

***A Child's Cry from Izieu: Oskar Morawetz: Complete Works for Violin and Piano.***  
**Jasper Wood (violin), David Riley (piano). CMCCD 12807. [www.musiccentre.ca](http://www.musiccentre.ca)**

The booklet of this CD begins with a touching explanation by the violinist, Jasper Wood. The *Duo for Violin and Piano* (1946, rev. 1947) heard on this recording was the very first composition by a Canadian composer that Wood learned. That positive experience led him to explore other repertoire of the last century and he came to view this learning of Morawetz's music as a pivotal moment in his career. After having the opportunity to personally meet the composer, he worked towards the goal of bringing all of the compositions by Morawetz for the combination of violin and piano together on one disc.

Morawetz died in June 2007, after these recordings were done but while production was still in progress. I am certain that he would be delighted to have all of his violin/piano works brought together on this disc, as it was a medium he was involved with for forty years. The work that gives this CD its title, *A Child's Cry from Izieu*, dates from 1987 and receives its first recording here.

These two works, the *Duo* and *A Child's Cry from Izieu*, provide the "sandwich fillings" between the three Sonatas that Morawetz wrote for violin and piano. Their dates are 1956, 1965/revised 1981, and 1985. Because their presentation is chronological on this recording, the listener can observe similarities of approach, but also further refinements as the composer explores possibilities of the violin and piano combination.

All three Sonatas are formally conceived as one-movement works, although the Sonata No. 2 begins with a slow introduction that leads directly into the closing lively *Poco Allegro*. A lengthy essay by Dr. Robin Elliott accompanies this recording. He points out overall structures for the listener by giving timings, which of course vary from counter to counter, depending on the machine. This essay also provides interesting biographical information on the composer and places each composition on this recording into perspective.

Elliott points out how Morawetz, when criticized about his "conservative approaches," would reply that his interest was in exploring the possibilities of "instrumental colours and new harmonic effects." Certainly the works on this recording show how Morawetz did not stand still. The interesting type of tremolo double stop with a pedal note on top and the rapid vibration of two other lower pitches seems to be a Morawetz soundprint in many of these works. Dr. Elliott brings up that Morawetz is often considered a "middle European" composer, but where does this tremolo idea originate?

As I think back on the analysis seminars that I had with Dr. Morawetz as a student at the University of Toronto, I recall how he enjoyed examining scores by Debussy. If one looks at Debussy's Violin Sonata there are tremolo effects both for violin and piano, but it seems that Morawetz has developed the idea farther with the use of the upper pedal note in the violin.

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I found the playing to be very technically competent throughout this recording, but overall I did not quite get the sense of the man that I knew in this music. My assumption is that perhaps the performers thought mainly of Morawetz as a “middle European” influenced composer and did not grasp other important aspects in how he approached sound, including influences from French impressionism plus his years of living in a Canadian environment. They did capture some impressionistic sonorities in the opening of the *Duo*, but this could be still further developed, particularly in sections of *A Child's Cry from Izieu* and the Sonatas Nos. 1 and 3.

For all who knew Dr. Morawetz, an essential element of his character was his deadpan humour. The website [www.oskarmorawetz.com](http://www.oskarmorawetz.com), prepared by his daughter Claudia, presents some wonderful accounts of this aspect of his character. In looking and listening to his scores, I find that musical humour occurs from time to time, but to my ears Wood and Riley fail to grasp these moments in this violin and piano repertoire. For example, the final section of the Sonata No. 2 is very scherzando-like in character and needs to have a playful approach. The Sonata No. 3 seems to me to have a wide variety of humorous gestures.

As one might expect, Morawetz based much of his compositional method in his works for violin and piano on the conversational texture used by Beethoven. Often in the process of tossing gestures back and forth, I found that the violinist, Wood, had very sensitive phrasing and shading, but then I was often disappointed when the pianist did not quite match that sensitivity. In my view, the pianist depended too much on the damper pedal instead of fully developing the range of colours possible with the piano apart from using extensive pedal. The piano was the composer's main instrument, and one on which he managed to get incredible colours and harmonic effects.

Overall, this recording provides us with a fine document of the contributions of Morawetz to the violin and piano repertoire. The production quality is excellent, and the presentation, with a photo by Karsh and then one of Morawetz by V. Tony Hauser, shortly before his passing, is outstanding.

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