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FROM POLYSTYLISM TO META-PLURALISM. ESSAYS ON LATE
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This book grew out of Ivana Medić's continuing investigation into music by Alfred Schnittke and his contemporaries following her defence of her doctoral thesis, on Schnittke's symphonies, at the University of Manchester. As such, it represents an up-to-date and original approach to a body of music with which she is deeply familiar but constantly questioning. Indeed, one of the most significant aspects of the book, and of Ivana Medić's work in general, is her willingness to think through conclusions anew and recontextualize: thus her coining of the term "meta-pluralism" to describe the Soviet tendency often equated (but inexactly, as Medić shows) with the Western phenomenon of postmodernism.

The book accordingly begins with a usefully objective introduction covering various Russian and Western approaches to the body of music under discussion (Richard Taruskin, Dorothea Redepenning, Levon Hakobian, Francis Maes, Peter J. Schmelz, Mark Aranovskii), and is subsequently divided into three large sections, "Polystylism," "Towards Postism via Spiritualism" and "Meta-Pluralism." The first begins with a succinct discussion of the origins and range of the term "polystylism," shedding useful light on the "first" and "second" Soviet avant-gardes and concluding that "[w]hat distinguishes the first polystylistic works by Soviet composers from earlier historical examples (as in for instance, Mahler, Berg or Stravinsky) is that the stylistic interaction itself provides the basis and the main constructive tool for a new work" (p. 20), an observation that is not as obvious as it may at first appear, perhaps especially to commentators in the West. This is followed by a substantial reflection on Schnittke's position as the "Godfather" of polystylism – "it was Schnittke who turned polystylism into a brand" (p. 23) – his own ambiguous categorizations of it, its origins in his discomfort with the dichotomy between his concert music and his film music, and the influences of Igor Stravinsky, Dmitri Shostakovich, Alban Berg, Gustav Mahler, and the Leningrad modernists active in the 1920s. Medić's approach

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to the different degrees and kinds of polystylism in Schnittke's music is neatly summarized in a table listing J. Peter Burkholder's classification of a vast number of methods of musical borrowing in parallel with her own commentary on these.

There follow discussions of four substantial works relevant to the establishment of polystylism as a "brand:" Luciano Berio's *Sinfonia*, Schnittke's own Symphony no. 1, Boris Chaikovskii's Symphony no. 2 and Shostakovich's Symphony no. 15. The section on Schnittke's Symphony is particularly virtuosic, giving as it does an overview of the various approaches that have been taken to this still-provocative work and a verbal analysis of it movement by movement, concluding that,

It is possible to say that, with his Symphony no. 1, Schnittke tried to create an 'anti-masterpiece': a blunt work firmly rooted in real life experiences and circumstances and intended to challenge every member of his audience. Schnittke's Symphony puts forth a strong argument that it is not only pointless, but morally and spiritually harmful, to try to write beautiful and ordered music in the ugly and chaotic world (p. 66).

This is particularly interesting in the light of Arvo Pärt's movement from his own kind of polystylism to his quest precisely to write "beautiful and ordered music in the ugly and chaotic world" – Medić comes to this in the second section of the book – but it is also reflected in contrasts to be found elsewhere in the world, say between Peter Maxwell Davies and John Tavener, a great number of Polish composers and Henryk Górecki, or Elliot Carter and the neo-tonalism of such composers as George Rochberg and David del Tredici. Far less well known to Western listeners will be the work of Boris Chaikovskii; his Symphony no. 2 is an early and highly successful monument of polystylism (as Schnittke himself noted), and while Shostakovich's Symphony no. 15 is of course at quite the opposite end of the spectrum of popularity, Medić's analysis of its "musical mementos" in this context sheds interesting new light on the work.

The second section, "Towards Postism via Spiritualism" may at first seem to be mistitled, given the connotations of "spiritualism" in English, but in fact it is intended to cover a wide range of approaches to the spiritual in late Soviet music, and Medić is sensitive not only to the wide-ranging implications of the term but to the wide variety of musical results to which it gave rise. She therefore continues with a discussion entitled "From Poly- to Monostylism," "monostylism" being the term employed by Soviet musicologists to describe what they saw as a change of approach in Schnittke's work after the Symphony no. 1, in such works as the Requiem (1975) and the Piano Quintet (1976). Medić is dismissive of this claim: "(...) in my opinion it is a gross overstatement to say that [Schnittke] abandoned his previous creative methodology in favour of 'monostylistics'" (p. 92). Indeed: I doubt that such a thought would ever have crossed the mind of a Western admirer of Schnittke's work; it seems an entirely artificial and unnecessary category. It is much more convincing to see this as simply a purification of technique, with the dawning realization that brutal contrasts of style

and literal quotations in the end lose their effect; what that can do, and did do in Schnittke's case, is to give rise to a far more integrated, self-sustained means of writing that nevertheless does not betray its origins in the obviousness of early polystylism.

This section continues with analyses of Arvo Pärt's Symphony no. 3 (excellent in its avoidance of the clichéd reading of it as merely a stylistically transitional piece) and Galina Ustvolskaya's Symphony no. 2, which neatly and convincingly demolishes Lemaire's assessment of her as a postmodernist *avant la lettre*, and a very thoughtful discussion of the work of Gubaidulina, one of the most interesting aspects of which is the complete incomprehension of her work on the part of British critics when her music was performed in London, an attitude that subsists in large part still today.

Finally we come to meta-pluralism. Medić's use of this term in this context is buttressed by its employment in other fields, and makes a great deal of sense. She observes that she came to it as the result of her own attempt to understand the position of Soviet composers when confronted by hitherto unimagined stylistic possibilities: "At that point they were forced to reflect both on the lack of historical stylistic continuum, caused by the decades-long reign of the socialist-realist doctrine, and on their own attempts to overcome this ahistoricity, as well as their exclusion from European currents" (p. 141). This is followed by a fascinating disquisition on the issues raised which builds intriguingly on the work of the Croatian literary theorist Dubravka Oraić Tolić, whose work the author extends to Schnittke's work after his First Symphony, thereby arriving at an analytical and aesthetic standpoint far more revealing than Taruskin's high-handed categorizations.

There follow, then, analyses of Schnittke's Symphony no. 3, Valentin Silvestrov's Symphony no. 5 and Boris Tishchenko's Symphony no. 5, and a postlude. Medić's work on the Schnittke symphony is masterly, once again countering the unconsidered harshness of the composer's British critics with an extended and profound consideration of the work's structure and symbolism, based on her work with the sketches. For those of us who needed no further convincing as far as Schnittke is concerned, the author's discussion of the symphonies by Silvestrov and Tishchenko is perhaps even more interesting. Silvestrov's Fifth was a revelation in the West, and gained him a wide following (as well as, inevitably, a good deal of hostile commentary), but Tishchenko has never really caught on, in spite of the availability of a good many of his works on (admittedly not very well distributed) commercial recordings.

In her postlude, Medić brings us back to Schnittke, neatly situating the other composers whom she discusses around him. It is interesting to speculate how such a thing might be done in reverse – could one imagine such a history being centred on Silvestrov, Pärt, Gubaidulina or Kancheli (and only after having written those names do I note that only one of them is Russian, and then only in a sense...)? Perhaps. But Schnittke provides a central point around which to construct a new narrative of many things that happened in late Soviet music (because what it discussed here greatly transcends the symphonic canon), and thus enlightens the reader in unexpected and fascinating ways. This book is nothing less than a landmark.