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Zygmunt Noskowski (1846-1909)

Violin Sonata in A minor (c.1875)

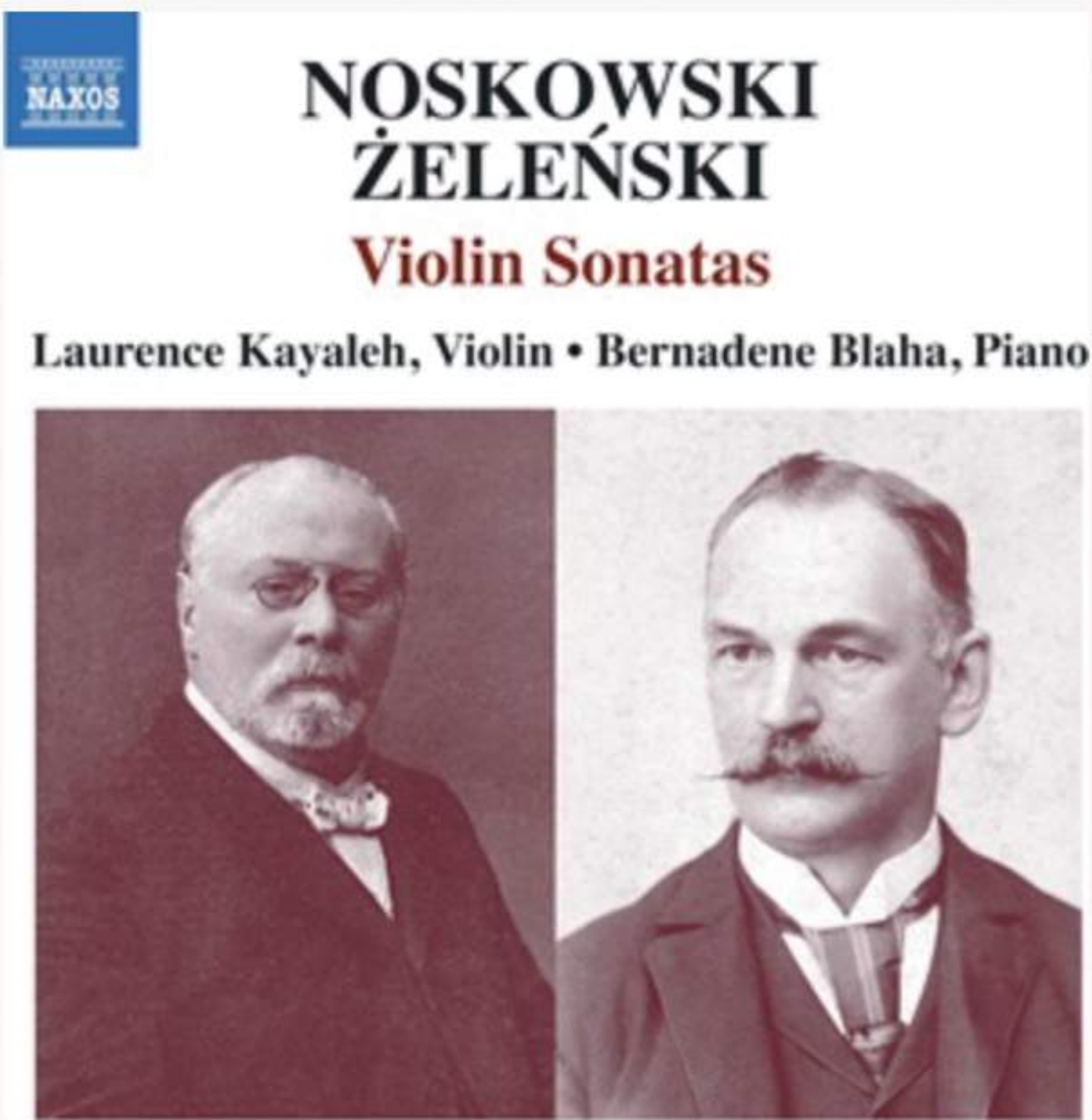
Władysław Źeleński (1837-1921)

Violin Sonata in F major, Op 30 (c.1879)

Laurence Kayaleh (violin), Bernadene Blaha (piano)

rec. 2022, Pollack Hall, Schulich School of Music, McGill University, Montreal

Naxos 8.574220 [64]



Nine years separates these two Polish composers, both of them steeped in the romantic tradition. Władysław Źeleński was born in Grodkowice in 1837 but moved with his family to nearby Kraków after the Galician uprising of 1846. In Kraków, he studied with a pupil of Hummel, Franciszek Mirecki, then continued his studies with Josef Krejčí in Prague and Massenet’s teacher Napoléon Henri Reber in Paris. In addition to composing, he was active as a teacher both in Warsaw and latterly in Kraków, where he did much to improve the musical life of the city. Like many romantic Polish composers, including his companion on this disc Zygmunt Noskowski, he has been pretty much overlooked especially outside his homeland and it is only relatively recently that his music has begun to appear on CD. I love the discs of his piano music on Acte Préalable and Jonathan Plowright recorded his virtuosic piano concerto on Hyperion CDA67958 ([review](#)). Zygmunt Noskowski was Warsaw born and studied at the Conservatoire there with Stanisław Moniuszko before travelling to Berlin, where from 1872-75 he studied with Friedrich Kiel. He is known, if at all, as being a symphonist, though his output includes four operas and other vocal works, piano and chamber music. Among these is the violin sonata in A minor, which appears to date from the final year of these studies, though it is certainly advanced for a student work. Though the short, delicate introduction doesn’t immediately suggest it, this is an overtly passionate work. There is gloriously romantic writing for both instruments; whether in the first theme, fervent and richly textured or the soaring second theme that sounds for all the world like it came from Tchaikovsky’s Violin Concerto written three years later. Tchaikovsky comes to mind too in parts of the second movement, a theme and variations, especially in parts of the final lyrical moments. In the sonata as a whole, the parts are very much equal partners. They share honours here with the piano taking a busy staccato variation with occasional comments from the violin before the parts swap and the violin is once more in the spotlight. After a ready-steady...and...go from the violin, the finale takes off in an energetic tarantelle with a jolly, swaggering Neapolitan tune as its focus as well as plenty of contrapuntal interplay! As the movement develops this becomes fugal on a couple of occasions but maintains its vivacious spirit to the brilliant end.

The Źeleński sonata is also in three movements and opens with a long violin melody over a driving chordal accompaniment. The drive of this triplet momentum continues throughout the movement except for a few bars where the second theme enters *misterioso*, quite beautifully I might add, the violin entering over a hushed piano. This is a virtuoso work with both partners equally involved and though it is accomplished and quite exciting it times it never becomes truly memorable. The second movement starts with a buoyant and charming country dance that in the central section grows more sturdy and begins to suggest something of a Polish dance, though its restraint keeps it firmly in the salon. This is the first hint of any Polish national character that I have found in these two sonatas. An extended dramatic and conversational introduction opens the finale, delaying the energetic rondo for a short while; the sustained music of the opening reappears just before the vivacious coda. It is all very entertaining, even thrilling, with some occasional moments of passion that are a bit too short for my taste, but I have to say it was the Noszkowski that was calling me back for more listening.

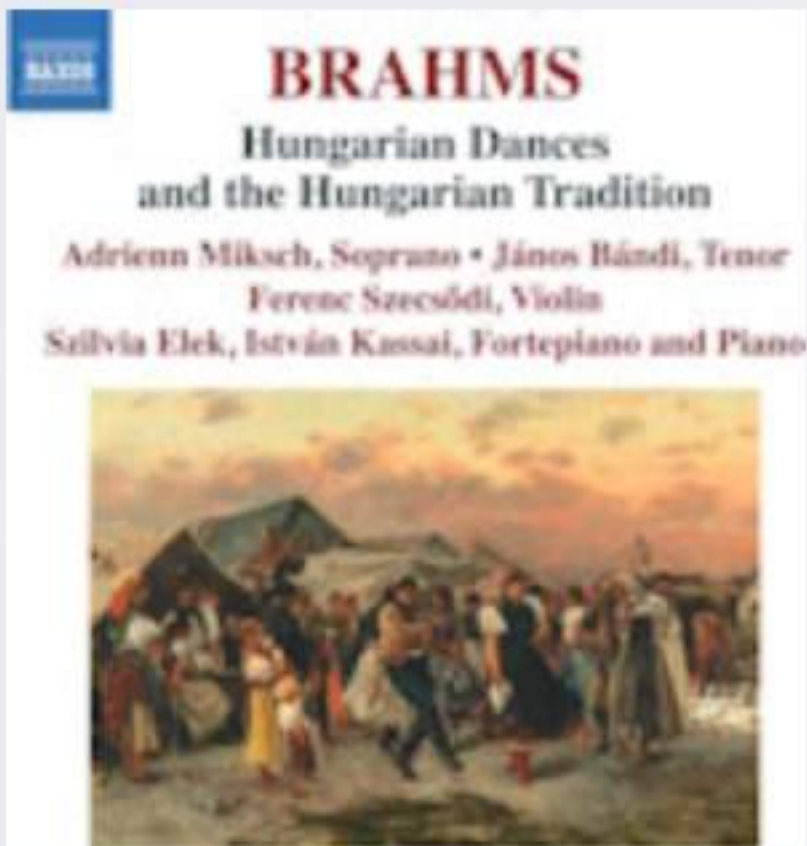
I have no complaints at all with the fine soloists, violinist Laurence Kayaleh and pianist Bernadene Blaha; both are passionate and fully immersed in the music, finding a marvellous blend in the quite intertwined parts. Both sonatas have previously been recorded on Acte Préalable, but I find Kayaleh’s tone much richer than either Jolanta Sosnowska in the Noszkowski ([AP0248](#)) or Gustaw Ciężarek (AP0238) and Barbara Trojanowski ([AP0112](#)) in the Źeleński. The latter recording makes heavy weather of the passage work, especially from pianist Elżbieta Tyszecka, something that is certainly not an issue with this fine Naxos partnership.

Rob Challinor

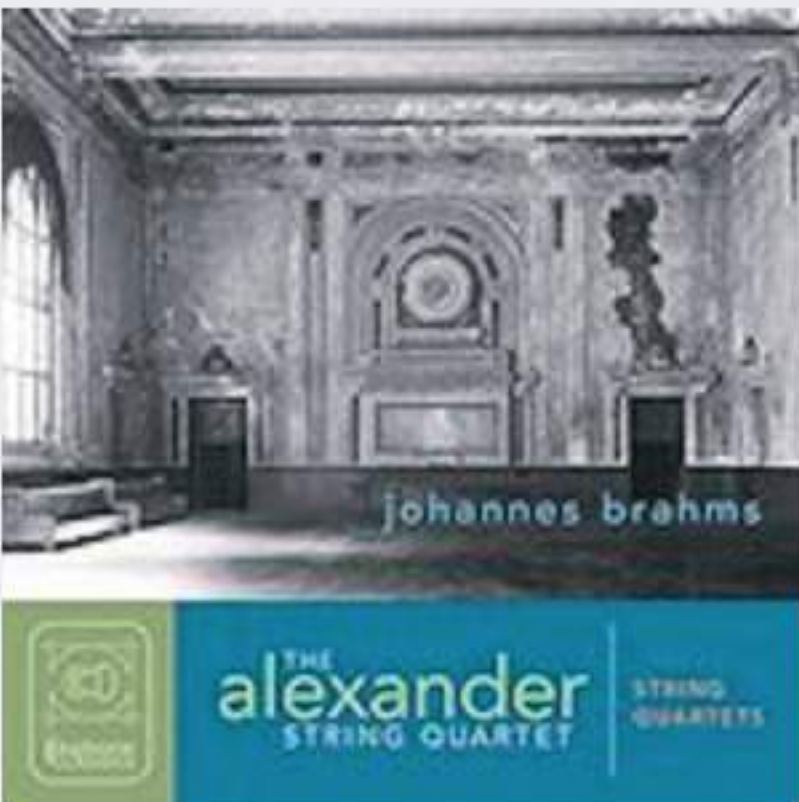
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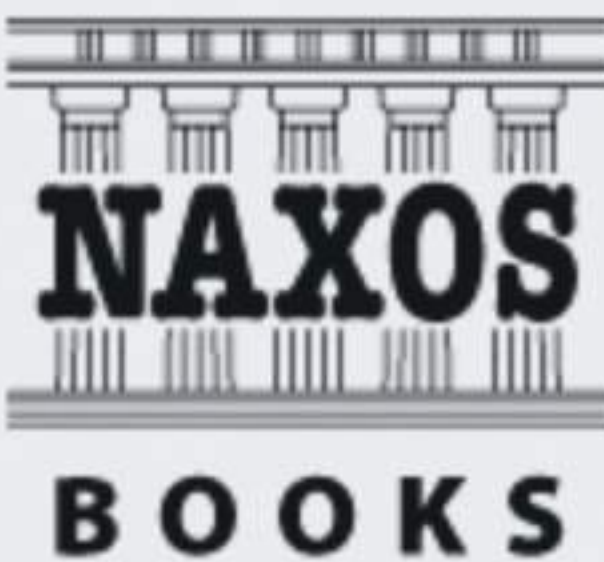
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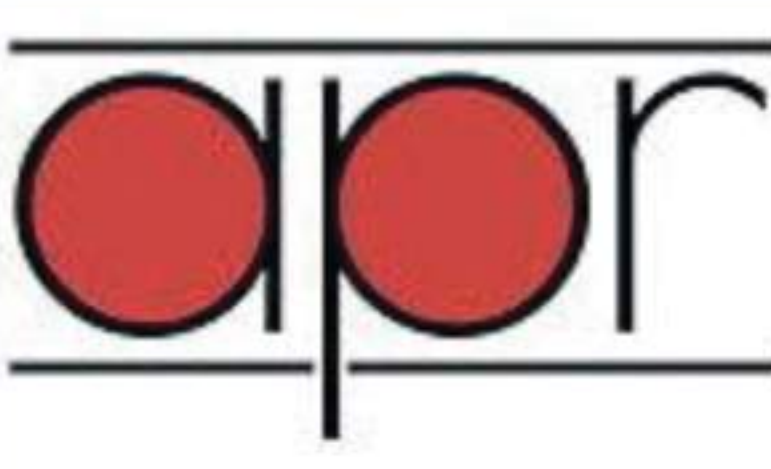
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