

## SAŽECI DOKTORSKIH RADOVA U MUZIKOLOGIJI – SUMMARIES OF DOCTORAL THESES IN MUSICOLOGY

### THE RECEPTION OF BAROQUE MUSIC IN SELECTED WORKS BY ROCHBERG, SCHNITTKE, AND SZYMAŃSKI<sup>1</sup>

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In my PhD thesis, I investigate the ways in which Baroque music has influenced the works of three significant postmodern composers: Alfred Schnittke (1934–1998), George Rochberg (1918–2005), and Paweł Szymański (1954–). While most studies of postmodernism in contemporary classical music examine the blending of various styles—historical, popular, and modernist—my dissertation takes a more focused approach by examining the singular influence of Baroque music within a postmodern context. This focus allows for a deeper understanding of how these composers referenced Baroque elements, not as simple quotations, but as reimagined components that were transformed within their postmodern compositional processes.

#### *Key Themes and Objectives*

One of the core aims of this thesis is to shed light on how Baroque music plays a pivotal role in the development of these composers' unique postmodern styles. The works of Schnittke, Rochberg, and Szymański show a distinct approach to

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incorporating Baroque music, not as an isolated or static tradition, but as an evolving reference point that interacts dynamically with the musical language of the late 20th century.

### *1. Baroque Influence in Postmodernism*

In my research, I analyze the significance of Baroque music in works like Schnittke's *Concerti Grossi Nos. 1–3*, Rochberg's *Nach Bach* and *Ora pro Nobis (Nach Bach II)*, and Szymański's *Concerto Grosso* and *Ceci n'est pas une ouverture*. These works highlight how Baroque music is recontextualized and reworked within a postmodern framework. Instead of treating Baroque music as a remote or static artifact of high culture, these composers engage with it dynamically, bringing it into conversation with contemporary compositional methods. In doing so, they not only revive Baroque forms and techniques but also reinterpret them to create new layers of meaning.

For example, Schnittke's *Concerti Grossi* draw directly from the Baroque concerto grosso form, but they integrate modern dissonances, micropolyphony, and non-linear structures that would be foreign to a purely Baroque idiom. Rochberg's *Nach Bach* takes the form of a musical dialogue with Johann Sebastian Bach, quoting from Bach's *Partita No. 6* while inserting contemporary harmonic language. Similarly, Szymański's *Concerto Grosso* engages with Baroque conventions and instrumentation, but then in a related work *Ceci n'est pas une ouverture* disrupts those conventions through fragmentation and recomposition, creating a postmodern reinterpretation of the Baroque style.

### *2. Intertextuality*

A major component of my thesis involves the application of intertextuality—a concept from literary theory that examines how texts (or in this case, musical works) reference, echo, or transform previous texts. By adopting framework established by poststructuralists like Barthes, Baudrillard, Genette, and Bloom, I was able to explore how Baroque elements function within the broader postmodern practice of stylistic heterogeneity. Rather than merely quoting Baroque music, these composers employ intertextual references that are often subtle or indirect, requiring the listener to engage with the music on a deeper level.

For instance, Schnittke's polystylism involves an intricate layering of styles from different historical periods, with Baroque influences serving as one of many sources of inspiration. This intertextual approach means that Baroque music, while often central to the structure of a piece, is not presented in isolation but is woven into a rich tapestry of other stylistic references, including modernist atonality and popular music. The use of Baroque elements as part of this multilayered compositional fabric invites listeners to recognize and interpret these references, enriching their experience of the music.

In Szymański's major works, Baroque references are often more concealed but no less significant. His *Ceci n'est pas une ouverture* contains subtle allusions to Baroque orchestration and harmonic conventions, but these are constantly subverted by abrupt fragmentation and changes in texture. This playful engagement with Baroque forms reflects Szymański's technique of surconventionalism, where familiar musical conventions are used to compose an initial stylistic copy which is then through the surconventional techniques recomposed and presented to the public.

### 3. Stylistic Copies and Quotations

One of the key findings of my research is that these composers do not merely quote Baroque music or use it as a superficial stylistic reference. Instead, they often create stylistic copies—imitations of Baroque music that are transformed within a modernist framework. This transformation gives these works a depth that goes beyond simple pastiche. For example, Schnittke's *Concerto Grosso* No. 1 does not just mimic the form and texture of a Baroque concerto but uses Baroque elements to comment on the nature of musical history and tradition. By juxtaposing Baroque passages with more dissonant, modernist material, Schnittke highlights the contrast between the old and the new, inviting the listener to reflect on the evolving relationship between past and present.

As stated earlier, in Szymański's surconventionalism, where conventional musical forms are transformed into something radically new through subtle distortions and shifts, the stylistic imitation of Baroque elements often serves as a kind of playful subversion. Composing shorter pieces using conventions is an indispensable part of the compositional process.

In contrast, Rochberg's *Nach Bach* explores this tension by directly quoting from Bach's works, but then altering and fragmenting these quotations to create something entirely new. His transformations challenge the idea of Baroque music as a static tradition, suggesting instead that it can be a living and evolving source of inspiration for contemporary composers. In *Ora pro Nobis (Nach Bach II)* for flute and guitar, which is based on the second movement from Bach's Italian Concerto, Rochberg changed the meter from 3/4 to 4/4 and the tonality from D Minor to E Minor, added guitar solo cadences and an extensive cadenza, and rewrote solo melody and markedly altered accompaniment to achieve his goals.

### 4. Historical and Cultural Context

In my thesis, I place the reception of Baroque music within the broader cultural context of the Cold War and the evolving artistic movements of the late 20th century. The ways in which Schnittke, Rochberg, and Szymański engage with Baroque music reflect not only their personal compositional interests but also the cultural and political climates in which they worked. Schnittke, for example,

composed in the Soviet Union, where official state policies often dictated artistic direction. His use of polystylism, including Baroque references, can be seen as a reaction against the rigidity of Socialist Realism, offering a more pluralistic and open-ended approach to musical composition.

Rochberg's turn to tonality and Baroque references in the 1960s reflected his dissatisfaction with the serialist techniques that dominated American academic music at the time. His decision to abandon twelve-tone composition in favor of a more eclectic style was seen by many as a radical departure, and his use of Baroque elements played a key role in this transition. Szymański, working in Poland, also found in Baroque music a means of bridging the gap between tradition and modernity, using historical forms as a way to critique and expand upon contemporary musical conventions.

### *5. Postmodernism and Personalized Compositional Techniques*

Each of the composers I examine developed unique compositional techniques that reflect the broader aesthetics of postmodernism.

- Alfred Schnittke is best known for his polystylism, a technique in which he blends multiple musical styles from different historical periods within a single work. In his *Concerti Grossi* Nos. 1–3, for example, Schnittke draws on Baroque forms, counterpoint and dance rhythms, but juxtaposes them with modernist harmonies and irregular structures that challenge the listener's expectations. This blending of old and new creates a rich and often disorienting listening experience, one that reflects the fragmented and pluralistic nature of postmodern art.
- George Rochberg, in contrast, developed a technique he called *ars combinatoria*, which refers to the combination of past and present musical languages. In works like *Nach Bach*, Rochberg incorporates direct quotations from Baroque music, but puts them in a contemporary harmonic and formal environment.
- Paweł Szymański, the youngest of the three composers, developed his own postmodern technique known as surconventionalism, in which he manipulates traditional musical forms to create new expressive possibilities. In his works Szymański at the first-level (pre-compositional) often uses Baroque orchestration and forms, but at the second-level distorts them through unexpected structural shifts. This technique reflects a broader trend in postmodern music, where historical forms are not simply revived, but reinterpreted and transformed.

### *6. Postmodern Baroque and Its Connection to Modernism*

One of the central arguments of my thesis is that the use of Baroque music in postmodern compositions reflects a broader connection between postmodernism

and earlier trends of historicist modernism. While modernism is often characterized by its break with the past, the composers I study use Baroque music as a way to engage critically with musical history. Schnittke, Rochberg, and Szymański do not simply quote Baroque music for the sake of nostalgia; instead, they transform Baroque elements in ways that allow them to comment on the present.

For instance, Schnittke's polystylism is not just an eclectic blending of styles, but a deliberate attempt to highlight the contrasts between different historical periods. By juxtaposing Baroque music with modernist dissonances and other contemporary elements, Schnittke creates a tension between past and present that forces the listener to reflect on the nature of musical progress. Similarly, Rochberg's *Nach Bach* uses Baroque quotations to explore the relationship between historical continuity and modern fragmentation, while Szymański's surconventionalism challenges the listener's expectations by disrupting familiar Baroque forms.

### 7. *Listener-Centered Intertextuality*

In my analysis, I emphasize the importance of listener-centered intertextuality, where the listener plays an active role in interpreting the multiple layers of reference and meaning within a piece of music. In postmodern compositions, the recognition of intertextual references often relies on the listener's prior knowledge of musical history. As a result, these works require a certain degree of historical and stylistic literacy from the audience.

Schnittke's *Concerti Grossi*, for example, are filled with references to Baroque forms and idioms, but these references are often juxtaposed with other styles in ways that challenge the listener to make sense of the contrasting elements. Similarly, Rochberg's *Nach Bach* requires the listener to recognize the quotations from Bach and to understand how these quotations are used within the context of a contemporary composition. This dialogic relationship between the composer, the work, and the listener is central to the postmodern aesthetic, where meaning is often constructed collaboratively through the interaction of multiple perspectives.

### *Conclusion*

In my thesis, I highlight how Baroque music serves as a unifying factor in the diverse and often contrasting works of Schnittke, Rochberg, and Szymański. These composers use Baroque elements not simply as historical quotations but as a means of engaging in a critical dialogue with the past. By incorporating Baroque music into their postmodern compositions, they challenge the notion of a linear progression of musical history and instead present a more pluralistic and dynamic view of tradition. An important part of the work of the three selected composers is the tension between »weak music« and stylistically heterogeneous concert works. While the heterogeneous works were commonly prepared for regular concert

stages or contemporary music festivals, the so called »weak works« are private pieces that are published just in exceptional cases. Whether they were composed for a film, as in the case of Schnittke, or composed as pre-compositional material, as in the case of Szymański, those pastiches provide an excellent view of the ways of working with the Baroque in postmodernism. Through the lens of intertextuality, I demonstrate how Baroque elements are transformed and reinterpreted in the works of these composers, contributing to the ongoing evolution of classical music in the late 20th century. From the huge corpus of Baroque-influenced 20th century works, just those selected cases by the three composers that represent different possibilities of working with Baroque in the late 20th century are interpreted intertextually. Even today I did not stop finding examples that are closely related to the incorporation of Baroque style like Luciano Berio's *Beatles Songs* which combine *The Beatles'* songs »Michelle«, »Ticket to Ride« and »Yesterday« with various Baroque ensemble sounds and accompanying Baroque figurations, or Thierry Escaich orchestral work titled *Baroque Song*. With that in mind, one of the incidental, but by no means insignificant, contributions of my dissertation is the list of the Baroque-influenced 20th century compositions which I compiled during my research.

Finally, by focusing on Baroque influences, my research offers a unique perspective on postmodern music, showing how the past can be reimagined to create new and innovative forms of expression in contemporary composition.