

The aesthetics of the neoromantic period in the work of Karol Szymanowski in the context of early 20th-century artistic trends as exemplified in his songs and piano pieces opp. 13, 14, 17 and 21

In this thesis selected works of Karol Szymanowski have been analysed against the background of artistic and intellectual trends existing in the time of their creation. Of crucial importance in this respect is Szymanowski's early 20th-century stay in Berlin, as it provided an opportunity to come into contact with the avant-garde movement and to immerse in the aesthetics and mentality of the fin-de-siècle. Songs opp. 13 and 17 and piano pieces opp. 14 and 21 were the result of this period – though certainly reflecting Szymanowski's fascination with German modernism of Reger, Brahms and Strauss, these works constituted on a deeper level an area for unique sound, formal and tone-colour oriented experiments that foreshadowed future works of Szymanowski and acted as a reference point for much later methods of composition, such as Polish sonorism of the 1960s. Szymanowski's work can thus be interpreted in the context of aesthetic and philosophical phenomena such as the Wagnerian idea of a total work of art, the mythos of Dionysus revived by Nietzsche, Bergson's intuition and with reference to various art movements, including expressionism, impressionism or aestheticism. The question of symbolism is addressed, however, in a separate chapter, as its distinctive concepts like synesthesia, correspondence or vast usage of suggestion and association permeated fine art, literature and music of the time equally; hence also the decision to analyse works discussed in this thesis through the notion of symbol. The interpretation aimed at identifying features that are characteristic of the Composer's musical language – motives of melodic and harmonic nature like the motive of bells or a 'swan figure' and a number of structural properties including, among others, stratal arrangement of texture. Such an approach made it possible to name and describe certain elusive yet vitally important sound phenomena, in particular emergence or kaleidoscopic and osmotic features of the harmonic substance. The significance of these attributes stems from the fact that they contribute to the creation of Szymanowski's idiom of a modern and original composer but also point to his Chopinian way of thinking and can, as such, inform the discussion on distinctive features of Polish music and on a certain lineage starting from Frederic Chopin, through Szymanowski to Witold Lutosławski.