

Poland: Delayed reception of avant-garde

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Abstract

The reception of avant-garde music took place in Poland with a few-years delay compared to Western European countries. This was the obvious consequence of the political situation in Poland – her membership in the bloc of Eastern European countries, which were cut off from the West by the “Iron Curtain”. Even the development of Poland’s own music was stopped by the famous conference in Łagów Lubuski in Western Poland in 1949, when it was proclaimed that only “surrealistic music” could be written and “musical formalism” was condemned.

The death of Stalin provoked a political thaw and changes in social life. In 1956, it was possible to organize the first festival of contemporary music, later called “Warsaw Autumn”. Thanks to this, Polish audiences (composers and critics as well) could hear the first examples of western avant-garde music. The first festival still included quite ‘classical’ works by Stravinsky (1908-1945), Honneger (1923-1946), Bartok and some examples of Schoenberg’s and Berg’s music. The events that followed were more advanced with avant-garde works, each of them shaped differently. At first, the reception of avant-garde music by the press was ambiguous. Not every work, which was later recognized as an excellent example of novelty, was accepted as such in the 50s and 60s of the 20th century.

What was the opinion expressed by Polish critics concerning western avant-garde music in Poland? How it was politically motivated? What was the reception of avant-garde works among Polish composers in the 50s and 60s? How did the international avant-garde shape the face of Polish avant-garde music? These are the questions I would like to answer in the paper I am presenting. The starting point that characterized the “delayed reception of avant-garde” in Poland would be the first program of the “Warsaw Autumn” festivals.

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Bogumila Mika – PhD, assistant professor and a vice-dean at the Department of Fine Arts and Music of the University of Silesia in Cieszyn. She studied music theory and composition at the Karol Szymanowski Academy of Music in Katowice. She received her PhD from the University of Silesia as a music sociologist (1999). She has published three books: *Critical connoisseur or naive consumer. Silesian music audiences at the end of the twentieth century* (Katowice 2000) *Music as a sign in the context of paradigmatic analysis* (Lublin 2007) and *Musical quotation in Polish art music of 20th century. Contexts, facts, interpretations* (Kraków 2008). She is also the author of more than forty articles on contemporary music and social aspects of music. She presented papers in many seminars and conferences, in USA (Yale), France (Paris-Sorbonne), England (London), Italy (Roma- Tor Vergata), Finland (Helsinki, Imatra), German (Schwerte) as well as in main Polish cities.