

Krzysztof Olczak

A composer and accordionist of the middle generation, professor at the Academy of Music in Gdańsk. His compositional interests mainly include chamber music, as well as electronics and live electronics techniques using computers. He performs as an accordionist and is also interested in teaching at primary and secondary school level, conducting numerous seminars and meetings with accordion teachers. He studied music at the Instrumental Department of the Academy of Music in Warsaw (accordion) under Lech Puchnowski, and then at the Academy of Music in Gdańsk (composition) under Eugeniusz Głowski. He is a laureate of accordion and composition competitions. As an accordionist, he has performed a number of world premieres. He has also made many recordings, mainly of new music. In recent years, his discography as a composer has been enriched with a number of CDs: with an accordion concerto (Dux), a flute concerto (Dux), solo and chamber accordion music (Dux), a composition for soprano and chamber orchestra (Dux), electroacoustic music (Requiem Records), and chamber music (Odradek). Since 1979, Krzysztof Olczak has been professionally associated with the Academy of Music in Gdańsk, where he works as a professor, currently heading the Department of Composition.

Krzysztof Olczak's compositional output includes over 60 compositions, including more than 40 featuring the accordion.

Surconventional view of the present in the works of Krzysztof Olczak (quoted excerpts from Joanna Schiller's article *Different Faces of Postmodernism in the Works of Contemporary Composers of the Gdańsk Milieu*).

Krzysztof Olczak's creative path stems from his background as an instrumentalist. First and foremost, Olczak is an accordionist. This path of artistic development gradually led the composer to his own creative work when, as an experienced musician, he completed his composition studies in Eugeniusz Głowski's class at Stanislaw Moniuszko Academy of Music in Gdańsk. However, Olczak's musical preferences were formed much earlier, when, during his secondary music school education, he was most fascinated by the avant-garde works of Krzysztof Penderecki, especially, as he recalls, *Tren*¹. His predilection for dissonant chords and expressive sound effects was coupled with a particular admiration for the works of Igor Stravinsky, especially in the field of metro-rhythmic techniques. These characteristics – avant-garde language and sophisticated rhythmic means – constitute the main areas of interest for the composer. Thus, they define the circle of references to the European musical tradition, placing them in a relatively close temporal perspective – less than a hundred-year-old.

¹ Based on the interview with the composer on July 9, 2015.

Referring once again to Alicja Jarzębska's criteria, Krzysztof Olczak's postmodernism is certainly dominated by the use of quotations. This phenomenon covers a number of stylistically diverse areas. Firstly, the composer has a particular fondness for referring to the works of other composers, which is clearly expressed in such works as *Belt the below* for tuba and accordion (1986)², *Trio homage à Szymanowski* for violin, guitar, and accordion (1987), *Expedition* for flute, guitar, cello, accordion, and piano (2004)³, and *Trio with tape homage à Chopin* for piano, accordion, and percussion (2010)⁴. Olczak most often uses borrowed motifs transparently, in such a way that, according to musical semiotics, they usually function as icons⁵. Thus, these motifs remain clear and relatively easy to decipher for the listener. At the same time, reminiscences of other composers' works are carefully woven into the musical fabric, becoming an integral part of it.

Exceptionally sophisticated deconstructions of quoted motifs can be found in more recent works, such as *Acco tango* for solo accordion (2012), in which Olczak draws on the sources of dance and popular music. The work is based on a reference to Leroy Anderson's popular composition *Blue tango*. A quotation of the main motif from this piece appears in a slightly deformed form in the central part of Olczak's work and remains audibly legible. However, the composer does not stop at simple quotation, but reaches for more sophisticated and diverse means. First, he selects the material of the model, highlighting the melodic idea, the rhythmic bass structure, and the figured formula of the central plan. Then, each of the thus isolated textural areas undergoes a kind of deconstruction using the technique of looping. This procedure, which originates from disco, dance, and DJ music, known as the effect of a skipping analog record, completely deforms the basic pattern. The adaptation of such an innovative means is typical for Olczak's work and once again points to the present or the not-too-distant past as a point of reference for his own work.

Using Alicja Jarzębska's categories consistently, it should be pointed out that postmodernism in Krzysztof Olczak's work manifests itself on three important levels. First, it is the use of musical quotations from very different sources, both highbrow and popular music. Secondly, it is the adaptation of procedures from the world of entertainment culture, most often based on electronic, dance and disco effects, which the composer successfully transfers to the realm of high music. Finally, it is a predilection for the use of traditional formal arrangements. At the same time, while using all these means, Olczak remains true to himself, and his musical language is expressive and recognizable, as confirmed by the composer's statement: "*For me, postmodernism means the desire to tell something familiar in my own words.*"⁶

² In this piece, we find connections with Krzysztof Penderecki's *Capriccio* for solo tuba.

³ The piece features a quote from Igor Stravinsky's *Symphony in Three Movements*.

⁴ A fragment of *Mazurka in A minor, Op. 17 No. 4* appears twice in the piece.

⁵ See E. Tarasti, *A Theory of Musical Semiotics*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1994.

⁶ Based on the interview with the composer on July 9, 2015.

Group 1

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/19PzFB5Wv8i9-uSb8LvRUeu7UUQsKI4Zu?usp=sharing>

Kolibionka dla kota (Lullaby for a Cat) Lullaby for a cat from the cycle: ***Dzeczé spiéwē z akòrdionā (Children's Songs with Accordion)*** for children's choir and accordion.

A completely different source in Olczak's work are references to folklore. Kashubian music is an intensively exploited area, as is the Kashubian language which appears in vocal-instrumental works. A good example is the cycle of miniatures for choir and accordion to the texts in the Kashubian language by Tomasz Fopke.

Trio with Tape for accordion, piano, and percussion.

A separate phenomenon is the concept of open form which we find in *Trio with Tape homage à Chopin for piano, accordion, and percussion* (2010). Here, Olczak allows the musicians to choose one of several possible performance scenarios. In addition to the obligatory material, there are a number of optional fragments – possible to perform but not necessary. The composer also gives the performers considerable freedom as to the placement of these glosses on the main text throughout the work. Similar techniques characterize the works of composers of the Second Avant-Garde of the 1950s, e.g. Pierre Boulez's *Piano Sonata No. 3*. The level of form shaping thus evokes procedures known from aleatoric experiments, once again clearly pointing to the composer's circle of musical fascinations.

***Dreaming* for two oboes, piano, and tape**

The composition *Dreaming* (2021) for two oboes, piano, and tape is dedicated to the outstanding performers of new music Marta Róžańska and Izabela Paszkiewicz-Ginter, who are the main figures of the album *Baltic Music*. The piece was written during the difficult time of the pandemic with the next edition of the *New Waves* festival in Gdańsk in mind. Fortunately, the premiere took place in front of an audience. The content of the composition is the titular “dream” of a bright and happy tomorrow, which is, however, somewhat disturbed by the “ragged” narrative of the piece, expressing anxiety and uncertainty.