

INTRODUCTION. CULTURAL DISTINCTNESS AND COHESION

Addressing the issue of national identity and its reflection in art – more specifically in music – one may, without exaggeration, paraphrase Leopold von Ranke’s observation (1869) that the documenting and researching of world history is necessary, but impossible. Yet that impossibility should not discourage us – he added – since even isolated research projects are instructive, insofar as they penetrate an essential element of the phenomena under consideration – an element of universal significance; and nowhere does that occur so often as in the field of history.¹

That would appear to be the best way of understanding the issue of national identity as a cultural phenomenon, considered in relation to an issue that is sometimes wrongly regarded as its opposite, namely universality as expressed and perceived through art.

Aware of how impossible and yet necessary it is to tackle the differences and concordances of the national cultures of Europe – differences and concordances that were fundamentally significant particularly from the end of the eighteenth century and are just as crucial, albeit in a different way, in the twenty-first century – at the Fryderyk Chopin Institute we programmed, and then from 2013 to 2015 pursued, an interdisciplinary project under the umbrella title ‘Between National Identity and a Community of Cultures: from Chopin and Tellefsen to the Twenty-First Century’. The stimulus for exploring this subject came from a long-running programme of support for cultural relations between member states of the European Economic Area (Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein) and Poland, hence the accentuation in particular events of Polish and Norwegian culture (and the Institute’s collaboration with Polish and Norwegian scholars, artists and organisers). However, we referred in our plans and subsequently in our activities to issues relating to national

¹ See Leopold von Ranke, *Aus Werk und Nachlaß*, ed. Walther Peter Fuchs and Theodor Schieder, vol. iv: *Vorlesungseinleitungen* (Munich, 1975), p. 463.

identity and community from the widest possible perspective, encompassing European culture as broadly conceived.

The two-year cycle of events that made up the project ‘Between National Identity and a Community of Cultures’ included a dozen or so concerts (most of them given as part of the International Festival ‘Chopin and his Europe’, with two repeated in Norway during the Trondheim Symphony Orchestra’s concert season), exhibitions (in Warsaw, Trondheim and Żelazowa Wola), books and multimedia publications (among them the first ever edition of Ingrid Loe Dalaker’s doctoral dissertation about the composer and pianist Thomas Tellefsen, one of the few publications devoted to this artist, of particular interest in relation to nineteenth-century musical culture in Norway and Paris) and educationally-oriented events.

Among the core elements of the project was an academic programme, realised through a series of four international musicological symposia: ‘Chopin and Tellefsen in the Musical Culture of Paris during the Nineteenth Century’ (Paris, September 2013), ‘Music at Source: Poland – Norway’ (Radziejowice, near Warsaw, August 2014), ‘The Shaping of National Identity in the Culture of Poland and Norway during the Nineteenth Century and up to the First World War: “National Styles” in Music’ (Trondheim, September 2014) and ‘Cultural Heritage and Dialogue: Lutosławski – Nordheim’ (Oslo, May 2015).

The symposia embodied, more or less involuntarily, Leopold von Ranke’s idea invoked at the beginning of this article, since they gave rise to a collection of studies concerning essential aspects of the principal topic, albeit individual studies, not globally encompassing the phenomenon (which by its very nature cannot be globally encompassed) of national identity.

The studies collected in the present tome are intended to represent the basic thematic areas explored during the successive symposia.

The starting point for the conference cycle was the relationship between Fryderyk Chopin and his pupil Thomas Tellefsen, from which the whole project took its title, considered from the point of view of their compositional output and within the context of the specific character of the musical culture of nineteenth-century Paris. At that time, Paris was the centre of European culture, attracting composers, performers, patrons and audiences of various nationalities and stylistic traditions, incarnating disparate aesthetic conceptions, which coexisted in that heterogeneous epoch. Thus in

the chapter comprising papers prepared for the Paris symposium, held in September 2013, we find reflections on the prominence of (Polish) nationality in Chopin's compositions of the Paris period (Irena Poniatowska), on one hand, and on Tellefsen's creative stance, of a fundamentally opposite aesthetic, on the other. Tellefsen embodied the cosmopolitan concept of the *juste milieu* (Ingrid Loe Dalaker), which blurred the boundaries between national styles, and yet after Chopin's death he found himself among the heirs to the Polish composer's legacy, as broadly understood (Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger). In this group of papers, the cultural context is enriched by articles dealing with the valuable, but little known, perspective from which Chopin was perceived by a contemporary critic who might be considered one of the composer's first biographers, Joseph d'Ortigue (Marie-Paule Rambeau), and the 'phonosphere' of nineteenth-century Paris, research into which leads to a deeper understanding of Chopin's creative process, the functioning of the artist in society and also, in effect, numerous aspects of his works.

The next two sections of the book contain papers collected from symposia held in 2014. The Radziejowice symposium 'Music at Source: Poland – Norway' combined classical scholarly papers with practical workshops. Given the dominance in the readings of the subject of the melodic and rhythmic formulas common to the traditional music of Scandinavia and Poland, revealing occasionally surprising similarities between the musical folklore of the two national groups, it may be assumed that those practical activities (learning the basic steps of Polish and Norwegian folk dances!) were particularly instructive for the participants.

The second gathering that year (Trondheim 2014) fruitfully explored the forms in which national identity manifests itself in music, thereby touching on the ambiguity of the phenomenon – intuitively understood, yet hitherto lacking a full and satisfying definition. Reflection concerned a number of areas: the connection between music defined as national and the language of a given nation (incl. Beryl Foster), which would confirm, of course, the highly influential theory of Johann Gottfried Herder, who divided humanity into nations equating to linguistic units; the possibility (or not) of assimilated foreign composers creating 'authentic' music of a given nation (Harald Herresthal); the possibility of pointing to quotations or stylisations of folk music (a particularly frequent phenomenon in opera, also present in instrumental music) as manifestations of nationality in art music; the impossibility



of stating unequivocally on what grounds music devoid of such discernible references might be treated as national. This reflection, although failing to produce that missing definition of national identity in music, did allow for the clearly necessary and inspirational signposting of the paths that could be followed by scholars wishing to investigate this issue.

The idea of tracing the changes which the notion of national identity could have undergone in relation to universality in European culture of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries informed the last conference in the cycle, held in Oslo in 2015, which focussed on the output of two composers largely representative of the contemporary musical output of Poland and Norway: Witold Lutosławski and Arne Nordheim. The papers delivered to this conference enabled participants to discern such things as the weight of stylistic similarities between the two composers (Marcin Krajewski), whilst their composition techniques remained highly individualised, resulting largely from the systems of aesthetic and ethical values they espoused (Grzegorz Michalski). Ultimately, the question of the legitimacy, in the current era of globalisation, of music articulating national elements – if indeed it even can – remained open. Nonetheless, the fact that this question arose and was debated suggests that national identity expressed in art, despite such far-reaching changes in society, remains a lively subject.

Before listening to the individual voices in this wide-ranging dispute – for that is what the papers collected here essentially represent – it is worth quoting Carl Dahlhaus's synthesising take on the subject: 'The idea of universality [...] and the national character which nineteenth-century composers tried to instill into music [...] were never viewed as opposite. Nationalism was seen as a means, not a hindrance, to universality. [...] The dialectics of nationalism and universality in music cannot be captured in a simple formula. The notions of human commonality, cosmopolitanism, nationalism, and individualism all impinged on music aesthetics in the nineteenth century, and it is precisely because nineteenth-century thought went around and around these anthropological categories that the relations between them are so tangled'.²

And so – let the discussion commence.

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² Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, tr. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley, 1989), pp. 36–37.