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Symphonic tribute to Mieczysław Karłowicz—*Kościelec 1909* by Wojciech Kilar

[While I was working on an article about *Krzesany* by Wojciech Kilar for the fourth volume of *Musica Iagellonica*,[1] the composer was celebrating his 75th birthday. Now he will be turning 80 in July this year and it is my hope that this text will be my small contribution to his jubilee.]

> [...] I found a shady spot and gazed upon the scratched walls of the Łomnica peak. My thoughts wandered back to those numerous hiking trips in the Tatra Mountains that like clear water refreshed my spirit and served as the links connecting and conciliating one with life. [...] none of [...] the mountains were ever as dear to me as the Tatras. It is the Tatras that drape themselves whole in a cloud veil for weeks and, like the most fickle lady of all, make us wait endlessly for their smile. But once the veil is gone and the azure eyes of the ponds flicker, when the snow blushes and steep mountain peaks take a breath of fresh east wind—a mysterious, giant hand reaches out to me from the mountains, grabs and carries me away with it. And it is at the top of a steep mountain, when I am all alone, with only the azure canopy of heaven above me and congealed billows of mountain peaks rising from a sea of plains when I become one with the surrounding expanse, when I cease to exist as an individual and feel a mighty, everlasting breath of the omnipresent upon me. This gust penetrates all fibers of my soul, filling it with gentle light, and reaching into its depths, where the memories of hardship and pain lie. And, it heals, straightens and smoothes. The hours spent in such half-consciousness seem to be a momentary return to the state of nonexistence when

[1] Stanisław Będkowski, 'A Farewell to the Avant-garde—Krzesany by Wojciech Kilar', [in:] *Musica Iagellonica*, 4, 2007: 143–162.

> hearing about an eternal serenity of becoming one with the universe, we no more fear for life and death.[2]

This is what Mieczysław Karłowicz, the most prominent Polish composer at the turn of the twentieth century, an outstanding mountaineer and an avid skier wrote about the moments he spent in the Tatra Mountains. His fascination with the Tatras came with the highest price—he died in an avalanche while traversing a slope of Mały Kościelec [Little Kościelec] during his lone skiing trip on February 8, 1909. There were also many others who ventured deep into the mountains and experienced the same feeling of exaltation, so beautifully and accurately described by Karłowicz. Wojciech Kilar, too, was many a time feeling the grip of the very same 'mysterious, giant hand'. The Tatra Mountains have always been dear to him, as has Karłowicz's way of contemplating them: pondering about the metaphysical, universal and eternal questions amidst the unchangeable mountain surroundings. The echoes of these matters are found in *Kościelec 1909*, which, on the one hand, can be seen as an homage and epitaph for Mieczysław Karłowicz (the year of his death is included in the title of the composition), on the other hand, it is an expression of Kilar's personal sentiment for this beautiful Tatra peak, climbing the summit of which sparked the composer's fascination with the mountains. In his conversation with Klaudia Podobińska and Leszek Polony Kilar said:

> My first visit to the mountains had most likely taken place after I had finished composing *Krzesany*. On July 14, 1974, the anniversary of the storming of the Bastille, I finished writing the score which tore down my own avant-garde Bastille. Afterwards, as always, I took a trip to Zakopane. I used to visit this town for years, however, I would usually spend my time there sipping coffee at 'U Kmicica' Inn, gossiping, and taking a stroll to the nearby valleys: Dolina Białego, Dolina Chochołowska and Dolina Kościeliska. This particular time, however, a son of our friends suggested we go to the mountains. We decided to climb Kościelec.'[3]

In *Kościelec 1909* Kilar combines, as he puts it, his 'two [...] loves—one for Karłowicz's music and the other—for his first [...] conquered mountain peak.[4]

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[2] Mieczysław Karłowicz, [in:] Jerzy Młodziejowski (ed.), *W Tatrach* [In the Tatra Mountains], Kraków 1957: 62–63.

[3] Klaudia Podobińska and Leszek Polony, *Cieszę się darem życia* [I'm Grateful for the Gift of Life], Kraków 1997: 34.

[4] Ibidem: 35. For further information about the beginnings of Kilar's interest in the Tatras and the Sub-Tatra region folklore, cf. Stanisław Będkowski, 'A Farewell…' (2007).

Kościelec 1909 was completed in 1976, two years after *Krzesany*, and is chronologically a second out of four pieces by Kilar from the so-called 'folklorist' or 'highlander' current.[5] Such a designation suggests that the source of inspiration for the music must have been for the most part the highlander folklore, and in the case of *Krzesany*, *Siwa mgła* and *Orawa* the name is undoubtedly accurate: *Krzesany* was mainly inspired by the highlander dance, *Siwa mgła*—by the highlander song and singing, and *Orawa*—by the unique manner of playing music practiced by highlander folk groups; parts of original folk melodies are included in all these scores. Yet *Kościelec 1909* is different in this respect, which is often overlooked: there are no direct quotations from actual folklore. It is the mountainscape, and the tragic event that took place there, that inspired the piece rather than folklore or folk music. Still, the echoes of the latter are also present in the form of folk rhythmic patterns and the scales used. As we all know, the landscape and the impressions made by it, as well as the folklore, are essentially two different sources of inspiration and their effects may, but do not have to be, joined in one work of art.

Kościelec 1909 became explicitly tied with a very specific tragic event and a place known by millions,[6] which provides the score with clear extra-musical contents and meaning, marking it as a program music. In this respect, *Kościelec 1909,* undeniably refers to the concept of the nineteenth century symphonic poem. The composer himself confirmed that the structure of his mature pieces is subservient to their expressive quality and that he tends to express extra-musical content in them. In 1976, in an interesting interview for the *Poglądy* magazine, he said:

> it is the extra-musical qualities that are the most important for me in music. I feel that I belong to this quite broad trend represented in music history by [...]: Beethoven, Shostakovich and other Romantics. They used music as a means to express certain messages, be it of philosophical or universal nature. Music for them was not only a combination of musical elements. Of course, I am not trying to underestimate the richest and most refined music out there. Quite the contrary! In my opinion, the "pure" works of art, in their wisdom and depth, do not need the "support" of philosophy or literature. They are more sophisticated—the wisdom behind Bach's fugue is deeper than Tchaikovsky's or Wagner's expression. However, personally I feel more connected

[5] The other ones are: *Krzesany* for orchestra (1974), *Siwa mgła* for baritone and orchestra (1979), and *Orawa* for string orchestra (1986).

[6] The path of the avalanche which killed Karłowicz crossed one of the most popular tourist trails in the Tatra Mountains; since Karłowicz's death, never again has there been a serious avalanche accident.

> with the group of artists whose expression is more straightforward, pom-pous, and their voice fuller. [...] "The technicalities" and "musical vocabulary" have never been of utmost importance for me. They are subordinate to the emotional and expressive dimensions of music. [...] It is only when I can enjoy the expressive quality of my music that I am satisfied as a composer.[7]

In the Program Notes to the 'Warsaw Autumn Festival' Kilar commented on the program aspect of *Kościelec 1909* saying:

> *Kościelec 1909* is a symphonic poem in [...] the way I understand this form today, i.e. a large symphonic work inspired by specific extra-musical contents or events, which are conveyed to a listener through musical means in a more general, poetic or even program fashion. [...] It is a story about an event that took place on February 8, 1909 at Mały Kościelec. [...] as if pausing and extending in time those few tragic seconds. It is a story about mountains and a man, about entrancing and a dramatic relationship; it is an apotheosis and an epitaph, "a song about love and death". And, finally, it is my very personal confession of faith, a homage to a person whom I could have never met but who, together with his works, is becoming closer and closer to me.[8]

Kościelec 1909 (1976) was composed to celebrate the 75th Anniversary of the Warsaw Philharmonic and was dedicated to Witold Rowicki, who conducted its Warsaw world premiere on November 5, 1976. The piece is scored for quadruple woodwinds (one flute interchangeably with a piccolo, one clarinet with a bass clarinet, two bassoons with two contrabassoons), quadruple brass (including one tuba), an expanded percussion section for six performers (six timpani, one bass drum, three snare drums, two bongo drums, two tom-tom drums, two woodblocks, marimba, vibraphone, bells, glockenspiels, triangle, two cowbells, two cymbals, three gongs), a grand piano, two harps (in unison) and strings (including a few five-string double basses).

Kościelec 1909 is a work from the early stage of Kilar's mature period and contains all traits characteristic of his works coming from that time. It lacks most of the avant-garde solutions, its musical means are limited and simplified, and the repetitive concept of music, already present in his works representative of his second period in his *oeuvre*, is clearly manifested here. Also, the full twelve-tone pitch material serving as a constant basis for the music

[7] Eugenia Wybraniec, 'Nie chcę uchodzić za kogoś, kim nie jestem. Rozmowa z Wojciechem Kilarem' [I Do Not Want Anybody to Take Me for Someone I Am Not. An Interview with Wojciech Kilar], [in:] *Poglądy,* No. 24, 15–31 December 1976: 7 and 17.

[8] Wojciech Kilar, commentary on *Kościelec 1909*, [in:] Program Notes to the 21st International Festival of Contemporary Music 'Warsaw Autumn Festival' 1977: 18–19.

of the composition is replaced here with local material fields, most frequently of a scalar nature with the technique of harmonic and sound intensification widely employed.

In terms of the form, *Kościelec* is a one-movement composition comprising of at least two strictly correlated sound pictures. First picture (mm. 1–196) opens with a few dozen measures performed by double basses, gradually building up a dissonant chord D_1-A_1-B_1-*F*, in which the upper tritone is 'resolved' becoming an element that complements the fifth chord D_1-A_1-*E* in the final part of the introduction (mm. 1-32). In the following measures, against the background of the fifth D_1-A_1, the first theme called by the composer in the score 'tema della montagna' (and in his commentary 'the theme of Kościelec') is introduced by double basses. The melody of the theme moves by small intervals utilizing notes drawn from the highlander scale *a*-*b*-*c*♯-*d*♯-*e*-*f*♯-*g*-*a* and is tonally doubled (in the same scale) at the lower 'fifth' (mm. 33-48). The last notes of the theme are sustained and doubled in harps, building up a chord that contains 'scratchy noises' of the seconds: *D*-*G*-*A*-*d*-*e*♭-*g*-*a*-*e*♭′.

A dissonant, and based on chord oscillation principle, 'tema dell' abisso chiamante' ('the theme of the call of the abyss', mm. 49–56) appears in four bassoons directly after 'the theme of Kościelec' over the D_1-G_1-A_1-*D*♯ sustained, burdon-like harmony in double basses that was taken over from the harps (Example 1).

The entire first picture is filled with both themes alternating. In a vertical dimension, they are gradually embellished with additional elements in each appearance ('the theme of Kościelec' 'looms from the low registers of double basses like a mountain peak from a dispersing mist').[9] In its second statement, 'tema della montagna' appears in cellos in the form of triadic parallel chords, and is accompanied by a counterpoint of double basses playing the theme in a quasi-inversion manner (slight deviation from 'standard' inversion), which is tonally doubled at the lower 'fifth' (mm. 57–72). In the following presentations the theme itself and its counterpoint (mm. 85–100, 117–132) are consistently vertically embellished with notes of the highlander scale, so that in the final form, both melodic lines, are carried out in parallel verticalized full highlander scales (chords) (mm. 137–152).

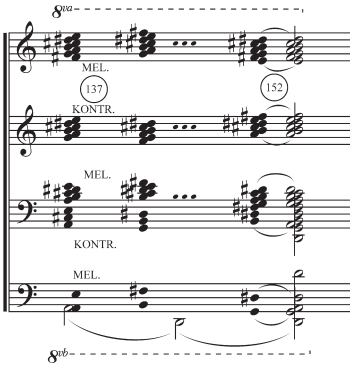
[9] Ibidem: 18–19.

Example 1. *Kościelec*, mm. 33–52



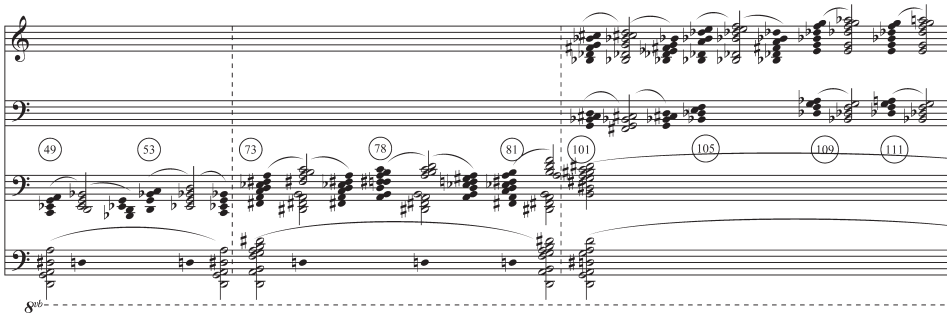
Example 2. *Kościelec*, mm. 137–144 (score) and mm. 137–152 (analytical reduction)





Since 'the theme of the call of the abyss' develops against the sustained closing notes of 'the theme of Kościelec', the range of its harmonic background in the following presentations is also expanded, culminating in the full, verticalized highlander scale. The harmony of the theme itself is modified each time it appears, and its density keeps increasing. The example below shows its three versions in a simplified notation.

Example 3. *Kościelec*, analytical reduction of the three versions of 'the theme of the abyss', mm. 49–56, 73–84, 101–116



An alternating 'build-up' of the themes (one in the strings, the other in the woodwinds) finds its climax in m. 153, where the trumpets and trombones introduce 'the theme of Kościelec' in strict imitation at the octave, against the *C major* chord in string instruments and the piano (mm. 153–168). It is followed by a 'harmonic' tutti of the orchestra performing multi-note chords utilizing all tones of the Lydian scale in *e,* that are additionally scored as runs in the piano and percussion parts (mm. 169–180). In the final measures of this picture the timpani in *piano* dynamics reintroduce 'the theme of Kościelec' against the gong tremolo and bourdon tritone $C\sharp_1$-G_1-$C\sharp$-G of the cellos and double basses.

Second picture (mm. 197–269) opens up with sharp, repeated percussion-like strokes of the French horns, trumpets, trombones and timpani (*f*♯-*c*″-*f*♯′--*c*″-*f*♯″). The components of the *C-major* chord are oscillatorilly placed over this tritone which gradually expands its range with additional brass instruments entering (mm. 197–210). The purpose of this phrase, as well as the following 'calmer' one (mm. 211–224), consisting of sequences of gradually transformed triads (initially *B minor*, *D major*, *F*♯ *minor*), is to introduce 'the theme of fate' ('tema del destino', mm. 225–232) (Example 4).

> It is a kind of chorale song, [...] which, apart from musical qualities of highlander music already found in "the theme of Kościelec", draws upon traditional melodies of lowland Poland. This theme, in terms of expression being as if "on the other side", is of exceptional importance, both because of its symbolism, as well as the role it plays in the dramatic narrative of the work. It prepares the most prominent (to use a moun-

Example 4. *Kościelec*, mm. 225–232



taineering terminology) part of the composition: the comeback of "the call of the abyss" in brass instruments.[10]

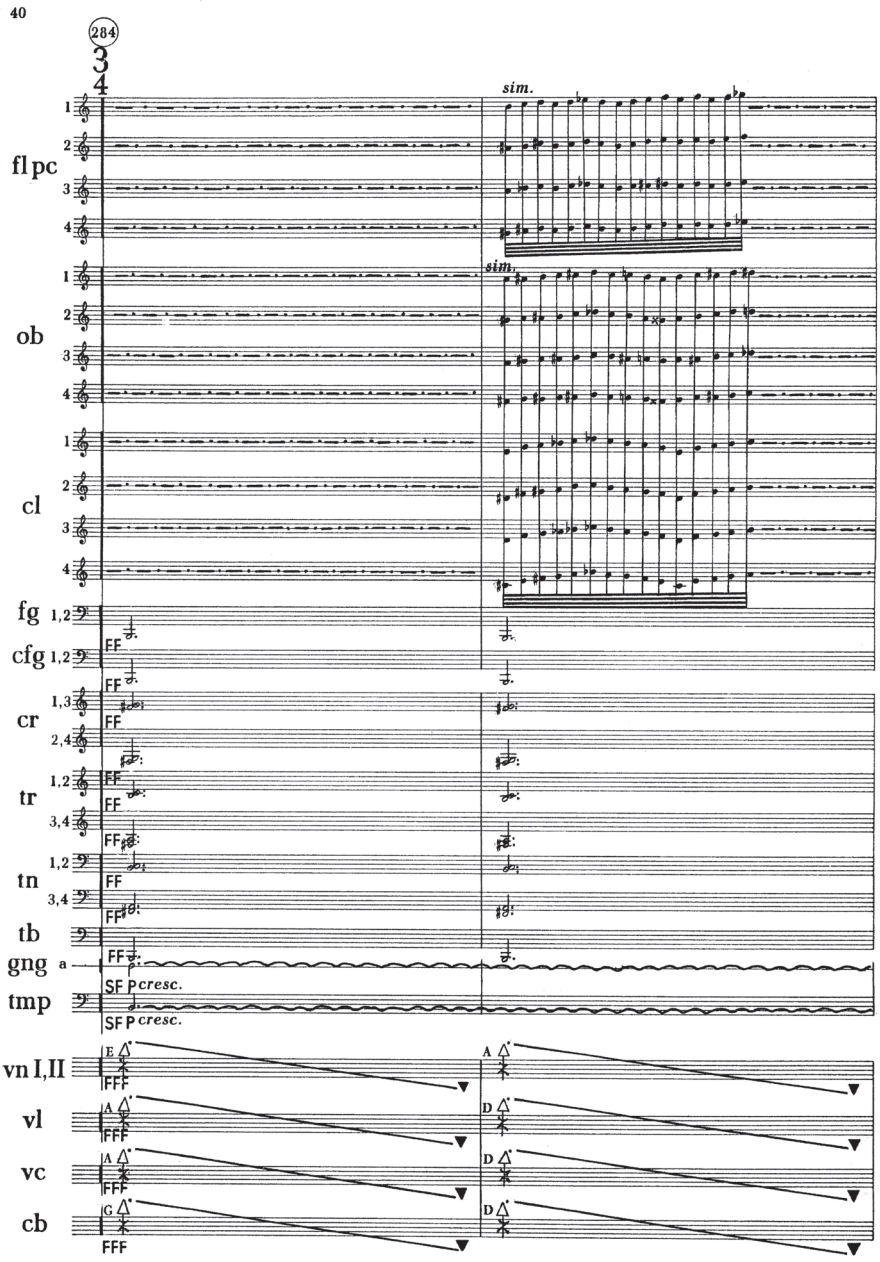
The theme, with its uniform eighth-note motion, forms a regular eight-bar period that can be divided into antecedent and consequent phrases. It is written in the key of *B natural minor* (the leading tone is not raised) and harmonized initially with pure tonic and subdominant chords. After the first statement of the theme starting with the *d,* the next ones are introduced in higher transposition: from *a* (m. 233), from *d'* (m. 241), *a'* (antecedent phrase, m. 249), and *a"* (consequent phrase, m. 253), *d'"* (m. 257). Next presentations of the theme are accompanied by typical for Kilar intensification in the harmonic background and the build-up in the dynamics which rapidly intensify in the final part of the theme's last appearance (from m. 262). Keeping the dynamics of the composition intense (*fff*), 'the theme of fate' is abruptly replaced with a reduced 'theme of the call of the abyss', which appears in the brass instruments against the dramatic tremolo of percussion (mm. 270–279). It may be seen as a symbolic completion of destiny—a fulfillment of what is 'predestined to happen'. This part leads directly to a sonoristic climax of this picture (from m. 282), where composer introduces mobile clusters in the woodwinds that are ascending gradually into higher registers against the background of falling *glissandi*, descending from the highest notes of the strings, and an added (from mm. 284) chord in the brass instruments, which consists of the notes *f♯-a-b-c♯* (doubled at an octave) (Example 5).

This mobile sound patch is sometimes interpreted as an clear depiction of an avalanche (according to Ryszard Gabryś, after the measure 284 'there is an onomatopoeic portrayal of a gliding snow and rock «avalanche», while quasi-aleatory flutter-tonguing in the woodwinds represent the glassiness of ice, perhaps a blizzard or visions of a skier and mountaineer who is paralyzed by the feeling that he is about to meet his Death'[11]). In measure 288 'an impact of the avalanche' subsides, while the mobile sound cluster is replaced with gentler chords (*c♯-e-g-b*, *e-g-b♭-c♯*, *c♯-d♯-g-a-c*), creating a background for the violins and trumpets that carry the main motive of 'the theme of the mountain'—

[10] Ibidem: 18–19.

[11] Ryszard Gabryś, 'Inspiracje góralskie i etos gór w poematach orkiestrowych Wojciecha Kilara' [Highlander inspirations and the ethos of the mountains in orchestral poems by Wojciech Kilar] , [in:] *Zeszyt Naukowy*, No. 49, Academy of Music, Wrocław, 1990: 189.

Example 5. *Kościelec*, mm. 284



a mountain, which remains imperturbable after shedding excess snow and bidding farewell to a daredevil who disturbed its eternal serenity. A descending passage *g-f♯-e-d-c♯-b* (a part of *B minor scale*) from the high register of violins (*g‴″*) to the lowest register of double basses (E_1) leads to a pure *B minor* chord, gradually building up dynamics in the entire orchestra moving from *ppp* to *fff*, which concludes the work.

As it has already been mentioned, *Kościelec*, unlike *Krzesany*, was composed to express the composer's fascination with the grandeur of the mountains rather than the Sub-Tatra region folklore, hence, none of its three themes are of folk origin. However, there are plenty of interesting examples of determining the range of the musical material by the scales used, primarily by the highlander scale. 'The theme of Kościelec', excluding an intermittently added *d* in double basses (which is a lower fifth of the *a,* and is the bourdon base for this segment), is harmonized with gradually added tones of highlander scale in *a* (mm. 33–48, 57–72, 85–100, 117–132), in order to eventually achieve a vertical form of complete scalar chords (mm. 137–152). Also, musical material of the 'the theme of the call of the abyss', which develops against the sustained notes of 'the theme of Kościelec', is determined to a certain degree by the highlander scale (its notes however, create only a layer of a harmonic accompaniment, the other layer is comprised of the developing theme, expanded and harmonically shifting to the point of encompassing the full twelve-tone pitch material in its third appearance in mm. 101–116). Apart from the highlander scale serving as a material basis of the composition, a Lydian scale (variant in *e*) is also found in *Kościelec*—for example all sonorities in measures 169–180 are contained within its pitch range. Thus echoes of highlander folklore are present in *Kościelec* thanks to intense application (both in a horizontal and vertical forms) of scales used in the Sub-Tatra region, as well as widely employed reversed dotted rhythms of folk origin.

There are various methods of application of select pitch material present in *Kościelec*. It is not possible to go here into a detailed description of all the procedures of handling the numerous scales used by the composer. However, it is worth mentioning the interesting shifts in the material within 'the theme of fate' group (mm. 225–269) that could be divided into five segments, which alternatively use the notes of the *B natural minor scale* and the highlander scale in *d* (while keeping the tone *b* as an ostinato base). Another example of this noteworthy approach is done by employing a whole-tone/half-tone scale *c-d-*

e♭-f-f♯-g♯-a-b-c in measures 73–84, where it serves as a source of pitch material for dissonant chords of the second appearance of 'the theme of the call of the abyss' (in the first presentation this theme uses a narrower pitch range—a scale consisting of a whole-tone/half-tone trichord juxtaposed with its transposition at the fifth—*c-d-e♭-g-a-b♭*). In both cases it was the accompaniment, made up from the final sustained notes of 'the theme of Kościelec' based on a highlander scale in *a,* that served as a separate sonoristic layer.

Only the remnants of the avant-garde, sonoristic music language from the second period of the composer's *oeuvre* can be seen in *Kościelec*. Solid sound clusters, for example, were eliminated; harmonies smoothed out, with just a few sonoristic effects remaining. *Kościelec* is 'embedded in a nostalgic and sorrowful Karłowicz-like symphonic music, the one out of which it arose.'[12] Tonal inclinations are apparent, while central chords are often in the form of traditional triads. For instance, in measures 153–168 the *C major* chord creates a permanent harmonic background for a melody carried out in a canon; a clear *B minor* chord (mm. 312–319) concludes the work. Even though the composer employs chord sequences based on their fifth relationship, this does not mean that the progressions are governed by the principles of the major-minor system. For example, in the middle of 'the theme of Kościelec' (drawing upon the notes of the highlander scale in *a*), there is a half cadence *e-g-b* (m. 63), where the dominant minor chord results from 'scalar' harmonizing (lowered seventh scale degree). Also other chord passages like *D major*, *E major*, *D major*, *C major* (mm. 233–240, 249–256) are 'forced' by the scale material used (e.g. Lydian raised fourth or a lowered seventh scale degree). There are also sonorities taking forms of the major-minor chords appearing as one of the harmonic layers—they are then combined into polychords or gradually expanded into scalar chords.

In *Kościelec 1909* especially worthy of notice is a spectacular application of scalar chords, usually together with the technique of harmonic intensification. Scalar chords, which had already been introduced in *Krzesany*, are used throughout the score of *Kościelec*. The 'tema della montagna' and its counterpoint in full scalar chords (the highlander scale in *a*) have already been discussed. Farther into the work other scalar chords are introduced: for example

[12] Anna Skrzyńska's comment on Kilar's *Kościelec 1909*, [in:] 'Z sal koncertowych' [From the Concert Halls], *Ruch Muzyczny*, No. 23, 1977: 14.

the measures 169–180 are filled with an expanded throughout various registers (*tutti*) Lydian chord rooted on *e* (in percussion and piano realized as a mobile sound patch); on the other hand, measures 257–269 are a good example of applying the harmonic intensification procedure in the process of building up the full chord that is a verticalization of the *B natural minor* scale. The use of some dissonant sonorities consisting of fewer elements and within a more spacious texture is also 'justified' by the scale material of their segments—e.g. chords in measures 223 and 224 are based on the notes of the whole-tone/half-tone scale.

Kilar usually employed the technique of harmonic-sonoric intensification in works where the role of melody was limited. *Kościelec* is one of the most interesting and clear examples of using this method in a work where the theme plays the leading role. Kilar was convinced as to the procedure's importance: 'For me, the entire *Kościelec* is meant to keep constantly growing. There are a couple of sudden breakdowns in dynamic tensions within the score with their goal being a preparation of the upcoming, more dramatic culminations.'[13] This way of shaping the musical continuum became a principle for developing micro- and macroformal structures—since both individual sonorities, as well as the whole theme statements, are subject to vertical expanding.

Kilar's poetic representation of the lofty and slender Tatra peaks in *Kościelec 1909* was met, just as it was the case with *Krzesany*, with a mixed reception from the critics. While the majority of the reviewers felt nostalgic about the lack of avant-garde solutions in the composition, some of them were able to appreciate the composer's courage to reintroduce into music artistic contents and means which seemed irrevocably gone or considered 'anachronistic'. His ability to merge them with his own concepts was also acknowledged. Straightforwardness and sincerity of expression, as well as the composer's flawless technique were also recognized. 'Almost kitsch, though not quite yet: almost a landschaft, though still a landscape. It is a paradox that the greatest value of *Kościelec* poses itself in its oscillating between the two. [...] Beautiful and profound work of art, living up to its grand theme.'[14]

Translated by Paweł Wróbel

[13] Wojciech Kilar, commentary on *Kościelec 1909*, [in:] Program Notes to the 21st International Festival of Contemporary Music 'Warsaw Autumn Festival' 1977: 18–19.

[14] Andrzej Chłopecki, 'Kilar: Kościelec 1909', [in:] *Ruch Muzyczny*, No. 23, 1977: 13–14.

Abstract

With its ties to a nineteenth-century symphonic poem, *Kościelec 1909* by Wojciech Kilar is a homage and an epitaph for Mieczysław Karłowicz, who died in an avalanche on the slope of Mały Kościelec [Little Kościelec] in Wysokie Tatry [High Tatra Mountains] in February 1909. Composed in 1976, the work comes from the first stage of Kilar's mature period and chronologically is the second (after *Krzesany*) composition from the so-called "folklorist" current inspired by highlander folk music and the mountain landscape. The two remaining works of this trend are *Siwa mgła* and *Orawa*. *Kościelec 1909* differs from those compositions by lacking of folklore quotations and by having less explicit stylization (scales, highlander rhythms).
The article presents the origin and circumstances of the work's creation, its program guidelines, its formal structure, strands of musical narrative, an adequate sound material, specific melodic-harmonic solutions (the technique of harmonic intensification, scalar chords) and its reception.

Keywords: Polish music of the twentieth century; Wojciech Kilar; Mieczysław Karłowicz; symphonic poem; highlander scale; scalar chords.