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Roots of Artistic Identity
Themes of Traditional Polish Dances
in Modern Improvised Music

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Introduction

In the first place I should admit that the following work is intended to expound my personal understanding of the topic, my own path of discovering the roots of improvisation and the connection between folkloric music in general and personal musical statement of a modern artist. Besides describing the Polish music itself, naming and specifying diverse types of dances coming from different parts of the country and time periods, I would like to highlight my own theory regarding its enigmatic relation to the genre we refer to as Jazz and contemporary, improvised music.

What I would like to prove here is that we, as performing artists, should not perceive our musical language only as a result of gathering a number of inspirations from the external environment, different and fresh ideas which can become strong impulses for our creation, but also, partly, as an outcome of our cultural origins which constitute an inherent part of our psyche. The process of searching for artistic originality, understanding the individuality in improvisation is always littered with fascinations in fulfilled musicians who “discovered themselves”, but at the same time (consciously or not) we are constantly dealing with this mysterious element which is modelling our final musical statement, which is making us special, unusual, and this is our background: as far as musicians are concerned, the aforementioned background is folkloric music. Our culture exerts the indelible, continuous impact we are carrying all the time, hidden in shame or shown with pride, forgotten with disappointment or discovered with enthusiasm, used with respect and wisdom or just lost in the ocean of strong influences.

In my case my musical root is Polish music, wonderfully and poetically portrayed by our great classical composers like Fryderyk Chopin, Karol Szymanowski, Henryk Wieniawski, Stanisław Moniuszko, Witold Lutosławski, Krzysztof Penderecki, Wojciech Kilar, Grażyna Bacewicz or Ignacy Paderewski.

The purpose of my work is not to analyse their œuvre, it is not my point to focus on rearranged, stylized music, even if sometimes it truly represents the prototype well, because my goal is to list and describe the origins, rhythms, melodies and chord changes coming from ancient times, formed through our Slavic and Lechitic civilisation, through Christianity until now.

I believe that the most interesting part of the process of personal realization of the significance of the ethnic impact in my music was just observing myself in the process of discovering my uniqueness not only while playing jazz, constructing jazz or classical improvisation, but also while composing. From my early years I had always been convinced that my own musical language in artistic invention would be the key to my personal accomplishment, but afterwards I understood that the way to achieve my own language is to be honest in creation, whatever it means in practical terms. Now, after a one year separation from my motherland, after my experience with artists from all around the world here in Berklee Valencia, I have finally come to the conclusion that being honest and following inner rules artistically means to be attached to my own culture and to fulfill its eternal "assumptions".

The reason I have decided to centre on Polish dances is because besides folkloric rites and rituals, witchcrafts, songs and chants, forms like *Oberek*, *Mazur*, *Polonez*, *Zbójnicki*, *Krakowiak*, and *Kujawiak* are the strongest points of my interest right now and apart from that they are manifesting our ethnic attributes in the best possible way by showing different rhythms, melodies, and harmonies. I hope it will be the right choice to make, in order to describe the beauty of music from my country and at the same time a good point of reference to elaborate on the possibilities of using these forms or its characteristics in modern music.

Polish Dances

The Polish culture is probably the most homogeneous one in East Central Europe, but at the same time it has a very varied structure. To consider forms of the dances we have to split the country into a few significant regions related to the period of time when Poland as a country was formed. In order to illustrate the origins and characteristics of each form we shall distinct three crucial areas where the directions of musical development were particularly extraordinary and unique.

The first one, *the Mazovia*, is a low-lying, east-central region of Poland, situated across a middle course of *the Vistula River*, where *the Mazur* dance comes from. The second one is *the Kuyavia*, the north-central region situated in the basin of the middle *Vistula* and upper *Noteć* rivers, where *the Kujawiak* dance was shaped. The third region, referred to as *the Lesser Poland*, is located in the southern part of the country, in upper confluence of *the Vistula River*, covering large upland, where dances such as *Krakowiak* (name based on the city Kraków) and *Zbójnicki* (from the region closest to *the Tatra Mountains*) come from.

In this chapter my intention is to demonstrate the similarities and differences between six Polish dance forms divided into two groups generated by myself, which are mainly correlated to the divergences in time signature and rhythm. The first group contains four dances in triple meter: *Oberek*, *Mazur*, *Kujawiak* and *Polonez*, and the second group includes two duple time ones: *Krakowiak* and *Zbójnicki*.

Besides describing the features of the abovementioned forms, I will attempt to demonstrate their philosophical meaning and the sense of a final shape of each dance, which has been forming through hundreds or, in some cases, thousands of years.

My point in doing so is to demonstrate the power of the human forces called origins, ingrained deeply within us, exerting their own indelible impact on all our daily activities, particularly in the realm of art. My conclusions in that matter will also include an introduction to ideas, which I set out to analyse within the next chapters.

Group I

Dances in triple meter

The Oberek

The Oberek, also referred to as *the Ober* and *the Obertas*, is one of national Polish dances, danced by couples to instrumental music (violin, bass and a drum, sometimes with a type of accordion called *Harmonia*) in triple meter of 3/8. Very fast and vigorous, joyful AABB form contains a huge number of various stamps, jumps, lifts and shouts. The name *Oberek* derives from the Polish expression *obracać się*, which means *to spin* and it is not related to any region of the country in contrast to the vast majority of others. It was often danced during wedding celebrations, rites or other secular ceremonies.

The instrumental accompaniment to this dance can be added either to singing or just to dancing. Musicians respond to the opening verse sung or played by a soloist, which in many cases is the first A section of the form (it is also common to start the piece with 4 bars upbeat, the anacrusis consists two dotted quarter notes and six eighth notes with crescendo and rubato in the end).

The musical notation shows the first A section of the Oberek dance. It consists of two staves of music. The first staff is labeled 'A' and has a tempo marking of quarter note = 230. The second staff is labeled 'B' and starts at measure 13. Both staves are in treble clef and 3/8 time. The first staff contains 8 measures of music, and the second staff contains 5 measures of music. The music is characterized by a fast, rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes, with a crescendo and rubato in the end.

example no. 1

The main melody is performed or sometimes spontaneously improvised on the violin, accordion or sung by a singer with an accompaniment of the bass instrument playing fifths rhythmically on simple chord changes based on dominant and tonic. The drum (or a tambourine), besides pointing every eight note in the measure is following the melody by accenting some more important notes and the endings of every section.



example no. 2

Although the first written documents mentioning this form come from the seventeenth century, it is clear that the quintessence of *the Oberek's* musical characteristics had been existing and had been developing for centuries.

We can observe these unique characteristics not only in this form but also in many other similar ones from different parts of Poland including main, national dances like *Mazur* (big similarities), *Kujawiak* or *Polonez*. However, there is no doubt about the fact that *the Oberek* exemplifies or represents them in the most profound and apparent way, at the same time not bearing any relationship to any particular region.

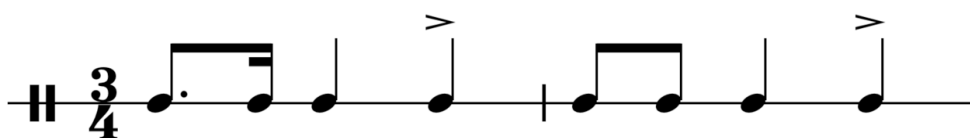
To summarize – this form emerged in the Polish culture as a way to celebrate and enjoy different kinds of occasions. It also perfectly shows the character of cultural mentality and the daily behaviour of Polish people, presenting the national spirit and in my opinion can be treated as a foundation underlying all national dances included in the group of triple meter. *The Oberek*, thanks to its all-demonstrable features is very much like a prototype of others and, as a dance form, it perfectly expresses the core of the Polish musical sense, the way of perceiving the reality and the way of gaining motivation to share in general.

The Mazur

The Mazur, or *the Mazurek* is also a national Polish dance originating from *the Mazovia* region, very often mistakenly identified with *the Oberek* because of their almost identical musical features. However, apart from the same time signature (3/8), a lively tempo, type of introduction, set of sections (AABB), instrumentation, dancers movements and the general tone we can notice some differences between these two dance forms as well.



First and foremost, while in *the Oberek* a plan of set up accents is more loose and unplanned, in *the Mazur* we can easily distinguish some regularity and common behaviours in that matter. Strong points are usually placed on the third beat of the measure (sometimes irregularly replacing with the second beat).



example no. 3

The accuracy in emphasizing accents is probably somehow related to the tempo of the dance, which is usually a little bit slower than in *the Oberek*. This specific aspect undoubtedly exerted a kind of impact on modelling the melody as well, because typically it is very transparent and memorable, more centred upon the attractive element, which is the beauty of the melodic line.

17 A ♩ = 190

B

25

example no. 4

Finally, *the Mazur* dance form is nothing more than a special kind of *the Oberek* coming from *the Mazovia* region, with a slightly altered contour thanks to the strong Mazovian community providing its own identity and a very interesting final purport. The transparency of the name clearly points to the relation with a particular area of the country, bearing very noticeable and obvious similarities to *Oberek*.

At the same time it might have a bit more “catchy” melodic line for an average listener, that makes this form more demonstrative and much more official as well.

Owing to its better recognition, *the Mazur* form became a huge inspiration for a number of Polish composers like Fryderyk Chopin (who wrote 58 stylized *Mazurkas*, mainly for solo piano), Karol Szymanowski (22 *Mazurkas*, also for solo piano), Oskar Kolberg (as a researcher he gathered around 10 thousand folkloric melodies, composed a number of stylized *Obereks* and *Mazurkas*), Henryk Wieniawski or Grażyna Bacewicz.

Moreover, the form was very popular and influential amongst classical composers all around Europe such as Alexander Scriabin, Pyotr Tchaikovsky and Alexander Borodin from Russia, Bedřich Smetana and Antonín Dvořák from the Czech Republic or Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel from France.

In addition, a significant piece of information, worth mentioning in my thesis, is that even the Polish national anthem *Mazurek Dąbrowskiego* is based on the form of *Mazur*, composed by Józef Wybicki in 1797 (two years after the Third Partition of Poland had turned into the removal of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth from the map of Europe), inspired by an original folkloric melody.

The image shows a musical score for the Polish national anthem, 'Mazurek Dąbrowskiego'. It is written in 3/4 time with a tempo marking of quarter note = 116. The score consists of four staves of music with lyrics in Polish underneath. The lyrics are: 'Jeszcze Polska nie zginęła, kiedy my żyjemy. Co nam obca prze-moc wzięła, szabłą od-bie-rzemy. Marsz, marsz, Dą-brow-ski, z zie-mi wło-skiej do Pol-ski! Za two-im prze-wo-dem złą-czym się z na-ro-dem.'

example no. 5

Whereas the examples of *the Mazur's* interpretations I provided are essential to show the momentous role of this form, at the same time my intention is to highlight a delicate matter, namely the phenomenon of discounting *the Oberek* in the cultural output and weakening its importance and position among other national dances.

As I previously emphasized, in my opinion *the Oberek* form with all its attributes is more like a mysterious prototype of almost all the other dances, while *the Mazur* is one of the ways to interpret it. In other words, if someone asked what the idiom, the core of the Polish musical characteristics is, we should admit that *Oberek* portrays it in the most perfect way and *Mazur's* additional features were just formed according to that.

It is not the question of a conflict between these two forms but of a difference between their dissimilar relationships to the very origin; unlike the rest, *Oberek's* fundamental characteristics exist in almost every Polish type of dance with a number of modifications.

The Kujawiak

The Kujawiak is a national Polish dance from the region of *Kuyavia*, also danced by couples to instrumental music with a setup of players similar to that of *the Oberek* and *the Mazur* (sometimes supplemented by the clarinet or different kind of flutes) in triple meter (this time more accurate to put 3/4). In terms of further parallels it is not difficult to notice the same AABB form, an analogous kind of introduction or even a similar rhythm structure.



However, there is also a number of significant differences that make *the Kujawiak* exceptional and absorbing. First of all, the tempo of this dance is much slower here in comparison with the two previous examples. The melody is usually in the minor key with a very lyrical or even sentimental melodic line. The melancholic tone has its impact on the resonance of every section starting from the introduction, which in this case, due to its longer duration acquires a new, enigmatic meaning, through A and B sections with a very calm and transparent way of leading the melodic phrase and, finally, the endings of these sections finished with accents, this time performed more decisively, resolutely, sometimes even with a kind of desperation.

example no. 6

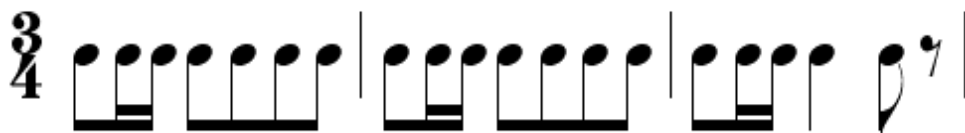
The Kujawiak with all its characteristics, created by the Kuyavian people, pictures ideally the magnificent landscape of *the Kuyavia* region in a metaphoric way. It is also a great example of how diverse the Polish folkloric music can be, how many points of view and ways to interpret the reality we can perceive.

Nevertheless, the evident connections with *the Oberek* and *the Mazur* raise the question of the origins again; we can distinguish the differences in *the Kujawiak*, a discourse about the beauty of details and inner reasons for their existence, but at the same time we let ourselves become seduced by its secretive, immortal parallels emerging from the Polish history, and we pay tribute to them.

This exuberant, sorrowful dance form stays in great contrast to the enthusiastic, joyful tone of *the Oberek* and may correctly be treated as an opposition; as a way of expressing reverse emotions but based on the same musical groundwork identical to all dances included in the triple meter group.

The Polonez

The Polonez, or in French *Polonaise* is probably the most internationally recognizable dance form coming from a group of national Polish dances. Danced by couples, walking around great reception dance halls or in the open-air in a very distinguished and elegant way with *moderate* tempo. Accompanied by different sets of instruments, in triple meter, usually with AABB setup of sections. In this case, the rhythm structure and arrangement of accents are relatively unusual in comparison to the dance forms mentioned earlier (emphasizing the first beat in every measure with a longer step).



example no. 7

In the first place it is principal to stress that this form owes its uniqueness to its ceremonial and splendid character, which obviously has a strong reflection in musical characteristics. The melody is usually composed with some short phrases, very majestic and sometimes ornamented. The key is typically undefined.





example no. 8

Analogously to *the Oberek*, the name *Polonez* is not related to any region of the country, but this time the reason for that fact is more correlated with a social role of the dance shaped by the history. In the past, *the Polonez* used to be named *Taniec Polski* (*the Polish Dance*) or *Chodzony* (*the Walking Dance*), and it was performed during folk or secular wedding celebrations and formal balls. The processional character of the dance and its final form was being shaped within a period of time when *the Polonez* was adopted by the upper class of the Polish society and when it became popular all around Europe.

Due to its very sophisticated form and numerous differences in comparison with other Polish dances, *the Polonez* became an important reference for many great classical composers like Johann Sebastian Bach, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Ludwig van Beethoven, Franz Schubert, Robert Schumann, Franz Liszt, Modest Mussorgsky, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Pyotr Tchaikovsky, Alexander Scriabin, and of course Polish authors like Fryderyk Chopin, Karol Szymanowski, Stanisław Moniuszko, Henryk Wieniawski, Zbigniew Noskowski, Wojciech Kilar and many others. Its form is also used in many national songs or several Christmas Carols, like *Bóg się Rodzi*, (*God Is Being Born*).

Bóg się ro - dzi moc tru - chle - je Pan nie - bio - sów ob - na - żo - ny

O - gień krze - pnie blask nie - je ma gra - ni - cę nie - skoń - czo - ny

Wzgar - dzo - ny o - kry - ty chw - łą śmier - tel - ny Król nad wie - ka - mi

a Sło - wo cia - łem się sta - ło i mie - szka - ło mię - dzy na - mi.

example no. 9

Obviously, this dance form has strong roots in a Polish form referred to as *Chodzony*, which is possibly related to some ancient ritual of exorcising ghosts from the village cottages with sung accompaniment and marching step but the modern shape of *the Polonez*, apart from its foundation remains under a strong musical influence of other dances. It is more like an aristocratic personification of a mixture of different characteristics, almost like an official hybrid of all national dances presented in a symbolic and representational way. This probably explains why one of its names is *Polski (the Polish)*.

Group II

Dances in duple meter

The Krakowiak

The Krakowiak is a national Polish dance deriving from *the Lesser Poland* region; its name comes from Kraków, the former capital town of the Polish Kings and nowadays the third biggest city in Poland.



This vigorous dance form consists of different elements like running, shuffling, passing and jumping. Very fast and dynamic, danced by couples with the leading man directing the dance from the first pair, in duple meter (2/4) to instrumental music with very specific syncopation and rhythm structure, supposedly imitating horses gallop.



example no. 10

Its form is also quite unusual; A and B sections are repeated twice but instead of coming back to the top, we are moving to doubled section C, D and so on, wherein every following segment is evidently altered.

Another remarkable feature is the fact that each melodic phrase is symmetrically repeated, which creates nearly identical pairs of melodies in every section. The melodic line itself is usually quite resolute and haughty; very concise in the basic state, but it can be ornamented with lots of extra rhythmic figures, spontaneous triad passages, and additional dotted notes.

The image displays four staves of musical notation for Example no. 11. The first staff is marked with a box containing the letter 'A' and a tempo indication of a quarter note equal to 120. The second staff begins at measure 36. The third staff is marked with a box containing the letter 'B'. The fourth staff begins at measure 44. The music is written in a single melodic line on a treble clef staff in 3/4 time. The rhythm is characterized by a repeating pattern of quarter notes and eighth notes, with some measures containing rests. The melody is symmetrically repeated across the sections.

example no. 11

The Krakowiak is the most famous and representative dance in duple meter with its own, strong individuality but, besides a number of evident differences (mainly completely contrasting time signature), it perfectly exposes the Polish national spirit compared to *the Oberek* and other *Oberek*-oriented dances. Furthermore, we can even characterize some interesting structural connections between these two dance forms, for example both of them use the same syncopated rhythm pattern, which is only articulated in a dissimilar way and used in a different beat in the measure.

Possibly, the people from *the Lesser Poland* created this form as a kind of mixture consisting of some Polish triple meter dances and the classical music, most probably secular dances originating from the Renaissance period (in duple meter), when Kraków occupied a very strong position in the field of music and the Kraków's scene was fairly influential in the region, the country and all over Europe.

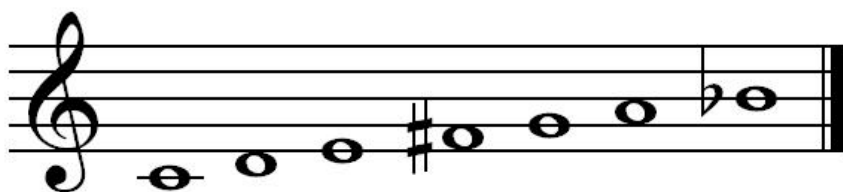
The other worthwhile theory would be that *the Krakowiak* is in fact a hybrid of a triple meter dance like *the Oberek* and another dance coming from the most southern part of Poland, just over the border with Slovakia, at the foot of *the Tatra Mountains*, named *the Zbójnicki*.

The Zbójnicki

The Zbójnicki is a very specific dance form which originated in *the Podhale* region (the southernmost part of *the Lesser Poland* occasionally titled *the Polish highlands*), danced by a group of men called *Zbójnik* which means a robber from that particular area. Incredibly enthusiastic and vital in the variable tempo, performed with an accompaniment of a small string ensemble in duple meter, with many kinds of steps and rampant figures, especially jumping and knee-bending.



The whole form of the dance can be compared to a kind of a suite, which includes an ad-libitum introduction, sung couplets and fast marching in circles with diverse, extra figures. Men, *Zbójnicy* always dance with their decorative axes called *Ciupagas*, which play an important role in some movements. A feature that is very emblematic of the music from *the Podhale* region is that harmony, chord changes and the melody are all based on a unique scale called *Skala Górska*, which means *the Mountaineer's Scale*.



example no. 12

Short melodic phrases are strongly linked with downbeats of the measure, which makes them very short, resolute and concise. After presenting the theme melody during the first couplet in a slow tempo or even tempo rubato, when men start dancing in the circle, the pulse is gradually changing to a fast tempo and the melodic line becomes ornamented in many ways by the leading instrument, which in most cases is the violin accompanied by very metrical hits of the rest of the string ensemble.



example no. 13

The musical characteristics and dance patterns of *the Zbójnicki* form are evidently typical of many dances of this region, also of forms coming from the opposite side of *the Tatra Mountains* – Slovakia and Hungary. The most probable version is that the prototype of this dance was the procession dance, which was the main form of dance for ancient nations from this highlands area.

It wonderfully shows the temperament and vitality of the people who have been living there for centuries. An additional, extraordinary confirmation of these attributes would be that the culture of *Podhale* is still alive, it is easy to notice people in folk costumes and men with *Ciupagas* even in the streets of the highland “capital”, Zakopane city, not to mention the countless villages around, where *the Zbójnicki* and other dances like *Góralski*, *Krzesany*, *Drobny* are still danced regularly.

The rhythmical and overall similarities between *the Zbójnicki* and *the Krakowiak* are very strong, but at the same time highly important and therefore worth mentioning. The reason I selected *Zbójnicki* from a group of dances coming from *the Podhale* region is not only its huge popularity, but also the strength of the way it has affected and changed the cultural environment of the entire *Lesser Poland* area and beyond.

This form was born and was growing in the mountains, developed by small, strong male communities as a symbol of their independence, inner powers, bravery and fearlessness. At some point back in the day, this exceptional land was discovered by others and their culture, music, social practices were gradually absorbed, which we can perceive based on this specific example.

The Krakowiak, with its 2/4 time signature (the only national Polish dance form that does not represent triple meter), the kind of dance movements and the general musical tone bears clear references to the music from *the Polish highlands* region, especially to *the Zbójnicki* dance. After all, my further observation is that *Krakowiak* is still well known and occasionally danced by villagers in *the Podhale*.

Summary

The main purpose of presenting these six most characteristic and well-known Polish dances is not only putting all distinctions and common features together and showing the musical diversity but also explaining the origins of specific dance forms.

Having gone through all these various ways of musical expression quite carefully, we are getting closer to the questions, which are the key to understanding the main thesis of this entire work; namely, the question why these forms have the final shape as described above.

Besides, the matter is why, despite all differences and variations, we can still admit that *Oberek*, *Mazur*, *Kujawiak*, *Polonez*, *Krakowiak*, *Zbójnicki* and others are truly Polish dances by naturally perceiving and extricating the secretive core, which remained unchanged throughout history.

Lastly, if the real folkloric music becomes less and less popular, the dancing practice in fact vanishes in the air, it is advisable to ask where we can find this core nowadays, besides a few remaining villages scattered throughout Poland. Is it lost? Or we just do not need it anymore in order to create our music because of an extremely vast number of influences all around the world. Have we already replaced our national, cultural personality structure with external inspirations and blindly keep on following the movement of globalization and the social progress?

From the my point of view, in order to answer these questions it is necessary to understand the primary meaning of the improvisation as a principal element forming our reality by a spontaneous act of creation.

The real, instinctive improvisation is a complex process of demonstrating our identity, which not only includes our artistic imports, influences, overheard genres or personal taste moulded by life, but also contains something separated from our consciousness, something constant and everlasting, something which created ethnic groups and, in the end, whole nations by separating one culture from another. Here, we can observe improvisation in this sense as folkloric creation; dance forms invented naturally, in the purest way by human communities living in harmony with nature and in peace with the principal rules of life.

We, as artists, by understanding the real meaning of improvisation, should conceive of the opportunity to find our roots by exploring our own culture, but at the same time we shall remember that even if we have no intention of doing so, it will remain existing somewhere inside us, hidden or used subconsciously. Again, this is an integral part of our identity.

Modern Improvised Music

In this chapter I will strive to showcase the phenomenon of improvisation in different contexts, and attempt to demonstrate the role of spontaneous creation in forming the musical styles like classical music, jazz and modern trends.

As I stated before, sense of improvisation has a much wider meaning to me; it is not only about a live act of unrehearsed performance, just a solo in a jazz piece or free music, it is a state of mind, which allows us to create. Sometimes this state inspires us to write a composition, sometimes it forces us to move specifically with music and create dance forms, sometimes it allows us to play a particular type of music, which we had no idea about before. It is a vehicle for the expression of our feelings, either intense or fleeting, positive and negative aspects of our existence in our own, sophisticated way.

While listing all these ways mentioned above, we can notice not only differences but also similarities; we can detect some interesting parallels, which shaped groups of cultures, and their own independence.

Therefore, it is highly significant to expose how this exceptional state of mind has already evolved in the history, how it is progressing nowadays, and if it still has the potential to affect the future of music, especially the genres more connected with live improvisation. In the next topics I am going to focus on these matters.

Improvisation in Classical Music

Besides the European refined concept of the perfect type of music understood more as a branch of science based on cosmic rules, biblical values and the primary meaning of beauty and truth, classical music was strongly affected by the human aspect throughout history, which has been modelling the shape and has been creating the actual result of a composer's creation. This human aspect contained some features like impacts from outside of Europe, fusions of cultures on the European continent and factors of accidental nature as well, but essentially it was overwhelmed by the identity of individual composers, their cultural background and national attachment. As I previously pointed out, these identities were manifested by different kinds of improvisation outcomes.

What is easy to notice is that having started from Gregorian Chants, having gone through medieval mannerism, the Renaissance and the Baroque, the general direction, which was the previously chosen course, was shifting. In other words, to put it in even simpler terms, the role of the classical music had the constant tendency to become more understandable, entertaining and enjoyable for the audience, which reached its highest point in the Classical period.

This propensity can be interpreted as a massive movement of searching for a perfect balance between universal doctrines and indelible human impact, or as an illustration of the symbolic fight between the divine and the human nature, but besides the meaning, the fact of this long-term trend would be difficult to deny.

From the historical point of view, composers began to focus more on their own invention, they started signing their works with real names and put a lot of effort into incorporating subjective musical impressions into them in order to immortalise them and to individualise the character of the composition itself.

The role of a creator-composer was gradually switching from a model of soulful servant with pure intentions of building the artistic monument in the name of God, to a self-centred careerist, mainly focused on his reputation and recognition or alternatively on the idea of progress, as the only target and main sense of art in general (further development). An interesting point to mention here is the very clear difference between these two attitudes.

In the first case the author believed that all his musical discoveries were coming from a non-materialistic, ideal world which we, as humans can hardly explore and draw conclusions based on our observations, distinguish the rules and use them in the process of creation. In the second extremity a composer is not attached to any rule except for the audience's taste, sense of style or intelligence of the listeners, an actual trend or mode, his own caprice or such a prosaic matter as the material situation.

That is why Romanticism was in a way the process of unchaining the art from the advanced musical simulation or illusion, which was based on some previously discovered rules, but commonly covered by a commercial layer, entertaining rather than enlightening role. The direction of this era was a kind of strong response to the Classicism's falsity and its window dressing to the delight of the people, later leading through big thoughts and ideas, through passionate Expressionism to the next extreme – mental chaos rationalized by the idea of the progress as a purpose.

At the end of this process classical music lost its initial postulations, commercial values and its powers to touch people's feelings except shock, disgust or just confusion, which we can notice nowadays. Romantic and Neoromantic inclination towards folk music is not accidental here.

While in previous musical eras folk music was treated as a lower-class genre, starting from Classicism through Romanticism until now this situation has been changing. By putting more effort into developing the individuality, composers started to look for new inspirations, among others derived by absorbing features from folkloric music, which turned its highest point in Romanticism, when composers showed their biggest interest in that matter within different kinds of works, from solo forms, through chamber music, to orchestral pieces.

In my opinion it was the natural tendency to leave artificial musical construction behind and start looking for sincerity, authenticity by getting closer to their own roots; at the same time giving up evanescence and naivety in favour of passion and unfettered expression. However, no one imagined that with time, this expression would unchain from any rule, any principle and would become the reason for their disappearance and further artistic blindness.

Improvisation in the meaning of a live spontaneous act existed in classical music as well, firstly as a tool used by musicians to improve a performance by adding complex ornaments to the notes (mainly Renaissance, Baroque), virtuoso cadenzas in instrumental concerts or in basso continuo, later even as a whole improvised performance, mainly solo (initially in Classicism, but more often in Romanticism). But here it is really important to emphasize that even if the whole performance was unprepared and impulsive, this kind of improvisation has nothing to do with the improvisation invented by Jazz.

While in classical music the whole improvised show was about imitating and fantasizing an already existing composition form with the potential, emotional outcome, in Jazz the order is opposite; the show is illustrating emotions in the first place, with the potential outcome of the form.

Fryderyk Chopin once said that for him the composition process is nothing more than catching the very first creative idea in its pure state and trying to put it on the paper without any accretions; for him it was the actual challenge. He believed that the closer composition is to improvisation; the truer the musical statement of the author is.

To continue this reasonable point, according to Chopin's musical output, I would say: the more honest improvisation and musical statement of the author, the closer the distance to own origins, to folkloric music.

Improvisation in Jazz

The phenomenon of Jazz is manifested and proved by several important facts as follow:

- It is a genre with the foundation of African folk music mixed with achievements in classical music;
- Jazz alters the role of improvisation firstly by enriching its significance and the power of shaping the composition, later by changing its meaning from just an extended ornament or the way to build a temporary musical piece, into improvisation act as an equivalent of a musical piece;
- Jazz has a tendency to develop by adapting new influences taken from other genres; by losing its primary attributes coming from folk music, it saves improvisation as a last bastion possible to distinct;
- Jazz, firstly stated as a popular, dance music, becomes known worldwide as a new art form;
- Jazz creates the new model of an artist, composer, interpreter, performer and improviser in one package.

Improvisation is a natural form of human expression, which has existed in every culture and in each human community able to interpret the outward reality. Folkloric music was in a way designed by instinctive improvisation based on the analyses of surroundings and the previously settled mental character; there was never any need to manifest the existence of improvisation, or to assign a dominant role to it. Even if in some specific cultures the importance of improvisation live act is easier to distinguish, it was still linked closely with the whole piece or a dance, in most cases it was not celebrated separately.

While in Europe classical music was invented without an impact of spontaneous improvisation, or even as an intended perfect contrary to pagan, “artless” folk, the rest of the world was still mainly linked with their native culture.

Deportations of African people to the United States and a long period of slavery on a massive scale created the favourable circumstances to renew the original music from Africa but in a more unconscious way, with strong, new influences of European-American music; this is how Blues, Ragtime, Gospel, Minstrels, Spirituals and others were invented. The element of improvisation was obviously present in every newly created genre due to its close relationship with folk, but at the beginning its role was not leading; at that time the interesting phenomenon was the type of rhythm syncopation, an innovative sense of time of African people, called Swing.

After the Swing era where improvisation was undoubtedly developing, Bebop style was initiated, which finally renewed the meaning of improvisation forever. It became an unusual way to express personal feelings, happiness, anger, nostalgia, fury, curiosity and ecstasy, a way to portray the prosaic part of our existence, hardships of everyday life and a subjective point of view on the sense of life.

Later, when Jazz music was propagated more in Europe and on other continents as an art form, with a gradually vanishing foreign Swing feature, a role of improvisation took on the characteristics of individualism, firstly by different fusions with other young genres like funk, rock, hip-hop or with Latin music, later by stronger connection with classical music and Jazz interpretations by European musicians. Artists from all around the world started looking for their own musical way of expression in Jazz, their individual language in improvisation and jazz composition with many different results.

The reason why Jazz with its exceptional kind of improvisation became so popular and respectable in Europe is because of a gap, created by a strong division between ideal classical music movement and European folkloric music treated as a relict of the past for centuries. People weaned away from this sort of expression found a new genre very attractive and fresh while musicians started to think entirely differently about the concept of sharing feelings through music.

Finally Jazz has become a symbol of individuality expressed by unchained improvisation, in any form, with any musical characteristics and accretions. Nowadays musicians are looking for their uniqueness by mixing the genres, mixing their favourite styles presented by great masters, but sometimes also by trying to understand their own musical roots. The last tendency is the one, where Jazz, after a long trip through many styles is coming back to its own origins, the folkloric music, but this time with a wide palette of different cultures. For now it is more about literal connecting folk themes and different jazz attributes, inter alia swing (coming from African culture), but I believe this direction can and will lead us to more sophisticated ideas and musical discoveries.

The main invention coming from the Jazz movement is ultimately improvisation with its new meaning, stimulating musicians from all around the world to find their own way to express themselves in this incomparable manner, inspiring other genres to use the improvisation as well, but if the last noticeable attribute of Jazz will be just an improvisation, then is it still Jazz?

Well, it depends on a definition, but we cannot deny that the direction of development of this kind of music perfectly proves the extremely significant role of improvisation in our lives and art at the same time showing us its folkloric origins. Now it is only our responsibility to learn this lesson and move forward while bearing in mind that only honest improvisation has the power to express our identity, create new genres and change the future.

Modern Trends and Improvisation

As I previously mentioned, Classical Music, by putting money on expression, firstly as an opposition to the dispassion of Classicism, later as contrary to the musical rules in general, created the tendency to lose its own indissoluble attributes. It lost its early postulations based on perfect rules coming from biblical, Christian values, it lost the commercial feature, which was making it the leading type of music in Europe, and in the end it lost the ability to touch the feelings of ordinary people because of musical extremism.

In Europe, the commercial feature of Classical Music was rapidly inherited by an incredibly wide palette of recently born genres like Pop in general, Rock, Punk, Rhythm and Blues, Funk, Drum and Bass, Hip-Hop, World Music, Electronic Music like Disco, Big Beat, Techno, House and many others (for some time Jazz played this role as well, mainly in the Swing era). According to the enlightening role, real passion and the educative impact caused by the capacity to move people's feelings and morals, Classical Music lost the fight with Jazz and related genres like Third Stream, new concepts of Free Jazz, alternative electronic music and many different fusions of modern improvised and conceptual music. Without these features, and without its own roots constructed on universal perfection, Classical Music is now standing on the verge of a cliff, with a completely dazzled idea of progress through expression without any limits or standards.

Thousands of new kinds of music and the global music business does not further an increase in the general level of genres, their content of art or the amount of progressive musical movements focused on authentic improvisation, refined concepts of composition or innovative live acts. However, we can detach some of them, be aware of its existence and development, at the same time observing the progress of Classical Music, which more and more often becomes involved in affairs with popular music and other genres, including Jazz.

Summary

By describing the role of improvisation in the most important musical movements of the last few centuries I made an effort to emphasize its role in shaping a structure of different kinds of genres, but also to show an evident relationship between improvisation and folkloric music, which is not accidental or previously planned, but inseparably interlinked.

My observations in this matter are leading back to the initial assumptions of my thesis: our artistic creativity and, ultimately, our musical outcome is not only a consequence of some influences and stimulations from the outside, but also, because we might be the source of inspiration to others, we have our identity, which has been evolving in our unique culture and has been shaping this culture as well. With the historical reference and with the awareness of modern tendencies, this statement can be treated not only as a way of interpreting the facts but also as an interesting indication for next generations of musicians and authors. It is essential to dispel all doubts about the meaning of folkloric music, to show, that it is not just an out-of-date musical genre, but this is the music generated entirely by improvisation, by our special, individual attributes, which now any progressive artist is seeking.

Nowadays, after decades of building the modern civilisation, when we are no longer living in small communities, with recently increasing globalization movement, immersed in the ocean of cultures, languages, points of view, political systems, moral values and finally musical genres, it is very difficult to find our own identity, especially when our intention is to play innovative types of music like Jazz. Nevertheless, according to my theoretical research, in order to find individuality in the musical statement it is necessary just to identify the origins of individuality. Of course, our indelible, cultural characteristics are not the only factor to structure the artist's musical outcome, but this is the only one we cannot abandon.

Conclusions

My first milestone point in this topic was when I realized how many features my previous artistic outcome and lately revealed Polish folkloric music had in common. By learning more about the characteristics such as rhythms of dances, way of leading the melody by folk players, type of accentuation and syncopation in dance movements, I became convinced about an important statement; thanks to my determined, long-term attempts to find my own musical identity without a proper knowledge of folkloric music, I was unconsciously getting closer to my cultural background. In other words I finally understood what it really meant to “be honest” in improvisation, composition or any other way of musical expression.

Therefore, in Berklee Valencia I took a strong decision to investigate my origins in a more profound way and dedicate time to finding an answer to several key questions such as:

- What is my artistic identity and how is it related to my cultural background?
- What is the role of improvisation in folkloric music and in other genres?

And finally:

- If the characteristics of Polish folkloric music are common to my sense of musicality expressed through improvisation and composition, what should be my next artistic step? What am I going to do with this knowledge?

I believe that the last question should not only refer to me but also to all musicians who are planning to improve their artistic statement by making it more truthful, powerful and reliable. The question is what we, as composers, improvisers and all music creators should do with this knowledge.

Steps to be taken by a Creative Musician

According to my understanding I have identified three possible steps, which a modern musician shall take:

1. First Step: *Exploration and Experience*

To mix folkloric themes and forms with already existing musical language, which consists of a number of influences, favourite genres as well as unconscious cultural elements. It is necessary to mention, that in most cases this way will be more about discovering and learning than creating art. Of course it can generate some musical profits but it is advisable to be aware of the difference between folkloric musical outcomes and the characteristics, which are modelling these outcomes. At the end, by quoting previous forms literally in our music, we can only study and practice with the aim of creating something new.

2. Second Step: *Consciousness and Creation*

To create music or represent other genres with a proper knowledge of folkloric musical characteristics, and the awareness of its essential meaning for artistic identity.

3. Third Step: *Imagination and Invention*

To try to find a new formula, in which folkloric characteristics would not only be an important component but rather the main foundation of the entire musical structure with the potential ability to transform into a new genre.

My First Step

Despite the fact that it has never been my intention to create stylizations of dances, in Berklee Valencia I decided to take the First Step from my list, compose three musical pieces based on Polish dances, arrange them with completely different approaches and finally record the results in a studio. To accomplish my goal, I used various instrumentation setups and section deployments.

As I stated in *the Polish Dances* chapter, *the Oberek* is in my opinion the most representative and concise dance form among the group named *Dances in triple meter* and that is why I have chosen it to prepare two original interpretations.

In the first case I composed a tune, which consists of a bunch of melodies referring to *the Oberek's* style. I partly rejected the routine AABB form and did some reharmonization and time signature changes but the most important factor here is the way of developing the form by improvisation of the solo piano.

In my interpretation I was striving to intensify and highlight the rest of *Oberek's* characteristics like syncopation, accentuation and others.

Oberek I

Piotr Orzechowski

A Open Intro on Cue 4 bars

A D G D

5 G D/F# F#9/A# G/B E- 3 3 3

9 A D (D/F#) G E- C#9/F D/F#

G D/A A7 D

B

17 C# A/C# C#13 C#7 F#A C#/G# C/G

24 C/G G D7/G B7/F# F7

29 F7 Bb/F F7 Bb13/F C7b9/E C#/F

35 C#9/Eb Ab/C Eb7/Bb Ab Eb7 4 - - 3 Ab

41 C7 F- C7 F-

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example no. 14

My second treatment of *the Oberek* form is more complex; I created, as presented below, a minimal-style counterpoint played by piano, guitar, electric bass and drums, on the top of which suddenly appears an improvised *Oberek's* melody, performed on the piano. By analogy, the way of approaching improvisation and interpretation is the key factor.

Oberek II

For Guitar, Piano Bass & Percussion

Piotr Orzechowski

A

Guitar

Double Bass

B

Gtr.

D.B.

BRIDGE

8

Gtr.

D

D.B.

BRIDGE

11

Gtr.

D

D.B.

C

Gtr.

Gtr.

example no. 15

From the second group: *Dances in duple meter* I chose *the Zbójnicki*, because of very strong characteristics, which had a significant role of affecting other dances, like for instance *the Krakowiak*. I composed the melody referring to the themes of *Zbójnicki* dance and arranged it for the piano and double bass duo. I tried to retain the suite form of the dance and to express the sublime vibe by using its characteristic scale in the melody but again, the most important things happen beyond the notes presented below, in the studio.

Zbójnicki

Piotr Orzechowski

INTRO (fast)

B- D E/F Eb

A (*slow*)

7 D E/F Eb/A \flat B-

12 D/F E/G Eb/A \flat B- *accel.*

B (*fast*)

D E/F Eb/A \flat B-

24 D/F E/G Eb/A \flat 1. B-

solo piano

29 Eb/A \flat

solo bass

33 B-

(*slow*)

37 D (D/B \flat) E/F (E/C) Eb/A \flat (Eb/C \sharp) B- (Bmaj)

example no. 16

Closing Statement

I am deeply convinced that the First Step taken in Berklee Valencia is a stepping stone to my further development. In my opinion the next Steps can be within reach but attainable only thanks to strong determination and intransigence in following the previously taken direction.

With the knowledge I have already gained here I will definitely persevere in my efforts to learn more, compose new tunes and take next approaches to improvisation; I am going to shift fluently between two first Steps for some time, with strenuous awareness of the existence of the third one. I believe this is the only possible way to reach the third level, which would be one of my chief artistic goals in the future.

For me personally, the birth of such exceptional musical movement as Jazz is a proof that reaching the third level is actually possible and even more, it is unavoidable. I believe that exploring our own culture, understanding it, ultimately identifying with own roots and exploiting its characteristics can naturally lead to some new artistic beginning, understood as a gradual realization of that matter by specific groups of musicians. Some of us will remain observers, some of us will unconsciously concur to this movement, but there are also artists, whose role will be to blaze a trail and take the risk.

After all I consider the authenticity the most important factor in modern improvised music. In order to share our real emotions, feelings, thoughts and ideas through music, we have to be authentic, we have to be ourselves.

But what does it mean to be myself? Well, when the answer to this question will become more important than our music itself, then some day the rest of our doubts will be finally dispelled.