

Johan Svendsen · Lange-Müller  
VIOLIN CONCERTOS



**Lars Bjørnkjær, violin**

Aarhus Symphony Orchestra  
**Giordano Bellincampi**

The two composers on this CD were active in Copenhagen at the same time and did not much care for each other. Lange-Müller thought that Johan Svendsen “corrupts his national motives by sprinkling them with French musical perfume”. On the other hand Johan Svendsen was of the opinion that Lange-Müller’s orchestration was too straightforward, and that there was too little elaboration in the inner parts.



Painting of Johan Svendsen (left) shaking hands with Edvard Grieg a cold winter day outside The Royal Theatre, Copenhagen

Travelling in music – describing Johan Svendsen's life is like writing an account of a journey. He set off from his native town Oslo with his violin on his back in 1860 at the age of 22, and did not seriously settle down until 23 years later he became conductor at The Royal Theatre in Copenhagen. Johan Svendsen had a musical upbringing, he played in local dance orchestras already at the age of nine, and when he was eleven he composed violin pieces, dances and marches. His father was a regimental musician, and at the age of 15 Johan Svendsen joined the band of the commando troops, where he played the flute and clarinet.

But the violin was his greatest interest, and in 1860 he had to get away. He travelled through Sweden to Lübeck, where his money ran out. In his hardship he managed to get a Swedish-Norwegian consul in the city to obtain a scholarship for him enabling him to develop his violin playing, and with this in the bag he travelled to Leipzig and entered the conservatoire there, which was the undisputed centre of European music, and where musicians from the whole of Europe went. Johan Svendsen concentrated on studying composition, because problems with his left hand limited his possibilities as a violinist. As an energetic member of the music society of the conservatoire students he had several of his compositions performed, including the string quartet, opus 1, the first symphony, opus 4 and the string quintet, opus 5. The string octet, opus 3, earned him the conservatoire's first prize.

Having gained such considerable recognition, Johan Svendsen travelled further to Scotland, the Faeroe Islands and Denmark, and in 1867 returned to Oslo, where he was discovered by Edvard Grieg. In the following years he was active as a conductor and violinist back and forth between cities including Leipzig, Paris, Weimar and Bayreuth, where he was invited to play in the orchestra which under Richard Wagner's baton was to play Beethoven's 9<sup>th</sup> Symphony at the laying of the foundation stone of the *Festspielhaus* in Bayreuth.

The **Violin Concerto, opus 6**, therefore saw the light of day during a hectic life of travelling – it was written in Paris and completed in Leipzig in June 1870. It is dedicated to the violin teacher he studied with in Leipzig, Ferdinand David. The first performance was entrusted to Robert Heckmann and took place on the 6<sup>th</sup> of February 1872 in Leipzig. The concerto could be heard for the first time in November of the same year in Oslo with Johan Svendsen himself conducting and Gudbrand Bøhn as the soloist.

The violin concerto is characterized by Johan Svendsen's thorough familiarity with the violin and his eminent abilities as an orchestrator. The orchestra plays a prominent role, somewhat at the expense of the solo part, which contains more melodic material than actual acrobatics on the violin, which is perhaps one of the reasons why the violin concerto has never really been a favourite with soloists. But this conception is Johan Svendsen's – he despised everything that could be regarded as superficial, empty playing to the gallery.

Now Johan Svendsen began to settle down. With minor interruptions he spent the years between 1872 and 1883 in Norway, where together with Edvard Grieg he directed the Music Society in Oslo, from 1874 as the sole conductor. This period was the most fruitful in Johan Svendsen's career as a composer, with the Orchestral Legend *Zorahayda*, opus 11, the *Festpolonaise*, opus 12, the orchestral fantasia *Romeo and Juliet*, opus 18, the 2<sup>nd</sup> symphony, opus 15, and the three Norwegian Rhapsodies, opus 17, 19 and 21.

The **Romance, opus 26**, is from 1881 and was one of the last works he composed. With it he fulfilled something his publisher had long hoped for, a concert piece for violin and orchestra. He composed the romance in two days, and the publisher wished to publish it immediately. Svendsen agreed to a once-and-for-all fee of 200 kroner, and said later, "He gave me 200 kr., and since I did not have much confidence in the piece, I was quite content. It was in spite of everything 200 kr. for a mere two days' work". The romance was performed for the first time in Oslo on the 31<sup>st</sup> October 1881 with the Polish violinist Stanislaw Barcewicz as the soloist and had to be played as an encore. It quickly became his most well-known and popular composition and before the composer's death it had already been published in 68 different versions.

After this, Johan Svendsen the conductor was constantly more in demand. After successful appearances in Oslo and Stockholm he came to Copenhagen in 1882, where he was offered the

post of chief conductor at The Royal Theatre. He took up his duties the next year and remained in Copenhagen until his death in 1911, after having raised the Royal Opera to a European standard. In particular he was of significance for The Royal Danish Orchestra with whom he was allowed to play four symphony concerts a year, if this did not affect work at the theatre. This was the beginning of a concert tradition which exists to this day.

Carl Nielsen, who was a violinist in The Royal Danish Orchestra under Johan Svendsen from 1889 to 1905, admired him, and said among other things at the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of his first appearance in Copenhagen: "We thank you, because as a conductor and leader you thoroughly appeased us and with a firm hand and sure will taught us to feel the fundamental element in all music – rhythm, and with a mild and soft hand and temperament, beauty of sound and naturally undulating phrasing".



"Lange-Müller, the musician", he managed to stutter out, lying in the street after a fainting fit. He was taken to hospital, but died four days later of the injuries sustained by the fall and from an attendant pneumonia. It was the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 1925; Peder-Erasmus Lange Müller lived to the age of 75. He had modestly called himself "Lange-Müller, the musician" all his life, as if he had had difficulty in choosing precisely

this occupation: "Why must one compose?" he once said to a friend; "There is after all so much excellent music – we don't need any more!"

His mother, who died when he was 9 years old, had indeed let her children sing and occupy themselves with music, but already at the age of 4 Peder-Erasmus was ill and suffered after-effects in the form of more or less constant headaches. This handicap pursued him all his life and certainly hampered him in his musical activities and zest for life in general. The headaches meant among other things that he did not go to school until he was 17. At the same time his first song was completed – music had become an integrated part of his world.

But since Lange-Müller was from a family of civil servants, he decided to study political science, although he entered the conservatoire at the same time. Ill health however caused him to abandon both courses of study. For a time he trained as a gardener on account of the effect of fresh air on his headaches, later travelling to Norway in order to clarify his situation, but returned home and was inactive until he wrote in his diary in August 1874 at the age of 23, "Now I cannot go on, now I shall set sail towards the realm of art, boldly, madly with my wretched vessel. It is no use, I cannot do otherwise". "Lange-Müller, the musician" had finally made up his mind, and for the first time had his music published: his opus 1, five songs from B.S. Ingemann's "Shulamite and Solomon".

It was a risky début because the grand old man of Danish music, J.P.E. Hartmann, had set the

same poem to music twenty years earlier. A comparison was unavoidable, but Lange-Müller's "wretched vessel" turned out to be quite seaworthy – he had already found his individual style, which not least together with his songs was to be a significant contribution to Danish music. Lange-Müller became a highly prolific composer. His pronounced interest in the theatre developed his dramatic awareness at an early stage, and this resulted in music for plays and several operas. Apart from this he composed works including two symphonies, orchestral suites, chamber music, piano pieces, and not least developed a special Danish style inspired by folk-music in his theatre music and in his many solo and choral songs.

The **Violin Concerto** was composed in 1902 and was first performed in 1904 by one of Lars Bjørnkjær's predecessors, the Leader of the Royal Danish Orchestra, Axel Gade, who was the son of the composer Niels W. Gade. Gade was a pupil of the famous German violinist Joseph Joachim, and Lange-Müller was taken with the soft tone and fine phrasing which characterized Axel Gade's violin playing. "Music is the art of sincerity" Lange-Müller said, and the pronouncement could in fact serve as a motto for the violin concerto. It has been called a violin fantasia rather than a regular concerto; it is based on moods, musical lyricism and beauty more than finely-honed musical structure and precisely these lyrical, imaginative features are Lange-Müller's hallmark. The violin concerto is at the same time spirited and visionary.

Lange-Müller, who was a man of independent means, led a secluded life and did not hold other public appointments other than being co-conductor of the Music Society from 1879 to 1883, which he helped to establish. But even so he became a kind of national composer through "Once upon a time" – Holger Drachmann's play, which he set to music. "Once upon a time" was indeed on the programme for the gala performance at The Royal Theatre on the occasion of Lange-Müller's 75<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1925. The government had established a scholarship in his name, and in the interval the Queen presented him with a gold medal for meritorious services. Afterwards homage was paid to him with torchlight processions and celebratory speeches. In his reply he said among other things that he considered himself to be in the service of a higher power – Danish music, "such as it is, originating in the folk-song. It has planted its fairest flowers in the music of Weyse, Gade and Hartmann. This strain has I suppose also left its mark on my music... I see in this evidence that the Danish strain now as before is deeply rooted in the soul of the people and lives and will live there".

Almost two months later "Lange-Müller, the musician" was taken to hospital. The rest we are familiar with.

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English translation: Gwyn Hodgson

**Lars Bjørnkjær**, was born in 1968 in Los Angeles, but grew up in Aarhus, Denmark. He received his first lessons at the age of 6 from Tove Detreköy. He was accepted at the Jutland Music Conservatory at the age of 13 to study with Henrik Sachsenskjöld. Subsequent teachers included Viktor Liberman, in Holland, and with Sally Thomas and Dorothy DeLay at the Juilliard School of Music in New York.

Lars Bjørnkjær was appointed 1. Concertmaster of the Royal Danish Orchestra (Det Kongelige Kapel) in 1993. The 2007-08 season brings him to Stockholm as 1. Concertmaster at The Royal Swedish Opera.

As a soloist Lars Bjørnkjær has performed a large number of violin concertos with most orchestras in Denmark and with orchestras abroad.

As well as the standard repertory concertos, he has performed those by Poul Ruders, Samuel Barber and Paganini's Concerto No 1.

He appeared for the first time with the Aarhus Symphony Orchestra at the age of 13.

Lars Bjørnkjær gave his debut as a conductor with The Royal Danish Chamber Orchestra in 2000.

As a chamber music musician, he has toured all over the world.

Lars Bjørnkjær has contributed to the world of classical music in Denmark by among others

things establishing the Danish Strings Summer Academy, [www.danishstrings.dk](http://www.danishstrings.dk), The Anneberg Festival and the Samsø Festival. Lars Bjørnkjær plays the 1714 Stradivarius "Yoldi-Moldenhauer" which belongs to The Royal Danish Theatre.

Visit [www.larsbjornkjaer.dk](http://www.larsbjornkjaer.dk)

The Danish-Italian conductor **Giordano Bellincampi** took up the position as General Music Director of the Danish National Opera in September 2005. He has been Music Director of the Copenhagen Philharmonic Orchestra 2000-2005, having served as the Orchestra's Principal Guest Conductor since January 1997. During the period 1997-2000, he was also Chief Conductor of the Athelas Sinfonietta Copenhagen, the leading avant-garde ensemble in Denmark.

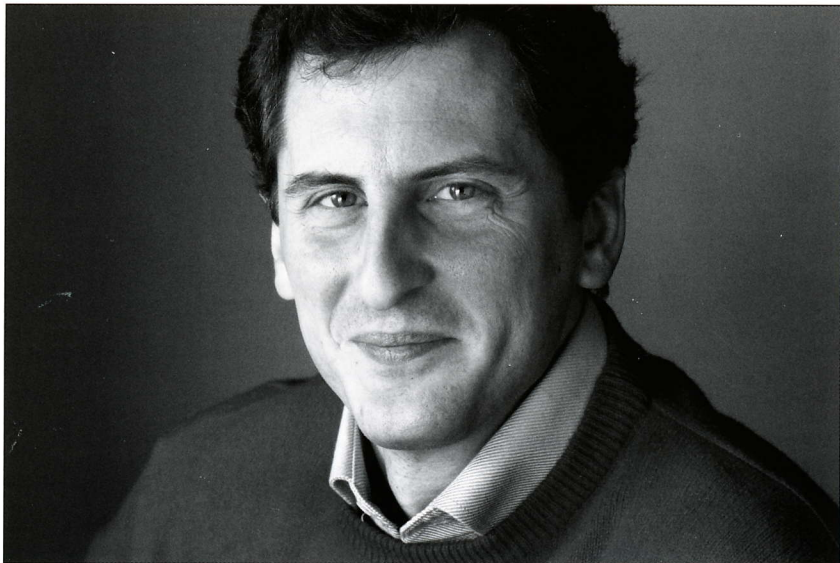
Mr. Bellincampi was born in Rome in 1965, but has lived in Denmark since 1976. He was trained at the Royal Danish Music Academy in Copenhagen, studying both bass trombone and conducting (the latter with the famous Finnish conductor Jorma Panula), and has had an active career as an orchestral musician in the Royal Danish Orchestra, Copenhagen, among others. In August 1994, he made his conducting debut with the Odense Symphony Orchestra, and subsequently has been a regular guest with all major Danish orchestras.

Abroad, Giordano Bellincampi is also a sought after conductor, and he has conducted orchestras including the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, KBS Symphony Seoul, Prague Philharmonia, Malmö Symphony Orchestra, Stavanger Symphony Orchestra, Trondheim Symphony Orchestra, Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, St. Petersburg Symphony Orchestra, the Pomeriggi Musicali Giovanile in Milan and the Guangzhou Symphony Orchestra, and in March 2007 he conducted the Tjajkovskij Symphony Orchestra with the Russian soprano Anna Netrebko, the Italian bass baritone Ildebrando d'Arcangelo and

the mezzo Ekaterina Semenchuk as soloists in a programme with opera highlights.

In 2005/2006 he appeared with the Toledo Symphony, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Pomeriggi Musicali and Lahti Symphony, and returned in 06/07 to the RTE National Symphony Orchestra in Dublin as well serving on the jury of the Panula Conducting Competition and conducting the Danish National Opera's new production of *Rigoletto*. He made his debut with *La Boheme* at the Royal Opera in Copenhagen, and since then, has conducted many of the great Italian works there, including *Falstaff*, *La Traviata* and *Il Trovatore*. He conducted the new production of *Aida* at the opening of the Royal Opera's new Theatre in 2005. In 2005/2006 he also made his opera debut with the Cincinnati Opera with *Tosca*.

Giordano Bellincampi has recorded many CDs of the contemporary repertoire, including Vagn Holmboes 10 Preludes with the Athelas Sinfonietta Copenhagen, H.C. Lumbye's works with the Tivoli Symphony Orchestra, Weyse's *The Sleeping Draught* with the Danish Radio Sinfonietta (Release of the year in the Danish Classical Music Awards 2002), Schierbeck: *The Chinese Flute*, *Queen Dagmar* and *the Tinderbox* with Odense Symphony Orchestra, Walton's Violin Concerto and Carl Nielsen's Symphony No 3 "Espansiva" with the Copenhagen Philharmonic Orchestra, works by Carl and Gustav Helsted and Joachim Andersen with Danish Philharmonic Orchestra, South Jutland and works by Fini Henriques with Helsingborg Symphony Orchestra.



Front cover: Johan Svendsen's gold pocket watch, which was a gift to him from some of his admiring students. The watch belongs to The Royal Danish Orchestra and is in the care of Lars Bjørnkjær. It bears the inscription: To our beloved master in deepest admiration from his grateful pupils Fini Henriques, F. Hemme, Hakon Børresen, Arnold Nielsen, J. Bruun de Neergaard.

Photo front cover: Henrik Mark

Photo Lars Bjørnkjær, inlaycard: Gorm Valentin

Photo orchestra: Anders Bach

Photo Giordano Bellincampi, above: Tivoli Festival

## **Aarhus Symphony Orchestra**

### **Aarhus Symfoniorkester**

Chief Conductor: Giancarlo Andretta

General Manager: Palle Kjeldgaard

Musikhuset Aarhus · Skovgaardsgade 2 C  
DK-8000 Århus C · Denmark  
Tel. +45 89 40 90 90 · Fax +45 89 40 91 00  
www.aarhussymfoni.dk

Aarhus Symphony Orchestra was founded in 1935. The main venue of the Aarhus Symphony Orchestra is the Concert Hall Aarhus. From September 2007 the orchestra has moved into an extension of the house, comprising – among other facilities – a concert hall with 1200 seats.

Aarhus Symphony Orchestra gives about thirty subscription concerts a year; furthermore the orchestra plays fifteen opera performances, about 100 concerts at local schools, chamber concerts, summer concerts, concerts for the elderly, and CD recordings.

The orchestra performs the entire classical repertoire, including choral works, but also enthusiastically supports contemporary music. The Aarhus Symphony Orchestra has commissioned works by Danish composers and performs regularly at the SPOR contemporary music festival. In 1992 the Aarhus Symphony Orchestra played at the NEMO Festival and at the ICMC Festival 1994, the International Computer Music Conference. The Aarhus Symphony Orchestra has co-operated with The Royal Danish Ballet, the MBT Dance Theatre and the Leipzig Ballet. Under the direction of former Chief Conductor

James Loughran the Aarhus Symphony Orchestra has recorded *Serenades* by Brahms and Dvorák, the complete works for piano and orchestra by Rachmaninov and recently music by Balakirev and Bruckner. A complete cycle of Vagn Holmboe's thirteen symphonies was recorded with Owain Arwel Hughes and a complete cycle of the symphonies of Franz Schubert with Hans Graf. Other recordings include works by Niels W. Gade, Richard Strauss, Per Nørgård, Niels Viggo Bentzon, Bent Lorentzen, Knudåge Riisager, Carl Nielsen, Niels Marthinsen, Rued Langgaard and the much acclaimed interpretations of music by Frederick Delius conducted by Bo Holten.

Aarhus Symphony Orchestra has a permanent co-operation with The Danish National Opera (Den Jyske Opera), and has since 1983 attracted international acclaim at the annual Festival in Aarhus, which has included Wagner's *The Ring of the Nibelung*, *Tristan and Isolde* and *Parsifal* and Strauss' *Elektra*, *Salome* and *Die Schweigsame Frau*.

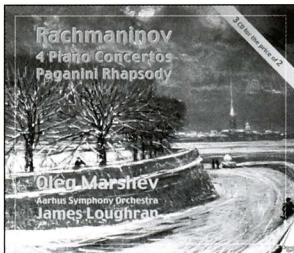
The Aarhus Symphony has toured Sweden and Finland (1978), Canada (1986), Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival (1988), Edinburgh Festival (1990), Sweden and Spain (1991), England and Northern Ireland (1992), the Baltic countries and Russia (1995), Germany (1996), Sweden (2003) and Italy (2006).

Ole Schmidt was Chief Conductor 1978-85, Norman Del Mar 1985-88, Eri Klas 1991-96 and James Loughran 1996-2003. The Italian conductor Giancarlo Andretta was appointed Chief Conductor in 2003 and has prolonged his contract until 2012.

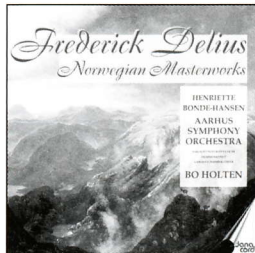
Aarhus Symphony Orchestra on Danacord  
www.danacord.dk



First recordings of Danish orchestral songs plus works for choir, orchestra and soloists. Bo Holten, conductor  
DACOCD 536



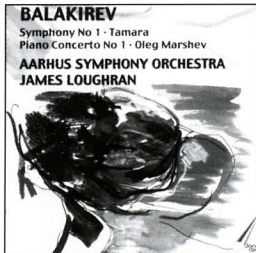
All the Rachmaninov works for piano and orchestra with Oleg Marshev, piano. James Loughran, conductor  
DACOCD 582-583



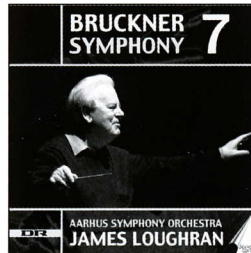
First recordings of Norwegian orchestral songs plus works for choir, orchestra and soloists. Bo Holten, conductor  
DACOCD 592



First recording of the Piano Concerto no 2 plus solo pieces. Oleg Marshev, piano. James Loughran, conductor  
DACOCD 596

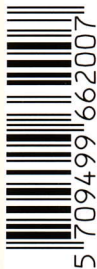


Symphony no 1, Tamara, Piano Concerto no 1. Oleg Marshev, piano. James Loughran, conductor  
DACOCD 616



Live recording from the Aarhus Cathedral of Bruckner Symphony No 7. James Loughran, conductor  
DACOCD 655





**DAC OCD 662**

DIGITAL DDD

Total playing time  
64:57

Recorded in  
Frichsparken, Aarhus,  
Denmark  
January 2-5, 2007

Recording engineer  
Claus Byrith

Producer:  
Morten Mogensen

Executive producer:  
Jesper Buhl

DANACORD  
Nørregade 22  
DK-1165 Copenhagen  
DENMARK

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**Johan Svendsen**

(1840-1911)

**Concerto for violin and orchestra**

in A major, op. 6 (1869-70) 31:09

- [ 1 ] Allegro moderato ben risoluto 15:12
- [ 2 ] Andante 8:18
- [ 3 ] Finale. Allegro giusto 7:27

[ 4 ] Romance for violin and orchestra  
op. 26 (1881) 7:31

**Peter Erasmus Lange-Müller**

(1850-1926)

**Concerto for violin and orchestra**

in C major, op. 69 (1904) 25:58

- [ 5 ] Moderato (Cadenza: Lars Bjørnkjær) 11:21
- [ 6 ] Allegretto sostenuto 4:50
- [ 7 ] Allegro giocoso 9:36

**Lars Bjørnkjær, violin**

**Aarhus Symphony Orchestra**

**Giordano Bellincampi, conductor**

