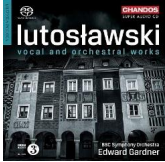


Lutoslawski - Vocal & Orchestral Works (2018) CD5

Written by bluesever
Sunday, 08 April 2018 13:39 -

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01. *Symphony No. 1: I. Allegro giusto* 02. *Symphony No. 1: II. Poco adagio* 03. *Symphony No. 1: III. Allegretto misterioso* 04. *Symphony No. 1: IV. Allegro vivace* 05. *Partita (Version for Violin & Orchestra): I. Allegro giusto* 06. *Partita (Version for Violin & Orchestra): II. Ad libitum* 07. *Partita (Version for Violin & Orchestra): III. Largo* 08. *Partita (Version for Violin & Orchestra): IV. Ad libitum* 09. *Partita (Version for Violin & Orchestra): V. Presto* 10. *Chain II: I. Ad libitum* 11. *Chain II: II. A battuta* 12. *Chain II: III. Ad libitum* 13. *Chain II: IV. A battuta-Ad libitum-A battuta* 14. *Preludia taneczne: No. 1, Allegro molto* 15. *Preludia taneczne: No. 2, Andantino* 16. *Preludia taneczne: No. 3, Allegro giocoso* 17. *Preludia taneczne: No. 4, Andante* 18. *Preludia taneczne: No. 5, Allegro molto* Tasmin Little - violin (5-9) Michael Collins - clarinet (14-18) BBC Symphony Orchestra Edward Gardner - conductor

This is the final volume of what has become a five CD survey of Witold Lutoslawski's music, witness to an increasingly confusing system as it is marked as volume six of Chandos's Polish Music series; the unaccounted fifth Lutoslawski volume being that with his vocal music (see review), so falling outside the numbered canon of orchestral volumes, and volume five of the Polish set being one with works by Szymanowski (see review).

With this being Lutoslawski's centennial it has to be expected that the classical labels will bring out come celebratory releases. I happened to have the two CD set from Sony Classical 88765440832 which brings Esa-Pekka Salonen's Los Angeles symphonic cycle to a conclusion with a new recording of the *Symphony No. 1*.

This is a very good recording and performance with some elements of added excitement over Edward Gardner's BBC Symphony Orchestra recording, but in the end I do have to come down on the side of Gardner. Lutoslawski's *Symphony No. 1* is a relatively up-beat work, which might be something of a surprise considering what was happening in Poland at the time of its

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composition. Gardner might be a little less wild and edgy in the outer movements, but his ear for detail, a feature of all these Chandos releases, brings out colours and associations which you might have missed in other versions. There are a myriad of allusions in this work, some possibly unconscious, others perhaps deliberate, but you can spot the lush romanticism of Szymanowski amongst the chill of Bartók in the second movement, the elegant neo-classicism of Stravinsky amidst the punchy narrative of the Allegretto misterioso and perhaps the narrative pace of Prokofiev in the final Allegro vivace. No, this symphony is not a patchwork of external influences, but with such a rich tapestry of orchestration and an intense musical ride on top of a superbly designed tonal torpedo it is inevitable that we're going to pick up all kinds of little flags on the way, and Gardner waves them all like the expert puppet-master he has proved himself to be. This is as vibrant and engaging a performance of this symphony as I have ever heard on record, so we're off to a good start.

Any recording of the Partita has to go up against that of Anne-Sophie Mutter on Deutsche Grammophon, conducted by the composer. The timings for this compared to Tasmin Little and Gardner are as close as makes no difference, and in another keenly observed performance I have to say I'm not entirely sure if this is heresy, but I think I prefer this Chandos recording. The DG 'original' is a classic of course, but this team has a way of giving the music some extra oomph which makes it even more impressive. Little's little glissandi and her dynamic expression give the piece a motivating drive which is quite compelling, and the orchestral support is a music-for-musicians feast of refined style and quiet energy - contrasts of dark and light creating an acute sense of mystery and at times cinematic drama. A similar story could be woven around this recording of Chain 2. The timings are a touch longer here and there in this case, but with a score riddled with markings of *Ad libitum* this is perhaps more to be expected. Again, Tasmin Little is urgent and emotionally engaged with the piece from beginning to end, linked inextricably to striking moments of orchestral beauty which can bring you to your knees, or sections with violence which can have you cowering into your comfy club-style armchair. Mutter is somewhat more *parlando* in her approach to this score, but Little is every bit as communicative, creating for instance a genuine sense of tragic lament in the initial stages of the second *Ad libitum*, and responding with fearsome technique to the demands of a remarkably intense work. To my ears this performance generates a closer synergy between soloist and orchestra, and therefore creating a more satisfying musical experience. The Partita and Chain 2 were also part of Lutoslawski's final concert by the way, released by Naxos and also worth having in its own right (see review), though not as a first choice.

After all that gripping *furioso* violin we deserve a bit of a break, and the Dance Preludes with their folk-style derivations deliver. These pieces are of course deceptive in their sprightly rhythmic and melodic charm, and if you can listen between the barlines there is plenty of toughness, turbulence and tragedy to be found. Michael Collins is soloist par excellence, extracting all of the wit and pungency from these tremendous little masterpieces. Picking out the Antoni Wit Naxos alternative (see review), you can hear how important the soloist's colour is in the communication of the light and joy in these pieces - Zbigniew Kaleta is very good, but his

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less perky tone can't lift the opening Allegro molto in the way Collins does, and there is a deal less contrast further on as well - it's all a bit gloomy with Wit's team, where the BBC/Collins alliance generate another highly satisfying roller-coaster ride full of character and zing.

With this release, Chandos and Edward Gardner can look back on a series of recordings which has to be considered a worthy new reference in some of the best music the 20th century has to offer. Each new Lutoslawski release has been a highlight over the last few years, and this volume is every bit up to standard. The SACD and stereo sound layers are both rich, full and detailed, delivering plenty of the sonic spectra demanded of these pieces, from the spectacular First Symphony to the atmospheres and subtle brushstrokes of the Partita and Chain 2. Balance between soloists and orchestra is realistic, and I have no complaints ... other than this being the last one. ---Dominy Clements, musicweb-international.com

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