

Being a composer

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Composition is an inseparable part of music, just as the art of performing. It came to being in response to the invention of music notation, which had provided a means of recording on a paper a tone or a sequence of tones — a melody —, so that this melody may, at a different time or place, be played again unaltered. With the passage of time a melody wears down, starting to bore; it is then getting necessary for it to be modified or changed altogether. *Cantate Domino canticum novum*, sing to the Lord a new song, we surprisedly find in the Psalms. That is the composer's job. Music notation influences the music just as the letters influence the spoken word, by ennobling it. Thanks to the notation a new music universe arises in Europe — the polyphony. *Scribere est agere*, to write is to act. In putting his thoughts down on the paper, the writer makes them public, impelling those, who will have read them, to make up their opinion on them. Either to receive them and to act accordingly thereafter, or to refute them. Words of wisdom — often met by incomprehensible and unbelievable adversities against their author — shall bear universal good, while others are destined either to be forgotten or to cause ill. Such is his “*agere*”, the manner in which he transforms the world. The same, however, is true for the composer. A new song asks much of him: surely he should know something about old songs to avoid “reinventing the wheel”. (2010)

“Could you please write in a week a paragraph on your second symphony for our bulletin?”

The decision to write a symphony does not come easily. The more than two hundred years old history of the genre impels the person, who by fault of various circumstances is called a young composer, to think somewhat differently of it than of a four-movement orchestral cycle which obeys the rules one can learn in the classes on music forms at a conservatory. Over the said two centuries the art of symphony has travelled an enormous journey. And today, by the end of the 20th century, the evolution should not stop. A generation that is unable to create their own image of the genre, harms not only themselves, but also the genre itself. Creating one's own image entails entering into a conflict with the image that currently prevails. Too often in art has failure or misunderstanding proved to be a more lasting fruit than a cheap effect or an even cheaper copy. . .

“Apologies, we cannot publish this for you.” (1980)

How does it all start? My story is uncommon, but then all stories are such. In the environment in which I was brought up, career in composition was a re-

curing notion. A. Moyzes and E. Suchoň had been seen by me since my early childhood as concrete persons, well-known Slovak composers, no myths. When I was asked, whether at home or school, the question of “what would you like to become when you grow up”, I answered without hesitation. I started to compose as I was acquainting myself with the keyboard and music notation; as a twelve-year old I started to take private lessons with M. Kořínek, who lived on our street just a few blocks away. The example problems on practical harmony as well as on the elementary composition subjects, which he provided me with, interested me more than anything else and I was allegedly quite good at them. (1958)

In those years it became again possible, after a long break, for us to hear performances of the works of Béla Bartók, Igor Stravinski and Bohuslav Martinu. That was a completely different music, bold, full-blooded, brimming with irregularities and remarkable dissonances. Vinyl records were released by Supraphone’s Gramophone Club, Stravinski’s works in the Soviet Book. At the piano at home I found the piano version of Suchoň’s opera Svätopluk, the premiere of which was scheduled to appear in the theatre, for which my mum was preparing to write a review. There I found chords which I had not seen in scores ever before. By the end of 1958 she brought from one of the earliest Warsaw Spring Festivals a few vinyl records of Lutoslawski, Penderecki, Górecki, but also of Stravinski (In Memoriam Dylan Thomas), and then a couple of books, such as *Nowa muzyka* (New Music) by B. Schäffer. Later I read about young Slovak composers who had yielded to the Western influence and wrote dodecaphony (Zeljenka, Kolman). In 1960, my mum got seriously ill, while I enrolled in conservatory, and in 1962 she died. I became friends with Marián Varga, with whom I found, to a certain extent, a replacement home, and following Schäffer’s book we started to write our first dodecaphonic compositions. Sometime in the autumn of 1962 I brought with me to a composition lesson with Pospíšil my Webernian Inventions for the String Quartet, upon looking at which he called in joy for Kořínek, Zika, and even the headmaster Dr. Nováček, to have a look. “That is interesting, but carefully with that.” I think he remembered me; three years later I was in a conflict with Moyzes about my piece Sequence, and after further twelve years Nováček condemned my first piano concerto. Classmates of mine who played on the strings started to practice the Inventions, but they let it go. It would not work out. (1963)

W. Allbright: *Dance Macabre*, T. W. Adorno: *Fünf Orchesterstücke*, L. Andriessen: *De Staat*, T. Antoniou: *ChoroChronos*, G. Amman: *Funksignale*, K. Ager: *Partita, I Remember A Bird, Serenade, Metaboles*, G. Amy: *From the broad space*, D. Bergpope: *The wind septet*, L. Brouwer: *Diferencías*, L. Berio: *Sinfonia, Cinque variazioni, Sequenza III, Coro, Laborintus, Circles, Guaderni, Concerto for two pianos and the orchestra*, P. Boismans: *Oeuvre*, A. Bloch: *Carmen biblicum, Anenaiki*, A. Bon: *Transfiguration*, S. Bussotti: *Bergkristal, Aria di Mara, Miniatures*, H. Badings: *Six Images*, Z. Bargielski: *The violin concerto*, J. Barraqué: *Sequences*, M. BoroChowski: *Vox*, R. R. Bennet: *Commoedia*, E. Brown: *Ice Age*, M. Brandt, F. Burkh, G. Bauer, P. Boulez, H. Birtwisle, A. Bozay, R. Bredemayer, S. Balassa, G. Bialas, D. Christov, G. Crumb, F. Cibulka, F. Cerha... (about a 20

pages long list of works broadcast as part of the regular programme Studio neuer Musik, Vienna, edited by Lothar Knessl. The names of the authors and their pieces, which I noted as I heard them over the years 1971–89, might not be entirely correct.)

I spent a lot of time over my fourth symphony (1980–82). Although its composition itself took, as always, around nine months, the preparation was three or four times longer. The texts of Mihalkovič's poems are interconnected, and it is not possible to penetrate these complex relationships immediately. Moreover, here we are presented with poetry which is political, historical, and which, I would say, personifies today's attempts for a new understanding of the content of tradition and continuity, without a romanticising pathos, but with a good deal of critical relationship towards the contemporary, towards the circumstances, in which we are bound to live today. Many of the texts I genuinely understood only on the basis of my own experiences.

The texts were not suitable to be turned into a song cycle, as their theme required a larger space, a broader stage and a longer time. I chose the form of the symphony of the Mahler and Shostakovich type tending towards oratory. I am certain that the never-ending discourses on whether 40 minutes is too much or too little for a symphony can be steered in the right direction only if a piece is created that oversteps this limit twofold.

My previous pieces, from the *2nd wind quintet* up to the *3rd symphony*, were realisations of the formal type of one-movement sonata. Partly because of that I chose the many-movement type in this case; the symphony contains thirteen movements in this order:

Refrain I (chorus+orchestra) – Intermezzo I (orchestra) – Ján Hollý with a line in the vernacular (bass+brass instruments) – Janko Král' died in seclusion (mezzosoprano+strings) – Refrain II (chorus+orchestra) – Concerto grosso (orchestra) – It is but a moment (mezzosoprano+bass+solo violin+orchestra) – Until that moment you are here (bass+orchestra) – Chorale (orchestra) – Blissful of poetry (mezzosoprano+chorus+orchestra) – Intermezzo II (13 instruments) – Refrain III (chorus+orchestra) – So have we been burying you (chorus+orchestra)

The order of the poems of Mihalkovič's collection is modified; the poems alternate with orchestral or chamber movements of various lengths. The text marked in the book as *Post Scriptum* at the end of the collection is repeated in the symphony three times as the *Refrain*. If I understand it correctly, it is a kind of anti-ode to the three aforementioned poets, J. Hollý, J. Král' and J. Novomeský. By gradual unweaving of the text in the individual fugal entries of the chorus I try to support this impression (*how cruel, how hardhearted*), so that in the concluding pianissimo we hear a surprising, self-deprecating point on the helplessness of that average Slovak, who takes activity and courage for cruelty. Similarly as the text unfolds, the tone material returns in each new strophe to the starting tones of the sequence (c-d-a...), developing it further. Hence an impression of tonality arises, similarly as in the beginning of my first piano concerto. Heterophony in woodwind instruments creates a conceptual counterpoint to the chorus, representing the pole of the ex-

pression of peace, relaxation and freedom. I guess it is no more important to talk about mathematical approaches. They are as always in the rhythm, structure and in form. The line of harmonic sequence leads from the introductory unison towards the concluding orchestral cluster.

The second movement is orchestral, following the previous in the thematic component; the first two motifs are cluster and held tone. I thought of the fact that in the listener's memory it is the last word of the *Refrain*, "helplessness", that remains. I would not want to suggest that the second movement is an expression of helplessness, but yet some kind of hidden connection may dwell there. A similar means of development as that used in the *2nd symphony* is applied here but on a smaller scale. The diatonic components in the individual permutations of the all-interval series constitute unbelievable combinations, such as the clarinet solo with a sound which is close to that of folk meadow chants. This movement culminates in sudden entries of tutti and slowly recedes in intermittent woodwind solos.

The text of the poem about Ján Hollý calls for a bass solo. The entire movement is accompanied by a brass section. The combination of a eulogistic song with a parody should correspond to the use of sordines. The poem speaks so clear that it only needs being expressed on the back of held chords. The comical sequence with wine is based on a small passage *mobile* (aleatorics). It is certain that the text will arouse doubts and reflections on whether it is appropriate today to remind that Hollý was a priest; on how it was meant there with that text "Pray for us" etc. But this is the text of Mihalkovič's collection which was published in 1977 and therefore has nothing in common with the years of crisis, while it was marked as "engaged" by such experts as Feldek and Felix. So what? Alright, but why was it set to music by Bokes, who is nowadays in such a situation, you know... but that is just that helplessness, that is the "Reassurance of the embrace from which, so help us all saints, we be delivered."

I conceived the fourth movement as a variation on the third. It suffices to compare the alliteration in the titles of both poems. On the absurd notation of the accompaniment in strings I would only say this: as I analysed Boulez's *Le Marteau sans maître* I became interested on two occasions in the notation of a grace note, which is not led to a note on the beat, but is followed by a pause. It is an element on the border between metrical and aleatoric rhythms. Its importance should be duly appreciated, which I did by using this element as a basis for the accompanying figure. Had the strings played without grace notes, they would have played pauses, i.e. they would have not played at all. The alternation of bars, the structure in strings, the number of tones in the individual figures, it is all determined mathematically (Cartesian product). On top of all is a dramatic mezzo solo, more of a recitativo than arioso, in contrast to the bass aria. The mezzo-soprano is separated from the absurd metrorhythmics of strings. The meaning of the text is indisputable: "we have guessed", "we have transformed".

The second version of the *Refrain* maintains the continuous unfolding of the text. The chorus structure is nevertheless different, making use of micropolyphony and melismatics in the individual chorus members' parts. The chorus/throng is

in chaos, in the stage of an opinion shift; the society goes through an inner conflict, having noticed the error in their previous attitude towards the activity of an individual whom they had formerly denounced or ignored.

Concerto grosso is the longest movement of the symphony, its size being maybe more than three times that of the entire *3rd symphony*. Can someone state a rule, unchanging and unbreakable, which would give the maximal tolerable ratio between the lengths of the individual movements of a cyclic composition? I am more and more occupied with the extramusical aspects of composition structure; this movement also corresponds to what is “told” by the structure of the previous one *Refrain II*. The name *Concerto grosso* is slightly misleading, there is no neoclassicism here like Stravinski; it is a competition, duel, a conflict between two orchestral groups of winds and strings. The motional, or better to say melodic, element is carried in by the winds. The rhythm is relaxed at first in the aleatorically polyphonic combination of instruments of same kind. In each new segment the long tones of phrases are shortened until the relaxed melody is turned into a strictly rhythmic succession of unevenly alternated crotchets and quavers. Nevertheless, even here the irregularity, from the viewpoint of the golden ratio, is a regularity. The density of structure in the individual successive segments does also change according to the golden ratio, yet it does not constitute a linear arc directed upwards towards the climax, quite to the contrary, before the climax the structure reduces to a five, three, two voices and eventually to a single voice. The climax sets in subito in a multiphony of 21 solo woodwind and brass instruments. From here on the course of the symphonic movement could be characterised as a rippled retrogradation leading up to a single-voice rhapsodical melody in solo flute (let us recollect the 2nd symphony). The static, sonoristic or harmonic element of the movement is in the string group. Each segment is built on pedal point or ostinato. It starts with a cluster in the central register of the string orchestra, which builds upon the conclusion of the *Refrain*, similarly as the second movement builds upon *Intermezzo I*. In the next segments the cluster is gradually broadened up to the extremal positions, while its density is diluted in waves. Of course, the golden ratio sequence is valid in this course also. Such a sequence consistently leads up to the dyads in extremal registers (C \sharp –c $'''$), forming a basis for the climactic multiphonic segment in winds. The progressive retrogradation subsides in accompanying that harmony, i.e. one of its tones, until the end of the movement. The individual phases of the element development are separated from each other by contrasting segments, in which the motional component shifts into the string section as a progressively growing and thickening *mobile*; the static component is instead in the solo wind instruments, which emphasise the tone selected from the previous static block in strings. This element, just as the subsidence, in combination with successive fading away of the tones C \sharp –c $'''$ constitute the coda of *Concerto grosso*, the first focal point of the 4th symphony.

Now follows the movement named “*It is but a moment*”. Due to the presently concluded large scope of *Concerto grosso*, this name acquires a certain humourous, lightened undertone. The poem, the first of the three dedicated to Novomeský,

bridges a number of paradoxes. It peaks at words which are of contrasting meaning but are similar in sound (*zvečniet'–zvecniet', útokom–útočišť'om*, the meanings of which are: eternalise–materialise, attack–refuge). Their character requires that in music, which is restricted to a “chorded” accompaniment, a similar solution, that of changing the chord colour, is used, similarly as is done by Schoenberg in the slow movement of his Five Orchestral Pieces. The colour is only in the background, in the centre is the duet of the solo players, extraordinarily exposed especially at the words “*moment*”, “*eternalise*”, “*beast*” (that *b'* will possibly be long remembered by bass singers, it is a proper falsetto), “*able*”. Mathematics is also present here not only in the structure of chords, but also in the melismatic figures of solo players. The duet is in the style of baroque oratorios encased between the introduction and the conclusion with the use of solo strings. Who wants will find the golden ratio approach here; someone else may underline the violin part by the text of the poem. The conclusion is shortened in the ratio of the golden section as well. In this movement I use orientational bar lines, with no time signature given, which are intended to facilitate periodisation.

The next movement “*Until that moment you are here*” is a solo bass recitativo and uses a strict bar partitioning. The challenge is possibly in the combination of bars of fourfold difference in the base rhythm unit (crotchets and semiquavers), as the common combination is that of twofold difference ($3/8$ and $2/4$, $5/16$ and $3/8$). Boulez, Xenakis as well as Ferneyhough magnify these differences; in the bifurcation of the rhythm two contrasting elements arise. Their contrast is accentuated in the instrumentation: the singing is joined with the trills in the strings, opposite to which, as an extended upbeat, the faster tone sequences in brass instruments are heard. This movement is maybe a bit pathetic, yet in this case I am happy with that. Such an expression is conveyed in particular by the segment repeating the text “*no, not for oneself*”, which is underlined in the orchestra by a sequence reminiscent of the end of the 2nd symphony (he who wants will understand this connection), and which sets the scene for the text’s main point which is as if tailored for the status of L. Novomeský after 1968. And not his only.

The orchestral *Chorale* is a large gradation towards the second focal point of the symphony, which is the entry of the movement “*Blissful of poetry*”. As for its style, it is possibly a return to the multiserialism technique. I do not mind such an “uncontemporariness”. Anyway, if we are nowadays returning to all kinds of things, maybe we should also come back to this one. The following components are organised:

Metrum - permutations of a similar kind as are in one of the segments in the development of the 2nd symphony, in which the number of beats are combined with their base unit in the ratio of the golden section. In this case the metrum coincides with the rhythm, as the instruments, or the groups, set in always at the start of irregular bars.

Instrumentation - regular permutations of orchestral groups (woodwinds, the brass section, strings).

Structure - a gradual shift from the introductory single voice to almost incom-

prehensible clusters with the use of the golden ratio, Cartesian product and the necessary number permutations.

The gradual increase in the overlaying of the individual layers is accompanied with the increase in intensity and causes the sound to become “rough”. The pitch is as everywhere derived from the permutations of the base all-interval series. This circumstance brings into the serial “savagery” an unusual element, first signs of tonal relations as a consequence of aforementioned secondary diatonicity. I realised that in all of that preparatory multiserial organisation I had an enormous freedom stemming from the fact that the tones of a given serial constellation, the instruments of a given configuration and of a given rhythmical value can be combined thanks to their transposability to various registers. It is here that all that “random”, “subjective”, “unpredictable” and “mysterious” is applied. It may seem little, but it is enough for me. Why is this movement called *Chorale*? After the performance it should no longer be necessary to answer this question. It should suffice to say just that the chorus do not sing here, that the choral fragments are as if scissored. A gradation leads to the start of the next movement, in which all, except for the bass, partake. The bass has sung its part in the aria “*not for oneself*”.

The poem “*Blissful of poetry*” is divided into three strophes. This form is maintained by the music structure, whereby the first strophe, the second and the main focal point of the symphony, is played in forte, while in the next two strophes the dynamics fades away. Each strophe begins with an orchestral polyphonic entry, followed by a choral segment which makes use in the delivery of the text highlighted in Mihalkovič’s poem by a specific font (the italics; is it not a quotation of Novomeský?) the combination of Sprechgesang with an extended and rich polyphonic melismatics placed upon the central syllable of the text. The notation verges on the graphical, though that should not be important. The chorus should sound here as a vocal imitation of the orchestral entry. Both components, the orchestra as well as the chorus, thereafter take over the accompanying role; on the background of thus created, more complex, harmony (cluster), the solo singer sings the next text in recitativo, as if giving a commentary on what was sung by the chorus. The third strophe contains in the chorus the text “*Every collapse eventually leads to a new beginning*”, which I emphasised by a fugal, baroquising, delivery. In this movement we may therefore talk about polystylistics. It is however not a pure baroque, nor a fugato; the tones follow in serial sequences and the entire segment is built on top of a gradually intensifying ostinato-sounding orchestra, similarly as it was in the segment “*not for oneself*” in the movement “*Until that moment you are here*”. The movement ends in quieter dynamics, at which the orchestra, now significantly reduced to a few solo instruments and a quartal chord in cellos, returns to the thematic material from the beginning of the movement.

The next course of the symphony may well be met with misunderstanding, as in its expression it does not chime with the positive note of the preceding movement. But it is ultimately the text that said “*Ah, I am pitiful today*”, implying that today people do not understand one another. That is where we can find the motivation for the noted choice of expression “*Senza spirito*”, the music of misunderstanding.

The second Intermezzo is written for 13 solo instruments only, which play all the time in the same (unusual) manner. This movement has a certain relationship with the orchestral *Chorale*; the *Intermezzo* is essentially its caricature. The structure of the movement is similar, at first the solo instruments alternate, then the structure is gradually thickened up until the point of a climax, at which all play simultaneously; thereafter ensues a phase of fading away prosecuted in a manner opposite to that of the *Chorale*. If in the *Chorale* the metrical irregularity stemmed from changes in the number of beats as well as in the length of base unit, the *Intermezzo* maintains a constant base unit (the quaver), by which an impression of mechanical delivery arises, an expression of mindlessness, which is to be further emphasised in the later movements of the symphony.

The last return of the *Refrain (III)* can be characterised, in particular in chorus, as a replay of the first movement. The chorus is as if representing the yet unmechanised, yet unautomatised part of the society. The strings provide a static surface, played in ostinato, and the winds, which in the first movement played an aleatoric polyphony, are already automatised; they play in slow quavers and in staccato.

In the last movement all have been automatised, including the chorus. The text calls for the use of the funeral march elements. It is but a march of the automatised partaking at their own funeral — “*we may yet bury ourselves*”. Originally, the working title for this movement was “*R. U. R. Marche funébre*”. Here we may also discern the notion of the energy crisis, threatening that the days of our technology-based civilisation are counted. The chorus recites the text in the following manner: a short syllable corresponds to the crotchet, a long syllable corresponds to the half-note.

The chorus imitates the articulation in the speech of computers/robots of the science fiction cinema: between the words are quarter rests, the comma is represented by the half rest. Interesting effects arise at the prepositions “*k*” (which means “to”, “towards”) and “*s*” (meaning “with”), which are treated as individual words/syllables.

The rests are filled by a beat or several beats of the percussions, the order of which is determined by the permutation principle. The percussions but emphasise the mechanical expression of the final movements.

The sentential cadence (the period) is emphasised by an aleatoric entry of trumpets and trombones with percussions; it is a kind of unaccomplished fanfare before the statement of the text. Each such entry is framed by three beats of the xylophone, in which eventually the long symphony concludes. These may well be interpreted as a citation from Beethoven, or as an application of an instrument with an unambiguous expression (see *Danse macabre*, *the Fossils*, etc.). The role of the comical element in this tragicomedy should be played by the relentless doubling of the individual tones of the chorus in alternating orchestral groups, among which the bells were included with a clear intent - to emphasise the seriousness of the tragicomedy.

In truth the symphony does not conclude on too optimistic a note; it does not even provide a classical catharsis; yet never before had I experienced that feeling of closeness of truth as when I was finishing it. (1984)

P. S. 2006: This feeling is to return at the writing of the Credo of the Mass.

I am foremost interested in the results of the so-called secondary diatonics, which arises as a by-effect of the serial structure. If we really want to follow the rule of equality of all intervals, then we should stop the unconscious preference for the minor second, seventh and ninth in building the series, stop avoiding triads in a dodecaphonic series. All tones are equal, as are intervals (e.g. the all-interval series). It is then that we encounter the afore-mentioned secondary diatonics, which at first can surprise by its absurdity a person who was brought up listening to dodecaphony. Here is a field for a new equality of expression techniques: the unambiguous forms of diatonics represent on one hand the early stages of the individual periods of development (Gregorian chant, Early Baroque, Early Classicism, Romanticism); the extreme forms of chromatics are typical for the final (“decadent”) phase (Gesualdo, Bach, Wagner, R. Strauss). Classical delivery can connect diatonics with chromatics in a “just” manner. So far in the history diatonics served as a basis and chromatics as an extension - would it not be now possible to have it the other way round? (*Notes on the Sonata for the violin and the piano, 1979*)

It is advisable to study the tonal, rather than personal, relationships. When I subscribed in the 1st piano concerto to the consistent work with the twelve-tone series, it influenced the musical language of the following compositions. Similarly, the focus on the all-interval series had its impact on the expression; yet that is only to be seen in the unperformed, “drawer-bound”, compositions, starting with *Coll'Age*, in which the phenomenon with a working title of secondary tonality is applied. During the long work over the *4th symphony* I tried to resolve the tonal relationship in a different manner, from a different point of view.

Schoenberg's discovery of the 12-tone series was due to the effort of ensuring an equal use for all tones of the chromatic scale, so that none of them should assume the central role. Practice showed that even the most orthodox dodecaphony cannot bring about such a result; the character of the central tone is determined also by the rhythmical (long/short) and the metrical (heavy/light) factors, by the pitch (a low or a high tone), and by the dynamics (forte/piano). In addition there are the indeterminable factors of psychology and experience. Yet dodecaphony took hold, created a new audio experience and, significantly, an experience of new expression; it has proven able to develop and has convinced of being a heir to the previous late Romantic expression techniques. Most importantly, it gave rise to works of indisputable value, without which the music of this century cannot not be conceived.

Yet the series need not be a twelve-tone one. If the number of tones is increased or decreased, some will be preferred to the others, and the statistical balance will be violated. Surely, in some constellations that can be redeemed by suitably chosen transpositions. If we use a series, which is a multiple of a 12-tone one, then we will satisfy this condition. The quaternion (or matrix) serves as an example. When I arrived at the product 7×12 , where e.g. 7 instruments play in varied order all chromatic tones, it appeared to me that I could reverse this dodecaphonic principle. The building stone would be a simple major or minor scale transposed 12 times

in the chromatic order or round the circle of fifths or fourths. The fundamental assumption that all tones are equally used is satisfied. Using permutations of the tones we ensure that their relationships gradually escape their tonal character; an interesting tone material arises, one that is comparable with the permutations of the all-interval series. Except for the unpredictable random combination of chromaticisms with *diatonicisms* a new element comes into play — the random repetitions of tones which are present in the prime series in seven copies. This element did not exist in the classical dodecaphony; it was simulated by the possibility of tone repetition.

The frequency statistics of tones in tonal compositions are interesting. The most frequent are the first and the fifth step; the steps II, III, IV, VI and VII occur with approximately equal frequency, while the chromatic notes are rarer, yet their abundances vary too. In the minor scale the differences in tone frequencies are somewhat less pronounced than in the major scale; thus, the minor scale is closer to dodecaphony. Dodecaphony itself represented a new step in development 50 years ago, that has been surpassed today. New methods need to be tried out, from which the possibility of a new perspective on the tonal relationships emerges. The principle of tone equality is *en gros* upheld; it is in details where the tonal (or rather to say quasitonal) relationships accumulate. If I state in public that the prime series of a composition is a sequence of scales on the circle of fifths, there will again be some critics shaking their heads in disapproval. Which provides indirect evidence that working with the 84-tone series is not a useless excursion. (1981)

Not only John Cage was an expert in mushrooming. In 1988 a book by Vladimir Solouchin, *Hunting for mushrooms*, was published for our readers — 131 pages of writing on where and when in the Russian countryside far away from Moscow this miracle of nature grows, and on the multitude of ways it can be well served. The book is not solely concerned with this topic; in no more than two instances, very succinctly in a single sentence, the author mentions some almost forgotten, unbelievable tragedies, the consequences of which reverberate till today. The mushrooming paradise is thus transformed into a perfect “Absurdistan”. The unclear and hardly recognisable fraction of darkness casts a long shadow upon the rest of enchanting narration; it is only the fraction that is remembered. Such was for a very long time our perception. Given incomplete and partial information on the most serious matters, we were left inferring from some kind of suggestions, unwittingly uttered fragments, putting together a puzzle that merely hinted at the cruel, naked truth. That was reflected in the choice of the means of expression: the Cantilena is falling apart into a sequence of melodic fragments or into almost unconnected tones in the *2nd string quartet* and in the following compositions, in the *2nd* and *3rd symphonies* in particular. Obviously, the aforementioned Absurdistan arrives with this on the scene in the shape of a metaphor: the never-ending, tragicomical and unaccomplished cantilena of the tuba; the automatised and overly heavy-handed rhythm contrasting with relaxed aleatorics. (2003)

It is needless to explain all that the decision to write music using liturgic texts involved in the period until 1989. I thought of such a piece for a long time, but

the final decision came after 25 March 1988, which has gone down in history as Bratislava's Good Friday. I did not go there; the all-day-long showing-off of the riot police cars was intimidating. Yet this was just what evoked the memories of the Soviet tanks in 1968, and in retrospect its recognition as a sign of the looming collapse of the regime which was to end in the same way as it had begun. And there came the idea which may seem contentious from the perspective of liturgic music, yet for me it became a source of motivation to work on the Mass: to connect the central movement of the Mass cycle *Credo* with sound effects reminiscent of the day (police car sirens, the rain, water cannons). After the tuba solo of the 3rd symphony and the Allegretto conclusion of the 2nd piano concerto yet another absurd piece of evidence is presented, which unfortunately even in this case has turned out to be true. Really unfortunately? Not quite so; those people were able to follow the Christ; I felt my duty was at least to capture in music this historic occasion.

Kyrie. A single tone, slow rhythmical values reminiscent of the Gregorian chant, acceleration and slowing down at the words *Kyrie eleison*, the golden section. The text is gradually shifted from the chorus to all instrumental groups; the orchestra also “cries” *Lord, hear our prayer*. The solo voices deliver the section *Christe eleison* — in dissonances as well as consonances, which are, owing to the technique used discreetly for years, made equal. The concluding *Kyrie* is a four-voice fugue; at the same time my *preludes and fugues* piano cycle was being written. On the background of a fugue an instrumental framework emerges — indeed, this event is an image which will one day be framed —, a monotonically expanding chord beneath the energetic conclusion of the fugue, reminiscent of the collision in the 3rd part of the Mass. The word “framework” was once used by Suchoň with respect to the defense of the original version of his *Krútnava*...

Gloria. The text is uncommonly divided into expressive and cantabile solos and a contrastingly reserved chorus. Thus a tension in the expression is created, which leads to the “foggy” aleatoric passages at the words “*qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis*”; it flows into a soprano solo and a concluding Amen on the background of a diminished 6/3 chord.

Credo 25. 3. 1988. The centre of (not only) the Mass. Just at the time when I finished writing this movement, a substantial change took place — 17th November 1989, the Velvet Revolution. An unbelievable experience based on seeing what happened under the windows of my study to be nothing but what I had just been writing. Such an event is rare; I wish other composers could experience it. I would like to point at the outward similarity between the articulation of the Mass's text and the concluding movement of the *4th symphony*. There it was the image of a brainwashed crowd, the sorrow caused by that image; here the same people stood up with a prayer on their lips, which at points would slip their mind, since they too are afraid, since they do not remember that prayer that much, against the superiority of police force. Nothing more or nothing less is here in this part; after a new fugue “*Et vitam venturi*” sung and played “*con tutta energia*” there comes an aleatoric “chaos”, an image of the times that have ended.

Sanctus. I returned to the Mass in the spring of 1990, when the situation at the school and in music life had significantly changed; it was after three months of exhausting and all but fruitless chairmanship of the new Slovak Music Union. The fourth movement may most remind of the then recently finished *5th symphony* and *Hosanna* could be a kind of gradual transformation of an anthem into a mystical chant, reminiscent of the atmosphere of *Kyrie*. The automatised rhythm of a man being turned into a robot is present even in the instrumental accompaniment of the passage *Benedictus* (the regular strikes of the claves), which interrupts the relaxed singing of the soloists — changes take longer to be implemented in the mindset of man.

Agnus Dei. In this movement it is again the soloists that initiate the broad-breathed, free vocal expression; it takes longer for the chorus until it starts to sing again. Eventually the calm expression of freedom, though marked by sorrow, dominates in the third, concluding and extremely slow choral fugue with the string accompaniment “*Dona nobis pacem*”.

The clean copy of the composition is dated 22. 2. 1991. *Missa Posoniensis* (the Bratislava Mass) has also become a piece that is waiting for a premiere for years. It seems that this is not solely due to the communist censorship. (2007)

Translated from the Slovak by Pavol Bokes.