

Review Essay

Moniuszko and the Revival of the Noble Traditions: *The Countess and The Haunted Manor*

Stanisław Moniuszko, *Hrabina* (The Countess)

Karen Gardeazabal, *sop*, Nicola Proksch, *sop*, Natalia Rubiś, *sop*,
Rafał Bartmiński, *ten*, Mariusz Godlewski, *bar*, Jan Martiník, *bass*
Podlasie Opera and Philharmonic Choir, Europa Galante, Fabio Biondi, *cond*
Fryderyk Chopin Institute, NIFCCD 089-090 2021 (2 CDs: 120 minutes), €18

Stanisław Moniuszko, *Straszny dwór* (The Haunted Manor)

Edyta Piasecka, *sop*, Monika Ledzion-Porczyńska, *mezzo sop*, Małgorzata
Walewska, *mezzo sop*,
Karol Kozłowski, *ten*, Arnold Rutkowski, *ten*, Marcin Bronikowski, *bar*,
Mariusz Godlewski, *bar*, Tomasz Konieczny, *bar*, Rafał Siwek, *bass*.
Podlasie Opera and Philharmonic Choir
Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century, Grzegorz Nowak, *cond*
Fryderyk Chopin Institute, NIFCCD 084-085 2019 (2 CDs: 146 minutes), €18

The two recently recorded CD sets of *Hrabina* (The Countess) and *Straszny dwór* (The Haunted Manor) in complete concert versions with eighteenth-century instruments add enormously to the Polish operatic repertoire in the nineteenth century, and offer a fresh listening experience for those who have long wished for first-rate recordings of lesser-known, yet brilliantly executed, works of the hitherto neglected composer, Stanisław Moniuszko (1819–1872).¹ Born in the Minsk district of modern Belarus, Moniuszko was gentry, and his nostalgia for the customs, the fields and forest, and the rural community that shaped his childhood years, fuelled his enthusiasm for modern operas set in the eighteenth century. These stellar concert versions of *The Countess* and *The Haunted Manor* provide a fascinating glimpse into the provocative and glittering salons of the eighteenth-century Warsaw nobility, whose inhabitants stand firmly in contrast to the more modest and self-effacing life of the peasants and the country gentry. In both operas Moniuszko successfully provides a romanticized portrayal of pre-Partition courtly life in Poland. While

¹ For further reference and scholarly insights into Moniuszko's life and his contributions to the repertoire at the Teatr Wielki in Warsaw, see Rüdiger Ritter's recent biography, *Der Tröster der Nation: Stanisław Moniuszko (1819–1872) und seine Musik* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2019); Phillip Ther's cultural study, *Center Stage: Operatic Culture and Nation Building in Nineteenth-Century Central Europe* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2014); and Józef Szczublewski's pioneering work, *Teatr Wielki w Warszawie 1833–1993*, in collaboration with Teresa Kilian (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1993).

these two operas were highly regarded as national treasures in Poland, they were not particularly well known outside of the country. Polish opera at that time was largely overshadowed by Italian, French, and German composers, and the nation's subjugation to the Hapsburgs, Prussians, and Russians throughout the nineteenth century contributed mightily to the neglect of staged works by Polish composers. Additionally, singers needed to be trained in the nuances and inflections of the language. Prior recordings were either incomplete or were not available with English translations of the librettos. With the Biondi and Nowak recordings, Moniuszko's vision of expanding his art to a global audience has finally been achieved. These recordings are accessible to all opera enthusiasts on an international playing field.

With these two operas, in particular, Moniuszko artfully explores opposing aspects of sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth-century Polish society, and does so during the middle of the nineteenth century. Both operas challenge the listener with issues surrounding social justice and contemporary ethics during a problematic time spurred by political upheaval in Poland and the rest of Europe.

Although Moniuszko spent several years of his childhood in Warsaw, he took a circular route through Europe and Russia before returning almost two decades later as a celebrated national figure. In 1842, at the young age of 23, he left a fairly successful stint conducting at the national theatre in Vilnius and composing operettas for the local amateur society, and briefly took up residence in St Petersburg, where he earned a living primarily from composing, conducting choral concerts, and offering private piano instruction to the mostly female children of the city's wealthier citizens. He had already gained a reputation as an art song composer, and he enhanced his stature when he advertised the publication of the first volume of his *Śpiewniki Domowe* (Songs for the Home) (1842) in *Tygodnik Peterburgski*, September 22, 1842.² These strophic songs, with their expressive melodies and rhythms drawn from Polish national dances, elevated his stature in the Russian capital, and, not surprisingly, he found himself in high demand as a teacher. Advertisements for his latest songs appeared almost weekly in St Petersburg gazettes, and by 1845 he had solidified his reputation as a composer and teacher. The distinguished music publishing firm of Matvey Bernard published single editions of his songs and one advertisement that appeared in the officially sanctioned *Journal de St.-Petersbourg*, on 30 January 1845, offered for sale several volumes of Polish mazurkas and krakowiaks for voice and piano by unidentified composers, with texts in Polish and Russian.³ At this point in his career, Moniuszko espoused his primary aims and goals as a composer, and set forth his thoughts about the meaning of music within the broader society. Almost two decades before sketching *The Countess* and *The Haunted Manor*, Moniuszko argued in an essay in *Tygodnik*

² *Tygodnik Peterburgski*, 22 September 1842, 495. *Tygodnik Peterburgski*, a twice-weekly periodical published in St Petersburg in the Polish language, was published approximately 1830–1859. It included essays and advertisements from literary figures and composers, including Moniuszko. Several first editions of Moniuszko's songs survive in the St Petersburg Rimsky-Korsakov State Conservatory Archives, but no dates are given for the publication. These include *Drugi Śpiewnik Domowy St. Moniuszki* (Vilnius: Nakładem Józefa Zawadzkiego, no date given): pl. no. J. 957, 1–42; *Czwarty Śpiewnik Domowy St. Moniuszki* (Vilnius: Nakładem Józefa Zawadzkiego, no date given): pl. no. J 10 Z, 1–58; *Piąty Śpiewnik Domowy St. Moniuszki* (Vilnius: Nakładem Józefa Zawadzkiego, no date given): pl.no. J 10 Z, 1–75; *Piosnki Sielskie Władysława Syrokomli. Z Kantaty: Rok w Piesni. St. Moniuszki* (Vilnius: Nakładem Józefa Zawadzkiego, no date given): pl. no. J 957 Z, 59–70.

³ *Journal de St.-Petersbourg*, 30 January 1845, no. 860, 3442.

Peterburgski that music understandably reflected the feelings and passions of the composer, but more importantly, perhaps, music also served a larger goal within society, that is, it helped affirm a cultural identity.⁴ The composer's revitalization of the ancient Polish customs and the traditions derived from the eighteenth-century Polish court, and his application of dance and popular song in the opera, contributed largely to his success in Warsaw.

Moniuszko was not only a music pioneer who helped shift the audience attention from the court to the public theatre. He was also an astute businessman whose artistic vision provoked discourse and created enthusiasm for modern staged musical works. Despite the strict theatrical censorship that followed in the wake of the November Insurrection of 1830–31, an unsuccessful Polish rebellion that sought to overthrow Russian rule in the Kingdom of Poland, Moniuszko remained undeterred. Although the restrictions remained in place for the remainder of the composer's lifetime, he nonetheless moved ahead with his operatic ventures that told the story of the landowners and the forgotten nobility, and freely incorporated Polish customs into *The Countess* and *The Haunted Manor*. During the 1840s, the music business in Warsaw almost came to a halt, as musicians, composers, and publishers fought uphill battles with the Russian censors, or local officials working at the behest of the state administration. In 1848, in response to the European revolutions that swept across Europe, the Russian administration renewed its efforts against the publication of music set to Polish texts, and in Warsaw, the law was strictly imposed. Moniuszko was not to be dissuaded, however. Rather than publishing collected volumes of his latest songs, he disseminated them through publication of single editions and marketed his works for domestic use, rather than for the public arena. It is important to recall that at that time the incorporation of recognizable folk tunes and melodies in his operas and songs was indeed considered revolutionary, but Moniuszko chose to march to his own drummer and thereby forged lasting emotional ties with his audience.

In keeping with his artistic goals, Moniuszko remained a lifelong advocate of the public theatre and premiered many of his operas at the Teatr Wielki, the Grand Theatre, in Warsaw. The Warsaw Grand Theatre still is an historical venue that remains in use today.⁵ With a seating capacity of two thousand, the Grand Theatre, located on the elegant Theatre Square in central Warsaw, houses a theatre and opera complex, and is currently home to the Polish National Ballet. 1860 saw the premiere of Moniuszko's *The Countess*, set to a libretto by the young Warsaw radical poet Włodzimierz Wolski, and the following year the composer envisioned a second opera that honoured Poland's past, *The Haunted Manor* (1861–64), with romantic/nostalgic poet Jan Chęciński as librettist. Despite the hardships imposed by the censors by mid-century, *The Countess* and *The Haunted Manor* are both based on themes drawn from Poland's aristocratic past, and received premieres in the public theatre, although the staging of *The Haunted Manor* was beset with censorship restrictions that stemmed from the January 1863 Uprising. In yet another artistic blow, in 1863, while Moniuszko was hard at work on *The Haunted Manor*, the Warsaw Grand Theatre was converted into military barracks, and shortly thereafter Moniuszko lost his job as conductor of the opera orchestra. Further, the administrative theatrical censors viewed the opera, with its supernatural themes, patriotic imagery, and modern Polish libretto,

⁴ *Tygodnik Peterburgski*, 22 September 1842, 495.

⁵ See <https://teatr Wielki.pl/en/> (accessed 8 August 2023).

as inappropriate for a public premiere in a state theatre, primarily because they believed that the work would invoke national sympathies with Polish audiences. As a result, *The Haunted Manor* received only three public performances at the Warsaw Grand Theatre following its premiere in 1865, and thereafter the theatrical censors withdrew the work from the repertoire entirely.

Fabio Biondi and Europa Galante are to be commended for this beautiful and compelling concert version of *The Countess*. Recorded during the festival 'Chopin and his Europe' at the 'Teatr Wielki' Polish National Opera in Warsaw, 17–19 August 2020, this world premiere studio recording with a first-rate Italian period instrument Baroque orchestra joyously recreates Moniuszko's eighteenth-century setting. It is a pleasure to listen to this recording, especially the soloists, including sopranos Karen Gardezabal (*The Countess*) and Natalia Rubiś (*Bronia*), tenors Rafał Bartmiński (*Casimir*) and Krystian Adam (*Dzidzi*), baritone Mariusz Godlewski (*Valentine*), bass Jan Martiník (*Horatio*), and soprano Joanna Pach-Żbikowska (*Miss Eva and Others*). It's truly a pleasure to listen to the entire opera, complete with spoken dialogue rendered by Danuta Stenka (*The Countess*), Andrzej Seweryn (*Horatio*), and Joanna Pach-Żbikowska (*Miss Eva and Others*). The Podlasie Opera and Philharmonic Choir, directed by Violetta Bielecka, serve as a foundation for the emotional and elegant narrative, and the chorus adds substantially to the dramatic quality of the production. The recording is well-paced, and Biondi is judicious with the tempo, dynamics and broader interpretation of the emotion and meaning of the text. For example, Biondi and Europa Galante capture the essence of the frivolous countess, from her glittering life in Warsaw to her emotional despair over the loss of her faithful admirer Casimir, who, upon return from war, chooses the virtuous, modest Bronia as his bride. He rejects the countess, mainly because he now finds her self-absorbed attitude not to his liking. Moniuszko paints a portrait of a young man who has grown and seen the world: the countess is no longer consistent with his values or his larger world view. In this opera, perhaps we find a self-portrait of Moniuszko, himself a humble man, who through music and the stage, exposes the shallowness of the Warsaw nobility and eschews the values of the salon society that the countess represents. This is Moniuszko at his best, and Europa Galante brings the music to life with the performances of Polish dances, most notably the opening drawing room scene in the first act, where Warsaw society is arriving for the countess's ball, and the opening third act polonaise for three cellos, viola and double bass, which so delightfully describes Horatio's manor house. The countess's final aria, as Gardezabal interprets it, is stunning. The countess is in despair at the loss of Casimir, as she sings, 'To wake from these delusive dreams, suppress the groan from my heart, and so return alone again, into the vain and modish crowd ... a dreadful sacrifice to pay, too great the price for passing rage, I loved him, oh, I'll love him still' (liner notes, p. 158).

The liner notes to *The Countess*, prepared by Grzegorz Zieziula and translated into English by John Comber, are scholarly and insightful. While the opera is sung in Polish, the libretto is available in an excellent – and valuable – English translation. The Biondi recording, along with programme notes and English translation of the libretto, are extremely valuable for all listeners, especially for students and instructors engaged in interdisciplinary courses that focus on a diverse group of composers in music, literature, and cultural studies classes. After many years of neglect, it is rewarding to see composers who flourished in nineteenth-century Poland, like Moniuszko, finally getting the attention they have long deserved. The opera incorporates the mazurka, a lively folk dance in triple metre, and the

courtly polonaise, both of which serve as thematic markers for the rural gentry and the former nobility, thereby intensifying the dramatic action.⁶ In *The Countess* Moniuszko superbly crafted a musical staged work that revolved around the hopes and dreams of one central character, interspersed with the dramatization of events that involved favourable and unfavourable portrayals of the gentry. Gardezabal's interpretation of the complex and varied emotional states of the countess is nothing short of brilliant.

Throughout his career, Moniuszko displayed an active interest in vocal melodies that accurately reflected the text accents of the Polish language. Perhaps inspired by his teachers, August Freyer (1803–1883) and Dominik Stefanowicz, who conducted the local theatre orchestra in Mińsk, Moniuszko adapted melodic and rhythmic inflections drawn from the language and incorporated these linguistic inflections into all vocal lines in *The Countess*. Fryer, a student of the acclaimed theorist and composer Józef Elsner (1769–1854), was Chopin's classmate at the Warsaw Conservatory and was influenced by Elsner's advocacy of a contemporary Polish repertoire, as well as by his writings on the accentual patterns of the language in musical settings. Fabio Biondi and Europa Galante render these subtle linguistic inflections with aplomb! The singers and the orchestra, together, dance their way through this artistic-musical concert performance. Further, Biondi shapes the orchestra and singers into a compelling and accessible stage work that entices the audience and successfully draws the listener into Moniuszko's world of a romanticized eighteenth century infused with wit and common sense.

In *The Haunted Manor* Moniuszko offers a particularly insightful character portrayal of the rural gentry. The opera opens as two brothers, Stefan and Zbigniew, both representing minor gentry, return home after a successful military campaign. They vow to remain unmarried so they can continue to serve their country, but their aunt Cześnikowa has other plans for her two nephews. She has been hard at work arranging a marriage between the two brothers and the daughters of a local town administrator. The two brothers affirm their oath and set out for the neighbouring Kalinowo Manor (the haunted manor), to collect past debts from their friend Miecznik, an old nobleman and warrior known as the Swordbearer of Kalinowo. Cześnikowa warns the brothers that the Manor house is under a curse and is haunted by ghosts, but the brothers are undeterred. In the second act, which takes place in Miecznik's manor house, he and his daughters, Hanna and Jadwiga, are celebrating New Year's Eve with friends and family. Chęciński's libretto tells a story that is built around the customs and ceremonies that take place on the rural landowning estates as the country gentry entertain visitors during the holidays. Hanna and Jadwiga observe tradition when they appear at their looms beside the fireplace where the young girls sing and play games of fortune. A potential suitor, Damazy, enters the room, and announces that he is looking for a wealthy wife and he hopes one of the daughters will marry him. The fortune-telling session ends as the wax mysteriously melts into the shape of a young knight, and Miecznik is delighted with this prophesy. Cześnikowa is unhappy with the results of the fortune-telling because she has already arranged marriages for Stefan and Zbigniew, and she tries to deceive Miecznik by describing

⁶ For additional sources on traditional Polish dances, see Anna Czekanowska's study, *Slavonic Heritage, Polish Tradition, Contemporary Trends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and Timothy J. Cooley, *Making Music in the Polish Tatras: Tourists, Ethnographers, and Mountain Musicians* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

her nephews as superstitious, fearful, and filled with terror at the thought of staying for any length of time in the haunted manor. She also emboldens Hanna and Jadwiga as they plot to punish the two brothers for their alleged lack of courage. The opera's plot becomes complex at this point with various plots and counterplots involving Damazy and Cześniakowa creating conflict among the characters, yet the main focus of the libretto remains on Stefan and Zbigniew, Hanna and Jadwiga, and Miecznik. At the opera's conclusion, Stefan, alone in the haunted tower room, dreams of Hanna, while at the same time Zbigniew realizes his love for Jadwiga. Both brothers publicly renounce their oath of bachelorhood and ask Miecznik for his consent to marry his daughters. After relating the tale of the haunted manor, Miecznik gives his permission for the marriage, and Hanna and Jadwiga agree to the nuptials. The opera ends on a festive, celebratory note, as the chorus sings: 'May the star of hope be blessed and visit our humble abodes!' (liner notes, p. 188).

The two-CD concert version of *The Haunted Manor*, with Grzegorz Nowak and the Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century, belongs on every listener's list of 'must-have' recordings. Recorded during the festival 'Chopin and his Europe' at the Witold Lutosławski Concert Studio of Polish Radio in August 2018 and August 2019, this is the first recording of the work in its complete version on period instruments. Nowak's elegant concert version of the opera more than meets audience expectations. The programme notes to the opera, written by Grzegorz Zieziula and translated into English by John Comber, are thoroughly researched and well written, and offer a wealth of material about the censorship of Chęciński's libretto, as well as a section devoted to musical and textual borrowings and interpolations. Zieziula's interesting narrative illustrates the extent to which Chęciński borrowed from an earlier short story, *The Haunted Manor: A Tale of Courtiers in the Portcullis Tower* (1834), by the popular writer, Kazimierz Władysław Wójcicki (1807–1879), for the opera's libretto (liner notes, p. 35). The Podlasie Opera and Philharmonic Choir, under the direction of chorus master Violetta Bielecka, add musical heft and character to the large choral sections, with nuanced shadings of dynamics and tempos. As a practical matter, the choruses provided a fresh and substantial repertoire for the community of singers who belonged to the burgeoning Warsaw amateur societies. This review would be amiss without commending the fine singers in this production, including bass-baritone Tomasz Konieczny (Miecznik/the Sword Bearer), soprano Edyta Piasecka (Hanna), mezzo-soprano Monika Ledzion-Porczyńska (Jadwiga), tenor Arnold Rutkowski (Stefan), baritone Mariusz Godlewski (Zbigniew), tenor Karol Kozłowski (Damazy), mezzo-soprano Małgorzata Walewska (Cześniakowa/Chamberlain's wife), baritone Marcin Bronikowski (Maciej), bass Rafał Siwek (Skołuba), mezzo-soprano Joanna Motulewicz (Marta), tenor Paweł Cichoński (Grześ), alto Oksana Gołambowska (Old Woman). The opera is sung in its original Polish text, with English translations, which is all well rendered.

The Haunted Manor perhaps best represents Moniuszko's artistic vision and his nostalgia for Poland's past. He fervently believed that the composition of an opera based on an epic tale served a significant function in society that went beyond mere entertainment. His incorporation of Polish national customs in this opera, including hunting, fortune telling, sleigh rides, and various amusements, served as an important national cultural identifier for its time. Yet such a vivid musical portrayal of the traditional landowning gentry, set to a Polish text, did not find favour with the administrative censorship and the opera was soon pulled from the repertoire of the public theatre. Despite these thorny musical setbacks, however,

Moniuszko strongly held to the belief that his primary compositional goal was to provide music for a diverse domestic market and for him that meant presenting the opera in the Polish language. With *The Haunted Manor* Moniuszko sought to cultivate a new audience for the public theatre and the presentation of the work in the vernacular remained high on his list of acceptable practices. The practice of presenting operas with Polish texts in translation for premieres at the public theatres was not unique to Moniuszko. Earlier in the nineteenth century, operas of Elsner and the theorist and composer Karol Kurpiński (1785–1857), originally set to Polish librettos, were translated into Italian, French, or German and staged in those languages at the Warsaw Grand Theatre.

Clearly, although his efforts to stage his earlier opera, *Halka* (1846–47), in Polish at the Warsaw Grand Theatre in 1848 met without failure (the revised version of the opera premiered in Italian translation), the composer remained undeterred in his efforts to stage *The Haunted Manor* with the original Chęciński libretto.⁷ The strict censorship measures that the Russian authorities imposed after the November Insurrection included a statute that banned public premieres of operas and theatrical productions sung or staged in Polish, and those operas deemed to make use of patriotic or national imagery. Depictions of the gentry are often viewed through the scrim of the polonaise, a court dance in stately triple metre, and the mazurka, a peasant dance in ternary form characterized by strong accents on the second or third beats of the bar. These dances served as musical signifiers for Polish audiences as well as the composer. *The Haunted Manor* presents a romanticized view of events in Polish history, as national and patriotic themes are entwined with magical and fantastical events that take place in a seventeenth-century manor house situated in the Polish countryside. Understandably for its time, the opera, with its patriotic overtones, did not sit well with the administrative theatrical censors, and after the opera was withdrawn from the repertoire in 1865 it was neglected in the operatic repertoire. *The Haunted Manor* was not staged at the Warsaw Grand Theatre until 1914, and until Nowak's recording there was no complete performance on the work on period instruments.

The opera serves as a great equalizer of country and town life, and Nowak's concert version aptly showcases the characters as they appear alternatively witty and plodding, heightening the emotional impact of the music. For example, in the second act, which takes place at Miecznik's manor house on New Year's Eve, Damazy, a fashionably dressed lawyer and potential suitor for one of Miecznik's daughters, enters the room to the strains of a minuet, by that time an outdated French court dance. The polonaise, a popular Polish national dance, is now *en vogue*, and,

⁷ Włodzimierz Wolski provided the libretto for *Halka* and the successful premiere of the revised 1858 version brought Moniuszko to the forefront of musical activity in Warsaw. He accepted a position as director of the Teatr Wielki soon thereafter, and worked ceaselessly to bring Polish opera to the general public. *Halka* is based on Kazimierz Wójcicki's story, *Góralka* (The Highland Girl), from his collection of tales titled *Stary gawędyiii i obrazy* (Old pictures and legends). The narrative embraces a musical portrayal of social conflict between the traditions of the Polish nobles and those of the mountaineers. The plot was considered scandalous for its time: a young nobleman breaks his promise of marriage to a peasant girl who has given birth to his child and instead chooses to marry the daughter of a local nobleman. Here the opera's conflict was two-fold: first, a betrayal of the moral code of the mountaineer community, and second, the unflattering depiction of the nobility. Despite the extensive revisions, the revised version of *Halka* premiered in Italian translation, rather than in the original Polish, due to the strict censorship of operas sung in Polish in the public theatres.

adding to that, Damazy is not dressed in traditional costume. Rather, he is wearing the latest French fashions, which does not sit well with the country gentry. The patriotic imagery comes through at this point in the opera, as Miecznik sings a passionate aria that spells out the qualities he expects in a son-in-law, 'He must be good and brave ... and with power wield a sword. For his country he must stand, be courageous, forge ahead, for his land, for his precious motherland' (liner notes, p. 108). The third act opens in the haunted room in the tower of the manor house, and once again references the opera's ties with the ancient aristocracy. Moniuszko's incorporation of the broken chiming clock in *The Haunted Manor*, for example, served as a subtle reference to the era before the last Partition of Poland in 1795. Such symbolic clues fuelled audience enthusiasm in the second half of the nineteenth century when nostalgia for the past pushed the boundaries of the art form. As the festivities continue in the manor house, the guests – and Polish audiences – immediately recognize the mazurka's predictable triple metre and identified it with the national dance they recalled from childhood.

Nowak offers a first-rate production that includes traditional and non-traditional instruments, tightly structured ensembles, and beautiful, elegant singing. In act 3, scene four, Stefan's bittersweet tenor aria with chimes is set as a polonaise, invoking a world that is now lost to him. He sings, 'I see father walking in the field surrounded by his family, teaching us a sword to wield ... I hear that tune, an echo of childhood days, flow from his heart to the sky somewhere' (liner notes, p. 143). The text and the musical association with the courtly polonaise was considered radical for its time and would have added considerably to Moniuszko's already pressing difficulties with the theatrical censors. Despite these challenges, however, with the staging of *The Haunted Manor* Moniuszko sought to raise the public consciousness and promote a musical aesthetic that incorporated contemporary Polish librettos. In so doing, he actively engaged audiences with beautiful melodies and wondrous tales during a difficult period in Poland's political journey. Polish audiences relished updated tales of the folk and the gentry, and *The Haunted Manor* offers the listener lyrical melodies that were accessible to the general audience. Moniuszko conveyed his ideas on music in an essay published in *Tygodnik Peterburgski* in 1842, affirming that beautiful poetry and beautiful melodies should forever echo in one's hearts and minds.⁸ Nowak and the Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century have created a recording that captures the inherent speech rhythms drawn from the Polish language and masterfully reinforces the national sentiment and elegant spirit of the dance, all of which serve as a hallmark of *The Haunted Manor*.

The concert versions of *The Countess* and *The Haunted Manor* have much to offer the listener. The performance style of both operas, using eighteenth-century instruments, results in a fine-tuning of Moniuszko's compositions, and both impress mightily. The CD sets offer well-written and extremely informative programme notes, and the English translation is available on the same page as the original Polish libretto, making it easy to keep track of the libretto for the duration of the opera. The presentation of the spoken texts in *The Countess*, a significant part of the entire opera, gives the listener a more complete notion of the difficulties with the administrative censorship that Moniuszko was forced to endure with his compositional forays at the Warsaw Grand Theatre. Both productions involve an enormous amount of research and hard work on the part of the director, singers,

⁸ *Tygodnik Peterburgski*, 22 September 1842, 495.

scholars, translators and engineering staff, and all are to be commended for their very fine efforts. The recorded concert versions of *The Countess* and *The Haunted Manor* aptly reflect the passion and enthusiasm of participants and listeners alike and they set the bar high for future performances of other neglected nineteenth-century composers from diverse regions. The recordings of *The Countess* and *The Haunted Manor* would be of great interest to musicians, scholars and students engaged in multidisciplinary studies that incorporate music, literature and political thought, in addition to opera enthusiasts. Moniuszko used music as a form of creative resistance to the nation's oppressors, while at the same time lavishly celebrating Polish nationhood. His operas served as a fitting tribute to Poland, then and now, just as did Chopin's mazurkas, polonaises, and ballades earlier in the century.

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