

## Henryk Gorecki - Piesn Rodzin Katynskich (Song of the Katyń Families) [2008]

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### Henryk Górecki - Pieśń Rodzin Katyńskich (2008)



1. *Pieśń Rodzin Katyńskich* (2004) 2. *O Domina Nostra* (1985) 3. *Cantata* (1968) 4. *Totus Tuus* (1987) Elżbieta Towarnicka - soprano Andrzej Białko - organ Jagiellonian University Choir Agricultural University Choir and Theological Academy Choir Włodzimierz Siedlik – conductor

Sacred music is central to Henryk Mikołaj Górecki (b.1933) and his range of reference to sacred texts or musical idioms is great. On the one hand, there are the simple versions of hymns (*Pieśni kościelne* [Church Songs], 1986) for unaccompanied choir, on the other, larger-scale choral settings of a text from the psalms (*Euntes ibant et flebant*, 1972) or even of a single word (*Amen*, 1975). And then there are the magnificent vocal-orchestral works such as the Second Symphony (1972), Third Symphony (1976) and *Beatus vir* (1979). This last work was written for and dedicated to the Polish Cardinal Karol Wojtyła and premiered in his presence when he returned to Poland for the first time as Pope John Paul II. Górecki wrote a number of other pieces to mark later visits by the Polish Pope, including one of his best-known a cappella works, *Totus Tuus* (1987).

### Pieśń Rodzin Katyńskich

*Pieśń Rodzin Katyńskich* (Song of the Katyń Families) is a much more recent work, dating from 2004. It relates closely to the hymnal qualities of *Totus Tuus* and other intervening choral works, although it is one of Górecki's simplest settings. Its subject matter is more overtly patriotic, even political with a small 'p', than his other pieces.

The story of the cold-blooded massacre of thousands of Polish army officers in the Soviet forest

near Katyń in 1940 was for decades a matter which could not be discussed openly in Poland. The USSR accused the Nazis of the atrocities and, although everyone knew that the Soviets were culpable, the Polish authorities, from the end of World War Two until the re-establishment of democracy over four decades later, toed the Soviet line. Nevertheless, shrines to the victims would spring up in cemeteries, especially during the early 1980s, only to be torn down by the authorities.

Katyń has been the subject of a number of Polish compositions, notably Katyń Epitaph (1967) by Andrzej Panufnik and the 'Liberate Me' (1984) in the Polish Requiem by Krzysztof Penderecki. Górecki's *Pieśń* is comparatively modest and takes as its text a poem by Tadeusz Lutoski. The poet starts with the opening words of the Polish national anthem, but then turns them deftly towards Katyń: 'Poland has not yet perished as long as Katyń lives'. He exhorts Poles to remember the fate of their fathers in their hearts, strengthened by the enriching love of the 'Polish Holy Father'. At this point, the music rises from its low register and minor modality for the only time, bringing a clear ray of warmth as the harmony shifts into brighter realms before coming to rest on a resonant E flat major chord. At the very end, Górecki recapitulates the words from the Polish national anthem.

### O Domina Nostra

The text for *O Domina nostra* (1985) was compiled by the composer, using few words: 'O Domina nostra, Claromontana – Victoriosa, Regina nostra – MARIA. Sancta Maria – ora pro nobis'. It is subtitled 'Meditation on Our Lady of Jasna góra', marking the 600th anniversary in 1982 of the arrival of the statue of the Black Madonna at the Jasna Góra monastery in Częstochowa.

The circumstances of its composition were fraught. Górecki began work on the work while recuperating from a life-saving operation in August 1982, but didn't properly compose the piece until three years later. He made minor revisions in 1990. He dedicated it to the Polish soprano Stefania Woytowicz (who had premiered the Third Symphony), not least because it was thanks to her intervention and that of her husband that Górecki was able to be treated in 1982 at the height of martial law in Poland.

Fittingly for a work dedicated to the most important Catholic icon in Poland, *O Domina nostra* is deeply meditative. Its generally slow tempo is characteristic of Górecki's approach to time, as are its essentially modal idiom and repetitive phrasing. It opens with a pedal D natural which

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supports an organ solo consisting of chant-based lines harmonised with almost exclusively major triads. Its reflective character is taken up by the soprano, whose developing chant outlines the Dorian church mode.

On the word 'Claramontana' (Latin for 'Jasna góra'), the music recalls the initial chordal textures, now forte. Soon, the pedal D is abandoned as the music swells dynamically, to be replaced at the second organ solo by a pedal A flat, whose distance from the 'home note' D is emphasised by its dissonant relationship with the fff chordal chanting above. Calm eventually returns, as does the original pedal. The coda sets the words 'Sancta Maria ora pro nobis' as if in a trance, the harmonic changes lifting the music's hands as if in exultant prayer and thanksgiving.

### Cantata

Religious terminology has been a part of Górecki's compositions since his student days. For example, his First Symphony (1959) has two movements entitled 'Chorał' and 'Lauda'. So calling a purely instrumental work Cantata is not a total surprise. This short organ piece won first prize in a competition organised in 1968 by the Szczecin Musical Society for the organ of the cathedral in Kamień Pomorski in northern Poland.

Górecki's idiom at this time still had a strongly dissonant, avant-garde flavour, its discordant chording enhanced in Cantata by the stop mix of the organ. Sustained, uneventful passages alternate with livelier ones, which are built up of varied repetitions of limited motifs. As he said of the four pieces of the Little Music cycle, on which he was concurrently working, they 'all tackle the same problem, that of putting the most stringently restricted material to maximum use'. In many ways this has remained Górecki's compositional aesthetic ever since. --- Adrian Thomas, onpolishmusic.com

Od pewnego miejsca twórczość Henryka Mikołaja Góreckiego podporządkowana jest muzyce religijnej. "Sacrum" wyznacza rozwój jego myśli kompozytorskiej. Korzysta z tekstów liturgicznych, ale i z pojedynczych słów, jak na przykład – "Amen".

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Henryk Mikołaj Górecki komponuje utwory na chór a capella oraz na rozbudowaną orkiestrę symfoniczną z chórem i solistami. "Pieśń Rodzin Katyńskich" powstała w 2004 roku, a znajdują się w niej odniesienia do utworów wcześniejszych, takich jak "Totus Tuus". Jej tekst opiera się na wierszu Tadeusza Lutoborskiego, a rozpoczyna się słowami polskiego hymnu narodowego.

Drugi utwór to "O Domina nostra" z podtytułem "Medytacje o Jasnogórskiej Pani Naszej" dedykowany znakomitej sopranistce Stefanii Woytowicz. Tu świetną wykonawczynią jest Elżbieta Towarnicka oraz towarzyszący jej na organach Andrzej Białko. Organista równie perfekcyjnie zaprezentował utwór "Kantata", który zdobył nagrodę na Festiwalu Muzyki Organowej w Kamieniu Pomorskim w 1968 roku. Wreszcie wspomniany hymn skomponowany dla Ojca Świętego na chór mieszany a capella pod dyрекcją Włodzimierza Siedlika. Całość to duch polskości połączony z głęboką religijnością. Cały czas czekamy na kolejne tego typu dzieła. --- Barbara Tenderenda, audio.com.pl

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