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The idea of "open performance" by example of the Warsaw Music Workshop and Gnarwhallaby—a comparative study

The act of musical performance (*Aufführung*), regardless of the style, epoch or form of notation, transfers a certain degree of responsibility for the sound of the work to the shoulders of the performer. In the case of 20th-century aleatoric and experimental music, the responsibility tilts towards the performer more than it is in the case of strictly written (or fully determined) works. However, if there is responsibility, there is often also artistic freedom as an interpreter's right to creative expression. Performing new, current music requires musicians to adopt an active artistic attitude. If musicians strive to broaden their horizons and undertake other activities than just performance, they enter an area that can be described as open performance.

This term is based on an association with the notion of an open form, usually understood as such a form whose general course is composed, while the performer is responsible for its structural shape, i.e. the sequence of links ("work with a variable external form"[1]). However, this concept is sometimes

[1] „Werk mit Veränderlicher aüsser Gestalt", Christian von Blumenröder, *Offene Form*, in *Terminologie der Musik in 20. Jahrhunderten*, H.H. Eggebrecht (ed.) (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1995), 324.

defined more broadly, for example as "a musical form whose shape (...) is an element of artistic creation transferred to the performer"[2] or a genre whose goal is "getting to know the music itself, its secrets"[3]—as poetically described by Bogusław Schaeffer.

The concept of open performance corresponds to the idea of an open work presented by Umberto Eco in his well-known book *The Open Work. Form and indeterminacy in contemporary poetics*. Based on research on many contemporary artworks, using various analytical methods, Eco made an attempt to describe the theoretical model of an open work. His considerations lead to the conclusion that every modern work of art has a specific potential of openness (which is often beyond the creator's consciousness or intention), and whether it will achieve it depends on the interpreter: performer or recipient. He wrote:

> Opennes is […] a condition for any aesthetic experience, and any perceptible form, as long as it has an aesthetic value, it is "open". Even if the artist himself intends to convey to us not an ambiguous but unequivocal message.[4]

Although Eco pointed out that the entire semiotic and aesthetic potential of a work is created in the process of interpretation, in his book he focused more on the opus itself than on the moment of its contact with the performer or the recipient. On the other hand, the idea of open performance is clearly visible at the junction of the above-mentioned phenomena: the work and its performance; it creates a space to look at the attitude adopted by performers towards music that poses requirements beyond the performers' traditional *emploi*. In the concept of open performance, the openness can be understood generally as affirmativeness, commitment, and proactivity. It is attempting to blur the lines between being a performer and a creator, to a possible extent, differently in each musical piece. By viewing music through performative point of view, we identify performance as one of the infinite incarnations of the work. This stance is realized in the activity of the Warsaw Music Workshop, a pioneering group in its field, which paved the way for other ensembles on the new music scene.

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[2] *Forma otwarta* [Open Form], in *Encyklopedia Muzyki* [Encyclopaedia of Music], Andrzej Chodkowski (ed.) (Warszawa: PWN, 2006), 277.

[3] Bogusław Schaeffer, *Otwarte formy* [Open Forms], in *Mały informator muzyki XX wieku* [Small Guidebook of Twentieth Century Music] (Kraków: PWM, 1987), 176.

[4] Umberto Eco, *Dzieło otwarte. Forma i nieokreśloność w poetykach współczesnych* [The Open Work. Form and indeterminacy in contemporary poetics], trans. J. Gałuszka, L. Eustachiewicz, A. Kreisberg, M. Oleksiuk, 2nd edn., (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1994), 83.

The Warsaw Music Workshop

The Warsaw Music Workshop was one of the first groups in Poland dedicated solely to performing and promoting new music. The genesis of the ensemble should be seen in the series of concerts under the same name, "Music Workshop", initiated by musicologist Józef Patkowski, which took place between 1963 and 67 under the banner of the Polish Radio Experimental Studio. Many Polish and international new music pieces were performed (or premiered) during the "Music Workshop" concerts, of which the cast was variable. The Warsaw Music Workshop as a quartet was founded at the end of 1967 on the initiative of Zygmunt Krauze (b. 1938). The pianist and composer, disappointed with the quality of many performances within the "Music Workshop" concert series, decided to establish a professional group that was to specialize only in the latest music. Three other musicians decided to join him and devote their careers to playing contemporary pieces: trombonist Edward Borowiak (b. 1934), clarinetist Czesław Pałkowski (b. 1934), and cellist Witold Gałązka (1941–2021). The unusual combination of instruments made it necessary to create new repertoire. In the very beginning of its concert activity, the group performed pieces commissioned from Polish composers (e.g. Włodzimierz Kotoński, Witold Szalonek, Wojciech Kilar, Waldemar Kazanecki, Zygmunt Krauze), supplementing the concert programs with preexisting pieces for indetermined cast, or graphic scores by, i.a., Karlheinz Stockhausen, Cornelius Cardew, Toshi Ichiyanagi, Bogusław Schaeffer, Leoncjusz Ciuciura. Then moved on to almost exclusively playing pieces dedicated to the quartet. The result of the group's activity is over one hundred works written especially for the Warsaw Music Workshop by composers from around the world, which they had been performing in eighteen countries for twenty years of regular stage activity, until 1988.

Extensive research on versatile and fruitful activity of the Warsaw Music Workshop led the author to put forward a thesis about a new, open type of performance. It can be broadly defined as

> an artistic attitude at the interface between performance and creativity, combined with a popularizing and culture-creating role, redefining the concept of music interpretation. Its influence goes far beyond the score.[5]

[5] Anna Wójcikowska, *Elementy estetyki jazzowej i muzyki popularnej w repertuarze „Warsztatu Muzycznego" Zygmunta Krauzego* [Elements of jazz and popular music aesthetics in the

The characteristics of open performance, the exemplification of which is the activity of the Warsaw Music Workshop, include elements determined by repertoire. The main aspect is versatility, manifested in three following areas: technical, aesthetical and performative. The scope of technical requirements includes, first of all, the mastery of extended techniques, many examples of which can be found in the repertoire of the Workshop. In addition, a challenge of a technical (but also performative) nature is to go beyond your own specialization, i.e. playing other instruments: conventional, folk (traditional), electronic and sound objects, as well as singing. The technical aspect is related to the aesthetical one—the stylistic range of the pieces performed by the Warsaw Music Workshop is very large. These pieces require musicians to use not only extended playing techniques, but also traditional articulation, the so-called "beautiful sound", because some compositions imitate the style of early music or dances, or contain quotes from the classical and romantic repertoire. The performative field consists primarily of compositions from the genre of instrumental theater, *quasi*-theatrical pieces (event scores), or even some conventional works that contain a humorous element, and therefore require acting.

The Warsaw Music Workshop's open performance is broadly based on making artistic decisions, and as such can be seen as a curatorial role. In addition to the obvious issues related to the functioning of the group, i.e. choosing which pieces will be included in the repertoire, there are examples of interfering with the musical material, not only in the case of open forms, but also in the case of works which we would call closed (finished) forms. Here again we talk about the issue of co-authorship and responsibility for the work. In the case of the Workshop it is particularly important—not only because a large part of the group's repertoire is indeterministic music, where it is the performers' artistic vision that often creates the identity of the work; but also because in some cases musicians actually modified the pieces that had been composed for them, guided by their own aesthetic and artistic sense.

Open performance should be considered in the composer-performer-audience triad. This type of attitude undoubtedly broadens the field of influence of the above-mentioned entities. Sometimes musicians interacted directly with

repertoire of Zygmunt Krauze's Warsaw Music Workshop], in *Współczesna kultura muzyczna a popkultura: spotkania, dialogi, konfrontacje* [Contemporary music culture and pop culture: encounters, dialogues, confrontations], Ewa Kowalska-Zając (ed.) (Łódź: Grażyna and Kiejstut Academy of Music, 2021), 121.

composers who supervised the process of preparing a piece for public presentation, but this influence has primarily a culture-forming effect, resulting in the emergence of new repertoire on a previously unused combination of instruments. Towards the audience the musicians of the Warsaw Music Workshop assumed a semi-dialectical, semi-confrontational stance. Their actions were often calculated for a specific reaction of the audience, freeing them from the convention of passive reception. The popularizing activity is also invaluable. Unlike many avant-garde or improvisational groups, the Warsaw quartet presented latest compositions to an extremely diverse audience: from participants of contemporary music festivals, through philharmonic music lovers, students of music academies, elementary school students, and night club visitors. These actions aim broadly, and their purpose is undoubtedly to translate the music far beyond the score.

Gnarwhallaby

After the ensemble has officially ended their activity in the late 80s, it seemed that pieces written for the Warsaw Music Workshop would be doomed to oblivion. However, an unusual phenomenon occurred in later years, when Workshop's replicas—Nonstrom from Poland and Gnarwhallaby from the USA—had been founded to revive forgotten pieces.[6]

Gnarwhallaby's trombonist Mattie Barbier reveals that they first encountered the Warsaw Music Workshop around 2004 during their undergraduate studies at the California Institute of the Arts in Santa Clarita, United States. It was then that they heard from their teacher about *Musiquette IV*, a piece by Henryk Mikołaj Górecki dedicated to the Warsaw Music Workshop, and later formed a group along with Brian Walsh (clarinets, saxophones), Derek Stein (cello) and Richard Valitutto (piano, keyboards). The musicians called themselves the "grandchild quartet" of Krauze's group. Aside from performing the Workshop's and Nonstrom's repertoire, Gnarwhallaby continues the tradition of commissioning new pieces for this particular instrumentation, by such composers as Nicholas Deyoe (b. 1981) or Michelle Lou (b. 1975).

[6] In the 1990s and 2000s there existed one more group consisting of clarinet, trombone, cello and piano, called Quartett Avance. However, according to the members of Avance, the same instrumentation as the Warsaw Music Workshop's was coincidental.

Musical "incarnations" of Krauze's *Polychromy*

Table 1. List of recordings of common pieces by the Warsaw Music Workshop and Gnarwhallaby[7]

Composer, title	The Warsaw Music Workshop	Gnarwhallaby
Zygmunt Krauze, *Polychromy* (1968)	Longplay *Polish Avant-Garde Music* (1970); Live @ Warsaw Autumn, September 25, 1968	CD album *exhibit a* (2014)
Henryk Mikołaj Górecki, *Muzyczka IV* [*Musiquette IV*] (1970)	Archival recording for Polish Radio (date unknown)	CD album *exhibit a* (2014)
Włodzimierz Kotoński, *Pour quatre* (1968)	Longplay *Polish Avant-Garde Music* (1970); Live @ Warsaw Autumn, September 25, 1968	CD album *exhibit a* (2014); Live @ Art Share LA, October 25, 2013
Edison Denisov, *D-S-C-H* (1969)	Archival recording for Polish Radio (date unknown)	CD album *exhibit a* (2014); Live @ Art Share LA, October 25, 2013
Witold Szalonek, *Improvisations sonoristiques* (1968)	Longplay *Polish Avant-Garde Music* (1970); Live @ Warsaw Autumn, September 27, 1973	Live @ USC Polish Music Center: *Exploring the Avant-Garde*, Los Angeles, March 25, 2017
Andrzej Dobrowolski, *Krabogapa* (1969)	Longplay *Polish Avant-Garde Music* (1970)	Live @ Pasadena's Neighborhood Church, March 5, 2014

As a performative act, open performance is an attempt to put an artistic stamp on each musical composition in the process of 'unraveling' the score. In order to grasp the extent of musicians' influence on the piece, understood as the final auditory result, it is necessary to analytically compare different recordings

[7] All of the listed archival Warsaw Music Workshop recordings (including the Warsaw Autumn) are held by the Polish Radio. All of the listed live performances of Gnarwhallaby are available on the group's Youtube page: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCq3GkYkporD-sRDKgRpL_JJg/videos (accessed 22 November 2023).

of that opus. There are several pieces that had been recorded by the Warsaw Music Workshop as well as Gnarwhallaby, as shown in table 1. This paper presents analyses of recordings of Zygmunt Krauze's *Polychromy* (1968), one of the most frequently played pieces in the Workshop's repertoire (118 public presentations), as well as one of Krauze's first unistic works.[8]

Zygmunt Krauze is the author of the concept of unistic music, inspired by the theory of unism by a polish painter Władysław Strzemiński (1893–1952). Visual unism (or: unism in fine arts) was derived directly from Kazimir Malevich's suprematism and initially named by Strzemiński post-suprematism. Its principle was to create a form that did not contain any contrasts. It was based on the idea of evenly filling in the surface of the picture—because it was devoid of specifically highlighted spots in the painting's composition.[9] In 1956, 18-year-old Krauze attended a monographic exhibition of Strzemiński's works and was suddenly inspired by unistic paintings. In that very moment, as Krauze claims, he realized he was going to be a composer and instantly discovered how he would practice composition, referring to the Polish painter as "a great teacher of musical form".[10] He then came up with the idea of musical unism, which was an attempt to translate Strzemiński's idea onto musical ground. *Polychromy* is a pure example of this genre, as it is homogenous music without tension, with no contrasts. The composer describes his concept vaguely:

> What the listener discovers in the first few seconds of the piece will continue until its end. The beginning of the composition immediately exposes the entire range of sounds. From there on, nothing unfamiliar will appear. There will be no surprises.[11]

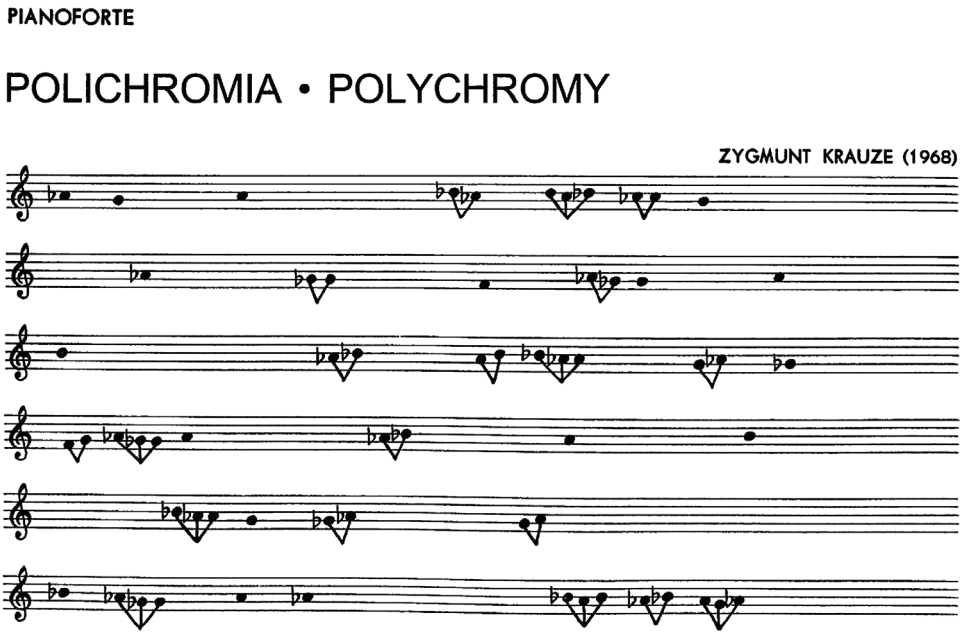
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[8] Krauze's first attempts at writing unistic pieces were *Leicht bis Mittelschwer* (1957–60) and *Pięć kompozycji unistycznych* [Five unistic pieces] (1963), however the composer himself considers *Polychromy* a unistic musical piece in its mature form. See: D. Muzyczuk, Interview with Zygmunt Krauze, „Glissando", no. 31(2), 2017, 36.

[9] Szwajgier Krzysztof, *Obrazy dźwiękowe muzyki unistycznej. Inspiracja malarska w twórczości Zygmunta Krauzego* [Sonic images of unistic music. Painterly inspirations in works of Zygmunt Krauze], Academy of Music in Kraków, Kraków 2008, p 15.

[10] Krauze Zygmunt, *Unizm w muzyce. Doświadczenia kompozytora* [Unism in music. Composer's experiences], [in] *Władysław Strzemiński 1893–1952. Materiały z sesji* [Session materials], Łódź 1994, p. 85.

[11] Krauze Zygmunt, *commentary to* Polichromia, „Hommage à Strzemiński", CD album booklet, Bôłt Records, 2015, p. 14.



Example 1. Piano part of Zygmunt Krauze's Polychromy

Each instrumental part consists of 6 staves contained in a single sheet of paper, with instructions. One staff lasts 20 seconds, the person controlling the time is the pianist, holding a stop-watch. This is a polyversive piece—the composer proposed four different formal combinations to choose from: first version is six staves, 20-second rest, repeated six staves, another 20-second rest; second version is three sections of four staves each, separated by 10-second rests; third version (not exemplified by any recording in this paper) is four sections of three staves each, separated by 5-second rests; finally fourth version is six sections of two staves each, separated by 2-second rests. Each of analysed recordings, shown in chronological order, presents a different formal version.



Figure 1. Amplitude envelope of recording A:
The Warsaw Music Workshop live recording, 1968—1st formal version



Figure 2. Amplitude envelope of recording B:
The Warsaw Music Workshop studio recording, 1970—2nd formal version



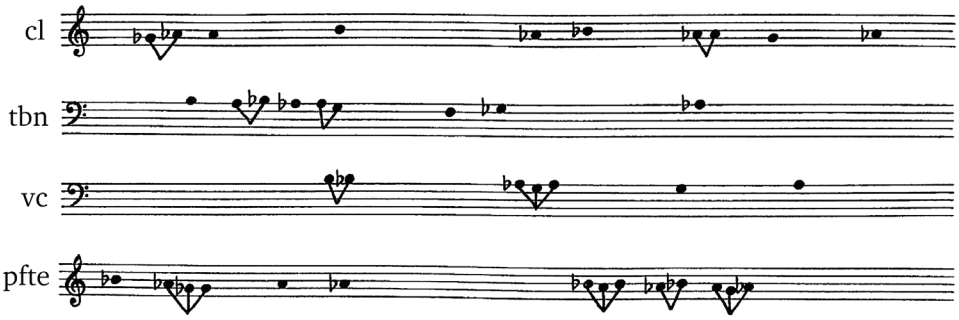
Figure 3. Amplitude envelope of recording
C: Gnarwhallaby studio recording, 2014—4th formal version

Based solely on auditory reception, it is easily possible to point out certain features of each interpretation. Recording B, which is the Warsaw Music Workshop's studio recording (longplay *Polish Avant-Garde Music*, 1970), best reflects the ideological assumptions of unistic music: it stretches slowly, the sound is blended, the timbral differences between the instruments are leveled. Recording a is Workshop's live performance from 1968, merely the fourth public presentation of the piece. Here the instrumental colors are a bit more varied, however, still coherent, the music flows quite smoothly without any tensions. In the recording C, done by Gnarwhallaby (CD album *[exhibit a]*, 2014), the sound is more clear, not as muted—however, it is very likely a matter of audio production, far more technically advanced in comparison with Workshop's recordings from 1960s and 1970s. Short motives consisting of two or three notes are played more rapidly and with an accent on the first note—this is, in fact, requested by the composer, who wrote this kind of performance note into the score. What's interesting is that it can't really be noticed it in the original Warsaw Music Workshop performances, despite the composer's tutelage over the preparation of the piece.

In terms of time structure, recording B is absolutely the most precise—it is played with an accuracy of half a second. Gnarwhallaby's recording C is also very close to the timing written in the score, in contrary to the recording A; despite the use of a stop-watch by the pianist-composer, the Workshop's live performance is quite off in terms total time, and that is mainly because the rests had been radically shortened—as if the musicians couldn't hold the tension created by the audience.

Table 2. Time structure of the recordings of Polychromy in comparison to the score

Recording a—1st version			**Recording B—2nd version**			**Recording C—4th version**		
segment	score	rec.	segment	score	**rec.**	**segment**	**score**	**rec.**
6 staves	2’	1’55”	4 staves	1’20”	1’20”	2 staves	40”	39.4”
rest	20”	11.5”	rest	10”	10.5”	rest	2”	3.4”
6 staves	2’	1’55”	4 staves	1’20”	1’19.5”	2 staves	40”	39”
rest	20”	12.5”	rest	10”	10”	rest	2”	2.6”
total	**4’40”**	**4’14”**	4 staves	1’20”	1’19”	2 staves	40”	39.4”
			rest	10”	10.5”	rest	2”	2.6”
			total	**4’30”**	**4’29.5”**	2 staves	40”	39.8”
						rest	2”	2.2”
						2 staves	40”	39.9”
						rest	2”	2.7”
						2 staves	40”	40.2”
						rest	2”	1.9”
						total	**4’12”**	**4’14”**



Example 2. Zygmunt Krauze, Polychromy, fifth staff arranged in a score format

Analysis of the notation in the vertical plane shows that only the first and fourth staves begin with a synchronous *tutti*. The beginnings of the other systems are non-synchronous—this means that some musicians, with the beginning of a new system, still realize the ligature of the previous, lasting note. In the recording A, the second segment starts with the fifth system. According to

the notation, this system should start with solo clarinet, then joins the trombone, then the piano, and finally the cello. Instead, the Warsaw Music Workshop musicians start this episode together, with the first notes written in this system. This can be justified in shaping a unistic form based on the similarity or even apparent uniformity of individual links—the sound of a solo instrument would be perceived by the listener as a textural change compared to the *tutti* that has been going on from the beginning. That is the case in Gnarwhallaby's recording C, where the musicians realize the score in a literal matter, which results in a few solo moments.

The issue of reading the composer's intentions in the case of this particular piece and its implementation by the Warsaw Music Workshop has a special context, as Krauze plays three parallel roles here: the creator of the work, the pianist who entrusts himself to control the musical form, and the leader who conducts the group on a daily basis. The composer's intention is therefore not a matter to be "read between the lines" from the score, rather it is given to the original performers directly, firsthand. However, the situation is different in the case of Gnarwhallaby, whose members only had the score, without any additional signposts regarding the interpretation of the work. When asked whether the Workshop recordings were an inspiration, trombonist Mattie Barbier responded that they were rather hard to find and the group acquired some of them after already playing together for a few years. They said:

> I don't know if they've been a particular inspiration or a lot of deep study on our end as we've generally preferred to take a path focused on putting our own stamp on their repertoire (…). But they've been enjoyable to hear both for their historical perspective and their differing approach to ours.[12]

Conclusions

Comparing the three interpretations on a level of general musical idea, as well as precision in reading the score, we could indicate the recording B as the model one. From an aesthetic, expressive and sonic side it best reflects the idea of unistic music inspired by unism in painting. It is also ideal in terms of carrying out musical time. That is because the piece here was recorded two years after its premiere, when it has already been performed several times, making it a ma-

[12] Mattie Barbier, e-mail correspondence with the author, 15.09.2021.

ture and deliberate interpretation. Moreover, recording the piece in the studio makes it possible to repeatedly try to achieve the desired effect.

Krauze is the type of creator who does not give up responsibility for his work, shifting it onto the performers; rather, he presents a frame of mind on the other end of the spectrum: he wants to keep control of the work at every stage of the path, from concept to presentation. However, even in such peculiar circumstances, there are some minor deviations from the notation that can be observed in both analyzed interpretations of the Workshop: in recording A, the musical time (length of segments and rests), in recording B, the tempo of two- and three-note motives and their articulation (lack of accent on the first note). What differs Gnarwhallaby's rendition is the time distance and the lack of the presence of a mentor, composer and first performer of *Polychromy*, who would supervise the process. This interpretation is based entirely on the score and indeed is characterized by particular care for the correct execution of the notation and respect for the performance instructions written in the notes—even more accurate than by the composer-pianist himself in both recordings of Workshop.

Open performance is exceeding beyond simply executing the score. It is about actively searching for "ontological gaps", as Roman Ingarden would say, in a musical piece in order to fill them with one's creativity. That, of course, must be done largely in indeterministic and aleatoric pieces,[13] but for the performance to really be "open" is to also give a conventionally written piece a distinct identity,[14] similarly to how Umberto Eco as a reader-interpreter discovers the potential of openness in certain works of literature. This kind of artistic behavior is shown here in interpretations of *Polychromy*—one of many examples of a piece with a limited degree of indeterminacy. Krauze's score represents a genre of open form, where the external shape is up to performers' choice

[13] A striking example would be Warsaw Music Workshop's various interpretations of a graphic score *Quartet SG* by Bogusław Schaeffer. The degree of artistic freedom given to performers results in each rendition being an individual, unique piece of music that certainly would not be identified as Schaeffer's score based on audial experience.

[14] This can also be observed when comparatively analysing some other recordings of pieces from Workshop's repertoire, such as Szalonek's *Improvisations sonoristiques* or Kilar's *Training 68*. Analyses of those pieces can be found in author's doctoral dissertation: Anna Wójcikowska, *Działalność zespołu "Warsztat Muzyczny" – fenomen wykonawstwa otwartego* [The activity of the Warsaw Music Workshop—the phenomenon of open performance], supervisor: prof. Marta Szoka, Grażyna and Kiejstut Bacewicz University of Music in Łódź, Łódź 2023.

within a small range of possibilities offered by the composer. This situation gives the performers an impression of some artistic freedom and agency in co-creating a new incarnation of a musical piece; at the same time, it still leaves no doubt in terms of authorship, in contrary to many indeterministic pieces. Performers with an open attitude, however, still seek to find spaces to fill with their creative expression.

Summary

Established in 1967, the Warsaw Music Workshop was one of the first ensembles in Poland dedicated solely to performing and promoting new music. It was indeed conceived as a 'workshop' for composers; the quartet's repertoire consisted almost exclusively of commissioned pieces due to an atypical combination of instruments (clarinet, trombone, piano, cello) and, therefore, lack of scores that would suit the group's profile. After the ensemble has officially ended their activity (1988), the majority of the pieces were no longer performed. An unusual phenomenon occurred in later years, when Workshop's replicas—Polish Nonstrom and American Gnarwhallaby—had been founded to revive forgotten pieces.

The aim of the paper is to compare the primary interpretations of Zygmunt Krauze's *Polychromy* by the Warsaw Music Workshop with a later recording of Gnarwhallaby. As the analyzed piece includes a certain degree of indeterminism, a question arises: is the score, in this case, enough to fully construe composer's intentions? Is it performers' duty to learn the original realizations recorded by musicians to whom the piece were dedicated? Or, on the contrary, should those musicians restrain from following the path marked by the prototype in order to interpret the scores freely? Also, how much room is there for performers' own individual choices? Through comparative auditory analysis the author peers at a point where composer's vision is met by performers' idiom; she then tries to mark the line between interpretation and co-creation and, finally, to define the term "open performance".

Keywords: open performance, avant-garde, 20th-century music, Warsaw Music Workshop, Zygmunt Krauze, Gnarwhallaby