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LUTOSLAWSKI AND HIS MUSIC by Steven Stucky
Cambridge University Press, 1981 (£21.50)

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Having been immensely depressed by the inadequacy, unhelpful generalities, and plain inaccuracies in the *New Grove* article on Lutosławski, I found it a pleasure to turn to Steven Stucky's new book on the composer. And that is not least because it has an excellent catalogue of works, discography, and bibliography (although I notice that John Casken's article 'Transition and Transformation in the Music of Witold Lutosławski', *Contact 12* (Autumn 1975), pp. 3-12, is missing). What the bibliography does make clear is that the time is ripe for a comprehensive survey and analysis of the music that will appeal to as wide an audience as possible. And by and large Steven Stucky, who is Assistant Professor of Music at Cornell University, has fulfilled this brief. His style is admirably concise and lucid even at its most concentrated, his terminology - a mixture of American and English usage - is generally clear, and the Polish and English proof-reading is of a high standard (although I do not care for 'postromantic', and several bar numbers in the structural synopses are incorrect).

Steven Stucky's central concern is naturally the music, but

he has not neglected to fill in biographical details where they are available and fitting. The opening three chapters cover the years up to 1960, intermingling biography and musical analysis effectively. A different and eminently sensible plan is adopted for the last 20 years: a fourth chapter mainly on the career, a fifth and central chapter elaborating on the main elements of the late style, and a final chapter consisting of 'summary discussions' of between four and nine pages on each of the principal compositions from *Jeux vénitiens* (1960-61) to *Mi-parti* (1975-76). Throughout, Stucky draws openly on the analytical work of other writers (Lidiia Rappoport on the early music, Wilfried Brennecke on *Muzyka żałobna* (Funeral music, 1954-58), Christian Martin Schmidt on the String Quartet (1964), etc.) and quotes extensively from existing interviews, including some, like the analytical sources mentioned above, that are not available in English. Here for example is a revealing comment made by Lutosławski in 1958 about his composition teacher in the early 1930s, Witold Maliszewski: ' "[He] instilled in the student a rigorous attitude toward one's materials and a sense of responsibility for every note one wrote. He was merciless in ferreting out the haphazard and illogical" ' (p. 5). For the lesser-known early works there are adequate quotations from the scores and neat, tabulated structural synopses. On the assumption that scores of the later works are more readily available, the balance of presentation in the later chapters switches to harmonic reductions.

Although Lutosławski is probably best known for his music of the last 20 years, Stucky quite rightly sees the earlier music as integral to a true understanding of his achievements. He is particularly good at placing the composer in the political and social contexts prevailing in Poland before 1960 but largely foregoes any detailed musical comparison with other contemporary composers (this is equally true of the later period). When it comes to the discussion of individual works in the early periods (and all are given fair treatment) Stucky's observations are basically sound. He highlights the odd harmonic premonition of later techniques but passes no comment on the remarkable solo cello writing in the Overture for Strings (1949) which comes into its own in the Cello Concerto begun 20 years later. Stucky's criteria for analysing tonal functions are not always clear. He asserts that in *Preludia taneczne* (Dance preludes, 1954) 'each movement conveys a clear tone center: E-flat, F, B-flat, G and E-flat' (p. 59), yet with regard to the middle three movements they are neither clear nor do they centre on the given pitch classes. His analysis of the use of folk sources in the Concerto for Orchestra (1950-54) on the other hand is illuminating, though I would have welcomed an attempt to discuss why these particular tunes might have been chosen.

When it comes to the transitional works preceding *Jeux vénitiens*, Stucky provides as perceptive a guide as one could reasonably hope for. His résumé of the uncompleted project that was eventually to emerge as the Three Postludes (1958-60) is typically informative, and his elucidation of the somewhat oblique motivic processes in the 'Metamorphoses' section of *Muzyka żałobna* is excellent. From time to time, however, general observations do prove inadequate when one looks at the imaginative fine details in the score. While Stucky accurately stresses the seminal pre-eminence of the Five Songs (1956-57) in the development of Lutosławski's concept of harmony as the crux of his mature compositional thought, he largely ignores the subtler touches where important developments in the poetic text (see the climax of *Wiatr* or the final lines of *Żima*) are enhanced by finely judged changes in harmony, register, and rhythm. It is precisely such moments that breathe life into the patterned chromatic partitioning which is to become the technical mainstay of the later music. Occasionally, too, a thesis can misleadingly over-reach itself. Later in the book Stucky talks about Lutosławski's fondness for the (unordered) hexachord comprising the successive interval classes 1:1:4:1:1:4. He states that this 'construction guarantees thirdless harmony' (p. 161). It does not. In *Muzyka żałobna* (an early example), where 'beginning with the fourth canon, interval class 4 (but never 3) does occasionally occur vertically' (p. 71), you will find over half a dozen harmonic instances of ic 3 from bar 23. More importantly, in later works Stucky fails to see that though at any one moment the harmony may be thirdless the melodic distribution will frequently emphasise the inherent ic 4 of the hexachord (Second Symphony, 1965-67: 'Hésitant', double reed refrain; Cello Concerto, 1969-70: brass interruptions from fig. 5). Indeed, Lutosławski extends this concept of

horizontal-vertical duality: ' "It may occur that the chord never actually sounds in its entirety – it is supplemented by our memory and imagination." ' (p. 120)

For many readers the most interesting chapter will be the one on elements of the late style, which Stucky divides into 'four broad aspects': microrhythm and limited aleatorism; pitch organisation and aleatory counterpoint; texture; macrorhythm and form. Such divisions are not comprehensive, but they do succeed in indicating the main compositional areas with which Lutosławski is preoccupied. The section on microrhythm includes a useful chart of notational devices used at various times by the composer, but there is insufficient attention given to the complex and vivid ways in which Lutosławski uses pulse. It is not just a question of pinpointing basic rhythmic patterns or of aleatory passages merging or contrasting with a regular metre, but more a matter of discovering how the inner rhythmic life consistently lends an immediate cogency to the musical argument. The Cello Concerto and Preludes and Fugue (1970-72) are excellent cases for such analysis.

Stucky's overriding interest in the book is the fundamental role of harmony. In themselves the harmonic blocks are amazingly varied and Lutosławski, in constructing them along consistent intervallic lines, has touched an aural nerve which so many have found refreshing. In the section on pitch organisation Stucky treads warily in the minefield of analysing the effect of different chords, apart from saying that they 'offer a rich and flexible source of harmonic expression' (p. 116). He does give plentiful examples from different works of the various basic types of construction (rehearsal numbers would have been useful), although less regulated chords get scant attention and there is no consideration of multiple chromatic passages such as the three-tiered climax of the second of the *Trois poèmes* (1961-63). The major shortcoming is the lack of an in-depth analysis of a substantial movement or even of a complete composition which would go at least part of the way to explaining the long-term function of such chords and their satellites within an overall harmonic and structural design. We have many of the materials but are short on their contextual motivation. Despite the absence of harmonic considerations in the section on form, Stucky writes well about Lutosławski's long-standing exploration of what he typifies as 'end-accented form' (but beware: the macrorhythmic *accelerando* cited with regard to the Second Symphony (pp. 128, 162–164) is a macrorhythmic *ritardando*, as shown by John Casken).

Here, as elsewhere in this crucial chapter, there lay a valuable opportunity for drawing substantial comparisons between compositions, even if it meant a depletion of the final chapter where each work is dealt with separately. As it is, Stucky has chosen to devote some 60 pages, virtually the last third of the book, to the 'summary discussions' of the ten most recent pieces, excluding the *Novellette* (1978-79) and the Double Concerto for oboe and harp (1980). In many ways this is where Stucky is at his best, providing a succinct and readable guide to further listening and reading, and tying in some of the technical aspects with the more elusive aesthetic aura of each work. Of course there are gaps, as in his discussion of *Jeux vénitiens*,¹ and errors (the harmonic summary 6.10 of part of the String Quartet (p. 150) is misleadingly incomplete), but Stucky generally weds argument and fact persuasively. The passage on *Livre pour orchestre* (1968) is particularly sure-footed and he tellingly encapsulates the essence of the unusual idea behind *Mi-parti* (while he affirms that in the opening sections 'melody . . . reigns supreme' (p. 190), there is no follow-up discussion of melodic style: is Lutosławskian melody simply a by-product of harmony?). Moreover, Stucky is not afraid of the occasional criticism. Of the final flourish in Preludes and Fugue he says tersely: 'musically it is a mistake' (p. 184).

The section on Preludes and Fugue is, I think, characteristic of the book as a whole: fluent and informed if sometimes reluctant to explore the consequences of Lutosławski's principal compositional techniques and decisions (here, for instance, Stucky avoids assessing the effect or success of the variable structure of Preludes and Fugue, a feature unique in Lutosławski's output). Reservations notwithstanding, this is an important book (at an important price!) and, with the scores close at hand, it is what Steven Stucky diffidently calls a 'hint at strategies for deeper study'.

NOTE:

¹ Adrian Thomas will discuss some unusual aspects of *Jeux vénitiens* in a future issue of *Contact*. (Ed.)