

***Lutoslawski on Music*, edited by Zbigniew Skowron. Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, Inc, 2007. 347 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0810848047; ISBN-13: 978-0810860131 (pbk.)**

Witold Lutoslawski (1913-1994) is widely viewed as one of the pre-eminent Polish composers of the second half of the twentieth century. Although he had been composing art music since his teens, it really was not until the late 1950s that Lutoslawski's music, like his famous composer colleagues Tadeusz Baird, Henryk Gorecki and Krzysztof Penderecki, came to be heard by western audiences. Our lack of awareness of a composer's early work might initially suggest that it took longer for Lutoslawski's compositional voice to have matured. However, as the composer himself notes in "Witold Lutoslawski's Life and Music," an unpublished autobiographical text the composer wrote for the ceremony of receiving the Kyoto Prize in October 1993 (which serves as the introduction for the present book), the repressive political environment in which all artists worked between the 1930s and 1950s made it virtually impossible for Lutoslawski's music to be heard outside of Poland until the late 1950s.

I was aware of Lutoslawski's literary proclivities, having read a couple of the composer's essays in the past. However, I have to admit that I was quite surprised to discover the vast amount and wide range of his extant prose. As Skowron points out, apart from the sheer volume of texts, the problem in organizing this body of work is twofold. First, many of these writings remain unpublished; second, what has been published is dispersed in a wide variety of sources. Skowron's achievement is no small feat: he has poured over hundreds of unpublished typescript papers, diary entries from over a twenty-five year period, as well as track down writings from, at times, somewhat obscure publications, to organize these texts within insightful thematic topics.

Skowron identifies a significant difference between Lutoslawski's writings and such polemical writers as Pierre Boulez, John Cage and Karlheinz Stockhausen, composers who also gained prominence during the 1950s. While the latter composers openly announced their aesthetics and radical attitudes, Lutoslawski instead chose to highlight practical solutions to problems in his and other compositions in order to aid listeners to understand these works, rather than build a theory of aesthetics in his own right.

The book is divided into six sections, each of which is devoted to a particular theme. Part One contains topics as diverse as beauty in music, the tonal system, Lutoslawski's view on orchestration, his use of aleatorism in his compositions, and reflections on the art of composition itself. Part Two contains statements about his own works. Some of these are short, and may be best viewed as program notes. However, in some instances (for instance, pieces such as the Symphony no. 2 and *Mi-Parti*), Lutoslawski's comments are quite extensive and provide fascinating insight into the compositional thinking behind

<p>© 2008 The author and the Canadian Association of Music Libraries, Archives, and Documentation Centres/L'auteur et l'Association canadienne des bibliothèques, archives et centres de documentation musicaux.</p>
--

such works. Part Three is entitled “On Composers and Musicians.” This section contains short essays about a variety of composers who have been influential on Lutoslawski’s compositional development as well as professional associations who championed his music.

Part Four, “Miscellaneous Items of Contemporary Music in Poland and Abroad,” contains short one- to two-page essays on a variety of topics, ranging from comparing the art forms of music and dance (“Reflections on Ballet”), his thoughts about the value of the London Sinfonietta to contemporary music (“The London Sinfonietta”), how modernism began with Wagner (“One Hundredth Anniversary of Parsifal”), and the overabundance of music and pervasive amount of noise in the contemporary world (“On silence”). Part Five contains speeches Lutoslawski gave at award ceremonies, and many are for the numerous honorary doctorates Lutoslawski received.

The Final part, “Notebook of ideas, 1959-1984,” is the shortest, yet arguably the most intriguing. Lutoslawski kept the habit of jotting down his thoughts on virtually a daily basis about current pieces he was working on, ideas for talks or speeches he had to give, or just random thoughts about a composer, performer or ensemble that had some relevance to him at that point in time. Given the vast abundance of materials in these diaries, clearly there were some judicious choices made, a point which I address next.

The book contains end notes that follow each essay, a substantial bibliography of Lutoslawski literature, and a name and title index. The production and editorial work are uniformly excellent. In the end, I have two quibbles. The first is rather minor: a complete list of Lutoslawski’s compositions is missing, and could have served as a reference to the various essays/program notes that constitute chapter two. My second critique is somewhat more significant: by the editor’s own admission, not all Lutoslawski’s writings were included. Yet there is no clear explanation for what methodology was employed in choosing what to include, only that the book “includes his most important texts arranged in six parts.” (p. ix) A short description would help the reader to understand Skowron’s approach to the choices he made with this variety of texts.

My slight criticisms aside, Skowron’s work is a substantial achievement, one which provides insights to Lutoslawski the man, but also into the compositional minds of one of most revered composers of post-1960 art music. Very highly recommended.

Edward Jurkowski  
The University of Lethbridge