NAXOS

Karol SZYMANOWSKI

Violin Sonata

Mythes • Notturno and Tarantella

Miriam Kramer, Violin • Nicholas Durcan, Piano

Karol Szymanowski (1882-1937)

Music for Violin and Piano

Although they are less central to his output than orchestral, vocal or piano music, Karol Szymanowski wrote a number of works for violin and piano, spanning his entire career; enabling a decent appreciation of his musical development from this medium alone. That development falls into four main phases: a first phase (1900-1912), in which the influences of Chopin and Scriabin, are combined with those of the German late-Romantics, notably Strauss and Reger; a second phase (1913-19), which sees the evolution of a highly individual style, drawing on the Impressionism of Debussy and early Stravinsky but also on Middle Eastern culture and folklore; a third phase (1918-24), centering on the opera *King Roger* and which intensifies the previous phase while anticipating that to come; and a fourth phase (1925-34), drawing freely and also imaginatively on Polish folk-music, notably that of the Tatra region, in music whose astringent harmonies and bracing rhythms reflect the composer's Polish heritage, in a personal take on the neo-Classicism then being pursued by such composers as Bartók, Stravinsky and Prokofiev.

Composed in 1904, the *Violin Sonata* is one of several large-scale instrumental works that emerged in Szymanowski's first phase, which also saw the first two symphonies [Naxos 8.553683] and the first two piano sonatas [Naxos 8.553867 and 8.553016 respectively]. Outwardly conventional both in its overall form and also that of each movement, the piece yet shows a thorough assimilation of its stylistic influences, as well as a confidence in writing for the difficult violin-and-piano medium that Szymanowski was to develop and refine in subsequent works.

The first movement opens with an impassioned theme that involves both instruments in a forceful dialogue. A second theme is more inward and discursive, while not lacking expressive impetus, before winding down in a pensive codetta. The development draws both of these themes into a rhapsodic yet cumulative series of exchanges that reaches a hesitant pause, only for the reprise to commence with the intensified but curtailed return of the first theme. Its successor is duly given more space to unwind, anticipating the resigned tone that is confirmed by a subdued coda. Initiated by soothing piano figuration, the slow movement unfolds as a lyrical cantilena for violin, its unbroken melodic line at length curtailed by capricious violin pizzicati and piano chords in rhythmic unison. Ending as abruptly as it began, this passes into a resumption of the lyrical music, moving towards a rapt climax that presently winds down to the tender close. The finale opens with a declamatory call to attention from both instruments, then proceeds with a purposeful theme that moves naturally into the easeful secondary melody. The brief but energetic central section features incisive motivic exchanges, before the main themes are recalled in an expressively heightened reprise then brought together in the surging coda.

Although a minor piece, the *Romance* (1910) is significant in that it finds the composer in the process of incorporating aspects of the musical Impressionism prevalent in his second phase, and which is exemplified in such works as the *Third Symphony* [Naxos 8.553684] and the *First Violin Concerto* [Naxos 8.553685]. The music unfolds in warmly lyrical writing, touching on greater reserves of emotion as it progresses, and twice building towards a brief but expressive apex, before concluding in a mood of gentle repose.

The *Notturno and Tarantella* (1915) is Szymanowski's most demonstrative work for violin and piano, though probably more frequently heard in the orchestration by the conductor Grzegorz Fitelberg [Naxos 8.553685]. The *Notturno* begins with lapping chords on piano and a mysterious, Oriental-sounding phrase on violin. This opens into songful writing that soon develops greater rhythmic impetus and also expressive immediacy, propelling the music to a varied recollection of its initial ideas then to a retreat back into

the sombre yet sultry atmosphere from which it emerged. With barely a pause, the *Tarantella* launches on its impulsive course. Complementary in every respect, it unfolds with a dynamism rare in Szymanowski's music of this period, and draws both instruments into a dialogue as intense musically as it is virtuosic technically. At length, the underlying dance rhythm drives the music forward so that it reaches a decisive and scintillating close.

It was with *Mythes* (1915) that Szymanowski produced a work for violin and piano able to rank with the finest in the medium. He was undoubtedly aided in this through collaboration with Pawel Kochański, the Polish violinist whom the composer credited with an altogether new expressive range for the instrument, and for whom he went on to compose both of his violin concertos [Naxos 8.553685].

The first piece, *La Fontaine d'Aréthuse*, opens with translucent piano harmonies over which the violin spins a melodic line both ethereal and ecstatic. The music becomes more quixotic as the instruments vie with each other in spiralling arcs of sound, and yet its essential poise remains as the initial mood is regained and the music proceeds to its close with two self-effacing piano chords. The second piece, *Narcisse*, is a 'romance' of chaste import, the violin line floating over delicate piano figuration with a supple grace that is only partially effaced by the greater fervency of the central section. This brings a semblance of emotional climax, only for the violin to effect a heightened return to the initial music and on to a conclusion that refers to both ideas in a mood of calm benediction. The third piece, *Dryades et Pan*, brings the sequence to a close with music of suitably liquid energy and grace. A central section features airborne violin harmonics, and also witnesses the complex harmonic interplay of both instruments in music of improvisatory elegance that rises to a brief climax, only to dissolve in a haze of dissonance. A deft exchange of gestures, and the music vanishes into the ether.

The *Berceuse d'Aıtacho Enia* (1925) is the only piece for violin and piano from Szymanowski's fourth phase. Another minor work, it yet touches on the pathos that is central to the music of his last years. Over a calm and undulating piano figure, the violin unfolds a delicate melody that touches on cadential resting-points, while all the time retaining its tonal ambivalence, before reaching a subdued close.

The final piece in this collection is Kochański's transcription of the famous aria that Roxanna sings in Act Two of Szymanowski's opera *King Roger* [the complete opera is on Naxos 8.660062/3], and which soon established itself as a popular encore item. After a largely unaccompanied introduction, the transcription closely follows the contours of the vocal line and also its fastidious harmonic support. Rising to a sensuous climax, it subsides regretfully to a 'concert-ending' that in no sense compromises the repose of the original.

Richard Whitehouse

Miriam Kramer

A culminating point in the career of the brilliant young American violinist, Miriam Kramer, described by *The New York Times* as "a gifted young violinist who proved a soulful performer showing flair and temperament, fine sensitivity and warmth", was at the Alice Tully Hall in New York's Lincoln Center where she recently gave her acclaimed début recital. Miriam Kramer has performed most of the standard concertos, and her concerts, from Bach to Bloch and Brahms to Shostakovich, have been widely acclaimed. She has performed in such halls as the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées with Philippe Herreweghe, the Barbican Hall with Adrian Leaper, Queen Elizabeth Hall with David Josefowitz, Carnegie Hall and Kennedy Center with Alexander Schneider, and at St Martin-in-the-Fields in a performance of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* with Michael Nebe. Her many recitals have taken her to concerts and festivals throughout Britain, and to the Spring Festival in Prague. At the Dartington Festival, in addition to giving master-classes, she performed in numerous chamber music concerts and solo recitals, and as a soloist with the Dartington Festival Orchestra under the direction of Diego Masson. After recording a newly composed work by Leo Cottakis, she was invited to the Egyptian Embassy in Athens to perform it there. Her début recital at London's prestigious Wigmore Hall drew further praise from the critics. She has broadcast with the BBC Concert Orchestra as soloist in Beethoven's *Triple Concerto*, on Classic FM, Radio 3, Radio Prague, Paris Radio Classique and on BBC television. Her début recording, *Hebrew Melody*, drew further critical praise, and her recording of the violin music of Ernest Bloch won five stars in the *BBC Music Magazine* and was Editor's Choice in *The Gramophone*.

Nicholas Durcan

Few pianists have enjoyed such a colourful and cosmopolitan career as Nicholas Durcan. He studied the piano with Hamish Milne and Angus Morrison and organ with Alan Harverson at the Royal Academy of Music where he won many prizes including the highest performing award, the Recital Diploma. From 1980 to 1982 he was sub-organist at Westminster Cathedral and in 1983 made his concerto début at the Queen Elizabeth Hall. He has since performed concertos at the Royal Festival Hall and St John's Smith Square, given recitals at the Purcell Rooms, broadcast on Classic fm and BBC Radio 2, 3 and 4, and appeared on several television programmes. He performs regularly in the United States and has given solo and chamber music recitals in Sweden, Germany, Holland, France, Spain, Italy, Malta, Switzerland and Hong Kong. He is also an acclaimed jazz pianist and appears regularly with London's top jazz musicians. In conjunction with a performing career he is also a composer and arranger and has written the music for BBC and Channel 4 television series. He has released a number of recordings, including a disc of piano music by the British composer Billy Mayerl.

NAXOS

SZYMANOWSKI: Music for Violin and Piano

8.557748

Although they are less central to his output than orchestral, vocal or piano music, Karol Szymanowski wrote a number of works for violin and piano, spanning his entire career. Composed in 1904, the emotionally turbulent *Violin Sonata* is one of several large-scale instrumental works that emerged during Szymanowski's first phase, in which the influences of Chopin and Scriabin are combined with those of the German late-Romantics. The intense and virtuosic *Notturno and Tarantella* (1915), draws on the Impressionism of Debussy and early Stravinsky but also on Middle Eastern culture and folklore. Unfolding in warmly lyrical writing, the *Romance* (1910) is cut from the same exotic cloth as the *First Violin Concerto* [Naxos 8.553685].

Karol

SZYMANOWSKI

(1882-1937)

Music for Violin and Piano

Violin Sonata in D minor, Op. 9 (1904) 24:12

1 I. Allegro moderato 11:00

2 II. Andantino tranquillo e dolce 7:23

3 III. Finale: Allegro molto, quasi presto 5:50

4 **Berceuse d'Aıtacho Enia, Op. 52 (1925)** 4:24

Mythes, Op. 30 (1915) 23:34

5 I. La Fontaine d'Aréthuse 6:41

6 II. Narcisse 8:23

7 III. Dryades et Pan 8:29

8 **Romance, Op. 23 (1910)** 6:31

Notturno and Tarantella, Op. 28 (1915) 12:28

9 I. Notturno: Lento assai 5:27

10 II. Tarantella: Presto appassionato 6:31

11 **Chant de Roxane from *King Roger* (transcribed by Pawel Kochański) (1924)** 5:35

Miriam Kramer, Violin • Nicholas Durcan, Piano

Recorded in Potton Hall, Westleton, Suffolk, from 8th to 10th June, 2005
Producer and engineer: Michael Ponder
Booklet notes: Richard Whitehouse

Cover image: *Narciso* by Paolo Zeccara
(by kind permission)

NAXOS

8.557748

DDD

Playing Time
76:45

7 47313 27482 6

℗ & © 2007
Naxos Rights International Ltd.

Booklet notes in English
Made in Canada

www.naxos.com

NAXOS
SZYMANOWSKI: Music for Violin and Piano
8.557748