Let us not relegate Cécile Chaminade’s brother-in-law to the piano alone. Having been professor to Wanda Landowska, Vlado Perlemuter and Thomas Beecham, Moszkowski also composed an opera and works for orchestra. To wit, Joan of Arc (1875 – 1876,) a symphonic poem in four movements, or more precisely, a narrative symphony, influenced by the compositions of Joachim Raff (especially his Lenore.) We know Moszkowski enjoyed the patronage of Wagner, and that the rehearsals of Götterdämmerung in Bayreuth left a deep impression on him. But his chromaticism stays fairly conventional, as does his general musical language, which precludes his association with music of the future. After the war, Moszkowski falls into obscurity only to die destitute in Vésinet in 1925. No matter, at just under an hour, the work reveals strong writing, mastery of form, and nuanced timbres. All of this in the service of a vividly narrative score, at times nearly “cinematic” before its time. According to the liner notes, Charles’ coronation march to Reims anticipates the music of Korngold’s film [of the same title.] Certain passages are highly evocative, such as Joan’s vision, which the composer entrusts to the solo violin and to the harp in the pastoral of the first part. Moszkowski was inspired by Schiller’s play Joan of Arc, which dramatizes the evolution of the saint, from country girl to prisoner, from victory to transfiguration. - Tod und Verklärung. Yes, one discerns a certain density in the coronation march, yet one must appreciate its generously overflowing lyricism. Let it not be said that Schiller inspired only Verdi and Tchaikovsky! Ian Hobson’s conducting avoids bombast; it breathes new life into the fresco by preserving its drama and cohesiveness and restoring its vibrant colors. A promising discovery, this is the first volume in a series of Moszkowski’s orchestral music.

-Didier Van Moere