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Résumé de l'article

La richesse et le raffinement du vocabulaire harmonique est probablement ce qui fascine le plus dans les mazurkas op.50 et op.62 de Karol Szymanowski. Son langage musical combine plusieurs éléments stylistiques, incluant l’utilisation de pédales, de quintes parallèles, de modes mixtes et de bitonalités. L’interaction entre ces techniques d’écriture contribue à déstabiliser les relations harmoniques fonctionnelles, conduisant à de multiples collisions harmoniques basées sur les demi-tons, que l’on a baptisées « Szymanowski clashes ». L’examen de ce langage harmonique à partir du concept de « Szymanowski clash » peut aider à mieux comprendre cette musique en mettant en lumière une conception et une logique structurelle compositionnelles, tout en rendant compte de la perception des surfaces musicales.

THE "SZYMANOWSKI CLASH": HARMONIC CONFLICT AND AMBIGUITY IN THE SZYMANOWSKI MAZURKAS

Matthew Bengtson

The 20 Mazurkas, op. 50 (1924–5) and 2 Mazurkas, op. 62 (1933–4) rank among the finest achievements of Polish composer Karol Szymanowski (1882–1937). Inspired by folk music of the Góral peoples—the inhabitants of the Tatras mountains at Zakopane, in the Podhale district in the south of Poland—Szymanowski devised a new musical style that reinvigorated the rather old-fashioned mazurka genre with charm, wit, and sophistication. Szymanowski's mazurkas successfully combine a diverse range of influences: a folkloristic style akin to Bartók and Stravinsky, an Impressionistic language related to Debussy and Ravel, and an intense emotional posture, somewhat reminiscent of Scriabin. Naturally, they also derive from the works of Szymanowski himself, from his middle period: the years of the Great War. Considering this wide range of influences, Szymanowski managed to achieve a remarkable coherence and consistency of style in these mazurkas. This repertoire has begun to receive increasing attention from pianists, listeners, and musicologists alike.[1]

The sophisticated harmonic vocabulary of these mazurkas is a key element of the freshness and novelty of this style and is one of its greatest fascinations.[2] The essential building blocks of this musical language include pedal points, bagpipe fifths, whole-tone and octatonic scales, modality, and modal mixtures. Key centres are established and organized by techniques including symmetrical division of the octave, axis tonality, and bitonality. While all these elements are important ingredients of the musical language, they are rarely adequate to explain all the salient elements of a given passage or the role they play in a composition. Szymanowski's audacious handling of layered harmonic structures poses great difficulties to an analyst seeking to explain his choices

[1] The primary literature on the mazurkas includes Wightman (1999), especially 289–93; Chylinska (1993), especially 195–9; Samson (1981), especially 166–72; three chapters by Downes—"Harmony and Tonality" (109–14), "Folk Music as Idea and Inspiration" (87–93), and "Chopin: His Influence on Szymanowski" (15–19), in Downes and Cadrin (2015); McNamee [Kosakowski] (1985); Zieliński (1960); Kosakowski [McNamee] (1980); and Bengtson (2001).

[2] The rhythmic vocabulary of these mazurkas is beyond the scope of this article, but it is worth remarking that Szymanowski's superimposition of triple mazurka rhythms over the traditional duple rhythm of Góral folk music represents yet another mixture of ingredients that enriches this style.

of pitch content. An adequate analytical framework is not easy to find. This elusive quality of the music is part of its allure and is an exciting challenge for a theorist.

In this article I will focus on conflict and ambiguity in Szymanowski's harmonic language in the mazurkas, specifically the frequent clashes by semitone that I will dub the "Szymanowski clash." Harmonic ambiguity is a hallmark of much of Szymanowski's music and is particularly widespread in the mazurkas. Chromaticism can cloud perceptions to the point that it is impossible to label one note as "consonant" or "diatonic," and another as "dissonant" or "chromatic." Clashing phenomena can even shroud the tonic pitch itself in a haze. Although Szymanowski's language is highly chromatic, it is never "atonal" in the Schönbergian sense.[3] Some clashing phenomena might well be considered and analyzed as "bitonal." A framework for analysis of bitonal counterpoint, in relation to larger-scale tonal organization, is proposed below.

The "Szymanowski clash" is not intended as a comprehensive and essentialist theory for all harmonic phenomena in this composer's music. As Szymanowski scholar Stephen Downes (1994, 277) has observed, "Szymanowski's mature art is notably resistant to interpretation based on a single principle." However, if explored in conjunction with other analytical techniques, a close reading of a mazurka's semitone clashes can illuminate the harmonic-colouristic properties of a mazurka, in a way that accords closely with a listener's or performer's aural perceptions. Although modal mixtures and "wrong note" harmonies can be characteristic of other contemporary styles, clashing phenomena in the mazurkas can often point also to aspects of structural organization.

Pedal Points and Bagpipe Fifths

A salient feature of the mazurka genre throughout its history is a preponderance of open fifths in the bass register, imitating the bagpipe's drone.[4] In this traditional usage, these fifths settle, ground, and simplify the harmony, and tend to reduce musical tension. However, Szymanowski liked to place different open fifths in conflict with one another, creating piquant harmonies, some quintal sonorities, and structural tensions. Conflicts created by this expanded use of bagpipe fifths are "Szymanowski clashes" that can govern the overriding logic of a piece's harmonic progressions. Finding new and imaginative techniques for employing this traditional device is one of many ways in which Szymanowski outstripped the earlier late-Romantic mazurka composers.[5]

The sound of the open perfect fifth in these mazurkas is a clear aural marker that conjures the image of a Góral folk band, but this element is not entirely alien to his musical language. His English-language biographer, Alistair Wightman,

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3 Szymanowski's commentary on Schönberg shows interest in and understanding of his music; see Szymanowski (1999, 220–2). Ultimately, though, these feelings diminished to a grudging respect, and to an outright dislike; see Wightman (1999, 123; and Szymanowski (1999, 99).

4 There are countless examples in Chopin, such as op. 6, no. 3 in the opening; op. 7, no. 1, mm. 45–51; op. 56, no. 2, etc.

5 The advances made by Szymanowski over previous composers of mazurkas are considered in Bengtson (2001, 25–38).

observed, "Szymanowski's liking for pedal-points [in his earlier music] easily translated into colouristic drone fifths which obviously sought to imitate the *dudy,* or Polish bagpipes" (1999, 292).[6] The very opening Mazurka op. 50, no. 1, is just one of many examples in the mazurkas of fifths in the bass register that solidify the harmonic structure. They function as a stable pedal point, while more remote and dissonant harmonies are employed above them.

In the Mazurka op. 50, no. 4 (example 1a), the left hand's fifths move in parallel whole steps, stacked as ninths, leading to a characteristic harmonic discord (D♭/D♮) in the third measure. The conflict embodied in this chord—sonorous G♭ bagpipe in the left hand against B♭ major in the right—forms the very dialectic of this entire composition. Carl Dahlhaus has proposed the terms "chord center" or "matrix sonority" for a chord of structural as well as harmonic significance (1987, 203).[7] Later in the same mazurka (beginning from example 1b), the same harmony is sustained for a more extended period from mm. 27–45, as the G♭ bagpipe fifth once again comes into conflict with the B♭ tonality of the right-hand parts.

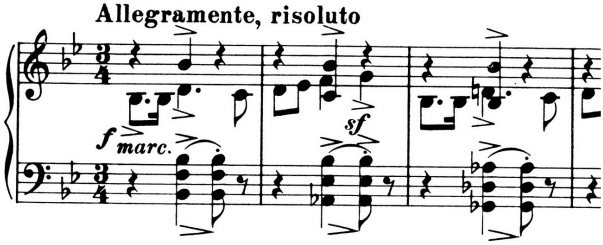
A layered harmonic texture like this always poses a question: Which of the two influences is ultimately more powerful? According to the basic principles of traditional harmony, the influence of the bass part ought to prevail. In this case, the G♭ fifth from m. 27 turns into a G♭ pedal point whose influence governs for nineteen measures. Formally, the section from measures 35 to 68 comprises the contrasting middle section of a ternary structure and therefore ought to represent a tonality distinct from the tonic B♭. Although the G♭ bass represents that tonal contrast, it is quite unusual that the composer would retain a tonic fifth (B♭-F) in the right hand in m. 29 (example 1b), at precisely this moment when tonal contrast is most urgently needed. This touch of ambiguity contradicts traditional principles of harmonic motion and serves as a good example of the composer's originality in creating seamless transitional passages throughout his mazurkas.[8] The logical thrust of the passage derives from the sequential harmonic progression of polychords in mm. 13–27, arriving at an E/C polychord in m. 15, a C♯/A polychord in m. 21, and finally B♭/G♭ in m. 27. These polychords, which sequence down by minor thirds, are constructed of major triads spaced a major third apart—a favourite sonority of Szymanowski's. Once the sequence has taken the bass to G♭, the right hand arrives at the tonic triad of B♭. The *dimin.* and *rit.* indications and the change of texture all imply a new section, overruling the B♭ right hand, but the unity of this harmonic material from m. 3 may also remain in the listener's aural memory. It is a moment of ambiguity, or irony, made possible by the Szymanowski clash technique.

The coda (mm. 99–115) suggests that the composer planted the seeds of this irony deliberately, and responded to it. The G♭/B♭ conflict is taken up again in bar 95. As in Classical repertoire, such as Beethoven symphonies, moments

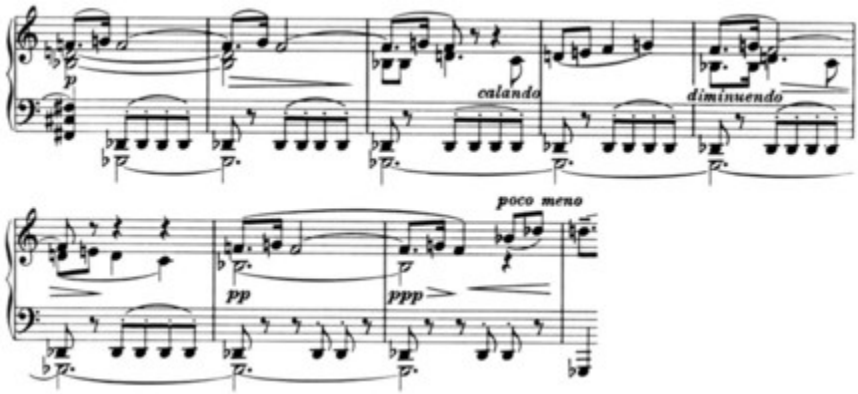
6 See also 138, for a detailed description of the middle-period style.

7 Stephen Downes has investigated the significance of chord centres in his discussion of "Tanz" from the Hafiz cycle (1994, 173–89).

8 Szymanowski's skill in transition passages is discussed in Bengtson (2001, 87–91).



Example 1a. Free parallel fifths from the Mazurka op. 50, no. 4, mm. 1–3. Karol Szymanowski "Mazurkas | für Klavier | op. 50". © Copyright 1926 by Universal Edition A.G., Wien. www.universaledition.com



Example 1b: Conflict of G-flat vs. B-flat tonal regions in the Mazurka op. 50, no. 4, mm. 27–34. Karol Szymanowski "Mazurkas | für Klavier | op. 50". © Copyright 1926 by Universal Edition A.G., Wien. www.universaledition.com

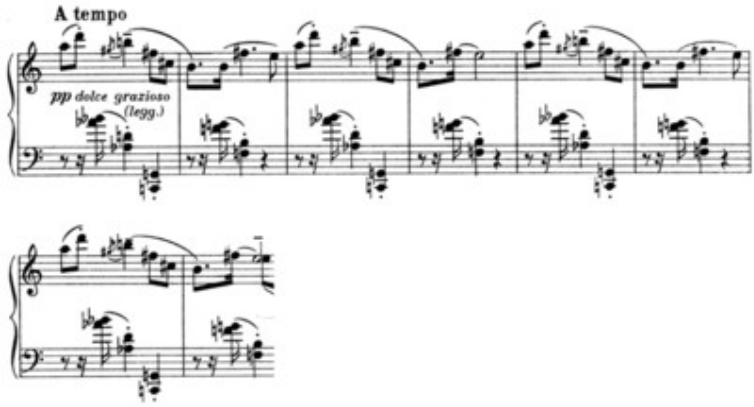
of conflict or instability during the main body of the piece are taken up again and resolved in the coda. In this mazurka, the B♭ tonality in the right hand gradually gains supremacy over the G♭ bagpipe—a rare example in which the treble wrests harmonic control away from the bass. Perhaps this turn of events explains the G♭ bagpipe's violent protestations in the form of gruff *sforzando* chords (mm. 99–100). As a final bit of mischief, the right hand ventures off onto a G major triad in 112–14: a new sonority departing from the dissonant major-third relationship noted above. At the very end, though, B♭ is sonorous and firmly in control, *subito ff*. The closing cadence consists of no more than an emphatic statement of this open fifth on this B♭.[9]

In this mazurka, conflicts created by Szymanowski's expanded use of bagpipe fifths govern the overriding logic of harmonic progressions and choice of tonal centres. However, matters are not always as straightforward. A bagpipe fifth can be used at times as the bass sonority in a dissonant structure

9 In fact, the open fifth is the most common concluding sonority in the mazurkas; it ends seven out of twenty op. 50 mazurkas, as well as op. 62, no. 1.

that consists of more than just two distinct layers. A good example is the *dolce grazioso* passage in op. 50, no. 19, quoted in example 2.[10]

The striking feature of this passage is the extent of harmonic disagreement among its component parts. These include the bagpipe fifth on C,[11] some broken dominant sevenths alternating between B♭ and G (suggesting octatonicism), and a melody (suggesting pentatonicism) that is probably centred on B—or is it on E? With so many conflicting tonal influences and modal collections, and with only conflicting harmonic support, it is rather difficult to tell. How, then, is one to categorize the whole combination? It isn't clearly bitonal, it isn't really "polytonal" (i.e. built of more than two pitch centres), it isn't whole-tone, octatonic, or pentatonic, yet it certainly isn't atonal, with so many elements evidently taken from the tonal and modal vocabulary.[12] The issues of modality and key centre need to be addressed.



Example 2. Dissonant structure superimposing many layers, in Szymanowski, Mazurka op. 50, no. 19, mm. 13–20. Karol Szymanowski "Mazurkas | für Klavier | op. 50". © Copyright 1926 by Universal Edition A.G., Wien. www.universaledition.com

Modality and Modal Mixture

One of the most widespread causes for semitone clashes in the mazurkas is polymodality, the mixture of modal influences over a single tonic. Although techniques of modal mixture achieved some popularity in this period, Szymanowski's treatment is idiosyncratic. In the works of Bartók and Stravinsky, for example, one can often separate these influences into distinct and consistent linear strands. In Szymanowski, ambiguities can often be detected already in

[10] Also see op. 50, no. 11, mm. 13–17.

[11] The role of the pitch C in this mazurka is worthy of tracing. It acts as a foil to the C♯ that concludes the A section (m. 12). However, this C occupies our tonal memory so strongly, through its frequent reiterations, that the return to a D♭ pitch (m. 37) appears quite foreign and exotic. This D♭, after its reinterpretation to C♯ (m. 43), has to be reimagined as the original pitch; this leads to another smooth return to the original material.

[12] Other situations where this description applies are op. 50, no. 10, mm. 37–48; op. 50, no. 5, mm. 57–60; and many passages of op. 50, no. 9.

the individual lines themselves, as well as in the relationships between them. Thus it is not so much the clear delineation of the parts but rather the phenomenon of harmonic conflict itself, within a prevailing modal environment, that is essential to the ear. In such contexts, local chromaticism can intensify to the point of approximating a twelve-tone aggregate, but rather than quasi-chromatic scales, it is generally more useful to consider this chromaticism as a collection of structural harmonic ambiguities, i.e., Szymanowski clashes.

The primary scalar basis for Szymanowski's mazurkas is the "Podhalean mode," a major scale with a raised fourth and lowered seventh, named after the folk music of the Podhale region in the south of Poland.[13] The literature on Szymanowski's nationalistic period is replete with commentary on his adoption of this folk mode.[14] However, Alistair Wightman again points out that this mode was no stranger to Szymanowski's earlier style: "When it comes to the harmonic practice of the mazurkas, it has to be remarked immediately that though there is here, as with other works of the 1920s, a more austere approach, the basic style did not have to undergo fundamental change because Szymanowski's mature harmonic idiom, with its exploitation of tritonal and whole-tonal elements, was already well suited to the assimilation of the modal peculiarities of the Tatra folk."[15]

Furthermore, the Podhalean mode itself does not immediately distinguish Szymanowski's harmonic style from that of other composers. After all, the same scale was regularly used in the early decades of the twentieth century by numerous other composers.[16] In the standard literature, it is commonly known as the Lydian-Mixolydian or "acoustic" scale, based on its relationship to the seventh and eleventh partials in the overtone series.[17]

Szymanowski sometimes utilizes this mode to generate melodic material, especially in the beginnings of the mazurkas. The opening of the first mazurka is an oft-cited example.

With the proximity of the Podhalean mode to a whole-tone collection, and with Szymanowski's well-documented attraction to whole-tone complexes,[18]

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13 The specific mode, a derivative of the Góral folk music, is fairly widespread in the mazurkas, but not ubiquitous. Some prominent examples are openings of op. 50, nos. 1, 8, 13, and 16. In fact, the influence of the raised fourth and lowered seventh is broad, not only revealed in this Podhalean mode per se; instances of the pure Lydian or Mixolydian modes can be found as well. See Samson (1981, 170–1).

14 See, for example, Chylinska (1993, 197); Wightman (1999, 289–92); Samson (1981, 170–1); and McNamee [Kosakowski] (1985). Szymanowski himself wrote on this subject only the following: "It is clear that the scales which form the basis of the greater part of Góral song diverge markedly from our 'culturally' tempered scales … and it is only with difficulty that they can be formulated within our tonal system" (1999, 117).

15 Wightman (1999, 292).

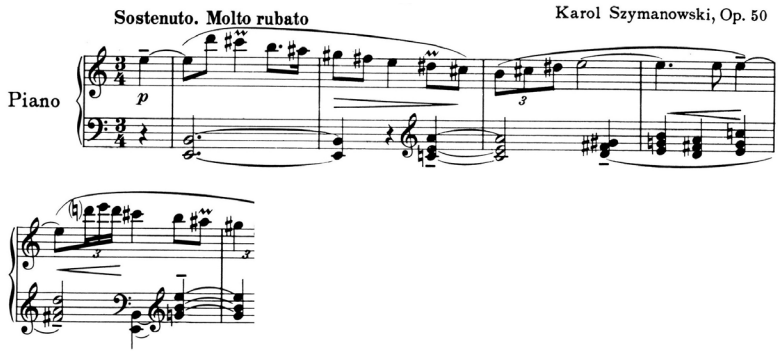
16 One well-known case in point is Debussy's *L'Isle joyeuse.* The phenomenon in Bartók's music is traced in Lendvai (1971, 67–70).

17 See, for example, Stefan Kostka (1990, 30–1); and Lendvai (1971, 67). This mode also contains the pitches of Scriabin's "mystic chord." Its relationship to Scriabin's harmony as the "mystic mode" is traced by the author in Ballard and Bengtson, with Young (2017, 273–81).

18 In addition to Wightman (1999), as in the quotation cited in n16, see also Stephen Downes, "Harmony and Tonality," in Downes and Cadrin (2015, 109); and Samson (1981, 66, 84, 107), to name a few.

the occasional appearance of a complete whole-tone scale is not unexpected. There are also occasional pentatonic references. Although apparently foreign to the harmonic landscape of the Podhalean mode, lowered seconds also make frequent appearances, and one can find occasional Phrygian modes.[19]

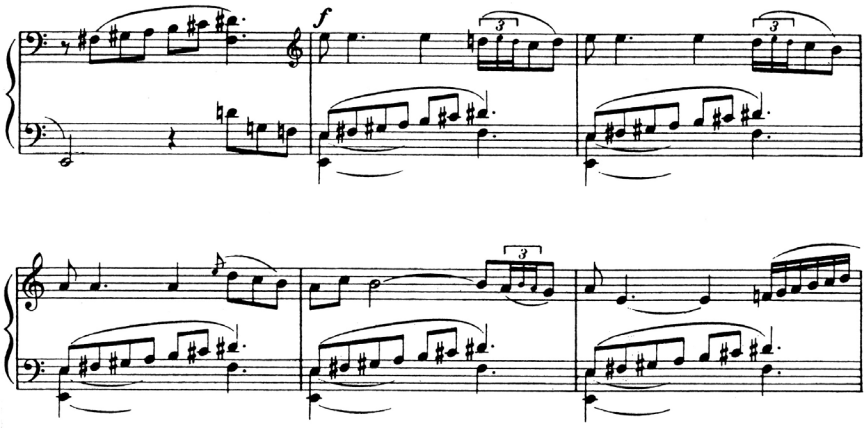
The striking and idiosyncratic feature of Szymanowski's use of modes in the mazurkas is the freedom with which he weaves into one and out of another, mixing colours locally even within a single voice. Perhaps Góral folk music is acting as inspiration; Wightman describes these mixtures as "variable scales" and remarks that they "derive from folk practices" (1999, 292). The opening Mazurka op. 50, no. 1 (example 3) serves as a prototypical example of this free modal borrowing over the fixed key centre of E. In addition to much conflict between the hands (especially major vs. minor), there is much internal conflict to be found in each hand on its own. Here, the leading-tone D♯ conflicts with the Podhalean mode's D♮, creating a characteristic ambiguity. Neither D nor D♯ possesses clearly greater influence, so it is impossible to analyze one of them as "diatonic" or "functional" and the other as "chromatic" or "dissonant." This phenomenon also cannot be explained away as a product of linear direction or voice leading, as in a melodic minor scale, because here the D♯ is used also in a descending pattern in m. 2. The left hand's chords suggest an E Aeolian mode; the G♯ in the third measure strongly contradicts, but does not ultimately override, the minor orientation of the other accompanying chords. The left hand's C♮ (in its A minor chord, m. 2) bluntly contradicts the right hand's C♯ throughout the passage. Finally, there is a conflict between the left hand's subdominant A♮ and the A♯ of the Podhalean mode in the melody: an important structural conflict on the fourth scale degree that underlies many of these mazurkas.[20]



Example 3. Podhalean mode as generator of melodic material in Mazurka op. 50, no. 1, mm. 1–5. Karol Szymanowski "Mazurkas | für Klavier | op. 50". © Copyright 1926 by Universal Edition A.G., Wien. www.universaledition.com

[19] Modes employed in these mazurkas are covered in more detail in Bengtson (2001, 61–4).

[20] This conflict was observed by McNamee [Kosakowski] (1995, 64).



Example 4. Mode mixture as employed by Bela Bartók, Six Dances in Bulgarian Rhythm, no. 1, mm. 3–8, from Mikrokosmos, vol. 6. Dance in Bulgarian Rhythm no. 1 from Mikrokosmos by Béla Bartók. © Copyright 1940, 1987 by Hawkes & Son (London). Reprinted by permission.

All in all, clashes occur frequently in this mazurka on scale degrees 3, 4, 6, and 7. Analysis of clashes by scale degree will be taken up in the last section.

Polymodality and modal mixture are certainly not an exclusive stylistic trait of Szymanowski, any more than the Podhalean mode.[21] A useful point of comparison is the first of Bartók's Six Dances in Bulgarian Rhythm. It shares with Szymanowski's mazurka an interest in folk styles and polymodality, and even the same tonal centre.

Comparing the two passages, I suggest that Szymanowski's interweaving of tonal ambiguities is more extreme, and even willful. In the Bartók excerpt, we can perceive the music as a juxtaposition of two fairly simple and consistent layers. The musical thinking is logical, contrapuntal, and neatly organized. In general, ascending passages tend to use sharps, while descending ones use naturals. In the Szymanowski example, the individual parts do not consistently follow those principles; they are more difficult to hear independently because of their internal ambiguities. For instance, the right hand varies between D♮ (mm. 1, 3) and D♯ (mm. 2, 3), and the left hand between G♯ (m. 3) and G♮ (m. 4). Therefore, the vertical aspect (clashing harmony) becomes the aesthetic focus of attention, such as the A minor/major in measure 2, beat 3, and the E minor/major from measures 3 to 4. It seems that the composer is actively seeking the special colour created by these conflicts, and that is why we can be justified to speak of the "Szymanowski clash" as a distinguishing element of this composer's style.

Accounting for the pitch content of passages such as these, some Polish authors have attempted to construct scales of more than seven notes that approach

[21] One may think of Ravel, Janáček, and Spanish composers, as well as Bartók and Stravinsky.

the twelve-tone aggregate.[22] Indeed, one outcome of this style is a saturation of the harmonic spectrum, nearly to the point of total chromaticism.[23] However, it is not very helpful to think of a "9-, 10-, or 11-note scale," which sounds virtually chromatic. More interesting is to consider the pitches omitted from the collection. This excerpt from op. 50, no. 1, for example, employs all chromatic pitches except an F♮. Had Szymanowski been specifically interested in filling the entire chromatic space, he could have done it here with little trouble. Instead, he saves the pitch F/E♯ for the middle section, m. 17, marked *poco più mosso,* in which prominent Phrygian modal coloration marks a contrast.[24] Rather than a long, almost chromatic scale, it is more useful to consider this chromaticism as a natural outcome of modal mixture in the melody and more modal mixture in the accompaniment, creating a collection of structural harmonic ambiguities, i.e., Szymanowski clashes.

This first mazurka is a useful introductory example because of its relative simplicity. In it Szymanowski seems to set forth as plainly as possible the characteristic elements of his musical language. The static, firmly rooted bagpipe fifths make it easy for the listener to perceive the Podhalean mode and the confluence of conflicting harmonic modal influences. Modal ambiguity and the Szymanowski clash are not always this straightforward. When melodic modal mixtures take place in the absence of such clear harmonic support, analysis becomes much more difficult. A good example of this phenomenon is the Mazurka op. 50, no. 9 (example 5), discussed in the next section, in which the mixture of Locrian and Aeolian inflections shrouds even the perception of a tonal centre in a haze.[25]

Establishment of Tonal Centres

Most of Szymanowski's mazurkas establish clear tonal centres within a modal environment. The half-step Szymanowski clash is most typically heard as a conflict among modal influences, as we have seen in the previous section, such as between a Lydian augmented fourth and a subdominant perfect fourth. However, clashing phenomena can undermine the listener's ability to perceive the tonal centre at all, most often when a modal or pentatonic melody is harmonized by elements foreign to that centre. Some mazurkas become a guessing game for the listener to figure out where the music might land. Even when the tonic is well established, Szymanowski sometimes leads astray from it in the coda to introduce the next mazurka of a set.

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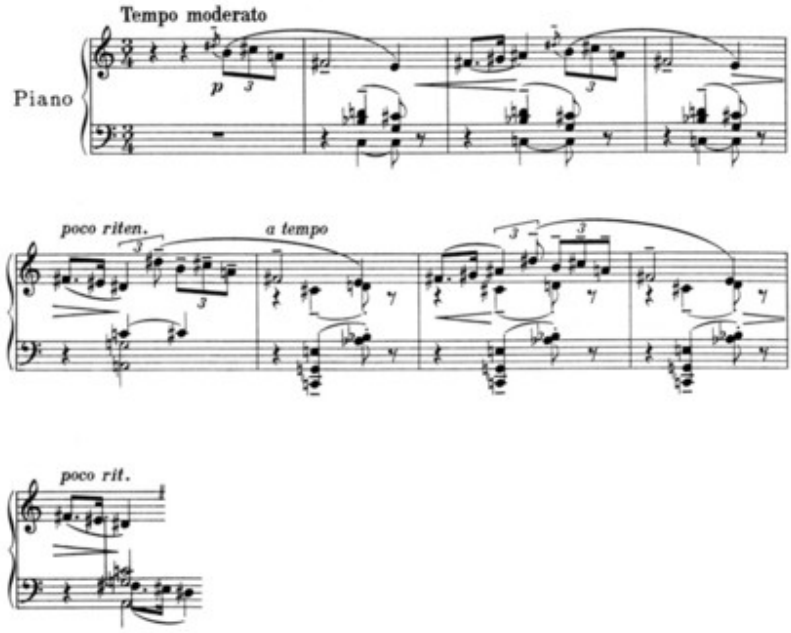
[22] The most prominent of these is Stefania Łobaczewska, an important Polish author on Szymanowski's life and music. She is cited by Zieliński (1960, 128), a passage in which Zieliński was voicing his own skepticism about these chromatic scales.

[23] Bartók aimed for this tonal saturation deliberately in his mixing of the Lydian and Phrygian modes, as an answer to Schönberg's total chromaticism. See Bartók (1976, 367).

[24] The eight-bar section from mm. 25–32 also omits one and only one pitch class: G♯. It is not by accident that this episode strikes the listener as the most minor in the piece.

[25] It is interesting to observe that the first nine measures of op. 50, no. 9, which certainly do not tonicize the key of E, also contain these same eleven chromatic pitches other than F♮. Again, Szymanowski doesn't show any theoretical interest in the possibility of completing a twelve-tone aggregate, which he could have readily attained had he wished it.



Example 5: A complex problem of locating a key centre: Mazurka op. 50, no. 9, mm. 1–9. Karol Szymanowski "Mazurkas | für Klavier | op. 50". © Copyright 1926 by Universal Edition A.G., Wien. www.universaledition.com

A key centre in the common-practice period is established by an overall system of tonality. Elements of this system include a referential tonic triad, a system of functional harmonic progressions, and a set of voice leading principles that pull leading tones up to tonics and fourth scale degrees down to thirds. These characteristic features are substantially weakened in the mazurkas. The third scale degree in the tonic triad is often missing or ambiguous (as in the G/G♯ dichotomy in example 3). Traditional voice-leading impulses that exist in the fourth and seventh scale degrees of tonal music are undermined by the Podhalean mode; what had been half-steps in a major scale now become whole steps. Furthermore, the typical cadential hierarchy (IV, V, and I) is undermined by one of the most typical of the Szymanowski clashes: subdominant perfect fourth against Lydian raised fourth. Perhaps that is why Szymanowski wrote, "It is only with some difficulty that [new folk scales] can be formulated within our tonal system" (1999, 117).

Nevertheless, these mazurkas generally do tend to establish a key centre. Wightman observes, "In general clearly perceptible 'key-based' tonalities are more evident here than is the case with the wartime works" (1999, 292). Clear cadences can still indicate a tonal centre, even when the chords are modally derived, as for example in op. 50, no. 15. In other instances, the characteristic bagpipe fifth supports the harmony so firmly that there could be no question of any other tonality, as in op. 50, nos. 1, 7, and 11. At other times, an extended pedal point (a favoured Szymanowski device) ultimately asserts itself as a tonal

centre, such as the long insistence on B♭ in op. 50, no. 12. Jim Samson observes a "tendency to use a single pitch rather than a tonal hierarchy to establish a tonality, just as Bartók did" (1977, 42).[26] Indeed, ths single pitch need not be only a bass note, but can be an insistence on a single pitch throughout the texture. One can find this approach throughout much of op. 50, no. 5 and op. 50, no. 18.

Szymanowski sometimes shunned the establishment of a clear key centre in his middle period, and in the mazurkas as well, we may find instances where a tonal centre is, at best, only weakly established. A fascinating example, the opening passage of op. 50, no. 9, is shown in example 5.

The right hand emphasizes the pitch F♯ by virtue of its strong metric position and its reiteration in every measure, but this pitch doesn't emerge as a clear tonic, because it isn't supported by any other elements of the music. In fact, it might be heard equally well as a dissonance, since it resolves downward every time. The left hand offers a persistent pedal point on C, but even in m. 6, where the entire C-major triad is present, this seems to act more as a resonance than as a functional tonality. There is little else in the music to confirm and support the pre-eminence of C. It exudes a folk-like sound and perhaps even impresses the listener as sounding out of tune with the rest of the ensemble. Although neither C nor F♯ seems to behave exactly a tonic, the tension between them is aurally striking. This discord is exaggerated still further by the lively passage in mm. 37–47, where that personification of tonal conflict, the "Petrushka chord"—combining C- and F♯-major triads—is repeated again and again.[27]

Ironically, while the C and F♯ seem the most vocal contenders for tonal control, the truth may lie midway between them. The cadence points of the melody, in bars 5 and 9, land on D♯ and suggest a possible interpretation of the melodic line as an octave descent on D♯, with a mixed Aeolian and Locrian modal framework. The strong presence of C in the bass, the vague cadential and whole-tone infused harmonies, and the E/E♯ and A/A♯ Szymanowski clashes in the melody conceal this from the listener's ear. This unexpected reading of this difficult passage is certainly not its only possible interpretation, but it accounts for many phenomena in this mazurka, including the modal segments of the upcoming measures (10–20, 32–43, and 59–72) and the authentic cadence in E♭ major at the end of the mazurka. Such an analysis may seem to appeal more to logic than to the ear, since Szymanowski keeps the listener guessing, making every effort to undercut E♭ in his harmonies whenever one might otherwise be inclined to hear that pitch as a tonic (cf., mm. 5, 9, 10, 14, 17, 59–61, 63, 77). Ann McNamee claims that the mazurka leads towards a "convincing" final cadence (1985, 69),[28] but I believe that this cadence still comes off as a surprise to the listener, a moment of mischief or whimsy, even a riddle. The logic of this E♭/D♯ connection to the opening is concealed underneath the surface detail.

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[26] The identical observation can be found in Wightman (1999, 153). It is important to note that Bartók was a great admirer of Szymanowski's (ibid., 143). Influences between the two composers were most likely reciprocal.

[27] The employment of the Petrushka chord in the mazurkas is explored in Bengtson (2001, 79).

[28] In her article, 69–71, she makes the important insight that the E♭ (D♯) tonality splits the tritone in half in mm. 37–56.

The symmetrical distribution of key pitches in this mazurka (E♭, F♯, A, and C) strongly suggests an interpretation as an axis tonality based on the equal partition of the octave by minor thirds.[29] The opposite side of the axis from the tonic E♭ is A, which shows up in a functional role in the measure 5 cadence, whereas the more prominent C-F♯ pole of the axis is heard in the opening passage and in the Petrushka chords.[30] Szymanowski's unique approach in this mazurka is to emphasize the weaker part of the axis, C-F♯, rather than E♭-A. Another symmetrical organizing system, based on the augmented triad (i.e., equal division by major thirds) can be seen in the Mazurka op. 50, no. 3, discussed under the rubric of bitonality.

In some mazurkas, there is not just ambiguity, but a genuine discrepancy between the prevailing tonic and the conclusion of the piece. Such moments often take on a humorous character. They may be best understood as preparations for the following mazurka, and in such cases, performers ought to consider playing the two pieces together as a group. In op. 50, no. 7, the tonic note A is beyond dispute, because of the underlying bagpipe fifths on that note throughout the piece. How, then, are we to interpret the mysterious conclusion on the open fifth E-B, other than as a preparation to the opening of no. 8? The E♭ cadence at the end of no. 9, while a satisfactory and logical answer to the tonal puzzle of that piece, seems even more attractive as a setup for the more firmly rooted A♭ tonic of no. 9. In both nos. 7–8 and nos. 9–10, the relationships of harmony and of mood between them flow very naturally.

The Question of Bitonality

The word *bitonality* has been expressly avoided to this point in this discussion, particularly in the analysis of op. 50, no. 9, but with so many instances of opposed, layered harmonic structures, it is essential to address this issue. A polytonal framework of combined scales and mixed chords describes a logically organized collection of harmonic Szymanowski clashes. Long disparaged as an analytical mode of inquiry, bitonality is overdue for reconsideration.

Arnold Whittall in the *New Grove Dictionary* defines bitonality as "the simultaneous, superimposed presence of two distinct tonalities," and continues, "In practice the term is applied not only to compositions which employ two unambiguously diatonic keys, but also to those which superimpose contrasted modal segments" (Sadie 2001, 637).[31] One of the most compelling apologists of bitonality was the French composer-theorist Charles Koechlin (1867–1950). He distinguished between "harmonic bitonality" and "bitonality by counterpoint" (Koechlin 1930, 2:250–66). The former category represents surface phenomena such as polychords. In this vein, all the possible

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[29] A study of axis tonality and symmetrical relationships in Szymanowski's music can be found in Downes, *Szymanowski as Post-Wagnerian,* 290–307.

[30] Axis relationships of this kind are also suggested by the E/B♭ dichotomy in op. 50, no. 5, and by the prevalence of G and B♭ against a tonality of E in op. 62, no. 2, where a full axis on C is made explicit in mm. 22–6.

[31] Here "contrasted modal segments" should mean modal segments centred on different pitches, to distinguish it from polymodality, which implies a single tonic.

superimpositions of triads, by quality, inversion, and interval of relationship, were catalogued by Darius Milhaud in order to exploit these relationships to the fullest (see Milhaud 1923). The latter category, "bitonality by counterpoint," evidences a larger time scale and richer juxtaposition of layers: a musical line taken from one key juxtaposed against another line or series of harmonies in another key. We will explore this deeper sense of bitonality in this section.

Bitonality, as an analytical construct, has been routinely disparaged or even dismissed by many music theorists of the twentieth century. One example among many is Paul Hindemith, who writes, "The game of letting two or more tonalities run side by side and so achieving new harmonic effects is, to be sure, very entertaining for the composer, but the listener cannot follow the separate tonalities, for he relates every simultaneous combination of sounds to a root—and thus we see the futility of the game … polytonality is not a practical principle of composition" (1942, 156).

Pieter van den Toorn writes in his treatise on Stravinsky's music, "It is to be understood that questions regarding the 'bitonality' or 'polytonality' of certain passages in this literature can no longer be taken seriously within the context of this inquiry. Presumably implying the simultaneous unfolding of separate 'tonalities' or 'keys,' these notions—real horrors of the musical imagination—have widely (and mercifully) been dismissed as too fantastic or illogical to be of assistance" (1983, 63–4).

The most laconic stab at bitonality is taken by the American composer-author Eric Salzman, who claims that the whole idea is not only unmusical but illogical: "In a sense, the concept of different yet simultaneous tonalities is self-contradictory" (1967, 64).[32] It seems that all these commentators strive to dismiss bitonality by holding it to an impossibly stringent standard. They require a bitonal passage to present two distinct and internally coherent tonal systems simultaneously, and at the same time present a single unified system. Thus, a listener would be expected to be able to follow three tonal hierarchies—the two separate ones and the unified combined one—all at the same time.

If bitonality is so entangled in elaborate conflicting notions, no composer could ever have employed it successfully. There can be no difficulty with the superimposition of pitch collections themselves; rather, the superimposition of hierarchical relationships is problematic. In particular, the word *unfolding,* as employed by van den Toorn, cannot help resonating with us today with its Schenkerian sense. *Unfolding* gives a sense of directionality, of purpose, oriented towards a particular goal.[33] Our ears can't possibly process three simultaneous unfolding structural hierarchies, and neither could a composer's music. However, we might well be able to imagine the unfolding of a single process given by relationships that take place between two conflicting sets of

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32 Even Whittall in the *New Grove,* who gives one of the more sympathetic accounts of bitonality, remarks that "the failure of bitonality to win widespread acceptance confirms that it is a distinctly mechanical way of deriving something new from something traditional."

33 I don't imply that van den Toorn's argument is Schenkerian; he was in fact arguing for an octatonic framework rather than a bitonal one for Stravinsky analysis. However, the image of Schenkerian thought will help to conceptualize the absurdity of simultaneous unfoldings in different keys.

pitches. At least bitonality, reformulated in this manner, could be criticized only on musical grounds, not as a logical absurdity. Bitonality, whether employed by Milhaud, Satie, Ives, Stravinsky, or Szymanowski, can be conceived as a technique for creating harmonic and linear combinations, without the implication that either layer need "unfold" over the course of a work. A more liberal formulation of bitonality is suggested by the formulation in the *New Harvard Dictionary:* "The simultaneous use of two or more tonalities or keys. This may occur briefly or over an extended span" (Randel 1986, 97). If we grant that such a superimposition of layers has a right to exist, our task remains to explain how the layers interact. Only then might we judge its musical value.

Ann McNamee attempts to find a new path to a unified structure in the mazurkas, remarking that "a standard analytical procedure for describing a piece of bitonal music is sadly lacking" (1985, 61). In the first part of her article, she criticizes previous commentators on bitonality for failing to find such a unified structure, even after observing the need for it,[34] remarking that a piece of music juxtaposing two tonal poles of attraction runs the risk of incoherence without a unifying principle (63). Her desire to discover how the two parts of a bitonal structure interact is laudable, and her article proposes a coherent system of interlocking fifths, spiralling out in opposite directions over time.[35] This system accounts for the layered harmony, as well as tonal direction in the middle sections of many of the mazurkas (see nos. 3, 5, 7, and 9 as analyzed by McNamee), where Szymanowski often modulates far afield by fifth relationships, often in parallel.

However, it is doubtful that this system of interlocking fifths has a broader application to the rest of Szymanowski's oeuvre, or to bitonal passages in music by other composers. It is unfortunate that, after remarking on the need to find a unified structure within an apparently bitonal framework, McNamee avoided discussing the bitonal surface of the music out of a mistrust for the technique, opting to supplant it with an entirely new approach. It is difficult to imagine that Szymanowski, who composed the last movement of his First String Quartet, op. 37, with four different key signatures, could have created the opening of his Mazurka op. 50, no. 3 (example 6) other than by mixing the sounds of A minor and C♯ major.

Let us find a path towards a unified analysis of such a passage that remains faithful to the listener's perceptions of the bitonal surface of the music and its implicit conflicts.

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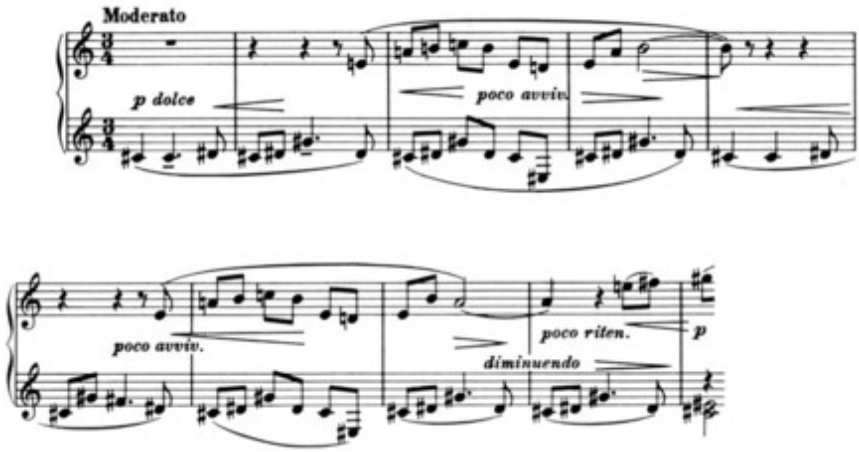
34 She refers to Gordon Cyr analyzing Ives, Kenneth Hicken analyzing Schönberg, and Constant Vauclain analyzing Bartók. See McNamee [Kosakowski] (1985, 62).

35 For a complete and thorough description of the system, the reader is referred to McNamee [Kosakowski] (1985) and to Kosakowski [McNamee] (1980) in which some detailed analyses are made with this technique.



Example 6. A candidate for bitonal analysis: Mazurka op. 50, no. 3, mm. 1–10. Karol Szymanowski "Mazurkas | für Klavier | op. 50". © Copyright 1926 by Universal Edition A.G., Wien. www.universaledition.com

An Example of Bitonal Analysis

A good place to start an investigation of a bitonal passage is to graph the superstructure of the two distinct tonal regions, taking note of any common tones.[36] Then the passage can be analyzed in harmonic detail as counterpoint, noting the most significant vertical sounds, both consonant and dissonant. Finally, the whole work should be considered for the larger-scale implications of the bitonal passage and for the resolution of its conflicts. Let us apply this methodology to the Mazurka op. 50, no. 3.

Szymanowski combines the tonal regions of C♯ major and A minor. The graph of these scales combined would show convergence only on E♯/F, and on C (B♯); all other pitches are independent members of only one scale. Coherence and unity can be found in the "polytonality by counterpoint" in example 6 if we analyze the interaction of the lines as in traditional counterpoint. As Paul Cadrin has suggested, "It is perfectly plausible that the aims pursued by [bitonal composers such as Szymanowski] were not substantially different from those of traditional contrapuntal writing, namely, the creation of lines that strike a balance between independence and coordination, lines that have

36 An exhaustive analytical framework for bitonality in these mazurkas, which is certainly beyond the scope of this article, might categorize these "superstructures" as bitonal super-tonalities, much as Milhaud mapped exhaustively all of the possible polychords. Vincent Persichetti recommended such a catalogue (1961, 258). He assumes that distant bitonal combinations, especially highlighting the tritone, are the most effective, or else "polytonality will fail to operate" (256). However, Szymanowski employs a wide variety of such configurations: for example, C♯/a in op 50, no. 3; G♭/B♭ in op. 50, no. 4; A/d♯ in op. 50, no. 7; and C/A in op. 50, no. 20. In this discussion, I will use the term *tonal region* to refer to a single layer of the polytonal structure, i.e., a collection of pitches with a tonic in the most primitive sense, without any implied harmonic hierarchies.

points of convergence as well as points of divergence, the points of convergence presumably acting as referential at one level or another" (1985, 138).[37]

Koechlin argued for the refinement of this technique when he wrote that polytonality is "an art far more subtle than that of accompanying in D a melody in C (as is assumed by simple-minded and amateurish people)."[38]

In this example, the A minor right-hand melody peaks on the high C, and suggests a half cadence in m. 5. The melodic turn down to A in m. 8 suggests an authentic cadence completing a periodic structure. The left-hand part, although quite static within its own C♯ tonal region, produces a rapidly shifting harmonic rhythm in its duet with the right hand's melody. Significantly, the left hand offers G♯ to coordinate with the right hand's B in m. 4, producing a consonance of dominant quality in the A tonal region. The E♯ proves useful harmonically; the E♯-D interval in m. 3, heard as F-D, provides another consonance between the two regions, implying the subdominant of A minor. In the second cadence, in m. 8, the composer prefers to highlight the dissonance between the two tonal regions with a G♯-A semitone, a powerful Szymanowski clash if ever there was one. The G♯-A clash on the tonic in m. 8 corresponds to the D♯-E semitone on the dominant in m. 2 that opened the passage of counterpoint. Another vertical intersection of interest is C♯-A, implying A major; the ambiguity between this C♯ and the melody C♮ is a familiar example of structural ambiguity on the third scale degree of A. If the C/C♯ ambiguity clouds the third degree of the A tonal region, Szymanowski makes a much bigger point of the E/E♯ ambiguity on the third of the C♯ tonal region, to poignant effect (mm. 9–10). This consistency of harmonic nuance reveals a symmetric relationship between the two tonal regions. As observed above, this E♯ (or F) is one of the most important points of contact between the two realms of C♯ major and A minor; its entrance in m. 10 provides a beautiful moment of consonance.

This analysis shows that surface details in the bitonal passage seem to apply more to the subsidiary tonal region of A, while the composition as a whole is centred on C♯. The mazurka can thus be understood as a conflict between these two regions, a C♯ major consonance and an A minor dissonance. The conflict between the implications of these two layers supplants the traditional long-term structural tonal dissonance between tonic and dominant. Although apparently fleeting, local phenomena, conflicts in the bitonal passage have repercussions in the organization of the rest of the mazurka.[39] One instance of this compositional tug-of-war has been discussed above in the Mazurka op. 50, no. 4, in which the right hand's tonal region B♭ ultimately got the upper hand over the left hand's G♭ region. The conflict in the present mazurka is more

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37 I am indebted to Prof. Cadrin for having generously shared the typescript of his dissertation as well as the typescript of his paper "À la découverte de la polytonalité," read in Edmonton, Alberta, in 1988. My historical remarks and references here owe much to his research, and my reading of op. 50, no. 3, here is influenced by techniques he employed in his unpublished graduate paper "Polytonality Revisited: A Look at the Mazurka opus 50 number 7 by Karol Szymanowski."

38 Koechlin (1930, 2:265), translated in Cadrin (1985, 139).

39 Whittal contended in *New Grove,* "Techniques loosely categorized as bitonal are often passing effects within a harmonic language that is subtly balanced between triadic hierarchies and new symmetries" (s.v., "Bitonality," 637). This subtle balance certainly does characterize this mazurka.

orthodox, in that the left-hand part proves to be the fundamental harmonic influence of the piece.

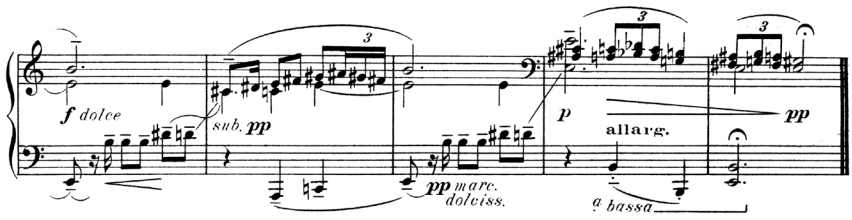
The next step is to look at the broader picture of the mazurka to see how the a/C♯ conflict resolves itself. Stephen Downes observed of this piece, "The larger tonal issue … is based on reconciliation of an opening a/C♯ dichotomy by way of an axial, 'mediating' F tonality. 'Modulation' within the axial system is based on exploitation of shared pitch and interval class membership in modal and diatonic scales. Contrast, even conflict, is produced by highlighting differences" (Downes 1994, 304–5). Thus, F is a critical shared pitch class between the a/C♯ systems; its significance is already clear in its manifestation as an E♯ in m. 10. However, its influence is most strongly felt in its appearance as a bass sonority in mm. 52–6. The middle section of the mazurka (mm. 30–51) explores more dissonant sonorities related to the region of A minor, sequentially arriving at the significant bagpipe fifth on F. This F acts as a prism uniting the disparate tonal regions of C♯ major (in the alto) with A minor (in the soprano). This passage is another prime example of Szymanowski's skill in transitional passages. The symmetrical axis of tonal relations shifts the characteristic clash on the third degree of the F mode between A♭ and A. The work concludes with a unification of all members of the axis: C♯ as tonal centre, A supporting a poignant augmented sixth sonority, and F (E♯) as the focal point of the melody. This analysis ultimately highlights the interrelated nature of the "Szymanowski clash," "axis tonality," and "polytonality by counterpoint."

Harmonic and Scalar Contexts of the Szymanowski Clash

To conclude the investigation, let us consider local harmonic contexts of the Szymanowski clash with more precision. If a tonic is clearly established, clashes can be categorized according to their scale degrees, unveiling definite coloristic and structural patterns. Although a modal mixture might take place on any scale degree, clashes on scales degrees 3, 4, and 5 are the most representative. The most subversive of these semitone clashes are the ones that conflict with the presumed tonic pitch itself; these will be considered last of all.

A clash on the third scale degree is the most commonly employed in the mazurkas; it implies ambiguity between major and minor modes. Tadeusz Zieliński went so far as to identify the "afunctional third" as one of the essential ingredients of Szymanowski's harmonic system in the mazurkas (1952, 133).[40] This phenomenon has appeared in many of our examples already: D♭/D♮ in op. 50, no. 4 (example 1), G/G♯ in op. 50, no. 1 (example 3), and E/E♯, C/C♯, and G♯/A in the axis of op. 50, no. 3. The final cadence of the last mazurka, op. 62, no. 2 (example 7) contains the same major/minor ambiguity between G and G♯, together with another clash on A/A♯.

[40] One good example of the major-minor opposition, exploited to great psychological effect, is the Shepherd's smile in *King Roger;* see Downes (2003), 59–61 and 65.



Example 7: Richness of scalar ambiguity at the end of the final Mazurka, op. 62, no. 2, mm. 80–4. With the kind authorization of Editions Durand.

Szymanowski troubled himself a great deal over this final cadence and produced an unusually large number of sketches for it.[41] It is appropriate that his final solution would prove to be the richest of all them in its harmonic innuendo, and particularly in its shifting between major and minor thirds.

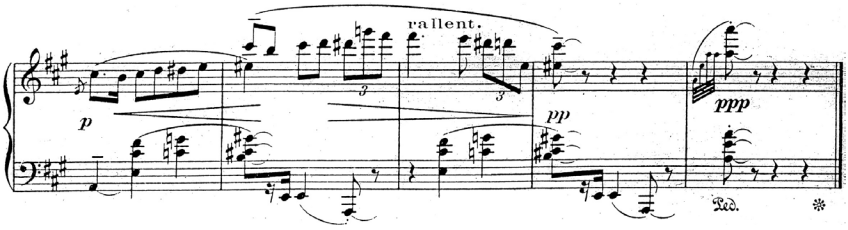
A clash on the fifth scale degree can take place between the perfect fifth and the augmented fifth, thus clouding a bagpipe fifth's overtone. In the context of a Podhalean mode, this augmented fifth is the one pitch needed to create a whole-tone aggregate. The proximity of these two modes is frequently exploited by Impressionistic composers, notably by Debussy in *L'isle joyeuse.* Mazurkas that employ clashes on the fifth tend to be rich in whole-tone material.[42] A typical example is the characteristic sonority of the Mazurka op. 62, no. 1 shown in example 8, in which a Szymanowski clash on E/E♯ results from superimposition of C♯ dominant seventh onto an open fifth on A. Had Szymanowski ever done a systematic polychord classification à la Milhaud, it is likely that this combination of harmonies separated by major thirds would have turned up among his favourites. He employs it frequently in his mazurkas, with the brighter sonority in the upper registers, creating shimmering overtones and this Szymanowski clash on the fifth.[43]

The trichord B-C♯-G♯ [0,2,9] plays a prominent motivic role in this mazurka (as it does also in Op. 62 No. 2). The major second B-C♯, with its whole-tone implication, is especially important. The perfect fifth in the trichord is sometimes altered; for example, it is "softened" to a diminished fifth in the strongly whole-tone retransitional passage (measures 37 through 42). Pedal points in the "B" section (mm. 19–41) have prepared this environment through their methodical whole-step progression from E♭, to F, G and finally A at the return in measure 42. It is characteristic of Szymanowski, though, that his motivic trichord expressly contradicts a purely whole-tone environment by coupling a perfect fifth with this B-C♯. When this fifth returns in measure 42, in the midst

41 Diplomatic transcriptions of this final cadence can be found in Kosakowski [McNamee] (1980, 304–5).

42 Some additional examples are op. 50, no. 5, mm. 24–39; and op. 50, no. 7, mm. 19–22.

43 This harmony was already encountered in the op. 50, no. 4 "source chord." Some other notable examples are op. 50, no. 5, mm. 24–37; op. 50, no. 6, m. 11 (among others); and op. 50, no. 11, mm. 13–19. It is curious that Koechlin used this exact polychord to argue that a simple major triad produces a "bitonal" sonority already if we combine the fifth partials of each of the three members of the triad (1930, 251). Although this would not rank among Koechlin's more compelling arguments in favour of bitonality, it certainly speaks for Szymanowski's sensitivity to overtone sonorities.



Example 8: Szymanowski clash on the fifth: Mazurka op. 62, no. 1, mm. 75–9. With the kind authorization of Editions Durand.

of the otherwise whole-tone harmonic background, it provides the half steps necessary to break the harmonic stasis, and thereby completes the retransition.[44] The G♯ in this fifth functions once again as a leading tone in the final cadence of the mazurka.

The most extraordinary form of Szymanowski clash is the one taking place on the tonic note itself. If the tonic cannot be heard unambiguously, the entire tonality of the music is called into question. I first realized the importance of semitone conflict in Szymanowski's style in his middle-period music, which is not inspired by or related to folk materials. A good example comes from the opening passages of "Sheherazade," from the Masques, op. 34, no. 1.

Certainly the pedal tone A, sustained in pulsating quarter notes from the opening measure, is meant to be understood as the fundamental pitch. However, the remainder of the harmonic texture gradually dissolves into an equally strong, lone repeated A♯, leaving the listener with no more harmony but the haze produced by this simple clash. In much of Szymanowski's middle-period music, "keyboard bitonality"—juxtapositions of "white-key" and "black-key" harmonies—plays a significant role.[45] I believe that this A/A♯ clash in "Sheherazade" is intended to be emblematic of this duality of these sound-worlds that fascinated the composer at that time.

Keyboard bitonality shows itself occasionally in the mazurkas. For example, the delicately interwoven texture of op. 50, no. 7, while a good example of "polytonality by counterpoint," is likely to have been inspired by the keyboard colourist's instinct; note that the A/B♭ polarity matches the exact pitches of "Sheherazade." Probably the most striking example of keyboard bitonality in all the mazurkas is the shimmering cadenza of op. 62, no. 2 that recalls the composer's middle-period style. Starting in m. 53, everything is whole-tone except the clashing D♯. Rather than dissolve the D♯ into the whole tones, Szymanowski initiates a flourish with a series of octaves to highlight this very D♯; everything culminates in a sparkling cascade of keyboard bitonality.

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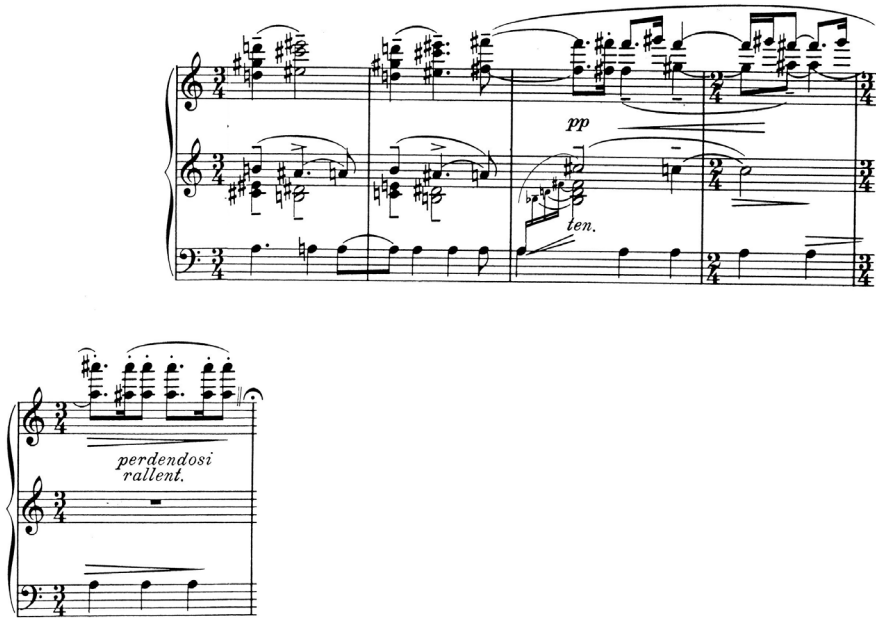
44 Downes observes the conflict of chromatic semitones against a whole-tone environment in Szymanowski's earlier music and considers it an important stylistic trait distinguishing Szymanowski's music from that of his contemporaries; see Downes (2003, 45 and 5).

45 This concept is discussed in Wightman (1999), and in Samson (1981). It suffices to mention the Etudes, op. 33, nos. 1, 3, and 4; and passages in Metopes, op. 29, such as "L'Île des Sirènes," m. 60; "Kalypso," mm. 3–11; and "Nausicaä," mm. 81–7, as striking examples from his earlier piano music. Influence from Debussy, in works such as *Brouillards* and *En blanc et noir,* is probable.

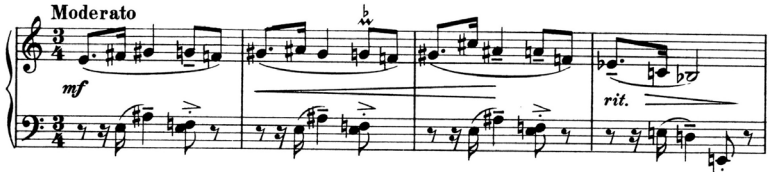


Example 9: Szymanowski clash on the tonic note: Sheherazade, op. 34, no. 1, mm. 5–9. "Masques, op. 34" © 1919 by Universal Edition A.G., Wien/UE 5858. Karol Szymanowski "Masques | 3 Morceaux | für Klavier|op. 34". © Copyright 1919 by Universal Edition A.G., Wien/UE 5858. www.universaledition.com

When the Szymanowski clash takes place on the tonic against its chromatic upper neighbour, it tends to imply vigorous bitonal competition.[46] It can even imply an entirely false tonic. A very interesting case of bitonal conflict can be found in the Mazurka op. 50, no. 5, which is among the most dissonant of this set.

This passage is full of mode mixtures and clashes of all kinds; in fact, it is even difficult to pin down the melody to any single key. It seems to be an equal combination of E, its opening note, and B♭, its cadential pitch. The left hand follows this duality with a bass note E and tenor note A♯. The left hand's accented E/F dissonance on the third beat is a familiar one in the mazurkas; it is often employed for a drum-like effect; the openings of op. 50, nos. 12 and 18 are prime examples. Under normal circumstances, it might qualify as a superficial dissonance; in this mazurka, however, it plays a substantial harmonic role. This sardonic semitone is emblematic of the divided nature of the right-hand melody. While the first two beats of the melody always belong to the E tonality, the third-beat eighths in the melody always belong to B♭. In the E/F semitone, the F supports this conflicting B♭ tonality while the bass note E supports the overall tonic. It is worth noting the changes of orthography in the right hand between A♯ and B♭, again mediating between both tonal regions.

[46] An earlier example of bitonality with a Szymanowski clash on the tonic is the opening of "Nausicaä," the third of the Metopes, op. 29.



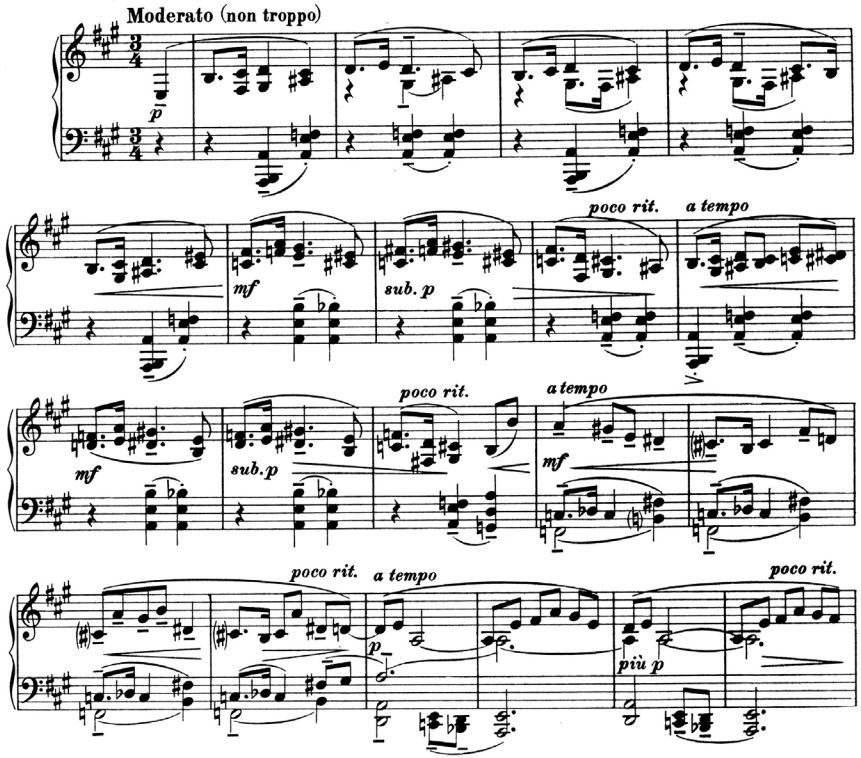
Example 10: Bitonal conflict between E and B-flat: opening of Mazurka op. 50, no. 5, mm. 1–4. Karol Szymanowski "Mazurkas | für Klavier | op. 50". © Copyright 1926 by Universal Edition A.G., Wien. www.universaledition.com

The dual nature of the melody is confirmed by the nervous climax in m. 12, when the poles are reversed: the bass resonates B♭ while the melody begins and ends on E (F♭, at first). At the centre of the conflict is the clash against the strong F in the left hand's bagpipe fifth. The E/F conflict is significant also later: in mm. 63–5, F briefly takes over from E as the supporting harmony (an ironic twist), but it fares even worse than E at resolving harmonic tensions, because the A and G♯ in the tenor range harmonize the "wrong" melody notes. The E/F conflict is finally resolved in favour of E in the work's coda (mm. 81 to the end), where the tritone polarity of E vs. B♭ is distilled to its essence.

The Szymanowski clash is at its most powerful when it falsifies an apparent tonic. The opening of op. 50, no. 9 (example 5) provides a good example. The C in the bass is aurally the most plausible candidate for the tonic, but the C♯ in the tenor on the third beat undermines it. C does not, in fact, act as a tonic for the piece, as discussed above; its conflict with C♯ is already a strong clue. Another highly dissonant example is the opening of the Mazurka op. 50, no. 8 (example 11), a work in which tonal ambiguity again plays a strong role.

The long resonant pedal point on A in the low register, and the strong cadence onto that A in mm. 18–20, would argue for A as the tonic; however, the ending of the mazurka is unambiguously in E. This struggle for supremacy between A and E has been set up by the surprising conclusion of the seventh mazurka. This passage probably employs more half-step clashes than any other, so it is a good example to round out our discussion. First, let us consider the fierce clash on A's scale degree five, with F (E♯) against the fifth degree E.

The fifth scale degree conflict, which at first just sounds like an out-of-tune bagpipe, proves significant for the harmonic events in the piece. The pitch F is heard as the root of a bagpipe fifth sonority in mm. 13–16. C, the bagpipe fifth of this F, is subject to even harsher dissonance treatment that was the E/F in the opening of the piece; here C♯ and B in the right hand and the D♭s in the tenor all clash with the C. C♯, the third degree of the supposed tonic A, is thus severely weakened. Finally, let us consider the clash against the apparent tonic note A. The major second combination A-B in the opening bass might seem at first only to enhance the tonic credentials of A, since the Mazurkas op. 50, nos. 2 and 12 conclude with this "add-2" sound. However, the A♯ in the alto is a genuine disruptive Szymanowski clash against the A. The lugubrious descent of the strong major second B into this dissonant B♭ (A♯) in mm. 6–7 is another sign of a weakened tonic.



Example 11: Opening suggesting an A tonic, but with Szymanowski clashes against A/A♯, E/F, and C/C♯: Mazurka op. 50, no. 8, mm. 1–20. Karol Szymanowski "Mazurkas | für Klavier | op. 50". © Copyright 1926 by Universal Edition A.G., Wien. www.universaledition.com

In the more dance-like section in mm. 21–32, the tonic of E is crystal clear by comparison. Now the opening section on A can be heard as a ruse; it has acted all along as a prolonged subdominant before the work's true tonic of E. The A-A♯ conflict that played such an important role in the first section (m. 1–20) is heard in its purest form in m. 21, as a traditional Szymanowski clash on the fourth scale degree between the subdominant (A) and the characteristic raised fourth (A♯) in the Podhalean mode. In this eighth mazurka, Szymanowski has creatively exploited the tensions of this underlying conflict.

Conclusion

The extensive use of "Szymanowski clashes" is an essential aspect of the harmonic style in the mazurkas. Such harmonic conflicts and ambiguities are especially widespread in the contexts of modal mixture and bitonality. Clashes on the third degree most often indicate polymodality over a clear tonic; a clash affecting the fifth points to a bitonal framework, and a clash on the first degree most often points to a false tonic. Bitonality, though long disparaged as a mode

of analytical discourse, should not be dismissed lightly. Analysis of bitonal counterpoint as proposed here can reveal both interesting local phenomena and aspects of large-scale harmonic planning. The Szymanowski clash, together with the Podhalean mode, bagpipe fifths, axis tonality, and bitonality, can combine to create a nuanced interpretation of both the harmonic colour and tonal structure of a mazurka that is faithful to a listener's or performer's perceptions of the musical surface.

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ABSTRACT

Among the greatest fascinations of Karol Szymanowski's Mazurkas, op. 50 and op. 62, are their rich and sophisticated harmonic vocabulary. Many stylistic elements are combined together in this musical language, including pedal points, bagpipe fifths, modal mixture, and bitonality. The interplay of all these phenomena tends to destabilize functional harmonic relationships, leading to many instances of harmonic clashes by semitone, dubbed "Szymanowski clashes." Considering this harmonic language through the lens of the Szymanowski clash can offer an understanding of this music that points to underlying compositional design and structural logic, while acting in accord with the listener's perceptions of the musical surface.

RÉSUMÉ

La richesse et le raffinement du vocabulaire harmonique est probablement ce qui fascine le plus dans les mazurkas op.50 et op.62 de Karol Szymanowski. Son langage musical combine plusieurs éléments stylistiques, incluant l'utilisation de pédales, de quintes parallèles, de modes mixtes et de bitonalités. L'interaction entre ces techniques d'écriture contribue à déstabiliser les relations harmoniques fonctionnelles, conduisant à de multiples collisions harmoniques basées sur les demi-tons, que l'on a baptisées « Szymanowski clashes ». L'examen de ce langage harmonique à partir du concept de « Szymanowski clash » peut aider à mieux comprendre cette musique en mettant en lumière une conception et une logique structurelle compositionnelles, tout en rendant compte de la perception des surfaces musicales.

BIOGRAPHY

Pianist Matthew Bengtson offers a unique combination of musical talents ranging from extraordinary pianist, fortepianist, harpsichordist, analyst, and scholar of performance practice. He offers a diverse repertoire, from Byrd to Ligeti and numerous contemporary composers, and has performed extensively in the United States, Mexico, and Europe, including numerous solo performances at Carnegie's Weill Recital Hall. His recordings of the complete Scriabin Sonatas garnered numerous rave reviews; the *American Record Guide* relates his performances of the complete Scriabin sonatas to legendary performances by Horowitz and Richter, asking, "Has Scriabin ever been played better?" He is co-author of *The Alexander Scriabin Companion: History, Performance, and Lore* (Rowman and Littlefield Press, 2017). Equally devoted to the music of Karol Szymanowski, he won a Stefan and Wanda Wilk Prize for Research in Polish Music, and recently released a 3-CD recording of the great Polish composer's violin/piano and solo piano works on the Musica Omnia label with violinist Blanka Bednarz. He is currently Assistant Professor of Piano Literature at the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre and Dance, where he teaches piano, fortepiano, and courses and seminars on piano repertoire.