



DUX 1254 / 2017

SZYMANOWSKI, PROKOFIEV, REGER : DREAMS

Joanna TRZECIAK – piano recital

* **Sergiej PROKOFIEV** (1891-1953) : Visions fugitives, Op. 22 (1915-1917)

* **Max REGER** (1873-1916) : Three Pieces from Dreams at the Fireside, Op. 143 (1915)

* **Karol SZYMANOWSKI** (1882-1937) : Masques, Op. 34 (1915-1916)

*The **A(É)IA** group created by **Anja Thomas** (Antemanha) and **Ivane Bellocq** is interested in a repertoire which subtly combines music and recited poetry. The poets reciting their poems are treated as instruments in the full sense of the word.*

They evoke whirling worlds, plenty of anxiety and dreams.

The CD opens with famous German operatic composer Aribert Reimann, whose composition is built around the text by Günter Grass.

The project also features: Édith Azam, Vincent Tholomé and Anja Thomas (poets), Ivane Bellocq (flutes) and Pauline Haas (harp).

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The pieces presented on the CD were composed at the same time, i.e. around 1915, and their common theme is the world of dreams and fantasy. It is not the end of the features they share; however, apparently it is a stylistically and formally differentiated repertoire. The works were created as an expression of the then-current stylistic tendencies; sometimes they represent their more significant movements and sometimes they remain sidelined. They constitute a testimony of a notable unrest in Europe on the brink of the First World War and of meaningful cultural, social, and political changes brought by the modernity.

We begin our concert with Russian composer Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953). He started working on *Visions fugitives*, Op. 22 in 1915. He was only 24 at that time and he had already had a thorough music education, had travelled to Paris and London, and had had his first debuts. For a moment, let us consider the Russia of that time, inevitably heading towards a disaster of the revolution. It was a unique place for young artists: open enough to the world, immediately picking up avant-garde ideas brought by the artists from their journeys abroad, but at the same time it was a place where the native culture was cultivated, the literature and philosophy were blooming, and the mysticism was of the highest quality. Young Prokofiev was taking advantage of that atmosphere; at that time he composed, e.g., piano concertos which were considered unusually avant-garde by the critics. *Visions fugitives* were evaluated in a similar manner. The piece was inspired by a poetic motto drawn from poet Konstantin Balmont: *In every fugitive vision I see worlds, full of the changing play of rainbow hues*. The piece was created within two years; the composer himself did not treat them as a compact cycle; on a number of occasions he performed them separately, as if he were influenced by his mood. However, in case of that work the mood is not achieved with the means of the past Romantic epoch. The composer deconstructs here the rests of the post-Romantic aesthetics and he does it on purpose. It can be observed in the harmony, which is strongly chromatic and far from tonality, often oscillating around more than one centre with the help of the *ostinato* technique rather than with typical modulations. Prokofiev's experiments with rhythm are interesting too: polymetre, polyrhythm, dance rhythms (waltz, march, even a typical descending three-beat mazurka rhythm). In combination with the distinctive, even "sharp" articulation, we receive miniatures which are full of vigour and character. On the other hand, the more melancholic ones seem to be inspired by the impressionists' sound painting, however, instead of calm they too bring a strangely disturbing, nostalgic mood.

The cycle of compositions *Dreams at the Fireside*, Op. 143 by Max Reger (1873-1916) evokes a completely different atmosphere. On the CD we present you three pieces. We will transfer us to the Western Europe, to Jena, where the forty-two-year-old composer would create and work, unconscious of the fact that he would soon die of heart attack. The critics agree that in the last years of Reger's life his mature works were blooming; he freed himself from the academic school of Riemann and from the Romantic legacy. The only exception was Brahms, whose music inspired the composer until the very end of his life. The "organ" manner of thinking, understood as treating particular instruments as pipes in an organ, dominated also his orchestral works. Only in the chamber music one can find a completely different facet of an artist who struggles with depression and alcoholism, which he tried to hide from the society at any cost. The very title of the cycle – *Dreams at the Fireside* – already reveals the character of the pieces. It is a return to the bucolic idyll from the time of his childhood, which must have been surprisingly joyful, which is proven by humoristic and sometimes even grotesque character of the miniatures. The composer seems to speak in his own intimate musical language which is comprised of the perfect technique, lightness achieved by a virtuoso technique bringing to mind Liszt or Chopin. This is a virtuosity which is not at the forefront, it comes effortlessly, being only a mean to tell particular stories. There is a lot of movement – interval leaps, unexpected harmonic turns, remote tonalities, while cadenzas, chromatic wandering, and understatements are reduced to the minimum. The lyrical fragments are probably most similar to Brahms' phrase – swaying and melancholic. Contrary to Prokofiev's *Visions fugitives*, Reger's *Dreams at the Fireside* have not gained popularity yet. They remain in the shadow of the German composer's organ and chamber music pieces. However, it is worth getting to know them, at the same time discovering the richness of that extremely personal and cheerful composition.

Our third trip will take us again to the east – to Tymoshivka, a village in Ukraine, where Karol Szymanowski (1882-1937) was on holidays in 1915-1916. A small family residence on the sideline of the events and tendencies gave rise to a piece in which the echoes of a great world resound – fascination with avant-garde, European erudition, inspirations with exoticism, youthful intransigence. The triptych *Masques*, Op. 34 suggests its programme subtexts already in the subtitles of particular movements which evoke the characters of Tristan, Scheherazade, and Don Juan. Each of those literary prototypes puts on a different masque changing their identity: to save life, as story-teller Scheherazade; Tristan, dressed up by a jester, wants to get to the woman he is in love with; and finally the Spanish lover and hooligan who seduces and abandons women. The musical language of those tales is a mixture of parodic humour and tragedy. The references to the music of the Far East and Spain are perceptible, however, they are not literal quotations but only

remote associations which reflect a European's notion of exotic cultures. The composition's texture is complicated and demanding. Similarly to some compositions by Prokofiev, the musical action sometimes takes place on three staves. The sharp and sarcastic character of the compositions is underlined by firm articulation, while the changing rhythm and tempo and virtuoso ametric fragments constitute a genuine challenge for the performer and are a test of the pianist's skills.

Agnieszka Jeż

Translated by Żaneta Pniewska

Joanna TRZECIAK – born in Cracow, she spent her youth in a country where the quest for material goods was not the most important issue. "To be" was more important than "to have." One can lose the fortune, yet the wisdom and knowledge are indestructible. That was the motto she learned at home and to which she is still faithful, even after many years of living in Belgium.

She was born to a family of historians, pharmacists, and lawyers; she was discovered by a rhythmic teacher and she quickly discovered the world of music and studied with great passion. After graduating from the High Music School in Cracow, she continued her studies at the then Higher Music School in Warsaw in the class of Prof. Jan Ekier. After receiving her diploma, she went to the Pyotr Tchaikovsky Conservatory in Moscow, the then Mecca for pianists, which was enabled to her by a scholarship of the Ministry of Culture and Art. She studied there in the class of outstanding pianist and teacher Lev Vlasenko. The fact that the professor was an active concert pianist had an extraordinary influence on his teaching style. "Practical" tips concerning mental preparation before a concert, recordings in a studio, or how to develop a concert repertoire were of extreme importance and they remained a guidance for life. In the subsequent years, it was the years-long friendship and cooperation with Prof. Irina Rumiancewa which shaped the artistic profile of Joanna Trzeciak.

Apart from dedicating her time to concerts with orchestra or recitals performed in Europe, both Americas, and Asia, the pianist spends a lot of time on recordings. She is particularly interested in original and less frequently performed works. After recording Karol Szymanowski's Sonata No. 1, the artist released four Rondos and the Sonata No. 1 by Fryderyk Chopin. Then two CDs with pieces by Johann Nepomuk Hummel were published. The majority of them have been recorded for the first time. The interest in such a repertoire is a result of working on the pieces composed by Chopin in his youth and of the willingness to discover the origins of the brilliant style. The effects of the years-long work and detailed exploration of libraries in Bratislava and Brussels, carried out with significant help of musicologists and producers of the Slovakian Radio, have been noticed by the international industry press and awarded with, e.g., "5 Diapasons." All the aforementioned recordings have been released by the Belgian company Pavane.

The originally, often controversially developed repertoire of the pianist's recitals is one of her characteristic features. Confrontations, contrasts, concepts. The CD featuring five Polonaises by Fryderyk Chopin and five Études-Tableaux by Sergei Rachmaninoff released by the Catalan company KNS is a fruit of those particular explorations.

Joanna Trzeciak continues to have a hectic work schedule. Next to an incessant work on mastering the piano playing, she also dedicates a lot of time to her second great passion – hikes in high mountains. She does it with equal persistence, dedication, and ambitions.