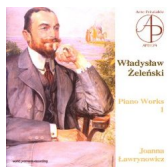


**Żeleński - Piano works Vol. 1 (2005)**



1. *Deux Morceaux op.63, I Toccata* 2. *Deux Morceaux op.63, II Idylle in B major* 3. *Ode to Youth, Solemn March op.51* 4. *March in Honour of the Immortal National Bard Adam Mickiewicz op.44* 5. *Deux Mazurkas op.31, Mazurka no. 1 in C sharp minor, Moderato* 6. *Deux Mazurkas op.31, Mazurka no. 2 in A major, Non troppo vivo, ma con gran brio* 7. *Sonata in E minor op. 20 in Seinem Freunde Stanislaus Tomkowicz, I Allegro con moto* 8. *Sonata in E minor op. 20 in Seinem Freunde Stanislaus Tomkowicz, II Adagio* 9. *Sonata in E minor op. 20 in Seinem Freunde Stanislaus Tomkowicz, III Scherzo* 10. *Sonata in E minor op. 20 in Seinem Freunde Stanislaus Tomkowicz, IV Allegro moderato* Joanna Ławrynowicz – piano

Jan Jarnicki's admirable – one might say heroic - work in service of the great Polish musical heritage has already led him to publish scores of some of the compositions of Władysław Żeleński. He has also issued at least two previous CDs entirely devoted to Żeleński – one containing organ preludes played by Julia Smykowska, the other a selection of songs performed by the soprano Anna Michalska-Przybysz and the pianist Małgorzata Wielgolinska. Now here is what is labelled as 'Volume One' of the Piano Works.

Żeleński was born near Krakow and it was there that he initially studied music, before advanced studies in Prague and Paris - finding time along the way to attain a doctorate in philosophy from the university of Prague. From 1881 he was director of the Conservatory in Krakow and a central figure in the musical life of the city – and the country – as composer, teacher and conductor. As a composer his works included at least four operas, choral compositions, a symphony, five string quartets and many songs, in addition to his works for solo piano.

On the present CD the young pianist Joanna Ławrynowicz plays – with considerable insight – both small and large-scale works by Żeleński. The programme includes his second piano sonata, a work dedicated to Stanislaus Tomkowicz, one of the great historians of Krakow. This

is a substantial piece in four movements, on the classical pattern. It is well made and polished, if perhaps a bit longer than it need be. The first movement has some attractive themes handled in orthodox sonata form. The adagio is a set of mostly rather stately variations, the scherzo has some interesting writing for the left hand. There is some adroit fugal writing in the final allegro. The whole is firmly in the classical/romantic tradition of the second half of the nineteenth century. It is enjoyable listening without being especially individual – one hears echoes of other composers and nothing happens to make one sit up in surprise.

The smaller-scale works elsewhere on the CD similarly suggest a composer with a pleasant gift for lyrical melodies and a 'correct', rather conventional harmonic sense. Tracks 3 and 4 consist of two somewhat solemn pieces which come close to overstaying their welcome. The Toccata which opens the programme entertainingly juxtaposes insistently rhythmic figures and a lyric grace. The Idyll is appropriately dreamy and suggestive and is presented affectionately and convincingly by Ławrynowicz. One is perhaps most aware of the shadow of Chopin in the two Mazurkas, particularly in the sentimentality of the shorter piece in C sharp minor; the second is perhaps the more interesting, in which a heroic theme frames an extended passage of quiet mysteriousness.

The music on this CD is not, perhaps, such as to make the blood race. It is not keyboard writing which demands fireworks from the soloist – though it is, in places, demanding enough. It isn't music that startles or surprises by its individuality. But Żeleński is thoroughly at home in his chosen idiom and anyone fond of the piano music of this period will surely find things to enjoy in what is on offer here. ---Glyn Pursglove, musicweb-international.com

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