

Krzysztof Penderecki:
Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima (1960)
Pg. 393 in the Anthology

1. **Penderecki**

- a. Born November 23, 1933, in Debica, Poland
- b. "In the years before World War II, Krzysztof took piano lessons without much success...From 1946 to 1951, Krzysztof excelled at the violin while attending grammar school."¹
- c. "Penderecki studied composition privately with Franciszek Skołyszewski and then (1954–8) with Malawski and Wiechowicz at the State Higher School of Music (now the Academy) in Kraków. On graduating, he joined the staff of the school as a teacher of composition."²
- d. "His first major success came in 1959 when *Strofy* ('Strophes'), *Emanacje* ('Emanations') and *Psalmy Dawida* ('Psalms of David') were awarded the top three prizes at a competition organized by the Union of Polish Composers. Subsequently he came to the attention of two influential figures who were to prove crucial in bringing his music to audiences outside Poland: the publisher Hermann Moeck...and Heinrich Strobel [German music critic and administrator]".³
- e. Compositional periods:
 - i. Early period (avant-garde), Middle period (late 1960's: neo-romantic return to tradition), Late period (1980's: synthesis of modern and traditional)

2. **"Threnody"**

- a. History
 - i. Completed 1960
 1. Originally titled *8'37"*. Present title was given after the work's completion.⁴
 - a. "[The piece] existed only in my imagination, in a somewhat abstract way. When Jan Krenz recorded it and I could listen to an actual performance, I was struck with the emotional charge of the work. I thought it would be a waste to condemn it to such anonymity, to those "digits". I searched for associations and, in the end, I decided to dedicate it to the Hiroshima victims' (1994)."⁵

¹ Josh Bazuin, "Krzysztof Penderecki." Available from <http://web.archive.org/web/19991103083940/www.freenet.hamilton.on.ca/~aa849/writings/penderec.htm>. Internet; accessed 1 May 2007.

² Adrian Thomas: "Penderecki, Krzysztof: Life", Grove Music Online ed. L. Macy (Accessed 29 April 2007), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Randolph Foy, "Textural Transformations: The Instrumental Music of Krzysztof Penderecki, 1960-1973" (D.M.A. diss., Peabody Institute of the John Hopkins University, 1994), 64.

⁵ Liner Notes by Mieczyslaw Tomaszewski, trans. by Jan Rybicki and Richard Whitehouse. Penderecki, Krzysztof [National Polish Radio Symphony Orchestra (Katowice), Antoni Wit conducting]. *Orchestral Works Vol. 1: Symphony No. 3, Threnody*. Audio CD. Katowice, Poland: HNH International, Ltd., 1998.

ii. Predecessors:

1. “Varèse’s conception of music as spatial...opened the door to music that centered not on melody, harmony, or counterpoint but on sound itself...Composers now wrote pieces whose material consists primarily of striking sound combinations that create interesting and novel textures, organized by gradual or sudden processes of change. One of the first to write such music for acoustic instruments was Iannis Xenakis...[i]n *Metastaseis* (1953-54).”⁶

iii. Editions:

1. 1961 Deshon Music Inc. and PWM Editions International (1961 and 1969). (our Anthology edition, and the school library has the 1969 PWM edition.)
2. 1961 P.W.P. (Przedstawicielstwo Wydawnicw Polskich), Warsaw, Poland.
3. 1961 (also 1970’s) Belwin-Mills (Melville, NY)
4. 1961 New York, Edition Eulenburg
5. 1961, 1969, and 1970, Kraków: Polskie Wydawn. Muzyczne
6. 1961 NY: Edwin F. Kalmus
7. Also, Schott.⁷

iv. Awards:

1. Fitelberg Composers Competition, Katowice, Poland, May 1960, 3rd prize.
2. Ministry of Culture and Art Award, 3rd degree, July 1962.

v. World Premiere:

1. (Live:) Sept. 22, 1961
 - a. Warsaw Autumn Festival, Krakow Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra, Andrzej Markowski conducting.
2. (Radio Recording:)
 - a. May 1961, Great Polish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Jan Krenz conducting.

b. Analysis

i. Organization:

1. “The work divides clearly into three parts, the second providing a contrasting middle section, the third returning to music that resembles the opening. The division between the first two sections is unambiguous [abrupt change in texture and timbre at m. 26]...preceded by a long, sustained single note [solo cello] with diminuendo leading to five seconds of silence. The second and third sections overlap, the third beginning some eight seconds before the second ends (mm. 63-64).”⁸

⁶ J. Peter Burkholder, Donald J. Grout, and Claude V. Palisca. *A History of Western Music*, seventh ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006), 928.

⁷ That is all that is mentioned (no years or any other details) in the only catalogue presently discovered in this student’s search, which is Bylander’s *Krzysztof Penderecki: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 44.

⁸ Robert P. Morgan, ed., *Anthology of Twentieth-Century Music* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992), 410.

2. Regarding m. 26 – “...a sequence of pointillistically-scattered sounds which, despite sounding improvised, are intricately woven into a 36-voice canon.”⁹
 - a. “Orchestra 2 answers Orchestra 1 as a strict canon at a distance of 12 bars, but with the instrumentation altered (quasi-inversion) whereby the parts of the 4 violins are answered by 2 basses and 2 cellos, etc. A symmetrical axis occurs between bars 42 and 43, when all the voices are mirrored, though again with altered instrumentation (like a retrograde inversion). Bars 16-19 are not included in the mirror. Thus in Orchestra 1 bars 42 and 43 match, likewise 41 and 44 etc., up to 30 and 55. In Orchestra 2 the symmetrical axis falls 12 bars later between bars 54 and 55. Orchestra 3 follows Orchestra 2 canonically at a distance of two bars, without the first four bars which are also left out of the mirroring; the instrumentation here does not change. The canon is sustained rhythmically and, with a few exceptions, dynamically as well, though the pitches may be a fourth or fifth removed. Such structural relationships within the ordering of the material, like the pointillistic refraction of this section clearly show the influence of the Second Viennese School and in particular Webern’s principles of symmetrical organization.”¹⁰

ii. Graphic Notation:

1. “Graphic notation and extended instrumental techniques featured in many Polish orchestral works of the 1960s. However, unlike most of his contemporaries, Penderecki proved an instinctive dramatist”.¹¹
2. See “Symbols/Technique” in *Performance Practice*, section c.
3. A thick black line crossing along the length of a staff indicates a cluster of pitches. Below each occurrence of such, the composer indicates the actual pitches to played (typically, one pitch per instrument) in parentheses on a small staff below the one harboring the black cluster indication.
 - a. However, on Anthology pg. 396, the composer explains, “Exact notation is given in the parts.”
4. Measure 18, Anthology pg. 399: a visual “swell”, as each individual part enters one after the other.

iii. Instrumentation

1. 52 Strings:
 - a. 24 violins, 10 violas, 10 cellos, and 8 basses
 - b. Individual players are grouped differently throughout the work:

⁹ Mieczyslaw Tomaszewski, Liner Notes.

¹⁰ Note 28, quoting Wilfried Gruhn, from Wolfram Schwinger, William Mann, trans. *Krzysztof Penderecki: His Life and Work* (London: Schott, 1979), 273-4.

¹¹ Adrian Thomas: “Penderecki, Krzysztof: Music up to 1974”, Grove Music Online ed. L. Macy (Accessed 29 April 2007), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

- a. “Flageolet tones”, more commonly known as harmonics. The indication of a glissando that follows the notation for flageolet tones lets the player know to execute a glissando of harmonics.
3. More common (standard) techniques are also used:
 - a. con/senza sordino = with/without mute
 - b. pizz. (pizzicato)/arco = plucked/bowed
 - c. ord. = ordinario = return to “normal” bowing after use of an extended technique
 - d. s.p. = sul ponticello = bow as close to the bridge as possible (without being on top of it)
 - e. s.t. = sul tasto = bow near or barely over the fingerboard
 - f. c.l. = col legno = bowing with the stick, instead of (or with very, very little) hair
 - g. l. batt. = legno battuto = striking the string with the stick of the bow.

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