Timbre Music and the Birth of New Cult-Sound

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Abstract: The article deals with selected ambits from the theory of timbre /sonoristic/ music. The Timbre Music is one of the most important expressions of music culture of 20th century as well as a signal of new qualitative musical-expressing means which started to be focused on the sound and timber /sonicity/. The author distinguishes two basic streams of Timbre Music – French Timbre Music and Polish Sonorism. He interprets basic theoretical sources of Timbre Music.


1 Introduction
Timbre music is very varied in its details and represents a certain type of revival of sensuality of music. We can characterise it as a certain type of dramaturgy /arrangement, mixing, eventually a collage/ of contrast sections, formed in /modal, serial, punctual, aleatoric/ way which are acoustically colorful, that is sonically dominating. The absolutisation of sonoristics is connected with the invention of new acoustic qualities and with the new cult of sound. From the point of view of the history of musical culture we encounter the problem of typologisation of names of timbre music which is frequently /and many times unambiguously and incorrectly/ labeled as imitated aleatorics, sonic music, music of sound-colorful sections, neoimpressionism, music of acoustic phenomenon, etc. In this contribution we would like to turn our attention to the selected musical-theoretical fields.

2 Problem Formulation
How to approach to the analysis of timbre music? The traditional questions of form, tectonics, harmony, melody and other musical-expression means which stood in the foreground of the analysis of the traditional expression system of the European musical culture based on tempered twelve-tone system are not sufficient. For the creation, structure and analysis of the musical form and its tectonics, the question of colour, movement, time and space becomes crucial. Each sound in the structure obtains individual function, given by the characteristics of its sound. The seizure of sound-sensual substance of tones, which creates the core for analytical situation, led to the negation of all tectonic principles of existing structure /form is not a formula but a process running in time/. In timbre music the sound developed into time is important, the quality of forms and relations is retransformed into the quality of colour. When analyzing, it is important to introduce parameters which enable the registration of sonic qualities /density, intensity, colour of sound/. In timbre music the development of topic is represented by the development of sound.

3 Problem Solution
In timbre music more extensive sound areas are exposed as a whole with intense colour characteristics. We comprehend these sound sections as a sonic whole in spite of its internal colourful changeability. Contrast of sound-colourful sections may be successive and also simultaneous – in this connection certain counterpoint of blocks, zones and sound units occurs, which is some kind of “metacounterpoint”. Instead of uninterrupted lines of individual voices there are inner differential units, grouping of voices which are placed in opposition and contrast. It utilizes longer lasting sound areas which provide the listener with the sufficient time to comprehend and experience music and which by their clearly perceptible structural segmentation make the music structure clear. The final musical effect depends not only on the dynamic timbre, on the contrast of motion and peace, but also on the overall creation of the artistic structure. Creation of timber music is based on shifting, changes, interdigation, gradation and regradation of colourful areas. The results of the mentioned sound operations create the heart of timber music. The sound is not bind to melody and harmony. Form, based only on sonicity without dynamism and themes would miss the most important: motion /movere/, tension. Sonic form would only be additive ordering of
different sound colours next to each other – it would be something static. Instead of malleability one works with acoustics of sounds which are more or less musically not stylized. In the hierarchy of musical- expressing qualities tone colour tops the scale. The colour is formed by the new way of articulation – by preparation of standard acoustic quality of performance on musical instruments. Richness of colour reached by acoustic changes is the main bearer of musical meaning. Timbre music pays attention to colour element; after becoming independent, the requests to broaden the colour palette were brought up. Instead of subject matter and form, the sound structure captured attention.

Timbre music utilizes that information that it views the tone system from two perspectives:
1. as a stable system with fixed degrees /for example keyboard instruments/,
2. as a variable system with changeable pitch of tone /for example bowed and woodwind instruments/.

Authors do not compose in the traditional tempered system where every tone has its predetermined tectonic-constructural-meaningful function but they work with new, acoustically determined qualititative elements. Pitch parameter stops having the crucial role but for the identification of the tone the pitch is not predominant but strenght, colour, eventually duration and way of articulation /direction from tone towards sound; already Edgar Varèse/.

Timbre music can be expressed as: 1. not organized sound activity or environment as a cut-out in larger sound organized context; 2. sound formations with number of variable details /technique of absolute aleatorics/; 3. acoustic-optical-kinetic productions and compositions.

The roots of timbre music can be sought mostly in sonic sections of French impressionism, in compositions of Italian bruits, in musical acoustic-spatial compositions and in electroacoustic music. So called “Novopolská school”, labeled as Polish sonorism has attributed to the new acoustic qualities of timbre music.

Timbre music hides the danger of absolutization of colour, of breaking up of shape, of uncertainty of conceptual intention. The advantage of timbre music in comparison with rational systems and willful aleatorics is experiencing of musical time, acceptance of human listening and it counts with the sensual appeal of sound.

Research of several experts has contributed to the analysis of timbre music. We have selected several examples for illustration. Wayne Slawson in his book Sound Color /1985/ distinguishes four dimensions of sound: openness, acuteness, relaxation and smallness. Slawson’s theory is based on the statement that any perceptually important parameter is possible to implement as a transformation /operation above space defined dimensions/ by utilizing the resonance model, which means in practice, that there is a potential possibility of some kind of universal “meta musical instrument”. Erik Christensen analysed compositions of Xenakis and Ligeti in a book The Musical Timespace /1996/ mainly because these composers deliberately applied concept of sound continuum, then, handling some masses of sounds which can be modeled into musically relevant shapes and for these the external shape is more important than detailed evaluation of individual elements. His abstraction of “musical timespace” contains four dimensions: pitch, timber, pulse and motion. In this construction there is a very interesting complex symmetrical relation of time space dimension /micro-time continuum and macro-time continuum/ and of dimension of so-called virtual space /micro-spatial dimension and macro-spatial dimension/, which meet at the centre of symmetry on the level of intensity. Virtual space is defined as space which is “generated by mental illusion based on perception of sequences and patterns of differences in macro-time and micro-time continuum” /Christensen/. To illustrate this highly abstract definition we will just state that this macro-spatial dimension is considered to represent the space evoked by a vertical reflecting perception of high and deep pitch of tone /in other words, width of register/. These two basic axes /time continuum and virtual space/ are further put into concrete terms by specifying their relation to four basic musical categories. Pitch of tone and timber are placed into category of microtime /locally/ parameters, and pitch of tone is characterised as a source of local regularity /stabilization/ and timber as a factor participating in evocation of changes. Dimensions of pulse and motion, according to Christensen, enter the process of perception on the level of macro-time /global, form/ actions. Pulse as an equivalent of pitch of tone causing regularity and motion as an equivalent of timbre causing change and directionality to the point of arrival. Presentation of sound space according to Michael Clark Extending Contacts: Concept of Unity in Computer Music /1999/ is based on thoughts and composition techniques of Karlheinz Stockhausen. His final representation tries to determine relation between the process of generation of sound and psychoacoustic categories of time, pitch of tone, timbre and space. Slovak musicologist Miroslav Filip in his study Character of Bearer of Information in Music /1963/ came to the conclusion that the energy of tone depends on frequency /altitude/, amplitude /oscillation/ and on spectrum /the way how it is compound of its partial tones, it is colour – timbre/. Filip came to the complete conception of these qualities on the basis of energy. He calls the given characteristic dynamics of musical tone and he speaks about sound form. Acoustic energy with its fragmentation in auditory field and in time is the bearer of information in music, the same as motion in objective reality.
Sonoristics is the implementation of specific sound colour of the whole of the given block. Simultaneous and successive colour contrast in motion originates by combination and succession of determined blocks with regard to time. The quality and intensity of contrast is determined by representation of instruments in the block /density, position, dynamics/. From the given position of intensity of contrast of the tone colour we can approach to the identification of tectonic construction /tectonics of sound units, oscillation of sound mass etc./.

4 Conclusion

The most substantial feature of timbre music is the absence of common metrical prosody, which would be binding for every performer of the piece. Timbre music is distinguished by some specific features, out of which we can present some: complete negation of melodious line; complete negation of musical theme; orientation towards the emotional sphere rather than towards consciousness of musical sequences in a rational, exact, thoughtful way; new spectrum of tone colour as an expression of musical or extramusical line; utilization of specific sounds, acoustic noises or clusters; utilization of exclamations, sighs, whispers, spoken singing, chanting, breaking words into syllables and speech sounds; combination of concrete sounds with electronic artificial sounds or with singing and sounds of musical instruments distorted in electronic way; musical form as the bearer of meaning was endangered; sound is not attached to melody and harmony; reduction of expression means in favour of sonicity.

References: