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Neoclassicism in the Concept of Michał Spisak (on the example of *Sinfonia concertante no. 1*)

The search for new musical material in Europe in the first half of the 20th century progressed on different planes, and not infrequently took on the form of multi-directional trials and experiments.¹ These propositions were not alien to Polish composers, and found reflection in their creative processes. Although evidence indicating a turning point in thinking about music is noticeable in compositions written already in the first years of the 20th century—chiefly in circles associated with the Young Poland group—it was only later generations who pushed these actions towards European solutions, representing in relation to them not only a secondary reflection, but also an alternative on an equal footing. Polish composers initiated particularly strong contacts with the Parisian center. Both before and after World War II, the number of composers leaving Poland for France, to pursue studies with Boulanger, was impressive.

Also among this group was Michał Spisak, born in 1914. After graduating from the Silesian Conservatory in Katowice with a dual degree in vio-

¹ Cf. Alicja JARZEBSKA *Spór o piękno muzyki. Wprowadzenie do kultury muzycznej XX wieku* [*Dispute on the Beauty of Music. An Introduction to 20th-century Musical Culture*], Wrocław 2004, Chapter II: 'Idee estetyczne inspirowane panteizmem, nihilizmem, ideą postępu oraz ich rezonans w twórczości kompozytorskiej' ['Aesthetic ideas inspired by pantheism, nihilism, the idea of progress, as well as their resonance in compositional art'], pp. 48–92.

lin and composition, he departed in 1937 for Paris to continue his studies in composition with Boulanger (in 1935–7, he had also taken private lessons with Sikorski in Warsaw), and then remained in the French capital until his death in 1965—maintaining, however, numerous and close contacts with the Polish music community (among others, Bacewicz). During World War II, Spisak gave lectures on the subject of Kurpian and Silesian songs.² His own compositions enjoyed great recognition already in the composer's lifetime, as manifested in his receipt of many prestigious awards. Among other things, he won the Boulanger Prize twice (1945 and 1946), and—also twice—the Grand Prix in the Queen Elisabeth Competition (in 1953 for *Serenada* and in 1957 for *Concerto giocoso*). In 1955 in Monaco, Spisak received the Grand Prix in an international competition for the official Olympic hymn. These works were also noticed in his native country. Although Spisak's music was not propagated very widely,³ his compositions were appreciated by the music community: in 1965, the Polish Composers' Union awarded Spisak their annual prize honoring artists for distinguished achievements in the area of music.⁴

Spisak's artistic attitude alluded to neoclassical models—mainly Baroque and Classical (the Neo-romantic threads present in, for example, the *String Quartet*, are extremely rare in Spisak's *oeuvre*). Spisak's neoclassical leanings manifested themselves in a preference for purely instrumental music. Among Spisak's over 60 works, a decided majority are symphonic (among others, three *sinfonie concertanti*) as well as chamber music (numerous duets, quartets), cycles and small forms scored for solo instruments (chiefly violin or piano); the presence of vocal-instrumental works (hymns, psalms, and a children's cantata) appears completely marginal. Spisak remained faithful to tradition by keeping to 'Classical' names for his compositions. Among the titles of Spisak's instrumental works, we discover the concerto, suite, symphony, toccata, serenade, or the sonatina and the sonata.

The composer's personal response to the crisis in art at the beginning of the 20th century is contained in his peculiar understanding of the essence of music itself. For Spisak, 'there is no true music without a true heart',⁵ as he put

² Cf. Zofia HELMAN *Neoklasycyzm w muzyce polskiej XX wieku* [*Neoclassicism in 20th-century Polish Music*], Kraków 1985, p. 68.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 51.

⁴ Cf. <http://www.zkp.org.pl/nagroda.php> (status as of 3 July 2005).

⁵ Leon MARKIEWICZ *Michał Spisak 1914–1965*, Dąbrowa Górnicza 2005, p. 107.

it in a letter from 16 February 1956 to Mitscha. Beyond this, Spisak stated, while writing to the same friend on 20 February 1963, that he ‘writes with the heart’.⁶ He repudiated the avant-garde explorations that were the portion of many composers of his time, and distanced himself from experiments in music whose aim would be experiment for experiment’s sake. Spisak did not have high esteem composers preferring a purely mental approach to music; he rejected precompositional ideas, for his own position at the intersection of the intellect and the heart resulted in ‘deeply-felt writing of deeply-felt music’.⁷ In addressing A. Mitscha on 15 August 1961, he expressed the opinion that while the effects of precompositional actions ‘are sometimes interesting things, it is difficult for me, despite great objectivism, to tolerate that static “music” for any great length of time’.⁸ Such a disposition resulted from the artistic credo of Spisak, who stood by his stance that he writes ‘music with the heart—they contrive it’.⁹ However, he does accept the possibility of experimenting with musical material. He wrote that ‘purely intellectual contrivances interest me only when they can find themselves within the bounds of the heart’.¹⁰ The consequence of such assumptions was the writing of music to which—as the composer’s friend, Jarocinski, wrote—‘one cannot apply the criteria of the avant-garde’.¹¹ Spisak’s artistic attitude was, however, perfect and complete. What distinguished Spisak, in Boulanger’s opinion, was ‘a distinctness and individuality of style’¹² that—despite the passing of the years—remained unchanged. The composer still presented the same kind of art, free of revolutionary transformations, placing emphasis on the constant perfecting of technique. While remaining within the sphere of influence of the Neoclassicists, Spisak consciously formed his own, distinctive artistic sensitivity, and was able to find a compositional idiom that distinguished him, which Jan Krenz characterized

⁶ Ibidem, p. 107.

⁷ Ibidem, p. 107.

⁸ Ibidem, p. 328.

⁹ Ibidem, p. 107.

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 40.

¹¹ Stefan JAROCIŃSKI ‘Sztuka bez autobiografii’ [‘Art without an Autobiography’], in: *Ruch Muzyczny* 1965 no. 14, pp. 3–4.

¹² Danuta SKROBAŁO ‘Dokumentacja materiałów pośmiertnych Michała Spisaka’ [‘Documentation of Posthumous Materials of Michal Spisak’], *Zeszyty Naukowe PWSM w Krakowie*, 1976 no. 1, p. 61.

in one sentence by saying about Spisak that he ‘consistently followed his once-chosen path’.¹³

Spisak’s music has been analyzed in the Polish musicological literature, which has characterized this *oeuvre* as belonging to the current termed ‘true Neoclassicism’ or ‘Parisian Neoclassicism’. The composer put into practice the aesthetic ideals of Neoclassicism represented by Boulanger and Stravinsky; and the influence of their thinking had its bearing on the compositional technique of Spisak, who summarized the relationship in this manner:

Obviously, I am under Stravinsky’s influence, as a true enthusiast of his *oeuvre* from my first steps as a musician. To put it simply, Stravinsky’s aesthetic language is closer to my heart than, for example, the aesthetic language of other great contemporary masters.¹⁴

A perfect knowledge of Stravinsky’s works bore fruit in particular technical solutions present in Spisak’s scores (however, the composer repudiated dependence on Stravinsky, drawing a very strong difference between being subject to an influence and being dependent on it¹⁵).

In putting into practice the watchwords of musical Neoclassicism, Spisak preferred autonomous music, rejecting extramusical content, which permitted him to approach his ideal of writing simple music whose simplicity—as he himself expressed—would be ‘as clear as saying “Hello” or “Goodbye”’.¹⁶ The fundamental postulates to which the composer adhered were objectivism as well as discipline in construction.¹⁷ The achievement of these aims was reflected mainly in transparent, clear structural arrangements, as well as in relationships with Baroque musical tradition. Spisak’s peculiar treatment of the form of works alluding in their nomenclature to past eras,¹⁸ but characterized by concise and transparent construction, is revealed in the building of works on

¹³ Elżbieta MARKOWSKA *Jana Krenza pięćdziesiąt lat z batutą. Rozmowy o muzyce polskiej [J. Krenz’s fifty years of conducting]*, Kraków 1996, p. 75.

¹⁴ Michał Spisak’s answers concerning the *oeuvre* of I. Stravinsky, *Ruch Muzyczny* 1957 no. 12, pp. 7–10.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ Leon MARKIEWICZ, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

¹⁷ Cf. Danuta JASIŃSKA ‘Przejawy neoklasycyzmu w II Symfonii koncertującej Michała Spisaka’ [‘Manifestations of Neoclassicism in Michał Spisak’s *Sinfonia Concertante no. 2*’], *Muzyka* 1980 no. 4, p. 66.

¹⁸ Attention is drawn to this aspect of Neoclassicism by Scherliess in the chapter ‘Zwischen Virtuosität und Neobarock’, characterizing the genres preferentially used by Neoclassical

a foundation of serially arranged combinations of auditive recognizable particles. The characteristic 'mosaicity' of constructions based on the polarization of contrasting and similar (or identical) motifs, is the result of multiple repetitions of certain units that undergo transformation or are presented in an unchanged form. Thus, the coherence of Spisak's works, which show a similarity in principles of construction to those of Stravinsky, results from fundamental mutual relationships, auditive isolated sound wholes, which Alicja Jarzebska, in analyzing Stravinsky's *oeuvre*, proposes to call 'partons'.¹⁹ About the combination of partons, she writes that they form 'as it were, elements of a mosaic, from which the composer builds—via montage of successive or successive-simultaneous character—a 'colorful', hierarchically-varied musical structure, as well as a logical sound continuum'.²⁰ Shaping the form via a characteristic collage of elements of hierarchically varied significance, Spisak indirectly alludes to the modernist assumptions of the avant-garde, for which collage exemplifies one of the dominant codes of presentation.²¹

In creating form, Spisak not only displays a predilection for the peculiar structures called, in Jarzebska's terminology, 'partons', but also manifests a tendency to draw clear contrasts among melodic partons, which are dominant in his *oeuvre*, as well as timbral partons. **Melodic partons** are normally presented for the first time by a solo instrument, or in octave doublings of instruments belonging to one section (e.g. strings or woodwinds), without accompaniment. These partons are often introduced in even rhythmic values (e.g. in even quarter- or eighth-notes); and only in the second presentation—extremely frequently appearing directly after the first—do they undergo rhythmic transformations, consisting of, among other things, introduction of dotted rhythms (we observe such a situation, for example, at the beginning of the *Allegro* from the *Suite for String Orchestra*). Spisak's melodic

composers. Cf. Volker SCHERLISS *Neoklassizismus: Dialog mit der Geschichte*, Kassel 1998, pp. 216–224.

¹⁹ Cf. Alicja JARZEBSKA *Z dziejów myśli o muzyce* [On the History of Musical Thought], Kraków 2002, Chapter 14 'Adaptacja schematu poznawczego do analizy muzyki Igora Strawinskiego' ['Adaptation of the Knowledge Acquisition Paradigm to Analysis of the Music of Igor Stravinsky'], pp. 271–288.

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 275.

²¹ Astradur EYSTEINSSON *The Concept of Modernism*, Chapter 4 'The Avant-garde as/or Modernism?', New York 1990, pp. 143–178, in: Ryszard Nycz (ed.) *Odkrywanie modernizmu. Przekłady i komentarze* [Discovery of Modernism. Translations and Commentaries], Kraków 1998, p. 166.

language, exposed in the melodic partons, is characterized by a peculiar utilization of traditional sound structures. The melodic partons display a quite significant differentiation in intervallic language, with a frequent preference for passages written in broken triads (cf. 1st movement of *Sinfonia concertante* no. 2—no. 4 ff.) The linear plasticity of the individual parts is revealed in polyphonic and quasi-polyphonic passages. So, the layering of parts in the 30-measure Intrada from the *Serenade*, gives rise to sonorities that are the effect of a sum of intervals, because emphasis is placed on voice-leading in the melodic lines.

Timbral partons are characterized by the presence of diatonic and scalar progressions (cf. *Concerto for Bassoon* nos. before 3 to 7), as well as by a predominance of *ostinato* figures. Beyond this, timbral partons are characterized by utilization of a greater number of instruments, as well as by sound plane diversification. In Spisak's work, these partons are often grouped into larger wholes encompassing two or even three direct presentations of the same parton in unaltered form (or perhaps with minor alterations—in the form of, for example, abridgements). The passages written in this manner are based on *ostinato* repetitions of timbral partons taking the form of figures which create a point of reference (in, among other places, the first movement of the *Sinfonia concertante*, nos. 47–50, the same figure is repeated 25 times; a similar situation occurs, for example, in *Allegro de Voiron* between nos. 77 and 79). The variety of solutions utilized by the composer applies to the means of creating timbral partons via, among other things: repetition of the same combination of pitches at regular time intervals, e.g. the beginning of the *Concerto for Bassoon and orchestra*, which utilizes in this manner the interval of a minor third (*c/e \flat* ; and later, *d \sharp /f \sharp*); or—more rarely—the persistent presence of a held-out chord, as is the case in Variation III from the *Sonata for Violin and Orchestra* (after no. 133, up to before 149). Another typical way of creating a timbral parton in Spisak's *oeuvre* consists of the serial combination of sonorities, often performed by one group of instruments (e.g. horns or trumpets). The sonorities appearing in the initial measures of *Allegro de Voiron*, interpreted as successive major chords: G F C F \sharp B \flat G E \flat A A \flat G F \sharp C (mm. 1–9) evidence the composer's utilization of remnants of tonal principles in order to create the impression of a 'pure' sound as an expressive value, recognized as an auditively autonomous fragment. A similar situation can be observed in *Intrada* from the *Sinfonia concertante*, where the clear sound of the four trumpets in a progression of major

chords—C B (a) G F# E D A⁷ F# G C A⁷ B^b C etc.—constitutes one of the timbral partons utilized in this movement.

In alternating use of melodic/rhythmic partons with use of partons with timbral values, Spisak obtained clarity of passages enclosed in symmetrical, two- or three-part constructions. The 15-minute *Sinfonia concertante no. 1* possesses a form that is the result of such an approach to the musical material. It was written in 1947, and performed in Poland for the first time on 27 April 1948 by the Great Symphony Orchestra of the Polish Radio in Katowice, under the direction of Fitelberg,²² and also—as one of only a few of Spisak's works—recorded on analog disk.

This work bears all the characteristic traits of Spisak's *oeuvre*, and is an example of balance in constructional means utilized in the building of the individual movements, as well as in the process of integrating the cycle. The *Sinfonia* is comprised of five movements of unequal duration: Intrada, Recitativo, Ricercare, Intermezzo, Sinfonia. These titles do not only allude to traditional, Baroque names, but also display a tendency observed in the *oeuvre* of, for example, Stravinsky, consisting of giving purely instrumental movements names reserved in the past for vocal-instrumental works. (Similarly, in the *Violin Concerto in D major*, written in 1931, Stravinsky entitles the two middle movements as *Aria I* and *Aria II*). Spisak's *Sinfonia concertante* is scored for orchestra with double woodwinds (oboes, clarinets, bassoons; aside from two flutes, also a piccolo), four each of horns and trumpets, as well as three trombones. A tuba also appears in the orchestral ensemble, as well as a piano, which fulfills an essential role and is frequently exposed. The percussion instruments are limited only to tympani. The foundation of the ensemble is the full string section. The utilization itself of such an ensemble is varied in the individual movements: the first and last—Intrada, as well as Sinfonia—most expansive in terms of duration—utilize the entire ensemble; the middle movements—Recitativo and Ricercare—are scored for smaller forces; and Intermezzo is scored only for full string section and piano. Even the distribution of the orchestra, in and of itself, suggests a structural framework, by assigning to the outer movements louder and more stopliwy sounds.

²² Michał Spisak *Sinfonia concertante no. 1*. Kraków 1970, p. 2.

Instrumentation plan of *Sinfonia concertante no. 1*

General plan

Domination of <i>tutti</i>	Instrumental combinations/ solos	Domination of <i>tutti</i>
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Distribution of orchestra in individual movements of *Sinfonia concertante no. 1*

Intrada	Recitativo	Ricercare	Intermezzo	Sinfonia
Predominant utilization of instrumental <i>tutti</i>	Predominant utilization of varied combinations of instruments	Predominant utilization of varied combinations of instruments	Strings and piano	Predominant utilization of instrumental <i>tutti</i>

Analysis of the individual movements of the *Sinfonia concertante no. 1* brings out Spisak's aim to preserve symmetrical or parallel arrangements—not only at the instrumental level, but also in the manner of construction of the partons; and above all, in their mutual relationships.

The total number of partons in the individual movements does not exceed ten. The **Intrada** from *Sinfonia concertante no. 1*, displaying an A B A' structure, utilizes, for example, five partons.

Characterization of partons utilized in the Intrada

Parton	Type of motion	Performance resources	Articulation	Register	Dynamics	Chord structure	Meter
a	Eighth-note	Solo vl	<i>arco</i>	Middle	<i>ff</i>		2/4, 3/4
b	Variant I: quarter-note	Trb or strings	Accented	Middle	<i>ff</i>	4/7/11 Major w/ added major 7 th	2/4
	Variant II: eighth-note	<i>tutti</i> pfte	<i>staccato/pizzicato</i>	Middle	<i>f</i>		
c	Eighth-note	Picc., fl. ob., cl., fg., cor., trb., strings	<i>staccato</i>	Middle Low High	<i>mf</i>		2/4
d	Eighth-note—triplets in strings	Picc., fl. ob., cl., fg., cor., trb., trnb., tb., strings	Accented	Middle Low High	<i>ff</i>	Major w/7 th (non-chord tones)	2/4
e	Eighth-note	Picc., fl. ob., cl., fg.	<i>legato</i>	High	<i>ff</i>		2/4
		Cor., trb., trnb., pfte	<i>staccato</i>	Middle			
		Strings	<i>pizzicato</i>				

f	Variant I: quarter-note	Picc., fl., ob., cl., fg., cor., trb., trnb., tb.	<i>legato</i>	High	<i>f</i>		2/4
	Variant I: sixteenth-note	Strings	<i>legato</i> (<i>arco</i>) <i>pizzicato</i>	Middle	<i>mf</i>		

Notated example 1—parton a

Notated example 2—parton d

In the outer movements (called, in A. Jarzebska's theory, hyperpartons), the composer combines, in principle, only two partons: melodic parton (a), which is a six-measure presentation of a melody carried by the solo violin; as well as parton (b), based on chordal progressions in a larger group of instruments. Coloristic value decides the separateness of parton (b) from (a), despite the retention of the melodic contour from parton (a) in timbral parton (b). The last hyperparton A', utilizing the same partons as the first, is abridged—above all in terms of the number of presentations of the partons (instead of eight, there are only half as many, i.e. four)—as well as slightly modified in the matter of the length of presentations of the individual partons. The middle hyperparton B of the *Intrada* is based on a principle of contrasting two partons of similar character, (d) and (e), as well as partons (e) and (f). All in all, the number of presentations of the partons is equal to eight—in other words, it coincides with the number of presentations of partons (a) and (b) in hyperparton A.

Schematic structure of the *Intrada*

Hyperparton	A	B	A'
Total number of parton presentations	8	8	4

The appearance of parton (f), already at the end of hyperparton A, ensures the internal coherence of the *Intrada* as a whole (although in hyperparton A, parton (f) does not possess any form-creating function, unlike the situation observed in hyperparton B).

Arrangement of partons in the Intrada

Hyperparton

	A				B				A'						
Parton															
a	x		x		x							x		x	
b		x		x		x							x		x
c								x							
d								x		x		x		x	
e										x					
f						x		x				x		x	

No. 11 No. 25

The **Recitativo**, which is the second movement of the *Sinfonia*, utilizes seven partons: four melodic, as well as three timbral.

Characterization of partons utilized in the Recitativo

Parton	Type of motion	Performance resources	Articulation	Register	Dynamics	Chord structure	Meter
a <i>timbral</i>	Sixteenth-note	Strings	Accented	From high to low	<i>ff</i>	2/4/6	3 /4
b <i>melodic</i>	Eighth-note	Solo oboe	<i>legato</i>	High	<i>mp</i>		3 /4
c <i>melodic</i>	Eighth-note (syncopated)	Solo horns	<i>portato</i>	Middle	<i>f</i>		3 /4
d <i>timbral</i>	Sixteenth-note	Strings, cor., trbn.	<i>staccato</i>	Middle	<i>p</i>	3/4/7/11	3 /4, 4/4/
e <i>melodic</i>	Quarter-note	Picc., fl., ob., cl., fg.,	<i>legato</i>	High	<i>mp</i>		3 /4, 4/4
f <i>timbral</i>	Non-selective	Picc., fl., ob., cl., fg.,	<i>legato</i>	Middle High	<i>ff</i>		3 /4, 4/4
g <i>melodic</i>	Quarter-note	Trb., trbn.	<i>portato</i>	Middle	<i>ff</i>	3/5/7	3/4

The successive and successive-simultaneous progression of partons in this movement, portrayed schematically, presents itself as follows:

PARTON	Measures													
	5			11			20			30				
	32			36			52			57				
a	X	X	X				X	X	X				X	X
b		X												
c			X										X	
d					X						X			
e					X			X	X	X	X			
f								X						
g									X					

Consistent pairing of timbral and melodic partons in simultaneous passages leads to the splitting of the sound layers. The clearly dominant timbral parton (a) is linked with melodic partons (b) and (c), as well as (g), which can be treated as a variant of parton (c). The combination of timbral parton (a) with melodic parton (e) is the result of the layering of the successive sound planes of individual structural units, and does not represent a separate coloristic quality—unlike the combination of timbral parton (d) with melodic parton (e), which constitutes an independent, autonomous segment within the process of the whole.

Pairing of timbral and melodic partons in the Recitativo

Timbral parton	Melodic parton
a +	b
a +	c
a +	g
d +	e

Notated example 3—Combination of partons (a) and (c)

The formal structure of the Recitativo is an example of the coexistence of parallel and symmetrical arrangements in the shaping of form in Spisak's works. The Recitativo falls into two hyperpartons: A (mm. 1–31) and A' (mm. 32–51), supplemented at the end with a coda utilizing the same musical material as the preceding hyperpartons, but shortened in duration, as well as devoid

of the internal structure characteristic of hyperpartons A and A'. Hyperpartons A and A' are bipartite: the first part of each of them represents a conflation of timbral parton (a) with melodic partons (b), (c) or (g), which latter displays kinship with parton (c); while the second phase is based on the conflation of timbral parton (d) with melodic parton (e).

Schematic structure of the Recitativo, including the two hyperpartons

Hyperparton	A	A'	Coda
Parton	a+b, a+c	a+g	a+c
Parton	d+e	d+e	e

If the fragment utilizing a combination of timbral parton (d) and melodic parton (e), lasting 10 measures (between mm. 20 and 30) or 11 measures (between mm. 41 and 52), is considered to be a separate structural unit, the picture of the formal construction of the Recitativo acquires traits of symmetry, and looks as follows:

Schematic structure of Recitativo, including five hyperpartons

Hyperparton	A	B	A'	B'	A''
Parton	a+b, a+c	d+e	a+g	d+e	a+c + e

The symmetry is decided by hyperparton A', appearing exactly in the middle of the passage (m. 30 of 60), utilizing partons (f) and (g), which, despite allusions to previously-occurring partons [cf. (a) and (f), as well as (c) and (g)], represent separate formal units reserved for the middle hyperparton. Though we cannot speak of mirrored symmetry in the case of the Recitativo, this symmetrical arrangement comprised of five hyperpartons does, however, correspond with the two-hyperparton arrangement, bringing out their parallelism.

**Comparison of the formal structure of the Recitativo,
underlining parallelism and/or symmetry of arrangements**

Hyperparton	A		A'		Coda
Hyperparton	A 19 mm.	B 10 mm.	A' 11 mm.	B' 11mm.	A' 9 mm.

↑
Axis of symmetry

The middle movement of Spisak's *Sinfonia concertante no. 1*, entitled **Ricercare**, is constructed on a principle of opposition between the sounds of solo instruments (chiefly winds) presenting melodic partons, and fragments with timbral values. The formal structure of this movement not only is based on a Baroque alternation of *ripieni* and *concertante* fragments, but also utilizes an element of contrast via combination of segments characterized by a homogeneous sound, with fragments in which the sound layers undergo splitting. Spisak skillfully differentiates the sound of the *tutti* fragments into (a) uniform, and (b) non-uniform, i.e. those in which individual coloristic planes are clearly separated. Sensitivity to sonoristic values bears fruit in the structural clarity of the movement as a whole.

**Schematic structure of the Ricercare,
including division of sounds into homogeneous and non-homogeneous**

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
Homogeneous sound		XX		XX <i>Tutti</i> w/pfte		XX <i>Tutti</i> w/pfte			
Heterogeneous sound	XX		XX		XX		XX	XX Repeat of 7.	XX
	no. 43	no. 45	no. 47	no. 49	no. 51	no. 52	no. 54	no. 56	

↑
Axis of symmetry

Fragments of homogeneous sound in the Ricercare apply to a use of the orchestral ensemble where only one instrumental section is utilized (e.g. strings in nos. 45 and 46), or where the *tutti* sound retains characteristics of *stopliwości*. Heterogeneous sound appears in a situation where melodic partons are presented by solo instruments without any accompaniment (e.g. at the beginning of the Ricercare) or—more frequently—when a group of instruments is entrusted with a solo part, retaining an accompaniment that functions as a background for the figure. Spisak most prefers to entrust solo parts to the wind instruments (both woodwinds and brass).

The Ricercare preserves melodic coherence by utilizing one leading melodic parton of thematic function. Allusions to Baroque technique cause this parton to be frequently presented in imitation, e.g. the simple imitation by

the violin and oboe at the beginning of the movement; and its leading portion undergoes arrangement in *stretto* form from no. 52 onwards.

The following **Intermezzo** represents a contrast within the framework of the symphonic cycle as a whole, not only on account of the utilization of the already-mentioned atypical ensemble, including the full string section and piano, but also on account of the manner of utilization of these instruments, and the attendant extreme simplicity of structure. The Intermezzo is comprised of the three hyperpartons A B A'. Its formal breakdown into these units results from the internal arrangement of the partons assigned to the piano part. During the entire course of the Intermezzo, the string section executes only one timbral parton (f), which is the note *b*, held in a bourdon-like manner for 28 measures, presented in octave doublings. This parton is characterized by a suspension in the upper voices (*c-b*); and in such a form, this parton is recalled three times at the end of the movement (mm. 29–34).

Characterization of partons utilized in the Intermezzo

Parton	Type of motion	Performance resources	Register	Dynamics	Meter	First presentation
a <i>rhythmic</i>	Sixteenth-note	Pfte	High	<i>p</i>	3/4	m. 2
b <i>melodic</i>	Quarter- and sixteenth-note	Pfte	High	<i>mp</i>	3/4	mm. 10–11
c <i>timbral</i>	Half-note	Pfte	Low	<i>p</i>	3/4	m. 2
d <i>timbral</i>	Sixteenth- and eighth-note	Pfte	Low	<i>p</i>	3/4	m. 4
e <i>timbral</i>	Quarter- and half-note	Pfte	Middle	<i>pp</i>	3/4	m. 9
f <i>timbral</i>	Static	Strings	Middle	<i>mp>pp</i>	3/4	m. 1

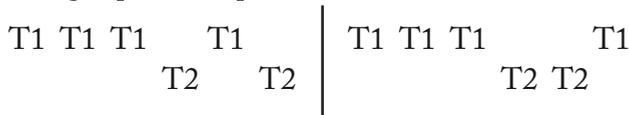
Notated example 4—First eight measures of Intermezzo (partons a, c, d in piano part, as well as parton f)

The piano part is scored for four hands; the first performer executes two partons—the rhythmic (a), as well as the melodic (b); the second performer is assigned partons (c), (d) and (e), which fulfill a coloristic function.

movement, cause it to take on traits of an introduction to the final, more expansive Sinfonia.

The number of partons—as much as eight—utilized in the **Sinfonia** is a consequence of the dimensions of this movement, which is the crowning of the entire *Sinfonia concertante*. Conducive to the preservation of the Sinfonia's coherence is the giving of a thematic function to two melodic partons: parton (a) takes on the significance of a primary theme, while parton (d) bears the marks of a secondary theme. The Sinfonia clearly breaks down into two parallel hyperpartons, utilizing partons of thematic function in an analogous manner.

**Schematic plan of Sinfonia,
including disposition of partons (a) and (d), of thematic function**



Both themes are introduced in the violin part. The primary theme is quickly taken up by other groups, while the secondary theme remains associated with the violin part throughout the entire Sinfonia. Nevertheless, the successive presentations of the themes differ from each other in the instrumentation utilized. In the first hyperparton, the string section generally dominates, contrasted with fragments of *tutti*. The second hyperparton is characterized by a general increase in sound volume via the maintaining of the instrumental *tutti* over the span of longer segments. Within the *tutti*, the dominating role is taken over—on an alternating basis—by the wind and stringed instruments.

The montage structure technique in force in Spisak's *Sinfonia concertante no. 1* is typical of the composer's entire *oeuvre*, together with the predilection for symmetrical or parallel structures characteristic of his compositional craft. Layering of these planes causes the breakup of the larger formal wholes into two or three segments, depending on the levels of division assumed. The ambivalence of such divisions (e.g. in the *Recitativo* or *Ricercare*) does not obscure the transparent construction, which relies on the principle of contrast. Beyond this, Spisak displays a frequent tendency to link partons into pairs. In the simultaneous passages, the composer combines melodic and timbral partons, with a predilection for retaining the same sets throughout the entire work. Spisak bases the development of the musical action on contrast between melodic and timbral partons. The principle of opposition also applies to al-

ternating utilization of uniform and varied sounds. Allusions to the Baroque tradition present in his love of *concertato* technique, or in the introduction of quasi-polyphonic fragments, as well as manifesting themselves in characteristic titles, give his entire *oeuvre* a neoclassical slant. So, the composer's dream of simplicity in his music found reflection in formal clarity and transparency, supported by sonoristic values.

The features of Spisak's *oeuvre* predestined him for a name as a composer representing the Neoclassical current. Musicologists studying his legacy have often underlined the relationships with tradition appearing in his works,²³ as well as his attempts to overcome norms previously in force. Spisak's musical language has been explained by, among other things, a superficial relationship with functional tonality. Markiewicz has even described the tonal/harmonic sphere of Spisak's works as one of the style 'secrets' of the composer, in whose scores 'traditional major, minor, augmented and diminished chords exist on an equal footing with strongly dissonant and varied sonorities'.²⁴ Though the composer forms sonorities via superposition of thirds, as a consequence of this, he does, however, obtain constructs in which major and minor thirds coexist on an equal footing. For example, in the fourth movement of *Concerto giocoso*, the major and minor thirds retain a privileged status in both vertical and horizontal elaborations. In the 4th movement of the *Suite for String Orchestra*, major and minor thirds appear alongside each other (*a/c* or *a/c#*), which makes it impossible to identify the mode unambiguously. The third structure of the chord, in itself, is also not a measure of consonance with Spisak: added tones (not infrequently as a result of overlaying an additional third) cause the euphonic character of the sonority to be obscured. Spisak is prone to layering two major triads atop one another. For example, the entire no. 5 in the *Intrada* from the *Sinfonia concertante no. 1* is based on a C major chord presented alternating with a major or minor seventh (notated as *a#*). A similar situation can be observed in the 1st movement of the *Suite for String Orchestra*, in which the structure recurring in violins I and II (in, among other places, nos. 3, 5 16 in C major; and in E major, in nos. 4 and 18) utilizes a⁸⁻⁷ suspension—one time

²³ Elżbieta ZDOLIŃSKA-KORCZAKOWSKA *Problem klasycznej architektury w twórczości symfonicznej Michała Spisaka* [*The Problem of Classical Architecture in the Symphonic Oeuvre of Michal Spisak*], Master's thesis written under direction of Prof. Zofia Lissa at the Institute of Musicology, University of Warsaw 1970.

²⁴ Leon MARKIEWICZ, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

with a major seventh, the next time with a minor seventh; and in no. 3 of that same work, the composer placed major mode (*e* as the third of the chord in the violins and violas) together simultaneously with minor mode (*d*[♯], enharmonically equivalent to the *e*[♭] in the 'celli). The notation of simultaneously sounding, enharmonically equivalent pitches in both sharpened and flatted form, without any attempt at agreement in the different systems, evidences that not only clarity of function, but also the existence of functional relationships in itself, were of no importance to the composer—who, after all, not infrequently underlined that the notation of a score must be executed carefully.²⁵ This principle is confirmed by the example of the *Suite for String Orchestra* (beginning of 4th movement), where the coexistence of the pitches *g*[♯] and *a*[♭] performed simultaneously by violins I (*g*[♯]) and II (*a*[♭]) seems significant, bearing in mind the fact that Spisak himself was a violinist and therefore not unfamiliar with problems in intonation.

Danuta Jasińska, in analyzing the third-based structures appearing in the *Sinfonia concertante no. 2* (and in other works by Spisak), as well as his usage of broken major or minor chords, also attributes them to traditional rules of functional harmony.²⁶

In turn, Zofia Helman, in discussing certain aspects of Spisak's *oeuvre*, alludes to the concept—distant from major-minor tonality—of pandiatonic language present in his works. She writes that the sonority appearing at the beginning of the *Sinfonia concertante no. 2* is

... the result of the layering of pitches from the Doric scale: *d-e, b-d-e-f, b-d-e-g, b-d-e-a*. Despite the underlining of the fundamental tone of the scale (*d*), its 5th degree (*a*) and 6th degree (*b*), the sonorities are not in functional relationships characteristic of the major-minor system.²⁷

Thus, the functional system has been overcome in Spisak's works by application of new technical solutions consisting of ordering pitch and sonority progressions utilizing a sound centralization principle. The essence of this technique is based on exposition over a longer segment of a constant structure with melodic, harmonic or rhythmic values, whose main task is to create a

²⁵ Andree Spisak—the composer's wife mentioned that her husband 'wrote his notes very carefully, providing them with signs'. See Leon MARKIEWICZ, op. cit., p. 104.

²⁶ Danuta JASIŃSKA 'Przejawy neoklasycyzmu...', op. cit., p. 67.

²⁷ Zofia HELMAN *Neoklasycyzm...*, op. cit., p. 92.

center of reference. For this purpose, Spisak utilized timbral partons. The non-functional sound constructions arising in this manner, combined on a principle of similarity and contrast, contributed additionally to the creation of new forces of energy. This happens because—as Poszowski writes—“centra brzmieniowe powodują ... powstanie sił ześrodkowujących, działających centralizująco i tworząc punkty odniesienia” [sound centers build ... centralizing powers, which make points of reference].²⁸ This indubitably modernist contour of Spisak’s musical language, brought out by the possibilities created via analysis utilizing the achievements of cognitive psychology, points up the innovative characteristics of his compositional technique.

In previous papers, however, rarely has attention been drawn to the modernist aspect of Spisak’s *oeuvre*, ignoring two facts. On the worldview plane, the association of musical Neoclassicism with the manifestation of modernism has been passed over; and in the unitary dimension, all that has been signaled—without expanding upon the topic—are individual, modernist characteristics of Spisak’s *oeuvre* concerning his treatment of musical material (form shaping via montaged combination of differentiated segments retaining autonomy with respect to each other, or the sound centralization principle). Thus, the modernism of Spisak’s music manifests itself, on the one hand, in his allusions to neoclassical solutions; and on the other, in a creative approach to musical language and renewal of compositional technique.

The composer himself, however, did not leave behind any opinions concerning his own understanding of musical modernism. During Spisak’s lifetime, i.e. in the first half of the 20th century, the multidimensionality of designation of this term, as well as the impossibility of unambiguously narrowing its meaning field and defining it, meant that many researchers involved with the phenomenon, including Czech formalist Mukařovský, concluded that ‘the concept of modernism is very indeterminate’.²⁹ This ambiguity of the term ‘modernism’³⁰

²⁸ Antoni POSZOWSKI ‘Technika centralizacji brzmieniowej jedną z zasad porządkujących przebieg konstrukcji dźwiękowych w utworach XX wieku’ [‘Sound Centralization Technique as One of the Principles for Ordering the Progression of Pitch Structures in 20th-century Works’, *Zeszyty Naukowe. Akademia Muzyczna im. Feliksa Nowowiejskiego, Bydgoszcz* 1998 no. 10, p. 39.

²⁹ Richard SHEPPARD ‘Problematyka modernizmu europejskiego’ [‘The Problematics of European Modernism’], in: Ryszard Nycz (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 71.

³⁰ Lesław EUSTACHIEWICZ *Dramaturgia Młodej Polski* [Dramaturgy of Young Poland], Warszawa 1986, p. 99.

arose from, among other things, the extremely broad application of the concept in relation both to literature and to the general body of arts being created at the beginning of the 20th century,³¹ which in consequence caused European modernism to be viewed on different planes of discourse. The characterization of modernism often took place via the assignment of constant attributes, such as ‘uncompromising intellectualism’, ‘formalism’, ‘nihilism’ or ‘discontinuity’.³² A certain dissatisfaction must have been engendered by the definition of modernism as a ‘continuation of or opposition to Romanticism’,³³ while many concepts polarized modernism and the realism accompanying Romantic art.³⁴ This latter theory, alluding indirectly to an essay by Gasset from 1925, accepted implicitly that Romantic art—as an art arousing the emotions—was closer to human nature than modern, dehumanized art.³⁵ The hidden assumption accompanying this train of thought referred to the identification of modernism with the avant-garde. In the common understanding, these terms are not infrequently treated as synonymous, while their scope of meaning—though no doubt close—is not analogous, for the avant-garde is taken as a subordinate category in relation to modernism, not associated with any concrete historic period.³⁶ Spisak’s opposition to the avant-garde meant that the modernism identified with it was classified as a concept distant to the composer’s achievements. But, after all, innovation of solutions and the search for new possibilities both in art and in music at the beginning of the 20th century in great measure defined this period of modernism. As Porebski writes, modernism carries with it a tendency ‘to oppose itself to prevailing constructions, expand its field of experience, break up the previous coherent unity and replace it with the multi-directionality of frequently divergent attitudes and aims’.³⁷

³¹ Cf. entry ‘Modernizm’ [‘Modernism’], in: Władysław KOPALIŃSKI *Słownik wyrazów obcych i zwrotów obcojęzycznych* [Dictionary of Foreign Words and Expressions], 16th ed., Warszawa 1989, p. 337.

³² Richard SHEPPARD, op. cit., p. 73.

³³ Richard SHEPPARD, op. cit., p. 75.

³⁴ Nicholas ABERCOMBIE, Scott LASH, Brian LONGHURST ‘Przedstawienie popularne: przerabianie realizmu’ [‘Popular Presentation: A Reworking of Realism’], in: Ryszard Nycz (ed.), op. cit., p. 393.

³⁵ Jose Ortega y GASSET *Dehumanizacja sztuki i inne eseje* [Dehumanization of Art and Other Essays], Warszawa 1980.

³⁶ Astrud EYSTEINSSON ‘Awangarda jako/czy modernizm?’ [‘The Avant-garde as/or Modernism?’], in: Ryszard Nycz (ed.), op. cit., p. 155.

³⁷ Mieczysław PORĘBSKI *Ikonosfera* [The Iconosphere], Warszawa 1972, p. 236.

Thus, the designation 'modernism', functioning in aesthetic and philosophical space, applied to a multifaceted reaction of European culture and art to the crisis of that civilization, standing at a crossroads in the initial years of the 20th century. Sheppard summarized the varied character of the term in a framework of seven different artistic attitudes, which were answers to the crisis of European culture in the 1930s.³⁸ The first reaction, he calls nihilistic; the second, ecstatic; the third, mystic; the fourth, aesthetic; the fifth, he describes as a retreat from modernity; the sixth, he characterizes by typical allusions to primitivism; and the seventh, he describes as 'modernlatry'. Each of these attitudes found its reflection in the works presented by European artists in the first half of the 20th century.

Another thing that characterizes musical modernism is the different and multi-threaded character of the attempts made to overcome its previous heritage. This process began after 1890—when, as Dahlhaus writes, there ensued a turning point seen in musicology as that discontinuity, historical transformation characteristic of modernism.³⁹ The twilight of musical modernism follows, according to Dahlhaus, already ca. 1910. Polish musicological writing adopted the term modernism to describe the time frame of activity of the so-called Young Poland, relying on the classification proposed on the ground of literary studies. Consequently, the name of modernism is applicable to the years 1894–1918, which were the period of artistic activity of composers who in predominant majority felt themselves to be their heirs of symbolist as well as expressionist tendencies.⁴⁰ Thus, the narrowing down of musical modernism to the 10–20 years at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century does not fully convey the possibilities created by the application of the term 'modernism', and marginalizes such phenomena as futurism, barbarism, *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivism), Neoclassicism, softening the impetus of modernism as a period of breaking down aesthetic boundaries.⁴¹ The wide application of the category of modernism—with reservations about its ontological status, beginning, for example, from its identification with a historico-

³⁸ Richard SHEPPARD, *op. cit.*, pp. 123–140.

³⁹ Carl DAHLHAUS *Nineteenth-Century Music*, Berkeley 1989, p. 334.

⁴⁰ Stefan JAROCIŃSKI 'Młoda Polska w muzyce na tle twórczości artystycznej rodzimej i obcej' ['Young Poland in music against the background of the indigenous and foreign artistic oeuvre'], in: *Muzyka polska a modernizm [Polish Music and Modernism]*, Kraków 1981, p. 93.

⁴¹ Daniel ALBRIGHT *Modernism and Music: An Anthology of Sources*, University of Chicago Press 2004.

stylistic concept on the one hand; and on the other, with ideological and artistic attitudes—was utilized by Maciej Gołąb, proposing to call the period of 1890–1910 by the name of modernism; and the following periods of twenty-five years after that, ‘waves of modernity’.⁴²

Botstein distinguishes five, clearly formed already ca. 1933, manifestations of modernism in music: The Second Viennese School, the French–Russian axis dominated by the achievements of Stravinsky, German Expressionism, the scattered modernists—among others, Ives in the United States, Bartók in Hungary, or Szymanowski in Poland—as well as experimentalism.⁴³ The variety of composers’ responses to the crisis in art corresponds with the seven propositions proffered by Sheppard (for example, Scriabin’s mysticism, or the type of allusion to primitivism present in the fascination with peasant culture of, among others, Bartok, which is explained as an ‘attraction felt by many modernist intellectuals towards pseudo-primitive communes modeled on tribal society’⁴⁴). In the spirit of the understanding of modernism in the music of Kaczorowska, this term means a new view on the ‘material-technical and structural problems of a musical work. Modernism means [...] a break with continuity, conscious renewal of technique, innovative tendencies’.⁴⁵

Musical Neoclassicism, of which Spisak is a representative, brought out into the foreground postulates of realization on musical ground of, on the one hand, the thesis of ‘art for art’s sake’, i.e. the fourth of the propositions presented by Sheppard, designated as an aesthetic ‘attempt to establish art as something autonomous, ahistoric [...]’;⁴⁶ and on the other hand, to propose a certain distance from modernity, understood not as a retreat from it, but as a more attentive look at models propagated in music before the Romantic era. In this sense, musical Neoclassicism is a part of modernism, intensifying the assumptions presented by Albright in his book from 2004. Thus, its basic distinguishing features are: versatility and depth, semantic specification and

⁴² Maciej GOŁĄB *Spór o granice poznania dzieła muzycznego* [*Dispute on the Limits of Knowledge of a Musical Work*], Wrocław 2003, p. 170.

⁴³ Leo BOTSTEIN ‘Modernism’, in: S. Sadie (ed.) *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, London 2001, vol. 16, p. 871.

⁴⁴ Richard SHEPPARD, op. cit., p. 121.

⁴⁵ Krystyna TARNAWSKA-KACZOROWSKA ‘Karol Szymanowski—*Trzy piosni* op. 32’ [Karol Szymanowski—*Three Songs* op. 32], in: *Muzyka polska a modernizm*, op. cit., p. 160.

⁴⁶ Richard SHEPPARD, op. cit., p. 127.

density, as well as expansion and destruction of tonality.⁴⁷ The creation of the musical language of Neoclassicism—as is universally known—did not represent an attempt to reconstruct pre-Romantic norms; its innovative character was decided by the combination of avant-garde musical resources (so strongly associated with modernism), with a peculiar view on the evolution of musical culture, represented by composers alluding to Neoclassicism. Consequently, the modernism of the Neoclassicists, Spisak as well, is decided by their attitude towards compositional technique, associated with the tendency to ‘overcome the fundamental laws and principles of tonality resources, as well as with the creation of new laws and principles in their place’, as Poszowski has written.⁴⁸ The modernism of Spisak himself was most fully visible in the manner of creation of a sound continuum, via particular sensitivity to the sonoristic values which have input into the co-creation of the form of a work.

⁴⁷ Daniel ALBRIGHT, *op. cit.*

⁴⁸ Antoni POSZOWSKI, *op. cit.*, p.114

