



Grażyna
BACEWICZ
(1909-1969)

Complete
String Quartets • 2

Lutosławski Quartet



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Expressionism. Neoclassicism. Serialism. Sonorism. Important movements in twentieth-century music, and each – in varying degrees and at various times – an aspect of the seven string quartets of Grażyna Bacewicz. Creator of a broad catalogue encompassing symphonies, concertos, songs, ballets, piano pieces, incidental music and numerous works for violin (both with and without piano), Bacewicz continually looked for ways to develop her style. In a 1964 interview, she said, "A progressive composer would not agree to repeat even himself. He has to not only deepen and perfect his achievements, but also broaden them. It seems to me, that for instance in my music, though I do not consider myself an innovator, one can notice a continuous line of development." Her last five quartets, in particular, trace her commitment to new ideas while maintaining her dedication to form, logic and expression.

Bacewicz was born in Łódź, Poland, on 5 May 1909. Urged by her father to play the violin from the age of five, she developed as a child prodigy, playing several concertos with the local orchestra before she was twelve years old. In 1932, she graduated summa cum laude from the Warsaw Conservatory with degrees in both composition and violin performance. She went on to study with Nadia Boulanger at the École Normale in Paris. After a brief stint teaching at the conservatory in Łódź, she settled in Warsaw. In 1936, she accepted the position of principal violinist with the newly formed Polish Radio Orchestra under Grzegorz Fitelberg; she toured with the orchestra for two years.

The late 1940s and early 1950s were a challenging time for Polish composers. The nationalization of music institutions and the imposed doctrine of "socialist realism" made it difficult to embrace musical trends that were taking root elsewhere. At the same time, the systematic collecting of folklore, intended to cultivate feelings of national pride, provided composers with a rich vein of inspiration. While her desire to experiment might have been (temporarily) thwarted by this restrictive milieu, Bacewicz continued to

draw ideas from Polish folk music and push the envelope in matters of style and form. 1951 was an especially prolific year for her, seeing the completion of her second symphony, her first cello concerto, her fourth violin concerto and her fourth string quartet.

In *String Quartet No. 4*, Bacewicz challenges traditional formal structures but stops short of totally abandoning them. The first movement opens with a sombre, gradually unfolding introduction that leads to a theme of folk-like simplicity. Brutal chords intervene, and although the lyrical idea tries to reassert itself, the violence seemingly cannot be stopped. When it finally subsides, the cello introduces a second subject (which shares some rhythmic features with the first) against a hushed background of *tremolando* violins and *pizzicato* viola. A subsequent *Allegro* passage develops the rising semitone so prevalent in that second theme. Both ideas are then reprised with a surprising amount of literal repetition – suggesting sonata form even though there has been no development in the classic sense.

The central *Andante*, although not so described by the composer, is a haunting nocturne. Again, two lyrical themes contrast with episodes of more rhythmic character, one of which tries to generate a *fugato* that never develops. Textures throughout are mostly delicate, occasionally expanding to create passages of rich harmonic density. Any suggestion of emotional depth created by this movement is quickly dispelled, however, by the light-hearted rondo which concludes the quartet. The principal theme is an irrepressible jig – suggesting a traditional Polish *oberek* – that appears at one point played *pizzicato* and transformed into duple metre. The contrasting episodes include a modal passage in 9/8 metre that explores such colour effects as harmonics, *tremolando* and *sul ponticello*.

Bacewicz's *Fourth Quartet* was an immediate success. It received first prize (out of 57 entries) at the International Composition Competition in Liège, Belgium (where it was published by Edgar Tyssens), and

contributed to the composer's second Polish National Prize in 1952. In 1953 it became a required piece for competitors in the International String Quartet Competition in Geneva. With its perfectly judged balance of formal complexity, approachable thematic material and harmonic sophistication, it is not surprising that it continues to be one of her most frequently performed works.

Like millions of other Europeans during World War II – even those not directly involved in the conflict or the horrors of the Holocaust – Bacewicz faced numerous challenges. She and her family were displaced from their home in Warsaw (first to a refugee camp and then to the city of Lublin), and she had to care for her wounded sister. Musical life in Poland was severely curtailed, yet she continued to compose. Performances were often given in private homes or intimate public settings, such as the artists' café in Warsaw where her *String Quartet No. 2* premiered in 1943. It is, in spite of the composer's circumstances, a life-affirming work.

The opening movement, sparkling with energy, is in three broad sections. The first and last are essentially in C major, while the middle portion – characterized by wide melodic leaps – is in G minor. The rhetoric is clearly neo-classical; semiquaver motion in one voice or another propels the musical argument forward throughout. The expansive second movement features two broad themes, often reinforced by octave doublings. Bacewicz introduces the first at the outset; when she reprises it the tonal centre shifts from E to A. Likewise the second, assigned to viola and introduced against sustained open fifths, moves from D to G when it recurs, with the added interest of cello following in canon eight beats later. At nearly twelve minutes, this is the longest movement in all seven quartets. Extreme emotion is perhaps kept at bay by the composer's focus on manipulating her material, and the movement concludes with a harmonically enigmatic chord.

High spirits return for the concluding *Allegro*. The 2/4 metre, C major tonality, rhythmic figures and fast-moving scale passages in the first theme recall the opening movement; the more lyrical second subject, introduced on cello, begins with a long note while semiquaver movement continues underneath. Where we might expect a

development section to begin, Bacewicz slides effortlessly – almost without our being aware – into 6/8 and introduces new ideas. Both initial subjects return, however, and the quartet ends in unequivocal C major. Although it is not as well-known or popular as some of the quartets Bacewicz composed after the war, *String Quartet No. 2* is a testament to her continued inspiration and positive spirit during a most difficult time.

By the time she composed *String Quartet No. 5* in 1955, Bacewicz had begun to leave her neo-classical (a term to which she always objected) period behind. The *Fifth Quartet* inhabits a very different world than the *Fourth*. It builds a massive, confident structure of Beethovenian intensity with decidedly 20th-century aspirations on solid – even traditional – formal grounds. The opening movement's sonata structure features two subjects. The first, heard directly at the outset, is restless and probing, focusing on the minor seconds and thirds which permeate the entire movement. The second provides contrast with a more regular phrase shape (hinting at folk song) and a more colourful presentation (simultaneous *arco*, *pizzicato* and harmonics over a pedal bass). The first subject group is repeated almost verbatim in the recapitulation.

The fleet second movement (*Scherzo*) is a compositional tour de force featuring two fugues. The first, in 3/8, dissolves into a series of *glissandi* before the second arrives and changes the metre to 2/4. When the two combine into a double fugue for the final section, the metric displacement caused by the opposing metres results in delightful rhythmic confusion that Bacewicz handles with complete assurance. The slow, solemn *Corale* which follows continues the exploration of minor seconds and thirds begun in the first movement in essentially the same non-tonal fashion. The central section of the ABA structure is slightly more animated but no less dissonant.

The quartet concludes with a set of colourful variations on a theme which is hardly a theme. In the words of Bacewicz biographer Adrian Thomas: "Not for Bacewicz the classically simple theme with regular phrasing, binary structure and dominant-tonic bass line; her theme is already a racy variation, its metre changing virtually every

bar, with *tutti pizzicati* masking its motivic and harmonic basis.” The six variations are each of a distinctively different character, exploring new textures and moods. Only the consistent presence of a minor third – already such an important building block of movements one and three – perceptibly holds everything together. Solo cello leads off the coda; the final cadence is rhythmically similar to the ends of previous Bacewicz quartets but bears no hint of tonal resolution.

Celebrated in her native country (at least two streets and four schools bear her name), Bacewicz is slowly emerging from the shadows of contemporaries such as Lutosławski and Panufnik on the international stage. Her musical integrity and probing intelligence guarantee her an esteemed place in the annals of twentieth-century Polish music.

Frank K. DeWald

Lutosławski Quartet



Photos: Marek Szczepański

The Lutosławski Quartet was founded in 2007 and has appeared at many festivals, including in Poland, Berlin, Brussels, Ankara and Ghent. In 2013 the quartet was invited to the Hong Kong Arts Festival, and to Tongyeong in South Korea, Tokyo, Singapore, Hangzhou and Beijing, as well as for concerts in Sofia, Athens and Thessaloniki. The quartet has given concerts with Andrzej Bauer, Bruno Canino, Paul Gulda, the Silesian Quartet, the Royal String Quartet, Tomasz Strahl, Ryszard Groblewski, Nicholas Daniel, Eugen Indjic, Garrick Ohlsson and Michel Lethiec, as well as outstanding jazz players such as Kenny Wheeler, John Taylor, Benoit Delbecq and Uri Caine. They have also performed Bohuslav Martinů's and Arnold Schoenberg's concertos for quartet and orchestra under Jacek Kasprzyk's baton. Together with Krzysztof Jakowicz and Andrzej Bauer, they have made the first recording of Witold Lutosławski's complete chamber music for the Accord label, winning the 2009 Fryderyk Award nomination. In 2010 they recorded quartets by Karol Szymanowski, Dmitry Shostakovich and Marcin Markowicz for their debut solo album. Other recordings include Lutosławski's *String Quartet* and Paweł Mykietyn's *String Quartet No. 2*. The Lutosławski Quartet repertoire includes classical music, as well as recently commissioned pieces, and focuses on popularizing Polish music, including works by Lutosławski, Bacewicz, Szymanowski, and compositions by one of the group members, Marcin Markowicz. The quartet works as one of the resident ensembles at the National Forum of Music.

Grażyna Bacewicz is now emerging from the shadow of her Polish contemporaries, such as Panufnik and Lutosławski, on the international stage. She constantly sought ways to develop her style and it is this continuous line of development that is perfectly exemplified in her series of string quartets. *String Quartet No. 2* was premièred in 1943 in challenging circumstances but attests to her positive spirit. The prize-winning *String Quartet No. 4* is one of her most performed works, perfectly balancing formal complexity, approachable themes and harmonic sophistication. The powerful and intense *String Quartet No. 5* is a compositional tour de force. Volume 1 can be heard on Naxos 8.572806.

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**String Quartet No. 4
(1951)**

- | | |
|------------------------------|------|
| 1 Andante – Allegro moderato | 9:13 |
| 2 Andante | 5:40 |
| 3 Allegro giocoso | 5:41 |

**String Quartet No. 2
(1943)**

- | | |
|-------------------------|-------|
| 4 Allegro ma non troppo | 7:43 |
| 5 Andante | 11:54 |
| 6 Allegro | 8:01 |

**String Quartet No. 5
(1955)**

- | | |
|---------------------------|------|
| 7 Moderato | 9:18 |
| 8 Scherzo (Fuga): Giocoso | 3:37 |
| 9 Corale: Largo | 8:23 |
| 10 Variazioni: Allegro | 8:44 |



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Lutosławski Quartet

**Jakub Jakowicz, Violin I • Marcin Markowicz, Violin II
Artur Rozmysławicz, Viola • Maciej Młodawski, Cello**

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