

Witold Lutosławski

One of the most prominent Polish composers, Witold Lutosławski was born on January 25, 1913, in Warsaw and died on February 7, 1994, in Warsaw.

He studied composition under Witold Maliszewski and piano performance under Jerzy Lefeld at the Warsaw Conservatory (1932-1937). His first success was the 1939 world premiere of the *Symphonic Variations*, directed by Grzegorz Fitelberg. The war years hampered Lutosławski's career as he played in Warsaw coffee houses along with Andrzej Panufnik and arranged some 200 pieces for two pianos. In these times he created the celebrated *Variations on a Theme by Paganini*.

Lutosławski's creativity underwent numerous stylistic transformations, from Neoclassicism and folkloristic inspirations of the first period to the unique musical language of the mature years. First in a long line of masterworks came the *Concerto for Orchestra* (1954), which is the most frequently performed composition worldwide by Lutosławski. The growing international fame of Lutosławski was fortified by such works as *Funeral Music* (1958), *Venetian Games* (1961), which introduced controlled aleatoricism, *Trois poèmes d'Henri Michaux* (1963), with which he commenced his activity as conductor of his own compositions, *String Quartet* (1964), *Livre pour orchestre* (1968), and *Preludes and fugue* (1972). He wrote many works with great performers in mind, e.g. the *Cello Concerto* for Mstislav Rostropovich, *Chain II* for Anne-Sophie Mutter, *Piano Concerto* for Krystian Zimerman, vocal pieces for Peter Pears and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau. Masterworks from the 1st period include the *Third* and *Fourth Symphony* as well as *Chantefleurs et chantefables*.

Starting as early as the 1950s Lutosławski benefited from a growing international fame and was invited to participate in prestigious festivals and juries of composition competitions, and obtained requests to give lectures and compositional workshops. He received commissions from world-leading orchestras and institutions. His achievements won him numerous awards (which include the Jurzykowski, Siemens, Herder, and Queen Sophia awards, the Polar Music Prize and the Kyoto Prize), and doctorates honoris causa of well over a dozen prestigious institutions of higher learning in Poland, Europe and North America (e.g. the University of Warsaw, Jagiellonian University, as well as universities in Cambridge, Strasbourg, Chicago, Montreal, and institutions of higher musical learning in Cleveland and Boston). He was an honorary member of numerous artistic and scholarly academies and musical societies. Sensitive to the needs of others, he discreetly led a charitable activity, an example of which was his founding of scholarships for young composers and performers. Being a citizen who felt matters of social importance to be close to his heart, he became actively engaged in the various operations of "Solidarity" in the 1980s.

Lutosławski's works exerted an immense influence upon the development of music in our times. His consistency in discovering new areas of music in connection with his creative use of tradition, a masterly compositional technique and originality of musical language have placed him firmly within the ranks of the most outstanding composers of the twentieth century.