



Discovery of the Month



Wladyslaw ŻELEŃSKI (1837-1921)

Piano Concerto in E flat, Op.60 (1903) [34:00]

Aleksander ZARZYCKI (1834-1895)

Piano Concerto in A flat, Op. 17 (1859-1860) [17:21]

Grande Polonaise in E flat major Op.7 [10:03]

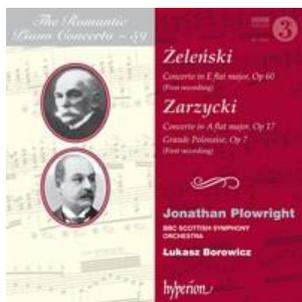
Jonathan Plowright (piano)

BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra/Lukasz Borowicz

rec. June 2012, City Halls, Candleriggs, Glasgow, UK

Pdf booklet included

HYPERION CDA67958 [61:24] – from hyperion-records.co.uk (mp3, 16/44.1 and 24/96 lossless)



It's hard to believe that the Romantic Piano Concerto project – which began as a lunch meeting between Hyperion and the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra in 1990 – has now reached No. 60. It's been a magnificent traversal of often little known or frankly neglected works, featuring a *Who's Who* of modern keyboard virtuosi. Among these is the multi-award-winning pianist Jonathan Plowright who, I must confess, is new to me. The Warsaw-born conductor Lukasz Borowicz is also unfamiliar, but I see from his bio he's worked with conducting compatriots Antoni Wit – well known for his recordings for Naxos – and Kazimierz Kord, who conducted a fondly remembered Rachmaninov 2nd Piano Concerto with Ilana Vered back in the 1970s (Decca).

The Polish composer and music educator Wladyslaw Żeleński's only piano concerto is an engaging work; unashamedly Romantic in idiom it also has a focus and rigour that for all its 19th-century echoes – the Grieg A minor concerto in particular – makes for a most distinctive and individual piece. The dancing, native rhythms of the third movement are especially appealing, and Borowicz elicits some lovely, spontaneous playing from the BBCSSO. Most impressive though is the understated yet eloquent advocacy of Plowright, who brings much effervescence and charm to the proceedings. The high-res recording is a little on the bright side, but there's enough oomph in those tasteful tuttis to make amends.

Aleksander Zarzycki's two-movement concerto – dedicated to Nikolai Rubinstein – may well have been prefaced with an opening *Allegro*, but as Adrian Thomas points out in his admirably succinct liner-notes the Paris premiere only featured the *Andante* and *Allegro non troppo* recorded here. From the moody opening bars it's clear this is a much more refulgent work, whose rising, rhapsodic character is superbly realised by this fine pianist. True, the orchestration is conventional and more than a little diffuse at times, but there's more than enough incident – and, in the *Andante*, moments of ear-pricking introspection – to sustain one's interest to the end.

Balances are very believable throughout, although I don't find the overall sound quite as appealing as that captured on Hyperion's class-leading solo piano recordings. That said, there's detail and warmth aplenty in this high-res download, so that's a minor quibble only. The *Grande Polonaise* – an overt homage to Chopin and nationalist sentiment – is certainly animated, if perhaps a little too rhetorical for my tastes, and Plowright makes the most of its restless, roaming elements. Borowicz brings out the work's dance rhythms well enough, and it makes for a most entertaining filler.

In a long-running series such as this – and especially one whose *raison d'être* is to ferret out the arcane and obscure – there's a real risk of duds from time to time. I've not heard all 60 discs but of those I have encountered musical interest has triumphed on every occasion. That's certainly true of this new instalment, although Żeleński's is by far the most memorable and original work here. As for Plowright, he's a welcome addition to Hyperion's roster of top-notch pianists, and I look forward to reviewing his other recordings soon.

Even the weaker pieces get a persuasive outing; another good 'un from Hyperion.

Dan Morgan

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There's nothing much to add except that I've awarded the ***Discovery of the Month*** heading for obvious reasons. **BW**