

CD REVIEW 126 – 2 CDs

Nordic Sound

BENT SORENSEN Whisperings for recorder and strings.

Homage a Axel Borup-Jorgensen

PELLE GUDMUNDSE-HOLMGREEN Music for 13 strings. For Axel "Boje"

SUNLEIF RASMUSSEN Winter Echoes for recorder and 13 strings. Homage a Axel

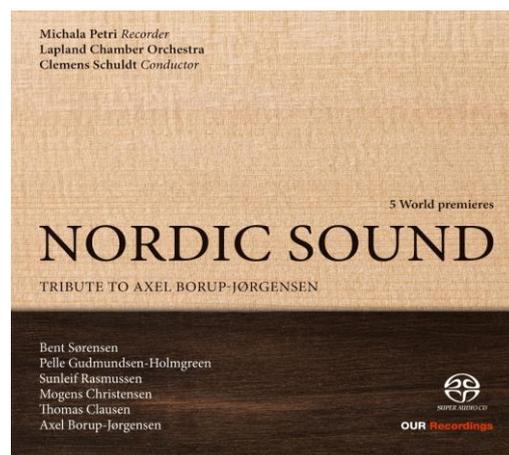
MOGENS CHRISTENSEN Nordic Summer Scherzo for descant recorder and strings

THOMAS CLAUSEN Concertino for recorder and strings

AXEL BORUP-JORGENSEN Sommasvit Op 24 for string orchestra

Michala Petri (recorder) Lapland Chamber orchestra. Clemences Schuldt

OUR Recordings 6.220613 (69.12)



This first fascinating CD is a tribute to Axel Borup-Jorgensen who was born in Hjørring, Denmark on 22 November 1924.

As a child, he moved with his family to Sweden, where a piano teacher showed him Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata which acted as a sort of spiritual conversion for him and also opened a new world for him. Sweden gave him a real sense of the beauty of its landscapes and literature and music deeply impressed him.

After the war, he went to the Royal Danish Conservatory in Copenhagen and studied with Anders Rachlew graduating in 1950, but he was mainly self-taught. His first works were of a Scandinavian Romanticism but then he was influenced by Bartok and expressionism and, like Sibelius and Nielsen, he turned away from Nordic tradition.

He was one of the first composers from Sweden to attend the Darmstadt school.

In 1963, he began work on what some call his masterpiece, Marin Op 60 which is a grand symphony. It has parts for 44 strings. It took about seven years to complete and was premiered by the Danish National Symphony Orchestra under Herbert Blomstedt and later awarded a prize by the International Rostrum of Composers in Paris.

His work on this CD is Somnavit, composed in 1957, and the Sweden title is Sommen suite. Sommen is a large forest area with a lake with an archipelago of about 300 islands and these scenic delights were the inspiration of this five movement short work. The atmosphere invoked in this music is impressive. The penultimate movement is staggering.

He died in 2012.

Bent Sorenson was born in 1958 and was originally a folk musician. He studied at the Royal Danish Academy of Music with Rasmussen and the gifted Per Norgard. Sorenson is the composer of three string quartets, some individual chamber music, a symphony and three concertos with titles for violin, piano and trombone respectively. His music has been likened to the complexity of composers such as Finnissy and Fernyhough. Whisperings for recorder and strings has much to commend it although the high register of the soloist leads itself to shrillness.

Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen was born in 1932, the son of an admired sculptor, and he studied at the Royal Danish Academy. His first success was the Variations for solo cello of 1954. He tried serialism but was not sufficiently able to undertake or maintain such a challenging discipline although there is a worthy symphony from 1962-1965. His work is often rhapsodic, stop and start music, and often with effects rather than pure music. Music for 13 strings is an interesting essay.

A very interesting composer is Sunleif Rasmussen was born in 1961 on Sandoy, one of the Faroe Islands. Much of his training was in Norway and he supported himself by playing in rock and jazz bands. He studied in Copenhagen with Ib Norholm and he also had studies in electronic music with Ivar Frounberg. Then he discovered the music of the French composer, Tristan Murail.

He has a very individual and personal style and there are two symphonies. The first is called Oceanic Days and won the Faroese Cultural Prize Award. The Symphony no 2, The Earth Anew, is scored for soprano, baritone, male chorus and orchestra. There is the Missa Nordica in five Nordic languages and concertos for violin, recorder and saxophone respectively.

Winter Echoes is in three parts and is scored for bass recorder to soprano recorder. There is a cadenza for tenor recorder and there is also one for alto recorder. The work includes a toccata and the work is often complex.

I did not warm to the work by Thomas Claussen born in Copenhagen in 1949 in that he is primarily a jazz musician and, also, that his music lacks an original voice.. His works include music for big bands and his Concertino has a welcome brevity and recalls the baroque music of Vivaldi. Most listeners will find this work the most approachable on this CD

For over thirty years, Mogens Christensen has been an admired teacher as well as a composer. He was born in 1955 on the northeast of the Jutland peninsula. After graduating from the Royal Academy of Music, he studied with Per Norgard, Paul Ruders, Hans Abrahamsen and Karl Aage Rasmussen and then at the Royal Danish Academy with Ib Nordholm. His Nordic Summer scherzo is a concerto for descant recorder and strings. It is work full of colour and varied intensity with high harmonics and often bird like effects. I would love to see a score.

Michala Petri was born in 1958 and is the finest recorder player of all time winning prizes all over the world. She has premiered over 150 works and there is no praise high enough for her.

I do feel that some contemporary works may not be suited to her amazing talent but she is, nevertheless, to be commended on her devotion and reliability in all the music she performs. She is a star and she has a sense of humour.

Those who suffer from prejudice may not warm to this music but that would certainly be their loss. We live in a society of blinkered people who only like music with tunes and traditional harmonies. Such ignorance has a price to pay.

However, this is a fascinating CD and would make some want to hear more music by the composers represented.

Danish and Faroese Recorder Concertos

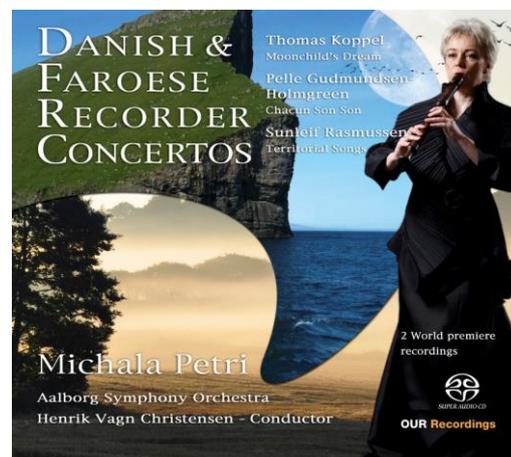
THOMAS KOPPEL Moonchild's dreams, Concerto for recorder and orchestra

PELLE GUDMUNDSEN-HOLMGREEN Chacon Son Son, concerto for recorder and orchestra

SUNLEIF RASMUSSEN Territorial Songs, Concerto for recorder and orchestra

Michala Petri (recorder) Aalborg Symphony Orchestra, Henrik Vagn Christensen

OUR Recordings 6.220609 (57.01)



I cannot understand why composers give concertos names or subtitles. Nor can I understand why so many composers of serious music embrace jazz, pop and other 'secular' modes. Gershwin wrote shows and songs which, in their own right may be good, but then tries his hand at a Piano Concerto... oil and water do not mix.

Thomas Koppel was the son of the composer Herman David Koppel (1908-1998) of Jewish origin whose output includes 13 symphonies.

However, Thomas was born on 27 April 1944 and died suddenly in Puerto Rico on 25 February 2006. He composed string quartets, a piano concerto, symphonies and operas and much more. He founded an experimental rock group called Savage Rose which achieved a cult status and he eventually moved to Los Angeles. He thought that his studies at the Academy was irrelevant and his performances were so unconventional that the Academy failed him. But why do 'serious' composers dabble in lesser music?

The concertos on this CD treat the recorder not as a poor relation that can only be accompanied by strings. Koppel's concerto has the subtitled Moonchild's Dream apparently dealing with the hopes, fears and dreams of a little girl living in the Harbour area of Copenhagen and this was one of his works displaying concern for poorer people and one of three he wrote for Petri. There is much percussion almost to the point of gratuitous violence. There are four movements lasting about 20 minutes and the work will appeal to all save the extremely prejudiced. It goes without saying that Petri is both magnificent and reliable as usual.

I did not respond favourably to Gudmundsen-Holmgreen concerto entitled Chacon Son Son of 2014. the title is a play on words of a French expression

'to each his own taste.' There are chunks of heavy percussion which seems at odds with the general style of the music. To call it a recorder concerto is not strictly accurate and the bombastic sections are uncomfortable. More gratuitous violence. Three recorders are used

The Rasmussen is the most interesting work and is another concerto with the subtitle Territorial Songs. It was composed in 2008-9 for Michala when the composer was composer in residence with the South Jutland Symphony orchestra. It is inspired by bird song and such birds have strong territorial areas. There are five movements lasting just under 20 minutes. The opening and closing leggiero movements are fine but the penultimate movement, marked tranquillo is far too repetitive and wearisome.

This is fascinating and original music recalls Edgar Varese's comment, "Composers are not ahead of their time; the listening public are far too behind the times."

The sound is exemplary although my copy had a minor glitch in track 3.

But, as I have said before, these CDs are a magnificent acclamation of a superb artist who has an unlimited talent. Everything she plays is worth hearing.

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