

Chapter 3

A Phenomenon of String Quartet in the Works of Kraków Composers from 1960s

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Abstract A string quartet, being a test of skills for a composer's workshop, is a genre willingly practiced in the circles of Kraków composers. In 1960 Krzysztof Penderecki initiated a new stage in the genre with his *Quartetto per archi* No. 1 maintained in the poetics of sonorism. Penderecki's students took up experiments in the scope of articulation and texture, e.g. Marek Stachowski (1936–2004) as well as composers representing an older generation, e.g. Krystyna Moszumańska-Nazar (1924–2009). A string quartet acquired a different image in the works of Zbigniew Bujarski (born 1933), who took up this genre in 1980s making it a carrier for programmatic messages. Still other propositions are brought about by the quartet work of a tireless avant-garde author, Bogusław Schaeffer (born 1929) and the master of the genre, Krzysztof Meyer (born 1943) who composed over a dozen string quartet pieces. The objective of the paper is to capture the diversity of the string quartet concept in the works of Kraków composers.

3.1 The Situation of the String Quartet in 20th-Century Music

3.1.1 Introductory Remarks

Throughout 250 years of history of the string quartet genre, the 20th century became known as the time of significant changes. The crisis and the end of the major-minor system, which was a “natural environment” for a quartet, resulted in the fact that it started to be influenced by new compositional techniques and aesthetic concepts. Arnold Schoenberg's dodecaphonic quartets, Anton Webern's Op. 28, serial quartets of Bruno Maderna and Luciano Berio and microtonal ones by Alois Hába—all this was created in the 20th century. Alfred Schnittke used his

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polystylistic technique in a string quartet, and Maurizio Kagel—the convention of an instrumental theatre.

The attitudes of the 20th-century composers towards the genre tradition of a string quartet polarized: from continuing in the works of neo-classicists to negating the genre basis by extreme avant-garde American composers: John Cage in the *Thirty Pieces for String Quartet*,¹ or George Brecht, whose “anti-quartet” consists of musicians entering onto the stage, taking a bow, shaking hands with each other and then exiting the stage.

3.1.2 *Stages of Development of the Genre in Polish Music*

In Polish 20th-century music the string quartet is continuously present, not many composers ignored this genre. Its history may be described in a nutshell in three stages parallel to the periods of the development of Polish music (Kowalska-Zajac 2005). Until 1956 the quartet remained under the influence of neoclassicism, and composers presented an attitude of accepting the genre tradition. After 1956 the quartet started to be pressured by the avant-garde and the authors expressed their rebellion against the tradition of the genre rejecting the concept of a quartet as a “noble conversation” (the negation attitude). The next turning point, beginning from the late 1970s brought a tendency of coming back to the values “hidden and lost”, as Tomaszewski (2005: 145) wrote. Composers started to renovate the basis of the genre (restoration attitude).

3.1.3 *String Quartet in the Works of Kraków Composers*

The transformations of the string quartet in its second and third development phases—the negation and restoration genre phases may be traced following the abundant quartet works of Kraków composers. These are: Krzysztof Penderecki and Zbigniew Bujarski, representing generation’33, debuting in the second half of 1950s; younger composers Marek Stachowski (1936–2004) and Krzysztof Meyer (born 1943), who debuted in the first half of 1960s, and Krystyna Moszumańska-Nazar born in 1924 (1924–2008), whose first compositions, including an unnumbered string quartet (1954) from the times she studied under the class of Stanisław Wiechowicz, are still part of neoclassicism.

The total number of string quartets in the works of the aforementioned composers reaches 40 compositions, from three in Penderecki’s work and four in

¹The composition written for Kronos Quartet in 1983 is a series of independent solo fragments played one after another or simultaneously which is such an extreme negation of the European quartet tradition that the performers even sit with their backs turned to each other.

Bujarski's, up to over a dozen in Meyer's. Some did not express themselves in the quartet medium until they were mature artists, as for instance Zbigniew Bujarski, who composed his first string quartet at the age of 47. The majority reached for the holy tradition of the genre already at the start of their work. Krzysztof Penderecki composed *Quartetto per archi* No. 1 when he was 27. Krzysztof Meyer is a record-holder—he wrote String Quartet No. 1 being only 20 and already having some 10 quartets in his youth achievements which are not included on his official work list. The quartet genre in Meyer's work holds a distinguished place, he has been practicing it regularly for half a century, at intervals not longer than five years. Marek Stachowski also regularly chose the quartet medium, although at greater interludes. Whereas in Krzysztof Penderecki's work two quartets from 1960s are distanced from String Quartet No. 3 by four decades, the time between them divided exactly in half by a miniature *Der unterbrochene Gedanke* (1988).

3.2 String Quartet in the Context of Sonorism

3.2.1 Krzysztof Penderecki

In 1960 Penderecki opened a new chapter in the history of the genre with his *Quartetto per archi* No. 1. In Polish music 1960s were a time of increased reception of avant-garde techniques (dodecaphony and serialism) after the raising of the Iron Curtain in 1956. Sonorism soon became a distinguishing feature of the “Polish composing school”, as western critics used to refer to the group of young talents. This direction is characteristic for its domination in the sound and color qualities with their textural consequences as well as an elimination of melody and harmony. Experiments with unconventional ways of articulation often lead to achieving a considerable distance between the source of the sound and the sound effect.

The possibilities to expand the repertoire of string instrument sounds were extensively tested by Krzysztof Penderecki in such compositions as *Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima* for 52 string instruments (1960) and *Polymorphia* for 48 string instruments (1961). His *Quartetto per archi* No. 1 is the first sonoristic composition for such instrumental ensemble, a specific manifest of a new trend. In an almost continuously four-part texture dominated by percussion effects, the characteristic string instrument sound is lost, however, the quartet acquires a shockingly new countenance unknown before. Among ways of articulation there are such that seem to turn against the nature of the instruments: striking the strings with the open palm or with fingers and striking the upper part of the sounding board with the nut or the finger-tips (Fig. 3.1).

More articulation innovations appeared eight years later in *Quartetto per archi* No. 2. Next to quarter tones these are, among others, the performer simultaneously whistling while playing and playing at the nut with strong pressure of the bow to achieve unpleasant jarring sounds. In comparison to the first string quartet, No. 2

The image shows the beginning of Krzysztof Penderecki's *Quartetto per archi* No. 1. It consists of three systems of musical notation for four instruments: Violin I (VNI), Violin II (VNI), Viola (VI), and Violoncello (VC). The first system spans from 0'' to 15'', with a 'senza arco' section starting at 4''. The second system spans from 20'' to 30'', and the third system spans from 35'' to 45''. The score includes various dynamics such as 'ff sempre' and 'pizz' (pizzicato), and articulation marks like 'x' and 'Pz'.

Fig. 3.1 Krzysztof Penderecki. *Quartetto per archi* No. 1, the beginning

gained in textural density and become more dynamic. The one-movement form, just as in the previous quartet, is more clearly defined here and refers to a tie and reprise structure.

Both of Penderecki's quartets developed from a rebellion against the quartet genre tradition [...]. In the context of that tradition these compositions are more designed for an ensemble of four instruments they inherited from the past rather than *actual* string quartets, which were connected with the specific formal, content, technical and expressive optimum (Droba 2006: 53).

Penderecki's sonoristic experiments inspired his students and colleagues, and only Bujarski did not test the possibilities of a string quartet in that aspect.

3.2.2 *Krzysztof Meyer*

The first four string quartets by Krzysztof Meyer are sonoristic (written between the years 1963–1974). The composer uses ways of articulation and percussion effects applied earlier by Penderecki, to whom String Quartet No. 1 is dedicated. He also introduces articulations of his own making, such as taping up and down all over the finger board with an open hand or the fingers and with the wood of the bow (*legno battuto*), or moving the fingers rapidly over the lower end of the finger board (i.e. near the bridge) in both directions alternately (Fig. 3.2).

The form of String Quartet No. 1 was sealed within a logically shaped, closed course. The sound strands of the first movement *Tesi* and the sound points of the second movement *Antitesi* are combined in the third movement *Sintesi*. Thomas Weselmann noticed in the form of the String Quartet No. 1 “a flash of drama concept adequate to Meyer’s later work” and stated that despite the extensive catalogue of effects the composition “does not give an impression of an attempt to reduce the time-honoured genre tradition into ashes” (Weselmann 2003: 188).

Sonoristic orientations are kept by the two subsequent quartets, but in lesser degree than by the first one, whereas String Quartet No. 4 is according to Weselmann (2003: 197) “a farewell to sonorism”. Here Meyer applies the ways or articulation tested in previous quartets, but at the same time—as Zygmunt Mycielski wrote in his review:

The image displays the beginning of Krzysztof Meyer's String Quartet No. 1, divided into two systems of musical notation. The first system features four staves: Violino I, Violino II, Viola, and Violoncello. The Violino I and II parts are marked with 'legno battuto' and 'p'. The Viola and Violoncello parts are also marked with 'legno battuto' and 'p'. The score includes dynamic markings 'p', 'cresc.', and 'ff'. The second system shows the staves for Piano (PZ) and Violoncello (PZ). The Piano part is marked 'p' and 'cresc.'. The Violoncello part is marked 'p' and 'cresc.'. The score includes dynamic markings 'p', 'cresc.', and 'ff'. The score is marked with '6'' and '5'' at the end of the first system, and '7'' and '7'' at the end of the second system.

Fig. 3.2 Krzysztof Meyer. String Quartet No. 1, the beginning

The atmosphere is completely different here, there is much more polyphony, much more “to play” in the sense of notes played with a bow in regular registers (Mycielski 1976: 11).

In a symmetrical form of String Quartet No. 4 the composer combined the variety of articulations and textures with traditional ways of playing and shaping musical material.

3.2.3 *Marek Stachowski*

In Marek Stachowski’s work in the context of sonorism we may consider two compositions written for string quartet. String Quartet No. 1 still bears neoclassicist features, whereas a two year older *Musica per quartetto d’archi* (1965) was created in the aura of sonoristic manifests of Stachowski’s master—Krzysztof Penderecki. The composition does not shock, however, with brutal sounds, using sounds that remain in compliance with the natural qualities of string instruments and is characteristic for its rather clear texture. In String Quartet No. 2 from 1972 Stachowski enriched the sound language enormously. Next to developed sonoristic techniques (including playing with a plectrum) there also appears aleatorism—approximately synchronized segments with controlled summary pitch and sound texture. Created in a compact three-movement form (movements merge into each other *attacca*), the sound world of the composition is delicate and sublime.

3.2.4 *Krystyna Moszumańska-Nazar*

Krystyna Moszumańska-Nazar’s *Quartetto per archi* of 1974 is part of the sonorism trend. The repertoire of articulation means includes, among others, percussion effects and quartet-tone intervals, as well as *arco jété* and *legno jété* articulations which the composer willingly applies. The specific feature of the composition is the association of refined sounds with a logical two-movement form parallel to a prelude and a fugue, whose subject is—according to the composer—“an expanding ‘interval smudge’ subjected to various modifications” (Kasperek 2004, 67). In the String Quartet No. 2 of 1979 the sonoristic references subside. As a Danish critic wrote, reviewing the 1994 performance of the composition:

In the String Quartet No. 2 this specific Polish sound reworking may be heard [...], but Moszumańska-Nazar knows how to work with sound in even more subtle way, whereas she opens before us a land of utopian longing for ideal beauty (Kasperek 2004: 86).

This longing is fulfilled by melodic lines often solistically conducted which encounter resistance from dissonant chords and sound layers created by a swift sound movement.

3.3 Towards the Tradition of the Genre

Departing from sonorism favored the restoration of the string quartet genre. In 1980s and subsequent decades it achieved a number of original solutions in the works of individual composers.

3.3.1 *Krystyna Moszumańska-Nazar*

Two last quartets by Krystyna Moszumańska-Nazar (1995 and 2003), advance towards tradition of the genre in the scope of cycle concept. They both consist of four separate movements contrasting in terms of tempo and expression. In the String Quartet No. 3 movements 1. *Sensibile* and 3. *Reflessivo* are slow and reflective, whereas movements 2. *Allegretto giocoso* and 4. *Allegro*—fast and exuberant. The layout of movements in String Quartet No. 4 is slightly different, more similar to the classical model: 1. *Moderato, con grazia*, 2. *Lento*, 3. *Impresja, moderato*, and 4. *Allegro*.

3.3.2 *Marek Stachowski*

In the four quartets by Marek Stachowski² dating to 1980–2001 there is a volatility and dynamism in music narration typical for his style, as well as a momentum and an elegance of gesture. Differently than in earlier quartets, the dissonant sounds coexist here with neotonal elements, melodies and polyphonic voice play appear. For example *Musica festeggiante* (1995) begins with an effective symphonic chord gesture, followed by a rapid, vehement fugato (Fig. 3.3).

In String Quartet No. 4 *Quando resta l'estate* the style becomes cleared and means simplified; music acquired transparency and a depth of expression.

3.3.3 *Krzysztof Meyer—Master of the Genre*

The attitude of Krzysztof Meyer, who is a composer greatly dedicated to the quartet genre—between 1977 and 2014 he wrote 10 compositions representing it³—is

²Marek Stachowski: *Quartetto da ingresso* (1980), String Quartet No. 3 (1988), *Musica festeggiante* (1995), String Quartet No. 4 *Quando resta l'estate* (2001).

³Krzysztof Meyer: String Quartet No. 5 (1978), String Quartet No. 6 (1981), String Quartet No. 7 (1985), String Quartet No. 8 (1985), String Quartet No. 9 (1990), String Quartet No. 10 (1994), String Quartet No. 11 (2001), String Quartet No. 12 (2005), String Quartet No. 13 (2010), String Quartet No. 14 (2014).

3/4 $\text{♩} = 120$ 2/4 3/4 2/4 3/4

f *f* *f* *f* *f* *f* *f* *f*

2/4 3/4 2/4 3/4 ① $\text{♩} = 100$

f *f* *ff* *ff* *ff* *pp*

2/4 3/4

pp *f* *f* *f* *f* *f*

Fig. 3.3 Marek Stachowski. *Musica festeggiante*, the beginning

characteristic for being deeply rooted into tradition. The attitude towards tradition does not consist of typically postmodernist play on quotations and stylizations accompanied by a syntax destruction in utterances and non-continuity of narration. If there appear references to the works of masters of the past, they are rather allusions, reminiscences and paraphrases that are difficult to hear. Meyer, being faithful to the idea of genre continuity, practices grand forms in which music grows and evolves, creating a dramatized process. His quartets have genre gravity, moreover they implement the classical concept of chamber music. These qualities results in the fact that—as one of the critics put it:

I listen to Krzysztof Meyer's string quartet [...] just as I would listen to quartets [...] by Beethoven, Brahms, Bartók, Shostakovich. Filled with a different sound content, made of a different sound matter – they impact me with an equal form power, they absorb me into a deliberate play of their own evolution (Pociej 1994: 134).

Discussing all of Meyer's quartets, created after the period of sonoristic experiences, exceeds the frames of that paper. Let us select “the treatise on a quartet”, as Weselmann (2003: 222) described String Quartet No. 10 (1993–4). Its form, seemingly classically consisting of four movements, with *adagio* and *scherzo*, is in fact closer to a multi-section form with frequent tempo variations and a very developed *adagio*. Aforementioned Weselmann claimed:

The only reference point for this composition, both in terms of form as well as expression, are the last of Beethoven's quartets (Weselmann 2003: 224).

Indeed, the composer wrote a subheading in the manuscript with a pencil: *Hommage à Beethoven*, however, it was omitted during publication.

3.3.4 Zbigniew Bujarski—in the Program-Tinted Line of the Genre Development

Meyer's quartets seem to realize the idea of absolute music. Zbigniew Bujarski's four quartets, from the years 1980–2001, present a different concept. In the history of the genre, traditionally being a part of pure music, there is also a tendency to suffuse music with non-musical contents and it is very distinct in the 20th century. Bujarski's quartets titled, respectively: *Quartet for a House-Warming* (1980), *For Advent* (1984), *For Easter* (1989), and *For Autumn* (2001)—are part of this program-tinted line of genre development.

The title-suggested content focuses around two semantic spheres: religion and existential reflection. The composer's instrumental religious music refers to the significant periods in the liturgical year. The intent music of *Quartet for Advent* expresses anticipation not only for the rebirth of Christ but also his arrival at the end of time; *String Quartet for Easter* is passion music. The second circle of meanings touches upon spheres of the condition of man. In *Quartet for a House-Warming*

the composer refers to the natural human need for a home, in *String Quartet for Autumn*—to a reflection of the passing of time.

The programmatic meanings of Bujarski's quartets is not obvious, rather allusive and symbolic. Nothing is said directly, or in an explicit and blatant way, through the use of quotations. Yet, certain "special places" appear, for example harmonic illuminations of a thick, linear dark-colored texture. Such "special places" seem to "concretize" the messages suggested in the titles.

3.3.5 *Krzysztof Penderecki's Restoration of the Genre*

The restoration of the string quartet genre finally occurred also in Penderecki's work. This happened only after four decades following the sonoristic quartets in which the composer betrayed the tradition of the genre. String Quartet No. 3 written in 2008, with a completely different language than the two previous ones from 1960s, regained its genre qualities. The quartet ensemble once again conducts a clear and visible discourse.

Penderecki placed the composition—just as Zbigniew Bujarski his quartets—in the circle of program music, entitling it *Leaves of an Unwritten Diary*. Referring to the composition as "a sentimental journey", he emphasized a deeply personal, autobiographic, retrospective nature of the work. Sure enough, in a number of subsequent contrasting episodes we recognize shadows of the past. Turbulent and grotesque at times *Vivace* is built on the motif from Penderecki's opera *Ubu Rex*, also used in the second movement of the String Trio. A folk melody appears in the further part of the quartet—as the composer described it after the première performance—"a traditional Hutsul *kolomyjka* that he had heard in his youth played on the violin by his father, who had come from Rohatyn in southeast Poland" (Lindstedt 2015) (Fig. 3.4).

3.4 **Playing with the Genre Tradition: Bogusław Schaeffer, *Quartet for Four Actors***

To complete the panorama of the string quartet in the music of Kraków composers, next to the authors belonging to the "main stream", it is worth mentioning a persona who, in a manner of speaking, creates a counter point to that stream. Bogusław Schaeffer (born 1929)—a tireless avant-gardist and experimenter, a pioneer of new genres in Polish music such as graphic music, happening and instrumental theatre—is an author of over a dozen string quartets. He delves intensively into quartet's possibilities for an ensemble, testing also microtonalism.

Schaeffer is the author of over 40 theatre plays. In many of them he transfers the principles of musical compositions onto the grounds of theatre, and his

The image shows a musical score for Krzysztof Penderecki's String Quartet No. 3, measures 432-454. The score is in 2/4 time and features a folk melody. It includes dynamics such as *ff*, *p*, *pp*, *mf*, and *sul G*, along with performance instructions like *pizz.*, *arco*, and *sub. p*. The score is written for four staves (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass).

Fig. 3.4 Krzysztof Penderecki. String Quartet No. 3 *Leaves of an Unwritten Diary*, a folk melody

“instrumental actor” is supposed to approach his presence on the stage in an abstract way by being, so to speak, a sound in a music score. In 1966 he wrote *Quartet for Four Actors*—quartet *à rebours*. Schaeffer disregards the musical content here, but not the convention of a quartet, adding a study of gesture and relations between four individualities—separate personalities which create an ensemble.

3.5 Composer’s Motivations

Why do 20th-century composers continue to write string quartets? “External” impulses play a certain role here—these are usually commissions to celebrate a specific event or anniversary. Kraków authors wrote string quartets, for instance, for

the concert accompanying the congress organized in Kraków to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Polish music in 1995⁴ and to celebrate the 80th birthday of the creator of Kraków theoretical school, Professor Mieczysław Tomaszewski in 2001.⁵ Following Krzysztof Penderecki's invitation, with the thought of the First Festival of Chamber Music—which took place in the newly renovated manor house in Lusławice—the following quartets were written, among others, commemorating the event in the title: Bujarski's *Quartet for a House-Warming* and Stachowski's *Quartetto da ingresso*.⁶

Apart from the “external” impulses, there are also motivations which may be described as “professional”. All authors share a common belief that a string quartet is a composer's criterion *métier*. Moszumańska-Nazar mentions that composing her first string quartet was for her “proving to her own self that she was mature enough for such a significant music genre” (Woźna-Stankiewicz 2007).

Composers stress also the attractiveness of an ensemble of four string instruments which is—as Krzysztof Meyer said—“a particular and unique source of specific sounds and colors not provided by any other set of instruments” (Meyer 1986). Whereas Krystyna Moszumańska-Nazar noted:

While writing [...] quartet music there are enormous possibilities to operate on diversified stresses and expressions as well as realizing that your own creative visions are almost boundless (Woźna-Stankiewicz 2007: 179).

The string quartets of Kraków composers seem to confirm that the possibilities of an ensemble favored by classics are in reality unlimited.

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⁴Krystyna Moszumańska-Nazar: String Quartet No. 3; Marek Stachowski: *Musica festeggiate*.

⁵Zbigniew Bujarski: *Quartet for Autumn*; Marek Stachowski, String Quartet No. 4 *Quando resta l'estate*.

⁶For the First Festival of Chamber Music in Lusławice, Krzysztof Penderecki also commissioned string quartets from Krystyna Moszumańska-Nazar, Eugeniusz Knapik, and Bronius Kutavičius. Quartets by such genre classics as Beethoven, Schubert, Fauré, Debussy, and Ravel were also performed during the two-day festival.

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