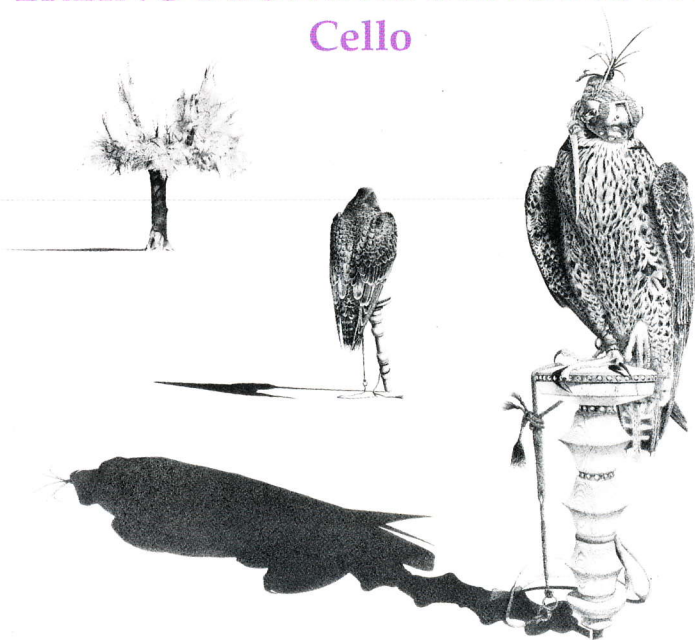


# ERLING BLÖNDAL BENGTTSSON

## Cello

dacord  
DIGITAL



Max Reger - Eugène Ysaÿe

## **Max Reger (1873 - 1916)**

### **3 Suites for Cello solo Op. 131c (1915)**

#### **Suite No. 1 G Major 11:04**

[ 1 ] Prelude - vivace 3:18

[ 2 ] Adagio 4:53

[ 3 ] Fuga - allegro 2:45

#### **Suite No. 2 D minor 18:04**

[ 4 ] Prelude - largo 5:06

[ 5 ] Gavotte - allegretto 3:42

[ 6 ] Largo 4:58

[ 7 ] Gigue - vivace 4:06

#### **Suite No. 3 A minor 20:14**

[ 8 ] Prelude - sostenuto 5:26

[ 9 ] Scherzo - vivace 6:28

[10] Andante con variazioni 8:13

## **Eugène Ysaÿe (1858 - 1931)**

### **Sonata for Cello solo Op. 28 (1925) 11:37**

[11] Lento e sempre sostenuto 4:04

[12] Poco allegretto e grazioso 2:33

[13] Adagio 1:29

[14] Allegro. Tempo fermo 3:26

## **Erling Blöndal Bengtsson, Cello**

Cello: Nicolas Lupot, Paris 1823

The music of **Max Reger (1873-1916)** has only with difficulty found an audience beyond the confines of Germany, and even today, where there is an unprecedented interest in the late romantics, it appears only rarely in concert programmes outside its own country.

But then, as a late romantic Reger does stand out from the group of his contemporaries which includes Mahler and Strauss. He composed neither symphonies nor symphonic poems (with the exception perhaps of *Vier Tondichtungen nach Böcklin*); he wrote no operas, and even though he did complete both a piano concerto and a violin concerto, the great, late-romantic virtuoso concerto was of little interest to him. His most important work was in the fields of chamber music and organ music, where his preoccupation with baroque and elaborate polyphony threatens to leave the listener quite out of breath.

Reger was a learned musician and one of the most skilled counterpointists in the history of music. He was a great admirer of Bach and attempted in his organ works to assimilate his art in a long series of fugues and passacaglias. The results display superior crafts-

manship but can be a bit too much of a good thing; the overloaded settings do here and there tend to strangle the thematic ideas.

But when Reger is at his best, he is one of the greatest of his time. His best organ works count amongst the foremost pieces for the instrument since Bach, and some of his chamber pieces do not pale by comparison with those of Brahms. On the other hand it is true that the chamber works in particular tend to sound overladen, because of the restless polyphonic scoring.

From 1911 to 1914 Reger was music director at the Court of Meiningen, and his experiences whilst working there were to leave their mark on his final orchestral pieces. "*Eine romantische Suite*", the four symphonic poems mentioned above inspired by the Swiss painter Arnold Böcklin, and the Mozart variations are all elegantly and transparently scored and deserve a wider audience than they currently enjoy.

Reger's profound admiration for the music of Bach inspired him to follow in the master's footsteps and compose a series of suites for solo string instruments: three for violin, three for viola and three for cello.

The six cello suites by Bach of course constitute the very core of the instrument's repertoire, and yet they were overlooked for almost two hundred years after the composer's death, until the Spanish cellist Pablo Casals dug them out and began a tradition for performing them. It was with these suites in mind that Reger in 1915 composed his own three suites for solo cello op. 131c.

### **Suite no. 1, G major**

The prelude to the first movement is without any doubt a celebration of Bach. The key, G major, is the same as that of Bach's first suite. Even while making only limited use of double-stopping Reger succeeds in creating the illusion of several independent voices.

The Adagio is a sarabande, a stylized, slow dance in 3/4 time with the accent on the second beat. The ornamentation of the melody line again points backwards to Bach while the harmony is clearly romantic.

The suite concludes with a two-part fugue which however is so elaborately developed that Reger again succeeds in creating an impression of many more independent parts.

### **Suite no. 2, D minor**

The time signatures again refer to their baroque antecedents: the gavotte and the gigue are stylized dance movements such as frequently appear in the instrumental works of Bach. The prelude is rich in thematic ideas, many of which are made use of in subsequent movements - a romantic feature which has no place in baroque music. Brahms too puts in an appearance: in the many double stops, in which the parts proceed in sixths.

The gavotte differs rhythmically from the stylized dance of the baroque period. Dynamically it ranges very widely and makes use of pizzicato to great effect. The key is F major, but the trio is in D minor, the principal key of the suite.

The largo is in three parts and in the key of B flat major, changing to the parallel key of G minor for the central part of the movement.

The finale bears the signature Gigue, or jig. It is a rapid dance movement in 6/8 time, again a common beat in Bach.

### **Suite no. 3, A minor**

The prelude is contemplative of character and quite complex harmonically.

The scherzo is witty and rhythmically intricate, the trio slightly slower and more serious.

The finale has the form of a series of variations over an original theme, a form of which Reger was very fond. In fact he wrote variations on themes by Bach, Telemann and Beethoven for piano, and on themes by Hiller and Mozart for orchestra, and there are numerous further sets of variations in his chamber music. His predilection for this particular music form places him in a long tradition of variation composers spanning Bach, Beethoven and Brahms.

The simple theme is followed by five variations of different character, the last of them quite virtuoso. The movement finishes with a repeat of the theme, albeit in a modified form.

**Eugène Ysaÿe** (1851-1931) was primarily a practising musician, one of the most admired violin virtuosos of his generation. But his talents went further: he was acclaimed for his searching interpretations of the great concertos, for his chamber music work (he founded one of the leading string quartets of the time); he founded an orchestra, the Société des Concerts Ysaÿe, which he

conducted himself; he was a first-rate teacher and, when at a relatively late stage of his career he took up composition, he surprised audiences and critics alike with his thoughtfulness and taste and uncontested skill.

Ysaÿe the violinist was a student of Vieuxtemps and others. Starting in 1881 he toured Europe as a celebrated soloist with, among others, Anton Rubinstein. He spent some years in Paris, where he became acquainted with César Franck and Vincent d'Indy. As a composer he was largely self-taught but none the less rapidly developed an impressive technique. He attracted attention with his invention of the symphonic poem for orchestra and solo instrument, examples of which are "*Amitié*" for two violins and orchestra, "*Meditation*" for cello and orchestra, "*Poème Nocturne*" for violin, cello and orchestra, and "*Harmonies du soir*" for string quartet and string orchestra. But his most important works are the six sonatas for solo violin, from 1924, composed for six contemporary violinists. Taking as a model the solo suites by Bach, he contrived in these technically extremely demanding but musically very gratifying sonatas to make use of

every conceivable trick made available by modern violin technique.

### **Sonata for solo cello**

For the cello Ysaÿe came up with a series of works for cello and piano, cello and orchestra, and this sonata for solo cello. It is not always possible to put a year to Ysaÿe's compositions, even though the opus numbers provide a clue. The six sonatas for solo violin bear opus number 27 and were composed in 1924, so there are grounds for reasoning that the cello sonata was composed a short time after that.

Here, too, Ysaÿe makes full use of the instrument's technical possibilities, in a late-romantic idiom. The first movement, solemn and majestic, is actually clearly inspired by the baroque idiom, but quite advanced harmonically. The second movement is heralded by two pizzicato chords which put in further appearances throughout the movement. The character is that of a scherzo, the time switches between 2/4 and 3/4. The adagio that follows barely merits being called a separate movement: very brief, separated from the scherzo only by a fermata, it is more a solo cadenza. The finale, despite its key

of C minor, is humorous and sparkling in its virtuosity.

The sonata was dedicated to the cellist Maurice Dambois, himself a member of Ysaÿe's renowned quartet.

*Mogens Wenzel Andreassen*

When at the age of three **Erling Blöndal Bengtsson** was given a violin by his father, his immediate instinct was to position it between his knees. However much his father protested, he could not be persuaded to hold it under his chin. The boy was adamant, and just six months later he gave his first public recital, on a viola with an end-pin attached to it.

Seven years later he was allowed to make his debut with an orchestra in Copenhagen's Tivoli Concert Hall where, in the summer of 1992, Erling Blöndal Bengtsson was celebrated on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday, the fiftieth anniversary of his debut, and as the greatest living Danish cellist - if not one of the finest anywhere, with his bright, slender tone, at once elegantly nimble and glowing with concentration and pained recognition.

"The born cellist" is no hackneyed cliché when applied to Blöndal Bengtsson. He found it all so easy that he could make do with one hour's practice a day as a child - and indeed no more was asked of him by his violinist father and exceptionally musical mother, an Icelandic woman straight out of the ancient sagas.

In 1948, just sixteen years old, Erling Blöndal Bengtsson travelled to Philadelphia to take up studies with the pre-eminent cellist of the time, the Russian-born Gregor Piatigorsky. Just one year later he became Piatigorsky's assistant at the Curtis Institute of Music, and the year after that he had succeeded him as teacher at the Institute.

He stayed in the United States for five years before letting himself be tempted back to a teaching job at the Royal Danish Academy of Music in Copenhagen. He was appointed professor at the age of 29, and has during the course of a career spanning almost 40 years become a model for a whole family of young cellists playing in Denmark and abroad, while at the same time tending his own soloist career. Between 1958 and 1978 he was also attached to the Swedish State Radio

School of Music in Stockholm; he was a professor at the Musikhochschule in Cologne from 1978 to 1982, and continues regularly to give masterclasses at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles, at Aldeburgh, Sion, and in Scandinavia.

In 1990 he moved back to the United States to take up a professorship at one of North America's leading centres of music, The University of Michigan School of Music in Ann Arbor.

Blöndal Bengtsson's repertoire is just as all-encompassing as his teaching activities. Much of it has been recorded; the complete Bach solo suites and the Beethoven sonatas, cello concertos by Boccherini, Haydn, Schumann, Dvorák, Lalo, Saint-Saëns and Tchaikovsky, but also some contemporary music. His insatiable curiosity about modern music has resulted in the first performance of a number of Scandinavian cello concertos, many of which are also dedicated to him, including those of Niels Viggo Bentzon, Vagn Holmboe, Herman D. Koppel and Jon Nordal. He has played the Danish premieres of concertos by Britten, Barber, Khachaturian, Delius, Lutoslawski and Walton, and indeed the latter two have them-

selves conducted performances with Blöndal Bengtsson as soloist.

For a number of years he has been playing 60 - 70 concerts a year, in Europe, the United States, and the former Soviet Union, and he has appeared with all the main Scandinavian orchestras and numerous foreign ones, including the Royal Philharmonic, BBC Symphony, St. Petersburg (formerly Leningrad) Philharmonic, and the Salzburg Mozarteum, with conductors such as Malcolm Sargent, Pierre Monteux, Nicolai Malko, Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt, Paavo Berglund, Sixten Ehrling and Yuri Temirkanov.

And Blöndal Bengtsson's audiences value him. He is a member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Music and has been awarded the Danish "Dischophile" prize of 1958 and the Hyman Morrison Medal for Cello in Gold in 1957, among many other prizes. He is also First Knight of the Danish Order of Dannebrog, and Commander of the Icelandic Order of Falcon.

*Lotte Bichel*

English translation: Per Sommerschild



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**DACOCD 372**DIGITAL DDD**Eugène Ysaÿe** (1858 - 1931)**Sonata for Cello solo Op. 28** 11:37

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**Erling Blöndal Bengtsson, Cello**

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*Total playing time: 61:17*

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