

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.

Referring once again to Alicja Jarzębska's criteria, Krzysztof Olczak's postmodernism is certainly dominated by the use of quotations. This

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

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 hommage à Szymanowski* for violin, guitar, and accordion (1987), *Expedition* for flute, guitar, cello, accordion, and piano (2004)³, and *Trio with tape hommage 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 2

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1HKKRjPUvERjyhE17onUpAaX3Zmtpz38S?usp=sharing>

Chanson for accordion and electronic media, *Chanson for accordion and electronic media*.

Among the emerging quotations from works that usually focus on the present and the not-too-distant past or traditional music, *Chanson for accordion and electronic media* (2008) stands apart as a piece that was created as an intentional marriage of the present with early music. In this work, Olczak consciously quotes and reworks a 16th-century French chanson. The electronic layer of the work is conceived as live electronic, so the processing and harmonization of the old with the new takes place in a concert setting. Both the accordion and the electronic apparatus use the quoted chanson in such a way that selected fragments appear in both parts and are separately deconstructed to varying degrees. The composer combines these techniques with recorded sounds of other instruments, such as strings, celesta, bells, etc., but also with imitations of contemporary sounds, such as big-city traffic, machine noises, the sound of means of transport, etc.

Flute Concerto *Concerto for Flute and Orchestra* (2014).

In addition to the use of quotations in Olczak's work, postmodernism is also evident in the form of the work. The architecture of the work is rooted in tradition and also undergoes a kind of deformation. This is the case, for example, with references to the sonata form. As the composer admits himself: we are as steeped in the sonata form as we are in major-minor tonality (based on an interview with the composer on July 9, 2015). Reminiscences of the sonata form can be found to a greater or lesser extent in a number of concert works: *Sinfonietta Concertante* for percussion and orchestra (1985-86), *Concerto for accordion and orchestra* (1989), *Gdańsk Concerto* for 3 guitars and orchestra (1997), *Concerto for flute and orchestra* (2014), where echoes of thematic dualism, transformation techniques, cadential passages, and final fragments synthesizing in the manner of a classical reprise appear. The composer also often draws on other formal arrangements and genres known from tradition, such as the rondo, e.g., *Rondino* for solo accordion (1985); suites, e.g. *Rząpielnik, czyli szkicownik z Pomorza [Rząpielnik, or Sketchbook from Pomerania]* for solo accordion (1982-1984), *Zimowa suita [Winter Suite]* for solo accordion (1980), *Letnia suita [Summer Suite]* for solo accordion (1980), *Suita dziecięca nr 3 [Children's Suite No. 3]* for accordion (1992); toccata, e.g. *Toccatina* for two pianos (1998-99); or etude, e.g. *Etudes* for solo accordion (2000), *Three Etudes* for solo violin (2002), *Three Etudes* for solo timpani (2003). In addition, many of his works feature the characteristic technique of building motivic relationships between extreme sections, which brings to mind the classical ABA form.

***Accotango* for solo accordion**

Exceptionally sophisticated deconstruction of quoted motifs can be found in newer 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*. The 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.