



SZYMANOWSKI

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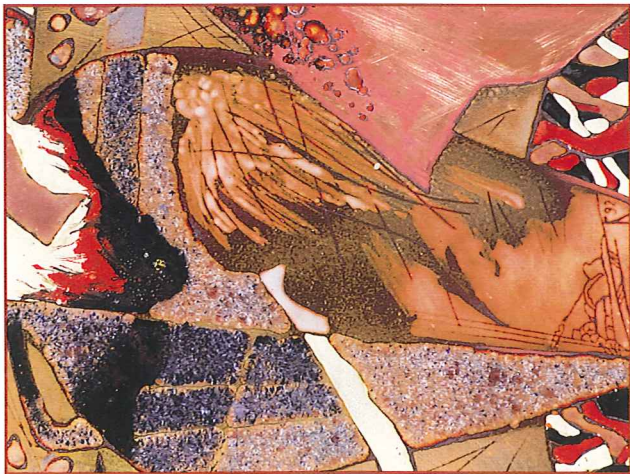
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Piano Works

Vol. 1

**Piano Sonata No. 2, Op. 21
Mazurkas, Op. 50 • Metopes, Op. 29
Four Studies, Op. 4**

Martin Roscoe, Piano



Karol Szymanowski (1882 - 1937)

Piano Music

Mazurkas, Op. 50, Nos. 1 - 4

Metopes, Op. 29

Etudes, Op. 4, Nos. 1 - 4

Sonata No. 2, Op. 21

Karol Szymanowski was born at Tymoszkówka in the Kiev District of the Ukraine in 1882, the son of a Polish land-owner and of a mother of Swedish extraction, born Baroness Anna Taube. The family and their immediate circle had a deep interest in the arts, a fact reflected in the subsequent careers of the five children of the marriage as musicians, poets or painters. His sister Stanislava later became a singer and his brother Feliks a pianist. Szymanowski's early education was at home, since a leg injury at the age of four prevented him from attending school in the neighbouring town of Elisavetgrad (the modern Kirovograd), where, nevertheless, he had music lessons from a relative, Gustav Neuhaus, who had a school there. In 1901 he went to Warsaw to continue his musical studies, taking lessons from the composer Zygmunt Noskowski in counterpoint and composition and from Marek Zawirski in harmony.

The feelings of Polish nationalism that had inspired Chopin and his contemporaries continued through the nineteenth century, exacerbated by the repressive measures taken by Russia, in particular, in the face of open revolt. Warsaw in 1901, however, remained as provincial as it had been in the time of Chopin, who had sought his musical fortune abroad in Paris in 1830. The century had seen Polish performers of the greatest distinction, particularly the violinists Lipinski and Wienawski. The opera composer Stanislaw Moniuszko, however, a rival to Chopin in his own country, enjoyed only a local reputation, while his successors, in Szymanowski's esteem, occupied a still lower place. Polish music was to a great extent isolated and provincial, a reflection of the society in which it existed. The new century, however, brought together a group of young musicians of much wider outlook, a circle that included the pianist Artur Rubinstein, the violinist Pawel Kochanski and the conductor Grzegorz Fitelberg. The last named,

the composer Ludomir Rózycki and the pianist and composer Apolinary Szeluto, together with Szymanowski, established, under the patronage of Prince Wladyslaw Lubomirski, the Young Poland in Music group, for the publication and promotion of new Polish music. Fitelberg, by training a violinist and composer, made his later career as a conductor, and directed the first concert of the group in Warsaw in 1906, when Szymanowski's *Concert Overture* was performed. He won later distinction as conductor at the Vienna Staatsoper and in work for the Russian impresario Dyagilev, before returning to direct the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra and, from 1947, the Polish Radio Symphony Orchestra in Katowice. Kochanski's support was to prove invaluable, particularly in the composition of the first of Szymanowski's two violin concertos and in a number of works written for violin and piano. Rubinstein, who, like Kochanski, made his later career in the United States of America, proved an additional champion of Szymanowski, while Paderewski, a musician of more conservative tendency, assisted in the wider dissemination of Szymanowski's piano music, favouring especially the famous *B flat minor Study*, a work that owes much of its popularity to his advocacy.

The first Young Poland concert in Warsaw had included performances of Szymanowski's *Variations on a Polish Folk Theme* and his *Study in B flat minor*, played by the pianist Harry Neuhaus, and had been well enough received. Berlin, however, proved much less interested, when Fitelberg conducted the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra in a similar programme in the same year. Szymanowski spent the following two years principally in Berlin and Leipzig, absorbing still further the influence of Wagner, of Reger and of Richard Strauss, composers of whom he later took a cooler view. This period saw the composition of his *Symphony No.1 in F minor*, completed in 1907 and given its first performance in Warsaw two years later. The composer subsequently withdrew the symphony and went so far as to destroy the 1907 *Piano Trio*, sensing what seemed to him the excessive influence of the post-Wagnerian, a reflection of a predominant aspect of music of the time in Germany. The following years brought periods at home in the Ukraine and abroad. He wrote his *Penthesilea, Opus 18*, an orchestral work with soprano solo derived from the *Achilleis* of the contemporary Polish painter and dramatist Stanislaw Wyspianski, in Italy in 1908, and in 1910 completed a very different *Symphony No.2 in B flat, Opus 19*, a work in which the influence of Scriabin

is noticeable, as it is in the piano music of this period. The new symphony, played under Fitelberg in Warsaw in 1911, proved unacceptable to both audience and critics, but won acclaim in Berlin, Leipzig and Vienna, establishing the international importance of the composer. Szymanowski determined, after this experience, to live, at least for a time, in Vienna, where Fitelberg was now employed at the Staatsoper, and where he reached an agreement with Universal to publish his work.

Vienna, however, proved less stimulating than Szymanowski had hoped, but the period changed to some extent his musical outlook, particularly through his experience of the music of Debussy and, still more, of Ravel, and of the Dyagilev company in Stravinsky's *Firebird* and *Petrushka*. In March 1914 he left Vienna and travelled south to Italy, Sicily and North Africa, returning through Rome, Paris and London, where he met Stravinsky. The war years he spent in musical isolation at home at Tymoszkówka, turning his attention to a study of Greek civilisation and literature, to the early history of Christianity and to the culture of Islam, the last an extension of an interest aroused by translations of the poems of Hafiz by Hans Bethge, poet of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*, some of which he had set to music in 1911, and exemplified in the remarkable *Symphony No.3*, completed in 1916, using poems by the 13th century Persian mystic and poet Mevlâna, Jalal al-Din ar-Rumi.

The Russian revolution put an end to Szymanowski's period of war-time seclusion. The family was compelled to move, for reasons of safety, to Elisavetgrad, and the property at Tymoszkówka was destroyed by the revolutionaries. In 1919 they moved to Poland, after the proclamation of the new republic. Kochanski and Rubinstein prudently chose to settle in the United States, but Szymanowski determined to stay in his own country and to seek there a further source of inspiration, particularly in the more primitive aspects of indigenous music. His reputation grew at home and abroad, and in 1927 he rejected the offer of a position as director of the conservatory in Cairo in favour of the financially less rewarding position of director of the Warsaw Conservatory, which in 1930 became the Warsaw Academy of Music, an institution of which he remained rector until his resignation in 1932.

The five years that Szymanowski spent at the Conservatory and the Academy brought many frustrations, particularly in dealing with musicians of a conservative turn of mind, and these difficulties finally led to his resignation. The remaining years of his life were not easy, without any regular source of income, and he therefore made more public appearances as a performer, writing the piano part of his *Symphony No. 4* in 1932 to suit his own relatively modest piano technique, no longer adequate for the more taxing compositions of his earlier career. In the same year he was greatly encouraged by the performance in Prague of his opera *King Roger*, a work that deals imaginatively with a struggle in medieval Sicily between Christianity and an Eastern Dionysian religion, a further example of his absorption of the essence of other cultures than his own, and of his reading of Euripides.

Szymanowski's final years were clouded by illness and he sought an alleviation of the effects of tuberculosis abroad in Davos, Grasse and Cannes, and finally in Lausanne, where he died on 29th March 1937. His last orchestral work was a second violin concerto, completed in 1933, followed by two *Mazurkas* for piano, written in the following year. The ballet *Harnasie*, inspired by the primitive folk-music of the people living in the Tatra mountains, was staged in Prague in 1935 and the following year, with much success, in Paris, with choreography by Serge Lifar. It became a popular part of Polish ballet repertoire after its first performance in Poznan in 1938, a year after the composer's death.

Szymanowski's twenty *Mazurkas*, *Opus 50*, were written in 1924 and 1925. While the title may suggest a debt to Chopin, these *Mazurkas* owe more to the Mazur source of the dance, drawing on varied folk material from the Tatras, although the result is very much in the composer's own mature idiom.

The three pieces that form *Metopes* were completed in 1915, a reflection of Szymanowski's travels in Southern Europe the year before and of his study of Greek civilisation now undertaken in the war-time isolation of Timoszówka. The title of the set of pieces suggested the figures in low-relief on the pediment of an ancient Greek temple. The individual pieces take their character from Homer's *Odyssey*, the account of the long home-coming of the Greek hero Odysseus after the fall of Troy. Adventures that befell him on his way back to Ithaca include a narrow escape from the Island of the Sirens and a still closer encounter with the sorceress

Calypso, who can change men into swine. Nausicaa represents an element of more obvious human charm, a girl, daughter of a local king, met by the ship-wrecked Odysseus on the shore where she plays with her attendant maidens. There are clear suggestions of the evocative idiom of Debussy in the piano writing, not least in the suggestion of water.

The four *Etudes, Opus 4*, come from relatively early in Szymanowski's career, written between 1902 and 1904 and betraying an overt debt to Chopin and to Skryabin. The impressive first of the series is followed by a rapid and brief second *Etude*. The slightly longer third of the set is possibly the best known of all, in its mood of tender melancholy nostalgia. The fourth *Etude*, with its torrents of notes, suggested another aspect of Chopin.

Szymanowski's *Sonata No. 2, Opus 21*, was completed in 1911, at the time of the composition of the *Second Symphony*, and was described by the composer as diabolically difficult. The challenge was taken up by Artur Rubinstein, who gave the first performance in Warsaw in the same programme as the new symphony. The form of the work, in two movements, is that of a sonata movement followed by a theme and variations, ending with a fugue, marked *Allegro moderato, poco scherzando e capriccioso*.

Martin Roscoe

Martin Roscoe is one of the busiest and most versatile pianists in Britain, where he has appeared with major orchestras and has a particularly close association with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. He is a frequent broadcaster, with some two hundred broadcasts as recitalist, chamber musician and concert soloist and has made regular appearances at the London Henry Wood Promenade Concerts. Martin Roscoe has performed in the Bath, Cheltenham, Ryedale, Harrogate, Cambridge, Three Choirs and Edinburgh Festivals. Tours abroad have taken him to South America, Cuba, Australia and Hong Kong, in addition to concert appearances throughout Europe.



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STEREO

DDD

Playing
Time:
66'44''

Karol
SZYMANOWSKI

(1882 – 1937)

Piano Works Vol. 1

Martin Roscoe, Piano

Mazurkas, Op. 50
Nos. 1 – 4

- | | | |
|----------|-------|--------|
| 1 | No. 1 | (2:02) |
| 2 | No. 2 | (2:13) |
| 3 | No. 3 | (2:27) |
| 4 | No. 4 | (2:46) |

Metopes, Op. 29

- | | | |
|----------|-------------------|--------|
| 5 | L'Île des Sirènes | (5:25) |
| 6 | Calypso | (5:34) |
| 7 | Nausicaa | (4:31) |

Four Studies, Op. 4

- | | | |
|-----------|-------|--------|
| 8 | No. 1 | (3:28) |
| 9 | No. 2 | (1:53) |
| 10 | No. 3 | (4:28) |
| 11 | No. 4 | (3:22) |

Piano Sonata No. 2
in A Major, Op. 21

- | | | |
|-----------|-----------------------|---------|
| 12 | Allegro assai | (9:45) |
| 13 | Allegretto tranquillo | (18:40) |

Recorded at St. Martin's Church, East Woodhay,
in February 1994.

Producer: Gary Cole

Music Notes: Keith Anderson

Cover Painting by Olexander Borodai

