Kristijonas Donelaitis Room, Faculty of Philology, Vilnius University

Guest lecture: The Reception of Antiquity in Early Music Clips
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Jörg Holzmann
Mozarteum / University of Salzburg
& Martin-Luther-University Halle-Wittenberg



Music, Myth, Movie

"La Fontaine d'Aréthuse" in a Cinéphonie by Jacques Thibaud, Émile Vuillermoz and Dmitriy Kirsanov (1935)

In 1935, the French violinist Jacques Thibaud and the influential music and film critic Émile Vuillermoz initiated a series of short musical films known as Cinéphonies. Produced by the Compagnie des Grands Artistes Internationaux, these films aimed to present classical music performed by outstanding musicians and "illustrated" by leading directors through cinematic means. The new possibilities of synchronized sound film allowed music, performance, and moving images to be connected in unprecedented ways. The Cinéphonies can therefore be regarded as early predecessors of the modern music video, although their aims were primarily artistic and didactic: Vuillermoz sought to make music accessible to a broad audience by translating it into visual form.

This lecture focuses on one particularly striking example: Dmitriy Kirsanov's 1935 realization of Karol Szymanowski's *La Fontaine d'Aréthuse* (The Fountain of Arethusa), performed by violinist Jacques Thibaud and pianist Tasso Janopoulo. Kirsanov, himself originally trained as a cellist, was responsible for three of the Cinéphonies, making his work particularly interesting for exploring the relationship between music and film.

Szymanowski composed *La Fontaine d'Aréthuse* in 1915 as the first of his three *Mythes* for violin and piano. Inspired by the myth of Arethusa, who is transformed by Diana into a spring while fleeing the river god Alpheus, the piece evokes water, pursuit, and transformation through shimmering piano textures and an increasingly passionate violin line. Kirsanov's film turns Szymanowski's musical interpretation into a visual narrative. Images of water and reflected light accompany the music, while Arethusa's pursuit and collapse follow its growing intensity. Her transformation into a spring is synchronized with a striking violin passage, and the final superimposition of Alpheus over flowing water suggests his transformation into a river.

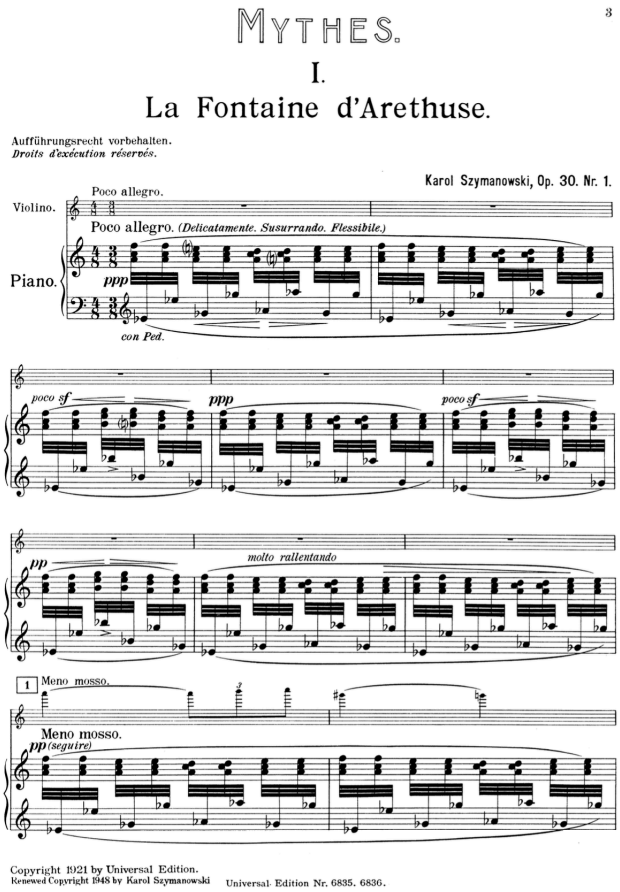
Of particular significance is the survival of La Fontaine d'Aréthuse in two versions: a dramatized version of the myth and a "concert version" showing Thibaud and Tasso Janopoulo at the piano performing the piece. Comparing them allows us to examine how the same musical work could be presented either through the bodies and gestures of its performers or through a cinematic reconstruction of its ancient sujet. The lecture thus approaches La Fontaine d'Aréthuse as a multilayered example of classical reception: an ancient myth is transformed into music, musical performance, and finally film. It asks what happens to the myth in this process of translation between different media and how the new audiovisual possibilities of the 1930s allowed antiquity to be reimagined for a modern cinema audience.



Jacques Thibaud in the "Concert version"



Sabine Earl in the "Dramatized version"



MYTHES. 3

I.

La Fontaine d'Arethuse.

Aufführungsrecht vorbehalten.
Droits d'exécution réservés.

Karol Szymanowski, Op. 30. Nr. 1.

Violino. Poco allegro.

Piano. Poco allegro. *(Delicatamente. Susurrando. Flessibile.)*

ppp

con Ped.

poco sf *ppp* *poco sf*

pp *molto rallentando*

1 Meno mosso.

Meno mosso.

pp (seguito)

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Renewed Copyright 1948 by Karol Szymanowski

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Links:

Concert version

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvIMAGE3bv4&list=RDlvIMAGE3bv4&start_radio=1

Dramatized version

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JmMykNwh7UM&list=RDJmMykNwh7UM&start_radio=1