

Zarzycki · Żeleński

'The Romantic Piano Concerto, Vol 59'

Zarzycki Piano Concerto, Op 17. Grande Polonaise,
Op 7 Żeleński Piano Concerto, Op 60

Jonathan Plowright *pf*

BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra / Łukasz Borowicz
Hyperion Ⓢ CDA67958 (61' • DDD)



Plowright goes Polish for 59th in the Rom-Con piano series

Władysław Żeleński's overture *In the Tatras* (1870) is still a popular concert item in Poland and Aleksander Zarzycki's Mazurka in G can be heard on a delightful 1940 recording by the violinist Ossy Renardi. For those who, like me, know nothing else of these Polish composers, Adrian Thomas's informative booklet tells us that both men were significant figures in the development of musical education in Warsaw. Zarzycki (1834-95) was the first director of the Warsaw Music Society and then of the city's Music Institute. Żeleński (1837-1921) succeeded him before moving to Kraków in a similar post.

Zarzycki's *Grande Polonaise* is a jolly Weber-cum-Chopin crowd pleaser. His later two-movement concerto, dedicated to Nikolai Rubinstein, dates from 1860. No first movement would seem to exist, though it feels as though there should be one, and the work begins 'as if in mid-sentence' (Thomas) with an *Andante* – a rather undistinguished one at that – before the krakowiak-like second movement. The unpromising opening material gives way to a heart-easing secondary subject.

Żeleński's E flat major Concerto (1903) is the more interesting work. The first and last movements are based on sprightly dance forms, the second is a theme and variations, while all three show the composer's predilection for thematic counterpoint. The soloist is kept busy throughout. And who better to do the business than that alchemist among keyboard players, Jonathan Plowright, who has that rare ability to turn second-rate music into masterpieces (viz, inter alia, his recordings of Stojowski's concertos in the same series – 6/02)? Buy the disc for the Żeleński finale alone. A word, too, about his conductor Łukasz Borowicz who catches spot-on every tricky twist and turn and inspires the BBC Scottish players in their cracking accompaniment. We'll be hearing a lot more of him.

Jeremy Nicholas

'Live at the Royal Albert Hall'



Berlioz *Le corsaire*, Op 21^a Chopin Piano Concerto
No 2, Op 21^b Gluck Orfeo ed Euridice – Dance of the
Blessed Spirits (trans Sgambati)^c Ravel *Daphnis et
Chloé* – Suite No 2^a Roussel Symphony No 3, Op 42^a

^bNelson Freire *pf*

^aBBC Symphony Orchestra / Lionel Bringuier

Bel Air Classiques Ⓢ DVD BAC079; Ⓢ BAC479
(95' • NTSC • 16:9 • DD5.1 & PCM stereo • O)

Recorded live at the Royal Albert Hall, London,
August 12, 2010



Bringuier's memorable 2010 Proms debut issued on DVD

He looks hardly old enough to have started shaving but, lo, the flash of a smile, an energised swing of the shoulders from the 26-year-old Lionel Bringuier and we hurtle off into *Le corsaire*. Towards the conclusion of the overture, the cameras catch a couple of string players smiling with pleasure. You might catch yourself doing the same.

Nelson Freire is the soloist in Chopin's F minor Concerto, one of his favourites. The least flashy of virtuosos, he conjures up a phenomenal palette of colours by the most economical means. I would urge anyone to hear this performance with Bringuier. The slow movement is mesmerising, with lovely contributions from the solo bassoon (Graham Sheen). Freire seems to do less than anybody else while saying much more, something he repeats in the Gluck-Sgambati encore. You may find your eyes, like mine, unaccountably burning.

The second half is very much the orchestra's and young maestro's showcase, opening with Roussel's Third Symphony from 1930, a Koussevitzky commission to celebrate the Boston Symphony Orchestra's 50th anniversary. Roussel is one of those composers who does not fall into any convenient category, one reason, perhaps, why his music in general and this hugely assured and unpredictable four-movement symphony in particular are heard so infrequently (this was only its fourth Proms outing). Bringuier's crisp, expressive technique is ideally suited to it. His facial expressions and exuberant gestures at climaxes remind one of Leonard Bernstein without the terpsichorean extras. You can sense even the oldest, most cynical hands in the band responding to his charismatic direction with enthusiasm.

This superlative performance is followed by another out of the top drawer of Ravel's Second *Daphnis and Chloé* Suite. I've rarely heard the opening 'murmur of rivulets fed by the dew that trickles from the rocks' so finely executed and perfectly balanced. Along the way we are treated to an outstanding flute solo from Michael Cox (likewise Stephen Bryant's violin in the Roussel) until the final joyous spine-tingling tumult.

All in all, a tremendous concert, one to return to with or without the pictures, and a souvenir of a stunning London debut by a conductor who is going to be around for a long time leading the world's greatest orchestras.

Jeremy Nicholas