

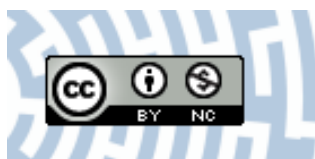


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Author: Anna Łobos

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Anna Łobos
Poland

**20 Polish Christmas Carols
for Soprano, Female Choir and Orchestra
by Witold Lutosławski
as an extremely good example of pedagogical interactions
in Polish school of music**

Abstract

The article presents some remarks on possible ways of the upbringing of teenager students by the employment of tools that are connected with tradition. These remarks follow from the just edited CD album with twenty Polish Christmas carols by Witold Lutosławski who is indisputably one of the major composers of the twentieth century. There is no doubt that Christmas carols are pure examples of tradition preserved by nations. Additionally, the album may be interesting for young students because of its excellent performance by their peers, i.e. students of the Karol Szymanowski State Secondary Music School in Katowice.

Key words: *musical education, the fostering of European tradition, the significance of Christmas carols, musical performance*

It is a well-known fact that tradition plays an important role in the education of children. Passing the knowledge connected with the tradition of the nation and region of life to the young generation is an inseparable part of pedagogical practice. Thanks to it young people can identify with their country, its history and, in general, with all the immaterial legacy that is called mankind's culture heritage, which was carefully worked out by previous generations.

One of the possible ways of the realization of the educational path related to tradition is, especially in Poland, bringing young people up by Christmas carol singing. This way is very fruitful – it allows young students to familiarize

with Polish culture, namely with the Polish language, religion, history, folklore, customs, ceremonies and rituals, etc. Moreover, this way is strictly connected with music that has been developed and kept by European Christians (it is clear and unquestionable that a large part of the common European culture stems from the Christian tradition) – for centuries the Church has been a crucial focus of music making and also musical education has been an important function of the Church (Lawson, 2003: p. 6). Obviously, musical education is still an essential component of comprehensive education (at home, school, and Church). The music and, in particular, songs that are sung by children have a favourable influence on their psyche and its development and they enlarge and enrich children's vocabulary, the ability of word formation or syntactic skills (Gruba, 2007: p. 99). A lot of Polish Christmas songs can be numbered among folk songs that have a great effect in the education of young students (Sadlonova, 2006: p. 230; Szulakowska-Kulawik, 2007: p. 62).

Polish Christmas carols and songs are a phenomenon on the world scale. No other country possesses such a large collection of carols; there are about ten thousand religious songs on the Christmas mystery. The contemporary Polish name of a Christmas carol is *kołęda* (it follows from the Latin word *calendae* that means the first day of a month), but this name has been used since the beginning of the nineteenth century; previously the following terms were used: *kantyka*, *kantyczka* (connected with Latin *canto* – to sing), *symfonia*, *rotuła*, *pieśń*.

A significant part of the Polish Christmas tradition is connected with Franciscan monks who introduced carols to Poland in the thirteenth century. The earliest surviving written source of carols comes from 1421. However, it does not contain the melodies, which were passed down by aural tradition rather than written one. In the Middle Ages there were two types of carols – liturgical (usually hymns strictly connected with the Latin Church liturgy) and paraliturgical (numerous lullabies sung for the new born little Christ who was laid in the poor manger).

Affectionate and tender lullabies were particularly close to the Polish culture so this type of carols is very popular and has been frequently performed up to this day. It is necessary to quote, as an example of vital paraliturgical carols, the two baroque carols: *Lulajże Jezuniu* (Sleep, Baby Jesus) and *Gdy śliczna Panna Syna kołysała* (Our Lovely Lady). The baroque is the heyday of the Polish carol. It is also the time when the typical Polish literary genre – *pastorałka* – arose. Its precursor was Jan Żabczyc. This kind of Christmas songs is of a more secular character, it contains stories about shepherds (usually with typical Slavonic names, e.g. Kuba, Wojtek, Bartosz) who met the new born Christ. This artistic endeavour led to a great increase in the popularity of the songs, due to the degree of identification with familiar pastoral images. Żabczyc's *Symfonie anielskie* (*Angel Symphonies*) from

1630 combine religious texts and melodies of polonaises and Polish folk dances, e.g. mazurkas and kujawiaks.

Although the next period, – the Enlightenment, was not conducive to religious writing, in the Polish literature it is associated with Franciszek Karpiński, who wrote, inter alia, a carol-masterpiece *Bóg się rodzi* (God is Born). In this carol the mystery of a human being's life that follows from the *Sacrum* is contained. The poet expressed the mystery by means of paradoxes such as: God is born, the power is terrified, Lord of heaven lies naked, the fire is setting, the glare is darkening, the Infinite has limits... Jan Twardowski, one of the greatest contemporary Polish poets, said that F. Karpiński gave a brilliant way of speaking about God by piling up paradoxes of love, faith and death, because the understanding of them is strictly connected with the nature of God and the mystery of life cannot be expressed by human logic; only God can explain the whole astonishing world in which there are carefully prepared coincidences, wise imperfection, justice which seems to be inequality (Twardowski, 2007: pp. 281–283).

Recently, a beautiful album with Polish Christmas carols has been published by Polish Music Publishers in Cracow. The album contains twenty carols worked out by Witold Lutosławski (1913–1994) who is the most outstanding Polish composer of the second half of the twentieth century. For his set of twenty carols Lutosławski took traditional texts and melodies from several collections gathered during the nineteenth century by Michał Marcin Mioduszeński (the first eighteen carols) and Oskar Kolberg (the last two carols). The choice of the most well-known twenty Christmas carols and songs was intentional. Lutosławski's settings for voice and piano were made in 1946 in response to a commission from the newly established Polish Music Publishing (PWM), and they treat the traditional diatonic (i.e. relating to the major or minor musical scales consisting of five full tones and two semitones) melodies with accompaniments that complement rather than correspond to their harmonic implications.

The beauty and uniqueness of the Polish carols, which connect simple folk tunes and strong theology contained in their lyrics, were emphasized and enriched by Lutosławski's sophisticated composition techniques. As in Lutosławski's other compositions, "a pervading harmonic principle is the skilful interchange of chromatically moving major and minor thirds, which modifies and confuses the diatonic functions of the tunes but without entirely undermining them. One can also observe the application of Lutosławski's characteristic technique of combining and alternating two types of intervals in order to generate a melodic line [...]. Throughout the whole set of carols, the accompaniments display a high degree of ingenuity and invention, which places them more on the level of miniature compositional studies than mere arrangements. Close inspection of individual

carols reveals a sophistication of harmony behind their apparent simplicity” (Rae, 1997: p. 3).

In passing, it is worth to saying that Lutosławski’s composition is known all over the world and is frequently performed by outstanding artists. In order to make foreign audiences familiar with the values contained in the Polish Christmas carols, these carols were precisely translated. The translation of poetry is usually a difficult task and in this case there are additional difficulties connected with the fact that the lyrics of the carols are inseparable part of their melodies. The good translation of the carols from Lutosławski’s setting required a lot of effort to convey the simplicity of style and rhythm, which contributes to the charm of the Polish carols. Also significant words such as Christ, Bethlehem, angel, shepherd are in the same position in the Polish and English versions so they are sung to the same note or notes.

In 1984 – 1989 Lutosławski transcribed his masterpiece for soprano, a female choir and a chamber orchestra. Such a version is presented in the latest album with Lutosławski’s *20 Christmas Carols* that are performed by Anna Noworzyn (soprano), the Female Choir of the Karol Szymanowski State Secondary Music School in Katowice, and the Karol Szymanowski Youth Symphony Orchestra. The musicians were conducted by Szymon Bywalec and the choir was prepared by Mirosława Knapik.

The Karol Szymanowski Youth Symphony Orchestra is the orchestra of the Karol Szymanowski State Secondary Music School in Katowice, the oldest Polish school (established in 1937) which combines musical and comprehensive education. The orchestra was created in 1945 by Karol Stryja who was also its first conductor. The orchestra gives many concerts in Poland and abroad, it also performs at youth music festivals. These young musicians have played several concerts in the National Philharmonic-Hall and in 2001 they took part in *Nono Concerto di Natale in Vaticano*. Many distinguished musicians who are known by the whole cultural world (inter alia Krystian Zimermann, Wojciech Kilar, Józef Świder) have gained their experience with the Karol Szymanowski Youth Symphony Orchestra.

Nowadays the orchestra is conducted by Szymon Bywalec, who studied conducting at the Music Academy in Katowice, where he is currently a faculty member. This very talented musician won the First Prize at the 2nd National Young Conductors’ Competitions in Białystok (1998) and two special awards at the 6th Grzegorz Fitelberg International Conductors’ Competition in Katowice (1999). He performs at many festivals of contemporary music such as *Warsaw Autumn*, *Melos-Ethos* in Bratislava, *The Velvet Curtain 2* in Lvov, *Silesian Days of Contemporary Music* in Katowice. As a guest conductor he has performed with many orchestras, including

Sinfonia Varsovia, Romanian National Radio Orchestra, Miskolci Szimfonikus Zenekar, Orchestra Filharmonica Europea, Polish Opera Orchestra and others.

The Female Choir (established also in 1945 by Karol Stryja) works at the Karol Szymanowski State Secondary Music School in Katowice. The excellent choir (regarded as the best in Poland) gives many concerts in Poland and abroad, having received the first prizes and honourable mentions. They also participate in prestigious international competitions; their repertoire includes pieces of music by various composers of various styles and centuries. Since 1981 the choir has been conducted by a brilliant musician and wonderful educator, Mirosława Knapik, who is also a professor at the Department of Arttherapy at the Faculty of Education and Psychology of the University of Silesia in Katowice. More detailed information on the choir, its conductor and Anna Noworzyn can be found in the article on the children's world of values (Łobos, 2007: pp. 98–99).

The above-mentioned album is characterized by a high professional level of performance and it delights with a unique tone, which is the result of high standards of teaching in instrumental, chamber and vocal classes. The great enthusiasm of the young artists who perform excellently, can be heard here. The vocal parts captivate the album audience with the style of passing on religious essence. They are endearing also by their unusually extreme care with proper diction that is so essential in the reception of the composition. Simultaneously, the instrumental part enchants with the colouring, subtlety and flexibility of performance.

Experts on music unanimously claim that Lutosławski's composition is very difficult to perform. Thus, the high level of its performance is all the more astonishing because the performers are very young people. It should be admitted that the youth from the choir and the orchestra of the Karol Szymanowski State Secondary Music School in Katowice makes the only young team of artists who was capable of such an excellent performance of Lutosławski's settings. It was possible thanks to the gifts and work of the eminent artists and educators working in this music school – Mirosława Knapik and Szymon Bywalec. They spent a lot of time and effort imparting to the youth the knowledge about the Christmas carols, their music, and all the connections between them, including culture, history and tradition.

It is necessary to acquaint young musicians with the conditions under which a composition originated, because some pieces demand a different style of delivery. The space of centuries that divides the time of the carols origin and their contemporary forms means in the historical development of the art not only a great difference in regard to form, but even greater with respect to musical expression. It is also known that the perceptive musical mind emerges as a necessary adjunct to mere technique and artistry (Lawson and Stowell, 2000: p. 1). The album with

twenty carols by Lutosławski is the result of such an approach to the preparation of young artists. The educational path that was realized in this music school finished successfully – the young people have deep and extensive knowledge in many areas and their performance has obtained enthusiastic critique.

There is one more example of preservation of tradition (but of other kind that is also essential). The Karol Szymanowski State Secondary Music School in Katowice has always been the best music school in Poland and its pupils have frequently been awarded prizes at international festivals and competitions. Hence, the contemporary students do everything in their power to be good successors of the previous generations of this school's alumni. And their efforts result in many important prizes (thus the rule of positive reinforcement works).

To sum up, it is worth noting that the album with the Christmas carols by Lutosławski can be also employed in non-artistic schools, especially as the Karol Szymanowski State Secondary Music School, who is the owner of the copyright, gave all large libraries in Poland as well libraries associated in the Forum of Directors of Public Council Libraries from Silesia the newly edited CDs, so the album is freely available. The album may be interesting for young students because of its excellent performance by their peers. It may be also a contribution to familiarizing of Polish students with the significant part of Polish culture, art, tradition, history that are strongly related and deeply rooted in the European ones.

The exquisite and very precise performance of the Polish Christmas carols, which contains deep reflection on God's wise intention toward a human being, brings us closer to *Sacrum* and it allows us to feel (at the beginning of the third millennium) how much we, the Poles, are one great family together with other people. The young performers gave their audience a valuable gift – they restored the meaning to words. It is a very important experience in contemporary time when it is difficult to tune in to the Christmas atmosphere; where the commerce and noise deaden the longing for the truth, beauty, brotherly love and peace.

It can be regarded as the crucial success of the educators that their students are aware of the primacy of the sung content over the music, even the most magnificent. The music always emphasizes the value of poetry.

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