

EWA WÓJTOWICZ (Kraków)

*Reference to the realm of nature
in the theoretical reflections
and the music of
Ludomir Michał Rogowski*

ABSTRACT: Besides an abundant musical output, the rich legacy of Ludomir Michał Rogowski (1881–1954) also contains numerous writings, a special place among which is held by *Muzyka przyszłości* [The music of the future], written in 1919 and published three years later. In this work Rogowski asserted that the possibilities for composing music on the basis of the major, minor and chromatic scales were exhausted. He went on to propose an expansion of the repertoire of scales, giving two criteria for the choice of scales: ‘naturalness’ and ‘rhythmicity’. A ‘natural’ scale is one which can be read from the sequence of fifth steps of the twelve-note chromatic scale in equal temperament. The simplest example is the anhemitonic pentatonic scale.

The concept of the renewal of tonal material is central to *Muzyka przyszłości*, but its author formulates an idea about the rhythmic essence of musical form as well. In his considerations on this subject, he proceeds from the nature-related phenomenon of symmetry. He treats the simplest symmetrical pattern, the ternary form ABA, as an elementary manifestation of rhythm expanded into form.

References to nature also occur in Rogowski’s texts on national music. In this context, folk music represents such values connected with nature as simplicity, honesty and freshness; it is devoid of all artificiality or posture, free from all convention.

In Rogowski’s musical output, a fascination with nature became a powerful source of inspiration, from which many symphonic works of a programmatic character emerged. The connection with nature and joy of life – the crucial values of Mediterranean culture – are conveyed by the music of *Cortège de Dionysos* and by the whole of composer’s oeuvre. Rogowski confirmed his belonging to the culture of the South not only with his music. When, in 1926, he left Warsaw for Dubrovnik, he confirmed it also with his life.

KEYWORDS: Polish composer, 20th century music, tonal crisis, theory of scales, musical form, national music, programme music, Dionysus, Dubrovnik

Besides an abundant and generically diverse musical output, the rich legacy of Ludomir Michał Rogowski (1881–1954) also contains numerous writings, a special place among which is held by *Muzyka przyszłości* [The

music of the future], written in France in 1919 and published three years later in the composer's home town of Lublin. This work contains a project – unique in Polish music history – for the renewal of the tonal foundations of music, as well as interesting comments on musical forms. The author of *Muzyka przyszłości* sought substantiation for his theoretical concepts in the realm of nature, to which he referred in his considerations of national music and in many compositions of a programmatic character, born of a fascination with nature.

'Natural' scales as a remedy for the tonal crisis in music

'Today, the three scales on which, until recently, the whole of music has been founded no longer suffice. [...] They have not been given to us by nature as invariable values [...]',¹ wrote Rogowski in *Muzyka przyszłości*, asserting that the possibilities for composing music on the basis of the major, minor and chromatic scales were exhausted. He went on to propose an expansion of the repertoire of scales to include four 'new' scales: 1) the anhemitonic pentatonic, 2) a six-degree whole-tone scale, 3) an eight-degree scale built alternately of semitones and whole tones (or the reverse) and 4) a seven-degree 'minor-major' scale (equating, in terms of intervallic construction, to the Gypsy scale).

Rogowski gives two criteria for the choice of scales: the first, basic, criterion is 'naturalness'; the second, closely linked to the first, is 'rhythmicity'. A 'natural' scale is one which can be read from the sequence of fifth steps of the twelve-note chromatic scale in equal temperament. The simplest example is the anhemitonic pentatonic scale, which results from reducing the four successive fifth steps to a single octave ($c g d a e \rightarrow c d e g a$). Not every scale can be read from consecutive fifth steps. The essence is a certain regularity to sequences within the order of fifths, defined by Rogowski as 'rhythmicity'. For example, a whole-tone scale can be obtained from a fifths sequence as a result of a succession of every other step, and a scale composed alternately of semitones and whole tones (the so-called *Zirefkend*) from an alternating sequence of every and every other fifth step (see Figure 1).

¹ Ludomir Michał Rogowski, *Muzyka przyszłości. Przyczynki i szkice estetyczne* [The music of the future. Contributions and aesthetic sketches] (Lublin, 1922), 35.

	c	g	d	a	e	b	f \sharp	c \sharp	g \sharp	d \sharp	a \sharp	e \sharp	b \sharp	
Pentatonic without semitones	x	x	x	x	x									c d e g a
<i>Hindschas</i> scale	x	x	x	x	x	x								c d e g a b
Eight-note 'natural' scale	x	x	x	x	x	x	x							c d e f \sharp g a b c \sharp
Whole-tone scale	x		x		x		x		x		x		x	c d e f \sharp g \sharp a \sharp b \sharp
<i>Zirefkend</i> scale	x	x		x	x		x	x		x	x		x	c c \sharp d \sharp e f \sharp g a a \sharp b \sharp
	x		x	x		x	x		x	x		x	x	c d d \sharp e \sharp f \sharp g \sharp a b b \sharp
Minor-major scale	x	x			x	x		x	x			x	x	c a \flat e f g a \flat b c
Major scale	x	x	x	x	x	x						x	x	c d e f g a b c
Aeolian minor scale	x	x	x					x	x	x	x	x		c d e \flat f g a \flat b \flat c
Harmonic minor scale	x	x	x			x		x	x		x	x		c d e \flat f g a \flat b c

Figure 1. Scales ordered according to their 'naturalness' and 'rhythmicity'

In *Muzyka przyszłości*, we find the scales set out according to their 'naturalness' and 'rhythmicity' (see Figure 1). Besides the four scales mentioned above, there are two further 'natural' scales: a six-degree scale constituting an expansion of the pentatonic scale by another fifth step (the *Hindschas*) and an eight-degree scale resulting from a sequence of seven steps of a fifth. Rogowski also included in his list the major scale and the minor scale in its Aeolian and harmonic varieties, seeking to demonstrate their 'unnaturalness'. If, however, we overlook the composer's assumption that the first note of a scale is at once also the opening note of a sequence of fifths (for Rogowski, this is the note c), then the major and Aeolian minor scales turn out to be 'natural', as they both represent a segment of a fifths sequence: the C major scale contains six fifths counting upwards from f, the Aeolian C minor scale from a *flat*. The only truly 'unnatural' scale would be the harmonic minor, as is borne out by compositional practice. When Rogowski turns to the minor scale – as he does but rarely – then it is indeed in its 'natural' Aeolian variant. He willingly employs the major mode, exposing for instance (at the beginning of the twenties) a major chord in the ending of a work or section/movement. It is also significant that in his own catalogue of key characters, Rogowski includes major keys only, thereby confirming the superiority of the major scale, as more 'natural', over the minor, which he called 'the ugliest and un-

wisest sequencing of notes of all [...] the possible sequences of the twelve notes of the present-day (tempered) octave'.²

In Rogowski's conception of the scales, the fundamental ('construction') interval is the fifth, and the first ('starting') scale of the set is the anhemitonic pentatonic. There are several hypotheses regarding the emergence of the oldest tonal systems – the empirical systems to which the anhemitonic pentatonic belongs. One of these is the hypothesis of instrumental choice. The starting point for this hypothesis is the phenomenon of the overblowing of pipes, which gives an octave, a fifth or a fourth. The first scales arose from a combination of these intervals.³ When, in the pages of *Muzyka przyszłości*, Rogowski traces an historical outline of the development of scales from the pentatonic to the major, minor and chromatic, one may gain the impression that – in his idiosyncratic, somewhat 'inspired', style – he is putting forward this very hypothesis of instrumental selection:

There was a moment when primitive man first noticed the sound of a quivering bowstring or of a horn, into which he had happened to blow. There was some brilliant man who noticed and investigated the first five-note scale and used it to express his feelings [...].⁴

A little further on, postulating the reinvigoration of tonal material, Rogowski writes:

The time has come for us to consider those forgotten scales which were formerly set aside [...]. Above all, we should find living music based on those other scales, a music that has remained from ancient times [...]. This forgotten property of humankind are the folk songs and ancient music of Eastern peoples.⁵

It may be presumed that Rogowski chose the pentatonic scale as the starting point for his concept of a renewal of the tonal foundations of music not only because he saw it as a scale in keeping with the laws of nature, 'natural' in the acoustic sense, but also because it was commonly present in the folk music of various nations, and finally due to its links with the culture of the East. Rogowski's fascination with this cultural world induced him to give 'Eastern' names, of his own devising, to two of the 'natural' scales: the six-degree scale constituting an expansion of the pentatonic with a further fifth progression was, according to Rogowski, the 'Persian scale *Hindschas*', and the eight-note semitone/whole-tone sequence was the 'ancient Persian scale *Zirefkend*' (see Figure 1).

² Ibid., 31–32.

³ See Mieczysław Drobner, *Systemy i skale muzyczne* [Musical systems and scales] (Kraków, 1982), 10–11 and 17–18.

⁴ Rogowski, *Muzyka przyszłości*, 29.

⁵ Ibid., 35–36.

Rogowski did not define the set of scales presented in *Muzyka przyszłości* as a system. This term was first used by Antoni Poszowski, the first scholar to study Rogowski's work, in 1977.⁶ Poszowski coined the name for the system from the criterion of naturalness that underpinned Rogowski's set of scales. In Poszowski's approach, the 'system' was ordered according to the number of notes in the scales and was considerably expanded. It now included scales overlooked by Rogowski: modal scales – the Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian and Mixolydian – and 'natural' sets of 9, 10, 11 and 12 notes, as well as the 'Slavic' scale that Rogowski did not 'discover' until 1936. Poszowski's polished and closed construct constitutes a logical system, for which Rogowski actually only sketched the initial theoretical principles.

On musical form

The concept of the renewal of tonal material is central to *Muzyka przyszłości*, but its author addresses other questions as well. For example, he formulates an idea about the rhythmic essence of musical form. In his considerations on this subject, he proceeds from the nature-related phenomenon of symmetry, which he understands as 'rhythm immobilised or suspended in motion'.⁷ He then explains:

The sense of symmetry is given to man from nature. It is linked so closely to the sense of rhythm that we may consider every form, with greater or lesser ease, as a manifestation of the association of different rhythms.⁸

In Rogowski's symphonic music, the principle governing the shaping of form is the sequencing of sections which bring in new thematic material or repeat themes presented earlier, altering them using procedures from instrumentation and orchestral texture, and within that of rhythmic pulsation, in line with the principle that 'the lack of tonal complements and contrasts [...] should be replaced [...] by a play of rhythms and contrasts of sound'.⁹

Rogowski treated the simplest symmetrical pattern, the ternary form ABA, as 'an elementary manifestation [...] of rhythm expanded into form',¹⁰ and held it to be 'unconditionally innate to man'.¹¹ In Rogowski's music, this form appears on different levels of the organisation of a work, both in its funda-

⁶ See Antoni Poszowski, '„Naturalny” system dźwiękowy L.M. Rogowskiego', *Res Facta* 8 (1977), 125–134.

⁷ Rogowski, *Muzyka przyszłości*, 47.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

mental version and also in various modifications and expansions, often taking on the form of segmented rondo-refrain patterns. Rogowski's conviction of the 'naturalness' of ABA form is also expressed in his strong tendency towards closing a work with a reference to its beginning. This procedure appears both on the level of a cycle, for example in his Fourth Symphony, when the opening theme of the first movement *Semplice* sounds in the ending of its fourth and last movement *Risoluto*.

As an opponent of a priori forms, Rogowski considered that every composition should receive its own unique formal shape.

According to a recipe, one can make a mixture in a chemist's [...], but one cannot create a flower or a butterfly; one cannot *make* life, and a work of art must *live* above all.¹²

Elsewhere, he stressed the role of spontaneity and intuition in the creative process:

The powerful, eternal and perennial words about life with which nature speaks to us are all equally mighty [...] whether this word be mountain chain, ocean, hurricane, flower or butterfly. The work of art must be such a word of nature – it must live, and life does not arise out of reckoning and combining, even the most brilliant [...].¹³

Invoking the inexhaustible diversity and wealth of forms in nature, he explained the multitude of styles in music and urged composers to seek an individual way of expressing themselves artistically:

The spirit, gazing into space, expresses its vision most diversely, like a plant apprehends and expresses variously its life-giving deity – the sun. [...] So the sunflower sees the sun as round, yellow and radiant, the mimosa acknowledges the yellowness of its god but senses the spherical shape of the planet with its oversensitivity, chicory [...] sees the sun as round, radiant and blue; common mullein, meanwhile, sees it firing out golden rays [...].¹⁴

¹² Ibid., 48.

¹³ Ibid., 15.

¹⁴ Ibid., 27.

On national music

References to nature also occur in Rogowski's texts on national music. When first writing on this subject, on the pages of *Kłosy* (1914), he contrasted the crisis in German music with the success of the Czechs and Russians, who had discovered a distinctive facet of national music, drawing inspiration from folk music. In the conviction that Polish composers ought to follow the same path, he addressed them thus:

The great German music is dying, and it tries to mask its lack of creative powers with the richness of the attire of the grand orchestra and the suggestion of descriptive programmes. [...] Today, the world is beginning slowly to comprehend the huge significance of the national type in music, and only a few epigones of German music, hypnotised by its splendid past, are desperately seeking new inspiration in the stifling atmosphere, now filled with orchids. Not there, not there will you find that revitalising inspiration! Flee to the fields, to the meadows, to the forests, flee!¹⁵

In this context, folk music represents such values connected with nature as simplicity, honesty and freshness; it is devoid of all artificiality or posture, free from all convention. According to Rogowski, the composer of national music ought to be characterised by a knowledge not only of Polish folk music, but also of its 'natural environment'. A sensitivity to the beauty of the nature of one's native land and the qualities of its landscape can only be formed through daily observation and contemplation. For this reason, Rogowski opines:

Only a Pole can create Polish music, and not a Pole in name or origin alone, but a Pole born of our soil, who understands the language of our fallow land, our meadows, fields and forests, who feels the melancholy of the Mazovian sands and the sadness of the Cuiavian wetlands, the cheerfulness of the Cracovian hills and the menace of the Tatra peaks, a Pole in soul and spirit.¹⁶

Such a conviction of the links between a composer's personality and the geographical environment in which he grew up testifies the influence on Rogowski's views exerted by the theories of Hippolyte Taine, widely known during his times.

¹⁵ Rogowski, 'Pro domo sua', *Kłosy* 1914/5, 30.

¹⁶ Rogowski, 'Pro domo sua', *Kłosy* 1914/2, 22.

Nature's inspiration in Rogowski's music

References to the realm of nature appear in all the strands of Rogowski's theoretical thought and aesthetic reflection. In his musical output, a fascination with nature became a powerful source of inspiration, from which many symphonic works of a programmatic character emerged. The first in this vein was his *Suita białoruska* [Belarusian suite], with its opening movement entitled 'Pejzaż białoruski' [Belarusian landscape]. This work – unfortunately lost – was performed, under Rogowski's baton, by the Vilnius Philharmonic on 25 November 1910. Four years later, he wrote *Obrazki mojej córki* [Pictures of my daughter], with his little daughter Sława in mind. Seven of the nine parts of this cycle present simple images from nature: pt. II is entitled 'Chmury–słońce' [Clouds–sun]; pt. III, 'W pasiece' [In the apiary]; pt. IV, 'Południe niedzielne w polach' [Sunday noon in the fields]; pt. V, 'W zagajniku' [In the grove]; pt. VI, 'W lesie' [In the wood]; pt. VII, 'Ogród w czasie deszczu' [A garden during rain]. In 1918, Rogowski completed another portfolio – *Images ensoleillées*, for various solo instruments and orchestra. He wrote this work in southern France, in Villefranche sur Mer, in awe at the Mediterranean nature, devoting each of the seven *images* to a different plant: olive trees (pt. I, 'Ce, que racontent les oliviers'), orange trees (pt. II, 'Comment les orangers s'enflent d'orgueil'), vines (pt. III, 'A quoi revent les vignes'), eucalyptus (pt. IV, 'Paroles nonchalantes d'un eucalyptus'), mimosas (pt. V, 'Extase ensoleillée des mimosas'), agava (pt. VI, 'L'offrande d'un agave au soleil') and fig tree (pt. VII, 'Berceuse tres maternelle d'un figuier'). During his sojourn in Villefranche, on the Mediterranean coast (1917–1919), the composer regenerated his physical and spiritual powers, strained by his Parisian years. It was here, in the sunlight of the South, that he wrote the aesthetic sketches *Muzyka przyszłości*.

Rogowski wrote further works inspired by nature in Dubrovnik, where he settled in 1926 and where he spent almost thirty years, until his death, in 1954. He lived beyond the city walls, in the old monastery of Saint James, surrounded by luxuriant vegetation. The window of his room looked out over the sea and the verdant island of Lokrum. Rogowski not only contemplated the changing images of the sea – calm or stormy, taking on different colours depending on the time of day and the weather. Communing in his retreat with the Adriatic nature, he became a part of it, living to it rhythm, with plants and animals as his friends. In a conversation with Zygmunt Stoberski in 1948, he said: 'I am at one with nature'.¹⁷

¹⁷ Zygmunt Stoberski, 'Spotkanie z Ludomirem Michałem Rogowskim' [An encounter with Ludomir Michał Rogowski], *Ruch Muzyczny* 7 (1963/6), 12–13.

On the Adriatic coast, he wrote *Pory roku* [*The Seasons*] (1933), and in the fifties *Dubrovačke impresije* [Dubrovnik impressions] and *Błyski po morzu* [Gleams on the sea]. In these two cycles composed towards the end of his life, with a clearly autobiographical suggestiveness, nature is shown from a deeply personal perspective. The composer pays homage to the sea: *Błyski* begins with 'Słoneczna pieśń przyływu' [Sunlit song of the rising tide], and the fifth, final, impression is a hymn to the unfathomed sea, entitled 'More, beskrajno more' [Sea, limitless sea].

With regard to the sources of inspiration in Rogowski's music, one discerns the opposition nature/culture. Alongside the group of compositions born of a fascination with nature, there is a group of works woven from the motifs of legends and myths from different nations and cultures: from family motifs in the cycle *Zjawy. Siedem legend polskich* [Spectres. Seven Polish legends] (1937) to the legend of Saint Blaise (who in the tenth century supposedly warned the inhabitants of Dubrovnik about an impending invasion by the Venetians) in the oratorio *Čudo svetog Vlaha* [The miracle of Saint Blaise] (1927); from Greek mythology in the suite *Villafranca* (1918), with its second part entitled 'Herkules w ogrodach Hesperyd' [Hercules in the Hesperides' garden], and Arthurian legend in *Legenda celtycka* [Celtic legend] (1940), to Hindu mythology in *Fantasmagories* [Phantasmagorias] (1920), where he invokes the Indian deities Krishna (pt. II, 'Danse de Krichna'), Ganesh (pt. III, 'Prière a Ganêça'), Kama (pt. IV, 'Les abeilles de Kâma') and Agni (pt. V, 'Invocation d'Agni').

A special place in this context is held by the figure of Dionysus, who links the two spheres of inspiration: belonging to the world of myth, he personifies the might of the cyclically reborn fertile forces of nature. Rogowski devoted to Dionysus the fourth part of the suite *Villafranca*, entitled 'Cortège de Dionysos'. This suite was composed in Villefranche sur Mer in 1948, and twenty-nine years later, in Dubrovnik, the composer arranged this section as a free-standing work.

The musical interpretation of programmatic ideas

In Rogowski's musical works, the interpretation of programmatic ideas connected with nature is served by a variety of means. The early *Obrazki moje córki* is dominated by simple illustrative effects, as in pt. III, 'W pasiece' [In the apiary], where a swarm of bees flies in *allegro*, in semi-quaver motion, and buzzes and hums in thirds tremolandos, scales and trills from the strings playing *con sordini*. In later works, naturalistic effects disappear; increasingly important is the building-up of the mood evoked by the programmatic title.

Among the means employed in works inspired by nature are the 'new' scales and textural procedures. For instance, often associated with the depiction of the sea is the use of the whole-tone scale; one extreme example is pt. II of the cycle *Błyski po morzu – 'W głębinach'* [In the depths], built in its entirety on this scale. The scales are also the building blocks for the layered tonal structures which are characterised by a stability of pitch and the disappearance of harmonic motion. Such a structure, built on anhemitonic pentatonics, opens and closes the work *Lato* [Summer], forging a background to stylised voices of nature (see Example 1). A structure with similar characteristics, but built on material of the *Zirefkend* scale, appears in the third of the *Dubrovačke impresije*.

One particularly interesting example of the musical interpretation of programmatic meanings occurs in the score of 'Cortège de Dionysos', where we find a figuration that uses a constant model, in which a major third is replaced by a minor third, obtained through movement in intervals of a second. The minor mode is overcome, so to speak, by the major mode – more 'natural' in light of Rogowski's theory of scales. This repeated figure, which permeates the music of 'Cortège de Dionysos', may be regarded as a musical symbol for the regenerative powers of nature (see Example 2).

Rogowski added to the Dubrovnik version of *Cortège de Dionysos* (1947) a commentary:

Every autumn in the south amazes me, [...] it stupefies me with the generative richness of nature, imposing upon my imagination a vision of the magnificent, divine Dionysus. I saw him in Italy, as in Villefranche sur Mer, as also here, on the Slavonic coast, in Dubrovnik. Since Greek times, he has been continuously disparaged: the Romans turned him into the 'sot' Bacchus, failing to grasp that he was drunk on life and sun and love – the people of today have turned him into small change, [...] quarrelling at market over the price of grapes [...]. And yet his is, he lives – the incomparable, magnificent, joyful and crazy god Dionysus, conjuring LIFE out of death, immortal.¹⁸

¹⁸ Ludomir Michał Rogowski, 'Geneza obrazu symfonicznego „Pochód Dionizosa”' [The genesis of the symphonic picture *Cortège de Dionysos*], loose typescript sheet dated 28 September 1947, appended to manuscript score of *Cortège de Dionysos*, Centralna Biblioteka Nutowa Polskiego Wydawnictwa Muzycznego w Warszawie, shelf-mark 1154.

Example 1. Rogowski, *Lato* [Summer], piano sketch, bars 89–96

Example 2. Rogowski, Suite *Villafranca*, pt. IV 'Cortège de Dionysos', piano sketch, bars 24–27

The crucial values of Mediterranean culture contained in these words – the joy of life and connection with nature – are conveyed by the music of *Cor-tège de Dionysos* and by the whole of Rogowski's oeuvre, not only his works inspired by nature. In the area of technical means, his music is characterised by a transparent texture, 'airy' instrumentation and anti-developmental formal tendency. Rogowski formulated the basis of his anti-German aesthetic in *Muzyka przyszłości*, for which he chose as a motto an extract from Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*,¹⁹ beginning with the following words:

Such a southerner, not by descent but by *faith*, must, if he dreams of the future of music, also dream of the redemption of music from the north and have in his ears the prelude to a deeper, mightier, perhaps wickeder and more mysterious music, a supra-German music which does not fade, turn yellow, turn pale at the sight of the blue voluptuous sea and the luminous sky of the Mediterranean, as all German music does [...].²⁰

Rogowski confirmed his belonging to the culture of the South not only with his whole oeuvre. When, in 1926, he left Warsaw for Dubrovnik, 'for salvation to the sun, to the sea, to free nature, those sanctuaries of truth and strength',²¹ as he termed it, he confirmed it also with his life.

Translated by John Comber

¹⁹ This same extract – as part of a somewhat lengthier passage – was quoted by Ferruccio Busoni in the close of *Entwurf einer neuen Ästhetik der Tonkunst* (Trieste, 1907), trans. Theodore Baker as *Sketch of a New Aesthetic of Music* (New York, 1911).

²⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, tr. Reginald J. Hollingdale (1973; London, 1990), 188.

²¹ Cit. after Urszula Dzierżawska-Bukowska (ed. and choice of texts), *Rogowski o Dubrowniku, Dubrowniczanie o Rogowskim (Rogowski o Dubrowniku, Dubrovčani o Rogowskom)* [Rogowski on Dubrovnik, the people of Dubrovnik on Rogowski] (Zagreb, 1999), 11.