

REPUTATIONS

An unjustly neglected composer? You decide, as pianist Seta Tanyel defends....

Xaver Scharwenka

THE BIG ROMANTIC PIANO CONCERTO was already in decline by the early part of this century, within the lifetime of one of its greatest composers, the Polish pianist Xaver Scharwenka. Nine years ago I was captivated by the flow of melodies and imagination of his music in a concert given by the great Earl Wild. Tuneful and witty, I couldn't see why his music had been so neglected. Since then I have recorded four discs of his works and will record more.

While conductor Walter Damrosch introduced his concertos to London and Mahler played the first concerto alongside one of his symphonies in New York, only a handful of his works feature in concert programmes today. This neglect is due in part to the reaction against romanticism earlier this century when it seemed at odds with

changing ideals and the cataclysm of two world wars. But today, when you hear what this music has to offer, the neglect seems unjustified, especially as it is so appealing to audiences. Whenever I play him in my recitals people just love it –

they get so excited even though they are hearing the music for the first time.

They love those long-breathed phrases and singing melodies which carry the pianist forward. In the concertos he has this great driving power but he also has intimate, lyrical and poetic moments.



Seta Tanyel, who wants more people to hear Scharwenka's music

Being Polish he brought a great balance of temperament to his music. You can feel the breadth of his Polish roots in joyous and melancholic movements.

Harmonically his piano works are very interesting; he has an assured sense of structure – very strongly symphonic even in his solo piano works. His music resembles Moszkowski and Chopin and the final movement of the third concerto [on our cover disc] combines Polish influences with Schubert and Schumann. But always his own charm and character come through.

Composer, pianist – and entertainer

Scharwenka wrote a grand opera, a symphony and some chamber works but it is on his four concertos and solo piano works that his reputation rests. As pianist and composer he knew how to write for the piano; it was the instrument through which he could most effectively express himself. You have to remember that around 1900 he was as famous as Liszt as a concert pianist. He was a great entertainer and his home in

Berlin was always open house to composers and musicians. There is a wonderful story of Liszt hearing a performance of Scharwenka's most popular work, the *Polish Dances*. He was so taken with the work that he insisted on meeting its composer. Some weeks later Scharwenka called at Liszt's home. Because he had no calling card he gave the valet his hat with a copy of the *Polish Dances* inside. Liszt took one look at it and instantly remembered hearing the music. They became the best of friends.

As a pianist I could not be without Bach, Beethoven or Chopin but I would love Scharwenka to be back in the limelight, and recognised as one of the greatest pianist-composers in musical history. *Seta Tanyel*

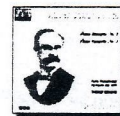
VERDICT

So, do you agree? Hear the extract and write, fax or e-mail your thoughts on Scharwenka, to our address on p. 22. We'll print the results next month

ON THE COVER DISC CD TRACK 7

SCHARWENKA Piano Concerto No. 3 in C sharp minor, Op. 80 – final movement, "Allegro non troppo", extract (5:16)

The first performance of the Third Piano Concerto, with Scharwenka as soloist, marked his return to Berlin as performer in January 1899 after a seven-year absence. In the Third Concerto the piano and orchestra are much more integrated than the Second. Thematically he tends to follow Liszt by using cyclic form, and although he has three separate movements, the main theme for the first movement is varied in lyrical form in the second, and it appears as the main theme in the third, but this time with rhythmic variation.



● SCHARWENKA

Piano Concertos – No. 2 in C minor, Op. 56; No. 3 in C sharp minor, Op. 80 ■ Seta Tanyel (piano); Radio Philharmonie Hannover des

NDR/Tadeusz Strugala ■ Collins Classics 14852 2 ■ 78:49 DDD full price

Who was Scharwenka?

Dates 1850–1924

Nationality Polish composer & pianist

Landmarks

1869 Debut as pianist in Berlin and publication of first compositions

1881 Opens his conservatoire in Berlin with a branch in New York

Works A grand opera, four piano concertos, sonatas, trios and songs

Most popular work

Polish Dances (1869), sold in millions.

Style hints of Chopin, Brahms and Moszkowski. Liszt was a great fan.

Where can I hear more? Seta Tanyel, the writer of this piece, has recorded more of his work than anybody else – available on Collins Classics

The Polish composer was an accomplished creator of a fading art – the romantic piano concerto