RECOMPOSING TIME

Robert Fleitz, piano
5. September, 19.00
Musiikkitalo Camerata Hall

Imants Zemzaris: *Warsaw Triptych* (1973) [10′]

I. Allegro vivace
II. Moderato
III. Andantino

Peter Schat: *Anathema* (1969) [9′]

Julia Perry: Prelude (1946, revised 1962) [3′]

George Rochberg: *Nach Bach* (1966) [8′]

Kuldar Sink: Piano Sonata No. 3 (1975) [13′]

Intermission

Valentin Silvestrov: Piano Sonata No. 2 (1975) [17′]

Alfred Schnittke: Piano Sonata No. 2 (1990) [17′]

I. Moderato
II. Lento
III. Allegro moderato

About the Program

"Genres are a funny little concept, aren't they? Yes they are…in theory, they have a simple definition that's easy to understand. But in practice, well, some may feel confined…"

— Linda Martell, on Beyoncé's album "Cowboy Carter"

Though used freely in conversation and discourse, the ideas of *style* and *genre* have immense political and perceptual power, encompassing both concrete musical characteristics and extramusical concepts. This is well illustrated in our current time, where popular music, films, and video games delight in declaring and then breaking generic frames (such as Beyoncé's recent "Cowboy Carter" quoted above, or the 2015 video game "Undertale" in which combat is optional). Playlists on YouTube, Spotify and elsewhere emphasize feature wryly curated formations of generic classification (one rather humorous example might be the popular Spotify playlist "Key Changes That'll Turn You Gay," in which a musical technique is implicitly linked to an extramusical identity). In Western Classical music however, particularly at the piano, there is a relative lack of discourse on this topic. Musical unity is often the core measure for evaluating a work's quality, with music that defies these expectations often proving mystifying to audiences, performers and critics alike. These works can be identified as **musical hybrids**. This term, put forth by musicologist and theorist Bruno Alcalde in 2017, is a concept in which assumed and idealized musical boundaries are transcended and combined through a variety of techniques. These works point outward toward external musics that exist outside of their "home" style or genre. This term is intentionally open ended, allowing us to think about transcending stylistic and genre boundaries through a variety of repertoire, time periods and techniques. In the context of my doctoral project as a whole, I am most interested in musical hybridity as a semiotic experience. **What does it mean when a work of music establishes a boundary, points beyond that boundary, and ultimately transcends it?** How do we, as performers, composers, and listeners, approach these works with our own agency and through our own changeable, personal, interpretive frameworks?

The first of my four doctoral concerts, *Recomposing Time,* offers a historical blueprint for the concept of musical hybridity as I will consider it throughout the rest of my doctoral project. All but one of the works on this program belong to a period of repertoire from the 1960s and 1970s, a period in which compositional processes of musical hybridity became quite common in contemporary repertoire. Together, the works on this program form what I believe to be an appropriately varied and representative look at the range of hybridity that was foregrounded in works from the 1960s and 1970s. The hybrid processes in these works may refer to familiar compositional tools including but not limited to collage, quotation, allusion, parody, and polystylism. This latter term, "polystylism", is often used as a generic description for all works of this period and merits further discussion in this context.

"Polystylism" was first defined by the composer Alfred Schnittke to describe trends in contemporary composition he saw emerging in the late 1960s, which consisted of the often chaotic joining together of different materials from disparate sources. Since then this term has proven difficult to define, and has almost disappeared completely from use in English-language musicology, occasionally appearing (albeit inconsistently) as a shorthand for musically hybrid works written in the countries that comprised the former Soviet Union during the 1960s and 70s. Despite the contemporary lack of clarity regarding this term (there is no entry for it in the *Grove Music Dictionary*, for example) Schnittke's observations still provide a helpful framework. In his work *Polystylistic Tendencies in Modern Music* (1971) he identifies polystylism as a phenomenon that he had observed in music from throughout the European musical landscape in roughly the decade before, including works by Stockhausen, Webern, Henze, as well as many composers from Russia, Ukraine, Estonia and elsewhere. For him, polystylism was the "subtle" uses of "elements of another's style" through "quotation" and "allusion" in a work of music, used in a way that could reveal a deeper layer to the individual composer's work by "showing the philosophical idea of the 'links between the ages'" (Schnittke 1971, 87–91).

The first half of the concert provides a quick and dynamic survey of possible approaches to musical hybridity, while the second half juxtaposes the second piano sonatas by Silvestrov and Schnittke, both significant figures in the current conception of these musical trends. The majority of this program focuses on works written by composers whose geographical and contextual

circumstances are stereotypically associated with "polystylism" (Sink, Schnittke, Silvestrov and Zemzaris). However, attention is also given to composers outside of this tradition (Rochberg, Perry and Schat) in order to establish and emphasize the wide scale of these aesthetic developments. Each composer approaches hybridity completely distinctly, using it as a tool to consider existential artistic and personal questions. **Hybridity is employed to distinctly critique historicity and to reconsider the bounds of the "acceptable" musical signification within which they were situated at the time of writing, thus reaching towards the possibility of transcendence**.

Opening the recital is ***Warsaw Triptych*** **(1973)** by the Latvian composer Imants Zemzaris (1951–). The piece was written when Zemzaris was only 22 years old, after a formative visit to the Warsaw Autumn Festival in Poland. According to Zemzaris, his visit to the festival enabled him to experience a wide range of musical styles that opened his mind to the possibilities of compositional aesthetics that existed beyond the rigid norms of his training in Riga, including polystylism. *Warsaw Triptych*, written in three parts, has a narrative structure that outlines Zemzaris's experience at the festival: I) riding the train from Rīga to Warsaw; II) the excitement of new aesthetic inspiration; and III) the return to Rīga with new knowledge in hand. This work, then, becomes a meta-reflection on his own growth as a person and as a composer, reflected in the musical content of the work. The first movement basically follows the musical parameters of modernism prevalent in Latvia at the time characterized by expressionism and Neo-classicism, featuring gentle polytonal harmony and a consistent Alberti bass-like figure. The second movement, while also similarly situated in modernist characteristics, alludes to progressive rock with its open left hand triadic harmonies, simple scalar melodies, and flamboyant texture. Finally, the last movement contains similar rock elements contrasted starkly with floating atonal harmonies, broken by quotations from Bach and Chopin. The latter melts into the first movement's opening figure, thus unifying the piece. The 1960s were a highly fertile time in Latvian music history, a time in which musical developments in both modernist and postmodernist aesthetics were happening rapidly in parallel. While polystylism was a common compositional technique during this period, it was often employed in a very subtle way. Here

however, Zemzaris foregrounds the distinctions between musical kinds as the primary thematic and structural concern, highlighting his reckoning both with the times he was living in and imagining possible musical futures. In my conversations with Zemzaris, he has expressed frustrated awe that this work, one written while he was so young, still remains one of his most popular.

A similar artistic exploration is used to differently radical ends in Peter Schat's (Netherlands, 1935–2003) work ***Anathema* (1969)**. Inspired by student revolts taking place in the Netherlands at the time of the work's writing, he writes that he wished to model contemporaneous political unrest by similarly breaking the "taboo" of melody that existed in the music of the time. He accomplishes this by interpolating a "tonal melody" in a "Baroque, Impressionist, and Romantic guise", among an otherwise "serialist idiom"**.** He then specifies that the final section of the work (in which the so-called "Impressionist" and "Romantic" materials are presented next to each other) is intended as an elegy for the end of the "revolutionary fervor of the sixties" (Schat in program notes for *Anathema,* 1969). Ultimately, his goal was to create a work in which dissonance and consonance are completely integrated. This final point is essential. While the surface of the piece demonstrates what could be described as a fragmented musical experience, these pieces in their composite whole are the result of Schat's nearly utopian attempt to craft a new, unified musical language. This gesture towards utopia exists only within the bounds of this one piece, one of very few in his catalogue which so clearly foreground hybridity. I have observed this work to be one of the most delightfully divisive in my repertoire, often eliciting strong reactions ranging from abject disdain, to confusion, to utter joy (the latter being my reaction upon first hearing it).

The next piece is Julia Perry's short and enigmatic **Prelude (1946, revised 1962)**. Perry (USA, 1924–1979) was a successful African-American composer who, despite winning two Guggenheim fellowships and a National Institute of Arts and Letters Award, among many other accomplishments, is relatively unknown today. Many of her works remain lost or unpublished. Her works overall show an interesting reckoning with the classical training she received from such teachers as Luigi Dallapiccola and Lili Boulanger; with the influence of African-American musical styles which she studied and worked with extensively (evidenced for example by the

influence of spirituals in her early works, or rock and roll and rhythm and blues in her later works). The Prelude is an interesting case study, then, as she wrote it in her early period and revised it during her later period upon returning to the United States from her years living in Europe. Though difficult to ascertain what was changed between the first and second versions of the piece, the work we currently have blurs the lines between the harmony of spirituals and the late romanticism of European classical music. The hybridity in this piece comes, in a way, by considering retroactively its author's overall compositional profile. If placed in the context of her studies with Dallapiccola and Boulanger, it fits neatly into the idiom of late romantic chromaticism; when considered within her her interest in African-American musics it is more aligned to the musical languages of the diaspora. The work's final bars appropriately leave many more questions than answers. As such, the piece is a perfect short specimen of the power of particular signals, both intrinsic to the music and external to our perception of the composer, in interpreting how to hear a piece and how we evaluate it within genre norms.

***Nach Bach* (1966)** by the composer George Rochberg (USA, 1918–2005) plays similarly with the work of Bach to deal with life-altering personal events. Having begun his career firmly in a 12-tone serialist idiom, as in works such as the *Duo concertante* for violin and cello (1953), Rochberg completely transformed his compositional process following the tragic and unexpected death of his son in 1964. *Nach Bach* is one of the first works in this new style. Much like the deeply considered structures of strict serialism, Rochberg considered collage a way to craft "secret structures" that underlined the "fundamental sameness" of musical materials and gestures across time. (Rochberg quoted in Taruskin, 2010). This work is a quasi-fantasia, written without barlines and with only vague indications of tempo (such as "very fast" or "quite slow"), moving between Rochberg's own vaguely tonal material, imitations or distortions of Bach, and actual precise quotations. Transitions between material happen at times seamlessly, so the border between Bach and Rochberg is nearly incomprehensible; at other times Bach enters almost rudely, the material literally sectioned off with boxes to distinguish its foreignness to its surroundings; at other times Bach is distorted through transposition as in a grotesque metamorphosis of a single measure quotation through several tonalities. As such, Bach's material

opens up the borders of what is possible in Rochberg's writing, quotation offering a model of freedom and artistic exploration, while still crafting a deep underlying structure.

Closing the first half of the program is Kuldar Sink's **Piano Sonata No. 3 (1975)**, the second in his Trilogy *Mäed ja inimesed (Mountains and People)*. By the time of this work's composition, the Estonian Kuldar Sink (1942–1995) had already established himself as a rather successful composer, writing primarily in a Neoclassical and serialist modernist idioms. During the 1960s and onwards, however, there was an increasing plurality of aesthetic interests in the Estonian contemporary Classical context. These included a greater interest in early music, folk music, pop and rock music, and a growing interest in non-Western music. Sink, a scholar and musicologist of folk music across the then Soviet Union (particularly in the Caucasus and Central Asia) had a critical eye to the application of these trends. He felt the grafting of folk music onto classical contexts and the sublimation of indigenous materials into western instruments decentered the local musicians who were actively and organically carrying on folk musical traditions. The 3rd Piano Sonata then is an attempt to synthesize his own extensive knowledge of both Estonian and non-Western indigenous musics (as well as aleatoric music, jazz, neoclassicism, early music, and other styles) with his critique of this music's sublimation into classical contexts. He writes:

> In this work, styles which differ widely both temporally and spatially, such as early medieval music, aleatory music, jazz, Kirghiz and Chinese music, are blended, although not by means of collage. **This is a reflection of what the human ear catches individually and of what is drawn from collective memory**."
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> (Sink quoted in Veenre, 2018, italics my own)

As such this work seeks to model a remapping of time as opposed to a mere collage, an experiment in utopian musical possibilities in which fragments of musics past and present, local and outside, exist concurrently without editorialization. This is all done within what I perceive as a self-aware critique of his own idealism, as well as an acknowledgment of the limits of his own identity and the instrument for which he was writing.

The second half of the program juxtaposes the second piano sonatas of two composers for whom hybridity is a central characteristic: Valentin Silvestrov (Ukraine, 1937–) and Alfred Schnittke (Russia, 1934–1998). These works utilize hybridity in a much more subtle, structural way, as opposed to the clear delineation and often abrupt shifts of the works earlier on the program. Nowadays, Silvestrov is often associated with minimalistic, tonal works. His **Second Piano Sonata (1975)** defies those associations in its musical material (which is often tonally ambiguous and occasionally frighteningly direct in character). Silvestrov himself has even called his works from his period "untimely" and "banal" (Silvestrov 1990, quoted in Schmelz 2009, 261). However, on closer look, it still exhibits the characteristically temporally spacious compositional style for which Silvestrov is now known. It also importantly precipitates the "postlude" style that Silvestrov later adopted. In this style, Silvestrov seeks to write a kind of "postlude" to some unidentified piece of standard repertoire, writing music that is "not so much beginning as responding to something already uttered" (Schmelz 2009). In the Second Sonata, Silvestrov composes prelude, postlude, and what comes between, while simultaneously blurring the lines through the use of different harmonic and gestural signifiers. Distinction is made between chromatic harmonies based on minor thirds, as comprises much of the opening material; triadic chorale harmonies, which appear in a striking and colorful way about two-thirds of the way into the piece; and a coda of sorts at the very end of the work which is based primarily on quintal harmony. Given Silvestrov's interest in the idea of resonance through time and space, his use of different musical signals can be interpreted as a way of signaling different temporal spaces, even creating links through the historicity of his own oeuvre.

Alfred Schnittke's name is practically synonymous with the concept of "polystylism". As mentioned above, the term originated with his 1971 article; and his *Concerti Grossi*, in which Bach-like gestures are recomposed, remixed and redeveloped, are often used as the quintessential example for a particular brand of polystylism. The **Piano Sonata No. 2 (1990)**, however, is much more subtle in its applications of musical hybridity than these predecessors. The work aligns itself with earlier traditions by with its fast-slow-fast three movement structure. Musical surfaces present unity as their ultimate goal, though on further examination this proves a bit more complicated. In the first movement, a contrapuntal primary theme is presented in the first

measures. This theme is not so much developed as it is mutated, constantly reappearing in more grotesquely expanded canons until it is nearly unrecognizable, and crashing into clusters just as it reaches moments of climax. A similar technique is utilized in the second movement, in which long melodic phrases similarly dip into clusters instead of finding resolution, placed next to an eerie static material that seems to be part tango, part polytonal chorale. In these first two movements, while the material is relatively conservative, its application is anything but, existing within the confines of a sonata structure to a certain extent but simultaneously failing within this frame.

It is in the final movement, however, where Schnittke truly breaks the structure of the piece both in its identity as a sonata and against the rules that the piece has set for itself thus far. The scherzo-like material is playful and contrapuntal, answering the contrapuntal material from the first movement. Here, though, Schnittke uses tight canons at the sixteenth note to build a chaotic climax that is followed by a sensitive, triadic chorale which seems to come out of absolutely nowhere. This chorale is followed by one last fiery buildup based on clusters which collapses into a section of nearly unstructured improvisation. In this, the work's most dramatic moment, the performer is in complete control of both timing and material, thus breaking the otherwise specific temporal structure "required" of a sonata. One final chorale and a series of gradually diminishing echoing clusters close the work. This work precipitates a kind of fluency of musical hybridity which Schnittke cultivated. Nearing the end of his life, we hear him reckoning with the ideas he had previously theorized in a fluent way. Hybridity is not simply foregrounded, but is an essential component of the unfolding of the work, and implicates the performer themselves in the process.

As a performer, engaging with these works has been incredibly stimulating both intellectually and musically. I have always been deeply drawn to this kind of music, and I am excited to be able to share this program. I believe that this program creates a new context for the historical idea of musical hybridity, demonstrating the multiplicity of aesthetic goals, surfaces, and interpretations. In performing and working on this repertoire, I have found that it can be mystifying for audience members. My goal as a pianist is to deeply explore the exciting

contradictions, complex temporal layers, and variety of stylistic technical requirements in order to best communicate it to the listener. In her posthumous work *The Life of the Mind* (1977–78), written contemporaneously to many of these works, the philosopher Hannah Arendt writes that "The mind seems to be even stronger than reality…it collects and re-collects what otherwise would be doomed to ruin and oblivion". The composers on this program were faced with deeply complex personal, political and musical reckonings. They re-collect musical materials, constructing their own paths from the weighty debris of history. By engaging with different styles and genres as generative musical material in itself, they sought new ways of listening by challenging the past, present and the future.

One final point to mention is this evening's concert outfit, designed by Latvian artist **Andris Kaļiņins**. The semiotic experience of a piano recital is not only dependent upon the notes that are played, but on the visual and experiential signals which are communicated from the performer and space to the audience. As such the performer's clothing is also an interesting facet to explore, and the question of how a pianist should look on stage is one that has been very interesting to me throughout my practice as a whole. In his work in general Kaļiņins interpolates and decontextualizes iconically recognizable tropes, reworked with a new sense of temporality and often a kind of dark humor. As such, I felt he would be an excellent fit for this program of music which often does the same.

In collaboration with Kaļiņins, we understood that it would be important to find a design that balances the internal variety of each individual piece with something that would underline and support the dramaturgy of the program as a whole. In addition, there was a practical consideration – the outfit should be comfortable to move and play in. The result is the deconstruction of a formal tailcoat a pianist might wear in a very proper context. Where the tailcoat has excessive fabric in its titular tail, this vest puts its excess on the back of a much less constricting vest. The textures of the non-traditional fabric choices also create for reflective interactions between the onstage lights, my movements at the instrument, and the audience. The overall look combines simplicity and elegance with a sense of humor to create a light and playful character; leading to delightfully ambiguous associations that differ between pieces.

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For more about me, visit my website: **https://www.robertfleitz.com/bio**