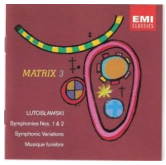
Witold Lutoslawski: Symphonies Nos. 1 & 2 - Symphonic Variations - Musique Funebre (1994)



01. Symphonic Variations / (1938) [0:08:56.00] 02. Symphony No. 1 (1947) / I [0:04:55.00] 03. Symphony No. 1 / II [0:09:32.65] 04. Symphony No. 1 / III [0:04:44.70] 05. Symphony No. 1 / IV [0:05:33.53] 06. Musique funčbre / (1958) [0:13:34.37] 07. Symphony No. 2 (1966 / 8) - I [0:15:42.45] 08. Symphony No. 2 / II [0:15:40.18] Polish Radio National Symphony Orchestra Witold Lutoslawski (Conductor)

It's my guess that posterity will judge Witold Lutoslawski as among the supreme twentieth-century musical colorists. All four works included on this superbly refurbished CD share an acute sense of texture, with the Symphonic Variations (1938) serving as a sort of changing room where the composer busily experiments with all manner of musical dress. But thereafter, dormant characteristics take on a stronger form, although my ears detect a good deal of Roussel in the First Symphony (1941-7), both in terms of texture and design. The Funeral music for Bartok (Musique funebre, 1956-8) is a powerful synthesis of original thought and active homage, with plentiful reminders of the master himself—especially of his Divertimento for strings.

The real ground-breaker, however, is the Second Symphony, a seething, structured mass in two parts: the first, nervous and diffuse (with strikingly original passagework for piano and percussion), the second—which arrives without a break—initially dense, but ultimately ethereal. All in all, this must surely count as the introduction to Lutoslawski's symphonic world, and Julian Haylock's helpful notes offer the uninitiated plenty of useful musical signposts.-- Gramophone [2/1995]

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