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Opera in Miniature

Around my piece *Raport o stanie planety* for four solo voices and ensemble

Skriftlig reflektion inom självständigt arbete

Det självständiga, konstnärliga arbetet finns dokumenterat i KMH:s digitala arkiv

Contents

Introduction.....	1
1. Opera	4
1.1. The Genre.....	4
1.1.1. The Paradox of Opera	4
1.1.2. Transformations of the Opera Genre.....	5
1.2. Opera in Miniature	8
1.2.1. Connection with the Opera Genre	8
1.2.2. The Ten Movements.....	9
2. Maximalism and Polystylism.....	14
2.1. Maximalism, or Keeping All the Plates Spinning at Once.....	14
2.1.1. The Term and Beginnings of Maximalistic Music	14
2.1.2. Symphony at its Maximum	15
2.1.3. Maximalism without Maximum of Sound.....	16
2.2. Polystylism, or All Over the Place	19
2.2.1. Musical Allusions in Alfred Schnittke's Music	19
2.2.2. Polystylism in Works by Other Composers	21
2.3. Polystylism at Its Maximum, or My Own Approach	24
2.3.1. Maximalism, and How to Handle It	24
2.3.2. Polystylism, and What Exactly Is In There	25
3. Conclusion	27
Reference list	30
Literature.....	30
Internet	31
Musical pieces	31
Appendices	33
Score of the piece	33
English translation of the libretto made by its author Michał Rogalski	33

Introduction

This thesis is a culmination of a two-year master program called Contemporary Performance and Composition (CoPeCo), a program that takes place each semester in a different music academy or university in Europe: Eesti Muusika- ja Teatriakadeemia in Tallinn, Kungliga Musikhögskolan in Stockholm, Conservatoire national supérieur de musique et de danse in Lyon and Hochschule für Musik und Theater in Hamburg. For my final project I composed a chamber opera (“opera in miniature” as I like to call it) *Raport o stanie planety (Planet Report)* for four solo voices and ensemble consisting of nine musicians. The main purposes of this thesis are to analyze the compositional techniques I used in that piece, problematize my artistic ideas, as well as put them in a context of other works.

My fascination for operatic music reaches my early childhood. Although from my very first contact with the opera genre – listening to Giuseppe Verdi’s *Nabucco* at the Warsaw National Opera House at the age of two – I remember feeling overwhelmed and terrified, ever since I watched Gioacchino Rossini’s *Italian in Algiers* at the Warsaw Chamber Opera at the age of eight I became a big opera fan. I used to attend basically all the shows at two opera houses in Warsaw, both more traditional and the experimental ones, with music from the baroque times until the present day, including works premiered in Warsaw, such as *Qudsja Zaher* by Paweł Szymański (2013) and *Moby Dick* by Eugeniusz Knapik (written in 2011 and premiered in 2014). However, I have been always fascinated the most by the operas by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and attended the Mozart Festival at the Warsaw Chamber Opera every summer, where all his operas were performed. I admired the combination of Mozart’s compositional craft at the highest level with the incredible lightness and colorfulness of his music. As a child, I remember being frequently told, that my musical taste would definitely change, once I grow up. Well, that has not happened yet. I would still love to hear all the Mozart’s operas during the Mozart Festival (sadly, the Warsaw Chamber Opera does not exist anymore) and do not feel like watching the story of *Nabucco* again (I tried it one more time though and still did not become a fan of the sublimity of Verdi’s music).

Despite my fascination of the opera, for a long time I did not think of composing one, since this genre seemed not to fit my compositional style at all. The great majority of my pieces are rather short (or extremely short as my *5 Aphorisms* for piano, lasting between 15 seconds

and one minute) and focused on presenting single, clear ideas, rather than large transformations of the material. I also tend to compose for small, chamber ensembles and do not see myself as a symphonist. In terms of aesthetics, my music is far from the post-romantic pathos, although I do think, that there is certain degree of emotionality. I like imposing clear rules on myself, in fields such as harmony and rhythm (such as creating modes or composing strictly bitonal or polyrhythmic music). At the same time, I have always been interested in combining music with text. As a result, I composed such pieces as *2 Songs after Poems by Edward Stachura* for mezzo-soprano and guitar (2010), *Gorzka miłość* after a poem by Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz for bass and piano (2010), a cantata *Oleander* for soprano and baroque ensemble (2015), as well as my music for theatre and radio plays.

In 2019 I decided to make an attempt to find a way for myself to write an opera, while remaining true to who I am as a composer. Thus, I came up with an idea of condensing the opera form into a relatively short piece of music and that is how I started working on my piece called *Raport o stanie planety (Planet Report)*. *Raport o stanie planety* lasts 13 minutes and is written for four solo voices (soprano, alto, tenor and bass) and a chamber ensemble. It consists of 10 short movements, such as arias, duets, quartets and an instrumental *intermezzo*, different from each other in terms of style. Among those movements there is an *a capella* part sung using the technique of *Sprechgesang* on the single consonants and vowels, where all the notated pitches are relative, as well as a movement written in the style of Mozart. One of my main ideas was to compose music in contrast to the text. Thus, the most dramatic movement is the first aria, where the text is completely plain and informative, whereas the eight movement, where the text speaks about the world's destruction is a tango with a jazz-like soprano saxophone solo. The *libretto* was written by a Polish writer and philosopher Michał Rogalski and is set in a big, global corporation. By spreading a pretty simple, homogeneous text into ten movements that are all different from one another, I wanted to emphasize it in a non-obvious way, as well as get new meanings out of it.

Due to the pandemic of COVID-19 the final concerts of the CoPeCo program, initially planned for July 2020, have been cancelled. That is why also my piece could not be performed on stage. In these circumstances my opera will be premiered online, with prerecorded voices and MIDI instruments.

In this thesis I aim to elaborate more about the techniques I used when composing my opera and problematize my compositional ideas. The thesis consists of two chapters, as well as an introduction and a conclusion. The first chapter is dedicated to the opera as a genre. I am

going to try to capture its main features and showcase its evolution throughout the music history. In subchapter 1.2. I will consider how my own piece relates to the opera genre. At its end I will also describe briefly each of the ten movements of my opera, focusing on the plot and its relation to the music. In the second chapter I would like to contextualize my piece by discussing two phenomena I find important to my piece: maximalism and polystylism. In subchapter 2.1. I am going to discuss several ways of approaching maximalism in music, focusing on examples from the beginning of the 20th century, such as Gustav Mahler's symphonies on one hand and punctualistic works by Anton Webern on another. Subchapter 2.2. devoted to polystylism, starts with discussing the phenomenon of polystylism in relation to works by Alfred Schnittke. Later on (subchapter 2.2.2.), I will also give examples of polystylistic elements in music by other composers, dividing it based on the way it relates to other styles – into allusions, quotations and stylizations. At the end of chapter 2. I am going to analyze the ways in which my opera can be considered maximalistic and polystylistic. Subchapter 2.3.1., apart from the topic of maximalism, raises also a question of perception of my work, which I find relevant when discussing such a dense and varied piece of music. In subchapter 2.3.2. dedicated to polystylism in my piece, I will give more detailed information about some of my compositional methods. In the conclusion I am going to summarize my thesis, relating to the topics raised in the two previous chapters – the genre of opera, maximalism and polystylism. In the final section of my thesis I will also consider, how having my work premiered online my affect the overall experience of my piece.

1. Opera

1.1. The Genre

1.1.1. The Paradox of Opera

In subchapter 1.1. I am going to attempt to characterize the genre of opera. I find doing this important, since in the next subchapter I will be considering the ways in which I have related to the opera genre in my own piece. This section (subchapter 1.1.1.) is based on the research article by Andreas Dorschel called "The Paradox of Opera"¹, complemented by information found, among others, in the *Grove Music Online* encyclopedia² (the article about opera in the *Grove Music Online* was used also when writing subchapter 1.1.2.).

The opera is a unique genre, based on the idea of combining three fields of art – music, language and the stage play. As we can read in Dorschel's article, opera without music would be a drama; without language, it would be a ballet or a pantomime; and without the stage play, it would be a cantata or an oratorio. Opera is usually a large piece of music, meaning to fulfill alone the whole evening (except for one-act operas, which are often performed in pairs) and is typically performed in the opera houses. Opera houses, especially the more modern ones, contain a big hall with a stage and an orchestra pit.

A crucial part of the opera form is the *libretto* – the lyrics of an opera. The purpose of the *libretto* is to serve the music, not to be a sufficient work of art itself. Here is what Dorschel writes about it in his article:

The libretto has to be a perfect imperfection: something that both allows for and calls for a complement. An adequate libretto is a structured, but in a crucial aspect empty, space that needs to be and can be filled.³

The *libretto* is often written before the music, although in some cases (operas by Mikhail Glinka, Nikolai Rimski-Korsakov, Giacomo Puccini) the librettists were the ones, who

¹ Dorschel A. (2001). "The Paradox of Opera" from *The Cambridge Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 4. Oxford University Press.

² Brown H. M., Rosand E., Strohm R., Noiray M., Parker R., Whittall A., Savage R., Millington B. (2001). *Grove Music Online. Opera*
<https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000040726?rskey=0OQjkP&result=8>

³ Dorschel A. (2001). "The Paradox of Opera" from *The Cambridge Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 4. Oxford University Press, p. 293.

had to fit their words to the precomposed melodies, not the other way around. Some of the *libretti* were based on preexisting texts (such as Tchaikovsky's *Queen of Spades* based on Pushkin's novella of the same name, Berlioz's *The Damnation of Faust* based on Goethe's dramatic poem *Faust* or Berg's *Wozzeck* based on Georg Büchner's play *Woyzeck*). Certain composers wrote *libretti* to their operas by themselves. Next to the above-mentioned Berlioz and Berg, the most famous example of such composer was Richard Wagner.

The article "The Paradox of Opera" raises interesting issues related to the genre of opera. One of them is the unnaturalness or even ridiculousness of the fact that regardless of what the characters are experiencing at the moment, they always sing. The author brings here examples of Tristan and Siegfried, title characters of operas by Wagner, who both sing while dying ("The last breath of Wagner's Tristan, for instance, needs to be powerful enough to reach the top gallery of a large opera house, and his Siegfried has to sing a long passage with a spear sticking between his shoulder-blades"⁴). The French writer and philosopher Voltaire, quoted by Dorschel, went even further and called the constant singing immoral. According to him an opera is a "sort of drama, where one is bound to sing arias, when the town is destroyed."⁵ I must say that the ridiculousness of this genre is probably one of its features which fascinates me the most; it is one of the reasons why I decided to compose an opera and also why I would love to compose more of them. In my opinion, the combination of drama and absurdity, nobleness and superficiality, as well as pathos and silliness make this genre compelling both for composers and theatre directors to this day.

1.1.2. Transformations of the Opera Genre

Throughout the music history, the genre of opera went through several transformations. Also, the composers dealt with its paradoxes in different ways. In this section of this thesis I am going to present selected information about the development of the opera genre that I find relevant to my work, relying mostly on the article about opera in the encyclopedia *Grove Music Online*⁶. I will focus on transformations in the structure of opera, not so much on its topics or aesthetics.

⁴ Dorschel A. (2001). "The Paradox of Opera" from *The Cambridge Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 4. Oxford University Press, p. 284-285.

⁵ Ibid, p. 287.

⁶ Brown H. M., Rosand E., Strohm R., Noiray M., Parker R., Whittall A., Savage R., Millington B. (2001). *Grove Music Online. Opera*
<https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000040726?rskey=0OQjkP&result=8>

The English composer Henry Purcell wrote only one stage piece, where the characters sing all the time, and this is his famous opera *Dido and Aeneas* (1689). Apart from that Purcell composed number of extended musical *intermezzi* to the preexisting dramas, presumably finding it a more suitable form to complement the dramatic texts.⁷ In the baroque times the division between arias and recitatives was established. Arias were sung movements for a solo voice and orchestra, where the text was usually expressing the character's emotions at the current moment of the drama. Recitatives on the other hand, were supposed to move the action forward and were either spoken or sung freely in terms of rhythm, following the prosody of the text, with an accompaniment of *basso continuo*. At the turn of the 18th century, composers of the Neapolitan school such as Alessandro Scarlatti and Nicola Porpora introduced a new type of recitative called *recitativo accompagnato*, performed with an accompaniment of the orchestra, as opposed to the *recitativo secco* performed only with *basso continuo*. Division between arias, recitatives and ensembles (movements performed by several singers) was maintained throughout the 18th century (works by Joseph Haydn and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart) and partially into the 19th century (works by Giacomo Rossini, Gaetano Donizetti and Vincenzo Bellini). The opera form was opened by an overture, where in some cases motifs from the latter movements were introduced (like in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, where the composer plays with the Commendatore's theme from the 2nd act). In the 19th century the genre of opera was reformed by Richard Wagner, who broke with the concept of arias and recitatives, in favor of creating his famous, 'never-ending' vocal lines. More about Wagner's operatic works can be found in the subchapter 2.1.1.

It is not possible within the scope of this subchapter to cover all of the ways in which operas were composed during the 20th century. However, in accordance with the categories of opera listed in *Grove Music Online*, I will attempt here to list the main 'streams' of Western opera that developed during this time. The turn of the century brought, apart from the compositions inspired by the national traditions by Pyotr Tchaikovsky, Modest Musorgsky, and Antonin Dvořák, deeply lyric operas by Giacomo Puccini (e.g. *Tosca*, *Madama Butterfly*), and the subtle, symbolic *Pelléas and Mélisande* by Claude Debussy. Simultaneously, there were composed grandiose, post-Wagnerian works by Richard Strauss (*Salome*, *Elektra*). Within the more atonal, expressionistic operas the best known one is *Wozzeck* written by Alban Berg in

⁷ Dorschel A. (2001). "The Paradox of Opera" from *The Cambridge Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 4. Oxford University Press, 283-306. Also, at this point of my thesis I stop referencing to this source.

1925. Also in the 1920s, composers were creating post-romantic (*King Roger* by Karol Szymanowski), as well as lighter, comedic operas, often including subject of magic (*The Love for Three Oranges* by Sergei Prokofiev, *L'enfant et les sortilèges* by Maurice Ravel). Composers other than Prokofiev, who were writing in a neo-classical style, were Igor Stravinsky (*Oedipus Rex*, *The Rake's Progress*) and Dmitri Shostakovich (*Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*). The most important figure in the British 20th century opera was Benjamin Britten (*Peter Grimes*, *The Rape of Lucretia*, *Billy Budd*), who was able to incorporate more traditional music into his works with an ease and lightness. In his later operatic works (*Curlew River*, *The Burning Fiery Furnace*), Britten turned away from composing for orchestras, in favor of chamber ensembles. Among the modernistic operas from the second half of century, especially noteworthy are works by Luciano Berio (*Un re in ascolto*), Györgi Ligeti (*Le Grand Macabre*) and a seven-opera cycle called *Licht (Light)* by Karlheinz Stockhausen. In the USA the second half of the 20th century brought the rise of minimalistic opera (*Einstein on the Beach* by Philip Glass, *Nixon in China* by John Adams).

Within the most recently composed operas I admire the most, excellent in terms of instrumentation works by Thomas Adès (*Powder her Face*, *The Tempest*) and multimedia operas by Michael van der Aa (*After Life*, *Sunken Garden*). There are also very interesting operas created in the recent years in Poland, such as *Qudsja Zaher* by Paweł Szymański and *The Magic Mountain* by Paweł Mykietyn.⁸

⁸ At this point of my thesis I stop referencing to the following source: Brown H. M., Rosand E., Strohm R., Noiray M., Parker R., Whittall A., Savage R., Millington B. (2001). *Grove Music Online. Opera* <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000040726?rkey=00QjkP&result=8>

1.2. Opera in Miniature

1.2.1. Connection with the Opera Genre

This part of my thesis is devoted to my piece called *Raport o stanie planety* (*Planet Report*). In subchapter 1.2.1. I am going to discuss its connection to the genre of opera, relying on the information gained at the beginning of chapter 1. Later on (subchapter 1.2.2.) I will list all the movements of my opera and describe them briefly, paying special attention to the clash between the plot and the music.

I like to call *Raport o stanie planety* an “opera in miniature”, since my main idea was to condense the form of an opera in a relatively short period of time, lasting between 10 and 15 minutes (at the end the performance of my piece takes about 13 minutes). My *Report* has been written for four voices - soprano, alto, tenor and bass – and an ensemble consisting of following instruments: flute (also alto flute), B-flat clarinet, saxophone (soprano and tenor), trombone, percussion for 1 player, violin, viola, cello and double bass involving a conductor. It is meant to be staged, not only performed as a concert piece.

The *libretto* was written especially for my piece by a Polish writer, philosopher and theatre director Michał Rogalski. Initially, my idea for the *libretto* was to use a text that was not written with an aim of being staged. I wanted to use one of the current reports about effects of global warming. I had already done similar thing in my cantata *Oleander*, where I composed an aria to an encyclopedic definition of a plant. While writing *Oleander*, I discovered that using text, which is plain in terms of dramaturgy, leaves more space to the music. The music can be emotional without being too maudlin or pathetic, which is often the case in my opinion, when it doubles the meaning of the text. At the end Michał Rogalski developed my idea and brought it to a higher level. He used some information from the actual report, but also gave it a little bit of a context. At the same time, he followed my suggestion of not creating fully developed characters and leaving them barely sketched, so that there is still a lot of space both for me as a composer and for the director. The *libretto* is set in a big, global corporation and concerns a training about global warming. However, in its final version, the global warming became more of a pretext to showcase the relationships between the employers and the employees, as well as gender division in the company. The majority of the text was written in Polish. Though it includes also certain words and phrases in English, imitating the way people working in big companies in Poland are talking nowadays. While composing my opera, I was in close collaboration with the author of the *libretto* and he was adjusting the text according to my needs.

For instance, we were shortening or prolonging some parts and changing certain words or expressions, depending on what I needed for the particular movement in terms of form, dramaturgy, as well as rhythm and vocal lines.

A list of the roles in my opera is as follows:

- Ania, one of the employees of the corporation, chosen to become a "coach assistant" – soprano
- Modelowa Pracownica Korporacji (An Archetypical Corporation Employee) - alto
- Darek, an "eco coach" – tenor
- Marek, the other "eco coach" – bass

1.2.2. The Ten Movements

My piece consists of ten very short movements, varying from each other in terms of style⁹ (the matter of polystylism in my opera will be discussed in the subchapter 2.3.2. of this thesis). The movements, named typically for the opera genre, are: two arias (alto and soprano, respectively numbers 1 and 9 – "Aria with porpoises"), four duets (numbers 3, 4, 6, and 10; number 6 also possesses features of a recitative), three quartets (numbers 5, 7 and 8), an instrumental *intermezzo* (*Intermezzo caffè – Coffee Break*) and a "finale", which the last section of number 10.

The full list of the movements of my opera can be found below:

1. Aria (*Modelowa Pracownica Korporacji*)
2. Intermezzo caffè
3. Duet (*Ania, Modelowa Pracownica Korporacji*)
4. Duet (*Darek, Marek*)

⁹ The term style in this context is used freely and relates to the esthetics, harmony and compositional methods of the particular movements in my piece. It can be taken directly from another composer, inspired by other composer or a music genre or follow compositional rules I imposed on myself without relating to any other composer or genre.

5. Quartet „To jest układ dobry dla wszystkich” (*Ania, Modelowa Pracownica Korporacji, Darek, Marek*)
6. Duet (*Darek, Marek*)
7. Reading the Report (*Ania, Modelowa Pracownica Korporacji, Darek, Marek*)
8. Tango (*Ania, Modelowa Pracownica Korporacji, Darek, Marek*)
9. Aria with Porpoises (*Ania*)
10. Duet (*Darek, Marek*) + Finale

As mentioned before, I decided to compose my music in contrast to the text. In the section below I will present the plot of my opera, as well as showcase, how it clashes with the music in each particular movement of my piece.

1. Aria (*Modelowa Pracownica Korporacji*)

The text in the first movement is purely informative. The Archetypical Corporation Employee is presenting the current situation (“we are having a training” repeated several times in slightly different words) and assuring us, how well the corporation functions (“our corporation is *social[ly] responsible*. It is also *eco-responsible*. It is *so responsible, so diverse*, there is *no discrimination* and *so much of empathy*.”)¹⁰ In terms of music, this is the most dramatic one from the ten movements. I gradually developed the material, with its climax in bar 27 (“*no discrimination* and *so much of empathy*”). The music is very chromaticized and the vocal line is composed solely with semitones, fourths, their inversions (fifths and major sevenths) and a tritone being the sum of the two.

2. Intermezzo caffè

“Intermezzo caffè” (“The Coffee Break”) is the only purely instrumental movement of my opera. My idea was to create music without any development or contrast (*mp sempre*). It is based on two kinds of articulations used alternatively: half notes played *tremolo* and the two eighth notes played *staccato*. The only intervals heard vertically are fourths and fifths and in between them I always used semitones and minor thirds. During this movement the singers are

¹⁰ The text, which is originally written in English, has been marked with italics.

supposed to make loud, aperiodic noises, such as hitting the tea cups with spoons or putting the tea cups firmly on the table.

3. Duet (Ania, Modelowa Pracownica Korporacji)

In the third movement Ania and The Archetypical Corporation Employee are introducing the two "eco coaches" Darek and Marek. In order to make this scene more ridiculous, I composed a sublime, almost triumphal music with a big climax at the end. In terms of harmony this movement is a continuation of the previous one. However, here the "empty" fourths and fifths are juxtaposed with another ones (located a triton higher) and serve also as a melodic material for the two voices and instruments. For instance, at the very beginning, to the tones c, f, I added f-sharp and b and create a following mode: f, f-sharp, b and c.

4. Duet (Darek, Marek)

In this movement the two male characters Darek and Marek are introducing themselves and presenting their achievements ("We've been working for so long already, so long. We have won so many grants. We have won so many awards."), as well as are choosing Ania to become their assistant. The lively, rhythmical music is based on the juxtaposition of two transpositions of the mode built with semitones and minor thirds. Whereas the solo voices and the higher sounding instruments are playing the pitches c, c-sharp, e, f, g-sharp and a, the trombone and lower strings are playing the augmented chord d, f-sharp, b-flat, belonging to another transposition of the same mode.

5. Quartet „To jest układ dobry dla wszystkich” (Ania, Modelowa Pracownica Korporacji, Darek, Marek)

Movement 5 concerns the gender inequality between the employees of corporation. As an example of that problem can serve the first lines sung by Darek and Marek: "This is a good arrangement for everyone. We speak and Ania assists. (...) Ania helps us and we coach." In contrast to the serious topic, I composed a light, fully tonal stylization for an ensemble from one of the Mozart's operas. Paradoxically, I believe, that the music, saying that "everything is as it should be and we are all happy", showcased the injustice of gender inequality even stronger.

6. Duet (*Darek, Marek*)

In their second duet Darek and Marek are singing about the title report on the effects of the global warming. The way the vocal lines have been written (e.g. repeating the same pitch several times) resembles a recitative in a traditional opera. In the first section, the Darek's part is composed solely using semitones, major thirds and a triton (later there also fourths, being a sum of the first two intervals). The chords are built predominantly with fourths and tritons, similarly to the first aria. Another rule I should mention here is the way I distinguished the English text from the Polish one in the music. The lines, which were originally in English are often more melismatic and there are several pitches sung on one syllable. The clearest exemplification of this idea is the huge *glissando* in Darek's part performed on the phrase "in English" in bar 6.

7. Reading the report (*Ania, Modelowa Pracownica Korporacji, Darek, Marek*)

In order to distinguish reading from speaking in one's own words, I needed to compose movement 7 in a significantly different way than the nine other ones. That is why I decided to compose it solely using the technique of *Sprechgesang* with pitches notated relatively. The singers perform single consonants and vowels, which altogether create entire words.

8. Tango (*Ania, Modelowa Pracownica Korporacji, Darek, Marek*)

In the movement 8 the four characters continue reading the title report, although the text here becomes more dramatic, almost apocalyptic („The planet's condition is rapidly deteriorating. Wildlife and biodiversity are rapidly disappearing. We are all in a very bad place, no exceptions.”). At the same time, the music becomes lighter. Movement is a jazz-like tango, where the meter is 4.5/4, instead of 4/4. In contrast to movement 7, in the eighth movement they singers are reciting the text simultaneously, without any suggested pitches.

9. Aria with porpoises (*Ania*)

In her aria, Ania is serving more specific knowledge about the effects of global warming in relation to Poland, with particular attention to the extincted and threatened animal species („Three species started the extinction. These were: sturgeon, common skate and gull-billed tern (...) Another hundred twenty-eight species are threatened with extinction.”). Whereas the text is rather scientific and informative, the vocal line is very expressive and ornamented.

Stylistically, this movement resembles a baroque aria, however the harmony is strictly bitonal (the soprano, woodwinds and higher sounding strings are playing in E-flat minor and the rest of the ensemble is playing in C minor).

10. Duet (*Darek, Marek*) + Finale

Movement 10 consists of two separate sections. First of them is Marek and Darek's duet, where the two are thanking the employees of the company for attending their training. It finishes with an unsuccessful joke from Darek („This is training, so we need at least two days. Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha. Ha ha ha!“). The harmony is based on the forth-triton chords and so are the vocal lines.

In the “Finale” I come back for a while to the classicistic style from movement 5. However, together with accelerating the tempo, also the pitches get higher and the section ends in F major, not in D major as it started. This effect was inspired by the sound of a driving ambulance, which changes its pitch as the ambulance moves away from the listener.

2. Maximalism and Polystylism

2.1. Maximalism, or Keeping All the Plates Spinning at Once

2.1.1. The Term and Beginnings of Maximalistic Music

The term “maximalism” in relation to music may refer to various elements of the piece, such as its length, emotional impact, harmonic complexity, wealth of instrumentation or amount of non-musical references. However, in this thesis I will focus primarily on maximalism in the meaning of high rate of musical events in relation to the duration of the piece, as well as density of changes in the field of harmony, dynamics, instrumentation etc. This is also the way I consider my opera to be “maximalistic” – my piece is rather short and far from the post-romantic grandiosity, although it is full of different, often contrasting material. This subchapter (2.1.) is based on the first chapter of *Music in the early twentieth century. Oxford history of western music vol. 4* by Richard Taruskin¹¹, compiled with my own selection of pieces falling into a category of maximalism. I have decided to introduce several approaches to this phenomenon here (subchapter 2.1.), so I can relate to it when speaking about maximalistic tendencies in my own piece in subchapter 2.3.1.

Although Taruskin discusses maximalism in relation to music from the *fin de siècle* (turn of the 20th century), I find it important to mention here the name of Richard Wagner. Due to the features of his operatic works, Wagner may, in my opinion, be considered as a precursor of maximalism in music. He was a creator of the concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk* (“the total work of art”), which aimed to closely integrate music, text and the theatrical aspect of opera¹². Wagner believed that all the above-mentioned elements should be controlled by a composer and wrote himself *libretti* to all of his operas.

In this section I will discuss selected features of Wagner’s operas, which fall, in my opinion, into the category of maximalism. First of all, the length of his works may challenge even the most dedicated opera fans. His operas last more than three hours and the longest one of them all – *Götterdämmerung* (*Twilight of the Gods*) takes about five and a half hours. Furthermore, in his late works - belonging to the genre of “dramma per musica” (“music

¹¹ Taruskin R. (2010), *Music in the Early Twentieth Century: The Oxford History of Western Music vol. 4*. Oxford University Press.

¹² Wagner R. (1895) *The Art-Work of the Future*. The Wagner Library. Translation: W. A. Ellis, Chapter 2.

drama”) - he moves away from the idea of dividing operas into separate movements, creating long, indivisible parts structured based on the prosody of the text.¹³ At the same time his operas are full of emotional impact, as well as philosophical references (mostly to Arthur Schopenhauer’s philosophical pessimism), which raises a question of perceptibility of his works.

Wagner was also a pioneer, when it comes to leading major-minor harmony to the extreme, by using unusual chord combinations and stuffing his music with chromatism (famous “Tristan chord” opening his *Tristan and Isolde*). He was composing for the large orchestra and using the full instrumental variety, including unusual instruments, such as bass trumpet and contrabass trombone. He even commissioned a new instrument, called the Wagner tuba, combining features of the French horn and trombone for his opera cycle *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.

2.1.2. Symphony at its Maximum

When speaking of maximalism in the symphony, I cannot skip the composer who was aiming to write a symphony “so great that the whole world is actually reflected therein – so that one is, so to speak, only an instrument upon, when the universe speaks.”¹⁴ This composer was Gustav Mahler, the continuator of Beethoven’s work, who brought the genre to its climax, as the last one from the great German symphonists. Here also it makes sense to mention the length of Mahler’s works. All of his symphonies last either close to an hour or more than that, with his 2nd, 8th and 9th symphonies lasting about an hour and a half. Mahler’s music is often recognized for how it constantly aims for the harmonic conclusion but forces the listener to wait a long time for it. As far as the harmony is concerned, his music was very much based on the dominant-tonic gravity. However, because of using it to the extreme, he is considered to be the one to initiate the revolution of the early twentieth-century music.

Mahler tended to also be “maximalistic” in his orchestration. In order to give an example of Mahler’s instrumentation I am going to list here all the instruments in his *Symphony No. 2 “Resurrection”*: 4 flutes (all doubling piccolo), 4 oboes (3rd and 4th doubling the English horn), 3 B-flat, A and C clarinets (all doubling bass clarinet), 4 bassoons (3rd and 4th doubling

¹³ Finck H. T. *The Wagner Music-Drama*: <http://users.belgacom.net/wagnerlibrary/articles/atl039235.htm#about>

¹⁴ Taruskin R. (2010), *Music in the Early Twentieth Century: The Oxford History of Western Music vol. 4*. Oxford University Press, p. 6.

contrabassoon), 10 horns (also offstage), 10 trumpets (also offstage), 4 trombones, tuba, big percussion, organ, soprano and alto solo, mixed choir and large string section. The unusual element here, apart from the number of players itself, is the presence of solo voices and choir. Mahler made the genre of symphony merge in many ways with the genre of the symphonic poem created by Franz Liszt¹⁵. By using text, he brought the development of symphony, at that point one of the clearest examples of instrumental music forms, to a new chapter. (Though this had been done before by Beethoven in his *Symphony No. 9*, Mahler is often recognized as the first composer to integrate these forms on such a large scale.) In the above-mentioned example of his *Symphony No.2*, the composer combined the old German folk poem *Urlicht* from the cycle *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* with the poem *Auferstehung* by Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock.

2.1.3. Maximalism without Maximum of Sound

Very different examples of maximalist music are works (especially the late ones) by composers of the Second Viennese School, with particular emphasis on Anton Webern. Music by Arnold Schönberg and his two students - Anton Webern and Alban Berg - is firmly entrenched in the post-romantic music tradition, as evidenced in their early works: dense, highly emotional, and embedded in tonal harmony (for example, Schönberg's *Verklärte Nacht* op. 4 for string sextet or Webern's *Passacaglia* op. 1 for orchestra). These works manifest certain features of maximalism in the sense of high rate of musical events and emotional impact.

However, I would like to have a closer look here at the later works by Webern (the more atonal ones, and eventually the dodecaphonic ones) and consider the ways in which they display features of the maximalistic music. To give an example of a piece from Webern's atonal period, I would like to have a closer look at his *Six pieces for orchestra* op. 6, written in 1909. This is a cycle of six pieces with the total duration of 11 minutes. Most parts of the cycle do not exceed 2 minutes. I consider this piece an anticipation of what Webern's music became after the discovery of dodecaphonic technique in 1923. In my opinion he managed to create fully developed, dramatic music condensed into a very short amount of time. Using short phrases and quick instrument changes, he stuffed his miniature pieces with the maximal amount of content. There are hardly any repetitions in the *Six pieces* and a lot of contrast in all elements

¹⁵ Taruskin R. (2010), *Music in the Early Twentieth Century: The Oxford History of Western Music*. Oxford University Press. Chapter I.

of his work, such as dynamics, texture and tempo. In his instrumentation Webern avoided playing *tutti*; as a result, some instruments (e.g. harp) play only a few notes in the whole cycle.

All the above-mentioned features fully blossomed once Webern started using the dodecaphonic technique (in 1924, in his *Three Traditional Rhymes* op. 17). At the same time Webern developed his compositional technique called punctualism¹⁶. It involved maximal condensation of the musical material by composing with very short phrases or even single tones, as opposed to linear, group-formed music. Typical for Webern's way of notation was writing different dynamic values for almost every note. I find it astonishing, how great importance Webern gave to the pauses, making them almost as meaningful and dramatic as tones. When it comes to instrumentation, Webern continued Schönberg's idea of *Klangfarbenmelodie*, which involved constant switching between instruments and instrumental groups, even within the same phrase. In general, as I mentioned already, the composer was avoiding using many instruments at the same time and even treated the orchestras as chamber ensembles. Thus, as opposed to the more traditional, entrenched in the classical-romantic tradition, Webern's *Symphony* op. 21 (1927-1928) is based on single "points" and short motifs, rather than full orchestral sound.¹⁷

Another way to form a definition of maximalism in music, which would include all kinds of different approaches to it I would like to propose, would be to juxtapose it with the term opposite to it, which is minimalism¹⁸. Just like in other fields of art the term minimalism in music (also called "minimal music") refers to works created with a very limited amount of material. Minimal music originated in the 1960s in New York and was represented by such composers as Steve Reich, Philip Glass, Terry Riley and La Monte Young. Shortly after that, many other, also non-American composers (e.g. Louis Andriessen, Arvo Pärt, Henryk Mikołaj Górecki) started creating music, which can be recognized as minimal in some ways. Minimal pieces (or being more specific, the ones falling into the genre of "repetitive music") are often tonal-based, rather large in terms of length and involve lots of repetitions. There are usually no big contrasts, when it comes to harmony, instrumentation, dynamic or texture. Listening to such

¹⁶ Herman S. (1994), *Goeyvaerts and the Beginnings of 'Punctual' Serialism and Electronic Music*. *Revue Belge de Musicologie / Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Muziekwetenschap*, p. 55-94.

¹⁷ At this point of my thesis I stop referencing to the following source: Taruskin R. (2010), *Music in the Early Twentieth Century: The Oxford History of Western Music*. Oxford University Press.

¹⁸ Potter K. *Grove Music Online, Minimalism (USA)*.

<https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-1002257002#omo-9781561592630-e-1002257002>

music can have the component of meditation. The pieces are either slow or fast but repetitive, so the changes of harmony are spread over a long period of time.

As opposed to minimal music, we can list following features of the maximalistic music:

- high rate of musical events over a short period of time
- tonal complexity/atonality/lack of harmonic homogeneity
- rather big ensembles, not necessarily treated as one unity
- fast instrumentation changes, textural variety
- extreme dynamic changes, often occurring briefly in succession
- dramatic role of silence
- listener focused on experiencing drama, following changes in music; in many cases does not have time to relax and/or proceed what he/she has just heard.

2.2. Polystylism, or All Over the Place

2.2.1. Musical Allusions in Alfred Schnittke's Music

In this subchapter I am going to discuss polystylistic tendencies in works by different composers from the 20th and 21st century. Based primarily on the research articles: "Alfred Schnittke's Polystylistical Journey: The Third String Quartet" by Oana Andreica¹⁹ and "The Theory of Polystylism as a Tool for Analysis of Contemporary Music in the Post-Soviet Cultural Space: Some Terminological Aspects" by Baiba Jaunslaviete²⁰, as well as an essay "Polystylische Tendenzen in der zeitgenössischen Musik" ("Polystylistic Tendencies in the Contemporary Music") written by Schnittke himself²¹, I will make an attempt to define the term and then present my subjective selection of different approaches to the phenomenon of polystylism. In subchapter 2.2.1. I will focus on works by the composer most famously associated with polystylism – above-mentioned Alfred Schnittke (1934-1998) - whereas in subchapter 2.2.2. I will discuss polystylistic elements in works by other composers.

In order to give an overview about polystylistic tendencies in Schnittke's music, I would like to introduce here three of his pieces that I find representative in this regard. The first is his *Symphony No. 1* written between 1969 and 1974. This large, four-movement work is a rare example of Schnittke's compositions including elements of aleatory and improvisation²². He also took into consideration the way the musicians enter and leave the stage and created a special "choreography" to be performed by them. The piece is stuffed with plenty of different styles, combined most of the times on the principle of contrast. In the first movement, Schnittke juxtaposes tonal harmony with clusters, quasi-baroque stylization with excerpts from film music and a quote from Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5*. The second movement of the symphony starts with a light, quasi-baroque stylization, soon interrupted by material not falling into its harmonic world. Towards its end we can hear a jazz-like improvisation of violin, piano and saxophone, followed by free improvisation of the full orchestra. It leads to movement three, the slowest one from the cycle, in which the composer uses elements of the dodecaonic and serial

¹⁹ Andreica O. (2012). "Alfred Schnittke's Polystylistical Journey: The Third String Quartet". *Studia UBB Musica*.

²⁰ Jaunslaviete B. "The Theory of Polystylism as a Tool for Analysis of Contemporary Music in the Post-Soviet Cultural Space: Some Terminological Aspects", p. 455-465.

²¹ Schnittke, A. (1971). "Polystylische Tendenzen in der zeitgenössischen Musik" ("Polystylistic Tendencies in Modern Music"). Indiana University Press, pp. 87-90. English translation: Goodliffe J. D.

²² Medić Ivana (2006). "The Dramaturgical Function of the Improvisatory Segments of Form in Alfred Schnittke's First Symphony. New Sound 32", p. 210-223.

systems. The final movement sparkles with quotes (from Haydn's *Farewell Symphony*, Tchaikovsky's B-flat minor piano concerto, The Beatles' songs and many others). The overall impression of the *Symphony No. 1* may be overwhelming, but in my opinion Schnittke does not exceed the limit of good taste and despite the unbelievable variety of styles manages to create a cohesive unity.

Another kind of polystylism is represented in Schnittke's *String Quartet No. 3* written in 1983. This piece is also largely based on quotations from other music styles. Three of those quotations appear already at the very beginning of the quartet: excerpts from Orlando di Lasso's *Stabat Mater* for mixed choir, Beethoven's *Große Fuge (The Great Fugue)* op. 133 and Shostakovich's monogram D-S-C-H(B)²³. However, in this case the above-mentioned motifs are used repeatedly throughout all three movements of the piece. Schnittke transposes them, creates their variations, juxtaposes them so that they sound at the same time and so on. The quotations become the source of linear and harmonic material for the composer and are no longer something strange, not matching with the original music written by Schnittke. In some cases the allusions are hidden to such extent, that it becomes almost impossible to recognize them – for example when the composer inverts the motifs. In my opinion, in contrary to the *First Symphony*, Schnittke in his *Third String Quartet* did not intend to surprise the listeners in any way by merging together different musical styles. He composed a grave and touching piece, where the usage of quotations has more of a symbolic meaning.

The last piece by Schnittke I would like to discuss in this subchapter is one of his most famous works – *Concerto grosso No. 1* for two solo violins, string chamber orchestra, harpsichord and a prepared piano from 1976. The piece consists of six movements (*Preludio, Toccata, Recitativo, Cadenza, Rondo* and *Postludio*) and retains many features of the baroque *concerto grosso*, including the main concept of dialogue between soloists and an ensemble²⁴. Schnittke often relates also to the baroque music in the melodic and harmonic material without quoting other composers literally. He juxtaposes the quasi-baroque phrases with more atonal music, as well as transforms it, for example by creating offset between strings following each other with a delay of one sixteen note (*Toccata*). In addition to the above-mentioned material, Schnittke introduces in this piece several excerpts from his film music. One such excerpt is the

²³ Andreica O. (2012). "Alfred Schnittke's Polystylistical Journey: The Third String Quartet". *Studia UBB Musica*, p. 103-115.

²⁴ Moody I. (1989). *The Music of Alfred Schnittke*. Cambridge University Press.

famous tango in the movement called *Rondo*, played first by solo harpsichord. This motif served originally as music to the movie called *The Agony* from 1974. Using such radical stylistic contrasts raises a question of reasons Schnittke had in his mind when deciding to do so. Here is how he explained it himself in the program note in Vienna in 1977:

I dream of the Utopia of a united style, where fragments of ‘U’ (Unterhaltung) [entertaining] and ‘E’ (Ernst) [serious] are not used for comic effect but seriously represent multi-faceted musical reality. That’s why I’ve decided to put together some fragments from my cartoon film music: a joyful children’s chorus, a nostalgic atonal serenade, a piece of hundred-percent-guaranteed Corelli (Made in the USSR), and finally, my grandmother’s favourite tango played by my great-grandmother on a harpsichord. I am sure all these themes go together very well, and I use them absolutely seriously.²⁵

I find Schnittke’s *Concerto grosso* a perfect example of a polystylistic piece, which is both surprising, compelling and ridiculous at times, as well as cohesive and well thought through. Though my ideas and compositional language are different than Schnittke’s, this was also the effect I wanted to achieve when composing my opera.²⁶

2.2.2. Polystylism in Works by Other Composers

In this subchapter I would like to present my selection of polystylistic musical works by composers other than Alfred Schnittke. In order to organize my text better, I would like to propose a division of polystylistic music according to the way it relates to other musical styles.²⁷

The first type of reference is the **allusion**. This group includes a wide range of polystylistic pieces. When defining allusion, I consider referring to one or more elements of the musical style without imitating it entirely or quoting any particular piece. Allusion most often uses melodic and harmonic references, but may also apply instrumentation or texture typical to the particular style (e.g. using harpsichord together with cellos and double basses), performance manner (e.g. strong vibration and *portamenti* on string instruments) or even form that evokes a specific time period in the music history (fugue). To this category would fall references to baroque music as well as tango in Schnittke’s *Concerto grosso No. 1*. Another example of

²⁵ Ivashkin, A. (1996). *Alfred Schnittke*. London: Phaidon Press Limited, p. 140.

²⁶ At this point of my thesis I stop referencing to the following source: Jaunslaviete B. “The Theory of Polystylism as a Tool for Analysis of Contemporary Music in the Post-Soviet Cultural Space: Some Terminological Aspects”, p. 455-465.

²⁷ This division is based on the one proposed by Schnittke in his essay *Polystylische Tendenzen in der gegenwärtigen Musik*. Although his idea was to make a division into following categories: the quotations, the processing and the allusion.

allusions in music would be Alban Berg's opera *Wozzeck* (1914-1922), where the composer refers to other styles by using forms typical to some particular periods of the music history. Thus, within the movements of *Wozzeck* we can find a suite, a passacaglia, a symphony, a fantasia and a fugue. When thinking about stylistic allusions in the music of the 20th and the 21st century, we realize that those references are predominantly made to baroque music.²⁸

Another category of stylistic references I would like to discuss here is **quotations**. Quotations in music are excerpts taken literally from other works. Two pieces which might be considered examples of the use of quotation are *Makrokosmos I* and *Black Angels*, by American composer George Crumb. In *Dream images (Love-death music)* from his *Makrokosmos I* for amplified piano from 1980, Crumb introduces three different excerpts from Chopin's *Fantaisie Impromptu*. In the same way, in the second part of his *Black Angels* for electric string quartet written in 1970 Crumb quotes Schubert's D minor string quartet *Der Tod und das Mädchen (The Death and the Maiden)*. I find it truly admirable how well the composer managed to merge the quotations with his original music without any feeling of dissonance. Another piece stuffed with quotations is Luciano Berio's *Sinfonia* for large orchestra and eight amplified voices, composed between 1968 and 1969, or more precisely its third movement²⁹. This movement is a collage of several different excerpts from other works, on top of which the singers make (mostly speaking) noises. Within the entire palette of quotations, we can hear few different fragments from *Scherzo* from Mahler's *Symphony No. 2*, as well as Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*, Debussy's *La Mer*, Ravel's *La Valse* and *Daphnis et Chloé*, Schönberg's *Five pieces for orchestra*, Berg's *Wozzeck* and Boulez's *Pli selon pli*. Berio in his *Sinfonia* applies the effect of cutting and gluing typical for the fixed media music into a symphonic piece.

The last category of stylistic references I would like to discuss in this subchapter is **stylization** (also referred to as "false quotation" or "pseudo-quotation")³⁰. Stylization means composing music so that it resembles as much as possible the imitated style. I cannot think of many pieces, which sound exactly, as if they had been written by another composer and thus, find the craft of stylization significantly underappreciated (it is likely that ability of creating in

²⁸ At this point of my thesis I stop referencing to the following source: Schnittke, A. (1971). "Polystylische Tendenzen in der zeitgenössischen Musik" ("Polystylistic Tendencies in Modern Music"). Indiana University Press, pp. 87-90. English translation: Goodliffe J. D.

²⁹ Goldford L. J., Irvine J. E., Kohn R. E. (2011). *Berio's Sinfonia: From Modernism to Hypermodernism* from *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies*. Penn State University Press, p. 19-44.

³⁰ Andreica O. (2012). "Alfred Schnittke's Polystylistic Journey: The Third String Quartet". *Studia UBB Musica*, p. 106. Also, at this point of my thesis I stop referencing to that source.

style of somebody else is more common in the field of fine arts). At the same I do not think that writing stylized music excludes being original. On the contrary, I believe that well done stylizations can be fascinating to listen to. In order to give an example of stylized music, I would like to have a closer look at the piece called *Une Suite de Pièces Sentimentales de Clavecin faite par Mr Szymański* (*A Suite of Harpsichord Pieces Made by Mr Szymański*), written in 2008 by the Polish composer Paweł Szymański. This is a full-size stylization for a baroque suite consisting of seven following movements: *Ouverture*, *Allemande*, *Courante*, *Sarabande*, *Air*, *Menuet* and *Gigue*. The composer recreated the suite form, paying attention to small details in the fields of harmony, melody and ornamentation, as well as counterpoint. It is the only example of Szymański's work I can think of where he stays so true to the chosen style throughout the whole piece and does not process it or juxtapose it with other material. However, there many other works where the composer uses the technique of stylization to a certain extent. Another example where Szymański plays with the baroque style is his *Concerto grosso con duoi Violini e Violoncello di Concertino obbligati e duoi altri Violini, Viola e Basso di Concerto Grosso del Sig` Szymański* from 2006. In turn, his *Quasi una sinfonia* for chamber orchestra written in 1990 involves fragments composed in the classicist style. In subchapter 2.3.2. I will discuss, how I approached the topic of stylization in one of the movements of my own piece.

2.3. Polystylism at Its Maximum, or My Own Approach

2.3.1. Maximalism, and How to Handle It

In this subchapter I am going to consider the ways in which my opera *Raport o stanie planety* displays features of maximalistic and polystylistic music, relating to subchapters 2.1. and 2.2. This section (subchapter 2.3.1.) is devoted to maximalistic features of my piece; I am raising here also the question of perception of such dense and varied music. In subchapter 2.3.2. I will be speaking about polystylistic elements in my piece, as well as give some more detailed information about my compositional methods.

The idea for *Raport o stanie planety* was to condense the form of opera in a relatively short piece of music. Thus, the ten movements of my piece last altogether about 13 minutes. Duration of the particular movements differs from approximately 30 seconds (mov. 2) until a little over 2 minutes (mov. 5). All the movements are meant to be played *attacca*, although in some cases there are short breaks in between movements, notated precisely in the score. Despite the fact that the tempo is not always fast, because of many changes often occurring briefly in succession, the musical “action” seems to progress quickly. There are not many repetitions in the music or in the text. The only two fragments where the text is not present are movement 2 (*Coffee Break*) and the “finale”, which is the last 12 seconds of movement 10.

My approach to maximalism is in some ways similar to the one described in subchapter 2.1.3, when I was discussing late works by Anton Webern. The most obvious common feature between my piece and Webern’s music is the condensation of the musical material. In both cases there are many quick changes in fields such as dynamic, texture and instrumentation. At the same time, my piece is not too sublime or pathetic; I rarely use full instrumental ensemble and maximal volume, which are also features relevant to Webern’s music. In this regard, my approach to maximalism is far from the one described in subchapter 2.1.2., when I spoke about Mahler’s symphonies. However, there is one more element I brought to the “maximum”, not mentioned so far in regard to maximalism in works by composers from the 20th century, and that is the “maximal” stylistic diversity, which is going to be discussed wider in the following subchapter.

The high density of musical material, as well as variety of styles, raise a question about the perception of my work. That is also something that I have the most concerns about, when it comes to *Raport o stanie planety*. The number of very different movements following one another may cause, that some of the compositional details are going to get lost while listening.

On the other hand, I do believe that juxtaposing complex, more difficult-to-perceive movements with some lighter ones helps the listeners maintain their focus. In this regard, having my piece premiered online might be actually beneficial, since it gives the listeners possibility of pausing the recording and re-listening to some fragments. This however affects the whole experience of my music, being no longer perceived as a whole, but rather as a collection of ideas.

2.3.2. Polystylism, and What Exactly Is In There

As mentioned before, my opera consists of ten movements, different from one another other in terms of style. In order to discuss the stylistic references in my piece, I will use the division introduced in subchapter 2.2.2., when I was discussing polystylistic works by other composers.

There are several allusions to other musical styles in my piece. One of them is the allusion to the baroque aria in movement 9, where I used melodic phrases and chord combination typical for the above-mentioned genre. However, unlike the baroque aria, movement 9 of my opera is strictly bitonal and combines the E-flat minor (in the voice and higher sounding instruments) with the C minor keys (in the lower sounding instruments). Also, the rhythm lacks regularity and the meter changes constantly, following the prosody of the text.

In turn, movement 8 is a reference to a tango and is based on the dance-like rhythmical *ostinato*. However, I would not have been myself, if I had not written it my way and that is why I used the meter 4.5/4, instead of 4/4. Stylistically, the movement resembles jazz music, especially the quasi-improvised soprano saxophone solo starting in bar 3. Movement 8 can be challenging for the saxophonist, who needs to switch to the jazz manner of playing.

While there are no direct quotations in my opera, there is one stylization and that is number 5 (quartet *To jest układ dobry dla wszystkich*), being kind of a “finale of act 1”. My goal was to compose a movement resembling as much as possible an ensemble from Mozart’s opera. As a reference I had analyzed several of the Mozart’s ensembles, such as *Ah taci ingiusto core* and *Sola sola in buio loco* from *Don Giovanni* and the finale of act II *Esci omai, garzon malnato* from *Le nozze di Figaro*. I attempted to imitate such elements of his music as: melodic lines, chord combinations, texture and form (even though the form of my quartet is very much condensed comparing to Mozart’s and thus, it is also significantly shorter). The only element clearly distinguishing my piece from the original ones is the instrumentation (I used a chamber ensemble, not an orchestra). In the final movement I came back for a little while to the classicistic style, but this time I decomposed it by using “effect of a driving ambulance” as I like

to call it. Together with accelerating the tempo, also the pitches go higher and the "finale" ends in F major, not in D major, as it started.

The other movements of my piece do not resemble so much of the preexisting music, although they also follow certain strict rules that I imposed on myself. Thus, number seven is an *a capella* piece performed entirely using technique of *Sprechgesang*. All the notated pitches in that movement are relative and the singers perform single consonants and vowels, which put together create entire words. One of the other compositional techniques I can list is writing using limited number of intervals. For instance, in the first aria the whole vocal line has been composed using semitones, thirds, their inversions and a tritone being a sum of the two. Also, the harmony in that movement is very much based on those intervals. In turn, all the chords in movement 2 are built only with thirds and fifths and the intervals between the particular chords are always semitones and minor thirds. Another technique I used in my piece was bimodality, i.e. using in two transpositions of a mode on top of each other, like in movement 4, where I used modes built with semitones and minor thirds. For instance, at the very beginning the two voices and the higher sounding instruments are playing the following tones: c, c-sharp, e, f, g-sharp and a in different registers, whereas the low sounding instruments are playing the augmented chord f-sharp, b-flat, d, which belongs to another transposition of the same mode. Important rule about composing this movement was not to repeat the tones in the two "layers" (higher and lower sounding instruments), so that they complement and not overlap each other.

3. Conclusion

In this thesis I have been considering what an “opera in miniature” could be and whether this term is adequate to my piece *Raport o stanie planety (Planet Report)* for four solo voices and ensemble, written in 2019. In the first chapter of this thesis I tried to capture the most important features of the opera genre with a particular emphasis on those, which are common with my piece. The first of those features is the cross-disciplinarity of the opera. The genre combines three different fields of art: music, text and the stage action. This applies also to my piece, although its duration is significantly shorter than duration of a typical opera, which is meant to fulfill an entire evening. In this thesis I also discussed the controversies about the opera genre, such as the fact, that regardless what the characters are doing or feeling at the moment, they always sing. I personally consider a certain amount of absurdity of the opera to be its advantage and in fact, it was one of the reasons, why I wanted to compose one. However, being aware, that doubling the meaning of the *libretto* with the music may actually make it sound more superficial or ridiculous, I decided to do something opposite to it, i.e. composed the music in contrast to the text. Also, unlike in the romantic operas for example by Richard Wagner, I did not mean to distinguish the characters of my opera in any way by associating them with any kind of *leitmotifs*. The movements of my opera are very different from one another and thus, require from the singers slightly different ways of singing. The names of the particular movements are related to the number of singers performing them, which is common for many operas. My piece consists of arias, duets, quartets, an instrumental *intermezzo*, as well as a “finale”, which is the last 12 seconds of the piece.

However, *Report o stanie planety* is a very particular example of an opera and that has to do with the two phenomena discussed in the second chapter of this thesis – maximalism and polystylism. Out of all the approaches to maximalism mentioned in that thesis – from Wagner’s music dramas, through Mahler’s symphonies, finishing with punctualistic works by Webern – my approach is the most similar to one represented by the last one from the above-mentioned composers. I consider my piece to be maximalistic in the sense of high rate of musical events happening over a short amount of time. My opera lasts about 13 minutes and consists of 10 movements, different from one another in terms of style. The action progresses quickly and the text is present in 9 out of 10 movements. There are not many repetitions in the music or in the text and the changes in dynamics, texture and instrumentation are often appearing briefly in

succession. When discussing maximalistic features of my piece, I came also to a conclusion, that the amount of different styles in my piece can be considered the ultimate feature of maximalism.

Each of the ten movements of my opera was written using slightly different compositional methods. In most cases, the compositional rules were established by myself and concerned such elements as the number of intervals used for creating the vocal lines or the harmony; or choice of keys/modes in the particular movement. In case of number 7, I decided to give up the precisely written pitches in favor of pitches notated relatively and usage of the technique of *Sprechgesang*. However, the compositional methods in movement 5 were dictated by the idea of imitating another style as much as possible. This movement is a stylization for an ensemble from the Mozart's opera. Among other stylistic references in my piece, we can list a reference to a baroque aria (mov. 9) and a reference to a tango (mov. 8). In my thesis I divided the stylistic references into categories of allusions, quotations and stylizations, as it had been done before, once I was speaking about polystylism in works by other composers. However, works by Alfred Schnittke I decided to discuss separately, finding him an especially important figure in the history of polystylistic music.

When discussing maximalism and polystylism in relation to my piece, I shared my concerns about the perceptibility of my music. Such dense and varied piece may turn out to be hard to perceive and certain details may get lost while listening. And although the movements are varied in terms of complexity, watching my opera requires from a listener a constant focus. However, this problem may actually disappear, as my opera will be premiered online, with prerecorded voices and MIDI instruments. Listening to the music from the speakers gives possibility of stopping or rewinding the recording at any point. This however affects the overall experience of my piece, being no longer perceived as a whole. It also reduces completely the theatrical aspect of my opera.

Nevertheless, in the times of pandemic, I find it important to try to adjust to the current situation, where the concerts are not happening as usual, and get familiar with the new ways of presenting music to the audience. Before recording the voices, I needed to rehearse with my singers online, since we could not meet in real life. It caused us many difficulties, mostly because the singers could not hear one other and I could not accompany them on the piano. At the same time, the musicians showed their high level of professionalism and at the end the results of the recording are more than satisfying. Surprisingly for me, the singers, coming from Australia, Italy, Germany and South Korea, did not seem to have big problems with the Polish

pronunciation. It all gives me hope, that despite the unusual circumstances, the final result is not going to be far from my original idea and I will be able to find out, whether my idea for an “opera in miniature” worked out well.

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Adams J., *Nixon in China* opera (19787)
Adès Th., *Powder her Face* opera (1995)
Adès Th., *The Tempest* opera (2004)
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Alzin R., *2 Songs after Poems by Edward Stachura* for mezzosoprano and guitar (2010)
Alzin R., *Gorzka miłość* after a poem by Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz for bass and piano (2010)
Alzin R., *Cantata Oleander* for soprano and baroque ensemble (2015)
Alzin R., *Raport o stanie planety* chamber opera (2019)
Beethoven L. van, *Symphony No. 5* (1804-1808)
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Berio L., *Un re in ascolto* opera (1981-1983)
Berg A., *Wozzeck* opera (1925)
Berlioz H., *Symphonie fantastique* (1830)
Berlioz H., *The Damnation of Faust* opera (1845)
Boulez P., *Pli selon pli* for soprano and orchestra (1962)
Britten B., *Peter Grimes* opera (1945)
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 Chopin F., *Fantaisie Impromptu* for piano (1834)
 Crumb G., *Black Angels* for amplified string quartet (1970)
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 Debussy C., *Pelléas and Mélisande* opera (1898)
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 Glass Ph., *Einstein on the Beach* opera (1975)
 Haydn J., *Farewell Symphony* (1772)
 Knapik E., *Moby Dick* opera (2011)
 Ligeti G., *Le Grand Macabre* opera (1977)
 Mahler G., *Symphony No. 2 "Resurrection"* (1888-1894)
 Mozart W. A., *Le Nozze di Figaro* opera (1785-1786)
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 Purcell H., *Dido and Aeneas* opera (1689)
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 Rossini G., *Italian in Algiers* opera (1813)
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 Schönberg A., *Verklärte Nacht* op. 4 for string sextet (1899)
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 Schubert F., *Der Tod und das Mädchen* string quartet (1824)
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Strauss R., *Salome* opera (1905)

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Szymański P., *Une Suite de Pièces Sentimentales de Clavecin faite par Mr Szymański* (2008)

Szymański P., *Qudsja Zaher* opera (2013)

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Tchaikovsky P., *Queen of Spades* opera (1887)

Verdi G., *Nabucco* opera (1842)

Wagner R., *Sigfried* opera (1856-1871)

Wagner R., *Tristan and Isolde* opera (1857-1859)

Wagner R., *Götterdämmerung* opera (1871-1874)

Webern A., *Passacaglia* op. 1 for orchestra (1908)

Webern A., *Six pieces for orchestra* op. 6 (1909)

Webern A., *Three Traditional Rhymes* op. 17 for voice, violin (doubling viola), clarinet and bass clarinet (1924-1925)

Webern A., *Symphony* op. 21 (1927-1928)

Appendices

Score of the piece

Attached as a separate file, named "R.Alzin_PlanetReportFullScore.pdf"

English translation of the libretto made by its author Michał Rogalski

Attached as a separate file, named "PlanetReport_LibrettoEng.pdf"

