

ANTONI STOLPE

David C F Wright PhD

Here is yet another composer neglected and forgotten and it highlights the gross and unforgiveable injustice that the BBC and other broadcasters give.

In 2014, on the BBC, we had over 214 broadcasts of Elgar and nothing by at least over 40 British composers which I could name, most of whom are more original and finer composers than Elgar.

Stolpe was an exceptional Polish composer who died young but who lived at a time when Polish culture was almost non-existent. It is claimed that he was influenced Chopin who tried to inaugurate a Polish music national school but he was so immersed in his self-importance and suffering from manic depression, that he was unsuccessful.



If Stolpe had lived, he would have had a greater appreciation than Chopin since his music has form, an originality and is free from clichés and Chopinesque devices. Stolpe was a pioneer and not a disciple. He wrote a symphony, two string quartets, a piano sextet and other works far beyond the ability of Chopin. Stolpe's piano works are very fine and more masculine and richer in content than the tinkling cascades of Chopin. There is a greater and richer variety in Stolpe's work

Antoni was born on 23 May 1851 and was a descendant of a musical family. His antecedents came from Sweden. His father, Edward, was a teacher and composed some small pieces of music. In 1843, he married Marianna Turowska who also came from a musical family.

Antoni's first teacher was his father and it was soon realised that the boy suffered from ill health. He studied at the Alexander and Mary Institute. As well as his father he studied harmony and counterpoint with August Freyer and, later, with Stanislaw Moniuszko. At a public concert at the Institute, both the audience and staff were amazed at Stolpe's mature piano playing vastly superior to the remembered playing of Chopin. In 1866, Stolpe wrote his first work, O Salutaris Hostia. The following year in June, he received prizes for his piano playing and for counterpoint. Later, the 'best' students gave a concert and Stolpe played Chopin's Etude in C sharp minor and his own Mazurka in B minor.

Five new works were soon completed including the excellent two movement Piano Sextet in E minor, the Overture for orchestra played in an arrangement for string quintet and piano, four hands, the Dramatic Scene for cello and strings, which could be called a concerto, and two piano studies being allegrettos in A major and A flat major respectively. A Piano Concerto in F is lost.

There are some accomplished choral works such as the Credo for mixed choir, string quintet and organ and a few vocal works.

The composer was anxious to extend his studies and travelled to Berlin to study counterpoint with Friedrich Kiel and piano with Theodore Kullak. In order to raise funds, he put on a concert including music of his own including a Song to a text by Victor Hugo with the accompaniment of a string quartet, Three songs in the form of an Etude, and an orchestral work, Homage to Mendelssohn. He played Liszt's Spanish Rhapsody as well as conducting the orchestra. He had another concert in May 1869 including new works of his, namely his Concert Overture no 3, the Piano Trio, Ave Maria for contralto and string quintet and other pieces. There are two string quartets.

So gifted was he that Kiel offered him a teaching post in Berlin but sickness was to intervene.

By the time he was eighteen, Stolpe has produced more than Chopin did in his entire lifetime. In Berlin, Stolpe wrote piano works such as the Allegro appassionato, the Variations in D minor and the superb Piano Sonata, also in D minor. There is an unfinished Piano Sonata in A minor. The Variations are very impressive and does not suffer from any dull or tedious variations.

His stay in Berlin was cut short by illness as tuberculosis and pneumonia had set in and he died in Merano on 7 September 1872. He was 21. His last work was a sonata for violin and piano.

Acte Preamble have just brought out a CD of the piano music including the Sonata and the Variations and it is highly recommended

If Chopin is a great composer then Stolpe is a mega great composer!

(732)

© COPYRIGHT David C F Wright PhD 2015 – This article or any part of it, however small, must not be copied, quoted, reproduced, downloaded or altered in any way whatsoever nor stored in any retrieval system. Failure to comply is in breach of International Copyright Law and will render any offender liable to action at law.