

Thesis of a Dissertation

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Organizing Principles in Witold Lutosławski's
String Quartet (1964)

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I. Antecedents of the research

The topic of my doctoral dissertation is the *String Quartet* composed by Witold Lutosławski in 1964. I consider this composition as an important and essential piece of the chamber music of the 20th century. With my dissertation I also intend to address a niche, since the literature written in Hungarian dealing with the Polish aleatory is considerably scarce.

During the writing process Steven Stucky's book, titled *Lutosławski and his music* had been a great aid, since it provides a roadmap to Lutosławski's life from his childhood up until 1979. The author of the book describes Lutosławski's compositions in chronological order, moreover he provides short analyses of the pieces. In his book Stucky discusses the *String Quartet* several times, but he describes it in detail in the chapter titled "Notes on the late works". In the analysis he explains the structure of the form of the composition, a description that I also incorporated into my dissertation.

Several great writings of Charles Bodman Rae contributed to my dissertation also. *The Music of Lutosławski* written by Bodman Rae – who personally knew Lutosławski – is certainly one of the most accurate biographical works on the Polish composer. Irina Nikolska's *Conversations with Witold Lutosławski* and Bálint András Varga's *Witold Lutosławski. Conversations with Bálint András Varga* are also gripping and essential works, however they are less objective, therefore I mostly used them as background information about Lutosławski's mentality. In my view, the majority of the available literature does not place enough emphasis on Lutosławski's aleatoric technique, thus I mostly read studies that deal with aleatory through the works of other composers.

II. Sources

Since my dissertation is of analytical nature, I did not deal with sources describing the origins and the background of the *String Quartet*. For the analysis I used Witold Lutosławski's *Kwartet smyczkowy* score published by Edition Wilhelm Hansen in 1968.

III. Method

In the first part of my dissertation I discuss aleatory in the general context of music literature, moreover I describe Lutosławski's stylistic maturity. Subsequently, an analytic approach to the *String Quartet* constitutes the major part of my study. In this part I aimed at providing a detailed description about the dramaturgic ideas, the structural methods and the sound and rhythmic structures of the quartet. I used a new structural approach to examine the aleatoric sections, since one of the most important questions for me is to find out which factors influence the partial freedom of the different string parts within the aleatory. In the first movement I analyse the rehearsal marks and thus the sections one after the other, except for the *hook* parts, the *hook*-variants and the quasi metric sections. Due to the length and the difficult music material of the second section, I divide the music material into groups according to the "aleatoric final module" already introduced in the first movement: three subsections deals with the sections containing aleatoric modules (1), sections that do not contain aleatoric modules (2) and sections using free notation (3).

The problem of notation – direct, indirect-notation schemas and the occasionally illogical use of aleatoric final modules – is palpable all through the *String Quartet*. In the analysis I placed great emphasis on learning about this problem and exploring it in more detail. There is a unique characteristic of the notation of the limited aleatory used by Lutosławski: it provides an opportunity to connect shorter music sections to each other in an easier and more transparent

manner. In the case of longer processes contingency and real chance are need to be taken into account. I discussed these phenomena in greater detail in the analysis.

IV. Results

My analyses clearly point out that the notational aleatory method used by Lutosławski gives some freedom to the player to influence the sound to some extent, and this freedom is therefore transferred to the audience as well.

I also explored the different ways used to connect the aleatoric sections to each other. I discussed how in the *String Quartet* Lutosławski used highly elaborated pitch structures to organize the music material of his string parts, meanwhile his rhythmic patterns remained aleatory. In the analysis I also revealed several notational deficiencies: from the sound connections I deduced errata and misprints, moreover I brought into light the problems of the direct and indirect-notational schemas of the aleatory sections, and opportunities to execute them more clearly.

The conclusion of my dissertation is that in the quartet Lutosławski works with musical parameters calculated with remarkable punctuality, and although he did not explore completely unknown waters with aleatory, his piece is still a unique composition that aims at achieving a balance between freedom and control.

V. Documentation of the Activities Relevant to the Topic of the Dissertation

While writing my dissertation I composed some pieces myself that I developed both according to aleatoric and metric notation. My main interest was to see to what extent can aleatoric sound be achieved by using metric notation. Some compositions of mine using this technique amongst others are a piece for string orchestra titled *Lethe* (2014), a Bassoon Concerto titled *Laniakea* (2015) and a Viola

Concerto titled *Hesperus* (2017). Originally all three compositions were composed with aleatoric technique, and afterwards I created the scores using metric notation as well.

It became clear to me during the rehearsals of the compositions, that players experience different kind of difficulties while playing from a score written using aleatoric notations than in the case of playing from a traditional score. Moreover, the perception of the scores of my pieces by various European ensembles varied country by country: in Poland they read aleatoric notation with ease, while in German speaking areas they preferred metric score. As a composer I faced a great challenge while trying to find a way connect different sections to each other without breaking the progression of the music, which, in the case of a metric score resulted in an extremely complicated score, making it difficult to read for the players.

From time to time I notice some simpler forms of Lutosławski's aleatoric method in the pieces written by my students. I often encourage them to use aleatoric sections, since this gives some kind of unpredictability to their pieces. I hope that this will loosen my students' metric way of thinking, and they will discover new artistic techniques by integrating chance procedures into their pieces.