

Lutosławski, Witold

Witold Roman Lutosławski (1913–1994), who was born and died in Warsaw, was a conductor and the most important composer of 20th-century Poland. He was born into a well-known noble family of the gentry (squirearchy) from the town of Drozdowo, near Łomża. His mother, Maria Olszewska (1882–1967), was a physician, English translator, and City Councilor for Warsaw. His father, Józef Lutosławski (1881–1918), a graduate farmer and political patriot activist, was murdered by Soviet (Russian) communists in Moscow in 1918. Among his uncles, there was Wincenty Lutosławski (1863–1954), a famous spiritual and mystical philosopher, and Kazimierz Lutosławski (1880–1924), a Roman Catholic priest, physician, member of the Polish Parliament (1919–22) and instructor in the Polish scout organization – the creator of the Polish Scout Cross (used by all Polish Scouts throughout the 20th century and up until today). These uncles influenced the young composer's Catholic and Polish patriotic upbringing.

Witold Lutosławski studied mathematics at Warsaw University (1931–33), and piano (1932–36) and composition (1932–37) at the Music Conservatory in Warsaw. He composed hundreds of works (four symphonies, some concertos, many songs, etc.), including some inspired by the Bible.

The first Bible-related works Lutosławski composed were his *Three Carols* in 1945 to texts by the Polish poet, dramatist, novelist, critic, and translator Aleksander Maliszewski (1901–1978). These *Carols*, orchestrated for voice, choir, and instrumental ensemble, were published in 1946 by the publishing house Czytelnik.

Subsequently, Tadeusz Ochlewski, director of Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne (Polish Music Publishing House), requested some specifically Polish carols from Lutosławski. In response, in 1946, Lutosławski composed and arranged twenty Polish Christmas Carols, *Dwadzieścia kołęd* (edited in 1947; completed in 1984–89). First he composed only a cycle for voice and piano. This collection, *Twenty Polish Christmas Carols*, was first arranged for soprano and piano (1946), and was later orchestrated by him for soprano, female choir, and [chamber] orchestra (1984–89). The Polish premiere of carols 11, 15, 17, 18, and 20 from this collection (see full list below) was performed in January 1947 in Kraków by the soprano Aniela Szlemińska, accompanied by the re-

nowned pianist Josef [Józef] Hofmann. A second, expanded version of *Twenty Polish Christmas Carols*, for soprano, women's chorus, and orchestra, premiered with the London Sinfonietta Orchestra and Chorus, with the soprano Marie Slorach, in London, on December 15, 1985 under Lutosławski's own baton. This version had turned up earlier that year in the composer's drawer, after forty years, having been forbidden in communist Poland. Lutosławski originally orchestrated carols 1–17 of the twenty total. The complete choral-orchestral work included sopranos and altos together with one flute, one oboe, two clarinets, two bassoons, one trumpet, one trombone, percussion, harp, piano, violins, violas, cellos, and double basses.

On December 14, 1990, in Edinburgh, Scotland, the Chamber Orchestra of Scotland, with soloist Susan Hamilton and accompanying choir, gave the first performance ever of Lutosławski's full work, including all twenty carols. This version featured English-language texts, while the previous versions remain in the original Polish. *Twenty Polish Christmas Carols* have been likened to Ralph Vaughan Williams' folksong settings (see "Vaughan Williams, Ralph").

Lutosławski adapted the tunes and texts of the traditional Polish carols mostly from 19th-century printed sources prepared for Christmas on the basis of the works by the priest, Michał Marcin Mioduszeński, and Oskar Kolberg, the most famous Polish folklorist in the 19th century. The Polish texts were drawn from a number of books: (1) *Śpiewnik Kościelny* (Church songbook), a collection of 19th-century Polish sacred songs by Michał Marcin Mioduszeński (1838–1853); (2) *Pastorałki i kołędy z melodyjami* (Pastoral Christmas songs and Christmas Carols with melodies/tunes), a collection of 17th–19th-century Polish sacred Christmas carols by Michał Marcin Mioduszeński (1843); (3) *Lud* [= Folk], vol. 16: *Lubelskie* (Lublin region), by Oskar Kolberg (1883); (4) *Lud*, vol. 22: *Łęczyckie* (= Łęczyca region), by Kolberg (1899).

The 20 *Christmas Carols* is an atypical composition within Lutosławski's oeuvre which was generally marked by a modernist idiom. The mentioned Christmas Carols constitute his only fully biblical composition. It includes a very melodic interplay between soloist, choir, and orchestra. (Christmas songs were highly valued works in Poland in the period following occupations by the German Nazis [1939–45] and the Soviets [1939–41, 1945–89]).

The complete, twenty-piece order of the Christmas-carol collection includes:

- 1) *Anioł pastercom mówił* (The angels came to the shepherds)
- 2) *Gdy się Chrystus rodzi* (When Christ has come to us)
- 3) *Przybieżeli do Betlejem* (Hurrying to Bethlehem)
- 4) *Jezus malusieńki* (Jesus is there)

- 5) *Bóg się rodzi* (God is born)
- 6) *W żłobie leży* (Lying in the manger)
- 7) *Północ już była* (Just after midnight)
- 8) *Hej, weselmy się* (Hey, We look forward now on)
- 9) *Gdy śliczna Panna* (Our Lady [When lovely Lady])
- 10) *Lulajże, Jezuniu* (Sleep baby Jesus)
- 11) *My też pastuszkowie* (We are [also] shepherds)
- 12) *Hej, w dzień narodzenia* (On this day [of Christmas])
- 13) *Hola hola, pasterze z pola* (Hay la, Hey la, shepherds, there you [from the field])
- 14) *Jezu, śliczny kwiecie* (Jesus lovely flower)
- 15) *Z narodzenia Pana* (This is God's birthday)
- 16) *Pasterze mili* (Shepherds, can tell you what you have seen)
- 17) *A cóż z tą dzieciną* (What to do with this child)
- 18) *Dziecina mała* (Infant so tiny)
- 19) *Hej hej, lelija Panna Maryja* (Hey, hey, lovely Lady Mary, [the lily])
- 20) *Najświętsza Panienka po świecie chodziła* (Holy Mother Mary ran through the wide world) (see Lutosławski)

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See also → Carol