Lutosławski - Piano Concerto
Chain 3 - Novelette
Krystian Zimerman
BBC Symphony Orchestra • Witold Lutosławski

Deutsche Grammophon
STEREO 431 664-2 GH

Numerique
WITOLD LUTOSŁAWSKI:
PIANO CONCERTO • CHAIN 3 • NOVELETTE

The piano is Witold Lutosławski’s own instrument. He began playing it at the age of six, studied piano as well as composition at the Warsaw Conservatory, and performed as a pianist during the earlier part of his career. The orchestral works which constitute the core of his remarkable output nearly all include a prominent orchestral piano part (sometimes requiring two players); and his catalogue also includes several duos for a string or wind instrument and piano.

Yet Lutosławski has published only a handful of solo piano pieces; and (by his own account) after beginning work on a piano concerto at least twice, before and after the Second World War, he abandoned the attempt each time. However, in 1977/78 he made an arrangement for piano and orchestra of his wartime Variations on a Theme of Paganini for two pianos. And already by then he was discussing the possibility of a full-scale concerto with the young Polish pianist Krystian Zimerman.

The work which eventually resulted was completed in 1987, to a commission from the Salzburg Festspiele. It was first performed at the Festival in August 1988, with Zimerman as soloist and the composer conducting the Austrian Radio Symphony Orchestra. In an interview, Zimerman has described it as “a great privilege and distinction” to be the first exponent (and the dedicatee) of a major work by “a man of such eminence and such stature...an extremely open-hearted man, who helps young people enormously, and who is himself, inwardly, very young.”

The solo part of the Concerto is described by Zimerman as “extremely pianistic in style”; yet its relatively traditional layout is reconciled with Lutosławski’s highly personal musical language without the slightest sense of compromise. This is achieved chiefly by keyboard writing which recalls the textures and figuration, but not the melodies or harmonic devices, of several pianist-composers of the past: above all two of whom Zimerman is a celebrated interpreter, Chopin and Brahms.

The piano part makes considerable use of octaves, in order to allow it to hold its own against the orchestral textures; and many passages are built out of sonorous chords including both octaves and thirds. These factors sometimes create a stronger feeling of a key-centre than is usual in Lutosławski’s mature music. But he insists that tonality plays no part in the work’s harmonic progressions: his concern for many years has been to find other ways of “joining harmonies together” which similarly convey a “nobilis consequentia.” Zimerman describes the harmonic language of the Concerto as “still more developed and richer” than in Lutosławski’s previous works.

There is a similar reconciliation between Lutosławski’s highly individual methods and the Classical and Romantic traditions in the Concerto’s formal layout. It consists of four linked movements, of which the second and third correspond in character to a scherzo and a slow movement, while the finale (like the finale of Brahms’s Fourth Symphony) is a passacaglia. But this overall plan does not restrict the opportunities for Lutosławski’s unique attitude to formal construction, which depends on a constant interplay between the expectations created by the music and what actually happens. Zimerman describes this as “consciously composing not only the music itself but also its reception.”

This approach is particularly evident in the first movement, which as usual with Lutosławski is introductory in character, an extended “upbeat.” Of the four movements, this is the one which makes the most use of Lutosławski’s characteristic loosely coordinated “ad libitum” textures. In it, the full orchestra is gradually assembled around the solo piano, eventually taking over from it at the final fortissimo climax. Zimerman says that the time which the movement takes to unwind “already suggests the large dimensions of the whole work.”

Lutosławski describes this opening movement as based on two alternating types of material, motifs which are “nonchalant, light, sometimes rather capricious,” and “a broad cantilena.” These two types are separately explored in the second and third movements respectively. In the second movement, the piano plays almost continuously against a kaleido- scopically changing orchestral background. The moment of what the composer characterizes as a “chase” is maintained through a brilliant cadenza, and slackens only at the very end of the movement.

The third movement begins with the soloist alone, first in a recitative-like introduction and then in an extended cantabile melody. This melody is resumed at the end of the movement, after a contrasting central section with orchestra, which begins with the piano sounding a kind of call to attention, and culminates in an exchange between massive orchestral statements and heroic responses from the soloist. Although Lutosławski himself has always declined to draw parallels between his works and extra-musical events, Zimerman has suggested that the fact that the Concerto was composed shortly after the introduction of martial law in Poland “seems to find some reflection” in this dramatic movement.

The passacaglia theme of the finale is Lutosławski’s own thematic melody stated first by the double basses, and then repeated, a perfect fourth higher each time, in different sections of the orchestra and in varied forms. The cycle is extended by the interpolation of free variants of the theme, including one for unpitched percussion. Meanwhile, the gaps in the theme are increasingly filled in by the addition of other orchestral details; and the soloist adds another layer of virtuoso figuration, each new idea introduced not at the starting point of the passacaglia theme but approximately halfway through it. After the theme has gone through a cycle of all twelve starting pitches, it is treated more freely, with a final statement by the full wind and strings in which its rests are elided.

Then a brief piano recitative, accompanied by “ad libitum” orchestral textures, leads to a final presto coda.

Krystian Zimerman has pointed to this closing sequence of events, in which the recitative apparently disturbs the form but in fact helps to bind the whole together, as a good example of the composer’s “programming” of the reception of his work. “Lutosławski knows the point at which the listener may feel tired; hence the care he takes over the timing and the emotional progression of the music. The phrases are neither too long nor too short; at the pauses, the sounds do not die away, but remain alive and pul-
poseful. In this Concerto there is also a kind of positive nervousness, constantly pushing the work forward and increasing the tension. We listen to Witold Lutoslawski's music as we listen to Mozart's, except that there are no major and minor keys..."
The finale of the Piano Concerto, with its overlapping of the repetitions of the passacaglia theme with each new idea in the piano, is a simple example of Lutoslawski's recent preoccupation with what he calls "chain form". In this, short sections embodying different, unrelated strands of music, on different groups of instruments, are overlapped one with the next, like links in a chain. Lutoslawski has now written three works with the title of "Chain": the first for chamber ensemble, the second for violin and orchestra, and the third for full orchestra. Chain 3 was composed in 1986 for the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, and first performed by the Orchestra in December of that year under the composer's direction.

Lutoslawski's "chain" technique can be heard particularly clearly in the first, introductory section of Chain 3, which consists of a sequence of a dozen overlapped ad libitum passages for various groups of solo instruments within the orchestra. The central, and principal, section consists of four episodes in different but related metres and tempi; throughout these, a sustained melody struggles to assert itself, most often on the violins, surrounded by other strands of orchestral activity. This section culminates in a powerful climactic passage of ad libitum brass melodies and woodwind arabesques; but after this, and a second build-up to a more conventional climax, the work ends with unexpected abruptness.

The first work which Lutoslawski composed for an American orchestra, before Chain 3 and before his Symphony no.3 of 1981-83 for the Chicago Symphony and Sir Georg Solti, was his Novelette. This was written in 1978/79 for the National Symphony Orchestra and its conductor Mstislav Rostropovich — a close associate of the composer since the 1960s, when he was the instigator, first soloist and dedicatee of Lutoslawski's Cello Concerto. Rostropovich played the Concerto (with the composer conducting) in the same concert at which he conducted the first performance of Novelette, in the National Symphony's home city of Washington, D.C. in January 1980.

The title of the work is borrowed from the Novelette for solo piano by Robert Schumann, which Schumann himself summed up as "longish, connected adventure stories". The feeling of a fictional narrative is reflected in Lutoslawski's titles for the work's five movements, Announcement, Three Events and Conclusion, and indeed in the sharp contrasts and rapid transitions of the music itself. Announcement is a short but arresting introduction, which, Lutoslawski says, presents "as it were, samples of the 'events' which follow". First Event is an urgent, atmospheric quick movement with muted strings, including some of Lutoslawski's most intricate rhythmic writing; Second Event is more open in texture; Third Event is a quicksilver scherzo. The final movement, Conclusion, is, as in many of Lutoslawski's works, the most extended. In its first section, a double-stranded violin melody gradually climbs to the heights, surrounded by ad libitum "mobiles" in the other treble instruments. After that, the orchestra is redivided into small units for a series of disparate episodes, before regrouping for one of Lutoslawski's uniquely complex climaxes; then a brief but dramatic coda ends with a final reference back to the beginning of the work.

Anthony Burton
Executive Producers: Dr. Steven Paul / Hanno Rinke (Concerto); Dr. Steven Paul (Chain, Novelette)
Recording Producers: Wolfgang Stengel (Concerto); Christian Gansch (Chain, Novelette)
Balance Engineers: Helmut Burk (Concerto); Gernot von Schultzendorff (Chain, Novelette)
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WITOLD LUTOSŁAWSKI (* 1913)

Concerto for Piano and Orchestra
Konzert für Klavier und Orchester
Concert pour piano et orchestre
Concerto per pianoforte e orchestra
“For Krystian Zimerman”

1. J = ca. 110 — attacca [5'39]
2. Presto — attacca [4'39]
3. J = ca. 85 — attacca [7'23]
4. J = ca. 84 [8'01]

KRYSTIAN ZIMERMAN, Piano

Chain 3
for Orchestra

5. Presto [4'39]
6. Presto (3) [4'59]
7. (3) [2'12]

Novelette
for Orchestra

8. I. Announcement [1'44]
9. II. First Event [2'57]
10. III. Second Event [3'38]
11. IV. Third Event [2'11]
12. V. Conclusion [7'01]

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Chain 3
for Orchestra

5.  Presto
6.  Presto (13)
7.  (38)

Novelette
for Orchestra

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12. V. Conclusion

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