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Chaconne in memoria del Giovanni Paolo II and Penderecki's search for a universal music language

In his published lectures, Penderecki has stated:

> I have often pondered the lack of a universal musical idiom in our century. The musical «common language» present in earlier ages was made possible by the fact that musicians and their audiences accepted certain fixed points of reference. Composers of the twentieth century, while revolutionizing the existing foundations of music, found themselves at a certain moment in a void. The postulate of radical individualism and experimentation has brought about the shattering of all enduring points of sustenance.[1]

> It seems to me that the recovery of the genuine and natural, the universal language of music, is possible only through such a purification and transmutation of everything that already exists.[2]

In Penderecki's abundant compositional *œuvre*, an example of the search for a universal musical language, rooted in the diverse European musical tradition, could be the *Chaconne in memoria del Giovanni Paolo II* (2005), scored for string orchestra, which provided the final closure to the cycle of works which

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[1] Krzysztof PENDERECKI *Labyrinth of Time. Five Addresses for the End of the Millenium*, trans. William Brand, Chapel Hill 1998, p. 60.

[2] Ibidem, p. 19.

forms the *Polish Requiem.*[3] Among Penderecki's cantata/oratorio works, the *Polish Requiem* occupies a special place, both because its successive movements were composed over a span of nearly 25 years, and on account of its characteristic dedications.[4] The *Chaconne*, which refers to the memory of John Paul II's charismatic personality, is a creative continuation and, at the same time, a synthesis of the European musical tradition linked with the idea of the *opus perfectum et absolutum*, with the artistry of polyphonic and variational technique, with a clear construction of form, as well as with the expression and beauty of a melodic line suggestively resonating with human feelings, which are so difficult to conceptualize verbally. For this relatively short (ca. 6.5') work alludes both to the Baroque polyphonic variation known as the *chaconne*, and to the Classical theme-and-variations form with a clear dramaturgy of development; and the melody of the theme, an expressive *lamento*, has the traits of a Romantic gesture. At the same time, this work continues both the European tradition of *concertante* music as well as – via its characteristic dedication – referring to that function of music, present in all cultures, whose aim is to join a given community into one fellowship engulfed by similar feelings upon the death of a person dear to them. The *Chaconne in memoria del Giovanni Paolo II* can also be interpreted as a manifestation of the 'Penderecki syndrome' – that of a composer perfectly shaping the form of 'musical time' and, at the same time, writing music which strongly affects the emotions and feelings of the audience. In *Rozmowy Lusławickie* [*Conversations in Lusławice*] (2005), the composer answered the question 'What comprises the "Penderecki syndrome"?' as follows:

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[3] The *Chaconne* was completed in September 2005; its première took place at the Wratislavia Cantans Festival on 17 September 2005.

[4] The first movement of this Polish funeral mass, *Lacrimosa*, moving in its expressive *lamento*, written for Lech Wałęsa and Solidarity, was performed in Gdańsk on 16 December 1980 during the unveiling ceremony for a monument to the Victims of 1970, i.e. the Gdańsk shipyard workers who paid with their lives for their courage and determination in opposing Communist authority. Subsequent movements (*Requiem aeternam, Kyrie eleison*, *Dies irae, Agnus Dei, Lux aeterna, Libera me*) were composed during the years 1980–84. In 1981, affected by the death of Stefan Wyszyński, Penderecki wrote a moving *Agnus Dei* for *a cappella* choir, dedicated to the Primate of the Millennium. Later he added the *Dies irae* (1st movement), dedicated to the victims of the Warsaw Uprising, as well as (2nd movement) to Father Maksymilian Kolbe, and the *Libera me, Domine*, in memory of the victims of Katyń, as well as the *Lux aeternam*. On the other hand, in the *Recordare*, he alluded to Polish religious traditions, citing from the supplication *O Holy God*. He returned to the thus-organized mass cycle twice. In 1993, he composed the *Sanctus*; and in 2005, when, affected by the death of John Paul II, he wrote the *Chaconne* for string ensemble, dedicated to him.

A clear, precise form for a given work, regardless of the material I use. And a type of expression – obviously, individual expression […], [for] music is mathematized expression […]. I think that a composer must be a good psychologist and know exactly how what works, and when to use it.[5]

For the basic contour of Penderecki's musical poetics, immanent and formulated, is an uncommon discipline in the area of shaping of musical time, i.e. of musical form interpreted both by the classic metaphor of a building of clear architectural plan and refined ingenuity of component parts, and by the metaphor of a convincing oration, in which the speaker in various ways presents a leading thought, gradually builds tension and, at the appropriate time (normally associated with the 'golden proportion'), leads to an effect of culmination. Another leitmotif of the composer's statements and characteristic trait of his music is a relationship with the *ars contrapuncti* tradition, understood as a discipline of the creative process with the aim of shaping the sound texture so as to obtain a layered effect, i.e. simultaneously carry out 2–3 musical actions.

The composer often indicates that he owes his interest in polyphony as the art of bringing out the individuality of simultaneous pitch progressions to his teacher Franciszek Skołyszewski.

He got me interested in polyphony and I am very grateful to him. […] Under his influence, I radically changed my way of thinking – from vertical to horizontal. […] I found polyphony fascinating.[6]

Skołyszewski opened my eyes, made me aware that music is not chords; it is not vertical thinking, but rather horizontal (i.e. he began to educate me in polyphony). He indicated that it is worthwhile to be tempted by abstract thinking in lines, and not […] in chords. To this day, it has remained with me: in writing a work, I think horizontally – chords are often the result of the pursuit of lines.[7]

A stable characteristic of Penderecki's music – both that belonging to the avant-garde, impressing the audience with aggressive and unconventional sound, and that composed in the Postmodernist era, shocking, in turn, in euphony of pitch combinations and expression of melody – is the manner of shaping form and texture in a musical work (bringing out an effect of contrast

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[5] Mieczysław Tomaszewski *Penderecki, vol. 1. Rozmowy lusławickie* [*Conversations in Lusławice*], Bosz, Olszanica, pp. 137, 92, 184.

[6] Ibidem, p. 2.

[7] Przemysław Ćwikliński, Jacek Ziarno *Pasja: o Krzysztofie Pendereckim* [*A Passion: about Krzysztof Penderecki*], Warszawa 1993, p. 49.

and, at the same time, of harmonious combination of similar and different forms of sound into a coherent whole), as well as the exposition of the effect of polyphony (i.e. simultaneous carrying out of different 'musical actions'). The composer, in searching for universal principles of the European *ars componendi*, alludes in a new manner both to Classical/Romantic 'variational principles', gradations of expressions or 'recapitulativity',[8] and to the Renaissance/Baroque art of counterpoint which, in German musicology, has been interpreted in terms of the historicism, evolution and ideology of progress, i.e. as successive phases of the development of European compositional technique. One manifestation of such an understanding of the art of composition was, among others, the work *Von zwei Kulturen der Musik*[9] by August Halm, who differentiated 'two cultures' in European musical history: the early, associated with the artistry of polyphonic music; and the newer, bringing out the expression of a harmonically shaped and developed melody, as well as diversified sound color.

During his nearly 50 years of artistic work, Penderecki has in a new way continued the tradition of *ars contrapuncti* as well as of variational technique. In the scores of his works, there also appear sound shaping devices that explicitly or implicitly refer to the ideas of both polyphonic form and variational form of clear architectural construction. For example, in his *Magnificat* (1974), the second movement bears the name of *fugue*; and the fifth movement, that of *passacaglia*; similarly titled is the fourth movement of the *Symphony no. 3* (1988–95), as well as the first movement of the *Serenade* (1996) for string orchestra. Also called by the name of *passacaglia* is a fragment (nos. 22–26) of the one-movement *Symphony no. 5* (1992), as well as the final scene of the opera *Paradise Lost* (1976–78), bringing to mind an image of the Apocalypse and Last Judgment (as the theme of the *passacaglia*, there appears a quote from the sequence *Dies irae*); and the name *chaconne* is borne by the above-mentioned instrumental fragment of the *Polish Requiem*. Beyond this, in many of Penderecki's works, there are also pitch shaping devices whose construction evidently alludes to the idea of imitative polyphony, but the composer does not signal this with any verbal description. For example, in the *Violin Concerto no. 2* (nos. 68–73), a melody of a few measures' length (played initially by the violin solo) is imi-

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[8] Mieczysław Tomaszewski *Penderecki, vol. 1*, op. cit., p. 137.
[9] August Halm *Von zwei Kulturen der Musik*, Munich 1913, ²1947.

tated many times, also realized in inversion (by the violas), as well as combined simultaneously in several 'voices', creating a *stretto*.

In his search for a universal musical language, Penderecki has thus alluded both to Baroque polyphonic/variational forms, exposing the principle of simultaneous musical actions, as well as the variational repetition of pitch structures; and to the attributes of Classical form, such as proportionality in duration of successive segments, recapitulativity and symmetry in arrangement of segments of similar and different character (in terms of tone quality or texture), as well as bringing out of the effect of culmination in a time segment which suggests a relationship with the so-called golden proportion. In the *Chaconne*, he also referred to the Classical/Romantic tradition of an expressive melody treated as a theme repeated and modified multiple times, changing its expressive quality, among other things by means of a different type of pitch motion and dynamics. On the other hand, symptomatic of the 20th-century Neoclassical musical tradition is the peculiar tone quality of repeated pitch structures, which is the result of, among other things, their refined articulation.

An allusion to the art of counterpoint in the *Chaconne* is the effect of simultaneous carrying out of two musical actions, obtained by simultaneous combination of a stable harmonic formula (realized in the low registers) with a variationally repeated melody line (played in the upper registers). The composer, thus, continues the *chaconne genre's* basic characteristic, which is repetition of a selected sequence of sonorities, as well as a clear bass line falling in stepwise motion (*a♭–g–f♯–f…*) (cf. Table 1).

The repeated harmonic formula is created by a structure of five three-voice sonorities which are a superposition of two thirds, or of a fourth and a third. These sonorities, interpreted as inversions of a minor or major chord, create a stable sequence of minor and major chords (a♭, E♭, D, d, f) supplemented (or not) with other, 3–8-voice sonorities. For example, in the finale of segment 1, there appear, beyond this, three-voice pitch combinations which could be interpreted as the progression: D♭, G, b♭, c, D♭; in the finale of segment 4, combinations of 3–4 pitches create the sequence: e^7, D♭, $E♭^7$; and segment 7 finishes with a half-step transposition upward of an interval pattern which could be interpreted as an eight-voice sonority which is a superposition of two minor seventh chords a major second distant from each other ($a♭^7/f♯^7 - a^7/g^7 - b♭^7/g♯^7 - b^7/a^7 - c^7/b♭^7 - c♯^7/b^7$) (cf. Table 1). The evident similarity of the initial four sonorities is conducive to the impression of a clear construction; and the

Table 1. K. Penderecki, *Chaconne* (2005) Structural pattern.
Structure of 3–4-voice sonorities, as well as corresponding
performance and articulation resources

	Bass line and its realization (performance and articulation resources, pattern of motion)		Sequence of sonorities and their realization (performance and articulation resources, dominating pitch movement)	
1. mm. 1–7	a♭–g–f#–f…– (e–b)	Vc - Cb -	**a♭-E♭-D-d**-f-D♭-G-b♭-e-D♭	II Vn Vl
2. mm. 8–14	a♭–g–f#–f… – (e–e♭)	Vc+Cb -	**a♭-E♭-D-d**-f-D♭-C-c	Vn (I + II)
3. mm. 15–24	a♭–g–f#–f…– (e–e♭)	Cb -	**a♭-E♭-D-d**-f-D♭-C-c-(E⁹)-e-F#⁷-(b)	Vn (I + II) Vl
4. mm. 25–32	a♭–g–f#–f…– (d–f)	Cb -	**a♭-E♭-D-d**-f- e⁷-D♭-E♭⁷	II Vn Vl Vc
5. mm. 33–42	a♭–g–f#–f…– (b♭–b–c)	Vc + Cb (pizz)	**a♭-E♭-D-d-f**- G⁷-b♭-G-c	II Vn Vl
6. mm. 43–51	a♭–g–f#–f…	Vc+ Cb (pizz)	**a♭-E♭-D-d-f**- G⁷-b♭	I Vn Vl
7. mm. 52–61	a♭–g–f#–f…– (d♭–b♭)	Cb (arco–pizz)	**a♭-E♭-D-d**-D♭-a♭⁷/f#⁷-a⁷/g⁷ – b♭⁷/g#⁷ – b⁷/a⁷ – c⁷/b♭⁷ – c#⁷/b⁷	II Vn Vl
8. mm. 62–69	a♭–g–f#–f	Cb (arco)	**a♭-E♭-D-d-f**-	Vl Vc
9. mm. 70–83	a♭–g–f#–f…– (e–e♭–f)	Vc+Cb	**a♭-E♭-D-d-f**-D♭-c#-e♭-a♭/d	II Vn Vl

change in quantity and structure of sonorities in the finales of the successive segments – which contributes to their diverse duration and tone color – brings out an effect of surprise, as well as an impression of 'intellectual play' between the stable and the variable (cf. Table 2).

The repeated harmonic formula, realized in a diverse manner, accompanies an expressive, variationally-modified melodic line which is normally performed by the first violins (in the segments 1, 4, 5, 6 and 9); but it also appears in the viola part (segment 2) and in the cello part (segment 3). This melody is also played in octave doubling by the first and second violins (in segment 8), as well as by the first violins and the 'celli (in segment 7). Its identity (or impression of similarity) is decided by the downward transposition of repeated interval

Table 2. K. Penderecki, *Chaconne* (2005) Structural pattern.
Duration, metrical structure and dynamic level of successive segments

Successive segments	Measures	Meter, number of measures	Duration in eighth-notes (♪=64)	Proportions of duration of successive segments	Dynamics	
1	mm. 1–7	4/8 (6 mm.), 5/8 (1 m.)	29 ♪		p	A [86 ♪]
2	mm. 8–14	4/8 (6 mm.), 3/8 (1 m.)	27 ♪		p	
3	mm. 15–24	3/8 (10 mm.)	30 ♪	4	**f**	
4	mm. 25–32	3/8 (8 mm.)	24 ♪	3	pp	B [91 ♪]
5	mm. 33–42	3/8 (9 mm.), 4/8 (1 m.)	31 ♪	4 (5)	pp – p	
6	mm. 43–51	4/8 (9 mm.)	36 ♪	(6)	p – **f**	
7	mm. 52–61	3/8 (7 mm.) 2/8+1/16, 3/8, 4/8	31 ♪	4	p	A₁ [96 ♪]
8	mm. 62–69	3/8 (7 mm.), 2/8 (1 m.)	23 ♪	3 (1)	f	
9	mm. 70–83	3/8 (14 mm.)	42 ♪	6 (2)	**ff** – pp	

structures (initially, a downward minor second, and a downward leap of a major third or a fourth), and then their consistent transposition up the pitch scale. (Cf. Example 1).

Vl 1, mm. 25-29

Vl 1, mm. 33-36

Vl 1, mm. 33-36

Vl 1, Vc, mm. 52-55
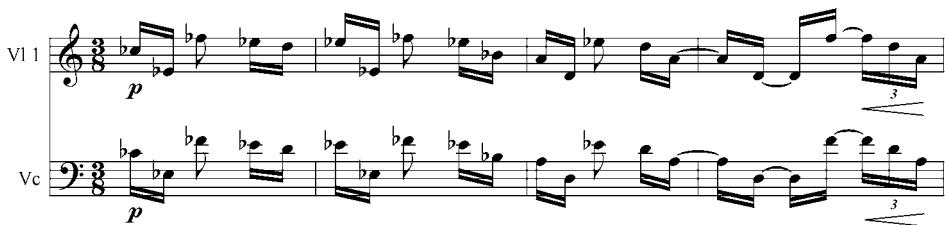
Example 1. Melodic theme and its variants

Universal means of obtaining an effect of modification in tone quality of repeated interval structures (linear and vertical) are change of pitch register, performance resources and articulation. In the *Chaconne*, this change has its logic, for it gives the impression of a consistent shifting of the repeated melodic formula first down the pitch scale, and then upward. In segment 1, the

melody is intoned starting from $f\flat'''$, and then an octave lower (from $f\flat''$ – in segments 2 and 5); and in segments 3 and 6, we hear it yet another octave lower (from $f\flat'$); in the final segments, it is transposed into higher pitch registers and realized in octave doubling from $f\flat''$ (in segment 7), and then from $f\flat'''$ (in segment 8); and in the final, 9th segment, from $e\flat''''$ (by the first violins).

Modification of the harmonic background consists of, above all, changing the tone quality by utilizing, in successive segments, diverse pitch movement and different rhythmic patterns in the ensemble of instruments realizing the sequence of sonorities mentioned. While the (in successive measures) regularly falling bass line is realized consistently by the 'celli and double basses (only in segments 4 and 8 by the double basses alone), the composer, in the successive segments, changes the manner of articulation and the type of movement over the pitch scale, normally couched in repeated rhythmic patterns. In the successive segments, pitch figures forming a sequence of three-voice sonorities are played (in a middle pitch register) by diverse groups of strings. Generally, this sound layer, representing a background/accompaniment for the melodic line played – in a given segment – consistently by one string group (or in octaves by two groups, as mentioned above), is realized by the remaining instruments in the string orchestra. For example, in segment 3 (mm. 15–24), the melody is played by the celli; and the 'sound background', with its repeated sequence of sonorities, is realized by the remaining string parts (i.e. violins I and II, violas and double basses).

Penderecki does not make use of experimental sounds, but subtly modifies repeated pitch formulas, combining, for example, *staccato* and *arco* articulation in succession (segment 7, double basses) or simultaneously (e.g. in mm. 49–50, a progression of the same pitches is performed at the same time in *arco*, *marcato* and *pizzicato* articulation by the violas *divisi a 2*; and in m. 51, the pitch progression doubled at the octave is realized in *pizzicato* articulation (violas) and in *arco* harmonics ('celli) (cf. Example 2).

The effect of terraced development of pitch events is the result of, among other things, 'thickening' of uniform pitch movement (notated at the tempo ♪=64). For example, in segment 3 (violas), a fast, uniform triplet sixteenth-note motion is utilized; and in segment 6, there appears an almost non-selective progression of pitches noted as 32nds and triplet 32nds. The composer also changes their articulation and the dynamics of the pitch combinations forming the repeated interval structures.

Vl 1, Vc, mm. 49-51
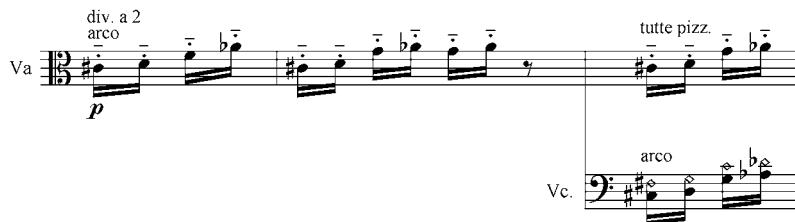
Example 2. K. Penderecki, *Chaconne Staccato–legato* articulation

The diversified tone quality and expression of the successive segments is, thus, the result of modification of the color and dynamics of both that melody and its accompanying 'harmonic background'. Penderecki's variational technique, thus, brings out the different tone colors of the successive nine variations, conditioned by the manner of articulation of pitches, their selective or non-selective progression, as well as choice of performance resources.

In the *Chaconne*, the composer repeats the aforementioned harmonic formula many times, dividing the work into 9 basic segments; but the manner of shaping sound dynamics and pitch articulation is the deciding factor in the impression of a hierarchical, 3-movement construction having the characteristics of recapitulation and symmetry (ABA_1) (cf. Table 2). While a *piano* dynamic dominates in this work, the composer precisely shapes the gradation of expression and leads up to a culmination in segment 8. The aforementioned three 'culminational waves' (linking three successive repetitions of the harmonic formula and the variants of the melody) designate a hierarchically differentiated architecture of musical time; but the final culmination appears in the time segment associated with the so-called 'golden proportion'.

Conducive to the grouping of three successive segments into larger formal wholes (A = mm. 1–24, B = mm. 25–51, A_1 = mm. 52–83) is the gradation of the dynamics (from *piano* to *forte* in segments 3, 6 and 9), as well as diversified articulation. The impression of differentiation in the three middle segments (which together create the section designated B) is associated with the *pizzicato* and *staccato* articulation which dominates in them – for in the remaining segments, a *legato* and *arco* articulation dominates. In turn, an effect of similarity between the three initial and three final segments (designated as A and

A_1) is obtained, beyond this, by analogous (uniform) movement and shape of melodic line (in the 1st segment, as well as in segments 7 and 8).

The duration of the successive segments (reckoned in numbers of eighth-notes; ♪=64) is diversified (from 23 to 42), but is subordinated to the principle of proportionality, including (approximately) ratios of 1:2 (segments 8 and 9) and 4:3 (segments 3 and 4, as well as 7 and 8), as well as a proportion of 5:6 (segments 5 and 6) (cf. Table 2). The composer changes both the duration of the successive segments, and their metrical structure. Generally, their dominant meter is 4/8 (segments 1, 2, 6), as well as 3/8 (segments, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9); but in the finale of several fragments, Penderecki introduced measures in different meters (e.g. in segment 1, 5/8; in segment 2, 3/8; in segment 5, 4/8; in segment 8, 2/8).

In 2005, during a conversation with Mieczysław Tomaszewski, Penderecki stated that

> I have created such a language […] as can be called universal. But perhaps only for my own use. […] I believe that my language is nonetheless my language, despite the fact that it takes from the entire past and consciously uses forms which have passed into oblivion.[10]

The *Chaconne* can thus be interpreted as a proposal for utilization of a universal musical language having traits of 'wordless oration'[11] aiming towards a culmination, as well as of an 'architectonic building' of clear, symmetrical and proportional construction, and also as a continuation of those 'legacy values' that Italo Calvino described in his *Lezioni Americane* as Leggerezza, Rapidità, Esattezza, Visibilità, Molteplicità [Lightness, Quickness, Exactitude, Visibility, and Multiplicity].[12]

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[10] Mieczysław Tomaszewski *Penderecki, vol. 1*, op. cit., p. 137.

[11] Mark E. Bonds *Wordless Rhetoric: Musical Form and the Metaphor of the Oration*, Cambridge MA and London 1991.

[12] Italo Calvino *Lezioni Americane. Sei proposte per il prossimo millennio*, Milan 1993.