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Kazimierz SEROCKI / Complete works for Solo Piano

Adam KOSMIEJA - piano

Kazimierz SEROCKI (1922-1981)

*Sonata for piano (1955)

*The Gnomes: Childrens' Miniatures (1953)

*Suite of Preludes (1952)

*A piacere: Suggestions for piano (1962-63)

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The greatness of the music art consists in a continuous confrontation with *the painful awareness of the terror of the time*, whereas Kazimierz Serocki's way to tame the time was to explore the modern ideas of composing sounds.

Kazimierz SEROCKI (born on 3 March 1922 in Toruń, died on 9 January 1981 in Warsaw) made his mark as an extremely talented pianist in his early childhood – an enthusiastic review of little Kazimierz's performances in Toruń has survived. In 1940, he arrived through the green border to the occupied Warsaw, where he earned his living playing in cafes (similarly to Lutosławski and Panufnik), at the same time attending clandestine lessons of harmony and counterpoint with Prof. Kazimierz Sikorski. Since his earliest years, he was drawn to modernity in music, with which he had an opportunity to familiarize himself in Paris (in 1947-48, he was there on a scholarship of the French government) and few years later – in 1957-58 – during the Darmstadt Summer Courses for New Music. In Paris he became fascinated with the dodecaphony promoted on the Seine at that time by Arnold Schönberg's pupil, René Leibowitz, and actually not with the dodecaphonic technique itself, but with the idea consisting in freeing twelve sounds of the music scale and constructing new sound constellations on the basis of them. As far as the composition was concerned, it was one of his most important *idées fixes*. In Paris Serocki also got to know Béla Bartók's music; its modernity resulting from a profound lecture of folklore had a huge impact on the folk pieces of the Polish artist. However, Kazimierz Serocki went in the history mainly as the creator of the Polish sonorism. We will hear the surprising with their original colours harmonies starting from his youthful miniatures from the time of his studies to his masterful "symphony of piano", *Pianophonie* for piano, electronic transformation of sound and orchestra (1978), which is his last colossal work. The beginnings of the composer's unusual sensibility to the sound colour should be sought in the Paris spell, when as a young artist starting his career he got acquainted with the music of Claude Debussy and Olivier Messiaen. Nevertheless, what was most important in his attitude was his inner freedom, which in the times of the severe Stalinism, let him work on an extremely "formal" *Suite of Preludes*, and in the times of fascination with the Darmstadt avant-garde, enabled him to distance himself from the ideological approach to the ideas of Karlheinz Stockhausen and Pierre Boulez. Serocki – the outstanding Polish modernist – always maintained freedom of his compositions, which in connection with his unique music talent resulted in several masterpieces.

In 1948, when the 26-year-old composer came back from Paris to Warsaw, began the artist's huge success story that lasted until his death (he died at the age of 59). No other Polish composer had been so highly valued in the circles of the European avant-garde for a period of time longer than 20 years. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, his music was performed on the most prestigious stages of the new music: in Darmstadt, Donaueschingen, Witten, Cologne, or Metz, starting from the debut in Darmstadt (*Musica Concertante* was premiered there in 1958) to *Pianophonie* in Metz in 1979. Then why had he been forgotten? Firstly, it was the composer's approach that contributed to that, he did not like conceding interviews, or commenting his pieces, as he was of an opinion that music should be self-explanatory. Secondly, he died in 1981, at the time when Polish musicologists stopped being interested in modernism in music, they were already more attracted to postmodernism and new romanticism. Is now the right time for his music? Everything appears to point to that, given that Serocki's Sonata for piano is certainly not inferior to Prokofiev's sonatas, whereas *A piacere* maintained in an open form belongs to the pioneer pieces of this movement, and such compositions

as *Arrangements* for flute, *Impromptu fantasque*, *Forte e Piano* or *Pianophonie* should be introduced to the canon of world modernism as soon as possible! The label Bôlt has just released two masterful pieces by Serocki: *Forte e Piano* and *Pianophonie*; now we present you with the first monographic CD with the composer's piano music with new recordings of an excellent pianist, Adam Kośmiejka. The piano was the first and the most important instrument for Serocki; since the earliest pieces he treated it as a tool of modernity. In the cycle of miniatures from 1953 titled ***Dwarfs***, the modernity consists in the meeting of folk archetypes, such as syncopated rhythms of mazurkas and obereks, plaintive song of a slow kujawiak, and modality as a rule organizing the pitch of notes. It was Béla Bartók that discovered the "narrow range," that is to say a few sounds considered as the basis of folk music, in the Hungarian and Romanian folklore and then he suitably adapted it in many of his works, in particular in the cycle *Duos for Two Violins*. In *Dwarfs* Kazimierz Serocki accomplished a similar feat with reference to the Polish folk music. The simplicity of these microscopic pieces for children displays the mastery of the highest quality. "It is not enough to use folklore as a workshop tool, it has to be explored, relished" – that is the composer's explanation that he shared with his friend, Tadeusz Andrzej Zieliński. The Polish folk music indeed fascinated young Serocki, that is why he could so suitably combine the folk idiom with the artistic mastery by choosing the simplicity proper for the folk culture.

Suite of Preludes, composed one year earlier for the 10th anniversary of PWM (it was dedicated to the publishing house's director, Tadeusz Ochlewski), is in turn a presentation of all the most important values of the 30-year-old composer, inter alia, the ability to find a variety of sound colours in the piano texture and to draw creatively from the most notable achievements of Chopin, Brahms, and Debussy. However, what is most important is the historic value of the piece as an example of the first attempt to face the unbound twelve tones in the post-war Poland. *Suite of Preludes* is an atonal piece, in which the composer accepted the challenge consisting in a new approach to harmony, accords, as well as to the way of constructing melodic phrases. Despite its pioneer qualities, the piece is not an experiment, but a fully mature and extremely brave work, as it was composed in the times of simplified doctrine of socialist-realist formalism.

Definitely the most important piece on the CD, ***Sonata***, was composed by Kazimierz Serocki in 1955, already after the end of the socialist-realist terror and isolation, in the times of so called thaw. The composer included in it one of the most significant features of his style: vitality, energy, and truly masculine strength, however, combined with lightness. In this four-movement cycle Serocki juxtaposed the chords requiring big hands, dominating dry articulation (staccato, staccatissimo, marcato), frenzied rhythm, which is characterized by a constant change of pace, tempo and pulse, and dense chords, being a preview of a totally new approach to harmony, with only one slow movement, yet an exceptionally beautiful one, the third one, marked with *elegiaco*; it is a unique example of modern lyricism of the highest quality. However, both the technical and the expressive sides of the piece are mainly constituted by the ultramodern at that time rhythm and the equally avant-garde organization of the pitch of notes, which is no longer based on chords, but on brutal, naturalistic accords – clusters. In the modern twelve-tone characteristic of Sonata – contrary to the assumptions of Schönberg's and Webern's dodecaphony – the energetic strength of chords (as in tonality) is preserved, whereas carefully selected intervals become the basic timber of both phrases and melodies, as well as of pinching the ears "chords." In this music there is a huge force! Kazimierz Serocki's Sonata can only be compared with famous Piano Sonata No. 7 Op. 83 by Sergey Prokofiev.

A strong strike and then the tension continually increases – this principle present in Sonata for piano would often return in Serocki's music of the 60s and 70s. In the last two decades of his life, the composer would explore the sonoristic possibilities of instruments, he would also change his way of treating the piano; therefore, playing directly on strings, electronic transformation of sounds, and radical approach to the sound including dense clusters would introduce Serocki's music to the world canon of avant-garde. He would combine percussion instruments, recorders, guitar, or a huge orchestra with piano, which he would stop considering as a purely keyboard instrument. Serocki would never return to piano solo compositions. He composed his last solo piano piece, *A piacere*, in 1962, opening the last, and at the same time masterful, period of work. In comparison to the rest of the pieces included on the CD, *A piacere (At one's own discretion)* is a completely new music: instead of traditional narration there are isolated, short, punctual motifs and chords, instead of traditional form – an open one, with which Serocki got acquainted at the courses of new music in Darmstadt – *XI Klavierstück* by Stockhausen and *Sonata No. 3* by Boulez stimulated his imagination in such way that he composed as many as three pieces in which the segments of a work written in frames can be put in any order like blocks of a mobile construction. *Arrangements* for flute and *Ad libitum* for orchestra end the series of this kind of ideas activating the performer's decisions. The first piece is exactly *A piacere*. The composition is divided in three parts that can be performed in any order; additionally, each of them consists of 10 segments, which order of performance also depends on the performer's decision. However, the incident introduced to music by John Cage does not have an access to this conception. Serocki perfectly controls the final outcome of the piece in all versions, starting with the first one performed by Frederic Rzewski at the Warsaw Autumn Festival in 1963, to the one performed on this CD by Adam Kośmiejka. In *A piacere* nothing is incidental.

Ewa Szczecińska
(*Polish Radio*)

Adam KOŚMIEJA – graduate of the Manhattan School of Music, piano student of Solomon Mikowsky (2011), awarded the Harold and Helen Schonberg Piano Scholarship (2007-2011), established in memory of the long-time leading music critic of The New York Times. In 2013 he took up doctoral studies with Katarzyna Popowa-Zydroń and Jerzy Sulikowski at the F.Nowowiejski Academy of Music in Bydgoszcz.

Adam Kośmiejka participated in piano master classes under Paul Badura-Skoda, Gary Graffman, Ivan Moravec, Andrei Gavrilov, Boris Berman, Mikhail Voskresensky, Lang Lang, Dina Yoffe and had supplementary sessions with Arie Vardi, Dmitri Bashkirov, Ewa Pobłocka, David Dubal. He took classes in composition with J. Mark Stambaugh, and his violin-clarinet-piano chamber trio coached under David Krakauer.

Mr. Kośmiejka participated and gave concerts at many international piano festivals: International Festival of Contemporary Music „Warsaw Autumn” (2015), (2014), Gilmore Music Festival in the USA (2012), Mózg International Contemporary Music Festival in Bydgoszcz (2013), Polish Piano Music Festival in Słupsk (2013), Les Journées polonaises à Toulouse in France (2011), International Piano Festivals in Spain (2010).

He won the 1st Prize at the Mieczysław Münz Piano Competition in New York (2009), Chopin Piano Competition at Columbia University (2010) and Josef Suk International Piano Competition in Prague (2013). He received a semi-final award at the 3rd China Shenzhen International Piano Concerto Competition.

He performs as a soloist in Europe, USA and Asia. In New York he performed at Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall and the Yamaha Concert Artist's Hall. Outside of Poland and USA he played in Japan, China, France, Spain, England, Sweden, Finland, Italy and Czech Republic.

His repertoire and performing experience range from the Baroque up through contemporary music, including experimental music.

Other new music projects include 3xPiano (2009-2011), which combines the classical, jazz and electronic piano music, prepared in cooperation with American jazz pianist and 2014 Grammy Nominee – Christian Sands.

From 2014 Mr. Kośmiejka works together with Polish composer Stefan Węglowski, on a project which focuses on minimal music, with the use of electronics.