

Ewa Pobłocka

MY LUTOSŁAWSKI

I had seen Witold Lutosławski many times at the Warsaw Philharmonic during concerts which he either conducted or attended as a listener, as well as in the S-1 Concert Studio (later renamed the Lutosławski Concert Studio after the composer's death). However, our first personal encounter took place in spring 1990 at the Lutosławskis' home in the Warsaw district of Żoliborz, after I asked Witold Lutosławski for the opportunity to listen to my recording of his *Piano Concerto* together, and for his feedback (I played the concerto for the first time in Gdańsk, under the baton of Jerzy Maksymiuk, who prepared me for it by talking to me on the phone every day for several months from Glasgow, where at that time he was director of the Scottish Radio Orchestra). What I remember from that afternoon spent at the Lutosławskis' is the atmosphere of the entire home and the studio; the space, the pictures on the walls, the great kindness of my hosts and a tree in the garden, visible through the opened door. We had a brief conversation downstairs before moving upstairs to the composer's studio to listen.

In the introduction to the catalogue of the *Lutosławski. Homagium* exhibition Danuta Wróblewska writes:

The Lutosławskis' home was just like their entire life. Modest, but with marks of those friendships and interests that were important. Open to nature, with a pronounced presence of books, paintings and a few pieces of old furniture reminiscent of the youth and the manor-house in Drozdowo. The principles of order and harmony governed time, objects and people, combining them into a whole that was akin to a musical composition. Each thing had its place and its melody... For that home, among its other purposes, also functioned as an unnamed work of art.¹

Julia Hartwig adds: 'It seems to me today that it was my first visit in Lutosławski's studio—after numerous visits when I was received in their living room—which made me aware of the full harmony of that house, a complete sense of symmetry between the artist – who always differs from others – and the man who tries to hide his otherness in his everyday life'.

Of course I had known Lutosławski's music for years. As a child, lying under the grand piano in our Oliwa home, I listened to songs composed by Lutosławski from Tuwim's poems for children, sung by my mother. I reacted eagerly to the rhythm and harmony. I tried to sing the 'trala-trala' of Mr Tralaliński the Overdue Nightingale, and I felt strongly for his spouse Mrs Tralalińska, for her endless waiting... As a schoolgirl and later a student in Gdańsk I used to come to Warsaw to attend concerts at the Warsaw Philharmonic. I remember one of them, the performance of *Trois Poèmes d'Henri Michaux* for baritone, choir and orchestra. I can still hear that music in my head, its calmness, harmony, colour, time. It was a bit harder for me to comprehend the *Concerto for Orchestra*, a break-through work in Lutosławski's oeuvre.

'What fascinates me as an approach to composing; constant search for own means of expression.'

About *Funeral Music*: 'I tried to create a range of means that would become my own. And it is the first word spoken in what is a new language for me. I consider further search to be necessary, quite obvious' (from Bohdan Pilarski).

From Lutosławski's other works I remember of course the electrifying *Concerto for Orchestra, Five Songs to the poems of Kazimiera Illakowiczówna* (which I had the opportunity to perform many times with Jadwiga Rappé and Ewa Podleś; I even recorded them with Ewa Podleś for the CD entitled *Treasury of Polish Songs*) and the later cycle *Chantefleurs et Chantefables*, about which Lutosławski once told me that first he had had the music in him, and had to search for a text that matched the music for years.

Despite having listened to *Livre pour orchestre* conducted by Lutosławski himself on many occasions, for instance during the rehearsals for our joint performances, I could not understand that piece. This was quite the reverse for the *Third Symphony*, scheduled for the second part of the evening right after the *Piano Concerto*. I often rushed to join the audience and listen, still in my long stage dress, not having enough time to change. The composer led the orchestra very clearly, with sparse movements, never turning it into a 'show'. He was focused entirely on the music, on realizing his score. It was the same when we played together — he controlled things, listened. Forever with a friendly attitude towards the orchestra, he was nonetheless demanding. I was privileged enough to appear on stage with the Maestro (he disliked being addressed thus) at many concerts in Poland and abroad, as well as making a joint recording of the *Concerto for Piano* with him. In addition to the moments spent on the stage, among musicians, or backstage where we sometimes discussed details, I also spent some private time with Witold Lutosławski and his wife Danuta when travelling, or in those hours when there were no rehearsals. I remember having some unexpected 'time off' in Florence one December day, when the famous Maggio Musicale Fiorentino Festival orchestra went on strike because of an underheated concert hall! Lutosławski just smiled good-naturedly, made no comments, and we 'went out on the town' earlier. We usually dined in small but decent restaurants, the dessert being the most important course of the meal. Whilst on board planes, the Lutosławskis used to put on cotton gloves and – expressing their astonishment at my fear of flying — devoted themselves to reading newspapers.

One of the works I often return to is *Symphony No. 4*, the last symphony of the composer's output, written towards the end of his life. Of course tonality is out of the question here, but I always hear it in C minor. Because of its character and mood, I perceive it as nothing less than tragic.

I remember vividly our first concert, held at the Silesian Philharmonic. Unfortunately, the recording made that evening could not be published anywhere because of certain audible noises. While the concert was in progress, coal was being unloaded in the yard of the Philharmonic building... Those rustling and shuffling noises disturbed the audience and got recorded. I remember my thoughts before the concert: 'do not ruin the work, do not disappoint the composer'. Lutosławski, dressed in his usual dark-blue tailcoat with a velvet collar and velvet cuffs, seemed cheerful and very calm backstage. It took me some time to finally be able to pinch his arm, as is my custom – I pinch a conductor for luck before we appear on the stage. Fortunately, he only smiled at that. The audience packed the hall full, the piano was well prepared, the orchestra attentive... And so the music began to flow. I was playing Lutosławski, but I remained myself. I later performed that concerto many times with various other conductors. I recorded it three times on CDs (two of which received phonographic awards, the third released in late spring this year). The *Concerto* has always met with an enthusiastic reception. I remember best its performances in Thessaloniki and in Madrid. During those two concerts I had the impression that I was leading the listeners into some other world.

After Lutosławski's death a lot of publications were released and a lot of previously unknown material was put to print, such as his *Postscriptum* and *Notes*. I have studied all of them thoroughly and keep them in my study, yet the publication that I most often return to is *Lutosławski, Homagium*, an exhibition catalogue published by Galeria Kordegarda (Warsaw, September/October 1996). On the front cover of that catalogue there is a picture of the tree from the Lutosławskis' garden; inside, one can see reproductions of paintings that hung on the walls of their home and photos of the interior. I have always been most impressed by a picture by Jerzy Stajuda, entitled *Zone*.

When Witold Lutosławski was introduced to Jerzy Stajuda, the two gentlemen knelt face to face in the middle of the Warsaw Philharmonic. I do not think those walls have ever witnessed another such homage paid by one person to another, one artist to another artist, one art to another. That situation that happened almost twenty years ago acquires beautiful symbolism. Here is an example of friendship and understanding between two great individuals. In the times when people live and create in solitude, professional groups and circles function in similar separation from one another. Co-existence becomes a forgotten circumstance. The race has ruled out the possibility of the exchange of friendship. About the Romantic synthesis of arts one can read only in books.

I had the chance to see Stajuda's picture when it was displayed in the Lutosławskis home in Żoliborz, then again at the exhibition, and now I have its reproduction in the catalogue. Whenever I look at it, I always feel that this picture is like Lutosławski's music: crystal-clear, spacious, deeply moving in its transparency. The picture is difficult to describe, but I like coming back to it. It is blue, slightly blurred, with outlines of trees, reflections on water, the glow of hidden light. It emanates tranquillity, and yet there is hidden energy, symmetry and freedom in it, the breath of an angel.

This is how I see Lutosławski's music. I see it sky-blue...

FOOTNOTE

¹ Lutosławski. *Homagium. September— October 1996*. ed. M. Guzowska. transl. J. Holzman, Warsaw 1996.

All the remaining quotations come from the same source.

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