

# Musical postmodernism in contemporary Poland (1989-2009)

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## Abstract

Notions of the avant-garde have far-reaching connotations in the musical life of contemporary Poland. Polish composers created unique musical visions during the experimental period following the post-Stalin thaw of the 1950s, and in the ensuing decade they developed one of the most radical avant-garde movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. In the post-1989 environment, a new generation of composers has emerged as rightful heirs to such luminaries as Krzysztof Penderecki, Wojciech Kilar, and Henryk Górecki. In "Musical Postmodernism," representative works by two of Poland's most intriguing young composers, Paweł Mykietyn (b. 1971) and Agata Zubel (b. 1978), are examined. Characterized by pastiche and a tendency towards deconstruction, Mykietyn's recently premiered *Passion according to St. Mark* (2008) revisits the passion tradition in an innovative setting and draws inspiration from many disparate sources. Zubel's *Symphony No. 2* (2005) is an exploration of successive sound groups in an evocative musical mosaic, and the daring electronic works of *ElettroVoce* (Zubel's collaboration with composer Cezary Duchnowski) challenge the limits of the experimental medium in an array of instrumental and vocal contexts. Their multifaceted palette of compositional techniques is indicative of a movement towards pluralism that defines Poland's contemporary artistic milieu. Highlighting information from recent interviews, this study answers the following complex question: How has the shifting terrain of Poland's post-1989 environment created possibilities for musical vocabularies that composers could not have anticipated? Findings reveal that composers tend to embrace contradictions and question populist and elitist values. They challenge divisions of high and low styles, inscribe multiple meanings in their works, and respond to social, political and cultural contexts. An examination of aesthetic priorities of the most recent generations of Polish composers provides a deeper understanding of the function of music in our human experience and reveals how man navigates the tangled paths of our contemporary world.

## CV

Christopher Cary is a doctoral candidate in historical musicology at the University of Florida. In 2008 Cary was awarded a Fulbright scholarship to conduct research at Jagiellonian University's Institute of Musicology in Kraków, Poland. He is in the process of completing his dissertation entitled *Musical Life in Poland, 1989-2009: Composers, Works, and Socio-Cultural Context*. As a 2007 Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellow, Cary studied the Polish language and East European cultural studies. His interest in Polish music has produced investigations of works by composers such as Henryk Górecki, and his current study emphasizes the works of the newest generation of Polish composers.