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Contact: A Journal for Contemporary Music (1971-1988)

<http://contactjournal.gold.ac.uk>

Citation

Montague, Stephen. 1978. 'Interview with Zygmunt Krauze'. *Contact*, 19. pp. 8-11. ISSN 0308-5066.

Interview with Zygmunt Krauze

I FIRST MET Zygmunt Krauze at The Ohio State University in the spring of 1972 after an interesting lecture-recital he had given on new literature and notational systems for the piano. The following autumn I received a Fulbright-Polish Government Grant to work in the Experimental Music Studio of Polish Radio, Warsaw and got to know him much better. Krauze is quiet, good-looking and very intense. He has a pianist's hands and a steel grip. There seems to be a kind of Lisztian magnetism about him but although he has many acquaintances he has only a few close friends.

Krauze had been unknown to me either as a composer or a pianist before I met him on his 1972 tour of the USA and I am sure that at that time he was unknown to the majority of American new music audiences. That autumn when I arrived in Warsaw I found to my surprise that he, together with several other young Polish composers, were practically household names. All his music was published and several recordings of his music, as well as of his performances both as a soloist and with his ensemble, The Music Workshop, were available. His large orchestral work *Folk Music* was performed at the Warsaw Autumn Festival that year and his ensemble played to enthusiastic standing-room-only crowds. I was impressed. It was certainly a far cry from the lonely recital I had heard him give in the USA a few months earlier.

At this time I was new to the European contemporary music scene and, while I was impressed with Krauze's popularity in Poland, I suspected that his work was not well-known elsewhere. However, during the year and a half I spent working in Poland and travelling abroad to festivals in both Eastern and Western Europe I began to realise that his name appeared on the programmes of nearly all of them. Also about this time his works began to be published not only by PWM, the Polish publishing house, but by West European publishers: Edition Modern, Moeck and Universal. New recordings also seemed to be coming on to the market continually.

Over the course of several years performing at festivals and new music centres on the Continent I have been able to observe that Zygmunt Krauze is currently one of the most sought-after composers on the European contemporary music scene. His music has been performed at nearly every major festival in Europe and he currently has more commissions than he can complete. But in spite of his great popularity on the Continent, he remains largely unknown in Britain. A tour with his ensemble that is planned for the near future should help introduce him and his music to this country.

Krauze was born in Warsaw in 1938. He studied the piano with Maria Wiłkomirska and composition with Kazimierz Sikorski (father of another interesting young Polish composer, Tomasz Sikorski) at what was then the Warsaw Conservatory and later did postgraduate work with Nadia Boulanger in Paris. In 1966 he won the Gaudeamus Competition for Interpreters of New Music. In the mid-1960s he organised an ensemble of four musicians which grew out of work he and others had been doing with Josef Patkowski at the Experimental Music Studio of Polish Radio; the group took its title from this organisation and became known as *Warsztat Muzyczny*, 'The Music Workshop'. He has received many prizes and awards for composition including a year as a composer-in-residence in West Berlin on a DAAD grant. At present he lives in Warsaw with his actress wife Ewa and divides his time between composing and touring, both as a piano

soloist and with his ensemble.

The following 'interview' is compiled from conversations I have had with Krauze over the past few years; the various excerpts do not necessarily appear in chronological order.

STEPHEN MONTAGUE What are your plans at present? I know that in the past you have done quite a lot of touring as a piano soloist. Are you planning to continue or are your composing commitments becoming so great that you will phase this out of your career?

ZYGMUNT KRAUZE No, I don't plan to stop playing. I will keep performing as a soloist, especially a programme I call 'The Last Recital' which is a kind of pot-pourri including more than 40 different works.

SM In one concert!

ZK Yes. Classic, Romantic and contemporary works. But I don't play all of the pieces: I sometimes play just part of a piece or repeat a section of it in various ways. I combine some of these segments with pre-recorded tape. It's a kind of retrospective of my entire experience as a pianist: doing theatre music, 'happenings', normal playing like Brahms, Chopin, Rakhmaninov and the new repertoire. It lasts about 50 minutes. But I don't consider 'The Last Recital' my piece, it's just something I put together. I've performed it in Copenhagen, Stockholm, Budapest and Cleveland. In Copenhagen, for example, I did it each night for eight nights and each time I performed it was interesting for me because it was slightly different.

SM Would you tell me a little about the development of your ensemble, The Music Workshop?

ZK We started in 1963 organising concerts of new music and improvisation with the radio. At that time the group was quite large and the number of performers varied with each work we did. I realised after a time that this was not the best way to make performances, so I formed a group consisting of four musicians: Edward Borowiak (trombone), Witold Gałaska (cello), Czesław Pałkoski (clarinet) and myself as the pianist. I selected musicians who were enthusiastic about performing new music and who were not solely interested in making money. This was in 1967. At that time there was, of course, no repertoire for this kind of group, so I asked my composer friends to write music for us. By the following year, 1968, we had several pieces, mostly by Polish composers who have since become internationally known: Kotoński, Szalonek, Dobrowolski, Serocki and Górecki. I kept asking people to write for our group and now we have enough music for ten different concerts! Some internationally known composers who wrote for us are: Feldman, Kagel, Ferrari, Nørgård, Nordheim, Lorentzen, Chiari, Denisov, Globokar, Rzewski and Erb. We worked in that way with repertoire written especially for the group from 1968 to 1971. We never perform pieces which do not use all of us in some way. What surprised me though was that for such a difficult combination of instruments each of the pieces that was written for us was quite unique: that was very satisfying. After about 1971 I became increasingly interested in folk music. I started to collect folk instruments in 1972. The group now has more than 30, among them are hurdy-gurdies, bagpipes, folk violins, bells, fifes, etc.

SM Are all of these instruments Polish? And are they old or especially built for your group?

ZK All of them are Polish and all of them have been made especially for us by Polish folk artists. Some of the instruments are quite rare: for instance, the hurdy-gurdy made by an old man in Zywiec — he is the only person in Poland that still knows how to make this instrument. I wrote a piece for these instruments [*Idyll*] which also uses a pre-recorded tape taken from the sounds of nature. I used these instruments in *Fête galante et pastorale* which was done for the 1974 Graz Festival at the Schloss Eggenberg in a spatial version, and at the 1975 Warsaw Autumn Festival in the concert version using a symphony orchestra and a group of four musicians playing folk instruments.

SM Where does the group go from here? Are you going to continue working with your other repertoire as well?

ZK We will continue playing our other repertoire since we have many good pieces in it, but we are also going to be doing more with folk instruments. I would say at present our typical programme would consist of standard pieces for the first half of the concert and works using folk instruments in the second half. This season [1975] we are using this programme for our tour of Germany, Belgium, Holland, the USA and Canada.

SM Would you tell me a little bit more about the work you were commissioned to produce for the Graz Festival?

ZK It was a piece for the 26 rooms of Eggenberg castle. There were 13 tape recorders which transmitted the music (via loudspeakers) to 13 rooms. In addition there were live performances by six chamber groups placed in six other rooms. Thus, there was music in 19 rooms and silence in the remaining seven. *Fête galante et pastorale* as it was called, was performed eight times during the festival and each performance lasted about 50 minutes. Many kinds of music were important to me in writing this piece: gypsy music, Italian folk music, primitive music, cembalo, religious music and Mahler-like music. The idea was that people could walk through the various rooms and listen to what they wanted for as long as they wanted. The pattern they chose for walking through the rooms created their own personal structures for the piece.

SM Your Piano Concerto was commissioned for the Donaueschingen Festival 1976 and performed by you at the 1977 Warsaw Autumn Festival. Could you describe the piece?

ZK The piece evolves from some basic material which is tonally related and interconnected, but quite static in its movement. It is first of all, however, a virtuoso concerto for a pianist, and that was my first consideration. I wanted it to be a logical extension of the long concerto tradition from Chopin, Hummel and other Romantic composers.

SM When you say that it has a kind of static fabric, is it in any way an outgrowth of your *Orchestra Piece No. 1* or *No. 2* in which a large band of sound shifts very slightly internally while maintaining a kind of basic outer shape?

ZK You may see it as an outgrowth, but I think it is somewhat different. First of all the piano part varies quite extensively and the orchestra imitates the piano part; however, there are no real contrasts in the piece. It consists of seven sections and each section is rather homogeneous. The sections are not posed as contrasts, but rather blend into each other.

SM You mentioned the use of folk instruments in several of your works. Is there any use of folk material in the Piano Concerto?

ZK No. But I still intend to work with folk music, particularly Scandinavian folk music at the moment.

SM I understand that you wrote the Piano Concerto knowing that you would be playing the solo part.

ZK Yes, and I must say it is quite different for me and

quite difficult to compose when I know that I will play the solo part myself. I feel that not only could I have written the piece much faster, but that it would also be easier for me to compose if someone else were to play it. Since I will be the soloist I must make it practical and really 'playable' for myself.

SM How did you set about writing the Concerto?

ZK I started writing it by improvising . . . I think for more than a year. I repeated the fragments I liked best and finally recorded the ones that pleased me. Then from the recording I transcribed these fragments. Finally I arranged these passages in the most comfortable and practical order. That was the process I used in creating the solo part.

SM When you compose do you think of a sound you would like to create and then find the instruments which might produce it, or do you let the available instruments determine the sounds which you might use?

ZK I am always close to real sound: when I write I'm thinking of the groups that I am going to write for.

SM What do you consider your most important work to date?

ZK The Piano Concerto.

SM Is there a recording of it?

ZK Warsaw Autumn Festival makes recordings of all the Polish composers' works played at the festival.

SM All the works I know of yours do not involve electronic sounds other than electric guitar or organ or something amplified. Are you interested in synthesizers or any other kind of so-called electronic music?

ZK No. Maybe that's because I am a pianist constantly playing with a chamber group, but I really have no feeling for these machines. It may be foolish to say so, but I feel that I cannot control them and the sounds they produce; I can control the buttons, etc., but somehow I feel that I cannot control the music.

SM How do you view the influence of electronic music? Do you think that new music is developing toward the electronic field or perhaps away from it?

ZK I think that electronic music is only one way and not a very wide one at that. What is really important is the quality of the music itself. It doesn't matter whether or not it is electronic.

SM Sometimes it is interesting and often times an enlightening insight to a composer to ask him what composers or works of other composers he finds interesting.

ZK That's an embarrassing question, but . . . OK. For example, thinking of the festival which we've just heard [1975] I enjoyed the pieces by the Danish composers, particularly Per Nørgård's *Waves* for percussion solo: a very good piece. I also liked Arne Nordheim's *Dinosaurius* for accordion and tape. I thought Tomasz Sikorski's *Other Voices* was good . . . fine. Let's see, what else. I admired Nono's piece very much: *Como una ola de fuerza y luz* for soprano, piano, tape and orchestra.

SM Are you interested in political music? Do you feel that your music makes or attempts to make any kind of political statement?

SK No, I don't see my music as a vehicle for political expression.

SM Could you tell me a little about a composer's life in Poland? How does he get started?

ZK The young composer studies composition for five years at the conservatory. In the third year he can apply to become a candidate member of the Polish Composers' Union. The Union organises concerts of music every few months for its members, so by joining the member has the opportunity to have his works performed, and, of course, to meet the older members of the Union. At the end of his studies there is an annual competition organised by the

Union. The first prize is a year's study abroad. The second prize is a two-week trip to one of the socialist countries.

SM You studied in Paris after you finished conservatory. Did you go to study specifically with Boulanger?

ZK It's a kind of tradition here: she is a kind of mother to Polish composers.

SM To many of the older generation of American and English composers too. But anyway, back to the third prize from the Composers' Union.

ZK Oh yes, the third prize. That's not too impressive, it's free tickets to the Warsaw Autumn Festival. But it's important to have the prize to discover and reward talent. But anyway, back to the Composers' Union. When a student finishes and becomes a full-fledged member of the Union he can then apply to the Ministry of Culture for a grant to write music.

SM How does the Ministry determine who gets the grants?

ZK All members of the Union get grants, but what actually happens is that a composer asks the Ministry once or twice a year for a grant. He can't get a second grant until he finishes his score and turns it in to the Ministry. Many composers do other work like writing for the radio, but it is possible to live on the money from these grants.

SM Does the Ministry have any regulations concerning what kind of music you produce for this money, or is it *carte blanche*?

ZK *Carte blanche* — 'absolutne'. There are no regulations. There is a jury that decides to whom to award the grant, but this jury consists of members of the Union and of course the Ministry. The discussion though is not about style, but about dividing the money they have with the number of applicants.

SM How do they decide what to pay you? Do they pay more for an orchestral score than a solo flute score?

ZK Yes, that's fixed in a kind of price list. It sounds awful, but ... the price depends on the number of instruments and the length.

SM Would this then encourage composers to write more orchestral music than chamber or solo works?

ZK No, I don't think so.

SM So any member of the Union can just apply for these grants one after the other?

ZK Yes, well you know our friend Tomasz Sikorski. He's been on these grants for years. There is also the possibility of doing a piece first than taking it to the Ministry and having them award you the money just the same as the other way round.

SM Could we go back to the Composers' Union for just a minute? Who determines the young applicant's credentials? How does he finally get in?

ZK There is a jury of the most prestigious composers. This jury looks at the applicant's music and determines its worth. To become a member of the Union each candidate first becomes a member for a trial period. Later the membership can be permanent.

SM How many composers are there in the Union?

ZK About 200, including musicologists. The rules are essentially the same for musicologists: they must be active in musicological activities to be a member of the Union. There is also a union for light, popular music.

SM What are the advantages of being a member of the Composers' Union?

ZK A member has free medical care, transportation in Poland: there are special resort places for members, etc.

SM Composers who are not members of the Union are paid less than Union members for the same job, for instance, in doing the music for a film. I think it's about

half the Union's scale.

ZK Yes, that's about right.

SM Does the Union help you get your music published?

ZK Only perhaps indirectly, since several members of the Union are on the board of PWM. PWM too has a kind of tradition of publishing everything that is performed at the Warsaw Autumn Festival. As you know, all the Polish pieces are recorded and usually issued on disc the day after the concert.

SM Are recording contracts controlled by the Union?

ZK Yes, this is controlled by the Union. I was here in the Composers' Union lounge yesterday and I noticed there was a meeting of the Polskie Nagrania [Polish Record Company] jury to determine what was to be recorded, and most of them were from the Composers' Union. But the situation is not ideal yet: we would like to have more new music recorded and we are pushing Polskie Nagrania's directors more and more.

SM In the discussions I've had with you these few times, I've gathered that Poland takes pretty good care of its composers. Are there any disadvantages to being a Polish composer in the 1970s?

ZK We are still not happy with the amount of new music the Warsaw Philharmonic plays although you say that you have heard a new or relatively new Polish work on the programme nearly every week. I think there is some feeling of isolation here, but certainly the Festival dispels much of that. All things considered, being a composer from a small country like Poland has greater advantages than being a composer from a large country such as the United States where there is less interest in the creator of new music and almost no governmental support for him.

Two works by Zygmunt Krauze — *Idyll* and *Soundscape* — will be played by the composer's own group, the Warsaw Music Workshop, on their Arts Council Contemporary Music Network tour of eleven British cities, October 15-29.

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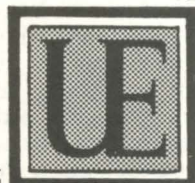
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