

Embracing Folk Material
and Finding the New Objectivity:
Karol Szymanowski's
Twenty Mazurkas Op. 50
and Two Mazurkas Op. 62

Prace Naukowe



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A n n a K i j a n o w s k a

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Preface

This book was inspired by my deep affection for Karol Szymanowski's music, the Góral – or Highlander – culture of the south, and the beauty of the Tatra Mountains which soar in the Podhale region of my native Poland.

As an active performer, I have faced criticism from teachers and fellow artists concerning my production of “harsh” sounds, my liberal approach to tempi, and my extensive use of *rubato* during my performances of Szymanowski's *Mazurkas*. This criticism arose from the mistaken belief that his compositions should be approached in the same way as Chopin's *Mazurkas*. This lack of knowledge about Góral culture, and in particular its music and character, became my motivation for choosing the subject of this dissertation. It is intended as a reminder that Karol Szymanowski's *Mazurkas* were predominantly inspired by Podhale folk music, that the compositions are a collection of various dances in a great variety of tempi, and that subsequently their interpretation should reflect the harsh and driven sounds that are found at the roots of Highland Góral music.

This book is dedicated to my daughter.

Anna Kijanowska
(www.annakijanowska.com)

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Summary

This book examines the presence of folk material in and the influence of the New Objectivity on the *Mazurkas* op. 50 and op. 62 by Karol Szymanowski through various elements: rhythmic patterns, form, proportions, phrase structure, texture, accompaniment patterns, and articulation. Special emphasis is placed on the influence of the folk music practiced in the Highland region of the Tatra Mountains and its unquestionable presence in the *Mazurkas*. This dissertation dispenses with an analysis of the tonal system in the *Mazurkas*, a topic extensively covered in a thesis by Ann Kossakowski (Yale University, 1980).

Chapter 1 discusses stylistic differences in Szymanowski's works prior to the 1920s and beyond, as well as general trends in European music of that period. Chapter 2 focuses on the New Objectivity movement which is exemplified by the return to traditional forms and textures. Found in the works of Schoenberg, Stravinsky, and Hindemith, this new trend represents the search for a new direction reflective of Baroque and Classical models. The subsequent chapter is devoted exclusively to Polish folk music with distinctions drawn between Lowland and Highland folk styles and draws upon various examples of folk dances and songs.

The main body of the book begins in Chapter 4, which is devoted to the analysis of the *Mazurkas*. A close look at the individual elements of the compositions highlights the remarkable way in which Szymanowski's music manifests the New Objectivity in its texture, clear phrase structure, symmetrical proportions, and the rhythmic unity achieved through irregular accents typical of folk music.

Chapter 5 explores the interpretive challenges a performer faces in the *Mazurkas* and examines each composition individually, analyzing the character and function of key elements: rhythmic patterns, articulation, and especially *rubato*.

Szymanowski's influence on modern Polish music and his contribution to later generations cannot be overstated and is the subject matter of the last chapter, followed by a summation in the conclusion.

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