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ROMANTIC
PIANO

JÓZEF
WIENIAWSKI
Polonaise No. 1 in C major
Andrew Cannestra



Romantic Piano • 5

Józef Wieniawski (1837–1912)

Józef Wieniawski was a prolific Polish composer and virtuoso pianist. Coming from a musical family, musicians and audience members alike are likely to be familiar with his more famous older brother, virtuoso violinist and composer Henryk Wieniawski (1835–1880). The two brothers even collaborated with one another in composing several pieces together, most famously the *Allegro de Sonata in G minor, Op. 2*, which they performed together in concert many times. As a solo concert pianist, Józef toured widely across Europe throughout his lifetime, becoming only the second pianist to perform Chopin's complete études in concert (after Franz Liszt) and frequently programming his own works. While his music fell into relative obscurity during the 20th century, contemporary performers have begun to revitalise his works, and this album presents several works that have never been commercially recorded among others with only a small handful of recent recordings.

Born in Lublin, Poland, Józef received high-quality musical training from an early age, first studying with Franciszek Synek before moving to study at the Paris Conservatory at the age of ten. In Paris, he studied composition with another like-minded virtuoso pianist-composer, Charles-Valentin Alkan, and his piano teachers included Pierre-Joseph-Guillaume Zimmermann and Antoine François Marmontel. A few years after graduating from the Paris Conservatory, he spent two years in Weimar studying with Franz Liszt, largely as a pianist but also absorbing Liszt's compositional style. Through these formative years, Wieniawski was already touring extensively, at first with his brother as a twin billing of child prodigies but before long as a soloist in his own right. At his peak, he gave over a hundred concerts per year, cementing his legacy as one of the great virtuoso pianists of his time.

At the age of 22, Wieniawski first settled in Warsaw, becoming an active performer and organiser in the music scene. Over the coming decades, he would temporarily take up residences in Paris, Moscow and Brussels, but Poland remained his musical centre; he was rewarded with the position of director of the Warsaw Music Society in 1875, and later recognised for his illustrious career as Honorary Member of the Society in 1896. Along the way, he collaborated with many of the prominent Polish musicians of his time, both performing as a soloist and as a chamber musician, as well as other contemporaneous European greats such as Eugène Ysaÿe. He largely ceased composing in his final decade, with his final opus dating from 1898, and died in Brussels in 1912.

Despite his reputation of living in the shadow of brother Henryk, Józef's compositions are certainly worthy of performance and scholarship on their own merit. His *oeuvre* largely consists of works for solo piano, particularly character pieces. Beyond those works recorded here, other significant solo piano works of his include a set of *8 Romances sans paroles, Op. 14*; two *Valses de concert (Op. 3, Op. 30)*; *8 Mazurkas, Op. 23*; a neo-Baroque *Fantaisie et Fugue, Op. 25*; two opus sets of *Pièces romantiques, Opp. 39 and 40*; a set of *24 Études, Op. 44*; and *4 Klavierstücke, Op. 51*. He also wrote in the genres of the nocturne, tarantella and impromptu. Many of his forms were initially popularised by Chopin and still in vogue across the latter half of the 19th century. Beyond his solo piano music, he also composed orchestral works, including a *Piano Concerto, Op. 20* and a *Symphony in D major, Op. 49*; he also contributed chamber music, such as duo sonatas for violin (*Op. 24*) and cello (*Op. 26*), a *String Quartet, Op. 32* and a *Piano Trio, Op. 40*. Lastly, near the end of his career Wieniawski wrote German Lieder, including the *6 Gesänge, Op. 47* and the *6 Lieder, Op. 50*. The intensely lyrical nature of Wieniawski's music made him well suited to write for voice, and his proximity to his brother and many of the great string players of the 19th century certainly influenced and directly led to much of his chamber music, too.

His style and musical language certainly owes a great debt to his predecessors Fryderyk Chopin and Franz Liszt, but the originality of Wieniawski's voice as a composer is on full display in his solo piano music. His writing is both highly virtuosic and quite pianistic, bearing the mark of a true master of the instrument and showcasing a wide variety of textures and colours. Nearly all standard Romantic-era virtuoso techniques appear in these pieces: octaves, scalar passagework, arpeggios, and free, rapid cadenzas, while also requiring a warm, lyrical tone and careful phrasing. Despite this heightened virtuosity, it is never superfluous, adding essential characters and colours that form the fabric of his music. Above all, his music is remarkable for its sincerity and refreshing takes on familiar art forms and genres.

Much like Chopin, Wieniawski absorbs different elements of Polish dances, particularly the polonaise, often in ways beyond what one finds in Chopin's polonaises. He crafts highly danceable textures in stark contrast alongside more intricate virtuosity and rhythmic complexity. Similarly, he channels equally authentic and charming Polish dance elements in the *Polka brillante, Op. 11*. Furthermore, his expressive markings are very precise and illuminative, generally using at least one or two Italian words or phrases corresponding to each new section or change in character, even including some terms used infrequently by other composers of the era. While he composed through the end of the 19th century, witnessing substantial innovations in harmony and musical style, his musical language remained largely unchanged across his career, unaffected by those composers at the forefront such as Debussy or Schoenberg.

Performing the music of Wieniawski requires an intimate awareness of the many specific details in the score alongside a sense of imagination and creativity from the performer to bring these pieces to life. While many of his works have fallen into obscurity in the last century, these recordings strive to not only revive some hidden gems, but to inspire others to take up performing them. Much of his piano music remains virtually unknown today, leaving room for others to uncover even more hidden masterworks as interest in his more well-known music continues to be revived.

Polonaise No. 1 in C major, Op. 13 (pub. c. 1858)

Over the course of his career, Wieniawski composed four polonaises, each with very different characteristics, and they provide an insightful window into his development as a composer. The first of four is perhaps the most musically straightforward, but does not lack in virtuosity or variety of character.

One common thread across the four polonaises is Wieniawski's use of rondo form. With this first polonaise, he uses three main melodic ideas: the recurring jaunty, rhythmic C major idea; a frequently modulating, more unstable section; and a more sombre figure in A minor.

Andrew Cannestra

Andrew Cannestra



Pianist and composer Andrew Cannestra first rose to prominence as the winner of the 2021 Aeolian Classics Emerging Artist Competition, where he was unanimously lauded by the jury. In 2024 he was awarded the Bronze Medal at the Seattle International Piano Competition. His debut album, *Mystic Pool*, was released in 2022, featuring one of his own compositions alongside works by William Grant Still, Alexander Scriabin, Fryderyk Chopin and Henri Dutilleux. He recently gave the Oregon premiere of Amy Beach's *Piano Concerto* with the University of Oregon Symphony, as well as the world premiere of Ryan Johnston's *Piano Concerto No. 1* with the Boston-based Horizon Ensemble. Cannestra currently resides in Northfield, Minnesota, where he serves on the piano faculty at his alma mater, St. Olaf College. He is also a doctoral candidate at the University of Oregon, studying with Alexandre Dossin and David Riley.

Józef Wieniawski, younger brother of Henryk, was a prolific Polish composer and virtuoso pianist renowned throughout Europe. After studies in Paris he spent two years in Weimar studying with and absorbing the compositional style of Franz Liszt – Wieniawski’s work combines the pianistic flair and poetic intensity of both Liszt and his fellow countryman Chopin. These qualities can be heard in the four *Polonaises*, the first of which is virtuosic and characterful. Andrew Cannestra’s album of Józef Wieniawski’s piano works, including *Polonaises Nos. 2–4*, is available on 8.574583.

Józef
WIENIAWSKI
(1837–1912)

1 Polonaise No. 1 in C major, Op. 13
(pub. c. 1858)

9:22

Andrew Cannestra, Piano

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Piano technician: Mike Reiter

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