

Marek Czerniewicz's Film Music

Joanna Schiller-Rydzewska

Stanisław Moniuszko Academy of Music in Gdańsk, Gdańsk, Poland

The work of Marek Czerniewicz reveals an important connection between image, word, and sound. He is present both in the field of creative inspiration and in the means of composition, sometimes he also determines the formal shape. These premises, which are observed in the field of high music, lead to a movement of applied music, which includes theatre, film, and children's music. Seen in this way, the field of film music is particularly viable for a creator who does not shy away from giving music extra-musical meanings and integrates it uncompromisingly into the context of reality. The music written for Marcin Bortkiewicz's films stands out in this clearly usable branch of work. The titles of the films to be mentioned here are: *Drawn from Memory*, *Walpurgis Night*, *Silence*, and *Initial Training*. In these images, the music has an important function that correlates with the content. It shows itself here in a symbolic, dialogical, or metaphorical sense, rarely as a literal illustration. All these outlined perspectives are a fascinating field of research that completes the picture of the composer's creative achievements.

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Introduction

Marek Czerniewicz is a middle-generation composer who has been associated with the Gdańsk music scene for years. In his work he does not avoid from usable music, collaborating with theatres, writing music for specific appointment of the institutions, and music for advertising, especially for social projects. Characteristic of his work is also the strong need to give music extra-musical meanings, especially through suggestive titles that symbolically permeate the musical texture. The composer is still a sensitive artist who deals with armed conflicts, such as the war in Syria or Afghanistan; re-examination of a difficult historical past, e. g. the Holocaust. Music inspired by religious conflicts is also widespread. After all, an important source of inspiration is a moving picture, a photo, or a film work.

In the face of such an attitude, which is the result of personal commitment, which does not avoid from commenting on reality vividly, the music written for films is a natural habitat for the composer. Czerniewicz took up the challenge for the first time in 2003. From now on, it is safe to say that he is a conscious artist who shows his face and helps shape the vision of the director.

The most interesting and appreciated soundtracks of Czerniewicz's were created in collaboration with Marcin Bortkiewicz. His films are intellectual cinema, niche cinema, sometimes documentaries, mostly short. All the films that have emerged from this collaboration between composer and director are poetic images aimed at the sensitive spectator who, in the cinema, searches for a non-obvious art that is beyond the usual schemas and is rooted in reality; a sensitive and wise cinema.

Joanna Schiller-Rydzewska, Dr.Habil., Assistant Professor, Faculty of Conducting, Composition and Music Theory, Stanisław Moniuszko Academy of Music in Gdańsk, Gdańsk, Poland.

The composer points to four soundtracks created for films that are completely different from each other: *Silence* (2003), *Initial Training* (2009), *Portrait from Memory* (2011), and *Walpurgis Night* (2015).

The above movies are fundamentally different from each other: type, duration, theme. It seems impossible, however, to notice in this cinema the delicately defined communal spaces that result from timeless reflections on transience, the human condition, the state of the world of nature.

In view of the little known subject matter, it is appropriate to take a detailed look at each of these films before attempting to formulate generalizations by indicating the role that Czerniewicz music plays in them. A helpful chronology also shows the stages of this collaboration, as it matures—from early school years to the first full-length film based on its own script and now filmed by the streaming platform Netflix.

The Silence

In 2003, the meeting between director and composer became a reality thanks to the documentary film *Cisza* “The Silence”, which Bortkiewicz realized at Andrzej Wajda’s Master School of Film Direction. The title “silence” in this picture is extraordinarily musical and refers to the classification of the function of film music by Zofia Lissa—the music remains “in its natural role” (Lissa, 1964, p. 188). In this almost four-minute film, music is the meaning and content. Literally—musicians play during the funeral ceremony. The essence of the film is its intransigence. Only the last scene reveals the director’s camouflage. When the piece is finished, it is sort of disenchanted. Up to this point, before the shovels appear and the tomb is buried, the spectator can assume that it is an open-air concert, probably in a park, and the audience is random passers-by. Siegfried Kracauer reminds us of a well-known cinematic rule: “The effect is amplified when the music stops abruptly at the moment of greatest tension and leaves us alone with the picture” (Kracauer, 2009, p. 158). Although the music sounds in this particular situation, it is clearly closed, and only then do we witness the routine of the rite. The music is immanent (Płażewski, 2008, p. 349) here, but it is not only an element of the plot, but rather its essential core.

Initial Training

The function of music was designed differently in the documentary *Initial Training* from 2009, which the director made on behalf of the Helian Sealarium. The camera accompanies a young student of oceanography who is doing an internship at the Seal Centre of the Marine Station named after Prof. Krzysztof Skóra run by the Institute of Oceanography of the University of Gdańsk. The station supports the reproduction and protection of seals in the southern Baltic Sea region. The centre has been in existence since 1999 and its main task is to care for young seals so that they can return to the natural environment and live independently there. The task of the Sealarium is best defined by the words of Prof. Krzysztof Skóra, which are used in the film: “In the Sealarium from the first day of its existence, we have been striving for its liquidation”, that is, until the time when seals will reproduce without the help of humans and will be able to easily observe them on the Baltic beaches. The basic principle in dealing with seals is the emotional neutrality of the workers. It’s about adult animals not wanting to interact with humans.

In this documentary, which lasts about 30 minutes, the music appears six times at very specific moments: always when the seals behave as naturally as possible. For the first time it accompanies the scene of caress—the tenderness that appears between the mother and the baby seal. In this scene, the main character watches everything through a hole in a wooden fence. It is the infant named Hel that becomes particularly close to the main character. The scene is accompanied by a delicate motif played on guitar-harp strings with reverberation

effect. Subsequent musical episodes are closely related to the fragments in which the seals appear in the most natural, free way. Every time Hel-Seal is in the foreground. For the second time—in the overall picture of the seal house with tourists who admire seals play in the water. Music deepens the mood of tenderness, which is clearly imparted to the main character. At other times, music is accompanied by observation of seal games, especially in a deep pool, etc. For the fifth time, we observe seals just before transporting them to the beach on the high seas. In the last scene with music, the sealers watch on the computer screen the image from the radars placed on the seal's ridges. The six musical additions to the picture thus clearly reveal the compositional-directional strategy. Music accompanies the next stages of the maturation of the young seal. In a way, the viewer participates in this growing up—the initial teaching of eating, swimming, etc. through the prism of a young trainee directly involved in the process. On the one hand, he adheres to a strict obligation not to get in touch with seals. On the other hand, these hidden feelings are extremely transparent to the viewer and additionally supported by the presence of music. So this is a typical example of building a deeper mood with music, in a sense, also the evaluation of events. This phenomenon is well illustrated by the words of Krzysztof Zanussi, who says that we are dealing with “a semantic kind of interpretation that occurs when music enters the level of script dialogue and values the meaning of what is shown” (Malatyńska & Malatyńska-Stankiewicz, 2002, p. 39). These moments of tenderness, which occurs during the observation of a carefree seal, are thanks to the music just such a dialogue with the script.

The music itself is precisely constructed. Remaining within himself the closest world from the area of *minimal music* Czerniewicz makes a gradual gradation of means in successive film scenes, thus symbolically accentuating the process of the seal's growing up. This gradation takes place at the level of expanding the instrumentation, thickening the movement with repetitive techniques, and expanding the textural means. Gradually, then, in each of the next six scenes, similar motifs receive more extensive elaboration, from single guitar-harp sounds to a full string ensemble juxtaposed with a glassy piano sound in the film's final scene. Active repetitiveness is united with the static music. It builds up the depth of individual scenes, images, shots that remain, as it were, frozen. The music therefore slows down the action, provides a counterbalance to it. It highlights moments of personal satisfaction for the Sealarium staff, their experiences that they cannot disclose. Music thus becomes here a “means of revealing emotions” (Lissa, 1964, p. 219). This is the role the director casts it in.

Drawn From Memory

The first short feature film *Drawn from Memory* (2011), which was created in collaboration between Bortkiewicz-Czerniewicz, is also styled as documentary cinema. It is an intimate picture lasting approximately 25 minutes. The plot bind here is the directorial task of the main character, who is testing a new camera. A young man, a student (Marek Kantyka) intends to make a film about his Grandmother (Irena Jun). The film also stars Małgorzata Zajązkowska as the Mother. However, the original intent of the film is fundamentally altered when it becomes apparent that Granny is suffering from dementia and the illness is rapidly worsening. As a result, the film is more of a record of a progressive disease, as well as of the changing relationships that take place between family members.

The composer creates the musical layer based on three basic ideas. The first is a kind of ragtime played on a piano with the specific sound of an old instrument. The second is the idea of styling it as a romantic nocturne, which appears in several instrumental settings. The third, on the other hand, is an enigmatic, static, and somewhat

dark set based on low string sounds, which appears only once, in the most dramatic scene of the escalation of the main character's illness symptoms.

In these three musical strands, the second idea—a kind of leitmotif (Wilczek-Krupa, 2014, p. 108) assigned to the character of the Grandmother—comes to the fore. For the first time, the composer uses it as an element of reference to the personal past when the heroine talks about her youth. It is therefore, again recalling Lissa's categories, also a “means of revealing memories” (Lissa, 1964, p. 206). But that only happens in the first scene. Then the same theme appears in an ever-changing context, always linked to the character of the Grandmother. Each time, too, in a different instrumental variant, a melodic shape slightly altered. However, there is always the same type of accompaniment on staggered chords with a predominance of bright, euphonic major arrangements that evoke an aura of calm, security and, at the same time, nostalgia. The first time is dominated by the timbre of glockenspiel-celesta, which directs the scene of memories to the period of childhood and the toy-music box sounds that belong to it.

The second time, this idea is the backdrop for the acting activities. Marek together with Grandma acts out the scenes that the camera captures. The music here is fused with a thread of amateur film recordings. It breaks off as Mother enters the room with an invitation to dinner. Symbolically, then, music is here linked to the world of illusion, the world of art, of the unreal.

The third instalment of this distinctive idea accompanies the clear signs of Grandma's illness, who, when going to get her shopping, gets lost and cannot cross the road. This time the musical theme sounds no longer as music-box. Here, the composer adds strings that build space, depth and, at the same time, anxiety.

In a final, very characteristic situation, the same motif appears as radio music. Thus, as in the film *Silence*, the music “remains in its natural role” (Lissa, 1964, p. 188). In addition, a listening Grandmother comments: “Oh, this is the kind of music I like best”. Thus, the music here enters into a dialogue with the unfolding action. At the same time, the words that follow lend credence to the intuition so far, underlining the sense of using this motif as music to identify the character of the Grandmother. In its radio final version, the musical idea is most nocturne-like, with the piano part accompanied by strings. The whole creates the illusion of the slow movement of an unknown 19th-century piano concerto.

This main musical idea, which appears four times in different variants, is complemented by the other two. The first is the idea initiating the film story. It appears as a backdrop to the first scenes recorded with the camera. Marek guides the viewer around the flat, entering the rooms one by one and commenting on where we are. Ragtime background music appears here in two senses: directly as a light dance tune that emphasises the impromptu mood of the scene, and symbolically as a reference to the origins of cinema, a period when this kind of music was performed by tapers illustrating silent films. The second is a motif accompanying the escalation of the illness, when Granny loses touch with reality and memory lapses lead to outbursts of aggression. Low bourdon sounds of strings appear here, with the sounds of tubular bells-glockenspiel again in the background, but this time they are complemented by reverberation which rather gives them the meaning of the sound of church bells.

What emerges again from these detailed observations is the very clear shape of the measures used. An initial, offbeat idea with dance-like features, referring to the history of cinema, is used here as a foreshadowing of amateur fun with the camera. Subsequently, the memories evoked and the accompanying motif of the Grandmother are only part of a flashback to childhood and early adolescence. Gradually, however, this musical motif breaks away from its original meaning through instrumental changes and internal transformative formulas eventually acquiring a form that is in a sense mature and at the same time external, as it flows from the radio.

And finally, the motif in which unsettling strings meet the sound of bells is a sort of ominous foreshadowing of the inevitable finale.

Walpurgis Night

Bortkiewicz's most spectacular picture, for which Czerniewicz wrote the music, is the 2015 feature-length film *Walpurgis Night*. Black and white, intimate cinema nevertheless touches on the most tragic events in 20th century European history. Almost all of the film's actions are locked in the dressing room of the great opera singer Nora Sendler (played by Malgorzata Zajaczkowska) following her performance at the Swiss Opera as Turandot on the evening of 30 April to 1 May 1969. This night is, according to Germanic belief tradition, Walpurgis Night, the night of ghosts, the dead, the night of witches. Witches' Sabbaths used to be held on this night. A young, unassuming journalist (Robert, played by Philippe Tłokiński) arrives at the singer's dressing room, but his intentions are not entirely transparent. A peculiar game begins in which the singer's past—her experience as a Jew from the Lodz Ghetto and a prisoner of Auschwitz—is the narrative axis. The protagonist of the film is also music, which is firstly the profession of the main character and, as it turns out in the course of the plot, also the profession of the young journalist; it awakens terrifying memories (the song "Mein Papa", Richard Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries", tangos and German songs from old records) and, finally, it offers a chance of survival (the viewer becomes convinced of this by listening to Nora's story from the war). In addition to evoking well-known musical themes, the film features an extended soundtrack. It could be said that this picture, which is over an hour long, gave the composer the chance to "spread his wings" more widely and write a soundtrack that blends in with the action of the film.

Referring to the successive segments of the film, the composer has constructed a nine-part soundtrack:

Whisky avec cola,
Misterioso,
Rain and night,
Lithuania!,
Ragtime,
Camp number,
Nora's Wardrobe,
An Instrument from Herta Grasse,
Neither bullets nor gas.

The names of these parts follow the action episodes. The music has a different relationship with them. Sometimes it is just a background or a reflection of memories, at other times it becomes the foreground vehicle of the action.

The most unambiguous in this respect is the episode in which Ragtime appears (c. 29:10). In the black-and-white painting, Nora tells the story of the golden dragon scarf, but the thing is that she tells it without a voice: with gestures and body movements only. In addition, her character moves in a manner characteristic of silent cinema: exaggerated, ecstatic gestures to the rhythm of a perfectly choreographed Ragtime dance. This association with silent cinema in the picture itself is heightened by the precise montage. Music, on the other hand, does not appear in the original sense of its function as in silent cinema: dramatic, aesthetic, or illustrative. It appears here as a kind of equivalent of the past, builds a close relationship with it, and has the sense of an intertextual, symbolic game with the viewer.

Another function is served by the theme *Lithuania!* (ca. 13:34), which accompanies the recitation of Mickiewicz's invocation from *Pan Tadeusz* (Mr. Thaddeus)¹. The music is clearly inspired by Wojciech Kilar's famous theme for the film under the same title, ostensibly in the rhythm of a polonaise, but with a changing arrangement of accents (kind of like a polonaise in 4). This quasi-relatedness reinforces the peculiar ceremoniality of the scene, but at the same time exposes its ridiculousness: the invocation is recited by Robert already after a *whisky sans cola*. Ostensibly, it is just music working together to shape the film narrative. In fact, however, it acts as a kind of cultural code, referring to national pathos, which in this instalment has an ironic dimension.

Among the other parts of this Soundtrack, the first theme, *Whisky avec cola*, is characteristic of the film, appearing even before the doors of the opera diva's dressing room open. In the scene with the doorman, a simple theme in which the composer initially combines the pizzicato of strings with the sound of glockenspiel symbolically reveals the second bottom of the somewhat nervous anticipation, while emphasising the fairytale-like character of the place, i.e. the backstage of the opera theatre.

Other motifs have a complementary, depth-building character. Sometimes they have the sense of reflections of the past, invoking a nostalgic, romanticising mood: for example, in the *Rain and Night* theme, the piano solo in a somewhat nocturnal approach, or in *Misterioso*, with a delicately sketched string line. Czerniewicz creates this music using his most favoured means—the technique of minimalism, where repetition is both a vehicle for persistence and change. In addition, he makes extensive use of his favourite instrumental means:

- glockenspiel, celesta, harp (and sometimes a specifically treated piano in this role)—leading to a characteristic glassy sound effect;
- strings in various takes, with a predominance of broad phrases and resounding soft consonances, which, discreetly passing one into the other, have the effect of deepening a reflective, nostalgic mood.

In addition, he reaches for euphonic sounds, sometimes framed by major-mole relationships, at other times, freely interpenetrating or lasting on the principle of broad planes.

All of these interventions contribute to the vision of the film, in which a subtle, poetic atmosphere meets the terrifying tragedy of personal experience. The music puts the spectator in the position of a distanced observer, helps to step over the threshold of the dressing room, supports the imagination that follows Nora's story. It also makes the strange, tense parts of the story a little more unreal, its dramatic twists, such as the attempts to play out the physical violence experienced by the main character, finally aiding the effect of purging the fears of the past. This past, however, does not let up in the film's terrifying conclusion.

Conclusion

The above detailed observations reveal three major problem areas as to the essence of Marek Czerniewicz's film music. Firstly, it is the director-composer relationship at the level of vision formation. Secondly, these are functions of music that, for the most part, have a symbolic meaning. Thirdly, there are the means used by the composer and his authorial aesthetic, i.e. showing his own face.

Director-Composer

In the beginning, the collaboration between composer Marek Czerniewicz and director Marcin Bortkiewicz

¹ Full title: *Sir Thaddeus, or the Last Foray in Lithuania: A Nobility's Tale of the Years 1811-1812, in Twelve Books of Verse*. This is a very important poem for Polish tradition and history, written (1832-1834) by Adam Mickiewicz during the Partitions of Poland. Its invocation is a symbol of patriotism, of love for the homeland. It is compulsory reading in Polish schools and children still learn it by heart.

was determined by a personal acquaintance. However, this meeting did not have to be so fruitful. Instead, it turned out that the creators somewhat share a certain sensibility, an understanding of the world around them, that somehow their paths intersect and that these are not just social issues. The composer always emphasises that he is humbled by the director's vision. Such an approach is, moreover, typical of film music composers, as Maria Wilczek-Krupa also points out in relation to the work of Wojciech Kilar (Wilczek-Krupa, 2014). What is important, however, is that the composer, following the director's vision, is able to give it a deepened, sometimes even surprisingly intense, expression. This added value, which is born intentionally already at the stage of the idea of the work, makes the film ultimately not only complete with music. By following the narrative of the image, music becomes an autonomous space. It has the power to create content that does not arise directly from the film script.

Music in Relation to the Image

In the music that Marek Czerniewicz composes for the films of Marcin Bortkiewicz, we repeatedly observe her in the symbolic role. Maria Wilczek-Krupa points out that "the author of the soundtrack plays, in a sense, the role of the first interpreter of the content of the film work" (Wilczek-Krupa, 2014, p. 109). This approach means that the composer, while conforming to the director's vision, also discovers and elaborates on meanings not visible on screen. In this interpretation, the author distinguishes four basic categories of the symbolic function of music: recalling, recurring, describing, and commenting. Recalling—recalls earlier scenes, recurring—reinforces specific impressions or draws the viewer's attention to character traits, describing—evokes through musical style or measures the character's personality traits, commentary—elaborates on the plot, or actions taken by the characters.

With regard to Czerniewicz's music, these categories are an adequate research and comparison tool. The symbolic nature of his music basically reveals itself in each successive step. In *Silence*—the music symbolises the moment of departure, the transition to the other side, it has a recalling and commenting sense. It recalls the ritual of passing away, comments on, and actually becomes a narrative. In *Initial Training*, the gradual addition of the initial musical idea symbolises the stages of seal development. Furthermore, the music autonomously builds the emotional sphere of the film. It comments on and even reveals the feelings that accompany the keeper's interaction with the seals. In this sense, it becomes a foreground element. It thus corresponds to the category of recurring function by consolidating impressions and drawing the viewer's attention to the character's traits, sensitivity, and attachment to the seal. In *Drawn from Memory*, the leitmotif of the Grandmother is symbolic on several levels. Firstly, it stands for something different each time: a memory of a carefree childhood or a world of theatrical illusion. Secondly, its successive exposures, by changing mainly instrumental means, symbolize the stages of illness. The motif thus has a recurring and descriptive function by evoking the main character through stylistics. In *Walpurgis Night*, the symbolic nature of the successive themes makes them a separate key to understanding the film, creating a parallel narrative of sorts, performing descriptive and commentary functions.

Me-Czerniewicz

The means used by the composer grow organically out of his metier. In all the images discussed, both aesthetics and sound technique are rooted in Czerniewicz's compositional self. In this sense, no false tone appears here. Traditional tonality shifts to euphonic, characteristic instruments: piano, strings, glockenspiel, harp; typical genres growing out of 19th-century style; the role of minimal music in terms of the use of repetition but also simplification of means; bringing melodicism to the fore. To this resource can also be added the extremely skillful

use of stylization, as in both *Ragtime*'s, the quasi-nocturnes, or in the fragment *Lithuania!* from *Walpurgis Night*. So despite the obvious differences between the films, the music reveals its own face, regardless of the narrative context.

To conclude all the detailed observations, it must be emphasised that in the films presented, music remains an essential component of the plot and sometimes even comes to the fore. Its strength stems from the composer's genuine involvement, who leaves his own authorial commentary in the film work.

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