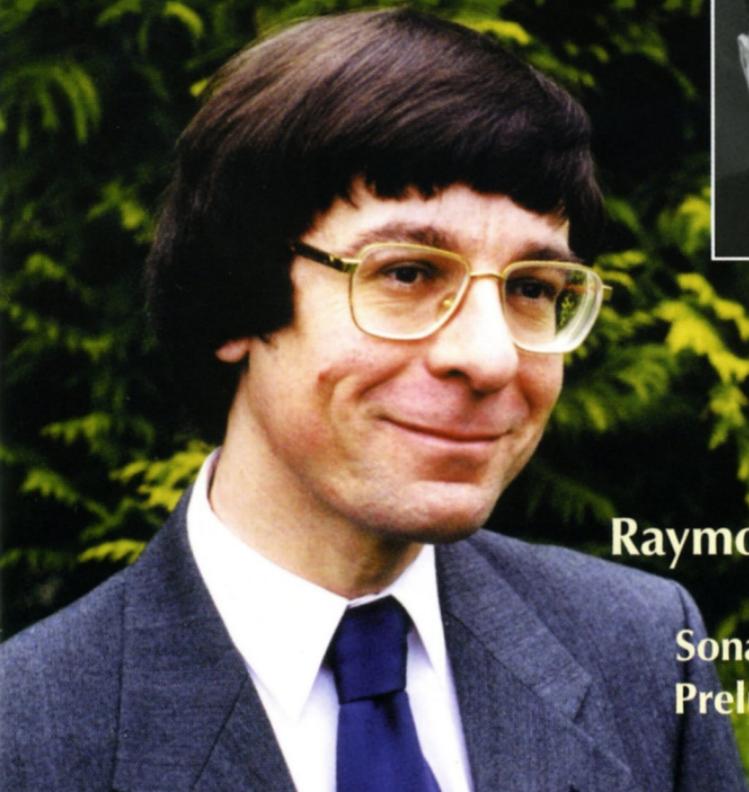
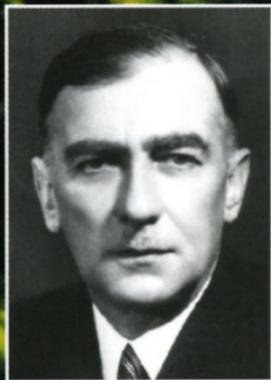




ATHENE
compact discs

SZYMANOWSKI



Raymond Clarke
piano

Sonatas 1, 2 & 3
Prelude & Fugue

KAROL SZYMANOWSKI (1882-1937)

PIANO SONATA No. 1 IN C MINOR, Op. 8 26' 49"

- [1] Allegro moderato 6' 58"
- [2] Adagio 5' 32"
- [3] Tempo di Minuetto 4' 13"
- [4] Adagio - Allegro energico 9' 55"

PRELUDE AND FUGUE IN C SHARP MINOR 6' 15"

- [5] Preludium : Lento, ma non troppo, rubato 2' 42"
- [6] Fuga a 4 voci : Andante 3' 32"

PIANO SONATA No. 2 IN A MAJOR, Op. 21 23' 51"

- [7] Allegro assai 7' 41"
- [8] Theme (Allegretto tranquillo) with variations and concluding fugue (Allegro moderato) 16' 03"

PIANO SONATA No. 3, Op. 36 15' 50"

- [9] In one movement

Total Playing Time: 73' 50"

Production & Digital Editing: **Joanna Leach**

Recording: **Mike Beville**

Recorded at the Djanogly Recital Hall, Nottingham University,
on 7, 8 & 9 September 1998

Cover: Karol Szymanowski (inset) and Raymond Clarke

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Karol Szymanowski is the most important Polish composer since Frédéric Chopin (the Polish-born Andrzej Panufnik made a contribution to twentieth-century music of comparable value to that of Szymanowski, but wrote most of his greatest works after taking UK citizenship in 1961). Describing Szymanowski's style to listeners unfamiliar with it is difficult, as although one can cite vague apparently-unreconcilable influences such as Debussy, Scriabin, Strauss and Reger, to do so over-simplifies the unique character of Szymanowski's music, which is ultimately too individual to be mistaken for any other composer. It is also relevant to cite Bartók - although here the influence was reciprocal, as he is known to have studied Szymanowski's work - as both composers assimilated the folk idiom of their respective homelands into their music, complete with the rough edges which are part of genuine folk culture, and the technical construction of both composers' later music shows creative design on a high level of thought. All of Szymanowski's most important writings (some of them highly appreciative of the work of musical figures with whose aims one might not necessarily have expected him to be sympathetic, although there are plenty of outspoken and critical assessments too) have now been translated by Alistair Wightman and published with much other valuable material in *Szymanowski on Music* (1999), a book in which the composer's own words clarify his views on many artistic topics relating to his own work and that of others, including Bartók. Szymanowski's startlingly-original *Twenty Mazurkas, Op.50* (1924-25), show the validity of such a compositional comparison with Bartók, the *sound* of whose music they do not resemble at all and the last of the sonatas on this CD, whilst its surface extravagance seems far removed from the mazurkas, has an underlyingly concision which is recognisably that of their composer.

Although neither of the earlier sonatas possesses such a clear focus as Szymanowski was to accomplish later, they still earn a place amongst the most valuable piano sonatas of the late-romantic era, along with those of Rachmaninov and Medtner.

As a child, Szymanowski received his first piano lessons from his father and soon afterwards he studied with his uncle, Gustav Neuhaus, a German emigré, who ran a music school in Elizavetgrad. Gustav Neuhaus was a strong influence on the young composer not only in music but in all cultural aspects, and his son, Heinrich Neuhaus was to become one of the leading advocates of Szymanowski's piano music. This was an ideal environment in which to develop artistically (no less a pianist than Vladimir Horowitz insisted in later life that Heinrich Neuhaus was - next to Felix Blumenfeld, Heinrich's uncle - the most important influence on his *own* early development) but the manuscripts of two early unpublished piano sonatas, in G minor and F sharp minor, written by Szymanowski in the 1890s, have been lost. His earliest surviving sonata dates from 1903-4. The composer Ludomir Rozycki reminisced that "when he was working on his *First Piano Sonata, Op.8*, I found him frequently at the instrument studying in minute detail the structure of passages in Chopin and Scriabin." There are parallels between this work and Chopin's *First Sonata*, though for all its (to my ears) inspired ideas, the latter has always been one of Chopin's least-esteemed pieces and is unlikely to have been a work Szymanowski sought consciously to emulate : both have outer movements in C minor, a slow movement in A flat major and a minuet in E flat major, neither sonata is a mature work, and their adventurous features can sound incongruous within the traditional overall idioms both composers adopted. The opening movement of Szymanowski's *First Sonata* is flawed, with a first theme

which relies on chromatic clichés in its bid to sound expressive, an unmemorable second theme and some exaggerated dramatic gestures at the end. The slow movement is more imaginative, a nocturne interrupted by an agitated G sharp minor section. When the opening music returns, it is decorated, marked "a little less tranquil", and leads to a coda which is even more relaxed than the opening. The minuet which follows recalls Chopin's *Étude in E flat, Op.10 No.11*, with its arpeggiations in both hands and the lightness created by the restricted use of the bass register. The *Trio* in B major forms a striking contrast before a return of the initial minuet and a nostalgic coda. The lengthy introduction to the finale, three bars of mysterious octaves then a slow portentous march, dispels the lightweight mood of the minuet in favour of greater seriousness. The fugue now launched by Szymanowski is an impressive one, its first theme based on the opening three bars of the introduction, its complex contrapuntal texture nevertheless idiomatic to play. The second fugal theme is in B major, a tonal area prepared for by the *Trio* of the minuet, but this leads to an apparent dead end with static repeated chords. The young composer's unconvincing solution is to bring back, *adagio*, the main theme of the first movement. The fugue resumes with both of its themes combined and the work concludes in C major, *ffff*. The *First Sonata* may be no masterpiece, but its music is never dull, and composing the piece gave Szymanowski experience for his later sonatas, which tackle the same issues of cyclical structure and thematic unity.

In 1910, the *First Sonata* was awarded first prize in a competition organised by the Chopin Birth Centenary Committee. By this time, Szymanowski's music had developed considerably, as one can hear in the *Prelude and Fugue in C sharp minor* (1905-1909), which itself had

already received second prize in a competition sponsored by *Signale für die Musikalische Welt*, with Ferruccio Busoni one of the three jury members. Composed in the year after the sonata's completion, the cool elegance of the fugue is far removed in character from the embattled fugue in the sonata, although its style is similar. The prelude was added four years later, with the competition specifically in mind, and although the evolution of its composer's musical language is evident here, it complements the fugue well, despite one's expectations that such a juxtaposition would create a discrepancy. It is surprising that Szymanowski did not consider this composition significant enough to allocate it an opus number.

The first performance of the *Second Sonata* (1910-1911) was given by the 24-year-old Artur Rubinstein, in Warsaw in April 1911, the same month as the premiere of the *Second Symphony*. Both works were repeated in Berlin, Leipzig and Vienna the following winter, and their success in Vienna brought the composer a publishing contract with Universal Edition in March 1912. The two works are connected in that both are two-movement designs in which the second movement consists of variations which include dance elements (a sarabande and minuet in the sonata, a gavotte and minuet in the symphony) followed by a fugue. The *Second Sonata* is one of the most elaborate piano compositions of artistic value ever written, but the density of its textures arises from the musical substance itself rather than, like much empty piano repertoire of the romantic era, from a self-conscious desire by its composer to produce 'virtuoso' keyboard writing. Szymanowski has taken such care over every detail of the keyboard layout that although the work presents a challenge to the pianist, its technical demands remain realistic, but even so, it was a remarkable feat that Heinrich Neuhaus performed the work successfully in Vienna

in 1913 only nineteen days after receiving the music. The opening plunges immediately into shifting harmonies, the notes distributed so as to employ all registers simultaneously. In the score, performance directions such as *passionato*, *con fuoco* and *furioso* indicate the predominant nature of the music in the first movement, though the second theme, *quasi andante*, provides respite. The second movement combines elements of a scherzo, slow movement and finale. The theme and variations format used here had been explored earlier by Szymanowski within his solo piano music in the *Variations in B flat minor*, Op.3 (where the inclusion of a waltz and a mazurka foreshadows the use of dance movements in the variations of the sonata and symphony) and in the *Variations on a Polish Folk-Tune*, Op.10 (where, as in the sonata and symphony, the conclusion consists of a fugue based on the theme of the preceding variations). A slow section, leading into a long pedal point on E, prepares for the fugue, whose texture is saturated with intricate thematic invention, yet contains no superfluous elements. The coda confirms the home key of A major with extreme emphasis.

The process which compressed the four-movement design of the *First Sonata* into the two-movement format of its successor is completed in the magnificent *Third Sonata* (1917), which is in one continuous movement, although the outline of a four-movement work is still discernible. Whereas the *Second Sonata* is sufficiently tonal for the listener to detect often a conflict between the chromatic harmony used constantly on the surface and the underlying sometimes relatively-diatonic base onto which it refuses to resolve for more than an instant, in that the music can be perceived frequently in terms of incessant elaborations of simpler chords, in the *Third Sonata* there is so little sense of any stable key trying to manifest itself that, although the

harmony is consequently even more complicated to analyse, it creates less tension, so the music's character is less stressful. Jim Samson, author of the first study of the composer's music in English, has devoted a chapter to Szymanowski in another of his books, *Music in Transition* (1977) and describes this sonata there as one of "the most harmonically intractable of Szymanowski's middle-period works", but points out how "tonal thinking exerts its influence in a subtle, indirect manner". The keyboard textures are particularly imaginative, reflecting perhaps those of the programmatic piano works *Métopes* (1915) and *Masques* (1915-16) which had followed the previous sonata. The composer's compression of his ideas into a smaller space than before is evident within the opening bars, *presto*, where wisps of sound dissolve into silence and the first of the *meno mosso* passages appears at a much earlier point than does the first slowing of tempo in the *Second Sonata*. The sense of each idea being displaced at the earliest opportunity by the next, such as the *animato* section which evaporates after only twelve bars of irregular rhythm to give way to a new texture, continues throughout the music which corresponds to a 'first movement'. After a silence, the 'second movement' follows, an *adagio* which is as expressively intense in its quiet outer sections as in the threatening music at its centre. The repeated D flats characterising the earlier *animato* passage return as repeated C sharps to introduce the brief *assai vivace* serving as the 'third movement', a brief and disconcerting scherzo linking the slow movement with the 'finale'. Yet again, the last section is a fugue, but too different in form from that of the previous sonatas to permit any criticism that the composer is repeating himself. Having integrated all of its themes and motifs so naturally that for many hearings one is likely to be unaware of the sophisticated technical processes at work, the music begins to drift on

the last page, exploring fragments quietly, but Szymanowski dismisses such a hint at directionlessness with a sudden *prestissimo* conclusion. The concentration of this sonata as a whole is summed up by its very last gesture, which replaces the mighty culmination of the *Second Sonata* with an ending which uses only three notes finally to establish the long-implied tonal centre of E.

©1999 Raymond Clarke

Raymond Clarke was born in Bournemouth in 1963. He was awarded an academic exhibition to read Music at Selwyn College, Cambridge University, where he gave his first recital at the comparatively-late age of 20. After graduating, he studied at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester with Ryszard Bakst, himself a Neuhaus pupil, and featured Szymanowski's *Third Sonata* in the public examination recital in June 1987 which formed the conclusion of his studies. Raymond chose this sonata (along with Andrzej Panufnik's *Pentasonata*) for his BBC Radio 3 debut recital, first broadcast in March 1992. The remaining works on this CD have been added to his repertoire more recently, specifically for this release.

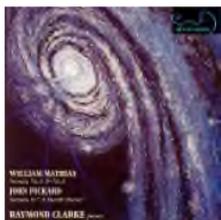
Raymond's concert programmes have included many 20th-century classics such as the complete Prokofiev sonata cycle, Messiaen's *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus*, the three Pierre Boulez sonatas and the four Michael Tippett sonatas. From the start of his career he was keen to advocate music by contemporary composers and following a performance of Panufnik's *Piano Concerto*, the composer wrote to him "I listened with great pleasure and I admired immensely your musicianship and wonderful technique. The slow movement was very poetic and you gave so much vitality to the last movement." As early as October 1988, *Music and Musicians* commented that already

Raymond "at last count has almost as much modern British music in his repertoire as the London Sinfonietta", but he prefers not to be regarded as a specialist in this field : his London concerto debut in October 1989 was in fact in Beethoven's *Emperor Concerto*, later that season he gave five recitals of Beethoven's solo piano music in London, including all the later sonatas from Op.81a onwards and his most recent broadcast for BBC Radio 3 featured Beethoven's *Sonata in C minor, Op.111*. His repertoire also includes all the sonatas by Mozart and Schubert.

His first CD featured Ronald Stevenson's eighty-minute *Passacaglia on DSCH* of which *Gramophone* commented that the artist "seems to be completely unfazed by the *Passacaglia's* ferocious technical demands...an important release". His second disc was devoted to the complete solo piano music of Robert Simpson and was featured in *Gramophone's* "Critics' Choice" of the best recordings issued in 1996. *Hi-Fi News & Record Review* wrote "hair-raising interpretative and technical demands are effortlessly surmounted by dedicatee, Raymond Clarke...performed with immense authority and understanding...A very strong recommendation". Hyperion has now invited him to record Simpson's *Piano Concerto* with Vernon Handley conducting. His first CD for Athene-Minerva consisted of Havergal Brian's complete piano music and this was followed by a disc containing sonatas by William Mathias and John Pickard, *Classic CD* writing of "a pianist who combines an emotional commitment to the music with a prodigious technique. The whole disc is enthralling. It is music-making of the first order". Also released on this label is a CD of Shostakovich's piano music.

Raymond's subsequent recordings have been issued on Divine Art and Diversions.

More recordings by Raymond Clarke



William Mathias & John Pickard - Piano Sonatas

Divisions DDV 24111

"Enthralling, magnificent." – Classic CD

"First rate recording – an excellent disc." – BBC Music Magazine



Aaron Copland – Music for Piano

Divine Art DDA 25016

"Clarke is in complete command... first-class playing." – Gramophone

"Flawless technique. Enthusiastically recommended." – Musical Opinion



Shostakovich and Panufnik – Piano Music

Divine Art DDA 25018

"Fascinating program intelligently executed." – American Record Guide

"Another magnificent offering from this fine performer." – MusicWeb



Piano Music for Children

Divine Art DDA 25022

"Brilliant." – MusicWeb

"Very fine – a recording to savour." – The Pianist



Havergal Brian – The Complete Piano Music

Athene ATHCD12 (ATH 23012)

“Outstanding... very beautiful.” – Tempo

“Excellent... beautifully atmospheric.” – BBC Music Magazine



Shostakovich – Preludes and Fugues / Sonatas 1 & 2

Athene ATHCD18 (ATH 23018)

“An absolute winner, legendary and superlative. Definitive.” – MusicWeb

“A Powerhouse... Clarke is perfect.” – American Record Guide

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