

Polish Mystery and Minimalism: Twardowski, Bembinow, and Łukaszewski

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The term 'Holy Minimalism' evolved in the late 1990s to describe the work of John Tavener of England, Arvo Pärt of Estonia, and Henryk Górecki of Poland. It was a style that went against the trend of complexity and towards a mood of contemplation. Forward motion was replaced with stasis; intellectualism was discarded in favor of spirituality. Each of the three Holy Minimalists were heavily influenced by techniques common in the medieval and Renaissance periods of choral music and frequently set their music to liturgical texts.

The influence of 'Holy Minimalism' spread to many composers throughout the world, including three contemporary Polish composers who are the subject of this article: Romuald Twardowski (b. 1930), Miłosz Bembinow (b. 1978), and Paweł Łukaszewski (b.1968).

Romuald Twardowski

Composer Romuald Twardowski is a Professor of music at the Fryderyk Chopin University, one of the oldest and largest schools of music in Poland. His musical training included extensive studies at the conservatories in Vilnius and Warsaw as well as a year with Nadia Boulanger. Twardowski describes his approach to composition: *I did appreciate the role and significance of tradition, finding in it inspiration for my own music. Assuming that extremes do meet, I looked to the medieval times, to the Gregorian chant to find pieces that,*

when combined with the achievements of the 20th Century of composition technique (aleatorism, cluster), would result in the desired synthesis of New and Old.

This synthesis of chant and modern techniques is clearly seen in Twardowski's *Regina Coeli* (1996). It is a work that is influenced by chant, but marked by rhythmic excitement and joy. He begins the composition with a short chant found in the *Liber Usualis*, shown here in its original version in Figure 1:



Figure 1. Regina caeli, from Liber usualis

In his version, Twardowski simplifies the chant into a less florid form, shown in the male voices (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Twardowski, Regina Coeli, m. 1-4

This contrast of chant and rhythm is a creative juxtaposition of ancient music and driving rhythm. The composer employs it twice more in the work. In the example in figure 3, the faster tempo "alleluia" slows into a chord that immediately resolves into a drone, a choice that emphasizes the feeling of mystery and connection to the past.



Figure 3. Twardowski, *Regina Coeli*, m. 27-31

In *Regina Coeli*, Twardowski has forged a joyful celebration of the traditional Marian text. Interwoven into the work is an occasional moment of mystery, primarily through a reappearance of the opening chant line. The majority of the short work features a triumphant *Resurrexit* theme and an assortment of joyful *Alleluias*, a common feature of Twardowski's music (Figures 4 and 5).

Figure 3 shows musical notation for measures 27-31 of *Regina Coeli*. It features four staves. The first staff is a vocal line with lyrics: "Re - su - rre - xit". The second staff is a piano accompaniment with lyrics: "t, re - su - rre - xit, re - su - rre - xit,". The third staff is another vocal line with lyrics: "re - su - rre - xit, re - su - rre - xit,". The fourth staff is a bass line with lyrics: "re - su - rre - xit, re - su - rre - xit,". The notation includes dynamic markings such as *f* and *p*, and a rehearsal mark *18* at the beginning of the second system.

Figure 4. Twardowski, *Regina Coeli*, m. 17-19

Figure 4 shows musical notation for measures 17-19 of *Regina Coeli*. It features three staves. The first staff is a vocal line with lyrics: "Al - le - lu - ja, al - le - lu - ja,". The second staff is a piano accompaniment with lyrics: "Al - le - lu - ja, al - le - lu - ja,". The third staff is a bass line with lyrics: "Al - le - lu - ja, al - le - lu - ja,". The notation includes dynamic markings such as *p* and *f*, and a rehearsal mark *35* at the beginning of the first system.

Figure 5. Twardowski, *Regina Coeli*, m. 35-38

Twardowski demonstrates his mastery of the rhythmic motive in *Hosanna II*, a work he describes as a *Concerto Breve für gemischten Chor*. In this composition, the composer employs the repetition of motives to build complexity and forward motion. The effect is almost one of sequenced loops; once a motive begins in one voice, it is repeated as other voices add their own variation.

The music presented in Figure 6 is a slight variation of the opening measures of the work. There is an additive process at work here as well: musical motives are layered on to each

(Figure 12).

3 *Lento*. [$\text{♩} = 69-72$]

Tenore solo
Baritono solo
Soprani
Mezzosoprani
Alti
Tenori
Baritoni
Bassi

mf recitativo moderato
Vul - ne - ra - sti cor me - um.

p bocca chiusa

p bocca chiusa

Detailed description: This is a page of a musical score for a choir. It features seven vocal staves: Tenore solo, Baritono solo, Soprani, Mezzosoprani, Alti, Tenori, and Baritoni/Bassi. The music is in 3/4 time, marked 'Lento' with a tempo of 69-72 beats per minute. The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The Tenore solo part begins with a recitative section marked 'mf recitativo moderato' and sings the lyrics 'Vul - ne - ra - sti cor me - um.'. The other vocal parts are marked 'p bocca chiusa' (piano, closed mouth) and provide harmonic support.

79 4 *Vivo*. [$\text{♩} = 104-108$] 3

S
Ms
A
T
Br
B

mf
Vul - ne - ra - sti cor me - u - m

mf
Vul - ne - ra - sti

mf
Vul - ne - ra - sti

mf
Vul - ne - ra - sti me - u - m

Detailed description: This is a page of a musical score, likely a continuation of the previous page. It features four vocal staves: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (Br/B). The music is in 3/4 time, marked 'Vivo' with a tempo of 104-108 beats per minute. The key signature has three sharps. The Soprano part begins with a measure marked '79' and sings the lyrics 'Vul - ne - ra - sti cor me - u - m'. The other vocal parts provide harmonic support, with the Alto and Tenor parts marked 'mf'.

Figure 12. Bembinow, *Vulnerasti Cor Meum*, m. 1-3, 11-12

Paweł Łukaszewski (b. 1968)

Paweł Łukaszewski is an extremely prolific composer with major commissions from top choirs from all over the world; his music has been recorded by luminaries including Stephen Layton in 2008 and the Choir of Trinity College, Cambridge. Łukaszewski's music is influenced by the mysticism of Pärt, Górecki, and Tavener, but the composer is unmistakably forging his own path with a unique voice, style, and technique.

Figure 15. Łukaszewski, *Nunc Dimittis*, m. 1-5

Łukaszewski is a composer who overflows with creative approaches to liturgical texts. He transforms techniques from the past into new tools for today. His approach is profound and his output is prolific; his music is better served by dissertations than by the limited words that can be devoted to him in this space. Other popular works include his *Two Lenten Motets* (1995), *Antiphonae* (1995-1999), and *Terra Nova Et Caelum Novum* (2006).

The musical creations of Twardowski, Bembinow, and Łukaszewski capture some of the spiritual “aura” of Tavener, Pärt, and Górecki. While they maintain their individual voice, many of their works show an inclination to spirituality through their choice of liturgical texts, the use or influence of chant, and employment of the drone and ostinati. These three composers have perfectly captured the mystery and techniques of the past and fused them with the harmonies and devices of today.

Edited by J. Aaron Baudhuin, Germany