

# Chapter 11

## Religious Motifs and Existential Reflection in Zbigniew Bujarski's Chamber Music

Ewa Wójtowicz

**Abstract** The chamber music of Zbigniew Bujarski (born 1933) comprises four string quartets, composed between 1980 and 2001, and seven compositions for other ensembles written in the period of 1993–2013. Almost all pieces have got titles extending beyond musical terminology. There are recurring motifs of birds (*The Fear of Birds I-III, Orniphania*), a motif of house (*Quartet for a House-Warming*), as well as some religious motifs (*Quartet for Advent, Quartet for Easter*). The paper discusses the spheres of these programmatic meanings and explores how these meanings had been coded in the sound material. The chamber music of Bujarski is presented in the context of its connections with the Polish tradition.

### 11.1 Introduction

The creative path of Zbigniew Bujarski, a Kraków composer born in 1933, runs according to a “pattern” characteristic for the generation of Polish authors who made their debut at the turn of 1960s. In Polish music this was the time of accelerated reception of avant-garde techniques, after the years of isolation behind the iron curtain, which culminated in the sonorism trend. In the second half of 1970s, composers started to depart from sonorism in search of—as Mieczysław Tomaszewski described it—“values veiled and lost” (2005: 145–56).

From the perspective of transformation of compositional technique, the author's monographer, Teresa Malecka divides Bujarski's works into two periods (Malecka 2006: 34–6). During the first one, between 1961–73, his work transferred from the casual serial technique to sonorism. A new period is opened—after four years of silence—with *Musica domestica* for string orchestra. This composition won the second prize of the International Rostrum of Composers in 1978. It was then that

---

E. Wójtowicz (✉)  
Academy of Music in Kraków, Kraków, Poland  
e-mail: ewa.wojtowicz@amuz.krakow.pl

Bujarski transferred from sonorism to “melodicity” and the crystallization of an individual and mature composer’s style occurred.

## 11.2 Chamber Ensembles in Bujarski’s Music

The sonorist period of Bujarski’s work is dominated by compositions for large performance ensembles. Only *Kompozycja kameralna* [Chamber Piece] for voices, flute, harp, piano and percussion (1963) belongs to chamber music. This composition became the composer’s debut at the International Festival of Contemporary Music “Warsaw Autumn” in 1964.

Chamber ensembles become Bujarski’s favorite artistic expression media in the second half of his creative life. The 1980s were dominated by string quartets.<sup>1</sup> The composer especially values this genre approaching it as a criterion of composer’s workshop skills and emphasizing the peculiarity of an ensemble which ensures the intimacy of sound and at the same time encourages a deeply personal expression (Bujarski 2002: 35).

The performing means in the theme cycle of three compositions *Lęk ptaków* [The Fear of Birds] are more sound-heterogenic.<sup>2</sup> The constant element of the ensemble are the percussion instruments: vibraphone, xyloimba and tubi di bambu. In *Lęk ptaków I* (1993) they accompany a violin and a viola, in *Lęk ptaków II* (1994)—two clarinets, and in *Lęk ptaków III* (1995) the instruments of both previous compositions are combined. Starting from 2001 a preference for a cello is noticeable in Bujarski’s chamber compositions. It appears accompanied by a piano, as in *Orniphania* (2001) and *KalSzelez* (2010), with a unique combination of an accordion and a piano in the composition *Frutti di Mare(k)* (2001), as well as in a multiplied form in compositions from 2013: *Adagio* for 2 cellos and *Largo* for viola and 2 cellos.

Bujarski’s chamber music is dominated by the sound of string instruments: “There are no better, more noble instruments than string instruments [...]”, the composer said in the year 2000 (in Malecka 2006: 123). In the catalogue of his compositions consisting of almost forty pieces, almost one third is appropriated for that group of instruments. According to Teresa Malecka, the string instruments were the ones for which:

The most beautiful and the deepest compositions [were written] [...]: *Pawana dla oddalonej* [Pavane for a Remote One] for string orchestra, and two quartets: *Kwartet na Wielkanoc* [Quartet for Easter] and *Kwartet na jesień* [Quartet for Autumn] (Malecka 2006: 124).

---

<sup>1</sup>Three of four compositions representing that genre were created at that time: the first quartet *Kwartet na otwarcie domu* [Quartet for a House-Warning] in 1980, the second quartet *Kwartet na Advent* [Quartet for Advent] in 1984, the third quartet *Kwartet na Wielkanoc* [Quartet for Easter] in 1989. The last quartet *Kwartet na jesień* [Quartet for Autumn] is from the year 2001.

<sup>2</sup>This cycle was composed in the first half of 1990s.

## 11.3 Chamber Music as a Space of Extra-Musical Meanings

The majority of Bujarski's compositions includes a curriculum contents indicated in non-musical titles and sometime elaborated on in commentaries. The "neutral" titles are an exception, e.g. *Kompozycja kameralna* [Chamber Piece] and late compositions such as *Adagio* and *Largo. Kompozycja kameralna* diverges from other pieces also in terms of subject matter. The composer used here the texts of contemporary Japanese poets (in Polish translation) discussing the tragedy of Hiroshima. Programmatic motifs in later compositions focus around two semantic spheres: religious and existential experiences.

### 11.3.1 Instrumental Religious Music

Two string quartets may be included as part of instrumental religious music: second—*Kwartet na Adwent* [Quartet for Advent] and third—*Kwartet na Wielkanoc* [Quartet for Easter].

Advent in the Catholic Church is a time in the liturgical year when the faithful wait for the dual coming of Christ. The composer emphasizes in the commentary to *Kwartet na Adwent* [Quartet for Advent] that it is the time "of purification before Christmas" and a time of "waiting for the One Person and for the One Thing which is the final purpose of human life" (Bujarski 1985: 32). Time becomes the essence in the focused and contemplative music. The one-movement form is structured on the basis of a principle of arranging sections, mostly of static nature and linear structure. These states of peaceful waiting are rarely disrupted by chord bursts. A continuum of non-linear events is created, the way of shaping emphasizes the extra-music state of anticipation.

*Kwartet na Wielkanoc* is Bujarski's longest composition representing that genre and at the same time the only one in the form of several movements. The titles of those movements, finally not included in the score, create an intelligible programme. The most primary role in its implementation is played by the contrast darkness-light, which is visible on the level of the cycle between the pairs of movements: I. *Crucifixio*, II. *Pietá* and III. *Hosanna*, IV. *Resurrectio*. Bujarski wrote about *Kwartet na Wielkanoc* [Quartet for Easter] that:

It is a kind of passion music [...]. The intimacy of the quartet sound, its repetitive specifics, the most internalized way the message is transmitted seemed the most appropriate to the composer for conducting divagations connected with the Lord's Passion and the Resurrection (Bujarski 1997: 134).

In the first two movements the dark coloring was achieved by the application of a thick texture and the use of the ensemble's full scale, including its lowest limits in a cello. In the second movement *Pietá*, means typical for a lamentation may be

distinguished: minor-second motifs of a lament and a neo-rhetorical *suspiratio* gesture—*glissando* sighs, filling a tritone interval or minor sixth with a descending movement. The accumulation of such motifs creates a poignant effect.

The third movement *Hosanna* shines with a special light. Almost all of it is maintained in a two- or three-line octave register. The impression of luminosity is co-created by a transparent and static texture with a subtle amount of sound clashes. In the ending the parts of all instruments receive an ascending direction and climb gradually onto higher and higher registers. A culmination is created, filled with supernatural light, which fascinates the composer in El Greco's paintings (Fig. 11.1).

Religious subjects in Bujarski's music are connected with the sense of belonging to the Polish tradition. In the fourth movement of *Kwartet na Wielkanoc* [Quartet for Easter] the joy of Resurrection was expressed by an almost dancing nature in syncope rhythms. At times it appears as if a highlander band was playing. In the ending of *Kwartet na Adwent* [Quartet for Advent] the composer introduced a simple melody of folk intonation, constructed on a lower tetra chord of an Aeolian G-sharp minor scale played in a heterophonic duet.

Affiliation to a religious community usually has its beginnings in a family. In Polish tradition the concept of a family home connotes religious values. Bujarski expressed it in his *Kwartet na otwarcie domu* [Quartet for a House-Warming], a composition commissioned by Krzysztof Penderecki for the 1st Chamber Music Festival in Lusławice, which took place in August 1980 in a newly renovated manor house of the Penderecki Family. In the concluding episode of this composition we can hear a

Fig. 11.1 Zbigniew Bujarski. *Kwartet na Wielkanoc* [Quartet for Easter], 3rd movement, the fragment of the ending

paraphrase of a highlander Christmas carol *Oj maluški, maluški* [Oh, Tiny Babe], conducted with parallel sixths in an A major key. Its candid mood may evoke memories of home during the most family-like holidays in Polish tradition.<sup>3</sup>

### 11.3.2 *The Motif of Birds and Its Meaning*

In mid-90s an air of uncertainty appeared in Bujarski's music, the most fully expressed in the cycle of *Lęk ptaków I, II, III* [The Fear of Birds I, II, III]. When asked about those compositions, the author talked of the anxieties regarding the unknown: "I already know the past, including its variety of experiences, whereas the future does not have to but might be dangerous to us" (in Malecka 2013: 69). Commenting on his work, Bujarski is generous with terms scarred with pessimism, and when expressing judgments and opinions, he avoids self-confidence. In the lecture *O własnej twórczości* [On My Own Work] he pondered "[...] where is the borderline between the justice of actions and the doubts that continuously trouble an author?" (Bujarski 2005a: 125). He interpreted the form *Concerto per archi I* (1979), in which an expected development is brutally interrupted on and off as "an expression of an inner dilemma of a contemporary man living in love for the grand cultural tradition and in tragic uncertainty of the next day, called modernity or progress" (Bujarski 1980: 108).

#### 11.3.2.1 *Lęk Ptaków* [the Fear of Birds]

The poetic title of *Lęk ptaków* [The Fear of Birds] enchants and intrigues. The composer wrote that birds are "man's eternal longing to fly away into heavens and the eternal uncertainty of earthly existence" (Bujarski 2003: 58). In a bird's life, stretched between heaven and earth, Icarus's dream is combined with the worries of everyday life. Birds "are connected to the element of air; [...] 'they are the height', and thus spirituality", clarifies Cirlot (2000: 340). A bird is also a symbol of freedom—a moving image of captivity is brought about by the sight of a bird locked up in a cage. A certain form of captivity is also fear described in psychology as a negative emotional state manifesting through anxiety, a sense of tension and danger. To live without fear means to be free.

The music of *Lęk ptaków* [The Fear of Birds] evocatively conveys a range of emotions suggested in the title. The composer introduces listeners—as it was

---

<sup>3</sup>Elements of Polish tradition in connection with religious themes also appear in Bujarski's other compositions. For example in *Cassazione per Natale* for wind chamber ensemble and percussion (1996), in the central chorale Andantino in the part of the horn there emerges a quotation from the old Polish Christmas carol *Aniol pasterzom mówił* [The Angel Told the Shepherds]. In *Stabat Mater* (2000), following Karol Szymanowski's example, Bujarski used a Polish translation of the selected fragments of a Medieval sequence.

described by one of the critics—“to a magical and subtle world of sound as if unstained with humdrum” (Woźna 1995: 3). He freely shapes the narration giving it oneiric qualities. Each of the three compositions have a form of an expressive arch: music emerges from silence and dies into it, passing through a series of loosely tied episodes. The vibraphone’s tone color emphasizes the lightness and fragility of birds’ existence, whereas xylorimba, and especially tubi di bambu mimic the sounds of fluttering, shivering corresponding to the state of anxiety and fear.

In the first movement of the cycle, percussion adds color to string instruments presenting bird motifs: two-sound figures based on the leap of a minor third or a seventh with a very short first and a longer second value. *Tremolo* and demisemiquaver chord progressions played *sul ponticello* in a high register resemble chirping and tweeting.

*Lęk ptaków II* [The Fear of Birds II] is characterized by a broader range of registers (a bass clarinet is used), the variety of bird sounds is also larger. In the interval structure of motifs apart from thirds and sevenths, there are also tritones and second processions, a new element is also sound repetition. After a gentle start there comes a sort of an explosion of panic of the startled birds; this effect is illustrated by brisk clarinet figures in a high register and *fortissimo* dynamics, and then the music gradually calms down, the clarinet song can be heard.

*Lęk ptaków III* [The Fear of Birds III] is the movement of the cycle most abundant in sounds, the most fluid and “singsong” of them all. This is the result of applying four melodic instruments (2 clarinets, violin, viola) and an approach to a vibraphone and xylorimba different than in the other movements. In these, the composer abandons *tremolo* and *tremolado* performances for the benefit of melodic formations. Within a six-voice texture various configurations arise: voices merge into one harmonious choir or perform a dialogue, some creating an *ostinato* background for the singing of soloists. Not until the ending are the sounds of tubi di bambu heard. Together with string instruments, which reach the highest possible sound production in the *tremolo* articulation and the *pianissimo* dynamics, they are accompanied by single motifs of clarinets. Such conclusion may evoke an impression of birds flying away, disappearing into the distance (Fig. 11.2).

Fig. 11.2 Zbigniew Bujarski. *Lęk ptaków III* [The Fear of Birds III], the ending

### 11.3.2.2 *Orniphania*

*Orniphania* for cello and piano (2001) is a specific culmination of Bujarski's bird compositions. The composer wrote that this piece is:

After the three *Fear of Birds* – another attempt at exploiting the extremely rich material of birdsongs. A long-standing fascination with this music of nature, the diversity of its genres and especially – one would like to say – the inventiveness and astonishing variations from one specimen to another of the sung motives, as if recurring but always somehow altered, stimulated me to attempt the creation of a certain tonal entity that, without aspiring to imitate the specific birdsong of different genres (as e.g. in the case of Vivaldi or, especially, Messiaen), would give a tonal “manifestation” of bird music (Bujarski 2005b: 25).

The composition's title and a dedication to Jerzy Stankiewicz refer to the person of Olivier Messiaen.<sup>4</sup> The Messiaenian hint leads us to delve around in the composition's sound language for qualities convergent with the French composer's system. And indeed an intense application of a whole tone scale is noticeable, especially in the construction of chords. However, it was never Bujarski's intention to faithfully transpose from nature the voices of particular bird species. Nevertheless, the composer managed to capture the essence of bird world of sound whose characteristic traits include an enormous variety and an abundance of options of short motifs.

The “language” of birds is present not only in those of Bujarski's works with the titles suggesting those references. It becomes as if an element of his composer's language. A bird's sad song is heard in the ending of *Elegos* for cello and string orchestra (2005), a composition in memory of Bujarski's dear friend, Marek Stachowski and in *Adagio* for 2 cellos (2013). Moreover, bird motifs are present in *Quartet for Advent* and *Cassazione per Natale*, where a choir of wind instruments sounds quite Messiaen-like.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup>Jerzy Stankiewicz—a long-standing president of the Kraków Branch of the Polish Composers' Union (1994–2014) and an organizer of the Days of Music of Kraków Composers. Stankiewicz, being Messiaen's student in a Paris conservatory in 1977, became an expert and a propagator of his music in Poland.

<sup>5</sup>In Bujarski's work birds exist not only in his music. We may also observe them in two paintings *Untitled* from 1980s. In the composer's painting catalogue prepared by Teresa Malecka both of these belong to the category “Visions-Fantasies. Symbolic Approaches” (2006: 191). Their expression, in some way resonating with the works of Hieronymus Bosch, seems to correspond to *The Fear of Birds* written in the next decade. The text of the fourth of *Five Songs* for soprano, string orchestra and vibraphone composed to the words by John Gracen Brown (1994–6), titled *A Small Bird* carries a completely different meaning. Having the form of “an American haiku”, it seems to convey a message that a contact with nature may be a source of spiritual experiences. The poem concludes with words: “And the soul is lifted”.

### 11.3.3 *The Reflection on the Passing of Time*

In *The Fear of Birds* the composer created an atmosphere of uncertainty, in *Orniphania* he attempted to show bird songs in a “pure” state, but the cello’s timbre colored the music with an elegiac tone. In *Kwartet na jesień* [Quartet for Autumn] composed in the same year (2001), Bujarski seems to reflect on the passing of time.<sup>6</sup> The season of the year evoked in the title communicates melancholy, sadness, and decline. Autumnal nature falling into winter sleep is conducive to reverie. At some point the composer elaborated on this title by describing it as “*Quartet for [the] Autumn ...of life*” (in Świstak 2005: 114).

The music of the last Bujarski’s string quartet is characteristic for its coherence and exceptional concentration of expression. The composition’s one-movement form is divided by general pauses. Within each of thus separated sections narration is conducted in a continuous manner, at a slow tempo and in dynamics with a scale rarely reaching full *forte*. It is dominated by a polymelodic texture. A three-line octave was excluded from the range of registers; the top range of a two-line octave is used rarely. In combination with a thick texture and a saturation of the sound fabric with resounding minor thirds or minor triads it leaves an impression of a dark coloring. It is punctually lit up several times, most often in the endings of individual parts, when all voices meet on one chord constructed mainly of fourths and fifths. The final illumination is brought about by the conclusion of the quartet in the form of a complete A-major chord. Its third achieved with a slow ascending motion in the highest voice substitutes a hitherto dominating minor third. One more step up leads to a Lydian fourth. The sound throbbing with regular repetition measures time, gradually subsiding to *al niente*. Reflection, comfort in consonance, the impression of opening—it is an almost metaphysical point (Fig. 11.3).

## 11.4 Final Remarks

Bujarski does not approach chamber compositions as an area of composing experiments. He does not display an element of pure play (otherwise significant for that type of music) which becomes the source of joy for performers and of pleasure for the audience. With fully shaped and mature language, he undertakes in the medium of chamber music the themes most important for man: he discusses his fears and anxieties, hopes and spiritual needs. Considering the string quartet genre, Bujarski wrote that it is a medium:

Most conducive to expressing particularly significant [...] emotional states or [...] noting thoughts and inquiries of men, touching upon even eschatological issues (Bujarski 1985: 32).

---

<sup>6</sup>*Kwartet na jesień* [Quartet for Autumn] was written for the Professor Mieczysław Tomaszewski’s 80th jubilee.



227

(*dim.*) (na granicy dźwięku / only just audible)

230

233

→ *all niente*

Fig. 11.3 Zbigniew Bujarski. *Kwartet na jesień* [Quartet for Autumn], the ending

At another time he defined a quartet as a kind of “a private letter the composer writes to a specific addressee” (Bujarski 2002: 35). The formula expressed in these words may be referred not only to string quartets but to all of Bujarski’s chamber music. The seriousness of the message addressed to an individual listener determines its significance.

## References

- Bujarski, Zbigniew. 1980. The composer's commentary to *Concerto per archi I. XXIV Międzynarodowy Festiwal Muzyki Współczesnej "Warszawska Jesień" 19–28 września 1980* [24th International Festival of Contemporary Music "Warsaw Autumn" 19–28 September 1980], eds. Krzysztof Bilica, Olgierd Pisarenko and Elżbieta Szczepańska-Malinowska, 108. Warszawa.
- Bujarski, Zbigniew. 1985. The composer's commentary to *Kwartet na Advent* [Quartet for Advent]. *XXVIII Międzynarodowy Festiwal Muzyki Współczesnej "Warszawska Jesień" 20–28 września 1985* [28th International Festival of Contemporary Music "Warsaw Autumn" 20–28 September 1985], eds. Olgierd Pisarenko, Krzysztof Bilica, Elżbieta Szczepańska-Malinowska, Dorota Szwarcman and Barbara Zwolska-Stęszewska, 32. Warszawa.
- Bujarski, Zbigniew. 1997. The composer's commentary to *Kwartet na Wielkanoc* [Quartet for Easter]. *9. Dni Muzyki Kompozytorów Krakowskich. Kraków 18–27 maja 1997* [9th Days of Music of Kraków Composers. Kraków 18–27 May 1997], ed. Jerzy Stankiewicz, 134. Kraków: Związek Kompozytorów Polskich, Zarząd Oddziału Krakowskiego.
- Bujarski, Zbigniew. 2002. *Kwartet na jesień* [Quartet for autumn]. The composer's commentary in the score, 35. Kraków: PWM SA.
- Bujarski, Zbigniew. 2003. The composer's commentary to *Lęk ptaków* [The Fear of Birds]. *15. Dni Muzyki Kompozytorów Krakowskich. Kraków 8–15 czerwca 2003* [15th Days of Music of Kraków Composers. Kraków 8–15 June 2003], ed. Jerzy Stankiewicz, 57–58. Kraków: Związek Kompozytorów Polskich, Zarząd Oddziału Krakowskiego.
- Bujarski, Zbigniew. 2005a. O własnej twórczości [On My Own Work]. In Świstak, Aleksandra. *Zbigniew Bujarski. Katalog tematyczny utworów* [Zbigniew Bujarski. Thematic Catalogue of Works], 125–131. Kraków: Akademia Muzyczna w Krakowie.
- Bujarski, Zbigniew. 2005b. *Orniphania*. The composer's commentary in the score, 25. Kraków: PWM SA.
- Cirlot, Juan Eduardo. 2000. Ptaki [Birds]. *Słownik symboli* [A Dictionary of Symbols], 340. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak.
- Malecka, Teresa. 2006. *Zbigniew Bujarski. Twórczość i osobowość* [Zbigniew Bujarski. Oeuvre and Personality]. Kraków: Akademia Muzyczna w Krakowie.
- Malecka, Teresa. 2013. Zbigniew Bujarski. Człowiek i twórca. Rozmowa z kompozytorem [Zbigniew Bujarski. The man and the artist. A conversation with the composer]. *Teoria muzyki. Studia, interpretacje, dokumentacje 2*: 59–75. Kraków: Akademia Muzyczna w Krakowie.
- Świstak, Aleksandra. 2005. *Zbigniew Bujarski. Katalog tematyczny utworów* [Zbigniew Bujarski. Thematic catalogue of works]. Kraków: Akademia Muzyczna w Krakowie.
- Tomaszewski, Mieczysław. 2005. Muzyka w poszukiwaniu wartości zasłoniętych i zagubionych [Music in Search of Values Veiled and Lost]. *O muzyce polskiej w perspektywie intertekstualnej. Studia i szkice* [On Polish music in the intertextual perspective. Studies and essays], 145–156. Kraków: Akademia Muzyczna w Krakowie.
- Woźna, Małgorzata. 1995. VII Dni Muzyki Kompozytorów Krakowskich. Ptaki polskie [7th Days of Music of Kraków Composers. Polish birds]. *Dziennik Polski* 136: 3. Kraków.