

ROMAN STATKOWSKI

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Roman Statkowski was a Polish composer whose piano music is very well written. Although Polish, his music does not sound like Chopin. Statkowski studied at St Petersburg from 1886 and one of his teachers was Anton Rubinstein, although his first teachers were Sygietunski and Zelenski in Poland. He had originally studied law.

He was born near Kaliz on 24 December 1859. His family were landowners and there was always an appreciation of the arts at home. Not only did he study with Rubinstein, but with Rimsky Korsakov and developed an admiration for the music of Richard Strauss. This is why his music is not worshipping at the shrine of Chopin with those ghastly cliches, tinklings at the top of the piano and nauseating predictability. One recalls the words of one of our finest pianists, "Great pianists play great music; the rest play Chopin".

Statkowski graduated from St Petersburg in 1890 at the age of 31. In 1909 he succeeded Noskowski as professor of composition at the Warsaw Conservatory but from 1904 to his death he wrote little, if anything,

There are two operas, *Philaenis* of 1887 and *Maria* of 1904. Both were well received. There are miniatures for violin and piano and six string quartets but a complete list of his works does not seem to have been compiled.

It has been expressed that Statkowski was not like a dreamy romantic poet of the piano but had the attitude of a lawyer or an architect. Russian music, which influenced him, had greater depth, passion, drama and character and watery music does not.

His piano works are very fine and some examples are mentioned below.

The Six Pieces Op 16 is a challenging work full of inventiveness and variety and lasts for about twenty minutes. There is the depth of expression with mainly conventional harmony and the occasional backward look at the music of French harpsichordists. Melody is always to the fore and while there is lyricism there are moments of exciting dash. There is the evident style of a lawyer or architect and, generally, there is no padding or time wasting. The variety in the music holds the attention; there is always something new happening. The third movement is a waltz and is the weak link because of its predictability but, apart from that, there is much good music here,

Immortelles Op 19 are six pieces. The word means everlasting and may refer to the flower from which Everlasting Oil comes. There are more than six pieces in the set but many of Statkowski's manuscripts were destroyed in the War.

The Four Mazurkas Op 24 are not written in the style of Chopin being more complex with such devices as polyrhythms. There may be an influence of Polish folk music, however.

The Toccata Op 33 is very impressive and calls for a pianist with a cool head and tough fingers. This is real encore music; it is simply splendid.

The Six Preludes Op 37 are a delight. The first in C is predominantly reflective; the second in A is somewhat stormy whereas the fourth in G is cheerful and the fifth in E minor has been likened to Rachmaninov's famous C sharp minor prelude. They require real skill from the performer.

The composer died in Warsaw on 12 November 1925

We should hear some of this music in recitals. Is the monopoly of Chopin preventing this?

Score: [Quartett für 2 Violinen, Viola und Cello, op. 10](#)

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