

Karol Szymanowski - Violin Concertos & Myths (Baiba Skride) (2013)



Szymanowski: Violin Concerto No. 1, Op. 35 24:38 1. *Vivace assai* 5:54 2. *Tempo comodo - Andantino* 5:26 3. *Vivace scherzando* 1:19 4. *Poco meno - Allegretto* 6:24 5. *Vivace (Tempo I)* 5:35
Szymanowski: Violin Concerto No. 2, Op. 61 19:42 6. *Moderato, molto tranquillo* 5:31 7. *Andantino sostenuto* 5:46 8. *Allegramente, molto energico* 3:33 9. *Andantino, molto tranquillo* 4:52
Szymanowski: Mythes, Op. 30, M. 29 21:10
10. No. 1. *The Fountain of Arethusa* 5:45 11. No. 2. *Narcissus* 7:41 12. No. 3. *Dryads and Pan* 7:44
Baiba Skride - violin Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra (#1-9) Vasily Petrenko - conductor (#1-9)
Lauma Skride - piano (#10-12)

Years ago it seemed that Szymanowski's music was the property of Polish musicians, as little of it ventured outside Poland. As to the violin concertos, it was Thomas Zehetmair with Simon Rattle and the City of Birmingham Symphony who broke the mold for many of us. Their EMI recording still holds a special place in the recorded literature of the composer. Yet here we have a terrific violinist accompanied by an equally superb orchestra and conductor who easily challenges that recording.

Szymanowski dedicated both of these concertos to Polish violinist Paul Kochanski, who encouraged the composer to write them and championed them until his death in 1933. He worked closely with Szymanowski on the violin parts. The First Violin Concerto shows the influence of Debussy and early Stravinsky in its exotic and rather impressionistic nature. Szymanowski based the work on a poem by Tadeusz Miciński, "May Night", though without any detailed musical programme. It has a nocturne-like atmosphere when it begins and then grows into something dynamic and ecstatic before evaporating pianissimo, "as if with the muted voices of the night", so described by Sebastian Strauss in his excellent notes to the CD. Where Zehetmair and Rattle brought out the Debussian elements well in their recording, Skride and

Petrenko are bolder and more dynamic. Skride has a vast range of colours in her violin tone and Petrenko provides very detailed accompaniment. Both violinists are well integrated with their orchestral counterparts, but with Skride and Petrenko the listener is more aware of the intricate detail of the composition. Some of this is due to the clearer and more present recording, but mostly it is the artists whose interpretative focus is different. Both are valid approaches to the First Violin Concerto. With Skride and Petrenko I am reminded of Stravinsky's Firebird, rather than Debussy. That's not to say that the unique character of Szymanowski is in the least slighted. The concertos represent the composer at his mature best. It is interesting that stylistically he did not travel all that far sixteen years later when he penned the Second Violin Concerto, even with its allusions to the folk music of the Tatra Mountains.

There is a lesser difference of approach in the two accounts of the Violin Concerto No. 2, where the folk elements are made apparent, even if the orchestral texture is dense at times. Nonetheless, Skride and Petrenko are that much bolder and the recording allows one to appreciate the orchestral part better than with Rattle. The Oslo Philharmonic plays wonderfully throughout both works and I continue to be hugely impressed with Vasily Petrenko whose selection of repertoire continues to bring out his strengths. I am a real fan of his Shostakovich and it is now hoped he will perform more Szymanowski. As for Baiba Skride, her recording two years earlier of the Frank Martin and Stravinsky violin concertos quickly has become one of my favourite discs - especially for the Martin work which had not received its due before that. I find it amazing how quietly Skride creeps in at the beginning of Szymanowski's First Violin Concerto with a silvery tone and then can turn this into something intense and lustrous later in that work and throughout the Second Violin Concerto. With her fabulous technique I am sure we will be hearing a great deal from her as she records pieces that demand to be heard, rather than doing only the warhorses on which so many violinists today have earned their reputations. Patricia Kopatchinskaja is another such violinist who has demonstrated that doing modern repertoire well enhances one's reputation more than just playing it safe with the chestnuts of the past.

If the two concertos on this disc were not enough to convince me of her extraordinary talent, Baiba Skride supplements these with the perfect "filler", the Myths for violin and piano. Here she is accompanied on the piano by her sister, Lauma. The three Myths with their titles of "The Fountain of Arethusa", "Narcissus" and "Dryads and Pan" respectively, are clearly impressionistic with piano writing that recalls Debussy in its delicate filigree. Szymanowski composed them the year before the Violin Concerto No. 1 and some of the violin writing, in particular the high register of the opening of "The Fountain of Arethusa", can also be found in the violin concerto. The harmony in the second Myth, "Narcissus", on the other hand, is also reminiscent of Ravel. The last of the Myths, "Dryads and Pan", is virtuosic and whimsical and sounds less like Debussy or Ravel - more like the Szymanowski of the concertos. I compared this recording with another favourite, the reissued disc of these works with Isabelle Faust and Ewa Kupiec on Harmonia Mundi that I reviewed here last year. Where Faust and Kupiec are more direct in their interpretation, the Skrides show greater tonal and dynamic variety. Their tempi are also varied more than the formers. There is not all that much in it and I would not want

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to be without either account. The deciding factor comes down to the particular couplings. Faust and Kupiec contribute first-rate performances of Janaček's Violin Sonata and Lutosławski's Partita and Subito on their CD.

For an all-Szymanowski programme, this current one will be hard to equal. Indeed, the artists have set a new standard for the violin concertos. Lauma Skride is as impressive in her role as her sister is, so a recording of Szymanowski's piano music would be welcome from her at any time.

I have reviewed many superb recordings this year, but none finer than this one. It should appear high on my list of Recordings of the Year. ---Leslie Wright, musicweb-international.com

Twórczość naszego kompozytora Karola Szymanowskiego rozprzestrzenia się na coraz większą skalę. Świadczy o tym między innymi powyższa płyta, na której możemy usłyszeć pierwsze dwa koncerty skrzypcowe w wykonaniu młodej, charyzmatycznej skrzypaczki, Baiby Skride. Album zamykają "Mity", które na fortepianie wykonuje Lauma Skride. ---empik.com

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