

ASO Program Notes

Orawa

Wojciech Kilar (1932 - 2013)

While Chopin is usually the first name to come to mind when speaking of Polish composers, there are a number of contemporary Polish figures who have distinguished themselves by incorporating Poland's indigenous culture and landscape into their music. One of these is Wojciech Kilar, now recognized as Poland's leading composer of symphony, oratorio and chamber music, as well as numerous sound tracks. He was trained in Krakow, then in Paris, studying under some of the greatest modern tutors of the 20th century and perfecting and adopting his distinctive neo-classical style. He performed regularly in concert halls and also accepted a number of commissions from film directors. Commissions included *The Truman Show*, *Dracula*, *Portrait of A Lady*, and *The Pianist*, among many others. After a period of particularly avant-garde productions, he settled into a strongly nationalistic style, showing elements of his country's folk and religious music.

His composition *Orawa*, completed in 1986, takes its title from the Carpathian region of the Polish-Slovak border. It also refers to mountainous terrain and grass-covered mountain pastures with rivers running through. It is the final work in Kilar's "Tatra Mountain works" for string orchestra and has been suggested to depict the potent forces of nature and an exuberant folk festival at harvest time.

Orawa is characterized by use of repeated figures played off against one another, with its texture varying in dynamics and rhythms for dramatic effect. It is the most popular of Kilar's works, and has lent itself to a variety of arrangements, including, at various times, for string quartet, for twelve saxophones, accordion trio and eight cellos!

In an interview in Krakow in 1997, Kilar said of his most famous work, "*Orawa* is the only piece in which I wouldn't change a single note, though I have looked at it many times... What is achieved in it is what I strive for - to be the best possible Kilar."

Beryl McHenry