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THE ELIZABETH EISENSTEIN ESSAY PRIZE 2016

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As reported in TIS Vol. 2 in September 2016, the winning essay of this prestigious Prize was "The Painted Page: Books as Symbols in Renaissance Art". However, as this was published in TIS Vol. 1 (2016) <http://www.ncis.org/sites/default/files/TIS%20Volume%201%20ALL%20%286%29.pdf> and easily available to TIS readers, we have chosen to reprint (by kind permission of author and her publisher) the essay which took the runner-up prize, "Clichés Revisited: Poland's 1949 Łagów Composers' Conference".

Clichés Revisited: Poland's 1949 Łagów Composers' Conference

[Originally published in Polski Rocznik Muzykologiczny [Polish Musicological Annual] 2015: 15-34]

Cindy Bylander PhD
(San Antonio, Texas, USA)

To nearly all who are acquainted with the events of Polish musical life in the twentieth-century, the word 'Łagów' is synonymous with a singular event, the four-day conference of composers, musicologists, and cultural officials held in the Łagów castle in early August 1949. As Włodzimierz Sokorski, vice-minister of the host organization, the Ministry of Culture and Art, remarked in his opening speech, the meeting's goals were two-fold: first, to „attempt to establish concepts and definitions concerning the entirety of today's musical issues and to attempt to use these definitions in practice,” and second, to take the „first steps in preparing the Festival of Polish Music,” which at that time was scheduled for the fall of 1950 but ultimately was not held until 1951. He concluded the conference by applauding its success: „The period of eclecticism in the views and compositions of our composers is closed. [This meeting] allowed us to behold the path leading to

our goal...Emotionally everyone agrees with the desires of our era.”²⁷

This conference has been cited numerous times as a turning point in Polish musical composition, when the principles of socialist realism were first imposed by the government and composers were thereafter expected to produce compositions that reflected these tenets and rejected so-called formalist traits. Although this

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the American Musicological Society Annual Meeting, November 2015.

²⁷ *Konferencja kompozytorów w Łagowie Lubuskim*, „Ruch Muzyczny” 1949, no. 14, pp. 12, 29-30. This is a revised version of the original transcript: ZKP (Polish Composers Union), Akt 12/91, Konferencji kompozytorów w Łagowie Lubuskim w dniach od 5.iii do 8.viii.1949. Protokół. All citations come from *Ruch Muzyczny* unless otherwise indicated.

interpretation is still invoked by some writers,²⁸ in recent years others have begun to refine this admittedly flawed assessment. In acknowledging some of the subtleties of the proceedings, including the diversity of opinions presented, some scholars have reviewed the reasons for labeling two compositions as formalist, but have not referred to the rationale behind a similar condemnation of two additional works from among the more than twenty-five pieces presented during the conference. They have also noted the failure to adopt a usable definition of socialist realism in music, but have not directly linked that shortcoming to the events of the next few years in Polish music.²⁹

After reviewing the conference's transcript, details contained therein invite further reconsideration of the event's significance, particularly when considered within the context of the first decade of postwar Polish musical life. Not only did the colloquium fail to meet its organizers' goal of clarifying the creative path towards socialist realism in Polish music but composers, taking advantage of inconsistencies in the discussions and hence aware of the chasm exposed between socialist realist philosophy and its practical realization, managed to retain a sense of autonomy in their quest to preserve compositional freedom during the ensuing years, years typically seen as unremittingly restrictive and depressing.

First, a bit of background. The concepts of formalism and realism in Polish music did not emerge without warning in the late 1940s. As Lisa Vest has discussed, in interwar Poland one of the primary controversies among composers and critics concerned the question of what Polish music should look like, or sound like in the future. Should it be related to past national traditions, with composers connecting with audiences through the use of folk materials and existing musical forms, or should they strive to become a recognized part of the larger

international community, participating in the development of new musical trends?³⁰ Indeed, the titles of published articles from that era reflect the issues of the day: „Does music have a social function“, „The relation of composers to folk music“, „Snobbism and progress in contemporary music“, „Is there really a crisis in music?“³¹ These very concerns were among those addressed by the same people in the postwar debates, which today are often viewed as arguments about realism and formalism.

In the Soviet Union, of course, the terms formalism and realism had been in use since at least the 1920s. In 1933, composers there were directed to draw their attention „toward...all that is heroic, bright, and beautiful“.³² In 1936, Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, previously praised by critics, was denounced in an article published in *Pravda*. In December 1947, the Soviet Union's Central Committee received recommendations that composers be instructed to reject „the pernicious 'theory' according to which complex, untexted instrumental...music ought to occupy the leading...position in Soviet music“.³³ In January 1948, Zhdanov declared that composers should recognize „the traditions of the Russian musical school...the deep...connection with the people and their legacy of music and folk song“.³⁴ The following month, the Central Committee accused Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Khachaturian and others of formalism. Khrennikov, president of the Composers Union, went even further by attacking foreign composers, including Hindemith, Berg, Britten, and Messiaen, for their compositional indiscretions.³⁵

²⁸ ELŻBIETA MARKOWSKA, *Jana Krenza pięćdziesiąt lat z batutą. Rozmowy o muzyce polskiej*, Kraków 1996, p. 45; KRZYSZTOF BACULEWSKI, *Polska twórczość kompozytorska 1945-1984*, Kraków 1987, p. 32;

<http://panufnik.polmic.pl/index.php/en/biografia/socrealizm-i-ucieczka-z-polski>, retrieved 21.12.2015; DAGMAR DOPIERAŁA, *Refleksje wokół Symfonii polskiej Zygmunta Mycielskiego*, in: *Twórczość Zygmunta Mycielskiego jako dziedzictwo kultury polskiej i europejskiej*, ed. Grzegorz Oliwa, Rzeszów 2008, p. 88.

²⁹ Thomas does refer to the difficult choices faced by composers and some of the compositions produced during these years. ADRIAN THOMAS, *Polish Music since Szymanowski*, Cambridge 2005, pp. 42-50, 59-60; DAVID TOMPKINS, *Composing the Party Line*, West Lafayette, Indiana 2013, pp. 27-31; MAŁGORZATA GAŚIOROWSKA, *Baciewicz*, Kraków 1999, pp. 181-184.

³⁰ LISA COOPER VEST, *The Discursive Foundations of the Polish Musical Avant-garde at Midcentury: Aesthetics of Progress, Meaning, and National Identity*. Indiana University 2014, pp. 10-11.

³¹ STEFANIA ŁOBACZEWSKA, *Czy muzyka dzisiejsza ma funkcję społeczną?* „Muzyka Polska” 1934, pp. 184-189; MICHAŁ KONDRACKI, *Stosunek kompozytorów do muzyki ludowej*, „Muzyka Polska” 1936, pp. 106-112; KONSTANTY REGAMEY, *Snobizm a postęp w muzyce współczesnej*, „Muzyka Polska” 1937, pp. 56-62; IZYDOR MONAS, *Czyżby kryzys muzyki?* „Muzyka polska” 1938, pp. 60-64.

³² BORIS SCHWARZ, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*, enlarged edition 1917-1981, Bloomington, Indiana 1983, pp. 55, 114; LAUREL FAY, *Shostakovich. A Life*, Oxford 2000, pp. 84-89.

³³ Quoted in FAY, op. cit. 155.

³⁴ Quoted in FAY, op. cit. 156.

³⁵ FAY, op. cit., pp. 157-158; SCHWARZ, op. cit., p. 225.

INTRODUCING THE DESIRED IDEOLOGY

In Poland, composers' conversations after the war were related both to the interwar debates and the Soviet-led push for socialist realism. The concepts of accessibility and social responsibility were clearly on their minds. In late August 1945, at the first postwar conference of Polish composers, discussion points included the ideological character of the future union, compositional freedom, and music for the masses.³⁶ In an article about the conference, Stanisław Wiechowicz offered a moderate viewpoint, stating his desire to maintain compositional freedom while providing „the best performance[s] of the finest music to the broad masses”.³⁷ In contrast, Witold Rudziński stated that „a contemporary composer...wants to sacrifice many of his own personal desires...to coordinate his work with the liveliest needs of reborn...Polish culture”.³⁸ Rudziński, who would become a proponent of socialist realism, worked for the Ministry of Culture and Art from 1947-1948 and was the Composers Union president from 1950-1951.

In 1946, compositional freedom was still officially accepted, but some composers and cultural officials spoke in terms related to socio-political aspirations. For example, Sokorski, a member of the Polish Workers' Party (PPR)—then the name of Poland's Communist-aligned party—spoke at that year's Composers Union convention about overcoming class prejudices in composition.³⁹

Anne Applebaum has argued in her book *Iron Curtain, The Crushing of Eastern Europe 1944-1956* that Soviet domination of Eastern Europe was a foregone conclusion following the end of World War II. Although an appearance of multi-party governing and freedom of activities initially existed, Soviets never intended this to be an ongoing state of affairs. Sokorski's 1946 speech to composers formed, I believe, one of the initial steps taken by Communist officials to convince musical artists to accept a Soviet-style system.

In January 1947, parliamentary elections in Poland were won via fraudulent means by a bloc dominated by the same Polish Workers' Party. This was effectively the beginning of Communist control in Poland, long before the official creation of the Polish United Workers Party in December 1948.⁴⁰ The debate about acceptable compositional practices heated up. Stefan Kisielewski had asserted in December 1946 that „a composition isn't national...because it contains quotes from folklore.”⁴¹ He continued to promote the need for artistic excellence and an awareness of diverse musical styles in subsequent years. (Following the 1949 Łągów conference, Kisielewski was relieved of his position at Kraków's Higher School of Music due to his purportedly formalist views.)⁴² Promoting a different outlook later in 1947, in a *Ruch Muzyczny* issue devoted to Soviet music, was Zofia Lissa, a musicologist who served as the cultural attaché for the Polish embassy in Moscow from 1945 to 1947 and as a vice-director in the Polish Ministry of Culture and Art from 1947 to 1948. For her, composers in capitalist countries, who allegedly did not care about their nation's musical culture, wrote music that only educated listeners could appreciate. In contrast, Soviet composers refrained from „ultramodern, extremely innovative stylistic trends” and drew inspiration from folk music.⁴³ Lissa's musical knowledge and her connections to high-level cultural officials gave her a leading role in the battle (to use a socialist realist term) to convince composers of the proper direction for Polish music.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ ANNE APPLEBAUM, *Iron Curtain, The Crushing of Eastern Europe 1944-1956*, New York 2012, pp. 205-206.

⁴¹ STEFAN KISIELEWSKI, *Muzyka narodowa i próby obrazoburstwa*, „Tygodnik powszechny” 1946, no. 91, quoted in *Przegląd prasy*, „Ruch Muzyczny” 1947, no. 1, p. 26; also in STEFAN KISIELEWSKI, *Pisma i felietony muzyczne* vol. 1, Warsaw 2012, p. 294. See LESZEK POLONY, *Polski kształt sporu o istotę muzyki*, Kraków 1991, for additional details on Kisielewski's polemics on topics related to compositional freedom.

⁴² DANUTA GWIZDALANKA AND KRZYSZTOF MEYER, *Witold Lutosławski. Droga do dojrzałości*, Kraków 2003, p. 275; <http://kisielewski.org.pl/index.php/stefan-kisielewski/kisiel-kompozytor>, retrieved 21.12.2015.

⁴³ ZOFIA LISSA, *Kształtowanie się stylu w muzyce radzieckiej*, „Ruch Muzyczny” 1947, no. 23, pp. 4-7.

⁴⁴ The relationship of Lissa's prewar writings to her postwar views related to formalism and realism was discussed in SŁAWOMIR WIECZOREK, *Na froncie muzyki. Socrealistyczny dyskurs o muzyce w Polsce w latach 1948-1955*, Wrocław 2014, pp. 103-113. For a discussion of subtle shifts of opinion in Lissa's writings during the socialist realist period, see also POLONY, *Polski kształt sporu o istotę muzyki*, op. cit., pp. 277-311.

³⁶ ZKP, Akt 12/1, Z I Walnego Zjazdu Związku Kompozytorów Polskich w Krakowie 29 sierpień-1 wrzesień 1945 r.

³⁷ STANISŁAW WIECHOWICZ, *Kompozytor w dobie dzisiejszej (refleksje w związku ze zjazdem kompozytorów polskich)*, „Ruch Muzyczny” 1945, no. 1, p. 7.

³⁸ WITOLD RUDZIŃSKI, *Nowe casy – nowe zadania*, „Ruch Muzyczny” 1945, no. 1, p. 8.

³⁹ ZKP, Akt 12/2, I Walny Zjazd (1, 2, 3.x.1946 Warszawa), p. 3. Sokorski was present at the Composers Union convention as a member of the Central Commission of Professional Unions (Komisja Centralna Związków Zawodowych).

At the Composers Union's annual meeting in October 1947, ideological conversations turned more definitively to composers' social responsibilities, including the need to provide music for workers and the military. However, most members ignored these issues, preferring to discuss how to improve their daily musical life.⁴⁵ The same year, musicologists were invited to participate; they would be officially accepted into the union in 1948. Thus the membership in Poland's union would mirror that of the Soviet Composers Union. Musicologists were given the task of guiding composers in „acquiring new artistic forms...for new listeners [and] diagnosing the cause of the crisis in contemporary music.”⁴⁶

The public declaration of socialist realism in the Polish arts came a few weeks later, in a speech given by the country's president, Bolesław Bierut, at the opening of the Wrocław radio station. To quote, „The responsibility of a creator...is to feel the pulse of the working people, their desires and needs, to draw inspiration...from their emotions and experiences...[A creator's]...goal should be to...ennoble the mass's level of living. An artistic work separated from this goal, art for art's sake, comes from asocial motives.” Ominously, he also said „the nation must shape its creators' culture by recognizing or rejecting their products.”⁴⁷ The stage for a full-scale implementation of socialist realism in the arts was now set and, indeed, had been prepared in advance. It was still more than a year and a half before the Łagów conference began.

EDUCATION, OR HOW COMPOSITION SHOULD REFLECT SOCIALIST REALISM

The question now was how to put ideology into practice. At Prague's International Congress of Composers and Critics in 1948, composers were directed to link their work to their own country's culture, express the emotions of the masses, and write vocal music.⁴⁸ The Polish Composers Union's official statement from that year's annual conference affirmed that a composer's task was to produce works understandable by new listeners. Elitism in music was declared obsolete, although paradoxically, the newest achievements in compositional technique need not be avoided.⁴⁹ Institutions such as the Ministry of Culture and Art,

working through their sympathizers in the union, which now included fifteen musicologists, had succeeded in inserting their ideology into its public declarations. The question of whether individual composers were similarly persuaded seems to have been partly answered by the decision of nearly half of them to avoid attending their own convention.⁵⁰ Moreover, composers were already experiencing pressure from cultural authorities. Lutosławski had complained in the summer of 1948 that Sokorski, by then the Vice-Minister of the Ministry of Culture and Art, had reminded him that he did not write music for the masses and that his First Symphony could not be performed in Poland. Although it was heard again in October 1949, several members of the Soviet delegation to the International Chopin Piano Competition characterized it as formalist; it then disappeared from the Polish repertoire until 1959.⁵¹

The musical genre most favored by proponents of socialist realism was the mass song. Following two retreats held to discuss appropriate texts, in 1948 Polish Radio and the Ministry of Culture and Art organized a competition for such songs, which were to be simple and preferably based on Polish folk themes or written in the style of Polish patriotic or military songs.⁵² Of 408 songs reportedly submitted, only 68 passed the first round of elimination. The remaining were dismissed because they “were harmonically complicated, hinted of jazz or were sentimental waltzes, naive mazurkas, [or] primitive marches, [or had] no honest musical idea.”⁵³ The search for ideologically pure music was thus put into practice.

In 1949, prior to the start of the Łagów conference, Polish compositions were already being critiqued for their adherence to realist principles. For example,

⁵⁰ ZKP, Akt 12/4, IV Walny Zjazd ZKP (20, 21, 22.XI.1948), 24, Lista obecności członków Związku Kompozytorów Polskich na Walny Zjazd, Załącznik Nr. 5.

⁵¹ LEON MARKIEWICZ, ed., *Korespondencja Grzegorza Fitelberga z lat 1941-1953*, Katowice 2003, pp. 133-134; GWIZDALANKA AND MEYER, op. cit., pp. 183, 334; BN (National Library, Warsaw), WOSPR concert program, 2 October 1949.

⁵² The retreats, held in November 1947 and March 1948, were organized by the Composers and Writers Unions. ZYGMUNT MYCIELSKI, *O Departamencie Muzyki w Ministerstwie Kultury i Sztuki*, „Ruch Muzyczny” 1948, no. 7, p. 13; *Kronika*, „Ruch Muzyczny” 1948, no. 7, p. 22.

⁵³ *Sprawozdanie z konkursu na polską pieśń masową*, „Ruch Muzyczny” 1948, no. 17, pp. 13-15. The Composers Union also held a separate competition in 1948 for works based on Polish themes that could be performed by amateur ensembles. Other organizations also organized mass song competitions. *Związek Kompozytorów Polskich ogłasza konkurs*, „Ruch Muzyczny” 1948, no. 7, p. 24; GWIZDALANKA AND MEYER, op. cit., p. 248.

⁴⁵ ZKP, Akt 12/3, III Walny Zjazd ZKP (20, 21.X.47).

⁴⁶ *I Zjazd Muzykologów Polskich*, „Ruch Muzyczny” 1948, nos. 22-24, p. 6.

⁴⁷ BOLESŁAW BIERUT, *O upowszechnieniu kultury*, Kraków 1948, pp. 12-13, 19.

⁴⁸ *Manifest*, „Ruch Muzyczny” 1948, nos. 13-14, pp. 26-27.

⁴⁹ *Deklaracja. Walne Zgromadzenie Związku Kompozytorów Polskich*, „Ruch Muzyczny” 1949, no. 1, p. 13.

Roman Palester's *Little Serenade* was criticized for its virtuosic technical means, in part due to listeners' negative reactions.⁵⁴ In June, critic Jerzy Kuryluk lambasted Lutosławski's *Symphonic Variations*, which bear the influences of Szymanowski and Stravinsky, by describing the work as a "chaos of sounds" while hinting that the composer wrote formalist music. At the same time, he praised Grażyna Bacewicz's folk-tinged Third Violin Concerto (1948) as music for the masses.⁵⁵ Musicologist Józef Chomiński praised Bolesław Woytowicz's *Twelve Etudes* for piano as an example of how to avoid formalism.⁵⁶ (More than a year later, however, Rudziński claimed these same etudes were formalist.)⁵⁷

Although critics had begun to use the prescribed ideological terms, little concrete advice on appropriate musical style had been provided. The definitions of formalism and realism, especially the latter, were still murky. Clarifying these issues was to be among the tasks of the Łagów composers' conference. For writers, artists, and dramaturgists, similar events had already been held in Szczecin, Nieborów and Obory, respectively. Composers could not have been surprised to receive their invitations to Łagów.

This event was attended by approximately twenty-five composers, musicologists, and cultural officials, including representatives of all generations. Among the most prominent absentees was Andrzej Panufnik, who was arguably Poland's best composer. Kisielewski was also not in attendance, but neither were about a dozen other composers active at that time.⁵⁸ Included on the agenda was a single prepared speech, to be given by

Zygmunt Mycielski, the president of the Composers Union. However, the debates were dominated by Lissa and Sokorski, who apparently had speeches ready in their pockets.

According to Mycielski, music history was a series of constantly shifting compositional styles occurring in a natural progression of events. Such an historical viewpoint did not explain current events, however, for now art had to be created for an entire nation. Mycielski also stated, for the record, that the Composers Union now accepted realism and rejected formalism, with the caveat that a work could not be deemed formalist after only one hearing. This last wish was not always put into practice.⁵⁹

Sokorski signaled almost immediately that this event would be a continuation of previous discussions, for he referred to the lack of progress made towards "the specified creative path" since the 1948 Composers Union convention.⁶⁰ As he had said on other occasions, realism in music could not be precisely defined; his intent at Łagów was to approach but not formulate such definitions.⁶¹ He encouraged composers to find an acceptable means for emotional expression in their music, which should be universally understood. He also cautioned against "a mistaken crackdown on formalism," yet within a few minutes he characterized many of Palester's compositions as bearing "traits of insurmountable formalism."⁶²

Lissa disagreed with Sokorski's approach, saying his generally psychological discussion would not lead to an effective solution for composers.⁶³ She rejected as decadent all technical innovations developed from 1914 to 1939, including neo-classicism, atonality, and anything that lacked melody. Instrumental music

⁵⁴ BRONISŁAW RUTKOWSKI, *Życie muzyczne w kraju. Kraków*, "Ruch Muzyczny" 1949, no. 2, p. 17. See also ZOFIA HELMAN, *Roman Palester. Twórca i dzieło*, Kraków 1999, p. 124.

⁵⁵ Wieczorek also discussed responses to Kuryluk's criticism of Lutosławski's work. SŁAWOMIR WIECZOREK, *Od 'kakofonii dźwięków' do 'wielkiej muzyki'. Krytyka muzyczna socrealizmu o muzyce Witolda Lutosławskiego*, "Res Facta Nova" 2013, p. 219.

⁵⁶ JÓZEF MICHAŁ CHOMIŃSKI, *O społecznej wartości dzieła muzycznego*, "Ruch Muzyczny" 1949, no. 2, p. 7.

⁵⁷ ZKP, 12/116, Protokół z pierwszego przesłuchania Sekcji Muzyki Pedagogicznej Z. K.P. odbytego w dniu 31. października 1950 r. w auli Państw. Wyższej Szkoły Muzycznej w Katowicach, p. 5.

⁵⁸ Rudziński noted that Kisielewski, Rytel, Spisak, Szałowski and others were not invited to Łagów. AKP (Archiwum Kompozytorów Polskich), Rudziński personal papers, 7 August 1949. According to Gąsiorowska, Bacewicz did attend, although Thomas claims the opposite. MAŁGORZATA GAŚSIOROWSKA, op. cit., p. 184; Thomas, *Polish Music*, op. cit., p. 83. A list of attendees can be derived from the speakers at the conference and a photo of participants, "Ruch Muzyczny" 1949, no. 14, p. 2.

⁵⁹ ZKP, 12/91, Załącznik Nr. 2, Zygmunt Mycielski, Przemówienie na zjeździe muzycznym w Łagowie Lubuskim, dnia 5. Sierpnia 1949 r. O zadaniach związku kompozytorów polskich, pp. 3, 12, 14; ZKP, Akt 12/116, Protokół i przesłuchania sekcji muzyki estradowej. Kraków, 5.xii.1950.

⁶⁰ *Konferencja kompozytorów*, p. 12.

⁶¹ The original transcript has "nie ich sformułowanie, ale zbliżenie się do nich." ZKP, Akt 12/91, Konferencji kompozytorów w Łagowie Lubuskim, pp. 3-4. The *Ruch Muzyczny* version uses "nie ich sformułowanie, lecz analiza poszczególnych pojęć." *Konferencja kompozytorów*, p. 13. See also WŁODZIMIERZ SOKORSKI, *Rodzi się nowa muzyka*, in: *Sztuka w walce o socjalizm*, Warsaw 1950. The latter reprints a speech made in January 1949.

⁶² *Konferencja kompozytorów*, p. 13. Sokorski deemed Palester's 1937 ballet *Song of the Earth* and his 1948 film music to *Border Street* more acceptable than his other works.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, p. 13.

reflected a tendency toward formalism. New compositions should unite Poland's musical heritage with a new language that reflected the current social era. Appropriating folk music was desired, as were vocal works.⁶⁴

Although Lissa's comments seemed to provide a somewhat practical definition of realism in music, Sokorski's response indicated otherwise: „Lissa's thoughts [are] not ... a group of established theses but [form] discussion material.”⁶⁵ Those present must have realized at that point that there was opportunity for future disagreement or, at the very least, flexibility, if even avid members of the Polish United Workers Party, as both Sokorski and Lissa were, did not have a party line when it came to musical composition. Chomiński contributed to this lack of consensus by declaring later that “the content of purely instrumental music is almost an unresolved issue. We know that its themes should be linked to reality...but we cannot say on what that link should be based”.⁶⁶

Many of the composers present resisted the views expressed by Lissa, Sokorski and Chomiński, although the degree of their stated dissatisfaction varied. Some speakers were perhaps hedging their bets by not expressing unconditional support for either side of the ideological debate. Piotr Perkowski said that “the matter of formalism and realism is simply a political issue,”⁶⁷ but seemed to admit that formalists were indifferent to the new reality. According to Woytowicz and Kazimierz Sikorski, a musical composition was incapable of reflecting any viewpoint about current social problems.⁶⁸ Sikorski warned that applying the Soviet concept of formalism would require musicians to ignore the past fifty years of compositional development. Woytowicz, whose own music was often agreeable to advocates of socialist realism, noted that various musical styles were needed to satisfy the needs of all listeners. He defended a composer's right to experiment, but at the same time asserted that composers were obligated to search for a musical language that was comprehensible to audiences. He complicated the picture, however, by urging that the musical literacy of potential audiences be improved as well as by claiming that some works considered formalist could, in fact, be understood by

many. Both Sikorski and Woytowicz asked for, but did not receive a more precise elaboration of the acceptable attributes of a realist composition.⁶⁹

Despite a lack of agreement on the characteristics of formalism and, especially, realism in music, the conference agenda moved to performances and critiques of specific compositions, listed in Table 1. Surely, after that, composers would be able to appreciate the differences between realist and formalist compositions. All or part of each work was heard live or on tape. These performance-discussions were among the first so-called *przesłuchania* in Poland that vetted compositions for ideological purposes. The concept for these examinations, or auditions, came from the Soviet Union, where similar events had occurred since at least the late 1930s. At Łagów, the plan was to measure each piece for its adherence to socialist realism, with composers expected to participate in critiquing or praising their colleagues.⁷⁰

One of the most striking aspects of these auditions was the relative paucity of time spent discussing the songs presented at the second concert. Given the oft-stated desire for vocal music as an emblem of the socialist era, it is puzzling that neither Sokorski nor Lissa chose to showcase the advantages of such works, even if only those by Klon and Gradstein fit neatly into the category of mass song.⁷¹ That most composers declined to critique these pieces likely reflected their disinterest in the government's call for socially useful songs.

Despite the supposed disdain for instrumental music among promoters of socialist realism, orchestral music dominated these concerts. Perhaps the organizers wished to emphasize the failings of such compositions. In fact, the Ministry of Culture and Art had purposely planned to include pieces that represented both formalist and realist approaches. Moreover, the presence in Łagów of the Poznań Philharmonic, which performed most of the works presented, may have been too advantageous to ignore.⁷² As seen in Table 1, four of

⁶⁴ Ibidem, pp. 13-16.

⁶⁵ Ibidem, p. 16.

⁶⁶ Ibidem, p. 17.

⁶⁷ Ibidem, p. 14. Rudziński's unpublished diary notes that Woytowicz made this remark. AKP, Rudziński personal papers, 8 August 1949.

⁶⁸ *Konferencja kompozytorów*, p. 14.

⁶⁹ Ibidem, pp. 14-15, 17. The word “Soviet” is omitted in *Ruch Muzyczny*, but is present in the original transcript, ZKP, 12/91, Konferencji kompozytorów w Łagowie Lubuskim, p. 3.

⁷⁰ RICHARD TARUSKIN, *Oxford History of Western Music*, vol. 4, Oxford 2005, p. 778; *Konferencja kompozytorów*, p. 12.

⁷¹ I have not been able to examine scores to all of the vocal works presented on the second concert.

⁷² The Presidium of the Composers Union compiled a list of works for the conference, most of which were performed. AAN (Archiwum Akt Nowych) 366/1-728, Sprawozdanie Departamentu Twórczości Artystycznej za III Kwartał 1949 rok, 5; ZKP, Akt 12/28, Protokół z posiedzenia Prezydium Zarządu Gł. ZKP w dnia 29 czerwca 1949 r.;

the nine orchestral works presented were characterized as formalist by Sokorski. Most composers disagreed with his depictions, however, not only declining to criticize their colleagues, but also choosing either to praise the work or merely to suggest improvements in specific details.

Sokorski's condemnation of Turski's *Olympic Symphony* and Panufnik's *Nocturne* as formalist has been mentioned frequently by other commentators and, indeed, Turski's work dominated the proceedings, for it was repeatedly brought up even during discussions of subsequent works. Recipient of first prize at the 1948 Olympic Arts Competition in London, the symphony had been broadcast previously on Polish Radio (most likely this was the premiere performance in London led by Grzegorz Fitelberg on 18 September 1948). In Łagów, Sokorski berated it as a work whose „content...does not agree with the spirit of our times...A work that scares and disorients the listener.”⁷³ Lissa claimed it did not mobilize man — in other words, it did not end on a victorious note. Most composers disagreed with these assessments and instead praised the work for its emotional weight and reflection of wartime experiences. Perkowski, for example, followed Sokorski's comments by stating that „we should remember past evil in order to be able to build a new better life. Therefore the performance of this symphony cannot be a mistake.”⁷⁴

Panufnik's *Nocturne*, which had won first prize at the 1947 Szymanowski Competition, had been performed at home and abroad. As the only stylistically adventurous composition presented in Łagów, its lack of emphasis on melody and its predominantly non-triadic harmonies undoubtedly aroused suspicion for advocates of socialist realism. Although Sokorski's comments on this work were brief but pointed, Panufnik's peers openly contradicted his rebuke, saying *Nocturne* was “understandable by everyone” and would enjoy future success.⁷⁵

Comparing the scores of the Łagów pieces to the critiques dispensed there only invites continued confusion about what formalism and realism really meant when applied to composition. Composers at the

time must have been similarly perplexed. The least complicated of the works were those by Sikorski and Tadeusz Baird. Written when he was only twenty-one, Baird's *Sinfonietta*, which boasts clear construction and uncomplicated melodies, appealed to proponents of socialist realism in music. In fact, the only people who commented on the work, albeit briefly, were Sokorski and Jan Maklakiewicz, both of whom supported that musical path.⁷⁶

No consensus was reached concerning the simplest piece, Sikorski's *Overture for Small Orchestra*. Although not considered a formalist work, it still resisted straightforward categorization within a socialist realist framework. According to the composer, the piece was intended for performance by amateur ensembles, but Lissa said it was too difficult for such groups. Sokorski, however, thought it was „useful for the dissemination of music.” Sikorski's fellow composers held varied opinions: the piece was easy and accessible (Perkowski), too easy (Klon), or less accessible due to its hackneyed themes (Woytowicz).⁷⁷ These differences of perception can be attributed in part to the innately individual experience that *is* listening to music. However, the reliance of socialist realist advocates on such non-specific terms as „accessible” hindered their attempts to impose pragmatic boundaries between formalism and realism.

The remaining orchestral compositions heard at Łagów can be described briefly as more thickly textured, with varying degrees of chromatic harmonies and classical-romantic formal constructions. The comments about Mycielski's *Silesian Overture*, which stylistically occupies a middle ground between the works of Baird and Turski, also yielded a variety of opinions. Sokorski claimed „he was lost in the melodic ideas of the second movement...[yet]...it was compact and suggestive emotionally.” Although Sokorski also said that in Perkowski's formalist (and rhapsodic) Violin Concerto, the melody disintegrated, the melodic issues in Mycielski's work did not merit a similar ideological censure. What was melody supposed to look like, one wonders. According to Woytowicz, Mycielski's piece was the most accessible work on the first concert. Andrzej Klon initially said it was „representative of good music,” but ultimately deemed it formalist only because it was too difficult for amateurs.⁷⁸ Fortunately, his pronouncement did not carry the same weight of official

http://www.jemiolow.net/wycieczka_nr8_do_lagowa_47.html, retrieved 21.12.2015; MARKIEWICZ, op. cit., 163.

⁷³

http://www.olimpijski.pl/Media/files/pdf/Symf_Olimp_ksiazeczka.pdf, retrieved 12.21.2015; *Konferencja kompozytorów*, p. 19; MARKIEWICZ, op. cit., p. 166.

⁷⁴ *Konferencja kompozytorów*, pp. 18-19, 23.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 24; BEATA BOLESŁAWSKA, *Panufnik*, Kraków 2001, p. 121.

⁷⁶ *Sinfonietta* received its unofficial premiere at Łagów.

Konferencja kompozytorów, pp. 28, 30.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 18-19, 22-23.

⁷⁸ I am not familiar with Ekier's unpublished Piano Concerto. *Ibidem*, pp. 18-19, 24.

censure as Sokorski's did. Panufnik's *Nocturne* disappeared from the repertoire until May 1954; Turski's *Olympic Symphony*, Perkowski's Violin Concerto, and Malawski's *Symphonic Variations* were apparently not programmed in Poland for at least the remainder of the first post-war decade. However, even Sikorski's less problematic *Overture for Small Orchestra* was performed infrequently, if at all, making the interpretation of concert programs for their political astuteness a questionable endeavor, and one that requires keen awareness of the ideological rigors of the moment.⁷⁹

Given the dismay and bewilderment that composers probably felt at the conclusion of this conference, was there anything positive that could be taken from it? No conclusions had been reached regarding an approved musical style or styles. While rhetoric about formalism and realism abounded, even after lengthy discussions about specific compositions, nothing translated coherently to the problem of actually composing a piece of music. Although Sokorski tended to label compositions he did not like or understand as formalist, he did not do so for all of the more complicated works. For example, Bacewicz's Third Violin Concerto was neither praised nor rebuked.⁸⁰ Folk music was barely mentioned in discussions about specific pieces, although it was supposed to be an important aspect of realist music. Even the simpler compositions were not enthusiastically praised by those in official positions.

COMPOSERS REACT TO THE NEW REALITY

The multiplicity of opinions voiced throughout the conference, expressed without redress from officials present, provided composers with an opening for future action.⁸¹ They could perhaps foresee that they would be

allowed to disagree with government officials, if not publicly, then behind closed doors. They could also expect continued inconsistencies of interpretation by those having the power or responsibility to review compositions for possible public performance. What then, could composers do, other than either write simple music, which might still be criticized, or continue carefully along their own path, staying wary of current trends and decisions made by cultural authorities.

Although space does not permit a thorough vetting of Polish music and musical life between 1949 and 1955, several events can be highlighted in order to demonstrate how and why various composers dealt with authorities' continued demands for a new musical language. The lessons learned from the Łagów conference likely helped some composers to cope with the shifting terrain of Polish musical life during those years, including its psychological and economic pressures.

Certainly official criticism continued, as did ideological discussions similar to those of previous years. At the 1950 Composers Union's conference, Rudziński falsely claimed that commissions were not being given for realist compositions.⁸² Sokorski remarked at the same meeting that „we have many talented composers...however...some strange atmosphere of opposition reigns. We see composers withdrawing from the position that they held in Łagów.”⁸³ By late 1951, following the months-long Festival of Polish Music, Sokorski still wondered why music had yet to reflect the expected vibrancy of socialist art.⁸⁴ As late as 1953, Zofia Lissa referred to impressionistic qualities in Bacewicz's Third Violin Concerto when she admitted that theorists had not adequately clarified which traditions of Polish music were “progressive” and which were false and unnecessary. She pointed out that composers should reach for musical traditions prior to the impressionist era.⁸⁵

Although all Polish composers wrote works identifiable as conforming to some perceived principles of socialist realism, they did not fall into line as much as cultural officials had hoped. Many were displeased with the state

⁷⁹ Based on concert programs at BN, Panufnik's *Nocturne* was presented by the Warsaw Philharmonic on 21 May 1954.

Mycielski's *Silesian Overture* was performed in Kraków on 30 September 1949. The same day, Ekier's Piano Concerto was played by the Poznań State Philharmonic. Baird's *Sinfonietta* and Bacewicz's Violin Concerto No. 3 were heard frequently during this time. I am not aware of extant programs for concerts presented in factories and other worker venues where, perhaps, Sikorski's work was presented.

⁸⁰ The folk tune-based third movement of Bacewicz's concerto was not performed. GAŚIÓROWSKA, op. cit., p. 184.

⁸¹ The one exception was Sokorski's rebuke of Maklakiewicz for his labeling of Sikorski's comments as anti-Soviet, a reference to Sikorski's concerns about using the Soviet definition of formalism. Sokorski stated that Maklakiewicz was not speaking for the Party. This reproach was not printed in *Ruch Muzyczny*, but appears in the original transcript. ZKP, Akt 12/91, Konferencji kompozytorów w Łagowie Lubuskim, p. 30.

⁸² Commissions were granted for mass songs, for example. ZKP, Akt 12/5, V Walny Zjazd (16, 17, 18, 19.vi.1950 Wwa), p. 49.

⁸³ ZKP, Akt 12/5, V Walny Zjazd (16, 17, 18, 19.vi.1950 W-wa), p. 30.

⁸⁴ Sokorski made these comments at the 1951 Composers Union annual meeting, 11-14 December 1951. WŁODZIMIERZ SOKORSKI, *Od Łagowa do Festiwalu Muzyki Polskiej*, „Muzyka” 1952, nos. 1-2, pp. 3-4.

⁸⁵ AKP, Korespondencja Z. Lissy (1945-1955), Ministerstwo Kultury i Sztuka, Państwowy Instytut Sztuki, 20 February 1953.

of cultural affairs in Poland. To determine the extent of their cooperation or dissent, we should consider the personal circumstances of each composer, for contrary to what Tompkins has said, not everyone was willing to cooperate with the desires of the authorities.⁸⁶

For various reasons, some composers did feel compelled to compose works desired by authorities. For example, as Thomas has noted, financial and health concerns were cited by Mycielski and Gradstein in their request for grants connected with the 1951 Festival of Polish Music. For the same event, Apolinary Szeluto was willing to compose songs in praise of Stalin, hoping that his son would then be permitted to leave the Soviet Union.⁸⁷ According to Gwizdalanka, Tadeusz Szeligowski was "inspired" to compose his opera *The Scholar's Revolt* due to a threat of arrest by the security services (UB) for his interwar political views. As part of a deal to get his father released from prison, Baird was apparently pressured to write three compositions, including two cantatas (*Ballad of a Soldier's Cup* and *Song of Revolution*) and a mass song (*At a Warsaw Rally*). If true, Baird's interest in a simplified musical language, first expressed at Łagów, did not prevent authorities from manipulating his personal concerns to their advantage.⁸⁸

Other composers chose to leave Poland in search of less restrictive situations. Nearly all of Panufnik's compositions written between 1949 and 1954, the year of his escape to Great Britain, incorporated Polish folk songs or were arrangements of early music, which on the surface points to his fidelity to the socialist realist cause. He was, we know, forced to give speeches and travel abroad on behalf of the government. Most scholars agree that he left Poland so that he could compose more freely, without these extraneous duties.⁸⁹ Palester, wary of the changes that had been occurring in his native country since 1947, eventually declined offers

of employment and performances that were contingent on his return to Poland from France.⁹⁰

Bacewicz, on the other hand, continued her successful career as a violinist and composer. As she told her brother, Polish composers did not compose just mass songs, for she received commissions for quartets, symphonies, concertos, and pedagogical works.⁹¹ The latter had been a part of her oeuvre even before the Łagów conference, but they also satisfied the government's current expectation for realist works, as did the folk-inspired elements in some of her compositions. She wrote at least one mass song, set to Wygodzki's *Song of Unity* (*Pieśń jedności*), this in November 1948 (that is, before Łagów) for a competition celebrating the "United Workers Party".⁹²

Others also straddled the fence. For example, Tadeusz Machl continued to write organ concertos, but composed a cantata for youth (*Kantata młodzieżowa*). Kazimierz Serocki composed cantatas and songs, but flirted with the undesirable idioms of jazz and twelve-tone structures in his 1952 *Suite of Preludes*. Lutosławski wrote several mass songs, some of them after being warned of potential repercussions if he avoided the task. Nevertheless, at the 1950 Composers Union convention, when Sokorski placed Lutosławski's name on the list of speakers, the composer refused to cooperate. In 1952, he refused to compose music to a film about General Świerczewski, a Pole who fought with the Soviets during World War II. Both Serocki and Lutosławski were among composers who attempted to avoid overt references to socialist realist idolatry when selecting song texts.⁹³

Symphonies, quartets, and other instrumental genres were indeed commissioned and scheduled for concert performances and broadcasts on government-controlled Polish Radio, even if they lacked references to folk music. They were also important components of the

⁸⁶ TOMPKINS, op. cit., pp. 32, 36.

⁸⁷ ADRIAN THOMAS, *File 750: Composers, Politics and the Festival of Polish Music (1951)*, http://www.usc.edu/dept/polish_music/PMJ/issue/5.1.02/thomasfile.html retrieved 21.12.2015.

⁸⁸ *Konferencja kompozytorów*, p. 28; DANUTA GWIZDALANKA, *Trzy postawy wobec totalitaryzmu: Roman Palester – Andrzej Panufnik – Witold Lutosławski*, in *Muzyka i Totalitaryzm*, ed. Maciej Jabłoński and Janina Tatarska, Poznań 1996, p. 181; <http://baird.polmic.pl/index.php/pl/biografia/grupa-49-i-walka-o-ojca-1949-1954>, retrieved 12.21.2015; <http://baird.polmic.pl/index.php/pl/tworczosc/w-neoklasycznym-kregu>, retrieved 12.21.2015.

⁸⁹ BOLESŁAWSKA, op. cit., pp. 146-155, 163-165; THOMAS, *Polish Music*, op. cit., pp. 65--69.

⁹⁰ HELMAN, op. cit., pp. 162-170.

⁹¹ Gąsiorowska questioned whether other sections of the same letter, which described the senselessness of avant-garde music, were written solely to avoid censorship or if Bacewicz was convinced of their truth. Gąsiorowska, op. cit., p. 185.

⁹² The score to Bacewicz's song is not extant, to my knowledge. The Polish United Workers Party did not exist when she submitted the piece. AAN, MKiS 366/1-499, *Pieśni nadesłane na konkurs Pieśni Zjednoczonych Partii Robotniczych*. Also, the incorporation of folk music into other compositions is not necessarily a sign of acquiescence to socialist realist principles, but could be the result of a composer's natural interest in such activity.

⁹³ THOMAS, *Polish Music*, op. cit., p. 64. IRINA NIKOLSKA, *Conversations with Witold Lutosławski*, Stockholm 1994, 41-42.

1951 and 1955 Festivals of Polish Music.⁹⁴ Moreover, although many composers composed at least a few mass songs, the vast majority were written by only a few composers, notably Alfred Gradstein, Edward Olearczyk, Tadeusz Sygietyński, and Władysław Szpilman, all of whom favored the socialist realist paradigm more so than Lutosławski, Bacewicz, and others. Bolesław Szabelski, Artur Malawski, and Mycielski wrote no mass songs, to my knowledge. The aforementioned reluctance of Łagów participants to critique songs was thus repeated through their unwillingness to revel in the very type of music preferred by cultural officials.

Composers' distaste for criticizing their colleagues also characterized the *przesłuchania* that took place somewhat regularly beginning in September 1950. Intended at least initially for all new works, these auditions were to allow composers to determine if their compositions could be „understood by the public and [formed] a bond with the people”. Attendees usually preferred to critique a work's musical details rather than assess its success as a reflection of contemporary reality. Many composers displayed their lack of interest or, perhaps, their refusal to support official ideology by simply not attending. Even the union's leadership often failed to appear at the auditions their own organization had scheduled.⁹⁵

Inside the Composers Union, unanimity did not reign. Mycielski, the union's president at the time of the Łagów conference, refused to accept a second term in office in 1950, saying that he could not follow the Party line. Rudziński took over, but was forced to resign in 1951 after complaints from the union's membership related to his aggressive criticism of composers' efforts.⁹⁶

Despite the government's attempt via competitions, commissions, and auditions to direct the compositional output of composers, its officials were never able to achieve their desired level of success. The Łagów

conference, part of a stream of ideological rhetoric and criticism of compositions that persisted for the better part of the first postwar decade, ultimately revealed a way in which to maneuver within a restrictive system that, by and large, was the product of a top-down approach to cultural policy.

Although the conference's organizers may have believed that their non-confrontational attitude would help persuade artists of the veracity of their philosophy, many composers instead recognized the loopholes they created. Since no one could agree on what socialist realism in music meant, composers could take advantage of the resulting atmosphere of ambiguity. While those who remained in Poland composed mass songs, cantatas and pedagogical works to satisfy authorities, some also pursued ideologically questionable initiatives in composition and their daily lives. Their endeavors to retain a sense of independence, even if some degree of accommodation also was necessary, proved to be an invaluable asset as they continued to operate within a Communist-led society.

⁹⁴ Poradowski's Violin Sonata, op. 5, and Machl's Organ Concerto are mentioned in *Audycje polskiego radia od 30.xii do 5.i.1952 r.*, „Radio i Świat” 30 December 1951–5 January 1952, p. 14; Frieman's Clarinet Sonata No. 1 is listed in *Tydzień muzyczny w Polskim Radiu*, „Radio i Świat” 6-12 January 1952, p. 2; Bacewicz's Overture for Strings and Krenz's Symphony were scheduled for broadcast in January 1950, *Audycje polskiego radia od 30.i do 5.ii.1950 r.*, „Radio i Świat” 30 January–5 February 1950, p. 19.

⁹⁵ Protokół z pierwszego przesłuchania Sekcji Muzyki Pedagogicznej Z. K. P. odbytego w dniu 31 października 1950 5., ZKP, Akt 12/116. Akt 12/116 and Akt 12/126 include information on auditions organized by the Composers Union.

⁹⁶ ZYGMUNT MYCIELSKI, *Dziennik 1950-1959*, Warsaw 1999, pp. 15-20; GWIZDALANKA AND MEYER, op. cit., p. 226.