knowledge, interests or areas of research. Szalonek learned about the culture of the Middle and Far East, Australia, but also of primitive peoples with their traditions, rites and rituals. The power of rituals, as is well known, was strongly linked to magic and to faith, and thus to the corporeal and the spiritual, the *profanum* and the *sacrum*. Rites of passage defined, positioned the individual in ethnic or social group membership, determined their maturity and marked their position, which Arnold van Gennep explains as follows:

Whatever the complication of this pattern, from birth to death, it is most often in the shape of a straight line. However, for some peoples (...) it becomes a circle. Each individual goes through an endless cycle of rites of passage – from life to death and from death to life. (...) The cyclical form of the schema has even acquired philosophical and ethical significance in Buddhism, and for Friedrich Nietzsche it became the basis of the theory of eternal return. For some peoples, a series of human transitions is linked to cosmic transitions, the movement of the planets, the phases of the moon. Here we find the great idea that links the stages of human life with the life of nature, and, going even further, with the eternal rhythm of the universe<sup>91</sup>.

It seems that in the last period of his life and work, the composer turned his interests towards mythology, rituals, as can be seen not only in his work on the *Symphony of Rituals* in 1991-1996, but also in the piece *Poseidon* and *Medusa* for two piccolo flutes, alto flute, bass flute and crotales (antique/pompeian plates), written in 2001, the year of Szalonek's death. The composer annotated the piece with the following commentary:

Medusa and one of her sisters – say Euryale – fly to Poseidon, who is asleep in a seaside cave, waking him up, teasing him, mocking his impotent anger. As flying creatures, they are unreachable to him. After a fruitless chase, Medusa, captivated by Poseidon's power and masculine beauty, seeks to placate and seduce him. Poseidon, enraptured by her charm and beauty, succumbs, succumbs to the charm of the dance and intones his love song. The mutual courtship becomes more and more intense, culminating in an act of love, after which Poseidon, exhausted, falls asleep in Medusa's embrace. The latter, intoxicated with love, cannot part with him for long. Urged on by Euryale, she flies away to her secret abode. Happily carrying Pegasus, the fruit of their love, she is unaware of the cruel fate that the gods are about to inflict on her to avenge her seduction of Poseidon.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 26.

<sup>91</sup> A. van Gennep, *Obrzędy przejścia. Systematyczne studium ceremonii* [*Rites of passage. A systematic study of ceremonies*], transl. B. White, pub. Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 2006, p. 190.

<sup>92</sup> W. Szalonek, commentary [in:] 44. *Międzynarodowy Festiwal Muzyki Współczesnej „Warszawska Jesień”*. Warszawa, 21-29 września 2001, [44th International Festival of Contemporary Music "Warsaw Autumn". Warsaw, 21-29 September 2001, ed. B. Bolesławska et al, pub. International Contemporary Music Festival "Warsaw Autumn", Warsaw 2001, pp. 137-138.

Szalonek's path to the composition of *Symphony of Rituals* is rather puzzling. It resulted – naturally enough – from pondering and creative explorations, from the need to broaden his horizons and develop his composing technique, and was thus the result of the many experiences Szalonek had gained as a composer and as a person. The process of creating the work itself, however, took an exceptionally long time. Movement II of the work – probably immediately planned as a link in a larger form – dates from 1984, and the whole was not completed until 1996. Perhaps, as I mentioned earlier, the first impulse for the composition was the “Warsaw Autumn” performance of *I+I+I+I* by the Wilanów Quartet (in 1975), bringing the idea of composing another quartet for the ensemble.

In the meantime, other compositions were written, such as *Proporzioni III* (1977), *Piernikiana* (1977), *Little Symphony B-A-C-H* (1979/81), *D.P.'s Five Ghoulish Dreams* (1985), or *Inside?-Outside?* (1987), *Medusa's Head*<sup>93</sup> (1991) and others. They bring a slightly different aesthetic, as Carl Humphries noted:

The childlike playfulness that illuminated his earlier works is overlaid with nightmarish anguish. In the compositions of the 1980s (...) the confluence of extremes in the form of intensely dense structures and minimalist emptiness creates a surreal impression of renunciation of security and settling into an ordinary existence<sup>94</sup>.

In her introduction to the score, Lilianna Moll-Gerlich points out the similarity of *Symphony of Rituals* (especially its third movement) with Igor Stravinsky's ballet *The Rite of Spring*. Images from the life of ancient Ruthenia<sup>95</sup>.

Certain parallels can be seen in the compositional means used, the rhythmic arrangements (especially irregular, polyrhythmic and polymetric), in the energy, vitality and aura of mystery that emerge from the work, or in the aspect of a certain ritualisation; formally, however, *Symphony of Rituals* is closer to the three-movement *Symphony of Psalms*. This is a period in which, according to Magdalena Dziadek,

works are created that pursue the tactic of «returning to the roots», inspired by the thoughts of Claude Lévi-Strauss, dealing with the issues of the archetype, the symbol, the imagination as tools and planes of cultural communication<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> The interest in mythology continues even later in the works: *Medusa's Dream of Pegasus* (1997), *Poseidon and Medusa* (2001).

<sup>94</sup> C. Humphries, commentary on the programme of the 1999 Festival of Contemporary Music “Warsaw Autumn”, p. 59; as cit. in: L.M. Moll, *op. cit.* p. 111.

<sup>95</sup> W. Szalonek, *Symphony of Rituals*, score, pub. PWM, 12,166, Krakow 2021.

<sup>96</sup> As cit. in: L.M. Moll, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

Szalonek, in turn, points out: "The ideological and sonic content, with some folkloric allusions, leads me towards the title *Hommage à Szymanowski*"<sup>97</sup>. Thus, the composition of the *Symphony* closely resonates with the composer's interests and reflections, initially situated in the 1980s, which in the process of evolution of his work take shape as we know them. The principle of contrast is part of the connotations of the quartet and the symphony that Maria Piotrowska writes about:

the drama of the first movement (...) was tempered by the lyrical, muted resting point of the slow second movement; the final movement brought movement, liveliness, dynamism – no longer conflictual, no longer dramatic, but only a liberating element of spontaneous play<sup>98</sup>.

Symphonic momentum, elaborate form, architectonics and texture are further clues to the definition of the genre, as in Witold Lutosławski's *String Quartet* or Henryk Mikołaj Górecki's *String Quartet No. 3*. The evolution of Szalonek's music was also inspired by changes and trends, contemporary directions, but for the most part, although written in the spirit of the avant-garde or experimental, it was firmly rooted in tradition, including that of the past.

From Bach, Szalonek drew the logic of construction, the pulse, the importance of each note, but also the perception of music as a spiritual experience. From Debussy and Szymanowski – the discovery of timbral possibilities, their impact, thus building tension and musical relaxation. From Chopin – a search for the true soul of the instrument. Like Arvo Pärt, he was interested in the sound of bells, the layering of sounds and their resonance. In Stravinsky he found a combination of magic, rituals and revolutionary solutions in the metrorhythmic layer. In Bartók, he was inspired by folklore, expanding the articulatory and timbral possibilities of instruments (e.g. Bartók *pizzicato*, *glissando* with trill, *glissando pizzicato*, playing in high position on a single string).

As a consumer of culture, a connoisseur of it and a creator of it, this broad-minded man certainly found much inspiration in it. Like every creator, he also experienced doubts, dilemmas, periods of creative impotence and powerlessness. He left behind many interesting and valuable works that made him one of the leading representatives of sonorism. However, in the eyes of many critics, but also in my opinion, the *Symphony of Rituals* is his *opus magnum*, a work that sums up his creative path, a work to which Szalonek consistently strove.

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<sup>97</sup> As cit. in: *ibid*, p. 142.

<sup>98</sup> M. Piotrowska, *Paradygmat europejskiej muzyki klasycznej*, [*Paradigm of European classical music*], as cit. in: E. Wójtowicz, *Oblicza kwartetu smyczkowego w twórczości kompozytorów krakowskich* [*Images of the string quartet in the works of Cracovian composers*], pub. The Academy of Music in Krakow, Krakow 2021, pp. 53-54.

## 3.2. Analytical and interpretative notes

### Form and dramaturgy

The *Symphony of Rituals* – in macro-formal terms – is structured in three movements, the first of which is the longest (lasting ca. 22')<sup>99</sup>, and at the same time the most complex and internally diverse. The second (ca.11') and third (ca.12') movements are internally more homogeneous. Although there is no suggestion of *attacca* in the score, and even a general pause (a moment of respite) is introduced between movements I and II, the smooth transition from one movement to the next is important for the work's drama. The shaping of the drama takes place in different ways: in movement I mainly through differentiated textures and metrorhythms, in II through nuanced dynamics, and in III through increasing pulsation, leading to an almost trance-like rapture.

### Ritualisation of form

An interesting perspective seems to be that of treating the *Symphony* as a performance, theatre, or – as indicated in the title – rituals, in which the playing musicians become the 'actors' – by means of sounds, gestures and movements they perform a kind of theatricalisation of the musical work. The 'rituals of tuning and practising' that begin the piece – so common and important for the performers, but usually inaccessible, uncovered for the listeners – become subjective in the form of the composition. The accompanying 'ritual of presentation' of musical thought co-creates a complete vision of creation and interpretation as a path that every musician must follow. The final 'dance ritual', although without stage choreography, takes place in the listener's imagination, completing the form.

The *Symphony* is full of analogies to human fate and the emotions and states associated with it: lyricism, sadness, nostalgia, reverie, but also boisterous fun, joy. The abrupt breaking of the dance, which reaches its apogee in its development, has extremely dramatic overtones. The *ricochets* vibrating across the strings in delicate *piano* introduce uncertainty and doubt, perhaps bringing an awareness of inevitable death. Certainly the parallels of a philosophical nature are deeper and concern the journey of every human being: its meaning and purpose.

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<sup>99</sup> Due to the numerous *rubato* sections, the performance time is different each time.

BLOCKS/ BARS	A	A	B 5-19	20-29	29-77			<i>Ben in misura 77</i>
					29- 33	33-63	63-77	
<b>PASES</b>	Ritual <b>tuning</b>	Ritual <b>practice</b>	Ritual <b>interpretation of musical ideas</b>	team-bonding process	climax			end
<b>COMPOSITION AL TERMS</b> (expressive; agogic)	<i>Improvvisando</i>	<i>Tempo rubato, ♩ = ca 56</i>	<i>Con scioltezza</i>	<i>Accentato</i>	<i>Senza misura meno mosso Tempo rubato, Agitatissimo, Accentato sempre, cantabile hesitating</i>			<i>Ben in misura</i>
<b>DRAMATURGY</b>	<i>introduc-tio</i>  tuning of instruments improvisation	<i>anticipatio</i>  setting up the action anticipation of the thoughts  <i>ad libitum</i>	<i>gradatio</i>  progressive ordering (pulse) and dynamic and conceptual	<i>gradatio</i>  development, accumulation of measures, material complications (rhythmic, dynamic, articulatory)	<i>culminatio</i>  relaxation of rhythmic discipline, reversal of dynamics  change in character  gradual build-up of climaxes			<i>conclusio coda</i>  abrupt reversal of dynamics to pp, calm pulse moves to short coda  <i>pizzicato</i>

Table 1. Synthetic treatment of Part I of Witold Szalonek's *Symphony of Rituals*.

## Time organisation

The organisation of musical time is presented using both traditional notation (e.g. metre, bar lines) and non-traditional notation (dashed lines, second sections, pause markings, lack of metre and bars). There are sections in which the composer leaves complete freedom to the performers (e.g. movement I, A, *improvvisando*), but also passages that are strictly defined (metrically, rhythmically or temporally).

The use of a variety of rhythmic values, a wealth of metrical changes (successive polymetry), as well as numerous agogic and expressive expressions make time in the piece flow freely, as if independent of regulation.

The time parameter is notated in four ways:

1. *Senza misura* – sections devoid of metre (and thus bar dashes).

The organisation of time, using traditional rhythmic groupings, is either 'locked' into a particular interval (4'-6' Part I, Block A) or refers to a particular tempo (Part I, nos. 63-77). Together with the suggested *tempo rubato*, it brings a sense of rhythmic freedom, yet somehow limited in time. The composer-defined pitches, distributed in time in an arbitrary, individual way and producing a different sonic result each time, are linked to the idea of aleatoricism.

2 The dashed vertical line + notes connected by a figure-eight bar refer respectively to: time measured in seconds (*circa*) and the duration of a given sound (approximately); Part I, nos. 29-33.

In our interpretation, we have adopted the premise of starting successive blocks according to notation (each block initiates *violino I*) with the order of the entrances of the other instruments to continue with a slight *rubato*. This approach gives a little more performative freedom without the need to follow the voices exactly, which seems to be in keeping with the composer's intention.

3. Dashed vertical line + 'classical' rhythmic values; the section between the dashed lines marks the course of the notes over the space of one second (approximately), unless metre is given. Classical values determine the appropriate time proportions between notes.

4. Continuous vertical dash; as a traditional notation of the organisation of time with a given metre in which full syncopation applies.

Parametr czasu notowany jest na cztery sposoby, w zależności od funkcji, jaką czas pełni wobec danego systemu organizacji materii dźwiękowej w formę wypowiedzi muzycznej, od zapisu aleatorycznego po „klasyczny” (izorytmiczny): • The parameter of time is notated in four ways, depending on the function which it discharges in relation to the given system of organising the sound material into a form of musical utterance, from aleatory to 'classical' (isorhythmic) notation:

1) *senza misura* – wartości rytmiczne notowane są zapisem klasycznym z podaniem pulsu w M.M. Znaki chromatyczne dotyczą tylko nut, które bezpośrednio poprzedzają. Np. cz. I, blok A, sekcje I-IV. • *senza misura* – rhythmic values are notated in the classical way, with a pulse given in MM. Accidentals apply only to the notes which they immediately precede. E.g. movt I, block A, sections I-IV.

2)  przerywana kreska pionowa + nuty połączone belką ósemkową – kreska pionowa wyznacza czas mierzony w sekundach (circa), a linia pozioma wskazuje w przybliżeniu na czas trwania danego dźwięku. Znaki chromatyczne dotyczą tylko nut, które bezpośrednio poprzedzają. Np. cz. I, nr 29. • a broken vertical line + notes joined with a single beam – the vertical line denotes time measured in seconds (approx.), and the horizontal line indicates the approximate duration of the given note. Accidentals apply only to the notes which they immediately precede. E.g. movt I, no. 29.

3) przerywana kreska pionowa + „klasyczne” wartości rytmiczne – zapis dopuszcza asynchron w „pionie” w grze zespołu. Znaki chromatyczne dotyczą tylko nut, które bezpośrednio poprzedzają. Np. cz. I, nr 5. • broken vertical line + 'classical' rhythmic values – this notation allows for 'vertical' asynchrony in the ensemble playing. Accidentals apply only to the notes which they immediately precede. E.g. movt I, no. 5.

4) ciągła kreska pionowa (kreska taktowa) – notacja klasyczna, pełny synchron. Znaki chromatyczne obowiązują w ramach taktu. Np. cz. I, nr 36 • continuous vertical line (bar line) – classical notation, fully synchronised. Accidentals apply throughout the bar. E.g. movt I, no. 36

Ex. 1. Witold Szalonek, *Symphony of Rituals* for string quartet, viola voice, p. 2.  
Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, Krakow 2021, PWM 12 166.

## Metrorhythm

In the extended first movement, sections with a constantly developing structure of metrorhythmic relationships are contrasted with sections that are, as it were, liberated (*tempo rubato*), in which each voice, led *quasi*-freely, performs its part in an independent manner: the arrangements and timbral relationships in successive performances are variable. The gradual complication of rhythmic modules and aleatoric blocks combined with increasing dynamics strongly build tension. The composer frees the music from any metrorhythmic patterns, so that the listener gets an impression of asymmetry and is surprised by events.

Movement II is dominated by a mood of contemplation and nostalgia, built on a melody in metre  $\frac{3}{4}$ , using quarter notes and half notes. The metre is variable, arranged in sections  $\frac{7}{8}$ ,  $\frac{3}{4}$ ,  $\frac{4}{4}$ . Each block is formed by different rhythmic material, which is then modified and transformed. Of interest are the numerous accented and trill-decorated syncopated delays, introducing an association with a slow dance.

Movement III, mostly maintained in a steady dance pulse, undergoes numerous changes of metre and rhythmic complications (e.g. syncopated rhythms) as it progresses, enhancing the impression of a dance that is out of the dancers' control.

In movement I, in the section depicting 'tuning rituals and exercises' (block A), the music shows no discernible pulse, tempo or rhythm, which, although written down, is performed in an independent and free manner. In the 'ritual of interpreting' musical thought (block B), in the sixteenth-note dialogue of *vno II* and *vla*, there is for the first time an impression of greater order. From Nos. 21-29, blocks based on sextols predominate; the pulse is clear, although interrupted by numerous pauses. From Nos. 36 to 63, polymetry with internally varied rhythmic structures predominates. A climax planned in this way requires a shared understanding and perfect timing.

The organisation of time in movement I: the initial moment of tuning is, next to the ending, the most mysterious and discreet section of movement I. Blocks of practice and presentation of musical thought introduce rhythmic structures of increasing density and variety, which lead to a climax with numerous metre changes that heighten the impression of chaos and unease. Only the ending with a coda, arranged from triplet structures, brings the desired calming.

FORM	Part I		Part II	Część III
	A	nr 64		
AGOGICA	<i>Rubato</i>  ♩ = 56	<i>senza misura;</i> <i>Meno mosso</i> <i>Rubato</i>  ♩ = 66-72	variable/differentiated  ♩ = 44-72 (cf. table no. 3)	constant/rhythmic impression <i>accelerando</i>  ♩ = 72

Table 2: Agogics in Witold Szalonek's *Symphony of Rituals* .

The organisation of time in movement II – its natural, free flow – contributes to the construction of an utterance from which a mood of contemplation, reverie, prayer, concentration, tranquillity emerges. The moments of acceleration that appear, momentarily introducing anxiety, eventually calm down, fade away, enhancing the impression of a mystical state.

Movement III: in the opening passage there is a presentation of the instruments, which successively enter in equal sections. The presentation of all voices is followed by instrumental ‘banter’ or dialogue, supplemented or punctuated by eighth-note structures that eventually form the melodic-rhythmic basis of the ritual dance. From No. 28 onwards, numerous metre changes and syncopated entrances complicate the narrative until the very end.

Part II										
SECTION	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
AGOGIC AND EXPRESSIVE TERMS	<i>semplice meno mosso</i>	<i>poco deciso</i>	<i>misterioso</i>	<i>avivando</i>	<i>semplice</i>	<i>meno mosso</i>	<i>deciso; accel.</i>	<i>lentissimo</i>		<i>accel.</i>
♩ =	54-58	44-88	40		54-58	44-48	60; 72	44		62

Part II									
SECTION	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
AGOGIC AND EXPRESSIVE TERMS		<i>rit.</i>	<i>a tempo; rit.; a tempo</i>	<i>deciso</i>	<i>deciso</i>	<i>deciso sempre</i>			<i>ritardando</i>
♩ =	59;	54		72; 54	72; 54	66;	40-48		

Table 3. Agogics and expression in Part II of Witold Szalonek's *Symphony of Ritual*.

<b>SECTION</b>	B no. 5-19 major (general) pause	19, 20 after general pause to 29	36-63	77 till end of Part I
<b>METRUM/PULSE</b>	second pulse	second pulse	variable metre	$\frac{4}{4}$
<b>vno I</b>	longer values, triplets, eighth fifths, sixteenths, sextuplets  impression of free speech	triplets, sixteenths, sixteenths, punctuated by numerous pauses	eighths, triplets, sixteenths, thirty-two  impression of falling sound cascades	triplets that move seamlessly between instruments
<b>vno II</b>	sixteenths	triplets, sixteenths, sextuplets, punctuated by numerous pauses	eighths, triplets, sixteenths, sixteenths, thirty-two  impression of falling sound cascades	triplets that move seamlessly between instruments
<b>vla</b>	sixteenths	triplets, sixteenths, sextuplets, punctuated by numerous pauses	eighths, triplets, sixteenths, sixteenths, thirty-two,  impression of falling sound cascades	triplets that move seamlessly between instruments
<b>vc</b>	eighths, triplets, sixteenths, punctuated rhythm, sixteenths, quintuplets	triplets, sixteenths, sextuplets, punctuated by numerous pauses	eighths, triplets, sixteenths, sixteenths, thirty-two  impression of falling sound cascades	triplets that move seamlessly between instruments

Table 4. Metrorhythmics in Part 1 of Witold Szalonek's *Symphony of Rituals*.

<b>SECTION</b>	1 <i>semplice</i>	2 <i>meno mosso</i>	3 <i>poco deciso</i>	4 <i>misterioso, avvivando, poco rit.</i>	5 <i>semplice</i>	6 <i>meno mosso</i>	7 <i>deciso</i>	8	9	10
<b>METRUM</b>	3 4	7 8	3 4	4 4	3 4	7 8	3 4	4 4	3 4	4 4

<b>SECTION</b>	11	12	13 <i>deciso</i>	14	15 <i>deciso</i>	16	17 <i>deciso sempre</i>	18	19
<b>METRUM</b>	3 4	7 8	3 4	7 8	3 4	7 8	3 4	7 8	4 4

Table 5. Metre in Part II of Witold Szalonek's *Symphony of Rituals*.

### Dynamics and articulation. Colour and timbre

In movement I, the predominant dynamic is *ff*, *tutta forza* and even *ffff agitatissimo*. Occurring exceptionally, sections of piano or *mf* quickly return to the main dynamic. The only longer passage to bring a dynamic softening (apart from the 'tuning and practice rituals') is No 77: *pp sul ponticello*.

When it comes to articulation, *accentato* dominates (with the exception of the aleatorically shaped *tempo rubato* sections), which – depending on the rhythmic values – is realised with varied *spiccato*. The *détaché* sixteenths from the beginning of the piece (still played in low dynamics) should be slightly separated, to be followed – with the appearance of double notes and a *crescendo sempre* (Nos. 13-19) – by differentiated *marcato* playing. As a rule, the composer does not specify articulations (e.g. sixteenths, sextols, eighths); sometimes he introduces character markings (e.g. *accentato*, *dolce*), leaving the decision to the performers. The key to the correct choice of articulation in such a situation becomes the music itself – its inner perception, feeling and impact.

The following also appear: playing *legato*, *pizzicato* and articulatory-sonoristic specifications, such as *pizzicato alla chitarra*, *col legno*, *martellato*, *trillo di capra*, *vibrato moltissimo e vivacissimo*, the circular movement of the bow along the string (*tasto-ponticello*), wave-like *decrescendo* and *ponticello*. The thickening of rhythmic values, the widening of intervals, the increase of inter-note complications with the (simultaneously required) ensemble

precision of playing, clarity of articulation and the maintenance of constant concentration are the supreme test for each musician and for the entire ensemble.

Movement 2 – at its most complex and refined in terms of dynamics – is mostly maintained in piano tones with subtly shaped nuances. Larger *ff-p/ff-mp* contrasts (built up in Nos. 11 and 14), combined with acceleration and deceleration of the tempo, introduce a sense of anxiety and tension, only to gradually die down in the later course (from No. 17 onwards). Hints to help form the appropriate expression are terms such as *semplice, poco deciso, deciso sempre, misterioso, avvivando, dolce, distinto, dolcissimo, en dehors*, tinged with glissandi *sul ponticello*.

Movement III, initially based on dynamics in *pp/mp* tones, is coloured by changes *ponticello – ordinario – tasto*. The dance pulse is not yet fully marked, but perceptible. From No. 15, the ensemble play of colours in *pp* continues, presenting successive instruments after increasingly shorter sections until No. 18, from where a *crescendo poco a poco sino al ff* begins and continues to 23-24, where it reaches a climax. After no. 24 *subito pp, vla* against *vc* introduces a *quasi-folk* melodicism, and the inclusion of *vno I, vno II* and the dialogues steadily intensify the dynamics. From here on, expressive articulation, emphasising the character of the dance structures and the colour changes *sul ponticello, col legno* combined with glissandos and accents, becomes a key element in bringing out the colour of this movement.

In No. 35, against a quintessential background of the other instruments, *vc* begins the fugue theme *ff*. This is successively joined by *vla, vno II, vno I f energico*. In Nos. 36-42, the 'Podhale music-making' is already clearly audible – with buzzing fifths, forewords, with chants passing through the successive instruments – exuding passion and joy.

In No. 44, an abrupt reversal to piano begins the build-up to the final climax *tutta forza molto accentato* – an orgiastic dance that is broken off at the solstice (in No. 59). A four-bar general pause introduces the longed-for silence. The jittery fifths are echoed by *piano* thrown *col legno* bow. From this point onwards, everything 'scatters', still trying to organise itself somehow, to entrain itself. In No. 62, the clearly jagged dance structures come *fff* to life for the last time.

The initial tuning of the instruments (*pizzicato, arco*) is a peculiar treatment. Unfamiliar with the score, listeners are unaware that the composition has just begun. Perhaps there is still a nervous search for a convenient position to sit in, some last coughing, whispering, thoughts running through their heads in anticipation of the music... In Witold Lutosławski's *Quartet* there

is a suggestion that the violinist should begin when the audience is not prepared<sup>100</sup>, However, the moment of surprise is short-lived. In Szalonek's *Symphony of Rituals*, depending on the realisation, the audience can be misled for a long time by the tuning. Even the transition to the 'practice ritual' does not yet give the assurance that the actual composition is already underway...

During the 'practice ritual', fragments of individual phrases emerge from the sound patch. Eventually, a stable pulse emerges in B (*vno II, vla*). Dynamically and texturally thickening, the music becomes energetic, sparkles with *pizzicato* colours.

Described in this way, the realisation of the initial passages of the composer's notation defines the concept of timbre in combination with the dynamics, articulation, rhythm and scale of instruments used. Subsequent sections add complex metrorhythmics and harmonics. Kaleidoscopically artful instrumental relationships exploit the fullness of timbral qualities. Tone-enhancing *ricochets*, *col legno*, *pizzicato*, goat trills, dynamic undulations, *ponticello – ordinario – tasto transitions*, *glissandos*, present throughout the piece, played in an expressive manner enrich the shimmering colours.

Colour and tone-colour in *Symphony of Rituals* are all the more important because, for the composer himself, they are the most important aspect of many of his compositions; they are the main 'material' around which Szalonek's musical world is centred. Sonoristic effects add variety to movement I and significantly fill movements II and III, while vertical and horizontal solutions present throughout the work serve to achieve the original colour of the string quartet and the unique colouring of the *Symphony*.

PHASES	tuning ritual	practice ritual	interpretive ritual	ripping process
BLOCKS, NUMBERS	A <sup>101</sup>	A	B From No. 13	20-29
DYNAMICS	As a preliminary act, I suggest moving in the dynamics of <i>p</i>	Shaping phrases arbitrarily with regard to their development	<i>poco a poco crescendo</i>	<i>poco forte, crescendo poco a poco</i>

PHASES	climax		termination	
BLOCKS, NUMBERS	29-33	33-63	63-77	od 77

<sup>100</sup> W. Lutosławski, *String Quartet*, score, pub. PWM, Krakow 1991.

<sup>101</sup> The composer in block A does not define dynamics.

<b>DYNAMICS</b>	<i>mf, crescendo poco a poco</i>	<i>crescendo do 51, od 51 ffff, 57 f, 61 meno mosso, p, 62 tutta forza</i>	<i>vno II mp crescendo f, tempo rubato ff, 76 ffff, diminuendo</i>	<i>pp, po 84 crescendo mf, crescendo, diminuendo</i>
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Table 6. Dynamics in Part 1 of Witold Szalonek's *Symphony of Rituals*.

<b>SECTION</b>	Beginning - meno mosso	1. meno mosso	2. poco deciso	3. misterioso	4. avivando	5. semplice	6.	meno mosso dolce
<b>DYNAMICS</b>	<i>piano, cresc. mp</i>	<i>pp subito</i>	<i>mf, dim. pp</i>	<i>pppp sul pont.</i>	<i>ppp cresc. mp dim.</i>	<i>piano</i>	<i>piano cresc. mp</i>	<i>pp</i>

<b>SECTION</b>	7. deciso	8. tutti lentissimo	przed 11, 11, po 11	13.	14. deciso 16.	17. dolcissimo
<b>DYNAMICS</b>	<i>mf cresc. ff</i>	<i>ppp sul pont. dim.</i>	<i>mf cresc. ff dim. dolcissimo piano</i>	<i>mp cresc. poco forte, mp</i>	<i>ff subito, mp dim. piano f, piano dim. pp, mf</i>	<i>pp cresc. mp dim. pp</i>

Table 7. Dynamics in Movement II of Witold Szalonek's *Symphony of Rituals*.

<b>SECTIONS</b>	1-4	4-6	6-8	8-10	10-15	15-18	18-24
<b>DYNAMICS</b>	<i>vc f dim. mf dim. mp dim. p dim. mp falowe dim. pp, mp dim, pp dim.</i>	<i>vla mf, mp, p, pp vc pp dim.</i>	<i>vc, vla mp falowe dim. pp dim.</i>	<i>mp dim. pp mp dim pp</i>	<i>vno II mf, vc, vla pp dim.</i>	<i>vno I mf, vc, vla, vno II pp dim.</i>	<i>crescendo poco a poco ff</i>

<b>SECTIONS</b>	24-35	35-44	44-59	59 to the end
<b>DYNAMICS</b>	<i>pp, p, mp, p p dim. p cresc. mp, p cresc. mp, mf, mp, cresc. mf, f, mf, poco f, ff,</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>p, mp, mf crescendo poco a poco fff tutta forza</i>	<i>p, fff, pp, fff, pp, fff</i>

Tab. 8. Dynamics in Part III of Witold Szalonek's *Symphony of Rituals*.

### 3.3. A performance-interpretative perspective

#### 3.3.1 The Festival of Contemporary Music “Warsaw Autumn” 2002 – a retrospective of the first performance

By the time I joined the Silesian Quartet, which was October 1985, the ensemble had already existed for seven years and was well established in Poland. I noted its extensive and varied repertoire. Alongside classical and Romantic works, it performed compositions written in the 20th century by Karol Szymanowski, Grażyna Bacewicz, Witold Lutosławski, Krzysztof Penderecki, Henryk Mikołaj Górecki, Krystyna Moszumańska-Nazar, and it was constantly expanding its repertoire to include recent works by Andrzej Krzanowski, Aleksander Lasoń, Eugeniusz Knapik, Paweł Szymański and many others. There is no doubt that since the 1960s Polish music has been gaining worldwide recognition. The numerous contacts established during its promotion – both with authorities in the musical environment and with young composers – developed into close relationships. These, in turn, resulted in cooperation – composers dedicated their works to us, often writing them with our ensemble, our performance line-up, in mind.

During meetings at festivals such as the International Festival of Contemporary Music "Warsaw Autumn", "Poznań Musical Spring", "Musica Polonica Nova", or the International Chamber Music Festival "The Silesian Quartet and its Guests", I listened to conversations, thus exploring, among other things, the secrets of culture, art and contemporary music. Witold Szalonek, whom I had the honour of meeting during my work on *I+I+I+I*, invited us to Berlin to present works by Polish – above all – composers to the local audience. On the occasion of one of his visits, he invited us to his home, where we were able to hear for the first time about the *Symphony of Rituals* project and see carbon copies of sketches. In 1988 we premiered *Inside?-Outside?* with clarinetist Harry Sparnaay at the "Times of Music" festival in Viitasaari, and in 1997 the second movement of *Symphony*<sup>102</sup> at the "20th Karol Szymanowski Music

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<sup>102</sup> We were convinced that this was the world premiere of Part II, especially as Szalonek did not mention any other performance. However, in the Archives of the Library of the Academy of Music in Katowice, there is a poster from a concert of the chamber orchestra "Camerata Impuls" under the direction of Małgorzata Kaniowska, which took

Days" in Zakopane. Some time later we received copies of the complete work, handwritten by the composer. After Witold Szalonek's death (2001), we decided to perform the complete *Symphony of Rituals* during the International Festival of Contemporary Music "Warsaw Autumn" in 2002.

The work on the piece was going arduously – the scale of complications was enormous, not only in the process of individual reading, but also in the ensemble orchestration. Having been in Warsaw a few days earlier (to rehearse the other pieces, played by a larger ensemble), we rehearsed the *Symphony* late into the night, unsure of the result we would achieve at the concert. We had the sense that we were dealing with a piece whose momentum and genre weight was special. Perhaps it was this awareness and the uncertainty of the performance quality that influenced the exceptional concert concentration and final score.

*Symphony of Rituals* was premiered on Tuesday 24 September 2002 at 9pm in Concert Studio S1, one year after the composer's death.

<b>wtorek 24 września</b>		godz. <b>21.00</b>	<b>Studio Koncertowe Polskiego Radi</b>
<b>KONCERT „WARSZAWSKIEJ JESIENI” I POLSKIEGO WYDAWNICTWA MUZYCZNEGO</b>		<b>Witold Szalonek</b> Symfonia rytuałów (1991–96) ** na kwartet smyczkowy	
Piotr Bober gitara		P R Z E R W A	
<b>KWARTET ŚLĄSKI</b> Szymon Krzeszowiec I skrzypce Arkadiusz Kubica II skrzypce Łukasz Syrnicki altówka Piotr Janosik wiolonczela		<b>Bronius Kutavičius</b> Zegary przeszłości I (1977) na gitarę i kwartet smyczkowy	
	<b>KWARTET PERKUSYJNY</b> Wojciech Kowalewski Bogdan Lauks Robert Siwak Monika Szulińska	<b>Annie Gosfield</b> Flying Sparks and Heavy Machinery (2) na kwartet smyczkowy i kwartet perkusyjny	
Łukasz Borowicz dyrygent			

Fig. 2. Programme of the concert of the International Festival of Contemporary Music "Warsaw Autumn"

place at the Upper Silesian Museum in Bytom on 17 December 1994; the programme included: W. Szalonek - *Adagio from Symphony of Rituals* (world premiere).

of 24 September 2002. The world premiere of Witold Szalonek's *Symphony of Rituals*<sup>103</sup>.

The concert programme included:

- Witold Szalonek – *Symphony of Rituals* (1991-1996) for string quartet
- Bronius Kutavičius – *Clocks of the Past* (1977) for guitar and string quartet
- Annie Gosfield – *Flying Sparks and Heavy Machinery* for string quartet and percussion quartet.

Performers:

Silesian Quartet: Szymon Krzeszowiec, Arkadiusz Kubica, Łukasz Szymnicki, Piotr Janosik; Piotr Bober – guitar.

Percussion Quartet: Wojciech Kowalewski, Bogdan Lauks, Robert Siwak, Monika Szulińska.

Łukasz Borowicz – conductor.

The concert was broadcast by Polish Radio<sup>104</sup>, and the performance of the *Symphony* was recorded and released in the CD chronicle of the 45th International Festival of Contemporary Music "Warsaw Autumn" 2002<sup>105</sup> (duration: 44'10").

*The Symphony of Rituals* was received with an ovation by audiences and critics, who awarded the Silesian Quartet the 'Orpheus' prize for outstanding performance. In concert etiquette it is extremely rare (in the Polish reality) to see a standing ovation after the first piece, as it demonstrates an extraordinary appreciation of both composer and performers. Personally, I admit that I was moved not so much by the recognition for us, but precisely for Witold Szalonek, who did not live to see such an applause for his work during his lifetime – a work whose value was already obvious to us at the time. I also felt regret and bitterness that so little time had elapsed for him to be with us at that time....

The work's uniqueness, its greatness – not only in the area of Szalonek's oeuvre, but in the circle of Polish musical literature in general – was emphasised by, among others, Ewa Szczecińska, who reported on the work's premiere in the following words:

This hasn't happened before: the tuning of instruments as an integral part of a piece. So music, before it becomes music, needs time, preparation, tuning, playing instruments. And musicians and listeners

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<sup>103</sup> 45. Międzynarodowy Festiwal Muzyki Współczesnej „Warszawska Jesień”. Warszawa, 20-28 września 2002, [45th International Festival of Contemporary Music "Warsaw Autumn". Warsaw, 20-28 September 2002], ed. B. Bolesławska et al., pub. MFMW „Warszawska Jesień”, Warszawa 2002.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>105</sup> „Warszawska Jesień” 2002, CD No. 3.

are slowly, gradually drawn into the mystery of sounds. These simple and nowadays forgotten principles were recalled by Witold Szalonek in his «Symphony of Rituals» (1991-1996) for string quartet. And a work of art was created. For the rehearsed passages passing into introductory prelude transform over time into musical matter. A grid of elaborate counterpoints which grow in strength, expression, phrases varied in many different ways imperceptibly become great music. The whole is crowned by a fugue. "Symphony of Rituals " is certainly Witold Szalonek's *opus magnum*, but also the *opus magnum* of Polish contemporary music. The music, although initially meandering, does not allow the listener a moment's relaxation; it captivates, absorbs, draws you in. It becomes feverish, swells (becomes a symphony) - then cools down again, faints. One thing is still there: the fullness of expression, the mastery of technique, the power of impact. This is no longer an avant-garde Szalonek, but an artist who achieves fullness, who synthesises<sup>106</sup>.

This can be complemented by the observations of Magdalena Dziadek, who noted that

Szalonek's difficult, focused music was transformed in the interpretation of the Quartet's musicians into a highly expressive sound treatise. It was received by the audience with due seriousness, attesting to an openness to the value of the score, which was not easy and was written in a perverse manner<sup>107</sup>.

There was also no shortage of question marks – reflecting on the attendance success of the festival and the interest of young people, Joanna Grotkowska wrote:

I understand the popularity of Pärt's music, it also seems clear to me that young people are tempted by electronica, and there was a lot of it, but Berger and his difficult, uncompromising, intellectual music? Or Szalonek with his 50-minute, uneasy, grating *Symphony of Rituals*?<sup>108</sup>

References to this performance also appeared later: in the *Tygodnik Powszechny*, Tomasz Cyz, reporting on the 47th "Warsaw Autumn", wrote:

The mastery was felt in five instances. After listening to «Inside?-Outside?» by Witold Szalonek, performed by the Silesian Quartet and Michał Górczyński (bass clarinet), I once again realised that the musical world – not only the Polish one – lost one of its brightest and most coherent systems three years ago. «Symphony of Rituals» two years ago opened up a wonderful, inspiring path, there are certainly more paths, «Inside?-Outside?» is a perfect example<sup>109</sup>.

Certainly two important elements also contributed to the success of *Symphony of Rituals*: place and time. Warsaw's Concert Studio S1 is famous for its excellent acoustics, and the Warsaw audience – made up mostly of young people – for its openness and curiosity towards

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<sup>106</sup> E. Szczecińska, "Warszawska Jesień" 2002 – rzecz o kondycji muzyki w Europie, ["Warsaw Autumn 2002 - the state of music in Europe"], "Ruch Muzyczny", No. 23/2002, pp. 9-10.

<sup>107</sup> M.G. Gerlich *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 146-150.

<sup>108</sup> J. Grotkowska, *Jesienny magnetyzm*, "Ruch Muzyczny", No. 23/2002, p. 11.

<sup>109</sup> T. Cyz, 47. Międzynarodowy Festiwal Muzyki Współczesnej „Warszawska Jesień”, 17-25 września Ciepło/zimno, [47th International Festival of Contemporary Music "Warsaw Autumn", 17-25 September Warm/Cold], "Tygodnik Powszechny", 3 October 2004.

new music. The beginning of the 21st century was probably a declining period of interest in music that was, let's call it, avant-garde (although Szalonek hated the term) or in some sense experimental, which used sonoristic elements to such an extent.

Another record of works by Witold Szalonek<sup>110</sup> – *I+I+I+I* and *Symphony of Rituals* – recorded by us in 2002, was also positively received, as evidenced by the words of Ewa Szczecińska: “This is the pinnacle of Polish music of our time, a musical must-read, especially as both the performance and the recording complement the greatness of the music perfectly”<sup>111</sup>.

Szalonek's music, although difficult and incomprehensible for some, can provide inspiration and a starting point for artistic endeavours for others – as can be seen, for example, in the jazz arrangement of a theme from the third movement of the *Symphony of Rituals*, which can be found on the album<sup>112</sup> of saxophonist Marek Pospieszalski.

### 3.3.2. Performance and interpretation issues

*Symphony of Rituals* is an unprecedented work in the Polish literature for string quartet. Its sheer temporal volume (in our presentations 44-45 minutes) is a performance challenge. However, it is not so much the length of the piece (although it is important) that is the main barrier, but the sum of all the elements, i.e. complexity, formation, accumulation of problems connected with extracting a particular timbre, achieving intonation precision, mastering technical inconveniences, articulatory clarity, dynamic shades, harmonisation of metrorhythmic dependencies. It would seem that the number of performances should bring one closer to greater freedom and perfection, but in fact – and especially after a prolonged break from the work – many of the issues need to be unravelled, rethought and simply practised again.

An important aspect, which poses a further challenge, is interpretation, i.e. the construction of an appropriate narrative and message, holding the audience in suspense from the beginning to the end of the piece and following the changing character and contrasting form of the whole.

Also, the rich yet nuanced catalogue of performance-interpretation markings can bring its own kind of difficulty in proper performance. An ensemble that is unable to perform, convey or construct, for example, dynamics (stretched in Szalonek's score between extreme volumes,

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<sup>110</sup> C&P Polskie Radio Katowice S.A. 2003, PRK CD 58.

<sup>111</sup> E. Szczecińska, review [in:] “Tygodnik Powszechny”, April 2004.

<sup>112</sup> M. Pospieszalski, *Composers of the 20th Century*, Clean Feed, CF585 CD.

from *pppp* to *ffff*), or variable articulation and timbre, will not fully realise the composer's vision.

Furthermore, it should be emphasised that individually each movement is technically challenging – built outside the patterns, in the colloquial term 'not under the fingers', rich in leaps, numerous passages through the strings, double notes, and additionally making extensive use of the scale of the instruments (e.g. *d*<sup>3</sup>, *eis*<sup>3</sup> in the viola in movement I, omitting the *glissando* to the highest note).

1. Timbre – in the *Symphony* it is an almost formative factor. Sonoristic timbres (although present to a lesser extent than in *I+I+I+I* or *Inside?-Outside?*) combined with traditional sounds and an extended dynamic-articulatory palette create unique correlations, building not only the colour but also the drama of the piece.
2. Metrorhythmics – the polymetry that dominates the piece creates a sense of an irregular, non-schematic flow of time. In movement I, section 36-63 alone, Szalonek uses more than 20 different metre markings, introducing nearly 90 changes of metre (almost every bar is in a different metre from the previous one); in the final climax of movement III there are about 60 changes of metre. Inscribed in polymetry, the complex rhythmic groups, separated by numerous pauses, are arranged in 'broken' phrases, interrupted by moments of silence. In this way, the composer achieves an effect of intense agitation, built from seemingly disorderly structures.
3. Articulation – even within a bar or second unit (e.g. in movement I), it is constantly modified (in conjunction with other elements of the work). Groups of sixteenths in *piano* dynamics and thirty-two in *ffff* are filled with a myriad of shades of *détaché*, *spiccato*, *accentato*.
4. Dynamics – the composer uses the full dynamic scale from *pppp* to *ffff* (and *tutta forza molto accentato*), varying the volume either contrastingly or successively, both within short sections and over the course of several bars, e.g. in movement II the final *diminuendo*, led from *mp* to *pp*, is spread over 17 bars (in tempo ♩ = 44-48).
5. Ornamentation – in all movements, following in the footsteps of Baroque performance tendencies (but also frequently encountered in folklore), Szalonek richly embellishes not only phrases of a singing character (e.g. in movement II), but also those of a virtuoso character (e.g. the fugue theme in movement III), or of a folkloric provenance (e.g. movement I, 37-41).
6. An important element of interpretation is to grasp the elements associated with folklore and to convey its specific character.

The viola is the only instrument included in a string quartet in which the size, the menzura, the width of the resonance box, the neck, the distances between the strings, and even the shape, have not been fully unified and standardised and depend to a large extent on the model on which they are based, but also on the violinist's experiments and preferences. There are viols in sizes such as 38-46 cm, while the most popular ones oscillate between 39-42 cm. In general, the larger the instrument, the more carrying and darker its sound. And it is these characteristics – timbre and carrying capacity – that are important criteria when choosing an instrument. The differences between viols, causing each to be played quite differently, consequently affect the range and nature of performance issues. For many years I have been playing contemporary instruments that range from 42.5-43.5 cm and, in terms of so-called comfort, are certainly too large for me, but they compensate for the discomfort with a beautiful and inspiring timbre.

The *Symphony of Rituals*, due to its complexity of texture, composer's choice of sonic relationships, metrorhythmic complications, dynamic amplitude, timbral and articulatory nuance, is an extremely demanding piece on many levels. The playing techniques employed by the composer are used and explored as widely as possible. Witold Szalonek was well aware of the possibilities of the instruments and constantly expanded them, if only in terms of bringing out specific timbres. In some aspects – concerning, for example, the extensional arrangement of the left hand, divergent *glissandi* on double notes – he proposed solutions that bordered on the feasible. Below are a few examples:

1. double-note successions: thirds, augmented fifths, fifths, sixths, major sevenths (see *Fingering and bowing*, example 2, p. 57);
2. articulation of structures based on *accentato* sextols, realised mainly by varied *spiccato* with a lot of leaps across the strings (example 3, p. 58) and rhythmic complications;
3. processions of parallel sextols, making extensive use of the instrument's scale (example 4, p. 59);
4. *accentato sempre* articulation for tritone-based passages and complex metrorhythmics (example 5, p. 60);
5. the realisation of double notes with simultaneous *glissandos* (examples 6 and 7, pp. 61 and 62);
6. the realisation of certain sonoristic timbres (e.g. the circular movement of the bow across the string, or the effect of dying sirens; examples 8 and 9, pp. 63 and 64);

7. rich ornamentation mostly realised on multi-chord passages (e.g. in movement II, example 8, p. 63, last line);
8. bringing out the atmosphere of folklore, chants, rich and variable articulation (example 10, p. 65);
9. folk character, e.g. in the fugue theme (example 11, p. 66);
10. the ability to shape the dynamic scale from murmurs to *ffff*.

Performing a given structure or group of notes at a slow tempo should not cause major difficulties, but combining them with a specific tempo and placing them in a planned continuity and dependence of runs – definitely makes it more difficult.

In addition to issues concerning the realisation of the part of a given instrument, there are wider issues in ensemble playing, related to joint, co-responsible performance. In Szalonek's piece, most often with:

1. Rhythmic precision (e.g. successive joining of instruments after sixteenths, sextols or thirty-second), metrorhythmics and agogics.

A string quartet performs the vast majority of works without a conductor, unless such a wish or suggestion is given by the composer (e.g. Andrzej Kwiecinski, *PIPE(s)*<sup>64</sup> for string quartet and tenor flute)<sup>113</sup>.

This practice is deeply grounded in a shared feeling, breathing, thinking about music that is shaped over many years and which is fundamental to the ensemble's sound as a completely unique performance medium. With such frequent changes of metre, tempo and rhythmic complications and dependencies in co-structuring, achieving unity is an arduous and time-consuming process.

2. The clear shaping of dynamics (e.g. during a long realised *crescendo*), resulting from the texture of the composition.

Until the second half of the 20th century, in keeping with compositional practice at the time, it was relatively easy to distinguish leading *versus* accompanying voices and sections in which all instruments were similarly important. With the introduction of new compositional techniques, the setting of priorities, or the prioritisation of material and statements, became ambiguous and complicated. There are only a few places in the *Symphony* where leading voices can be distinguished. This is particularly true of the second movement, where the main melody, conducted between the various voices, should be clear, and the beginning of the third movement and the fugue theme.

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<sup>113</sup> Performed at the “Festival of First Performances” at NOSPR, 10 March 2023, Silesian Quartet, Maciej Koczur - conductor.

3. The unity of articulation and its legibility (e.g. in the sextols in movement I, in the fugue in movement III).

There are many blocks in the *Symphony* consisting of intricately woven rhythmic structures that run through all the instruments. Achieving similar, consistent and sonically satisfying articulation in the ensemble is the result of a great deal of work and a long process. In Szalonek's piece, in combining its variety with complex metrorhythms, the articulatory aspect becomes a more complex and difficult task to achieve. Without good, common articulation and its legibility, the impression of chaos and messiness prevails.

4. Sonority sound (e.g. in movements II and III).

The timbres produced by the string instruments (e.g. violin and cello) will naturally differ, but the ensemble should aim to unify them, e.g. *sul ponticello* and *sul tasto* have their own tones that depend on the place of performance. Thus, *sul ponticello* played closer to the stand is more wheezing, while *sul tasto* played deep on the neck resembles the timbre of a recorder.

On longer planes, the sonority timbres are built up together, and their quality depends on all performers.

5. The right balance between the instruments, which depends on many factors (e.g. quality of instruments, way of playing). The more commonalities there are in the instrumentalists' playing, the easier it will be to create a space where everything is clear and intelligible. It is often the case that the sounds of the 'middle' instruments are too hidden, which can only be justified when they are performing an accompaniment part. In passages where the parts should be treated equally, one should always control the proportions and strive to even them out. If a musician cannot hear the others, it means that he or she is playing too loudly or someone is playing too quietly. We call this phenomenon the sound centre, located in the middle of the ensemble. The correct proportions are established and corrected at all times through the suggestions of the musicians. The situation is different during recording, during which the sound director can further influence the final shape.

6. With intonation.

Good ensemble intonation is a complex issue, requiring systematic control and practice. Regardless of individual work, it is built up together in rehearsals, checking and analysing each chord and unison playing. The most difficult in this respect in the *Symphony* is movement II, in the dialogues that are conducted. In movements I and III

we find numerous pure intervals: fourths, fifths, duple notes and *unisono* places. For the right results, after thoroughly practising one's own part, it is necessary to correct the intonation together.

The accumulation of all kinds of complications that occur in the interpreted compositions – especially those written in the last century – makes string quartet playing one of the most difficult, but also most interesting challenges facing the musicians. Compositional invention, drawing on tradition but also on modernity, provides the opportunity to discover a person in his broader dimension – not just through a perfunctory conversation or through the world created in social media. We get to know the personality from the inside, from a side that is hidden from the prying eye, but which the artist – through his work – cannot fully hide. It is a fascinating experience, not only in its musical aspect, but also in its psychological one. Importantly, there is no need to identify with a chosen aesthetic (just as we don't have to like the architecture of a place) - the essence here becomes co-presence and co-creation of an image of the world as it is.

### **Fingering and bowing**

Examples of the chosen fingering relate to the most demanding sections, which were discussed earlier. From the perspective of several concert presentations, the solutions used potentially put the least strain on the left hand or have a beneficial effect on clarity of articulation or intonation. In movement III, the second *glissandos* on the double notes are practically unplayable in many places, but they give a specific character and timbre.

In the bowing, I tried to find a compromise between its logic (placement in the time section) and naturalness and articulation.

The image displays a musical score for the viola voice part of Witold Szalonek's *Symphony of Rituals*. The score is written on a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It consists of five lines of music, numbered 14 through 18. Measure 14 begins with a circled number 14 and contains complex rhythmic patterns with numerous accidentals and slurs. Above the staff are various fingering numbers (1, 2, 3, 4) and articulation marks. Measure 15 continues the pattern, featuring a dynamic marking 'v' and a circled number 15. Measure 16 includes a circled number 16 and a 'repetit.' section indicated by a box and a repeat sign. Measure 17 is marked with a circled number 17, the instruction 'simile ad libitum', and a circled number 18. The final measure, 18, ends with a double bar line and a repeat sign. The score is densely annotated with musical symbols, including slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Ex. 2. Witold Szalonek, *Symphony of Rituals* for string quartet, viola voice, Part I, p. 9.  
 Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, Krakow 2021, PWM 12 166.

21 *accentato* *poco f* *cresc. poco a poco*

22 *pizz.* *arco* *pizz. (alla Chit.)*

23 *pizz.* *arco* *pizz. ord.* *arco*

24 *pizz.* *pizz. ord.* *arco*

25 *pizz.* *pizz. ord.* *arco*

Ex. 3. Witold Szalonek, *Symphony of Rituals* for string quartet, viola voice, Part I, p. 10.  
 Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, Krakow 2021, PWM 12 166.

33

34

35

36 ben in tempo misura\*

*ffp* <

\* od tego taktu, we fragmentach metrycznych, znaki chromatyczne obowiązują aż do kreski taktowej, w wątpliwych fragmentach dodano znaki przypomnieliowe • from this bar onwards, in the metrical segments, accidentals apply up to the bar line; reminder accidentals are added wherever it is deemed appropriate

Ex. 4. Witold Szalonek, *Symphony of Rituals* for string quartet, viola voice, Part I, p. 12.  
Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, Krakow 2021, PWM 12 166.

Musical score for viola voice, Part I, measures 51-59. The score is written on a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. It features various rhythmic patterns, including sixteenth and thirty-second notes, and rests. Performance instructions include "accentato sempre", "fff", "martellato", and "f". Fingerings and bowings are indicated with numbers and "v" marks. Measure numbers 51 through 59 are circled.

Ex. 5. Witold Szalonek, *Symphony of Rituals* for string quartet, viola voice, Part I, p. 15.  
 Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, Krakow 2021, PWM 12 166.

44

*p subito*

45

46

*mp*

Ex. 6. Witold Szalonek, *Symphony of Rituals* for string quartet, viola voice, Part III, p. 23.  
 Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, Krakow 2021, PWM 12 166.

5/4 V

6/4 0 2 0 2 2 3 1 1 4 3 4 2 3 3

crescendo poco a poco sino al *fff*

6/4 Π 1 2 4 2 0 6/4 Π 1 2

4/4 3 2 6/4 Π 3 1 2 3 1 3 1 0 1 3 2

V 1 4 3 3 49 5/4 1 2 1 3 2 1 3 6/4 1 3 5 2

5/4 1 3 6/4 3 4/4 1 3 5/4 2 1 1 3 4 3

50 6/4 4 3 3 1 3 4 2 2 1 3 0 2 1 0 4/4 V 3 0 1 3 0

2 1 1 3 0 2 1 11/8 3 2 1 3 51 4/4 V 1 3 0 2 1 3

0 1 3 0 11/8 0 2 4/4 1 3 0 1 3 2 0 1 3

Ex. 7. Witold Szalonek, *Symphony of Rituals* for string quartet, viola voice, Part III, p. 24.  
 Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, Krakow 2021, PWM 12 166.

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

♩ = 44  
s.p., saltato  
10  
*ppp subito*

♩ = 52 e accelerando  
mf

♩ = ca 69  
ff

♩ = ca 54  
mp  
poco rit. a tempo rit. poco f

deciso ♩ = ca 72  
ff subito

Ex. 8. Witold Szalonek, *Symphony of Rituals* for string quartet, viola voice, Part II, p. 18.  
Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, Krakow 2021, PWM 12 166.

69 → V  $\text{rr}$  V

70 → V 0 4 0 1 V V

71 → 1 3 0 1 0 3 4

72 → 3 3 1 0 3 1 4 3 1 2 1 4

73 → 1 4 1 3 4 1 3 4 3 4

74 → 3 1 3 2 4 2 3 V 3 1 2 4

75 → 1 3 0 2 3 4 3 0 3 0 0 4 2

76 → 4 1 tutti ad libitum gliss. *fff*

77 ben in misura s.p. 3 3 *sfz pp*

Ex. 9. Witold Szalonek, *Symphony of Rituals* for string quartet, viola voice, Part II, p. 17.  
 Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, Krakow 2021, PWM 12 166.

Musical score for viola voice, Part I, measures 37-43. The score is written in 13/8 time and features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth-note runs. It includes various performance instructions such as *ff*, *pizz.*, *arco*, *c.l.*, and *martellato*. Measure numbers 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, and 43 are circled. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#).

Ex. 10. Witold Szalonek, *Symphony of Rituals* for string quartet, viola voice, Part I, p. 13.  
 Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, Krakow 2021, PWM 12 166.

The image displays a musical score for the viola voice part of Witold Szalonek's *Symphony of Rituals*. The section is titled "FUGA energico" and spans measures 36 to 42. The score is written on a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The time signature changes from 3/4 to 4/4 and back to 3/4. The piece begins with a forte (*ff*) dynamic and a fermata over measure 36. Measure 37 contains an 8-measure rest. Measure 38 starts with a fortissimo (*f*) dynamic and a fermata. The score includes various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. Fingerings and bowings are indicated by numbers (0-4) and 'v' marks. Measure 39 features a complex rhythmic pattern with fingerings 4, 1, 2, 3, v, v, 3, 1, 4, 0, 2, 1, 4, and a fermata. Measure 40 includes fingerings 3, 3, 4, 4, 4, 3, and a fermata. Measure 41 has a circled measure number (41) and a fermata. Measure 42 has a circled measure number (42) and a fermata. The score concludes with a final note in measure 42.

Ex. 11. Witold Szalonek, *Symphony of Rituals* for string quartet, viola voice, Part III, p. 22.  
 Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, Krakow 2021, PWM 12 166.

## Reading musical notation – definite and indefinite places in the score

Twentieth-century music in the western part of Europe had a developmental rhythm, a sequence. New concepts were born in opposition to recently established ones or were their natural consequence. Dodecaphony, serialism, aleatorism and sonorist techniques usually appeared either in a situation of exhaustion or, on the contrary, of excessive accumulation and complexity of the material contained in a given compositional idea. The situation was different in Poland, where, after the Second World War (in the years 1949-1956), music adhering to the Socialist Realist doctrine dominated.

With the development of 20th-century music and the emergence of avant-garde concepts, there arose the need to introduce adequate (symbolic, graphic) notation into the score to reflect authorial ideas. The creation of individual notation systems or modifications of the classical system were the domain of composers who used in their creative process, among others, sonoristic means (Krzysztof Penderecki, Henryk Mikołaj Górecki, Zbigniew Bargielski, Marek Stachowski), aleatorism (Witold Lutosławski), serialism and microtonalism (Bogusław Schaeffer), or unism (Zygmunt Krauze)<sup>114</sup>.

Since the 1960s, Witold Szalonek has departed from classical musical notation in many of his works in favour of a notation he invented himself. Alongside the traditional approach, the composer introduces various symbols and signs in the *Symphony* to illustrate specific sonoristic effects (e.g. wave *decrescendo*, circular bow movement) or aleatoric solutions (frames, blocks, arrows), but also, for example, for individual time organisation (special pauses, second sections). Their legend – graphics and explanations – can be found on the first pages of the score. The performance of the precisely described and preferred by Szalonek unconventional sounds, associated with sonoristic effects, depends in many cases on the sensitivity, creativity, musical taste of the performer and the interpretative assumptions adopted. The assimilation of musical concepts and notation requires the performer to be open-minded and willing to broaden his musical horizons.

In the process of musical education, the performance problems of contemporary music are analysed, practised and – in a sense – tamed, which certainly promotes its understanding or deepening of musical awareness. Contact with the composer, his explanations and suggestions,

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<sup>114</sup> E. Kowalska-Zajac, *op. cit.*, pp. 105, 115, 124, 129.

greatly accelerate the process of working on the piece and allow one to focus on the substance, and thus on important matters, not always properly grasped in the first contact with the work.

The Silesian Quartet's interpretation of the *Symphony of Rituals* resulted from the experience the ensemble had gained preparing and performing his earlier works under the composer's guidance: *I+I+I+I*, *Inside?-Outside?* and the second movement of the aforementioned *Symphony* (performed several years earlier). Particularly while working on the first composition, Szalonek clarified all the markings, discussed and explained the colour effects he wanted to achieve.

For example: at the beginning of the piece, *vno II* he runs the fingers of his left hand over the strings by plucking them (*strappare*), achieving the colour of a rustle. The composer wanted – as far as possible – the murmur to be continuous, uninterrupted, imitating the noise of a mountain stream. *Fregare*, on the other hand, is the gentle rubbing of a finger on the record of an instrument to produce various squeaking, scraping and crackling effects of varying dynamics. What is important here is that they are musically woven into a sequence of ongoing sounds, dialoguing, conducting a convincing narrative.

The premiere in 2002 was based on the composer's handwritten material, and in this form it existed until it was published by Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne in 2021.

Szalonek's beautiful handwritten notations were associated with doubts, which I tried to clarify during the editing of the viola part. The printed version in the extensive passages is more readable, in the viola voice, however, it needs rearranging due to the lack of page turns at the end of movement III<sup>115</sup>. For the purposes of the edition, the notation of vertical dotted lines was not retained everywhere, being replaced by classical bar dashes. In the original notation, the note is on the dotted line or bar line, not after it. The composer's reasoning for using such a solution was to logically reflect the course of the sound material and to place the graphic notation in harmony with its timbral realisation.

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<sup>115</sup> When using an iPad, of course, the problem disappears.

Symfonia rytuałów · Symphony of Rituals  
 Hommage à Karol Szymanowski

Witold Szalonek  
 1927-2001

ed. Łukasz Syrnicki

I.

A 4-6'

improvvisando

intonare arco, pizz.

interpolare poco a poco meno sino al niente

tempo rubato ♩ = ca 56

I

II

III

IV

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Ex. 12. Witold Szalonek, *Symphony of Rituals* for string quartet. First page of the viola part edition.  
 Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, Krakow 2021, PWM 12 166.

## Symbols in the score

Reading and performing the symbols in the score should not cause experienced musicians any major problems. They are all explained in detail in the score legend. The symbols relate to, among other things, asynchronous playing, differentiation of pauses, organisation of material in frames, range of indicated parameters, number of repetitions, etc.

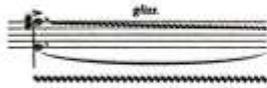
These usually include typically sonoristic sounds such as:

- a *glissando* to the highest note – a quick movement of the left hand to the highest register
- 'guitar' *pizzicato* on 4 strings – *pizzicato* played in an up-down direction or vice versa (the direction should be decided together so that the ensemble always plays the same way)
- *trillo 'di capra'* – goat trill, strong *vibrato*
- circular movement of the bow – slow movement of the bow in the range *sul ponticello* – *ordinario* – *sul tasto*, up and down
- wave-like *decrescendo* (fading sirens effect) – starting with a strong pressure of the bow on the strings successively decreasing and increasing the pressure with simultaneous *decrescendo*
- *didgeridoo* effect – a rumbling sound, simulating the playing of an Aboriginal wind instrument
- plucking the strings with the metal edge of the frog
- tuning the strings with a peg (during tuning).

Sonoristic effects or consonances should have their own expressiveness and should be played with courage and conviction. Their musical message, i.e. building tension or relaxation, is extremely important. Their placement in the score has its own logic, musical sense and is one of the elements influencing the drama, so it is important to perform them with a view to the longer perspective of the piece or even its whole.



falowe *decrescendo* (efekt zamierających syren) • wave-like *decrescendo* (effect of fading sirens)



falowanie głośności dźwięków glissującego i burdonowego (efekt didgeridoo) • undulating loudness of glissando and drone notes (didgeridoo effect)



zarwanie struny metalową krawędzią żabki • pluck the string with the metal edge of the frog



przestrzając strunę • retune the string

*Symfonię* rozpoczyna rytuał strojenia instrumentów (blok A), wykonywany we wstępującej kolejności: od wiolonczeli, poprzez altówkę , drugie skrzypce  po pierwsze skrzypce  według czasu wyznaczonego w przybliżeniu pauzami. Rytuał ten należy pojmować jako akt wstępny w dążeniu do uzyskania Jedni muzyka ze swym instrumentem. Wejścia poszczególnych instrumentów mogą mieć miejsce np. w następujących odcinkach czasu: wiolonczela gra solo minimum 30 sekund, następnie wchodzi altówka, a drugie skrzypce ok. 25 sekund po jej wejściu, po czym 20 sekund później dołączają pierwsze skrzypce. Strojenie przechodzi *ad libitum* w rytuał ćwiczenia struktur dźwiękowych ujętych w sekcje od I do IV. Sekcje te zawierają frazy muzyczne, które, podobnie jak w codziennej praktyce opracowywania utworu, mogą być wybiórczo, *ad libitum*, ćwiczone we fragmentach, przegrywane w dowolnej kolejności w całości, słowem: ćwiczone. Tempo podane w M.M. tylko ogólnie określa charakter fraz i kształt, który, tutaj rozwijany, powinien się w pełni ujawnić w bloku B. Ćwicząc fragmenty podanych fraz, należy interpolować strojenie  $\rho$ . Podsumowując, każdy wykonawca powinien materiał bloku A opracowywać w indywidualny, sobie właściwy sposób – taki, jaki stosuje przy ogrywaniu instrumentu i określonego utworu.

Blok A kończy wiolonczelista, dając odpowiedni znak, po czym płynnie wszyscy muzycy przechodzą do wykonania bloku B - oznacza to, iż po strojeniu i ćwiczeniu następuje rytuał interpretowania myśli muzycznej: przedstawiania jej słuchaczom zjednoczonym z wykonawcami w mistycznym akcie wspólnego tworzenia „stanu muzycznego” jako aktu duchowego. W tym też aspekcie ostatnią część *Symfonii*, zatytułowaną *Finale alla danza*, rozumieć należy – uwzględniając jedną z wielu funkcji, które w życiu człowieka pełni muzyka – jako rytuał tańca, choć bez scenicznej choreografii, a więc dokonywany wyłącznie w wyobraźni słuchacza.

Ex. 13. Witold Szalonek, *Symphony of Rituals* for string quartet, viola voice, p. 3.  
Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, Krakow 2021, PWM 12 166.

63 → gra asymltaniczna • asynchronous playing

Pauzy: • Rests:

 lunga

 molto lunga

 longissima

 dowolna kolejność dźwięków w ramach podanej grupy lub grup dźwiękowych • any note length within the given group or groups of notes

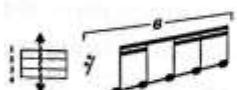
 powtarzanie objętego ramkami, oznaczonego daną literą, materiału muzycznego • repeat of the boxed musical material marked with the given letter

 powtórzenie elementów występujących poprzednio w ramce ze znakiem β • repeat of elements appearing previously in a box with the sign β

 podane parametry (czas trwania, dynamikę itp.) wykonywać we wskazanym zakresie • execute the given parameters (duration, dynamics, etc.) within the specified range

 repet.  
4  
↑  
↓  
6  
powtarzać 4-6 razy • repeat 4 to 6 times

 gliss.  
glissando do najwyższego dźwięku • glissando up to the highest note

 pizzicato „gitarowe” na 4 strunach • ‘guitar’ pizzicato on 4 strings

 trillo „di capra”  
szybka, bardzo ostra, podobna do tryłu oscylacja dźwięku („kozi tryl” = silne vibrato na sztywnym przegubie) • quick, very sharp oscillation of the note, similar to a trill (‘goat’s trill’ = strong vibrato with a stiff wrist)

 bardzo wolny, okrężny ruch smyczka po strunie przez obszary sul ponticello, ordinario i sul tasto (zmienna, realizowana *ad libitum* gra barw) • very slow circular movement of the bow across the string over the areas sul ponticello, ordinario and sul tasto (changing play of timbres, *ad libitum*)

Ex. 14. Witold Szalonek, *Symphony of Rituals* for string quartet, viola voice, p. 4.  
Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, Krakow 2021, PWM 12 166.

## Expression, poetics, narrative, phrasing

In the issues discussed above, I have tried to convey how important an aspect of interpretation is the performer's idea of the composition, thinking of the work in terms of beauty with all its shades. First contact with a work (from the perspective of both the performer and the listener) does not always reveal all its timbral and aesthetic qualities; it is only when one gets to know the work more deeply – during work, practice, and study of the score – that new horizons are opened and one can fully 'listen' to what the work has to tell us. The same is true of the *Symphony* – a cornucopia of compositional ideas that can be seen and understood only from a certain temporal perspective, and which often stand on a par with the most outstanding achievements of Polish chamber music in the second half of the twentieth century.

It is my conviction that the answers to questions concerning issues of interpretation should always be sought first within oneself, discovering the parallels that link the performer to the composer and his musical world. It is the performer who 'materialises' the ideas contained in the composer's score, reading the composer's concepts and introducing them into the sound world – the performer bears a huge responsibility for creating an interpretation that conveys the composer's intentions and message as fully as possible. The key, it seems, to a proper, profound interpretation of a work is to follow its narrative by, among other things, logically building up tension and relaxation phases, presenting continuity of thought, operating with sublime sound, concentrating on timbre. The essence here becomes:

- expression, referring to intensity, passion, commitment, expressiveness, differentiation of all elements of the musical work, including – dynamic, articulatory. It is closely related to inner, subjective feeling, and thus to what each performer in the act of presenting a musical work must activate in himself. For at the genesis of the creation of music lies, in addition to communication with another human being, the pleasure of playing an instrument;
- poetics, contained in the shading of the utterance, in the nuances and all the subtleties (such as the stroke of the bow, the type of vibration, the search for the right timbre), which reveal the musician's personality directly, without psychological analyses. In the process of perception, it is possible to grasp – with a high degree of certainty – the personality traits of the performer, such as inner sensitivity, diligence, precision and conscientiousness, or, on the contrary, lack of sensitivity, feeling, clutter, monotony;

- narrative liked to the logic of presenting musical thought, captured both at the level of the work's architecture (as form, construction, shape, temporal progression) and in its internal dimension;
- phrasing as shaping of sounds, their arrangement, combining in perspective thinking. Each phrase has its beginning and end, its climax, and each sound its direction, its aspiration. Only their logical combination with matching timbre, sound quality, appropriate dynamics, clear articulation shapes the individual image of the whole, which is a point of reference for discussion, criticism, comparison or evaluation. The result depends on the performers, on their ability to shape the sound, to drive the narrative, on the clarity and distinctness of the intentions conveyed, on their commitment to the logical construction of musical tensions and their discharge.

Szalonek was a composer with a sensitivity to detail – he delighted in details that others did not hear, or rather could not perceive their potential. All the concepts and markings found in this score – but also in his other works – represent the *Symphony's* creator as a human being, depicting his compositional journey, his intellectual potential and his broad horizons. In them we also find many parallels with the composer's personal lived experiences and experiences.

The *Symphony*, in its complexity, offers a huge scope not only for so-called display, but also for exploring and pushing one's own boundaries. Confronting Witold Szalonek's *opus magnum* is a challenge of the highest order for every musician and ensemble, audience and listener, but don't such encounters stay in our memories for longer?

### **3.4. In search of agreement: composer – work – performer**

Along the line composer – work – performer, interpretation is the binding process, linking the creative concept contained in the score with the sensitivity and skills of the performer. It is also a part, to quote Mieczysław Tomaszewski, of “the flow of information, the flow of a more or less important message, directed by the composer towards the society”<sup>116</sup>. A specific performance is one of the four phases of the existence of a work as identified by Tomaszewski: conception, performance, perception and reception, and the corresponding attitudes: creator – performer – listener – critic.

Genuine reading of a work, resulting on the one hand from the desire to take into account and convey the composer's intentions, not always specified in the score, and on the other hand,

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<sup>116</sup> M. Tomaszewski, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

from the need to fit in with the aesthetics, resulting, for example, from the epoch in which the work was created, is a kind of challenge. For there are many pitfalls that can lead to a distortion of the composer's assumptions.

As is well known, the score does not unequivocally determine either the shape or the way in which a work is to be read, as Ryszard Solik puts it:

Music is not identical with musical notation, music recording, score; these constitute a certain potentiality of music, which, however, is fulfilled and actualised in the act-like existence of reproduction, in musical interpretation. It is not at the level of musical notation, but in the reproduction, that this establishing and concretising dimension of the presence of the musical work is constituted<sup>117</sup>.

However, while performance invention can enrich the composer's intentions, it should never distort them, as Sophie Lissa points out:

Each generation has the right to hear, understand, experience and perform a given work differently. However, performance invention must not be an accidental work, deforming the proper image of the work<sup>118</sup>.

Although Lissa's statement is justified in the area of respecting the 'proper image of the work', a strict and 'flairless' realisation of the score should not be an end in itself, as it could lead to obscuring valuable aspects of the work, which the performer – through his or her skills, sensitivity and experience – could reveal to the listener.

A comparative analysis of various performances of the same composition leads to a valuable conclusion, creating a set of exemplary interpretations. Depending on the adopted parameters, an image is created – linked to our knowledge, our hearing of nuances, our understanding of music and its impact – which is in accordance with our preferences, and not necessarily identical to the expectations or perceptions of others. For dissimilarity is inherent in human nature, which is shaped in a continuous process of social activities and their interrelationships – starting with the family environment, the acquisition and expansion of education, professional activities and the historical and cultural location associated with them. However, what is most important from a creative and artistic point of view eludes attempts at

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<sup>117</sup> R. Solik, *Nieuchronność interpretacji a doświadczenie sztuki* [*The inevitability of interpretation and the experience of art*], [in:] *Wartości w muzyce*, vol. 5, ed. J. Uchyla-Zroski, pub. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2013, p. 19.

<sup>118</sup> Z. Lissa, *O wielowarstwowości kultury muzycznej*, [*On the multilayered nature of musical culture*], Krakow 1964, p. 117, as cited in: J. Uchyla-Zroski, *Wprowadzenie*, [*Introduction*], [in:] *Wartości w muzyce*, vol. 5, ed. J. Uchyla-Zroski, pub. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2013, p. 7.

classification, modification or analytical explanation. This factor is the seed of talent, contained in the genetic code, which determines our abilities and life potential. Furthermore,

rather the contextualisation of all experience opts for caution and, as a result, for allowing for the dissimilarity and incommensurability of historical evaluations and concretisations of artefacts<sup>119</sup>.

From my own experience, also supported by numerous accounts, the path to agreement between composer – work – performer is sometimes complicated. One of the challenges is the proper development of the material, especially in the purely technical sphere, which, in view of the (usually) short time for the preparation of the part, causes a tense atmosphere already at the starting point of work on the piece. On the other hand, contact with contemporary music, knowledge of its richness and diversity, as well as experience in interpreting it, make it possible to undertake a generally accurate assessment of creative intentions, which translates into a convincing reading of the works. Grażyna Bacewicz said significantly about Gaspar Cassado's premiere of her *Second Cello Concerto*: “he understands nothing of my music and doesn't know what to do. He has never played newer music”<sup>120</sup>. It seems, however, that the most distrustful and extremely negative attitude towards performers was taken by Igor Stravinsky. As Urszula Mizia points out, Stravinsky believed that interpretation leads to a falsification of the creator's intentions, and, like Maurice Ravel, he emphasised the necessity of faithful performance of a work, and placed the realisation of the text higher than interpretation<sup>121</sup>, stating: “Composers could justifiably envy painters, sculptors, writers who communicate directly with the public without the help of intermediaries”<sup>122</sup>.

Listening to the aesthetics of a given period, ‘entering’ the composer's style, attempting to read the work in its cultural context (as postulated by Mieczysław Tomaszewski), brings the performers closer to a true and complete reading of the work, preserving the conventions and spirit of the times in which it was created. In a situation where we are dealing with a work of a composer living and working ‘here and now’, the possibility for contact and conversation, during which the composer illuminates the concepts contained in the work, as well as relates performance or interpretative expectations, becomes indispensable and very valuable. When the composer sees a partner in the performer and vice versa, working on a piece can be very

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<sup>119</sup> R. Solik, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>120</sup> M. Gańsirowska, *Bacewicz*, Krakow 1999, p. 348; as cited in: U. Mizia, *Interpretacja muzyki procesem twórczym instrumentalisty*, [*Music interpretation the creative process of the instrumentalist*], [in:] *Wartości w muzyce*, vol. 5, ed. J. Uchyła-Zroski, pub. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2013, p. 140.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 142.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 141.

rewarding for both parties. It remains forever in the memory in the form of inspiring, developing signposts that broaden thinking and ideas about music. However, regardless of the composer's inspirations, in the process of maturing, shaping the creative concept, the performer remains alone, because – ultimately – its sense and essence is the individual perception of the work<sup>123</sup>. One of the most eminent educator-thinkers, Tadeusz Wroński, observed that

the feature of artistry – in general – is a creative approach to reality, and every creative moment is, in my opinion, an artistic moment, no matter whether it occurs in a musician, a visual artist, an engineer or a craftsman. Hence, in my opinion, it is possible to be a violinist or a composer without being an artist, and to be, for example, an artist-cobbler. Artistry is a peculiarity of a mental structure, not an attribute of a profession<sup>124</sup>.

The author elaborates:

The performer in music must first and foremost possess creative abilities, a strong inner consciousness, a strong «projector», otherwise he will be – analogous to the composers I mentioned above – a sound arranger, a weaver of meaningless threads of physical vibrations<sup>125</sup>.

Creator-interpreter encounters are therefore not the only guarantee of reproductive success. The issue is illuminated by the words of Ryszard Solik:

For, being the object of someone's perception, a work of art (or a piece of music) never exists «truly in itself» but always in the way it exists for the interpreter<sup>126</sup>.

And further:

the work in interpretation acquires its proper meaning and even presence. It is not, of course, about the changeable determinateness of meaning manifested in it (in music related at most to referentialism), but about the indispensability of interpretation as a factor inscribed in the work and each time co-determining it. It is about an interpretation that sustains in existence, capable of concretising the presence and diffusion of the work «by its inevitably continuous character»<sup>127</sup>.

The deeper the relationship between composer – work – performer, based on understanding and mutual respect, the greater the chance of co-creating a creation that will leave a mark, ‘move’

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<sup>123</sup> Author's explanation: by using the expressions reproduction and interpretation interchangeably, it is advisable to distinguish between them, which underlies the clarification of who the performer is and his role. Is his task to reproduce (craftsman) or to co-create (creator of interpretation, artist)?

<sup>124</sup> T. Wroński, *Techniki gry skrzypcowej*, [Violin playing techniques], pub. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa-Łódź 1996, p. 16.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 22.

<sup>126</sup> R. Solik, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>127</sup> Wojciech Kalaga, *Mgławice dyskursu. Przedmiot, tekst, interpretacja*, [Nebulae of discourse. Subject, text, interpretation], Krakow 2001, p. 219; as cited in: *ibidem*.

the creator, performer, listener, and be properly understood. With today's technological development, the author does not have to use – as Stravinsky used to say – intermediaries; an interpretation in line with the composer's vision can always be realised by computers and electronics. But I don't think that's the point... Nothing can replace the artistic soul, human sensitivity, which can lead to sincere emotion, or the awareness of participating in a unique event.

Striving to present a piece in a way that is in accordance with the composer's ideas is one possibility. For the most part, the performer has to rely on his or her imagination, skills and experience, seeking solutions in compliance with his or her artistic feeling, associations or emotions. Accepted for publication, the work takes on a life of its own in concert; enriched by the prism of performances, it reveals diverse facets, often surprising with its freshness, ingenuity and originality of resurrected beauty. Filtered through the re-creative psyche, carried towards the audience, it is subject to judgement: acceptance or rejection. The composer's musical communication with the public is not subject to the laws of dialogue, but depends on the possibility of understanding it, conditioned by education and cultural and historical location. The works remain for some time in the audience, trying to find their place in the catalogue of their musical experience and in the culture at large. They are subjected to analyses and verbal interpretations, appearing in reviews and scholarly publications as the subject of research; taken apart into the tiniest particles, they are the only ones to have a chance of being revived in a subsequent interpretation.

From the perspective of the performer, it is extremely interesting to read score markings through the prism of their historical significance. When analysing compositions written in centuries gone by, one can see the fact of their increasing detail. Baroque or early Classical scores are devoid of interpretative clues, yet they were legible and comprehensible to their contemporaries. The refinement in late Classical and Romantic compositions was connected with a change of aesthetics, a new expression, reaching its apogee in, for example, Gustav Mahler's symphonies, in which the composer noted precise articulation and dynamics for almost every bar, and – going even further – Anton Webern, for example in *Fünf Sätze* Op. 5 or *Sechs Bagatellen* Op. 9, detailed the 'parameters' of each note.

Questions of an objective nature also arise, such as: is the *pp*, which appears exceptionally in Mozart, the same as Henryk Mikołaj Górecki's *pp*, or closer to his *pppp*? Is the 'classical' *ff* the equivalent of the Szalonek's *ffff*? To what extent does the world of early music interpretation created today – through the enormous efforts of researchers, musicologists, performers, lutenists – really reflect the composer's intentions? The answers to questions posed in this way,

at least in my opinion, are not obvious and do not aim at a clear conclusion, but rather encourage us to seek, as long as possible, contact with the composer and to come to an understanding in the spirit of joint creation.

#### 4. Witold Szalonek's *Symphony of Rituals* in the light of Polish quartet literature: Szymanowski, Lutosławski, Górecki, Penderecki

The quartet works of Karol Szymanowski, Witold Lutosławski, Henryk Mikołaj Górecki and Krzysztof Penderecki have been thoroughly researched and described in scholarly works. The excellent evaluations and opinions of theorists coincide with the appreciation of music lovers and performers, providing a reference and inspiring successive generations of artists. The number of concert and digitally recorded interpretations is also impressive. Although written on the sidelines of the mainstream of compositional interests, which were large-scale instrumental forms, operas and symphonies, it is an extremely important complement to creative explorations. Slightly different were the compositional choices of Witold Szalonek, whose scores envisage primarily chamber compositions or small casts of choirs, orchestras and ensembles, as well as solo works. The composer of the *Symphony of Rituals* has won the recognition of a small group of experts in subjects covering contemporary music, but has never achieved international fame to the same extent as Penderecki, Lutosławski or Górecki. Additionally, the *Symphony of Rituals* was premiered after the composer's death, and its score and voices were not published by PWM until 2021. It seems reasonable to conclude that these exceptionally unfavourable circumstances had an impact on the scant knowledge of the score among performers.

At this point – as a conclusion to my considerations – an attempt will be made to look at Szalonek's work in relation to the achievements of the greatest composers of Polish quartet literature. I have in mind here: Szymanowski – because of the work's subtitle and the echoes of folklore resounding in it, Lutosławski – if only because of the aleatoric thinking common to the composers, H.M. Górecki – because of the specific organisation of time and, again, the link with folklore according to the composer's words: “Where Szymanowski was going, I am also going”<sup>128</sup>, and Penderecki's sonoristic achievements.

Like the composer from Atma, Szalonek alludes to Podhale music in *Symphony of Rituals*, and (especially in the first movement) emphasises phrases in the high register, separating the part of the first violin from the other instruments. The three-movement structure of the work, with a lyrical middle section and a fugue finale (*String Quartet No. 1*), as well as the emancipation of timbre as an essential element of (more broadly understood) colour, are

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<sup>128</sup> A. Thomas, *Górecki*, transl. E. Gabryś, pub. by PWM, Krakow 1998, p. 117.

common parts of Szymanowski's and Szalonek's quartets. Inspired by Szymanowski's music, the Podhale folklore and the assimilation of its energy, as well as references to early music forms (canon, fugue) are in turn a possible reference to Górecki's works. The composer builds tension through subtle changes in harmony and contrasting dynamics, while Szalonek uses timbre to do so. The reference can also be seen in the interval-motif of the fifth with which Górecki's *Quartet No. 1* begins, and which dominates the 'tuning ritual' of the instruments in Szalonek's piece. The use of aleatoric technique directs naturally to Lutosławski's work – but is not the only connecting element. A certain commonality between Lutosławski's *String Quartet* and the Szalonek composition under discussion can be found in the dramaturgical thinking – or, more precisely, in the direction of the work's beginning, in which the element of surprise plays an important role. The first notes of the violin in Lutosławski's work are incorporated into the murmurs or sounds of the audience, not yet prepared for the act of listening. Szalonek, on the other hand, begins the symphony with the aforementioned 'tuning ritual', which causes disorientation in the audience. Aleatorism in both composers serves strictly intended purposes that are otherwise impossible to achieve. In the *Symphony of Rituals*, it appears in contrast to the blocks formed from rhythmically complex structures, producing a liberating, freeing effect. In Lutosławski's work, the musicians' gestures indicating the ends of individual mobiles also appear in Szalonek's, marking consecutive numbered sections. It is likely that Szalonek – like Lutosławski – also took into account the psychological perception of the listeners as an important element supporting the construction of the work. The emphasis on sonority and the sonoristic technique present in the piece refer to the early compositions of Krzysztof Penderecki, which were probably an inspiration for Witold Szalonek, for whom sonorism became almost synonymous with creativity.

Through my decades-long quartet adventure and through interpreting hundreds of contemporary works, mainly (but not only) by Polish composers, I instinctively succumb to a subjective process of comparison, which may differ from the assessments of critics, musicologists or music lovers. The reason for this is a deeply personal perception of the piece, resulting, among other things, from the process of practising and processing musical content. Assimilation is not always dependent on an understanding of the composer's artistic message. Understanding, in turn, is not the same as acceptance and elements that, for me, are crucial to the feeling of aesthetic satisfaction. While I find many scores in contemporary music that leave a positive resonance in me, the works of the above-mentioned composers bring aspects that lastingly move the imagination and, despite our numerous performances, their artistic pillars remain unshaken.

## Reflection

Szalonek was an intellectual composer for whom form, architecture and all elements of a work had to make logical sense. The best example is his own analysis of *Concertino* for flute and chamber orchestra<sup>129</sup>. While the sonoristic *I+I+I+I* for 1-4 string instruments (1969), written a year after Krzysztof Penderecki's *String Quartet No. 2* (1968), shows sensitivity and creative potential in terms of articulation and construction, the *Symphony of Rituals* was probably planned from the beginning as a work focused on synthesis, with sonority being one of the formative elements of the work. Today, I am more certain that this summary not only deals with Szalonek's artistic path, but reveals important currents in 20th-century music, such as sonorism, aleatorism, with references to tradition, folklore, dance, rituals, theatricality or, finally, expression and spirituality. This cornucopia of compositional ideas, presented with logical consistency, results in the lasting presence of the piece in the psyche, minds and hearts of the performers, inspiring confidence in communing with an outstanding work.

The personal feeling and positioning of a given composition in a set of important or for some reason outstanding works, although important, is not the only criterion. Another is the reaction of the audience present at the premiere or the opinions and reviews of critics, musicologists and composers. All three arguments point to and emphasise the above-average or outstanding qualities of Witold Szalonek's work, which deserves a special place and sincere recognition in Polish contemporary music.

When I first became acquainted with contemporary music, I had many doubts and concerns about how to read and understand it. From today's perspective, the issues of interpretation are closer to me, although I would not call this kind of experience knowledge. After all, in art, and especially in music, there are matters that concern the senses, feelings that are not fully defined, fleeting impressions, although intensely experienced. Professionalism demands that we look at every musical phenomenon with due attention, not only through the prism of potential performance complications. Time spent with a piece of music always pays off in broadening one's awareness, which in turn results in a deeper reading of the piece. Isn't it the case, however, that opening a door reveals another one, and this next one ...?

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<sup>129</sup> As cited in: L.M. Moll, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

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