Polish Chamber Works

New

Zarebski Piano Quintet in G minor, Op. 34.

Zelenski Piano Quartet in C minor, Op. 61[a].

Jonathan Plowright (piano); **Szymanowski Quartet** ([a]Andrej Bielow, Grzegorz Kotów, violins; Vladimir Mykytka, viola; Marcin Sieniawski, cello).

Hyperion CDA67905 (full price, 1 hour 12 minutes). *Website* www.hyperion-records.co.uk *Producer* Jeremy Hayes. *Engineer* Ben Connellan. *Dates* December 4th-6th, 2011.

Comparisons:

Zarebski:

Malicki, Varsovia Qt

(Pavane) ADW7218 (1989)

Zelenski:

Polish Piano Qt (Olympia) OCD381 (1994)

The era of Polish culture between Moniuszko and the generation fronted by Karłowicz and Szymanowski remains a 'dark age' outside its native country – though enough music has now filtered through to suggest that, certainly in the chamber domain, it was not one bereft of achievements. Two of these have now been brought together on this welcome new disc.

Had he died before composing what was his final work, Juliusz Zarebski (1854-85) would barely be even a footnote in musical history. As it is, his Piano Quintet (1885) confirms a feel for Lisztian harmony allied to a commanding formal sense that should have been the springboard into an eventful maturity and, even so, is not so far behind those by Brahms, Dvořák or Franck as a significant contribution to its medium. This performance has the measure of the first movement's quirky yet compelling take on sonata form, its finely contrasted themes combined in a tensile development before the varied reprise and then an unexpectedly quixotic coda. The *Adagio* frames its lilting central section with a melody of rapt fervency, and which is itself framed by music of a 'Forest murmurs' atmosphere, while the *Scherzo* likewise surrounds its wistful trio with music of an intently rhythmic propulsion. If the final *Presto* is at all less distinctive in thematic content, this is because it is essentially a cyclical reprise of earlier ideas – picking up directly where its predecessor left off before pursuing a sonata-rondo trajectory that eventually culminates with a heightened recollection of the work's opening theme in an affirmative yet never overwrought coda. Make no mistake, Zarebski was a composer destined for considerable things and the fact that the present work was to remain the summa of his creativity does not lessen the extent of its attainment.

The Piano Quartet by Władlisław Zelenski (1837-1921) is complementary in almost every respect. Although he enjoyed a distinguished academic career, Zelenski was never to enjoy a comparable reputation as a composer – compounded by the seeming destruction of much of his output. Like most of what has survived, this work cannot accurately be dated, though its overall tenor suggests it as contemporary to, or even earlier than, Zarebski's quintet. Certainly the Brahmsian quotient is higher in a rigorous yet not inflexible first movement, with exposition repeat and a subtle modulatory sense that makes possible the tersely dramatic coda. The *Romanza* has a songful quality only fleetingly disturbed by the more demonstrative second theme that steals in prior to a rapt coda, while the *Intermezzo* alternates its lively and lyrical themes in a variation process that cuts across the expected ternary form. The finale more than maintains its initial tarantella impetus through a development of no mean contrapuntal dexterity and on to an intensified reprise of its main theme in the clinching coda.

Both these works have been recorded on more than one occasion, and anyone who has the comparative recordings listed above will have enjoyed getting to know them in unfailingly attentive and involving performances. If those by the Szymanowski Quartet are more refined and even understated by comparison, there is no lack of underlying conviction – while the pianism of Polish specialist Jonathan Plowright has an eloquence and poise which meshes with the strings in a master-class of responsive ensemble playing. Warmly spacious sound, and detailed booklet notes by Adrian Thomas, only add to the disc's attractions. Hopefully this partnership will record more Polish chamber music of the late Romantic era.

Richard Whitehouse

The Trio Sonata in 18th-Century France

New

Boismortier Trio in E minor, Op. 37 No. 2. **F. Couperin** Les Nations – L'Impériale. **Dollé** Sonata in G minor, Op. 1 No. 6. **Guignon** Sonata in D, Op. 4 No. 2. **Leclair** Sonata No. 3 in G minor, Op. 13 No. 6.

London Baroque (Ingrid Seifert, Richard Gwilt, violins; Charles Medlam, bass viol; Steven Devine, harpsichord).

BIS CD1855 (full price, 1 hour 11 minutes). *Website* www.bis.se *Producer/Engineer* Jens Braun. *Date* October 2010.

Over the last decade London Baroque has been working its way methodically across Europe, country by country, century by century, on a Grand Tour of the trio sonata. Now that its survey of the seventeenth century is complete – having visited England, France, Germany and (just released) Italy – the players are getting stuck into the eighteenth century. In 2010 their Georgian journey took in eight sonatas – including splendid pieces by Boyce, Arne and Handel (a little too much Handel perhaps), reviewed in October 2010. Now, for their second eighteenth-century volume, we have arrived in France and London Baroque once again maps out the terrain with works by several core composers (François Couperin, Leclair and Boismortier) plus a couple of unknowns – Charles Dollé and Jean-Pierre Guignon.

At first glance the dates of the publications from which the music has been drawn suggest a rather narrow chronological window: from 1726 (Couperin) to 1753 (Leclair). But, stylistically, it was a time of rapid change. Following the death of Louis XIV in 1715 the strictures of the *grand siècle* began to relax and the stiff resistance to Italian culture weakened. In 1725 François Couperin published his famous *Apothéose de Lulli*, where he advocated a fusion of the Italian and French styles, and the following year saw the publication of his collection *Les Nations*, which included 'L'Impériale',