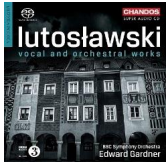


Lutoslawski - Vocal & Orchestral Works (2018) CD3

Written by bluesever

Wednesday, 21 March 2018 15:39 -

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Symphonic Variations (1936-38) 9:29 1. *Andante* -1:41 2. *Allegro - Stesso movimento* -2:41
3. *Adagio - Andante* -3:22 4. *Allegro non troppo - Subito poco meno mosso - Vivace* -1:45
Concerto for Piano and Orchestra (1987-88) 26:20 For Krystian Zimerman
5. 1 dotted crotchet=c. 110 - crotchet=c. 70 -5:41 6. 2 *Presto* (crotchet=c. 160) - *Poco meno mosso - Lento* -4:41 7. 3 quaver=c. 85 - *Largo* (crotchet=40 - 45) -8:13 8. 4 crotchet=c. 84 - *Poco meno mosso - Più mosso* (crotchet=c. 110) -7:44
Variations on a Theme of Paganini (1978) 8:44 for Solo Piano and Orchestra; Arranged by the Composer from a Work for Two Persons (1941)
9. *Allegro capriccioso - Meno mosso - Poco lento - Allegro molto - Più mosso* -
Symphony No. 4 (1988-92) 22:24
10. crotchet=c. 55 - crotchet=c. 80 - quaver=c. 160 -7:08 11. crotchet=c. 85 - crotchet=c. 115 - *Tempo i* (crotchet=c. 85) -5:04 12. *Lento* (dotted crotchet=c. 60) - *Tempo I* (dotted crotchet=c. 85) - crotchet=c. 100 -6:12 13. dotted crotchet=c. 70 - crotchet=c. 60 -3:04 14. crotchet=c. 160 - 170 -0:53
Louis Lortie - piano BBC Symphony Orchestra Edward Gardner - conductor

Witold Lutoslawski was the most prolific of 20th century Polish composers (and pianist and conductor) who was little known in America until 1956 when he visited the U.S. to give lectures and seminars. Lutoslawski was trained for the Polish Army Signal Corp during WW II but was captured and imprisoned by the Germans. He escaped and played piano in musical cafes of Poland for the duration of the war. He was also a composer in search of a compositional style with which he could confidently express his musical ideas, and his musical journey meandered through several influences and styles before arriving at his own. Initially, the expression of his musical ideas was limited to folk-dominated music by the post-war Polish state until finally in the 1950's, when he devised his own methods that involved using groups of musical intervals to build his harmonic structure. He also employed aleatory in which rhythmic elements of the music are subjected to chance. This element of chance culminates in Indeterminacy in which increasing degrees of freedom are granted to the performer.

I've covered only a sampling of Lutoslawski's life to give you some idea of its breadth. That life was an active one experientially as well as musically, and this album presents works beginning with the Symphonic Variations, his orchestral debut written at the age of 25, his Piano Concerto (1988), Variations on a Theme by Paganini for Solo Piano and Orchestra (1978), and his final Symphony 4 composed in 1992, just two years before his death. The works are performed by Edward Gardner and the BBC Symphony Orchestra on Chandos and were recorded in 2011.

The album begins with Lutoslawski's Symphonic Variations, composed while the composer was studying composition at the Warsaw Conservatory. His teacher pronounced it musically incomprehensible and ugly. Nice. It depicts the influence of Stravinsky and involves a ten measure theme first presented by flute, then violins. Seven variations follow with a final coda. The music immediately captures and holds your attention, and it demonstrates how fine an orchestrator Lutoslawski had already become. The music is exciting, sometimes lovely, and sometimes powerful, sometimes stark, sometimes lush – but ALWAYS endlessly fascinating. Okay, I'll admit it: I enjoy Lutoslawski! The rhythms, melodic elements, dynamic contrasts, orchestral sonorities, and drama make this music easy to enjoy.

The Piano Concerto was composed specifically for Krystain Zimmerman but is played here by Louis Lortie. Each movement has the tempo specified with metronome markings. The 1st movement is a driving affair with impressive climaxes. Lortie's piano tone is beautifully rounded. The 2nd movement is marked Presto but is inconsistently so. I did not find it nearly as interesting as the 1st. The 3rd movement is slower and even less interesting. The 4th movement opens with low strings playing a quiet but agitated melodic element (really, a brief series of strongly rhythmic motifs). After 30 seconds of that introduction, the piano enters. As the movement continues and more instruments join in, those motifs dominate the musicscape. A final coda ensues that is quite exciting. Lortie demonstrates superb technique in one of the more difficult sounding piano concertos I have heard. The music is uniformly interesting and more than listenable, but I find it somewhat difficult to give it stars for beauty.

The Variations on a Theme by Paganini have an interesting history. German occupation of Poland stripped the land of its classical music opportunities, and musical cafes popped up as a new venue. Lutoslawski partnered with composer/pianist Panufnik to arrange and perform light music. They composed or arranged a considerable number of works, all but these Variations lost in the 1944 Polish Uprising. Much later, Lutoslawski arranged the Variations for piano and orchestra. These are interesting and superbly played, but I will always defer to Rachmaninov for such an arrangement.

Symphony 4 begins darkly. A clarinet sings a long, slow, rather pensive melody is soon

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repeated that is taken up by other instruments and instrument ensembles as the single movement symphony unfolds. Before the first tempo closes, the intensity increases, and the "movement" becomes a bit furious. The second tempo section is agitated and at times angry-sounding. Four more tempo section follow. This is difficult music to love, yet Lutoslawski felt that his later music better expressed his musical ideas. Personally, although I find great pleasure in modern music, I find Lutoslawski's earlier works that are more easily accessible are far more enjoyable.

This album is an excellent sampling of Lutoslawski across time. Orchestral execution is superb, and Gardner is certainly in the mind of the music even if it has varying degrees of heart. Sonically, the disc is without flaw, and the music makes a big splash on an adequately amped audio system. VERY HIGHLY RECOMMENDED for the Symphonic Variations, but others may enjoy his more obtuse works as well. The latter, for me, are more enjoyable if absorbed rather than analyzed. ---Joseph Kline PhD, MD, amazon.com

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