

NAXOS

Grażyna
BACEWICZ
(1909-1969)

Symphony for String Orchestra
Concerto for String Orchestra • Piano Quintet No. 1

Ewa Kupiec, Piano • Capella Bydgosiensis

Mariusz Smolij



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Grażyna Bacewicz played a leading rôle in bringing Polish music into the twentieth-century mainstream and onto the international concert stage, as both a composer and a concertizing violinist. Following in the footsteps of Szymanowski, Bacewicz and her peers kept their roots in native Polish folksong while exploring and welcoming the possibilities offered by the invigorating trends of modernism. That this broadening of Polish musical culture was accomplished in spite of the country's struggles during World War II and the limitations imposed by the subsequent socialist regime is a tribute to the talent, grit and determination of Bacewicz and her generation.

Born in Łódź, Poland, in 1909, she received her first musical training from her father. She played chamber music with her siblings and violin concertos with the local orchestra; by the age of twelve she had started to compose. When she graduated from the Warsaw Conservatory in 1932 (with degrees in both composition and violin performance) a concert featuring her works marked the occasion. A scholarship from the Polish virtuoso, composer and statesman Ignacy Jan Paderewski subsequently allowed her to study at the École Normale in Paris. There she joined the growing list of composers studying with the redoubtable Nadia Boulanger and had her first taste of more cosmopolitan musical fashions.

After returning to Poland, she taught briefly at the conservatory in Łódź before moving to Warsaw, where she hoped to concentrate on her playing and composing. Another year of study in Paris followed, after which she accepted the position of concertmistress in the recently formed Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra. She played and toured with the orchestra for two years. In the spring of 1939, she made another trip to Paris – this time to supervise a concert dedicated to her compositions – returning to Warsaw just months before the start of the war. Although she and her family (she had married a doctor in 1936) were displaced during the conflict and musical life in Poland was severely curtailed, Bacewicz continued to compose even under the most difficult

conditions. Her works from that period include her *Second String Quartet*, her *First Symphony* and one of her most popular pieces: her *Overture for orchestra*.

After the war, Bacewicz renewed her concertizing and served on the juries of several international competitions. She also joined the Polish Composers Union (begun in 1945) and dedicated herself to bringing Polish music to the forefront of the international music scene. For the next decade, however, the political and cultural situation in her homeland imposed limits on what she and her colleagues could do. Her works written from 1945 to 1955 may be broadly categorized as “neo-classical” (although she objected when the term was applied to her music); after the first International Festival of Contemporary Music (known as the “Warsaw Autumn”) of 1956, she welcomed the opportunity to evolve her style in a more contemporary direction. “I disagree with those who maintain that once a composer develops her own style, she should stick to it,” she wrote. “I find such an opinion totally alien; it impedes further development and growth. Every composition completed today will belong to the past tomorrow.”

One of the most important of her post-war works is the *Concerto for String Orchestra*, composed in 1948. Written in the style of a Baroque concerto grosso, the piece won the Polish National Prize in 1950 and has become a favourite of chamber orchestras in Poland and beyond. After its American première by Howard Mitchell and the Washington, D.C., National Symphony Orchestra, music critic Milton Berliner wrote: “... there was nothing feminine about Miss Bacewicz's piece. It was vigorous, even virile, with ... a pulsing, throbbing rhythm and bold thematic material.”

The first movement opens with a sturdy, driven passage distinguished by contrary motion in treble and bass (reprised later in the movement with a tonal centre of G rather than D). A bridge featuring a brief dialogue between solo cello and solo violin leads to the principal thematic idea: an assertive, six-note motive which comes and goes with playful whimsy. Another connecting idea consisting of hushed *tremolando* chords adds textural

contrast. The mood turns serious, perhaps even dour, in the central *Andante*. Muted violins (with half playing *sul ponticello*) provide a hushed background for a keening line introduced by solo cello. Throughout the movement, solo lines emerge from the lush texture provided by richly divided (into as many as 17 parts) strings. High spirits return in the final movement – a spiky and angular jig with frequent hemiola cross-rhythms and asymmetrical measures to spark rhythmic interest. Two sections (the first featuring solo viola and the second solo violin) provide slightly more lyrical contrast, but the effervescent rhythmic pulse cannot be denied – it drives the movement to close on the same unison D with which the concerto had begun.

The *Symphony for String Orchestra* is the earliest work on this programme. Written in 1946, it perhaps reflects the optimism and renewed vigour felt by the composer when she was able to devote herself again wholeheartedly to composition after the war. From the outset the first movement is driven by a restless energy and remarkable inventiveness. Semiquaver motion is nearly always present in one voice or another and Bacewicz spins her motivic material with complete assurance. A similar restless spirit carries over into the *Adagio*, fed by dotted-note figures and an ambiguous harmonic sense. Midway through the movement it erupts into a brief *agitato* passage where the semiquavers try to reassert themselves. An airy, almost balletic quality infuses the third movement (where, once again, rhythmic momentum seems unstoppable).

The final *Theme with Variations* begins mysteriously but gradually evolves into a cornucopia of varied textures, rhythms and motivic transformations. Several variations succeed one another without pause; the theme itself is as much *developed* as it is *varied*, rarely appearing in any easily recognizable form.

Bacewicz created an extensive catalogue of chamber music, highlighted by seven string quartets, two piano quintets and five sonatas for violin and piano. She composed her *Piano Quintet No. 1* in 1952 – a year in which she also earned a second National Prize. The work is remarkable in both form and substance – displaying the composer's comprehensive understanding of instrumental techniques and sonorities (in addition to being a violin

virtuoso, she was an accomplished pianist). After a measured, sombre introduction, the first movement *Allegro* contrasts two themes – the first is energetic and pointed; flowing piano arpeggios and cantabile strings characterize the second. Bacewicz develops both ideas in an array of subtle yet sophisticated manipulations of the material, capping off the movement with a return to the haunted opening. The following movement evokes an *oberek*, a Polish folk-dance that was a favourite of the composer (also featured, for example, in her *Second Piano Sonata* and the finale of her *Piano Concerto*). The piano introduces the folk-like tune; the highly contrasting mid-section features a sparse duet between keyboard and viola.

The third movement is the emotional heart of the piece. Unremittingly serious, it plays out like a funeral procession. The middle segment introduces a string chorale played over a simple oscillating piano figure. As the piano texture thickens, the music builds to an intensely passionate climax, after which the opening material returns and the procession slowly dies away. The principal motivic idea of the concluding movement is introduced in fugal fashion – on first violins, then seconds, violas and cellos together, and finally piano. An elegantly flowing piano line, which opens with two rising fourths, provides a lyrical second subject.

In whatever style she was writing, whether the music was tonal or atonal, traditional or avant-garde, Grażyna Bacewicz always maintained a level of intellectual rigour in her work. In a 1947 letter to one of her brothers, she explained: “I walk quite alone, because I mainly care about the form in my compositions. It is because I believe that if you place things randomly or throw rocks on a pile, that pile will always collapse. So in music there must be rules of construction that will allow the work to stand on its feet. Naturally, the laws need not be old – God forbid. The music may be simpler or more complicated – it's unimportant, it depends on the language of a particular composer – but it must be well constructed.” The works on this recording provide ample evidence of this dedication to basic principles of form, yielding pleasures both intellectual and emotional for the discerning listener.

Frank K. DeWald

Ewa Kupiec



Photo: Demetrius Fordham

Ewa Kupiec regularly performs at the world's leading festivals and with major orchestras and conductors. The renowned Polish conductor Stanislaw Skrowaczewski has initiated and supported an exceptionally fruitful musical collaboration between the two, and as such they have performed all over the world and, released in 2003, recorded Chopin's *Piano Concertos* together. Ewa Kupiec is closely connected to the music of Chopin and other Polish composers. For his 200th birthday she offered three different Chopin recital programmes. In addition to standard works, her concerto repertoire includes works by Loewe and Veress. For Sony, she has recorded Wladyslaw Szpilman's music, known from the film *The Pianist*. Her Berlin Konzerthaus performance in 2005 of Schnittke's *First Piano Concerto* with the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra was the first performance of this work since 1964 and was released on CD in 2008. Ewa Kupiec studied in Katowice, at the Chopin Academy in Warsaw and at the Royal Academy of Music in London, and in 1992 won the ARD Music Competition (category duo piano/cello). Since autumn 2011 she has served as a professor for piano at the Hanover Hochschule für Musik, Theater und Medien.

Capella Bydgestiensis Chamber Orchestra



Photos: Marek Chelminiak



Capella Bydgestiensis is one of the leading professional chamber orchestras in Poland. The group was formed in 1962 and is one of the ensembles of the State Pomeranian Philharmonic in Bydgoszcz. The orchestra's current music director is José Maria Florêncio. In the past, the ensemble has worked under the artistic leadership of Stanislaw Galański, Włodzimierz Szymański, Karol Teutsch, Daniel Stabrawa, Mirosław J. Błaszczyk and Wiesław Kwaśny. Capella Bydgestiensis has enjoyed artistic collaborations with a number of distinguished conductors and guest soloists, including Paul Esswood, Roman Jabłoński, Krzysztof Jakowicz, Gary Karr, Wieland Kuijken, Konstanty Andrzej Kulka, George Malcolm, Waldemar Malicki, Piotr Pławner, Ewa Podleś, Paweł Przytocki, Mariusz Smolij, Jan Stanienda, Tomasz Tomaszewski, Takao Ukiyaya and Wanda Wiłkomirska. The ensemble distinguishes itself by performing a very wide gamut of repertoire from early Baroque to the most recent works of the 21st century. Its numerous recording projects include CDs for Polish, Dutch and Spanish labels, as well as recordings for radio and television.

Mariusz Smolij



The conductor Mariusz Smolij has won great acclaim from the international press, and has led over one hundred orchestras on four continents, appearing in some of the most prestigious concert halls of the world. In North America, among many others, he has collaborated with the Houston Symphony (Resident Conductor 2000-2003), New Jersey Symphony, Orchestra of the Chicago Lyric Opera, Rochester Philharmonic NY, Indianapolis Symphony, Symphony Nova Scotia and the Indianapolis Chamber Orchestra. He also enjoys a notable reputation performing with important orchestras of Germany, Italy, Switzerland, France, Israel, Holland, Canada, South Africa, China, Serbia, Bulgaria, Hungary, the Czech Republic and his native Poland. He has directed concerts at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Kimmel Center, the Tonhalle, Zurich, the Salle Gaveau, Paris, the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, the National Center for the Arts in Beijing and the Warsaw National Philharmonic. He is the founding member of the Penderecki String Quartet, former artistic director of the Lutosławski Wrocław Philharmonic and the International Festival Wratislavia Cantans, Poland, and currently serves as Music Director of the Acadiana Symphony in Louisiana and Riverside Symphonia in New Jersey. His recordings for Naxos include releases of works by Andrzej Panufnik, Tadeusz Szeligowski, Miklós Rózsa, Eugene Zádor and Ernest Bloch.

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Grażyna Bacewicz played a leading rôle in bringing Polish music into the 20th-century mainstream and onto the international stage. Following in the footsteps of Szymanowski, her works convey a striking emotional directness by combining elements of native Polish folksong with an invigorating openness to the possibilities of modernism. The *Symphony for String Orchestra* reflects the lively optimism felt at the end of World War II, while the award-winning *Concerto for String Orchestra* is one of her most important post-war works. The intense and expressive *First Piano Quintet* is heard here in a new version for chamber orchestra by the conductor Mariusz Smolij.

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	Concerto for String Orchestra (1948)	14:38
1	Allegro	4:52
2	Andante	4:41
3	Vivo	5:05
	Symphony for String Orchestra (1946)	23:44
4	Allegro ma non troppo	5:54
5	Adagio	5:08
6	Allegretto	4:40
7	Theme with Variations	8:02
	Piano Quintet No. 1 (version for chamber orchestra by Mariusz Smolij) (1952/2013)*	26:49
	WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDING	
8	Moderato molto espressivo	8:24
9	Presto	4:38
10	Grave	8:19
11	Con passione	5:28

***Ewa Kupiec, Piano**
Capella Bydgosiensis Chamber Orchestra
Mariusz Smolij

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