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Witold LUTOSLAWSKI : Carols

Piotr KUSIEWICZ – tenor
Waldemar MALICKI – piano

Witold LUTOSLAWSKI (1913-1994)

Twenty Polish Carols for voice and piano (1946, folk texts)

- * The Angels said to the shepherds
 - * It was already midnight
 - * Jesus, lovely flower
- * Hola, hola, shepherds from the fields [2:24]
 - * Hey, hey, thou lily Virgin Mary
 - * He is lying in a manger
 - * When Christ was born
 - * They hurried to Bethlehem
 - * Tiny Jesus
 - * Hey! We rejoice
 - * When the lovely Maiden
- * Hey, on the Day of the Nativity Day
 - * And what with this child?
 - * We shepherds too
 - * The little babe
 - * Sleep, little Jesus
 - * The gentle shepherds
 - * Of the Lord's birth
- * The Most Blessed Maiden walked on earth
 - * God is born

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The circumstances of composing his *Christmas carols* were described by Lutosławski himself some years later: "After commissioning the cycle of 12 *Folk Melodies* in 1945, the Polish Music Publishers PWM gave me another opportunity to make contact with folk material when they proposed that I arrange or, in fact, add accompaniment to, old Polish Christmas carols melodies. I willingly accepted the proposal as these were melodies many of which I had specially liked since my early childhood. The initiator of the cycle, [...] Tadeusz Ochlewski, knew well what to expect by commissioning the Christmas carols. He hardly expected any practical, conventional or 'polite' publication for home use. And so the mixed reactions which my cycle evoked from its first listeners did not take him by surprise. Some received the carols as a new, unexpected and attractive treatment of old melodies while others, on the contrary, were outraged by my lack of respect for tradition. They claimed that I had ignored some of the traditional harmonies and even textures that were implicit in the melodies themselves." (Danuta Gwizdalanka, Krzysztof Meyer: *Witold Lutosławski. Droga do dojrzałości / The Road to Maturity*, pp. 162-163)

Lutosławski's *Christmas carols*, written in 1946, contain 18 songs taken from the collection of Father Marcin Michał Mioduszewski and two from that of Oskar Kolberg. The composer selected the most popular melodies but the manner of their arrangement is far from traditional. The cycle was premiered in January 1947 in Kraków by Anna Szlemińska (soprano) and Jan Hoffman (piano), generating much critical response. Zygmunt Mycielski wrote in the periodical 'Ruch Muzyczny': "There are perhaps people who will pale at the sight of Lutosławski's carols. They are very diverse. Thanks to the choice of Szlemińska and Hoffman as performers the arrangement of these simple 'notes' can be placed alongside such creations as Szymanowski's *Kurpie Songs* or Panufnik's *Five Songs*." The composer Andrzej Dobrowolski, this time in the role of a critic, also pointed to the boldness of Lutosławski's concept, claiming, also in 'Ruch Muzyczny': "One can agree or disagree with the manner of arrangement but it should be admitted objectively that one cannot pass indifferently by this collection of songs, putting it aside for the umpteenth time and picking it again, only to put it back again with anger." Stefania Łobaczewska struck a truly panegyric tone, writing in a Kraków daily: "Witold Lutosławski's arrangement of the carols was probably this concert's greatest revelation and one of the revelations of our contemporary music [...] It is only such a master of contemporary form as Lutosławski who could afford what is undoubtedly a very bold experiment of linking the melodies of Christmas carols with a piano part that is conceived in a strictly contemporary spirit; the greatest effect of this experiment lies in this sparing but competent use of all types of musical devices."

Unlike the *Folk Melodies* for piano, which instantly became extremely popular, particularly among young pianists, the *Christmas carols* were performed relatively rarely, despite the fact that the collection was published by the Polish Music Publishers as soon as 1947. The first recording of the carols, by Krystyna Szostek-Radkova and Andrzej Hiolski, with the pianist Jerzy Witkowski, was made in the 1970s (for the Veriton label). But it was only in April 1980 that the tenor Piotr Kusiewicz, then freshly out of the State Higher School of Music in Gdańsk, introduced Lutosławski's carols onto the musical circuit. His performance during an academic session in Kraków devoted to Lutosławski (with Karol Tarnowski at the piano) was hugely appreciated by the composer, who wrote a beautiful thank-you remark in the score. After the concert, Lutosławski asked the singer if he would perform and record his *Paroles tissées*, his only vocal piece for the tenor voice. *Lutosławski's wish was not fulfilled until after the composer's death. In 1995 Kusiewicz became the first Polish singer to record Paroles tissées* (for Naxos). As for the carols, starting in 1981, Kusiewicz and the pianist Waldemar Malicki, then at the threshold of his career, performed the work several dozen times in musical centres across Poland, including the National Philharmonic in Warsaw. The present CD is of a recording made in 1986 in the studio of Radio Gdańsk.

Lech Dzierżanowski

Piotr KUSIEWICZ is one of the most outstanding Polish tenors. A versatile musician, he graduated from the State Higher School of Music in Gdańsk with two diplomas, in piano performance (the class of Professor Zbigniew Śliwiński) and in singing (the class of Jerzy Szymański). He has performed at all of Poland's concert halls, the Grand Opera Theatre in Warsaw and in Łódź, the opera houses of Kraków and Wrocław, the Baltic Opera in Gdańsk, the Alte Oper in Frankfurt, the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, the Philharmonic Halls in Berlin, Munich, and Cologne, the Palais des Beaux Arts in Brussels, the Royal Festival Hall in London, Carnegie Hall in New York, the Gewandhaus in Leipzig, the Musikverein in Vienna, as well as at concert venues in Vienna, Stockholm, Montreal, Milan, Moscow, Jerusalem, Seoul, Tokyo and Guadeloupe.

His repertoire comprises some 140 oratorios, operas by Handel, Monteverdi, Mozart, Rossini, Rimsky-Korsakov, and

Szymanowski, as well as numerous song cycles. He is highly sought after for his interpretations of contemporary music. He is the first Polish singer to have performed *Paroles tissées* by Witold Lutosławski, which he also recorded with the National Polish Radio SO under Antoni Wit for the Naxos label. This CD was commended by the Gramophone monthly in the 'Best Buy' category. The recording of Krzysztof Penderecki's *Utrenja* for the same label, with Kusiewicz and the Warsaw Philharmonic under Wit, was nominated for a Grammy in 2010. He also received the prestigious Prix de l'Académie du Disque Lyrique (2012) for his recording of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*, with the alto Jadwiga Rappé and the National Polish Radio SO under Michael Zilm (for Dux). An important point in his career was taking the role of Edrisi in Karol Szymanowski's *King Roger* under Charles Dutoit in Paris, Montreal, New York (Carnegie Hall) and Tokyo (1996-2002).

His discography includes 40 CDs for various labels (Koch, Naxos, Erato, Aperto, Polskie Nagrania, Accord, Dux, CD Accord and Acte Préalable) and several DVDs (Orff's *Carmina Burana*, Kilar's *Missa pro pace*, Mozart's *Requiem*).

Piotr Kusiewicz is the head of the Vocal Department at the Academy of Music in Gdańsk. She also runs a vocal class at the Arts Academy in Szczecin. As a pianist, he has accompanied many prominent Polish singers.

His honours include the Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice Cross, the highest papal distinction for lay people, which he was granted by Pope Benedict XVI (2008) and the 'Gloria Artis' Medal of Cultural Merit for outstanding artistic achievements (2011).

Waldemar MALICKI is one of the most versatile Polish pianists, performing as a soloist, improviser and chamber musician. He graduated with distinction from the Academy of Music in Gdańsk and subsequently perfected his skills in Vienna (1982-83). He performs across Europe, in both Americas, in Russia and Japan and regularly appears as an accompanist with leading Polish violinists and singers.

He has recorded about 40 LPs and CDs for Polskie Nagrania, Polton and DUX in Poland, Pavane in Belgium, Accord and Adda in France, Koch/Schwann Records and Wergo in Germany, and Pony Canyon in Japan. His recordings of works by Wieniawski, Bach and Paderewski have received the 'Fryderyk' Awards (1997, 2000, 2003) and his CD featuring works by Szymanowski was named the Record of the Year 1999 by Studio Magazine.

He has given masterclasses and seminars in Scandinavia, both Americas and in Japan. He has presented one-man musical shows, with a display of virtuosity and humour, at various events organized by cultural and civic institutions, including those at the World EXPO Exhibitions in Hanover and Osaka. He has also presented a recital featuring Liszt's late compositions, exploring mystical and religious themes, entitled 'Catharsis'.

He is one of the founding members of the Ignacy Jan Paderewski Society, of which he served as president for some years. He has been the artistic director of the 'Fun and Classic' Festival of Virtuosity and Musical Humour in Nowy Sącz since 2000.

A popular TV personality, he is the recipient of the 'Wiktor' and 'Telekamera' Awards. He is the co-founder (with Jacek Kęćcik) and presenter of an ensemble known as 'Filharmonia Dowcipu' (Philharmonic of Humour), which has given numerous television shows.