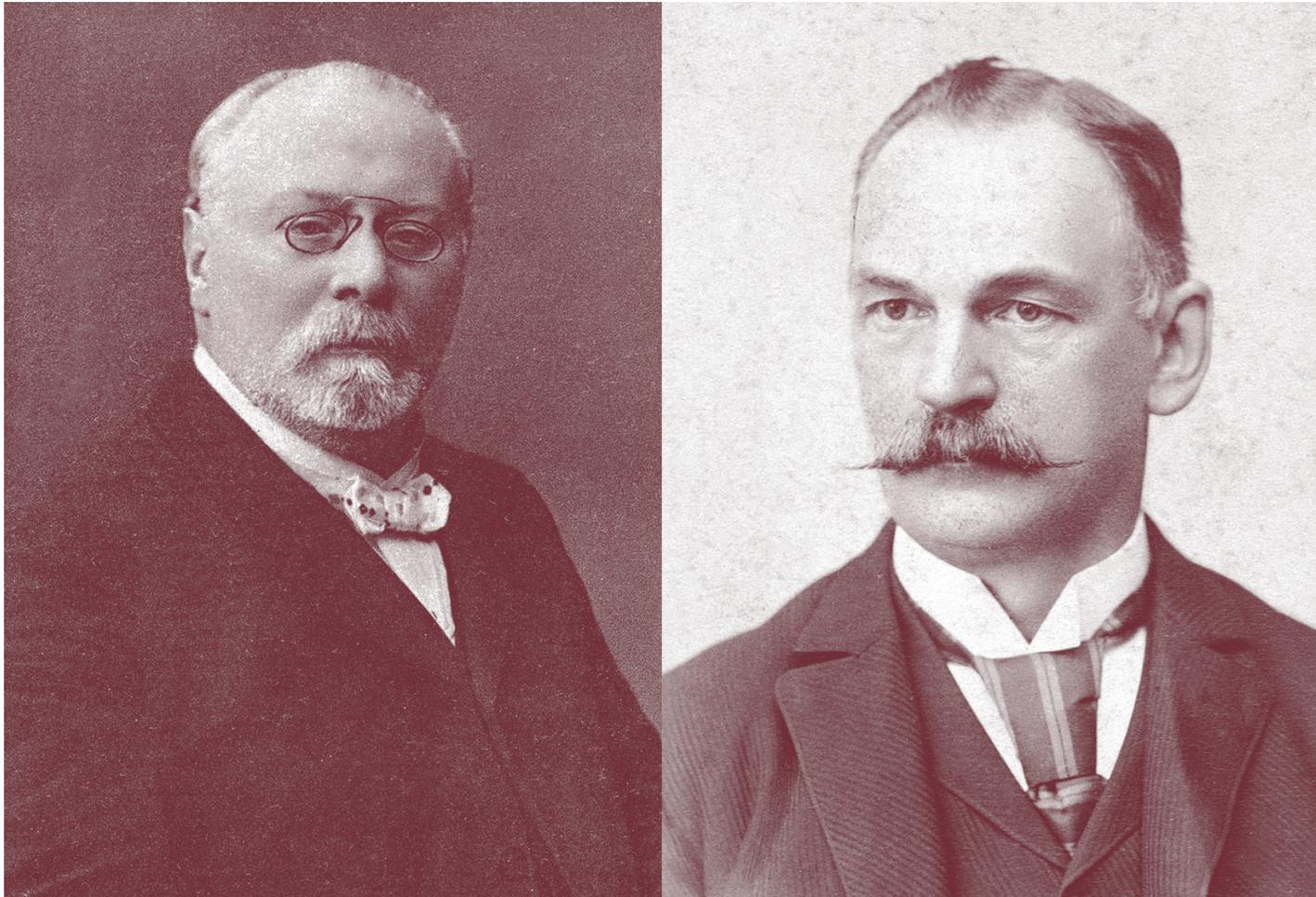




# NOSKOWSKI ŽELEŃSKI

## Violin Sonatas

**Laurence Kayaleh, Violin • Bernadene Blaha, Piano**



## **Zygmunt Noskowski (1846–1909): Violin Sonata in A minor**

## **Władysław Żeleński (1837–1921): Violin Sonata in F major, Op. 30**

The present album provides an overview of Polish chamber music some three-quarters of the way through the 19th century – a period during which the desire for national expression came to the forefront of creative endeavour, within the context of a political reality that was rarely other than unfavourable. Although the composers of this era achieved considerable success at home, their music failed to secure international acclaim and came to be regarded as typical of that period when – the operas of Stanisław Moniuszko aside – Polish music was in too great a thrall to its Austro-German forebears to establish a more personal outlook. That this need not detract from its actual merits is evident from the two violin sonatas featured on this release.

Zygmunt Noskowski was born in Warsaw on 2 May 1846 and graduated from the Warsaw Conservatoire, where he studied violin and composition with Moniuszko during 1863–67. A scholarship enabled him to travel to Berlin where, during 1872–75, he studied with Friedrich Kiel. After serving as Kapellmeister of the Bodan Choral Society in Konstanz, he returned to Warsaw in 1880 as professor of composition at the Conservatoire, conductor of the Warsaw Society of Friends and of the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra. He also achieved prominence as a journalist and mentor to later generations of Polish composers, notably while serving as head of the Warsaw Music Society from 1880 to 1902 and was generally held to be Poland's leading composer during the final decade of his life. He died in Warsaw on 23 July 1909.

Noskowski remains best known for an orchestral output that includes three symphonies, but he also contributed extensively to almost all those established musical genres – not least three operas. Most of his chamber music, including three string quartets and a piano quartet, were composed during the first half of the 1880s, though the *Variations and Fugue on a Theme of Viotti* (recorded by the Lutosławski Quartet on Naxos 8.573978) dates from a decade earlier. Composed around 1875, the *Violin Sonata in A minor* is on a large scale suggesting the influence of Beethoven's '*Kreuzer*' *Sonata* (which also features a set of variations for its central movement) in its imposing dimensions along with its sustained emotional rhetoric.

The first movement begins with a ruminative theme, initially a 'call and response' between violin and piano before heading into a forceful continuation on both instruments. Next comes a lyrical and often songful melody for violin with piano attentively in support – after which, this exposition is repeated in full. There follows the purposeful development of both themes, soon building to an opulent climax before a headlong descent on piano ushers in the reprise – halting at first, but soon regaining its earlier impetus and, in the second theme, its eloquence. There is no coda as such – rather, the music heads onwards to a dramatic and decisive close.

The second movement is a set of variations on a pensive theme in two parts, given initially to the piano then partnered by violin. The first variation is a lively exchange between these instruments, with the second exuding genial charm as it pursues its often discursive course. The third variation turns to the minor for an animated and closely integrated interplay, then the fourth suggests a Brahms-like manner as it goes its limpid and unaffected way. The fifth variation is by way of a coda, restoring the theme to its earlier poise then on to a serene end.

The third movement underscores the influence of Brahms with its declamatory initial gesture, heading into an energetic and close-knit theme whose continuation has a tarantella-like feel and exudes more than a hint of curt humour. This exposition is again repeated in full, then the opening gestures presage an intensive fugal discourse that builds to a rhetorical highpoint before a modified reprise of the main ideas ensues. The forceful nature of this latter episode is maintained in a tensile coda, violin and piano in heated pursuit toward the unequivocal close.

Władysław Żeleński was born on 6 July 1837 in Grodkowice (near Kraków). His ancestors had lived there since the 1720s and had formerly been Calvinists, until the composer's father converted to Catholicism early in the 19th century. The latter duly became an Austrian army officer with an active role in the November Uprising of 1830–31. The composer had grown up with his four brothers and sisters at a home in which practical music-making was actively encouraged, though not the studying of music as an academic subject. After the tragedies of 1846, when the composer's father was murdered by local peasants in the Galician Slaughter, the family relocated to Kraków. Żeleński's formal musical education included piano studies under Jan Germasz, along with harmony and counterpoint studies under Franciszek Mirecki (an erstwhile student of Hummel). Later he continued his studies in Prague with Josef Krejčí and later with Napoléon Henri Reber in Paris, where he also achieved a PhD in philosophy.

Żeleński then returned briefly to Kraków before moving on to Warsaw, where he taught at the Institute of Music. His active involvement with cultural activities soon led to his appointment as director of the Warsaw Music Society. At the beginning of the 1880s, however, he returned to Kraków where he attempted to instil a more outward-looking approach into what was then a provincial music scene. Aside from composing, he also worked as a conductor of numerous amateur ensembles and as a teacher. It was largely at his own initiative that the Conservatory of the Kraków Music Society was started in 1888. He died in Kraków on 23 January 1921 – by which time, his music had been all but overtaken by the emergence of the Young Poland school (most notably Karol Szymanowski and the composer/conductor Grzegorz Fitelberg) and it has only begun to be revived, recorded and published during the past quarter-century.

Despite his activities across the board as a teacher and organizer, Żeleński found time to build a substantial catalogue of works which includes four operas – *Janek*, the best known of these, being premiered at Lvov in October 1900 and whose verismo idiom with inflections of Polish folk-music helped to keep it in the local repertoire (a 2021 revival from Lublin is available on Naxos 8.660521-22). His orchestral works include a *Spring Symphony* and a piano concerto along with numerous overtures and tone poems, while chamber works include several string quartets, piano quartet, piano trio and a set of 25 preludes for organ. Dedicated to the pianist Marcelina Czartoryska (1817–1894, who also assisted with the founding of the Conservatoire in Kraków), the *Violin Sonata in F major* was written around 1879 and it typifies the essentially conservative though by no means reactionary idiom that Żeleński pursued in his maturity.

The first movement begins with an eloquent theme for violin over a lively accompaniment on piano, presently making way for a suaver while thematically related melody. There follows a lively and resourceful development, building to a heightened culmination and heading towards an extensively altered reprise which allots greater space to the second theme. This remains at the forefront in a coda that vacillates over major and minor but ends decisively in the former.

The second movement is an intermezzo whose first section is at once elegant and ingratiating in its dialogue. This is hardly less true of the central section, with its trenchant chordal pattern on piano and capering response from violin – after which, both sections are recalled in subtly modified form on the way to a conclusion which is the more appealing for its understatement.

The third movement starts with a sombre introduction, bringing with it the only slow music of the whole work, which unfolds at length and with audible gravitas before suddenly heading into an animated theme that transforms the introductory music as it does so and is followed by a melody of high-flown eloquence. These are subsequently combined and elaborated on the way to a subtly modified reprise – one whose greater emphasis on the eloquent melody sees an intensified return to the introduction, before the work moves on to its decisive close.

**Richard Whitehouse**

## Laurence Kayaleh



Laurence Kayaleh has performed as guest soloist with many distinguished orchestras, including the Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich, Russian National Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra (Washington, D.C.), Orchestre Lamoureux, Orchestre symphonique de Montréal, and the major orchestras of Cleveland, St. Louis, Caracas, Basel and Mexico City, under conductors such as Leonard Slatkin, Mikhail Pletnev and Hiroshi Wakasugi. She has performed at the Bolshoi and Tchaikovsky Concert Halls (Moscow), the Salle Pleyel and Salle Gaveau (Paris), Suntory Hall (Tokyo), Victoria Hall (Geneva), Verdi Hall (Milan), Teatro Teresa Carreño (Caracas), Place des Arts (Montreal), The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts (Washington) and Mie Center for the Arts (Japan). A guest of major festivals such as Lucerne, Blossom and Cervantino, she has shared concerts with Victor Pikayzen, Ida Haendel and Igor Oistrakh. For Naxos, she has recorded the complete works for violin and piano by Medtner, Honegger and Catoire, the complete violin sonatas by Raff, and Rebay's complete sonatas for violin and guitar, and viola and guitar. She plays a 1742 Pietro Guarneri of Venice which belonged to the eminent violinist and pedagogue Carl Flesch.

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## Bernadene Blaha



Pianist Bernadene Blaha is internationally recognised as a recitalist, concerto soloist and chamber musician. Blaha began her musical journey in Canada before gaining prominence with top awards at the Montreal Symphony Orchestra Competition, Lugano Switzerland Masterplayer's International Competition, and New York City's International Piano Competition. These prizes led to acclaimed recitals at Carnegie Recital Hall and the Lincoln Center Library in New York City. She was also featured at the XXIX International Chopin Festival in Marianske Lazne, followed by appearances at such distinguished venues as the Concertgebouw, Salle Cortot, Phillips Collection, National Arts Center and Disney Hall. In 2009, Blaha co-founded the piano trio Latitude 41 with Livia Sohn and Luigi Piovano. The group's debut album, featuring Schubert's monumental *Trio in E flat*, received high praise. With a rich discography, Blaha has recorded for the CBC, Centaur, Analekta, Eloquentia and Naxos labels. Currently based in Los Angeles, Bernadene Blaha is a professor at the University of Southern California's Thornton School of Music.

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Both Zygmunt Noskowski and Władysław Żeleński were leading exponents of Polish nationalism in the period from the last quarter of the 19th century. Noskowski is best remembered as a symphonist but his large-scale *Violin Sonata in A minor* is an imposing work that suggests the influence both of Beethoven's *'Kreutzer' Sonata* and of Brahms. Żeleński was as eminent a teacher as he was a composer, seeking to broaden Poland's provincial outlook through works such as his opera *Janek* (Naxos 8.660521-22). His *Violin Sonata in F major* typifies the essentially conservative idiom that Żeleński pursued in his maturity.

**Zygmunt**  
**NOSKOWSKI**  
(1846–1909)

|   |              |
|---|--------------|
| <b>Violin Sonata in A minor</b>           | <b>37:06</b> |
| ❶ <b>I. Allegro con brio</b>              | <b>13:44</b> |
| ❷ <b>II. Molto andante con variazioni</b> | <b>12:57</b> |
| ❸ <b>III. Prestissimo</b>                 | <b>10:18</b> |

**Władysław**  
**ŻELEŃSKI**  
(1837–1921)

|  |              |
|--|--------------|
| <b>Violin Sonata in F major, Op. 30</b>                | <b>26:47</b> |
| ❹ <b>I. Allegro non troppo</b>                         | <b>9:51</b>  |
| ❺ <b>II. Allegretto</b>                                | <b>5:54</b>  |
| ❻ <b>III. Molto sostenuto – Allegro molto con brio</b> | <b>10:45</b> |

**Laurence Kayaleh, Violin • Bernadene Blaha, Piano**

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(photograph by Stanisław Bizański, 1846–1890)

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