

# *Depicting* *Japanese* *Soundscapes*

*in Grażyna Pstrokońska-Nawratil's  
'Słownik i kamień'*

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## ABSTRACT

In an article titled 'Ekomuzyka' [Ecomusic], Polish composer Grażyna Pstrokońska-Nawratil states: 'Music is an audio organism. Its existence unfolds in time and space. When stopped, it dies, similarly to other living earth organisms or stars in space. Music is entirely subject to the rules of life: it is born, it grows, fades – and dies. It is renewable (recurring with every performance), and it can reincarnate!'. The artist introduced the term 'ecomusic' not only to describe a cycle of her own compositions, but also as a trend in music that can be observed since prehistoric times. As a keen traveller, Pstrokońska-Nawratil has visited many countries on almost all continents. After coming back from her trips, she writes down her impressions and feelings, thus creating musical reportages. Her oeuvre includes seven such work, the latest of which – 'Słowik i kamień' [The Nightingale and the Stone] (2020) – was inspired by the soundscape of Japan. In this piece, written for two pianos and percussion, the composer depicts places that she visited, among them: tea fields, dry gardens called *karesansui*, and Aokigahara forest. The paper summarises Pstrokońska-Nawratil's concept of ecomusic. The aim is to present the aforementioned composition by analysing sources of inspiration and signs that represent extramusical, Japanese reality.

**Keywords:** ecomusic, reportage, contemporary music, Grażyna Pstrokońska-Nawratil

Music is an audio organism. Its existence unfolds in time and space. When stopped, it dies, similarly to other living earth organisms or stars in space. Music is entirely subject to the rules of life: it is born, it grows, fades – and dies. It is renewable (recurring with every performance), and it can reincarnate! (it is reborn in a new form – sometimes centuries later, with a different appearance, e.g. played on different instruments and with new orchestration). As a genre, it is subject to continuous development. At the same time, it is a permanent, living chronicle of our life.<sup>1</sup>

These words come from an article titled 'Ekomuzyka' [Ecomusic] by Polish composer Grażyna Pstrokońska-Nawratil. Although the text was published in 2005, it presents an intriguing perspective on her music composed since at least the 1980s. The artist uses the term 'ecomusic', which she defines as 'human-friendly art of sounds inspired by nature'.<sup>2</sup> In the aforementioned text, the composer focuses on the 'phenomenon of transferring natural forces from the human environment (earth and space) to animate art – music'.<sup>3</sup> A part of this neologism is the prefix *eco-*, which the artist translates as 'home', 'surroundings', or 'friendly environment'.

For Pstrokońska-Nawratil, ecomusic is not a kind of tendency created at a particular historical moment, but a trend represented in art through centuries, almost from the very beginning. It should be human-friendly, beautiful, true, an art in which one may find home.

Before we go further, it is worth emphasising that Grażyna Pstrokońska-Nawratil did not set out to create a new theory, but she wanted to give a name to what she believed and observed. She developed her concept separately from e.g. Bernie Krause, Barry Traux, and Raymond Murray Schafer,<sup>4</sup> though it, too, might fall under the umbrella of ecomusicology.<sup>5</sup> She focuses on artistic music<sup>6</sup> composed throughout centuries in a traditional way, without electronics or the use of field recordings.<sup>7</sup> She does not even use the well-established terms known from (eco)musicological nomenclature, such as soundscape, nor does she focus on problems of contemporary humans, such as noise, because for her beauty is more important and she rejects ugliness. The above-quoted article is not (and should not be treated) as a scientific paper. Instead, it offers a deep dive into the composer's music and aesthetic ideas. Her comments do not come from years of scientific study of different soundscapes, but are the result of reflection filtered through personal sensitivity, a way of seeing the world. The composer's synaesthesia also plays a huge role in her unique approach to the proposed concept. Pstrokońska-Nawratil's ecomusic is rooted in her (post)humanistic and biocentric ideas. In previous decades, they were linked to the thought of Saint Francis

<sup>4</sup> See Robert Losiak, 'Wokół idei ekologii akustycznej. Koncepcje i praktyki', *Studia Etnograficzne i Antropologiczne*, 17 (2017), 115–126; R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape. Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> Jeff Todd Titon, 'The nature of ecomusicology', *Música e Cultura: revista da ABET*, 8/1 (2013), 8–9, [https://www.abet.mus.br/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/3\\_vol\\_8\\_titon.pdf](https://www.abet.mus.br/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/3_vol_8_titon.pdf), accessed 4 July 2025.

<sup>6</sup> A term taken from Philip Tagg. See Philip Tagg, 'Analysing popular music: theory, method and practice', *Popular Music*, 2 (1982), 37–65.

<sup>7</sup> The approach in her music is somewhat similar to what a painter does. To depict what she saw, she uses colours, symbols, and everything is filtered, i.e. transformed, through her emotions and style. The use of field recordings by e.g. Schafer or Krause is similar to photographing the landscape. See Bernie Krause, *This Is What Extinction Sounds Like*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KnpsMG0PWRY>, accessed 2 July 2025, and Schafer, *The Soundscape*.

<sup>1</sup> Grażyna Pstrokońska-Nawratil, 'Ekomuzyka' [Ecomusic], in Jan Mozrzyk, ed., *O naturze i kulturze* (Wrocław, 2005), 144–145.

<sup>2</sup> Pstrokońska-Nawratil, 'Ekomuzyka', 145.

<sup>3</sup> Pstrokońska-Nawratil, 'Ekomuzyka', 145.

of Assisi. Recently, however – especially in the last decade – they shifted towards concepts of deep ecology and posthumanism. According to the artist,

‘We are a part of the world, but also the world is us. [...] We are all part of an earthly family and belong to one enormous cosmic family. It thus suffices to add just one more thing: our sister – MUSIC.’<sup>8</sup>

Pstrokońska-Nawratil lists three main inspirations for ecomusic in her article: birds, water (or narrowly: oceans), and celestial bodies. Birds are bearers ‘of heavenly forces’,<sup>9</sup> a kind of spiritual beings that inspire not only through their unique voices and songs, but also the way they flawlessly move. Water is connected with many symbols, such as beginning and end, oblivion, etc. Lastly, celestial bodies – the Sun, the Moon, and stars – are sources of energy that also help to reflect on human life.<sup>10</sup> Pstrokońska-Nawratil drafts the rules of ecomusic, which are as follows:

- 1) ‘Birdsong is a primordial structure of music.’<sup>11</sup>
- 2) ‘Ocean is an archetype of the Great Musical Form.’<sup>12</sup>
- 3) ‘The cosmos is a primordial model of Time and Space in Music.’<sup>13</sup>

### ‘SŁOWIK I KAMIEN’: THE GENRE AND COMMISSION

Having put the meaning behind ecomusic into perspective, it seems worthwhile to focus on an example in which we can trace the composer’s approach to this musical genre. One such example is *Słowik i kamień* [The Nightingale and the Stone], part of the cycle ‘Reportaże’ [Reportages]. This generic name was inspired by literature and photography, in which a reportage is a kind of report from a specific place. Pstrokońska-Nawratil intends to capture what one might call the sonosphere of a country or a particular place. As she said in an interview conducted by Beata Bigda:

For several years now, I have been able to travel for pleasure

and fulfil my dreams (earlier, time allowed me only to make artistic trips). The central elements of those journeys are not necessarily the attractions listed in Baedekers. My reportages are faithful representations of unusual places, complete with their colours, temperatures, vibrations, and magic, translated into the dimension of sound. They are entire images contained and captured right there in a musical frame, and thus immortalised and passed on.<sup>14</sup>

The cycle of musical reportages by Pstrokońska-Nawratil consists of seven pieces, inspired by visits to e.g. New Zealand (properly Aotearoa), Japan, and Egypt. The prototype of this genre, although not yet called a reportage at that time, was *...como el sol y la mar...*, a concerto for flute and orchestra (2007) from the cycle ‘Myśląc o Vivaldim’ [Thinking of Vivaldi].

Although Grażyna Pstrokońska-Nawratil’s music was first presented in Japan in the 1990s, with the premiere of her *Terra* dedicated to the victims of the war, the composer herself visited Japan as late as 2013. That trip inspired her to compose the last, seventh piece in the ‘Reportages’ cycle. Completed in 2020,<sup>15</sup> it was premiered on 20<sup>th</sup> September that year during the 63<sup>rd</sup> edition of the ‘Warsaw Autumn’. The composition had been commissioned by that festival and dedicated to its performers – the Kwadrofonik ensemble consisting of Emilia Sitarz, Bartłomiej Wąsik – pianos, Magdalena Kordylańska-Pękała and Piotr Maślanka – percussion.

### FIVE ELEMENTS AS INSPIRATION BEHIND ‘SŁOWIK I KAMIEN’. VERBAL SIGNS

As the artist wrote in her note for the ‘Warsaw Autumn’:

*The Nightingale and the Stone* is my reportage from Japan, whose leitmotif is a haiku made up of several notes and assuming different forms during my journey across the palette of images and phenomena, such as Japanese rock gardens, nightingale floors, the green tea gardens, the Suicide Forest of Aokigahara, cedar groves, painted cemeteries, the cinnabar-coloured temple gates, and the monumental golden statue of the Buddha. The peace of Zen flows from the mystical whiteness of Mount Fuji.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Pstrokońska-Nawratil, ‘Ekomuzyka’, 150–151.

<sup>9</sup> Pstrokońska-Nawratil, ‘Ekomuzyka’, 145.

<sup>10</sup> More on that topic in Katarzyna Bartos, ‘The Concept of Ecomusic in the Works by Grażyna Pstrokońska-Nawratil’, in Anna Granat-Janki et al., eds, *Musical Analysis. Historia – Theoria – Praxis*, vol. 5, (Wrocław, 2019), 263–274.

<sup>11</sup> Pstrokońska-Nawratil, ‘Ekomuzyka’, 147.

<sup>12</sup> Pstrokońska-Nawratil, ‘Ekomuzyka’, 148.

<sup>13</sup> Pstrokońska-Nawratil, ‘Ekomuzyka’, 150.

<sup>14</sup> Beata Bigda, *Myślenie dźwiękiem. Z profesor Grażyną Pstrokońską-Nawratil rozmawia Beata Bigda*, 17 Sept. 2016, <https://beabard.blogspot.com/2016/09/myślenie-dzwiekiem.html>, accessed 30 Mar. 2025.

<sup>15</sup> On 26 August 2020, to be precise.

<sup>16</sup> Grażyna Pstrokońska-Nawratil, *Słowik i kamień (The Nightingale and the Stone)* – Grażyna Pstrokońska-Nawratil, <https://warszawska-jesien.art.pl/en/2020/programme-and-tickets/utwory/slowik-i-kamien->, accessed 30 Apr. 2025.

The piece is inspired not only by nature, but also by Japanese culture, traditions, and arts. The inspirations listed by the composer are reflected in the composer's own score headings of the work's phases (as the composer calls them), which are as follows:

... dry gardens, nightingale floors ... (the element – wind)  
... green fields of tea / ikebana (the element – water)  
... suicide forest (the element – earth)  
... colourful cemeteries (Jizō) / vermilion gates (Torii) / Buddha statue (the element – fire)  
... Fuji. Zen (the element – heaven).

The artist thus refers to the lucky number five, and to a classification of the elements different from that now known in Europe. In Japan, the existence of five elements (五大, *godai*) is recognised. This typology results from Buddhist concepts, but it was also influenced by Chinese and local teachings. Individual elements are represented in temples and gardens by corresponding stupas.<sup>17</sup>

Each of the phase headings in 'Słowik i kamień' serves as a sign that helps decode the meanings behind the music. As the composer sums up:

[...] there are [in this piece – author's note] references to Buddhism, to Zen, as well as vermilion gates, painted cemeteries, cedar groves, Mount Fuji, dry gardens 'combed' with sand, green fields of tea, and also a tigress leading her cubs through the water and nightingale floors... and from all this there emerges the bell of Hiroshima.<sup>18</sup>

In the first phase of the composition, the artist refers to the element of wind (*fū*, 風), representing what moves freely and connected with thinking or personality. In this phase, the composer depicts dry gardens (*karesansui*, 枯山水), created since the sixteenth century as places in which to stop, meditate, and contemplate. Their appearance may be a bit surprising to people accustomed to European gardens. An important place is occupied by stones, gravel and sand, which are raked in a specific way, to resemble waves. The heading also refers to nightingale floors (*uguisu-bari*, 鶯張). These are floors that warn of danger, because when someone stands on them, they make a high-pitched sound. For this purpose, special nails are used in their construction, and the high, piercing sound may resemble the cries of birds.

The second phase of the 'Słowik i kamień' is related to water (*sui*, 水) or fluid matter. It is associated with what flows, is shapeless, with flexibility and emotions. The composer, though, refers in her heading to fields of tea and to ikebana, which is linked to her experience during a tea ceremony, a centuries-old ritual full of harmony and solemnity.

...suicide forest (the element – earth) is a reference to *chi* (地 – earth – solid matter). This element represents everything that is hard and resistant to change, e.g. stones, and in the human body – to bones. It is associated with stability, strength, persistence, and gravity. In the heading, the composer also refers to the suicide forest – Aokigahara (青木ヶ原), located in the Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park. The composer did not go inside, but in an interview she said that this place might radiate strong energy.

The next phase is a reference to *ka* (火 – fire), which results from combustion and the release of energy. It is represented by animals, as well as metabolism and passion. In her piece, the composer was inspired by cemeteries, a golden statue of Buddha, and gates called *torii*. These gates, known as birds' roost, symbolise the border between human and spiritual worlds in Shintoism. They are also symbols of fire, as they 'greet' the sun every day. In an interview the artist talked about the differences in the atmosphere of different cemeteries and about small human statues with colourful pieces of clothing on them. These statues guard children's and travellers' souls<sup>19</sup>. It seems unsurprising that such bright and warm colours inspired her to write this phase of the seventh 'reportage', especially as the composer is a synaesthete.<sup>20</sup>

Lastly, *kū* (空 – emptiness, ether, as well as heaven) is mentioned in the heading of the last phase. It is pure energy that has the power to create – also the creation

19 Joshua Frydman, *The Japanese Myths. A Guide to Gods, Heroes and Spirits* (London, 2022).

20 Pstrokońska-Nawratil's synaesthesia is based on the connection between what is seen and heard. She has also developed her own unique colour code, in which every pitch is not only connected to a colour, but is also a symbol of an element in nature. For example, F-sharp is red and a symbol of fire. At the same time, although it might be very tempting to 'colour' all her compositions and try to analyse them from this perspective, she underlines that not everything she sees she also wants to hear, and vice versa. Such analysis might therefore distort her ideas if applied en bloc, without previous confirmation from the artist that she was actually referencing a certain colour and wanted it to symbolise something. Cf. Grażyna Pstrokońska-Nawratil, 'Słyszę to, co widzę', in Ewa Dobierzewska-Mozrzyms and Adam Jezierski, eds, *Przyroda i cywilizacja* (Wrocław, 2010), 133–146.

17 五輪塔, *gorintō* – consisting of five parts of different shapes – a square (earth), a sphere (water), a pyramid (fire), a crescent/hemisphere (air), and a form resembling a lotus flower (ether).

18 Maja Baczyńska, 'Grażyna Pstrokońska-Nawratil: Piszę jak w transie', *Presto*, 1 Jan. 2021, <https://prestoportal.pl/grazyna-pstrokonska-nawratil-pisze-jak-w-transie>, accessed 3 July 2025.

**Table 1.** Instrumentation and instrument preparation in 'Słowik i kamień' by Grażyna Pstrokońska-Nawratil. Author's own analysis.

|                                                                                                         | Percussion instruments and sound objects                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                  | Objects to prepare/play the pianos or additional instruments |                                                                |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                         | Percussionist 1                                                                                                                            | Percussionist 2                                                                                                                                  | Pianist 1                                                    | Pianist 2                                                      |
| ... dry gardens,<br>nightingale floors ...<br>(the element – wind)                                      | small Japanese hanging bells,<br>geophone,<br>two maracas                                                                                  | crotales,<br>hyōshigi,<br>(bowed) waterphone,<br>Tam-tam grande played with metal<br>rods, chopsticks, grelots                                   | three sheet metal<br>stands                                  | three sheet metal stands,<br>bamboo mat,<br>heavy crystal vase |
| ... green fields of tea /<br>ikebana (the element<br>– water)                                           | glockenspiel,<br>crotales,<br>Chinese opera gong,<br>taiko or tom-tom with mute,<br>flexatone,<br>metal wind chimes,<br>marimba            | xylophone,<br>tsuzumi (two bongos),<br>marimba                                                                                                   | crystal stopper,<br>plectrum                                 | plectrum                                                       |
| ... suicide forest (the<br>element – earth)                                                             | vibraslap,<br>woodblocks,<br>guiro,<br>Glockenspiel (also played with<br>drum brushes),<br>sistrum,<br>log drum,<br>lastra,<br>wood chimes | raganella (Buddhist 'fish'),<br>hyōshigi,<br>vibraphone<br>crotales (bowed),<br>vibraslap,<br>guiro,<br>tam tam grande,<br>whistle<br>bin-zasara | glass eggs<br>(paperweight),<br>rins                         | glass hemisphere,<br>glass egg,<br>rins,<br>heavy glass ball   |
| ... colourful cemeteries<br>(Jizō) / vermilion gates<br>(Torii) / Buddha statue<br>(the element – fire) | gong,<br>marimba,<br>gran cassa,<br>tam-tam                                                                                                | tam-tam grande,<br>marimba,<br>Japanese cup,<br>timpani,<br>gran cassa,<br>tam-tam                                                               | harmonics on<br>strings,<br>performed with<br>fingernails    | metal plates                                                   |
| ... Fuji. Zen (the<br>element – heaven).                                                                | xylophone,<br>marimba (bowed),<br>crane                                                                                                    | rins played with roller,<br>crane                                                                                                                | additional<br>instrument: crane                              | additional instruments:<br>koshi chime,<br>crane               |

of all matter. The composer refers here to Mount Fuji, which is a *kami* (god or goddess in Shintoism), and a home to the *kami*.<sup>21</sup>

### MUSICAL SIGNS USED TO DEPICT EXTRAMUSICAL REALITY IN 'SŁOWIK I KAMIEN'

#### *1. Instrumentation*

Before Pstrokońska-Nawratil wrote down the music, she had been experimenting with piano preparation for two weeks in order to obtain certain sounds. For each phase, she used different instruments or objects to prepare them (see Table 1). Some of those objects she already had

at home, others were borrowed (such as glass balls, from her relative), and still others (namely glass eggs) were found at a local supermarket. It is worth noting that the composer tried to use natural materials or instruments that comprise them. The instruments are wooden, they contain water or stones. Especially the geophone is interesting, as it was invented by the composer's teacher, Olivier Messiaen – and it is literally made of rocks. There are also the so-called 'cranes' which she made herself by using origami and unnecessary score fragments. They serve as an important symbol to the Japanese people – a wish for long life and quick recovery. Cranes are also related to the modern history of Japan. A girl, Sadako Sasaki, was a *hibakusha*, i.e. a person affected by the bombing of Hiroshima. She was only a teenager when her illness began in 1954; soon she started folding origami. By the time of her death, she had made more than a thousand cranes. In 1958 a memorial statue of her, holding a crane, was erected in the Hiroshima Peace

<sup>21</sup> Frydman, *The Japanese Myths*.

**Table 2.** Haikus in 'Słowik i kamień' by Grażyna Pstrokońska-Nawratil.

| Phase                                                                                          | Instruments playing the haiku                                                        | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ... dry gardens, nightingale floors ... (the element – wind)                                   | crotales – two percussionists, small Japanese bells – one percussionist              | Haiku 1 consists of such pitches as: F-sharp, A and B-flat (see example 1). Played in full by the crotales (5–7–5 rhythmic structure); essential pitches also played by bells                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| ... green fields of tea / Ikebana (the element – water)                                        | piano 1                                                                              | Haiku 2 appears twice – it opens (b. 65, <i>lontano</i> ) and closes (bb. 165–167) the phase.<br>Three groups of perfect fourths are played ricochet by a crystal stopper. Pitches used: A-flat, B-flat, D-flat, E-flat, F (a pentatonic scale). At the first statement, it is performed in high register, at the second statement – the last group is even played an octave higher                                                          |
| ... suicide forest (the element – earth)                                                       | Haiku 3a: piano 2<br>Haiku 3b: pianos 1 and 2                                        | Haiku 3a: eight notes on piano 2<br>Haiku 3b: minor seconds, pianos 1 and 2<br>Both of these haikus return, sometimes transformed, or they serve as a material for other motifs in this phase                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| ... colourful cemeteries (Jizō) / vermilion gates (Torii) / Buddha statue (the element – fire) | Haiku 4a: marimbas 1 and 2<br>Haiku 4b: timpani with Japanese cups (percussionist 2) | Haiku 4a: played on the marimba by percussionist 2, echoed by the second one as in a canon.<br>The interval structure resembles haiku 1. However, it is transposed and presented in low register.<br>Haiku 4b: only appears in the second percussion in timpani with Japanese cups placed on the drum's membrane. As it is an aleatory fragment, the note order can be changed by the performer; adding B-flat would make a pentatonic scale |
| ... Fuji. Zen (the element – heaven).                                                          | piano 1, xylophone (percussion 1), marimba (percussion 1)                            | It is presented first by piano 1 as a sustained C, and xylophone (percussion 1) as F-sharp repeated five or seven times in high register. Similar motifs then appear in marimba 1 (prolonged C) and piano 1 (repeated G in high register)                                                                                                                                                                                                    |

Memorial Park. For Grażyna Pstrokońska-Nawratil it is the second time, after the above-mentioned choral *Terra*, that she has honoured the victims of the Second World War and celebrated peace in her music. The connection between each instrument and the heading is intentional, and the instrument cannot be replaced by anything else.

## 2. Musical haikus

Although haikus are a genre specific to Japanese poetry that consists of a certain set of syllables: 5–7–5,<sup>22</sup> the composer did not use any words or quotations. Each of the phases contains a motif called haiku, mostly presented at the beginning. By an analogy to the poetic structure, she composed her motifs in most cases out of three groupings comprising five, seven, and again five notes. These are not leitmotifs *per se* – they are different in each phase, but they are viewed as the essence of each of the movements, serving as a kind of mottos (see table 2).

<sup>22</sup> What seems interesting is the fact that both these numbers are considered lucky and even holy by Japanese people, as they refer to the five elements and to seven gods of fortune (*Shichi-fuku-jin*). The composer numbered her haikus from one to five, but two of them have versions A and B, which makes seven haikus in total.

In two of the haikus, second and fifth, the use of certain pitches is correlated to the composer's colour code (see Example 2). The pitches used in ... green fields of tea / Ikebana (the element – water), that is: A-flat, B-flat, D-flat, E-flat, F (a pentatonic scale) – correspond to green and violet, and are symbols of water in the composer's own colour code.

In the last haiku, a sustained C in low register represent the colour black and a symbol of the earth. Both the repeated F-sharp and G are presented in high register. The closer we come to the highest C (symbol of the air), the lighter the colour becomes. Such a contrast of registers helps build an analogy to the majestic Mount Fuji, which is often hidden behind clouds, and its top is covered with snow.

## 3. Musical signs and analogies

'Słowik i kamień' is full of musical signs and acoustic analogies. In the first phase of the composition, the artist refers to a dry garden in Ryōan-ji, Kyoto, where a composition of stones<sup>23</sup> is called 'tiger family that

<sup>23</sup> There is a group of five, two groups of three, and two groups of two stones.

1 2 10" 2

małe, wiszące dzwonki japońskie o wysokim i przenikliwym brzmieniu

Percussion I

(haiku 1)

Uderzyć bardzo szybko dzwoneczkami o siebie i pozostawić wybrzmienie (wykorzystać naturalny pogłos pf 1 uderzając nad strunami)

(wysokości w przybliżeniu)

Crotales

Percussion II

(haiku 1)

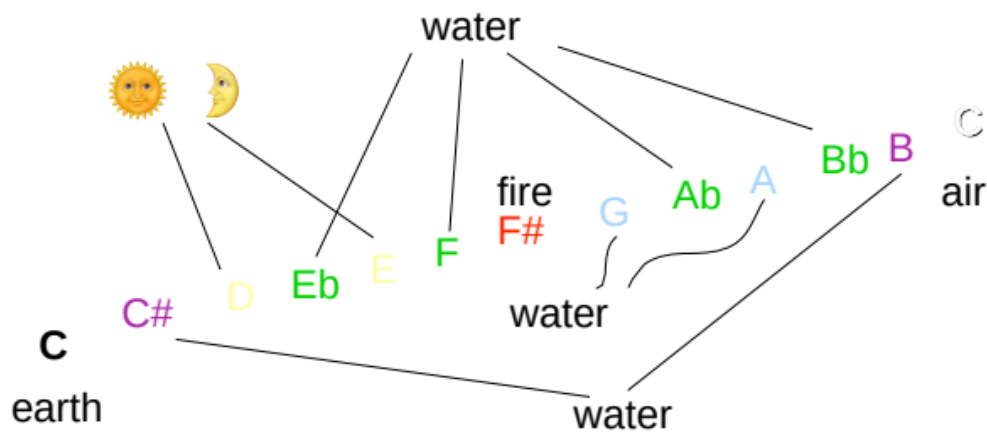
(wykorzystać naturalny pogłos strun pf 2)

hioshigi (klaskanka)

mf

hiosl

Example 1. Grażyna Pstrokońska-Nawratil, 'Słowik i kamień', unpublished score from composer's archive, p. 1.



Example 2. Grażyna Pstrokońska-Nawratil's colour code. Author's own diagram.

The image shows a musical score for two pianos, Piano I and Piano II. Each piano part consists of a grand staff (treble and bass clef) and a set of four staves for string sections. The string sections are labeled 'sektory na strunach wewnątrz fortepianu' (string sections inside the piano). The score includes instructions for using flat metal plates (3 pieces, ~11 cm) to create sounds on the strings, and a bamboo mat (~28x40 cm) to create sounds on the strings of Piano II. Pedal blocks are also indicated for both pianos.

**Piano I:**

- sektory na strunach wewnątrz fortepianu
- 3 podstawki (płaskie) z cienkiej blachy (~ 11 cm)
- (realizować bezpośrednio na strunach fortepianu)
- zablokować pedał (pedal block)

**Piano II:**

- sektory na strunach wewnątrz fortepianu
- 3 podstawki (płaskie) z cienkiej blachy (~ 11 cm)
- (realizować bezpośrednio na strunach fortepianu)
- mata z kostki bambusowej (~28x40 cm)
- zablokować pedał (pedal block)

**Example 3.** Grażyna Pstrokońska-Nawratil, 'Słowik i kamień', unpublished score from composer's archive, p. 1.

crosses the river'. She represents this by asking the first pianist (bb. 44–64) to play pentachords and the second pianist – to throw a small but heavy vase on the strings of the instrument. It is accompanied by two bright-sounding maracas and a tam-tam played with grelots. Each chord or cluster is like a stone in the dry garden. To depict combing the sand or gravel, the composer instructs the musician to move a bamboo matt across the strings of the second piano (bb. 6–29, see example 3). Wave-like motifs (first piano bb. 20–28, both pianos bb. 31–42) likewise seem to resemble the aforementioned activity of the monks.

To represent nightingale floors, the second percussionist is asked to play with a bow on the waterphone's 'strings' so that a squeak is produced (bb. 9–19). The pitches of these squeaks should be differentiated. A wooden chopstick is then spun energetically in the centre of the tam-tam and brings out an intense flageolet (e.g. in b. 34).

In the second phase the flow, constant movement and figurations in the pianos offer an analogy to tea shrubs moved by the wind. The beginning of the next

phase brings a shocking change of atmosphere. The Aokigahara suicide forest is not depicted as a place *per se*, but rather as a kind of meditation on emotions evoked by wandering in this unreal wood covered in fog. There are a lot of delicate sounds, played on the piano strings with crystal stoppers, the vibraslap, raganella, guiro, and lastra, as well as piano figurations. These sounds resemble the mystic forest floor in Pstrokońska-Nawratil's orchestral *Rainforests* of 2013.<sup>24</sup> Here, however, the composer does not rule whether the person who goes inside this forest will come back alive or not. At the end, the second percussionist plays a bin-zasara ('crack like a whip'<sup>25</sup>), and the second pianist is asked to throw a heavy glass ball on the strings such that it hits the piano frame loudly ('hit like a gunshot'<sup>26</sup>).

<sup>24</sup> For more on that composition, see Katarzyna Bartos, 'Ginący świat – "Lasy deszczowe" z cyklu "Ekomuzyka" Grażyny Pstrokońskiej-Nawratil', *Res Facta Nova*, 22/31 (2021), 79–90.

<sup>25</sup> Composer's note in b. 263, p. 39.

<sup>26</sup> Composer's note in b. 263, p. 39.

**Table 3.** Analogues to Japanese instruments in 'Słowik i kamień'.

| Name of the instrument | Counterpart in 'Słowik i kamień'                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Koto                   | A selective glissando on the piano strings with a plectrum                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Tai-kon [Taiko]        | Tom-tom with a mute. The composer stresses that the sound should be blunt and primitive. The percussionist should use hard mallets, like those used to play multi-percussion                                                                                                        |
| Shakuhachi             | Playing a melody in parallel minor seconds on the piano; it consists of short rhythmic values with a harsh grace note and, as the composer calls them, calm <i>zanutki</i> ('post-note' grace notes). The melody is marked as <i>giocoso, animato, piu mosso, semplice</i> . B. 128 |
| Shamisen               | A tremolo played on the piano strings with a plectrum                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Sho                    | Two parallel pentachords played higher and more loudly, then lower and more quietly on pianos 1 and 2. The effect should resemble breathing in and out, creating a sound abounding in additional harmonics.                                                                         |

In fourth phase of the piece, the composer depicts vermilion torii. There are five of them, each represented by the pianists more intensively than the previous one. The phase begins with a cluster and repeated pentachords in the pianos, then glissando-clusters played with the palms. Lastly, the pianists play these figures with their whole arms.

In the final phase it is crucial to focus on the calmness of zen practices and the majestic Mount Fuji. To do so, the composer restricted the music material to the minimum, producing something resembling almost a hum or white noise (played on the cranes).

To create a Japanese-like atmosphere in her piece, Pstrokońska-Nawratil used instruments of Japanese origin, but also tried to create analogues of other instruments' sound. These analogues are important especially in the second phase of the piece, where the composer aims to represent the sound of a traditional ensemble.

## SUMMARY

Nature has become a central issue in the music of Grażyna Pstrokońska-Nawratil since the late 1970s. One of her first pieces inspired by nature was *Eco per flauti* of 1980, followed by *Pejzaż z pluszczem* [Landscape with White-Throated Dipper] for soprano and three violins of 1986. Since then, almost all of her works have been linked to nature, both domestic and foreign. One of the works inspired by her trips is 'Słowik i kamień', analysed and interpreted in this article.

The composer depicts Japan, its soundscape and its characteristic landmarks. To do so, she focuses on differentiating musical colours by using various percussion instruments as well as sound production techniques on both percussion instruments and pianos, which requires specific instrument preparation. The artist also pays attention to the choice of pitches that correspond to her

colour code, musical symbols and analogies. She refers to the symbolism of the numbers five and seven, as well as the Japanese way of thinking about the elements. She also writes musical haikus, a kind of mottos for each phase of her composition.

In 'Słowik i kamień', Pstrokońska-Nawratil's ideas are close to post-humanistic concepts, in which such oppositions as nature–culture, human–nonhuman no longer exist. Her music takes listeners to unknown, often mystical places, accessible not to humans but to our 'smaller brothers'.

The narrative is adapted to a different, non-human perception of time. In her latest projects, the composer proposes that everyone should have access to authentic nature, and she rejects colonial traditions. For Pstrokońska-Nawratil, every creature, both human and non-human, is important and a part of something greater. For these reasons, she has even been called the 'David Attenborough of Polish contemporary music'.<sup>27</sup>

In her music, Grażyna Pstrokońska-Nawratil shares her admiration for nature, her observations and contemplations. She has not only composed music inspired by nature, but has also developed her own way of understanding the concept of ecomusic – in which one can find home, and which refers to the problems of the world around us. As an advocate for nature, the composer notes:

'We are but a medium that receives and transmits impulses of the world, less or more perfectly. We should not disrupt this natural order. In our art devoid of falsehood, we will then preserve the truth.'<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Ewa Szczecińska, *Grażyna Pstrokońska-Nawratil i jej dźwięki natury*, 27 Jan. 2021, <https://www.polskieradio.pl/8/8315/artykul/2667774,grazyna-pstrokonskanawratil-i-jej-dzwieki-natury>, accessed 30 Apr. 2025.

<sup>28</sup> Pstrokońska-Nawratil, 'Ekomuzyka', 150.

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