

## From Independence to Freedom – Frank Martin's Dispute with the Avant-garde of 1950's

The Swiss composer Frank Martin belongs to the generation of European composers who twice have faced the problem of new ideas in music. First time in 1930s when he was introduced to Arnold Schönberg's dodecaphony and found it as an interesting method of composer's development and a new experience enriching his own composer's *métier*. In 1950, being world known author of *Petite Symphony Concertante* and *Golgotha* Martin began to teach at Hochschule für Musik in Cologne. Among his students there was Karlheinz Stockhausen, one of the pioneers of avant-garde music. Although most of music lexicons include Stockhausen as a disciple of Frank Martin, in fact after five (!) two-hours lessons in 1950 Stockhausen gave up. Martin as a professor of composition didn't restrain his role to consulting and pronouncing his opinions on the works presented by students. They very often discussed problems of contemporary music, works of Bartok, Strawinski, Schönberg. The last one was certainly the most important to Frank Martin. And, quite naturally, to Karlheinz Stockhausen too, at his first attempts as a composer. The influence of Schönberg is apparent especially in *Drei Lieder für Alt und Kammerorchester* and *Sonata für Violin und Piano*. But when Stockhausen presented *Drei Lieder* to the jury of international composers' courses in Darmstadt, the work has not been accepted on charge of being too traditional. After all participation in the course in 1951, where Stockhausen has met Olivier Messiaen and Karel Goeyvaerts, let him get acquainted with the newest ideas and inspired him to looking for a new way - new way of writing music devoid of human element. After his return to Cologne, a fervent neophyte tried to convert Martin to the avant-garde (as Maria Martin has mentioned in her *Souvenirs de ma vie avec Frank Martin*, Lausanne 1990, p. 137) and quite soon he quit Martin's class.

In his later pronouncements on Stockhausen, Frank Martin never commented upon their lessons and discussions. His profound aversion was awakened by Stockhausen's megalomania – especially in the period of consolidating Stockhausen's position as the main avant-garde composer, the greatest one in the 20th century, „Bach and Beethoven of the 20th century music” in one person. Pride, arrogance, lack of humbleness, dogmaticism, indiscrimination, „revolutionary spirit”, fanaticism and „a pioneer's exaltation” – these were the main factors of his attitude. Martin analysed them very keenly in his letter of June 12, 1958 to Jeannie Hatt, who belonged to his private students in 1940s. This letter has never been sent to the addressee, probably because of the outrageous expression. After the death of the composer, it was published by Mme Martin (*Un compositeur médite sur son art*, Neuchâtel 1977). „Je regrette tout de même un peu qu'on donne une telle importance à des gens comme Stockhausen qui s'est plus fait connaître par ce qu'il dit de ses oeuvres que par ses oeuvres mêmes. Ce que j'en connais me paraît singulièrement primitif” (op. cit., pp. 237-238). According to Martin, the world of new music became devoid of everything – „tout ce qui est humain, >trop humain<, de tout ce qui peut faire évocation”, everything that could be an admonition, that appeals to spiritual and humanistic values, that is a sign of memory about tradition and continuity of the culture. Quite opposite, to Stockhausen: „Jedes Werk ist eine Station, ein einmaliger Kern, nicht die Variation eines schon Dagewesenen. Ich kann – says Stockhausen – nicht daran denken, >ein Meisterwerk< schreiben zu wollen. Es geht vielleicht überhaupt nicht so sehr um das Werk, vielmehr um das schöpferische Wirken überhaupt” (Stürzbecher, p. 72).

Much later, in the article written in 1971: *Le rôle de l'art dans la société d'aujourd'hui*, Martin again proves his reasons of inability to accept avant-garde, now identified not only with the activity of Stockhausen, but also Pierre Boulez and John Cage. „Je suis furieux contre lui [Paul Sacher] qu'il ait fait engager Boulez comme professeur au Conservatoire de Bâle. C'est une trahison de plus dans le monde” – Martin wrote to Ernest Ansermet in the letter of August 25, 1960 (*E.Ausermet, F.Martin, Correspondance 1934-1968. Ed. J.Cl. Piquet, Neuchâtel 1976*). It was for him a betrayal in a double sense: personal and generational. In 1930s and 1940s Martin belonged to the group of nearest friends of Paul Sacher. He dedicated nine works to Sacher and to Basler Kammerorchester, including such masterpieces as *Der Cornet*, *Petite Symphonie Concertante*, *Violin Concerto*, *Etudes* for string orchestra. After the Second World War Paul

Sacher was a great propagator of new music; which is evidenced not only in the repertoire of the orchestras he conducted, but also in numbers of works commissioned and dedicated to him, e. g. by H. W. Henze, H. Dutilleux, C. Halffter, H. Holliger, W. Lutoslawski, L. Berio, T. Takemitsu, W. Rihm, B. Nilsson and, of course, by Pierre Boulez who later became Sacher's friend.

Although Martin couldn't accept ideas and music of Boulez, he was always loyal to his fascination in Schönberg's dodecaphony. It makes him, paradoxically, quite close to the French composer. Especially if we compare their writings: two articles by Boulez: *Schönberg est mort* of 1952, and *Schönberg, le mal-aimé?* of 1974, and the article *Schönberg et les conséquences de son activité* written by Martin in the same year. Their individual thesis and estimation of Schönberg's achievements are different, but for both of them dodecaphony is the most important element of composers' outlook and has superior significance for the music in the 20th century. (Sidenote: for Boulez, Strawinski was equally important).

Frank Martin didn't feel well in the contemporary world, „the world of schizophrenics”, being the witness of the situation named as a „decomposition of the human soul” in his letter of 1970 to Victor Desarzens. Thirty years later the same impression will be shared by Roman Berger, a composer living in Bratislava: „The situation of a human being in the 20th century is that of the culture in the state of schizophrenia: we have a religion for special occasions and science and new technologies in a current day” – says Berger (Berger, p. 35).

As Martin observed, the concept of beauty refers only to the art of past epochs, to the academic art and is identified with the aestheticism. Many artists and philosophers have searched universal definition of beauty and good. Also their antonyms are connected: ugliness is evil – both in aesthetic and moral sense. As early as in the midcentury Adorno announced the end of art – that means the end of the aesthetics based on the triad: Beauty, Good and Truth. To Martin, connection between doing good and being in the service of beauty is an unchangeable, eternal imperative. He apprehended pursuing the aim of creating beauty as unselfish act of love.

On the other hand, one can observe rejecting beauty as a predominant principle of art and rejecting inspiration, „this damned word”, as says Boulez, as a creative power and replacing them with purely intellectual premises. It reduces the creation process and its mystery to a structural problem, or to a pure game, like in aleatoric technique, where both psychology and rational factor have been eliminated from the creation process. Sensitivity and experiencing music in an audible sense stop being important elements of this process. What becomes prominent is a conceptualism leading in extremum to the situation of a total atrophy of a piece of art, and also: precomposition, abstractionism etc. As Frank Martin wrote to Rolf Looser (letter of October 31, 1961, *Bulletin de la Société Frank Martin*, 1992, no 14, p. 7): „Bien sûr que l'abstraction comme but est une régression. C'est une descente aux enfers. Peut-être cette terrible descente est-elle parfois nécessaire, dans le monde, généralement, comme elle est parfois nécessaire pour l'individu. Mais encore faut-il savoir que c'est une descente et qu'il s'agit de l'enfer et ne pas y voir un progrès, une montée”.

In rejecting previous rules and canons and replacing them with total anarchy one can see the danger of vacancy, apology of nihilism and ugliness, anti-art. However, on the other hand, anarchy demonstrated also positive influence, that is, first of all, leaving safe and beaten tracks of academism and popular art, acceptance for contradictions and searching attitudes, nonconformity, full determination in challenging principles (Boulez). That is freedom and a new conscience. We may add that in Martin's ethical-aesthetical system anarchy and the freedom of an artist (freedom comprehended in the context of his responsibility) cannot be consistent.

The other alarming factor – in Martin's opinion – is total liberation of the sphere of subconsciousness as a main source of artistic expression. It is observed mostly in literature, fascinated by discoveries of modern psychoanalysis. As a result the reader has to deal with incomprehension and complication of the plot, illegible senses, formal incoherence etc. In music however, another attribute of avant-garde art appears more clearly. It comes to aggressiveness of used means, since artists aim at shocking the audience at all costs. The new way of listening music, a perception based on new premises, becomes necessary. These new premises are – first of all – taking the listener by surprise and excitation. Who used to listen music as a process of discovering its sense, founding logical succession of musical events and sound qualities, such cannot understand the situation of non-stop, unforeseen and senseless attacking stimulation. Indeed, if the

sense is gone, does it at all exist? Let's quote John Cage: „New music: new listening. (...) It is not a question of trying to understand. (...) It is all about attending to the activity of sounds” (*Silence*, p. 10). The expression of aggressiveness has become dogmatical, currently it is treated as a synonym of a really advanced artist. Naturally, Frank Martin perfectly distinguished between aggressiveness as a purpose, and the spirit of a contest and towering defiance. The last is very typical for the youth, and very often manifests in attack against „bourgeois habits” of the audience.

But the article *Le rôle de l'art dans la société d'aujourd'hui* is not an attack against avant-garde art, it does not even try to consider all problems connected with it. It is simply a contradiction and a sign of worry about authentic sense of music, and art in general, in the contemporary world. This is a pronouncement of a „no” to such forms of art as conceptualism, happening, abstraction, environment, group improvisation, performance, total indeterminism etc. To Martin, they are all a manifest that an artist gets rid of responsibility for his own work and for the choices he has made. Frank Martin was aware of the crossroads at which the art and artists of the twentieth century stood. The central tenet of his ethical system held that the composer was responsible for artistic options and choices. That means he wanted to address his music to people, to speak up in his own language and style, being perfectly aware of the sense and form of his work. But how could a composer be responsible for his work in a situation of a total indeterminity of means? This kind of artistic realization has certainly some positive aspects, such is a release of spontaneous reactions or of fraternal relations between artists – performers and listeners. But for Martin, recognizing those para-theatrical practices as complete works is a misunderstanding. „On fait des disques de ces pratiques ésotériques d'initiés que l'on présente comme des oeuvres de Stockhausen; ici je me révolte. Il n'y a pas d'oeuvre et il y a dedans fort peu de Stockhausen” (*Le rôle de l'art...*, p. 197).

Then, it is possible to claim that Frank Martin with his opinions belongs to fetishists, as Pierre Boulez called anti-avant-garde critics and listeners in his article of 1961 *L'esthétique et les fétiches*. Among five principal arguments against avant-garde there are:

1. Too much science, no sensibility
2. Desire to be original at all costs, hence artificiality and exaggeration
3. Loss of contact with the audience
4. Refusal to accept history and the historical perspective
5. Lack of respect for the natural order.

Martin shared at least three of these arguments. However, in his conclusion he assumed that the avant-garde art is necessary, first of all as a transitional stage, indispensable to create something entirely new and great as well. Many of avant-garde works were made with an assumption of their short life and quick passing into the silence. It does not mean that there are no highly valued and timeless pieces among them. Avant-garde tries to express everything that in the contemporary world has been devoid of humanism. So it could be perceived as a call to the defense of those lost values. Should the role of art be an explanation of the present time and world or a compensation for all they are missing? No, in Frank Martin's opinion art is an incarnation of spirituality, a material form of spiritual substance. The fundamental vocation of an artist is searching for an aesthetics appropriate to express the most profound inner life. It is not easy to find an adequate artistic form. The more difficult it is the higher level the ethical sphere fills. In this sphere Martin set up not only responsibility, but also fidelity to oneself, independence, unselfishness, humility, and last but not least – necessity of spiritual illumination. He just placed higher an independence from passing fashions and fads than total freedom of an artist proclaimed by the avant-garde.

Music has widespread possibilities of affecting emotional sensibility of the listener. The belief in such possibility is also a part of artist's ethics. The avant-garde composers deny or resign of this attribute of music. John Cage: „I have nothing to say and I am saying this” (*Silence*). Milton Babbitt's article of 1958 *Who Cares if You Listen?* is especially characteristic here. His claim was to stop public performances of new music and to replace them by private and electronic realizations. He also considered a possibility of total elimination of the idea of the audience and social aspects of a composition. This is an extreme view, since the avant-garde never excluded a participation of listeners in the communication process between the composer – performer and listener, although many avant-garde artists gave up the idea of influencing the audience's attitudes. But in the perception sphere they opened a new chapter, appealing to our intellectual abilities on one hand, and to our subconsciousness on the other, not like before – to emotional sense of

perception. In this new type of perception there are not previous criteria of beauty and perfection. Instead of reading over the semantic senses and connotations we have a records of acoustic phenomena and their qualification as a matter of experiment and innovation levels. New type of listening music is truly democratic; it does not require an extensive knowledge and erudition, but it allows spontaneous reactions. Expanding the sphere of experiencing time and space factors makes more dynamic listeners' attitudes towards new music. In some cases active perception means just free decisions about joining and resigning – in any moment of the performance – of the listening process (f. ex. in open forms).

Through a shortening of the distance between listener and composer, audience and authors, avant-garde tried to rebuilt broken connections and to find an antidote to the commercialism of contemporary art. Unfortunately, neither happening and other theatrical forms, nor structural and sound enrichment of music (done by Ligeti, Lutoslawski and others) could change the fact that new music lost its social prestige. To the avant-garde artists commercialism and objectifying the piece of art – there have been two main signs of a crisis. Now, at the very beginning of the 21st century, these two elements not only haven't been stopped, but seem to dominate. It is a paradox that it is avant-garde artists themselves, today safely protected by the official culture, that are responsible for almost perfect separation of majority of the audience from contemporary art.

On the other hand, we cannot disregard the evolution of the outlook fuelled by leading avant-garde composers. Present activity of Pierre Boulez, return to traditional forms of expression and notation in John Cage's works composed in the 1980s, finally Karlheinz Stockhausen's idea of „exploring the unknown beauty” in his mega-opera *Licht* – these facts are very characteristic. There are also other symptoms that could be interpreted as an attempt to revise their views. In the light of them Frank Martin's dispute with the avant-garde of the 1950s acquires a new meaning. The period of forced freedom, of „dissolute” freedom, became a stage necessary to the following turns. It is not true that the beauty has died. In a mysterious way, it still emanates even from very extravagant works.

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#### Marta Szoka

#### Nuo nepriklausomybės iki laisvės: Franko Martino disputas su XX a. šeštojo dešimtmečio avangardu

1950–1957 m. Frankas Martinas dėstė kompoziciją Kelno aukštojoje muzikos mokykloje. Tuo metu Kelnas darėsi vienu iš svarbiausių šiuolaikinės muzikos centrų. Tarp studentų, kurie lankė Martino klasę, buvo Karlheinzas Stockhausenas, kuris gana greitai tapo pačiu radikaliausiu Europos avangardo korifėjumi. Savo raštuose Martinas niekada neminėjo penkių užsiėmimų su Stockhausenu (iki kol šis paliko jo klasę, išklauses vasaros seminarą Darmštate) ir judviejų diskusijų. Tačiau iš esmės Martinas minėjo savo antipatiją avangardo menininkų atžvilgiu, kurie buvo pilni didybės manijos, dogmatizmo, revoliucinės dvasios, pasižymėjo kuklumo trūkumu bei išpuikimu ir pan. Martinas diskusiją su avangardo idėjomis pratęsė savo straipsniuose *L'expérience créatrice* (1950) ir *Le rôle d'art dans la société d'aujourd'hui* (1971) bei susirašinėjimuose su E. Ansermetu, V. Desarzens'u, R. Looseriu bei J. Hattu.

Dehumanizavimas, tradicijos ir kultūros tęstinumo pojūčio atrofija, atsisakymas priimti istoriją ir istorinę perspektyvą – Martino nuomone – yra svarbiausi avangardo prieštaravimai. Kitos nepritrimo priežastys – tai grožio idėjos bei įkvėpimo, kaip svarbiausio meno kūrinio principo, atmetimas ir avangardo menininkų atsakomybės už savo meną prieš klausytojus atsisakymas. Estetinėje-etinėje Franko Martino sistemoje menininko atsakomybė atsiduria pačiame centre (žr. straipsnį *Responsabilité du compositeur*, kurį Martinas parašė 1948 m.). Anarchija ir totali laisvė lėmė meninės nepriklausomybės sumažėjimą, nepriklausomybės, susijusios su atsakomybe. Tai ir yra pati disputo šerdis.

Kita vertus, Martinas nepuolė šiuolaikinio meno kaip visumos. Kai kurie reiškiniai yra stabilūs ir viršlaikiai, kiti – grynai eksperimentiniai. Negalėdamas priimti tokių kryptių, pavyzdžiui konceptualizmo, abstrakcijos, aplinkos, totalaus indeterminizmo, aleatorikos, grupinės improvizacijos, hepeningo, elektroninės ir konkrečiosios muzikos, jis vis dėlto suvokė avangardo, kaip pereinamosios stadijos, reikalingumą, kaip absoliučiai būtiną reiškinį, kuris pagimdys kažką iš tiesų naują ir didingą. Avangardas gali būti suvokiamas ir kaip visų šiame pasaulyje dehumanizuotų klausimų išraiškos forma. Tad jis gali būti suprantamas ir kaip šauksmas visų prarastų vertybių apgynimo vardan.

Stockhausenas nuėjo kelią nuo serializmo, eksperimentinės elektroninės muzikos iki „intuityvinės“ muzikos bei transcendencinio ryšio tarp kosmoso ir žmogaus supratimo. Jo kompozicinės technikos evoliucija driekiasi nuo kraštutinio avangardo idėjų iki „nežinomojo grožio tyrinėjimų“ operų cikle *Šviesa [Licht]*. Pasak Rudolfo Frisiuso (*Karlheinz Stockhausen. Einführung in das Gesamtwerk. Gespräche mit Karlheinz Stockhausen*. Mainz, 1996), K. Stockhausenas nuolat ieškojo būdų, kaip susieti naujoves ir tradiciją, eksperimentą ir sintezę. Paskutiniuosius Stockhauseno kūrinius, paskutiniausias Cage'o pjeses galima būtų traktuoti kaip jų pastangą peržiūrėti savo požiūrį į avangardą.