

JUSTYNA GABZDYL

BUILDING ON THE BEST OF POLAND IN MONTREAL

by ADRIAN RODRIGUEZ

Justyna Gabzdyl has come a long way. After graduating from the Fryderyk Chopin Academy (now University) of Music in Warsaw in 2005, this Polish pianist continued her studies at the École Normale de Musique Alfred Cortot in Paris. Her determination to hone her skills brought her to the Université de Montréal, where she earned a doctorate in 2012.

This month she releases a double CD that brings together Chopin's Ballades with Szymanowski's *Métopes* Op. 29 and *Masques* Op. 38.

"I wanted my first album to be dedicated to Polish composers because of my origins," Gabzdyl says.

"The Ballades are particularly resonant for Gabzdyl, who endorses the opinion of the American music critic James Huneker (1857-1921) that "none of Chopin's compositions surpasses [the Ballades] in masterliness of form and beauty and poetry of contents."

Gabzdyl is also of the opinion that *Métopes* and *Masques* mark the beginning of a new period of Szymanowski's creative output, influenced by impressionism, the Orient, and the ancient world.

"I find his music incredibly stimulating to the imagination," she says. "His style is unique, characterised by a beautiful, sensual tone.

"His huge sensibility to colour and sound is impressionistic. At the same time, the ecstatic climaxes make his style closer to expressionism."

Szymanowski traveled often to Italy, Sicily, North Africa and France – destinations with which Gabzdyl is familiar. She has lived in France, and visited the Maghreb numerous times.

"Countries that are culturally different from our own arouse our curiosity," Gabzdyl explains. "They open us to new smells, tastes, landscapes, lifestyles..."

"I think all these factors affect our emotions and inspire us. In this case, travelling in the composer's footsteps helped me to understand his intentions and galvanized my enthusiasm."

Studying in Canada also exerted an influence on Gabzdyl. "I think music interpretation is somehow influenced by the spirit of the nation," she says. "Moving to Canada improved my positive thinking. I became more relaxed."

More relaxed? The thought leads Gabzdyl to laugh.

"I find Canadians more jovial. Polish people have a tendency to be melancholic."

Her studies at the Université de Montréal also introduced her a musical perspective that lent greater stress to architecture.

"In Poland, there is generally more interest in the progress of the music's 'character,'" she says. "This focus is quite typical of Slavic schools."

"I was also influenced by the French technique of 'jeu perlé,' which I use both in Chopin and Szymanowski."

Masques and *Métopes* are both triptychs. The Ballades were published separately but are widely viewed (and frequently recorded) as a set of four.

"Musicians who record whole cycles have always impressed me," Gabzdyl says. "I also like it when there is some connection between the pieces."

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The Justyna Gabzdyl recital and CD launch takes place on Feb. 15 at 7 p.m. at the Consulate of the Republic of Poland in Montreal, 3501 Ave. du Musée. RSVP by Feb. 8 at infoconcert.reservations@gmail.com www.justynagabzdyl.com

