



Stanisław
MONIUSZKO

Ballet Music

Hrabina • Halka • The Haunted Manor



Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra • Antoni Wit

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(1819-1872)

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❶	Polonez koncertowy (Concert Polonaise) (1866)	7:51
	Hrabina (The Countess): Ballet Music (1859)	18:11
❷	I. Zefir goniący Florę (Zephyr chasing Flora)	8:07
❸	II. Neptun na Wiśle (Neptune on the Vistula river)	4:06
❹	III. Taniec Satyrów (Dance of Satyrs)	3:41
❺	IV. Kotyljon (Cotillion)	2:17
❻	Marsz żałobny Antoniego Orłowskiego (Funeral March for Antoni Orłowski) (18??)	11:41
❼	Polonez obywatelski (Civic polonaise) (post 1863)	6:07
❽	Halka, Act I: Mazurka (1857)	4:06
❾	Halka, Act III: Tańce góralskie (Highlanders' Dances) (1857)	4:55
❿	Muzyka baletowa do opery Otto Nicolaia <i>Wesołe kumoszki z Windsoru</i> (Ballet Music for Otto Nicolai's opera <i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i>) (c. 1849)	9:38
⓫	Mazur z baletu Monte Christo (ułożony do opery <i>Jawnuta</i>) (Mazurka from the ballet <i>Monte Christo</i>, arranged for the opera <i>Jawnuta</i>) (1866)	4:37
⓬	Jawnuta: Taniec cygański (Gypsy Dance) (1860)	4:31
⓭	Leokadia Polka (18??)	1:44
⓮	Straszny Dwór (The Haunted Manor), Act IV: Mazurka (1864)	5:16

Stanisław Moniuszko (1819-1872)

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Stanisław Moniuszko was the leading opera composer in Poland during the 19th century. His work, as Lennox Berkeley wrote in his Foreword to B.M. Maciejewski's 1979 book on the composer, may be said to 'bridge the gap in Polish music between Chopin and Szymanowski'. Born in Ubiel, near Minsk, he began piano lessons with his mother at the age of four. In 1827 he studied music with August Freyer in Warsaw and completed his training with Carl Friedrich Rungenhagen at the Berlin Singakademie (1837-39). After returning to Poland, he married and settled in Vilnius, earning his living as a piano teacher, organist and conductor of the theatre orchestra.

Moniuszko's output includes seven masses, several cantatas and over three hundred songs, the most successful of which were twelve volumes of *Śpiewnik domowy* (Home Songbook). There are also string quartets, the earliest significant examples of which date from the Berlin years. Also from this period, the operetta *Nocleg w Apeninach* (A Night in the Apennines) served notice of his gifts as a composer for the stage. After his return to Poland, he wrote further operettas. A visit to Warsaw inspired the grand opera *Halka* that brought him national acclaim. After European tours, during which he met Smetana in Prague and Liszt in Weimar, he became director of Polish productions at the Wielki Theatre, Warsaw. Work on his major opera *Straszny dwór* (The Haunted Manor) was affected by the increasing political unrest that led to the January Uprising of 1863-64. He subsequently lost his position at the theatre and *The Haunted Manor*, perceived as overtly nationalistic by the tsarist censors, was withdrawn after three performances in 1865. A decline in creative powers might explain the failure of his last major works. Undaunted, he was working on another opera at the time of his death, from a sudden heart attack, on 4th June 1872. His funeral was an event of national importance.

In addition to the sequence of operas and operettas for which he is most celebrated, Moniuszko wrote a number of purely orchestral works. They demonstrate his

grasp of instrumentation and prove that his essential lyrical style could be translated successfully into a non-vocal medium.

The *Concert Polonaise* in A major exists in three incarnations: the original score for large orchestra presented here; an arrangement for piano, and a version for four hands. The subtle harmonic shifts and modulations between major and minor in the recurring principal theme recall Schubert but the piece is entirely characteristic of its composer and nowhere more so than in its majestic and assured conclusion.

The four-act opera *Hrabina* (The Countess) was written in 1859 and received its first performance in February the following year. It takes the form of a satire on the divisions in Polish society at the start of the 19th century, contrasting those who followed Parisian fashions and spoke French with patriots who cared deeply about traditional national dress and customs. These divergent attitudes in Polish society are developed throughout the opera, with its simple songs and polonaise set against *coloratura* arias and cosmopolitan ballet scenes. Despite its unmistakably patriotic tones and national sentiments, *Hrabina* is essentially a comic opera, albeit one of more consequence than the average *opera buffa*. A witty libretto prompted the composer to write attractive, relaxed music full of memorable themes such as the haunting barcarolle-like melody at the core of the number entitled *Neptune on the Vistula River*.

The composer's serious side is revealed in the deeply felt *Funeral March for Antoni Orłowski*. His varied treatment of the stately main theme juxtaposing soft and loud phrases mirrors the intensely private and public aspects of such an occasion. A judicious use of brass, timpani and modest percussion reminds us that, when required, this born man of the theatre was able to temper his naturally extrovert musical personality to suit more formal, solemn utterances such as a *Requiem*, religious songs, hymns, psalms and prayers.

The *Civic Polonaise* in F major is a typical blend of

elegance and ebullience. Its convincing adoption of the quintessential rhythms of Polish dance into a distinctive musical voice denotes a composer of marked individuality.

During a visit to Warsaw, Moniuszko met a leader of the local bohemians, Włodzimierz Wolski, who gave him the libretto of *Halka*, a poem inspired by the 1846 rebellion of the Polish peasantry. It tells the story of a girl from the mountains, seduced and abandoned by a young squire. The resulting opera has music of considerable dramatic intensity graced with an unhackneyed thematic resourcefulness. Weber was a source of inspiration for its choral writing and orchestral style: Moniuszko knew *Der Freischütz* well and acknowledged it as a seminal influence on his own idea of national opera. *Halka* was first given in a two-act version at a concert performance in Vilnius in 1848. A staged production followed six years later. Moniuszko later revised the work, enlarging it to four acts, and in this edition it was performed in Warsaw to immediate acclaim on 1st January 1858. The vigorous *Mazurka* comes at the end of Act One of the opera and the nimble *Highlanders' Dance* of the mountain peasants appears at the heart of Act Three. They are both representative of the strong Polish flavour of *Halka* which may help to explain why it remains the composer's most popular stage work. Writing in *The Musical Quarterly* in January 1928, Zdzisław Jachimecki observed of *Halka* that 'no Polish dramatic composer had previously expressed by dance-scenes the Polish national temperament so perfectly as Moniuszko has done.'

The rare instances when Moniuszko found inspiration in non-Polish sources include a number of Shakespeare-based projects. He composed incidental music for *Hamlet* and *The Merchant of Venice* and in around 1849 he wrote ballet music for *The Merry Wives of Windsor* by the German composer Otto Nicolai (1810-1849). Themes by the latter which appear in the evergreen *Overture* for this operetta are deftly quoted by Moniuszko in his own engaging and finely wrought material.

Jawnuta, an idyll in two acts, was first performed in Warsaw in 1860. It is a reworking of *Cyganie* (The Gypsies), an operetta Moniuszko had written ten years earlier, hence the Hungarian flavour of the overture (featured on Naxos 8.572716), the orchestral *Mazurka* and the vibrant *Gypsy Dance*.

The delightful *Leokadia Polka* is representative of the various short dance movements which Moniuszko composed throughout his creative life. Mostly written for piano, these include occasional pieces for friends.

Moniuszko's four-act comic opera *Straszny Dwór* (The Haunted Manor) was completed in 1864 and premièred in Warsaw the following summer with the composer conducting. Jan Chęciński's libretto is based on a folk tale concerning two soldier-brothers Stefan and Zbigniew who foreswear marriage so that they will have no ties if called upon again to fight for their country. There are skilfully constructed trios, quartets and tuneful arias in a score notable for its imaginative treatment of the orchestra. In addition the chorus is assigned a rôle of central importance. Though the opera was hastily suppressed by alarmed authorities because of its patriotic content, it has grown steadily in stature since those early performances and is now widely regarded as the composer's greatest achievement – on the occasion of the re-opening of the Wielki Theatre in 1965, *The Haunted Manor* was presented to celebrate the opera's centenary and, seven years later, a new production formed a key part of the events marking the centenary of Moniuszko's death. Among several overtly Polish elements in the opera, including a polonaise and a choral 'krakowiak', is the lively *Mazurka*. The jewel in the crown of the festive finale, this spirited dance finds the composer drawing freely and inventively from his national heritage.

Paul Conway

Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra



Photo: Dominik Skurzak

The first performance of the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra took place on 5th November 1901 in the newly opened Philharmonic Hall under the artistic director and principal conductor Emil Młynarski, with the world-renowned pianist, composer and future statesman Ignacy Jan Paderewski as soloist in a programme that included Paderewski's *Piano Concerto in A minor* and works of other Polish composers, Chopin, Moniuszko, Noskowski, Stojowski and Zelenki. The orchestra achieved considerable success until the outbreak of war in 1939, with the destruction of the Philharmonic Hall and the loss of 39 of its 71 players. Resuming activity after the war, the orchestra was conducted by Straszynski and Panufnik, and in January 1950 Witold Rowicki was appointed director and principal conductor, organizing a new ensemble under difficult conditions. In 1955 the rebuilt Philharmonic Hall was re-opened, with a large hall of over a thousand seats and a hall for chamber music, recognised as the National Philharmonic of Poland, with Bohdan Wodiczko as chief conductor. In 1958 Witold Rowicki was again appointed artistic director and principal conductor, a post he held until 1977, when he was succeeded by Kazimierz Kord, serving until the end of the centenary celebrations in 2001. From 2002 to 2013 Antoni Wit was the managing and artistic director of the Warsaw Philharmonic – The National Orchestra and Choir of Poland. In 2013 Jacek Kasprzyk became the orchestra's artistic director. The orchestra has toured widely abroad (Europe, both Americas, Japan), in addition to its busy schedule at home in symphony concerts, chamber concerts, educational work and other activities. It now has a complement of 110 players. Recordings include works by Polish composers, Paderewski, Wieniawski, Karłowicz, Szymanowski, Penderecki, Lutosławski, Górecki and Kilar, and by foreign composers, with acclaimed interpretations of works by Mahler and Richard Strauss. Their releases have won many prestigious awards, including a GRAMMY® in 2012 and six other GRAMMY® nominations.

Antoni Wit



Photo: Krzysztof Niesporek

Antoni Wit studied conducting with Henryk Czyż at the Academy of Music in Kraków, continuing his musical studies with Nadia Boulanger in Paris. He also graduated in law at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. Immediately after completing his studies he was engaged as an assistant at the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra by Witold Rowicki. After winning second prize in the International Herbert von Karajan Conducting Competition in Berlin (1971), he became an assistant conductor to the patron of that competition. Later he was appointed conductor of the Poznań Philharmonic, collaborated with the Warsaw Grand Theatre, and from 1974 to 1977 was artistic director of the Pomeranian Philharmonic, before his appointment as director of the Polish Radio and Television Orchestra and Chorus in Kraków, from 1977 to 1983. From 1983 to 2000 he was managing and artistic director of the National Polish Radio Symphony Orchestra in Katowice, and from 1987 to 1992 he was the chief conductor and then first guest conductor of the Orquesta Filarmónica de Gran Canaria. From 2002 to 2013 Antoni Wit was the managing and artistic director of the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir. He has been first guest conductor of the Orquesta Sinfónica de Navarra in Pamplona since the 2010/11 season and its artistic director since the 2013/14 season. His international career has brought engagements with major orchestras throughout Europe, the Americas and the Near and Far East. He has made over 200 records, including an acclaimed release for Naxos of the piano concertos of Prokofiev, awarded the Diapason d'Or and Grand Prix du Disque de la Nouvelle Académie du Disque. In January 2002 his recording of the *Turangalila Symphony* by Olivier Messiaen (8.554478-79) was awarded the Cannes Classical Award at MIDEM Classic 2002. In 2004 he received the Classical Internet Award. He has completed for Naxos a CD series of Szymanowski's symphonic and large-scale vocal-instrumental works, each rated among 'discs of the month' by CD magazines (*Gramophone*, *BBC Music Magazine*). He also received the Record Academy Award 2005 of Japanese music magazine *Record Geijutsu* for Penderecki's *Polish Requiem* (Naxos), and four Fryderyk Awards of the Polish Phonographic Academy. In 2012 he received a GRAMMY® Award for Penderecki's *Fonogrammi*, *Horn Concerto* and *Partita* (8.572482), and six other nominations for Penderecki's *St Luke Passion* in 2004 (8.557149), *A Polish Requiem* in 2005 (8.557386-87), *Seven Gates of Jerusalem* in 2007 (8.557766), *Utrenja* in 2009 (8.572031) and Karol Szymanowski's *Stabat Mater* in 2008 (8.570724) and *Symphonies Nos. 1 and 4* in 2009 (8.570722). In 2010 Antoni Wit won the annual award of the Karol Szymanowski Foundation for his promotion of the music of Szymanowski in his Naxos recordings. Antoni Wit is a professor at the Fryderyk Chopin University of Music in Warsaw.

Stanisław Moniuszko was Poland's leading nineteenth-century opera composer, and has been called the man who bridges the gap between Chopin and Szymanowski. In addition to operatic works he also composed purely orchestral music, and this recording reveals that his essentially lyric style could function perfectly in the non-vocal medium. There is thematically memorable music from the comic opera *Hrabina* (The Countess), as well as enduring Polish-flavoured dance scenes from his most popular and famous stage work, *Halka*. The spirited *Mazurka* from *Straszny Dwór* (The Haunted Manor), Moniuszko's crowning operatic achievement, draws freely and inventively from his national heritage.



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