

LITTLE SUITE

WITOLD LUTOSLAWSKI

Born January 25, 1913, in Warsaw, Poland

Died February 7, 1994, in Warsaw, Poland

In the 20th century, Polish contemporary music has been led by Karol Szymanowski, Krzysztof Penderecki and Witold Lutoslawski. Lutoslawski was the first Polish composer to have a work, his first symphony (completed in 1947), banned for “formalist tendencies.” In fact, Poland’s vice minister for culture felt that composers such as Lutoslawski should “be thrown beneath the wheels of street cars.”

In the post-war decade, Lutoslawski was supposed to write music according to the principles of Soviet Realism (*socrealizm*) following the 1948 Second International Congress of (Soviet) Composers in Prague. Soviet Realism hated subjectivism and anything smacking of new artistic endeavor. Instead, music was to cultivate national character, use well-known forms and be simple, functional and direct. According to Lutoslawski authority Charles Bodman Rae, this was “an absurd, tragic-comic drama of Orwellian totalitarianism.” In 1945, Lutoslawski had been elected as secretary and treasurer of the newly constituted Union of Polish Composers. By 1947, the Stalinist regime clamped down on all *avant-garde* music deemed as non-conformist. Firmly opposed to such ideas, Lutoslawski resigned from the committee.

In 1950, the composer received a commission from Warsaw Radio, and he produced the light-hearted *Little Suite*. Lutoslawski was now given a chance to redeem himself and prove that he could write acceptable (enjoyable) music. The *Little Suite* premiered in Warsaw in April 1951, presented by the Warsaw Radio Symphony Orchestra conducted by Grzegorz Fitelberg. It was written first for chamber orchestra and arranged the following year for full orchestra.

Using a nationalist stance, Lutoslawski used folk melodies from the village of Machow, east of Cracow. All melodies are used as themes that are adapted for the suite. He did manage to use some “learned counterpoint” and some “atonal” harmonies but noted that under the circumstances, his “compositional techniques had been quite limited” and that he “had to compose within those limitations.” (*Music of the 20th Century Avant-Garde* by Larry Sitsky, page 284)

There are four movements:

Fujarka (Fife): *Allegretto*; music of a light marching character, featuring snare drum and piccolo

Hurra Polka: *Vivace* (*scherzo* like)

Piosenka (Song): *Andante molto sostenuto*

Taniec (Dance): *Allegro molto* (ABA format: two dances frame a middle song)

These are the orchestra’s first performances of *Little Suite*.