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## *THE SYNTHESIS PERIOD OF KRZYSZTOF PENDERECKI*

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### **Abstract**

While exploring universal language, Penderecki has engaged with several compositional styles. He has explored a wide range of contemporary compositional techniques, notations, styles and genres including sonorism, serialism, as well as neo-Romanticism. In the course of the 1980s, he discovered his own musical pluralism, a chromaticism that is primarily polyphonic without tonality, but with themes and motifs that make a counterpoint interaction possible. With his ultimate craftsmanship, Penderecki comfortably incorporated such extremes into the mainstream of his personal musical language which is called "synthesis". He believes that synthesis refers not only to a composition technique but it could also synthesis old themes with new musical techniques; or be a synthesis of modern and traditional techniques which would speak directly to audiences. The main purpose of this study is to investigate composer's creativity process towards the period of synthesis as well as to exemplify important aspects of chosen works under the circumstances of the style of synthesis.

**Keywords:** Penderecki; Avant-garde; Sonorism; Neo-romanticism; Synthesis.

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## 1. GİRİŞ

Penderecki emerged as the most celebrated musical figure in Polish modern composition alongside such characters as Witold Lutoslawski, Tadeusz Baird, Andrzej Dobrowolski and Henryk Mikolaj Górecki. Since winning his first composition competition in 1959, he won a growing number of awards and has had works commissioned and performed by the leading virtuosic performers. Penderecki composed in most musical genres covering four operas; eight symphonies; and symphonic, chamber and instrumental works as well as choral settings. His music spans an array of styles, with elements of serialism and sonorism in his early works, to an elimination of these principles and an acceptance of musical synthesis of both his evolving styles as a composer in later works, and all the while maintaining features of traditional composition. During the early avant-garde period of Penderecki, he has experienced new techniques by means of shaping the form, motive and material organization; explored contrasts of instrumentation, texture, timbre, dynamics etc.; then he searched for opportunities to turn back and rediscover tradition in order to find his own path.

### 1.1 Music towards the synthesis period

After World War II, the isolation of Poland from the rest of Europe made Polish composers create their own compositional language without any influence. The years of 1956-1962 were experimental for Penderecki that is based on a compositional system of a very distinct character which is known under the name of "sonorism" (Sonorystyka from the French sonore), pioneered by Penderecki himself and Henryk Mikolaj Gorecki. The terms sonorism and sonoristic is coined by Polish musicologist Józef Michał Chomiński. *Emanations* (1958), in which two string orchestras tuned a half-tone apart, was the beginning of this specific avant-garde style. It is represented by famous pieces such as *Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima* (1960), *Polymorphia* (1961) and *Fluorescences* (1962). This original language appeared from an attempt to develop rich sonorous material via using new techniques and experiment on notation (Chlopicka, 2003: 225). As Penderecki marks, these pieces are unmistakably avant-garde since they consantrated on "liberated sound outside the traditional manufacture of the instruments, indeed outside of the instrument itself, and [are] free of the traditional associations of patterned time." The unorthodox tonal approach and all manner of noise effects including tone clusters, microtonal intervals, glissandos, pitch bending, new timbres from string instruments, and also using exotic instruments were some of the techniques used during his early compositional period. The primary characteristics of this new technique was exploring contrasts of instrumentation, texture, timbre, articulation, dynamics, movement, and expression as primary form. These were obtained mainly by experimenting on sound material with the techniques such as smooth pitch oscillation, quarter tones and glissandos, cluster and pointillist technique (Chlopicka, 2003: 225). "Penderecki employed a compositional system whose axiomatic concept was not a single sound, but the sound matter in its totality" (Mirka, 2000: 1).

*Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima* (1960) is important as exemplifies his "sonorist" compositions that prevailed in his output. It is scored for 52 strings, with each musician playing an individual line. According to Thomas, in addition to similar pieces by Xenakis and Ligeti, *Threnody* endure avant-garde classic not only because in time of advanced post-serial complexity, it represented direct expression – as the title indicates (2001: 2). This piece can give a listener many images-buzzing insects, shrieking sirens, even an exploded bomb. To signify the effects he imagined, Penderecki invented several symbols; these became commonplace in new music graphic notation, much as other composers who worked at the very limits of acoustic possibilities embraced the sounds themselves. Figure 1 illustrates notation of time-space with a groundbreaking graphic notation, measured vertical lines measured and only estimated time positioning of musical events and connected to the spatial location within the rhythmic unit (Kałużny, 1963: 88).

It is captivating to recognize that the instrumental works of the composer in these years were quite experimental and avant-garde in style, while the choral works display clear interest in traditional musical elements as well as maintaining unconventional techniques. For instance, the earliest concertante piece in Penderecki's repertoire is *Fonogrammi* for flute and chamber orchestra (1961), in which "melody, along with harmony and rhythm, has been pushed aside as a communicative device, to be replaced by the familiar large-scale effects" (Griffths, 1974: 755); on the other hand, *Stabat Mater* (1962) indicate traditional musical

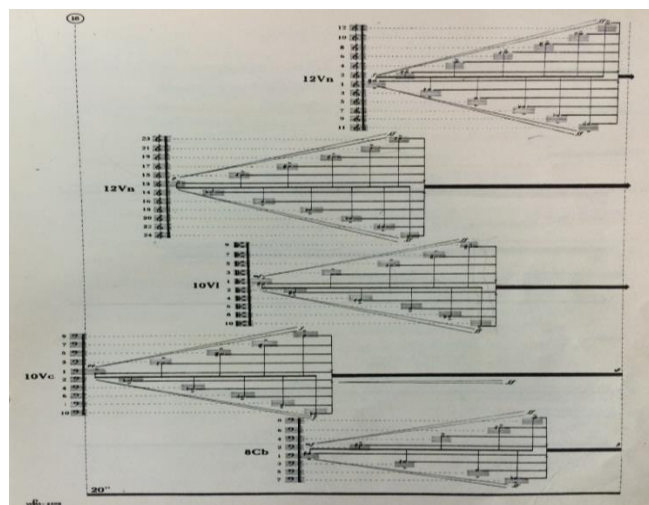


elements of "medieval chant, polyphony, and traditional tonality are cast within a rondo form" (Bylander, 2004: 9). The counterpoint techniques of Flemish masters such as Ockeghem and Obrecht are clearly seen in this work (Dufallo, 1989: 346).

As experimental as his instrumental works, the choral compositions often imitate electronic sounds and 12 tone rows while maintaining descriptive structure. In an interview with Ray Robinson, Penderecki comments on his avant-garde period, claiming that he never wished to abandon tradition but to expand it: "I wanted to develop a new musical language. It was not my intention to destroy everything that had been written before me. I only wanted to write my own music, so I was experimenting" (1983: 9).

Most of the scholars argue that this period lasted only three years until 1962, after the composition of *Flourescences* (1961–1962) that is characterized with Penderecki's first acknowledged period which comprises the innovative developments on sonic exploration as well as experimental notation. Works composed in the time period soon after *Flourescences* are characterized by a turn toward the past. They are more inspired from traditional styles and forms with less experimental sonorities which are common to his earlier compositions.

**Figure 1:** Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima (1960).

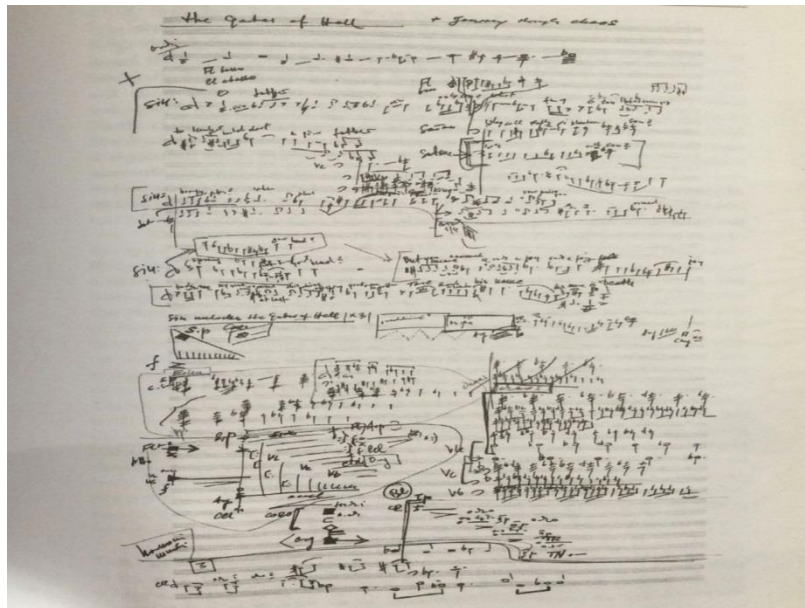


In the 1970s Penderecki moved from the experimental, graphic scores and sound effects to more conventional notation. His shift away from the sonoristic compositions towards a musical language renewed with a sense of tonality and created his neo-Romantic phase (Dufallo, 1989: 346). Starting from the First Violin Concerto, written for Isaac Stern, he left behind the complex clusters of tones for which he was affiliated, and instead focused on melodic intervals including the semitone and the tritone. Throughout his career the semitone has become a crucial element of constructing melody. As Adrian Thomas indicates "This idée fixe was crucial to Penderecki's development of his own brand of neo-romanticism" (2001: 3). Schwinger compares the piece to Bartók's Third String Quartet, which also uses the concept of "varied development," though on a much smaller scale (1998: 76). During this neo-Romantic phase, he listed some other composers in his interviews including Bruckner, Mahler, Wagner and Strauss. He once pointed out that first Bach, Berlioz, Tchaikovsky; then Bartók and Stravinsky; and Ockeghem, Obrecht, and Josquin were the influences he inspired (Schwinger, 1998: 66). *Paradise Lost* (1975–8) is styled a sacra rappresentazione (sacred representation) which combines opera and oratorio genres. The sound language (especially harmony), the Wagnerian approach to vocal parts and the neo-Romantic style of expression were elements that had a great deal of influence on the reception of this work. This neo-Romantic language of Penderecki turned up in the context of harmonies that were discovered via sonoristic approach. Three harmonic structures which characterise God, man and Satan constructed on strong tension and expressive melodic structures in *Paradise Lost* (Chlopicka, 2003: 234). That neo-Romantic phase, which is dominated by melodic and harmonic thinking and traditional techniques of instrumentation, continued during the early 1980's in addition to the extra-musical references to the historical events significant for Poland. A Polish Requiem (1980–84), one of Penderecki's most important works on history, includes musical symbolism of death and redemption along with the elements of traditional Requiem composing. It starts with the usual text of a Requiem (Kyrie, Dies Irae, Lacrimosa, etc.) and inserts words lamenting recent Polish tragedies including the



Holocaust, the Warsaw Uprising and the Katyn massacre. The musical language of the Requiem ranges from triadic harmony through microtonal glissandi, whispers, and shouted tone clusters on atonality

**Figure 2: Paradise Lost (1975-78), sketch.**



## 1.2 The idea of synthesis

After almost two decades of re-embracing tonality, or making reference to past idioms like Renaissance through the Romantic periods, his style began to sustain in a compositional language what he called "synthesis". As suggested by Penderecki, "So many new things have been discovered in the 20th century that now, at the end of the century, we need some kind of synthesis, some musical language which will allow us just to write music. We live in a decadent time, because in the arts there is absolutely nothing new happening. It's not a period of discovery. It's no longer possible to find something which will shock other people, because everything has already been done" (Schwarz, 1996: 33). This current style of his attempts to build up on his lifetime's compositional journey via synthesizing all that he has experienced throughout his compositional career both as a student and a professional. Because of that reverse shift - from avant-garde to tradition, he even was accused as a traitor for his abandonment of his sonorism. As he describes "malicious critics accused me of eclecticism, which was the opposite of what I had intended. Synthesis cannot depend on the mechanical connecting of elements, but must rather be a homogenous alloy resulting from a unifying experience" (Penderecki, 1997: 17).

A collection of lectures given from 1993-96 by the composer, *The Labyrinth of Time: Five Addresses for the End of the Millennium* published in 1997, discusses the reasons why he shifted from avant-garde style to a more traditional compositional approach. According to Bylander (1998), the reason is that the avant-garde style of his early years "ultimately became more destructive than useful as a means of enriching classical music" (1998: 114). His shift to synthesis of traditional and contemporary approaches is a kind of solution of artist's responsibility and reflection to the problems of contemporary world. In these lectures he acknowledged his thoughts about what he sensed to be an artistic crisis in contemporary music in the late 20th century. For him the development of the art is not a linear progression but it is best viewed as a labyrinth. Bylander's interpretation on this is quite relevant; "His "synthesis" of traditional and experimental approaches was his personal solution to this crisis. In the 1990s, tradition bears more weight than experimentation." (Bylander 2004: 12). Hence the idea of synthesis is based on the usage of traditional tonality in addition to modern and avant-garde elements. For Penderecki, composing such works also allows him to be able to reach his audience through his original musical language while being contemporary. Although his music is full of technical challenges which demand a great deal for performers, his expressive musical material reaches directly to the



audience. "Today we find ourselves at the time of great synthesis, the second fin de siècle. Everything that has been created over the last century is subject to re-evaluation. It seems to me that only the music that is written in a natural way and synthesizes everything that has happened in the last several decades has a chance to survive." (Penderecki, 1997).

The universal language he was looking for should be "that the recovery of the genuine and natural, the universal language of music, is possible only through such a purification and transmutation of everything that already exists." (Penderecki 1997: 19). In the lectures *Drzewo wewnetrzne* 'The Tree Inside' and *Elegia na umierajacy las* 'Elegy for a Dying Forest', Penderecki demonstrates the idea of synthesis via symbol of tree which represent tradition with the roots of a tree, and modernity with its leaves. He believes that synthesis refers not only to a composition technique but it could also synthesize old themes with new musical techniques; or be a synthesis of modern and traditional techniques. According to him, "the conscious use of tradition became an opportunity for overcoming [...] dissonance between the artist and the audience" (Penderecki, 1997: 16).

According to Penderecki, the search for universal language is an endeavour to enliven the arts at the beginning of the new millennium. In order to actualize that wish, he was building the ark "which would make it possible to convey to coming generations what is best in our twentieth-century tradition of the composing of sounds." (Choplicka, 2003: 290). He claims that "The need for synthesis is characteristic for the whole modern epoch. This is the response to the poignant feeling of the disintegration of the world." (Penderecki, 1997: 16). Penderecki himself believes that synthesis should be "a homogeneous alloy resulting from a unifying experience." (Penderecki 1997: 77).

R. Chlopicka and M. Tomaszewski are both discerning Penderecki's later synthesis period as a "patchwork", as a combination of his earlier styles while some others believe that he actually combines characteristics from previous eras of music history. In order to recognize what Penderecki's pursue, again, it is necessary to look at his lectures at *Labyrinth of Time*. Tomaszewski divides the idea of synthesis into two periods: 1985-1993 he labels as "Threshold of a New Synthesis: The Phase of the Black Mask," while 1994-2003 called as "Second Wind: Phase of the Credo" (1998: 98).

Tomaszewski addresses that after the "outward stretching" of his neo-Romantic period, the synthesis period angles more concise works, with a decrease of excess. When examined about this change, Penderecki replied, "I wanted to depart from the monumentality of *sacra rappresentazione* which was proper for the period of my fascination with late Romanticism." (Baran 1992:4). *The Black Mask* (1984-86), structured as an ensemble opera in one scene, embodies this compact and pluralistic new style. In this piece he got back to the sonoristic elements of clusters and glissandi that are combined with the expressive explorations he produced in his neo-romantic output. In *Credo* (1998), synthesizes the previous experiences in the analysis of the musical language and in descriptive technique; along with experiences in developing architecture of massive compositions. Here Penderecki also appends biblical and liturgical material at various points.

Regina Chlopicka divides synthesis into three period: "1986-1992: In Search of New Areas of Experience - Classic Convention of Play and Postmodernist Play of Conventions"; "1992-1995: In Search of a "New Lyric" - Chamber Espressivo Style" and "1995-1998: The Time of Synthesis - Monumental Symphonic-Oratorio Style" (Choplicka 2003: 244-54). The compositions until 1986 from *St Luke Passion* (1966) and *The Devils of Loudun* (1969) up to *The Black Mask* (1984-86) were dominated by dramatic elements such as darkness and death, horror and evil, for the sake of exploring universal values from different perspectives. *The Devils of Loudun* for instance, Penderecki examines issues of religious and political history, ecstatic religious visions, demonic possession, and exorcism via unusual orchestral and singing techniques. In 1991, on the other hand, Penderecki composed his fourth opera *Ubu Rex* in which Penderecki turned to a comic or buffo style of composition for the first time.

### 1.3 Instrumental works on synthesis

Starting from late 1980's, Penderecki concentrated mostly on instrumental style - generally concerto, and stage works rather than large-scale dramatic and religious works. There we observe the gradual move



towards what Chlopicka calls “symbolic sphere of light” in which form in classical style and more expressive tone are core elements (Chlopicka, 2003: 247). During this period, small form based compositions with the reduced orchestration with strings and percussion dominate his output. Clarity of texture and sound are featured in the chamber works. The following chamber works are based on small forms, include virtuosic instrumental parts, and transparent texture as well as “contrasting tempi, contrapuntal lines, and clear form”: *Concerto per flauto ed orchestra da camera* (1992), *Entrata* (1994), *Divertimento - Suite per cello solo* (1994), *Lucerne Fanfare* (1998), *Sextet* (2000) “contrasting tempi, contrapuntal lines, and clear form” (Bylander, 2004: 13). Penderecki claims that chamber music is the pinnacle of his synthesis style. *Quartet for Clarinet and String Trio* (1993) is Penderecki’s most substantial chamber work featuring the elements mentioned above as Penderecki himself once said: “Today, after passing through a lesson in late romanticism and utilizing the possibilities of post-modernist thinking, I see my artistic ideal in claritas. I am returning to chamber music, for I realize that more can be said in a hushed voice, condensed in the sound of three or four instruments” (1997: 18).

In the work *Quartet for Clarinet and String Trio* (1993), Penderecki was influenced by the mood of Schubert’s *String Quintet in C Major D 956* when watching the performance by Emerson Quartet with M. Rostropovich. Wolfram Schwinger claims that the second cello part of the Schubert quintet, along with the unison violin and the melody cello, is expressed in the beginning of the fourth movement of the Penderecki (Schwinger, 1998:76). The titles of the piece *Notturmo*, *Scherzo*, *Serenade* and *Abschied* are also pointing to Vienna as textural and formal aspects. In the fourth movement an echo of Schubert’s work can be heard by the ostinato in the cello and violin parts. *Scherzo* (Vivacissimo) attributes to Beethoven’s style of scherzo, while *Serenade* (grazioso, tempo di valse) has the Viennese scent (Chlopicka 2003: 248). Moreover, one can hear the second Viennese composers’ resemblance in the third movement serenade which reminds of Schoenberg, while atmospheric outer movements are recalling Berg (Cain 2012: 19). Moreover, some motives and other compositional aspects are shared between the pieces themselves such as the *Clarinet Quartet* and the *String Trio* sounded strikingly similar to some parts of *Ubu Rex* (Cain 2012: 94).

The two movement *Sinfonietta per Archi* (1992), expresses the idea of solo and collective music-making derived from concerti grossi of the 17th and 18th centuries. The first movement of the work is a reference to the Baroque form of ritornello while the second movement combines sonata allegro and a scherzo form. In *Chaconne in memoria del Giovanni Paolo II* (2005), as opposed to his first phase of synthesis period, Penderecki combines Classical theme and variations form, Baroque polyphonic variation chaconne, romantic lyricism, and avant-garde pitch structures are appeared inherently (Jarzebska, 2007: 181). *String Quartet No. 3* (2008) combines distinct aspects of sonorism, Romanticism, and also sacred music. The whole career of Penderecki especially was recognized for his pioneering ideas for expanding instrumental and vocal tone-colors. *Concerto per flauto ed orchestra da camera* for example, utilizes the instrument’s lyrical sound qualities instead of using unconventional extended instrumental techniques, while pushing the boundaries of virtuosic ability of the performer. The changes in the tempo breaks the concerto into seven movements that played continually without a break. With the alternation of lyrical and fiery moods, each movement has its distinctive flowing, substantial, and well-constructed melodic lines. The fast movements are mostly flying around very high register but are not written only for the sake of virtuosity but also intensify the texture (see figure 3).

Figure 3: *Concerto per flauto ed orchestra da camera* (1992).



The works exemplified so far above have shown that the composer synthesized using traditional compositional elements, forms and genres from different periods of Western music history. The third phase of synthesis period – mentioned above by Chlopicka, maintains Penderecki's experiences in composing through selecting from a wide repertoire of works of his own. According to Chlopicka "As a result of synthesis, the repertoire of composition means is not only established, but also ordered into a hierarchy with regard to the functions they play in the work. The composer makes use of this well-defined individual musical language in a natural, masterly manner" (2003: 249). Many aspects of the earlier works may be involved in the synthesis. Chlopicka believes that the "hierarchization" of the sonorous material – which covers "basic, typical, characteristic, centralizing, and symbolic" sound structures; materials of spatial composition and textural and formal issues are the most foreground. Each work bears a distinct, individual application of the principles that have been characterized with the composer. Many of his works of synthesis period combine chromatic polyphony and tone clusters with classical motivic development and expressive melodies. Within the varied instrumental timbre, his musical materials are quite individual which defines his musical language in what Chlopicka called "new lyric chamber *espressivo* style" (2003: 247).

#### 1.4 Selected works from the period

Operas: The Black Mask, 1986 Ubu Rex, 1991

Choral Works: Sanctus, 1993 Agnus Dei, 1995 Seven Gates of Jerusalem (Symphony No. 7), 1996 Credo, 1998 Lieder der Vergänglichkeit (Symphony No. 8), 2005

Concerti: Concerto for Flute, 1992 Concerto for Violin No 2, "Metamorphoses," 1995 Concerto Grosso for Three Cellos, 2000 Concerto for Piano, 2002 Concerto for Horn, 2008 Numerous arrangements and transcriptions of these works and others for different instrumentations.

Symphonic Works: Symphony No. 4, "Adagio," 1989 Symphony No. 5, "Korean," 1992 Symphony No. 3, 1988–1995 Symphony No. 6, 2003

Chamber: Per Slava, cello, 1985–86, Prelude for Clarinet, 1987, Der Unterbrochene Gedanke, string quartet, 1988, String Trio, 1990–91, Quartet for Clarinet and String Trio, 1993, Divertimento for Cello Solo, 1994, Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 2, 1999, Sextet, clarinet, horn, string trio, and piano, 2000, Sarabande, viola, 2000, Serenata, three cellos, 2007, String Quartet No. 3, 2008, Tanz, violin, 2009, Suite, cello, 1994–2010, Duo Concertante, violin and double bass, 2010, Violincello totale, solo cello, 2011.

## 2. CONCLUSION

Penderecki has long been a prolific composer in a wide range of genres. He synthesizes his previous compositional experiences as well as traditional elements and, despite changes in his musical language, emphasizes the consensus and constancy of the development of his music. His individual style makes use of particular, repeated interval combinations, motives, texture forms, instrument configurations. Counterpoint techniques such as the canon, the fugue and passacaglia play major roles in the process of working all those elements into a whole. For much of the time of the neo-Romantic phase, Penderecki did not attempt to write in a manner that was the exact imitation of the composers of the period. Rather, he used their coordinating methods, such as polyphony, to try to make some sense of the modern compositional language he had just discovered. He retained to apply the sounds he had discovered earlier, but what kept apart from the avant-garde was, putting the elements under control and making them comply with the requirements of expression. The idea of synthesis had a profound impact on the language and the ideological background of his music, arising from the "unifying experience" and being firmly rooted in the ideals of universal humanism. He was both a revolutionary and a conservative, like many other great composers, simultaneously searching for modern ways of musical expression while maintaining a keen appreciation of those who came before him and seeking the new inside the old.

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