LUTOSŁAWSKI’S FIRST SYMPHONY IN RELATION TO NEOCLASSICISM:

Musicologists often point to Witold Lutosławski’s First Symphony (1941-1947) as the consummation of his early period.¹ Many have also labeled the work and the period it embodies as “neoclassical.”² While this term has proven useful as a catch-all in generalized discussions of Lutosławski’s music, its use has also created much confusion and even lively debate as to its exact meaning and limitations. Such is the case with its application to the First Symphony. While a small number of writers have addressed the neoclassical label in relation to the symphony, their references are invariably in passing or serve other analytical agendas.³ To date, no author has examined the entirety of this important work in relation to any clearly defined norms of neoclassicism.

The development of neoclassicism under the influence of Stravinsky is thoroughly detailed by Scott Messing.⁴ In his book, he also outlines characteristics that are prevalent in neoclassical works, such as traditional sectional form, independence from programmatic influences (opera excluded), free interchange of major and minor thirds, and the addition of

---


pitches to the diatonic collection. The inextricable bond between neoclassicism and Stravinsky is discussed by Joseph Straus, Eric Salzman and Mosco Carner. The most complete analysis of the First Symphony is by Gertruida Steyn. She examines the work’s construction, cites contemporaneous and current criticism, and discusses neoclassicism as relevant to Lutosławski’s early period. Both Charles Rae and Steven Stucky analyze sections of the First Symphony, focusing on Lutosławski’s chord structures and use of canon. In their respective writings, Rae and Stucky argue against applying “neoclassicism” to the symphony, each saying that this work is too modern to warrant the label. Stefan Jarocinski and Arnold Whittall acknowledge the problems the term creates but do not offer any argument for or against its use. In a 1974 interview with Bálint Varga, Lutosławski himself speaks of the composers who influenced his early pieces, though without recourse to “neoclassicism.”

The major proponent of neoclassicism in relation to Lutosławski’s music is Jadwiga Paja-Stach, who cites sections of the First Symphony as examples of neoclassical counterpoint. In a separate publication she provides a more detailed description of neoclassicism in Lutosławski’s works but fails to include the symphony. Lutosławski’s connection with neoclassicism in popular print is evidenced by John Rockwell’s article for The New York Times.

---

8 Rae, The Music of Lutosławski, 25; Stucky, Lutosławski and His Music, 33.
This document explores the tenuous link between Lutosławski’s First Symphony and neoclassicism. Using the traits set forth by Messing, I will provide a theoretical justification for labeling the First Symphony neoclassical. I will employ Stravinsky’s *Symphony in C* to demonstrate the neoclassical paradigm. Through comparisons with Stravinsky’s *Petrouchka* and *The Firebird* I will also argue that as it applies to the First Symphony, neoclassicism has been broadened to simply mean, “bearing the influence of Stravinsky.”

Chapter 1, “Introduction,” sets forth the issue of neoclassicism in relation to the First Symphony, and includes the label’s proponents and detractors. Chapter 2, “A History,” is a history of Lutosławski and the First Symphony. Chapter 3, “Neoclassicism,” presents Messing’s neoclassical traits and includes examples from widely acknowledged neoclassical works. Chapter 4, “The First Symphony and Neoclassicism,” analyzes the symphony and relates it to the traits discussed in chapter 3. In this chapter, aspects of the symphony will also be compared to sections of Stravinsky’s Russian-period *Petrouchka* and *The Firebird*, as well as the neoclassical *Symphony in C*. Here, I will argue that while the term neoclassical is permissible, it must be applied with acknowledgment of its broader meaning. Chapter 5 will serve as the document’s conclusion.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


