

A Tribute to Erling Blöndal Bengtsson



Dmitri Shostakovich

Cello Concerto No. 1

Richard Strauss

Don Quixote Op. 35

Luciano Berio

Ritorno degli snovidenia

György Ligeti

Cello Concerto

Sven-Erik Bäck

Cello Concerto

Niels Viggo Bentzon

Cello Concerto No. 3

The Danish Radio Recordings 1966-2002

The Royal Orchestra · The Symphony Orchestras of

The Danish Radio & Aarhus & South Jutland

Conductors: Stanislaw Skrowaczewski · Michael Schönwandt · Jan

Latham-Koenig · Diego Masson · Miltiadis Caridis · Alexander Lazarev

Viola: Claus Myrup (Don Quixote)

Danacord has issued many recordings by **Erling Blöndal Bengtsson**, the eminent cellist born in Copenhagen on 8 March 1932 to musician parents; his Danish father was a violinist and his Icelandic mother a pianist. This is the latest release that continues Danacord's *in memoriam* tribute to him, for Erling Blöndal Bengtsson passed away on the morning of 6 June 2013. He was 81. This current release is the second tribute to Bengtsson using recordings from Danish Radio (the first is on DACOCD 727, with music by Barber, Salomon and Niels Viggo Bentzon).

The wide range of music that Bengtsson played included the great unaccompanied works by J. S. Bach (the Suites) and Kodály (the Sonata), the notable duosonatas with piano (not least those by Beethoven and Brahms) and the illustrious concertos, such as those by Elgar and Dvořák and also Haydn and Schumann. Bengtsson's playing was much admired for its stylishness, distinctive timbre and many subtle colours and inflections, as well as his trademark impeccable intonation. Bengtsson was also noted for his infallible memory and his impressive technical facility.

At the age of 16, Bengtsson was accepted as a pupil at the renowned Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. There he studied with the distinguished Russian cellist Gregor Piatigorsky (1903-76). Bengtsson made quite an impression on Piatigorsky (who played with such legendary musicians as violinist Jascha Heifetz and pianist Arthur Rubinstein) – enough for the master to invite his pupil to be his assistant (Bengtsson also taught at Curtis, between 1950 and 1952) and for him to later cite Bengtsson as a role model for his subsequent students.

It's not every cellist who is afforded the tribute of a statue. Bengtsson is an exception though. Because this musician and pedagogue was held in such high esteem throughout Scandinavia, an imposing bronze statue of him (by Olóf Pálsdóttir) graces the entrance to Reykjavík's main concert hall (HARPA) in Iceland's capital city. Not that Bengtsson restricted himself to the areas of his Northern birth, for he performed and taught regularly in Europe, the Americas and in Russia, and collaborated with many leading orchestras and conductors across the globe. As well as the established repertoire for his instru-

ment, Bengtsson essayed numerous rare and contemporary pieces (including several concertos written for him), not least the celebrated Cello Concerto by Witold Lutosławski (1913-94), composed for Rostropovich, which Bengtsson played several times with the composer conducting, as he also did for William Walton's Cello Concerto.

This current second release embracing Danish Radio recordings of Bengtsson includes a mix of established repertoire (by Shostakovich and Richard Strauss), music by modern masters Luciano Berio and György Ligeti, together with a couple of pieces that are probably less familiar, by Sven-Erik Bäck and the aforementioned Bentzon, both composers dedicating their concertos to Bengtsson.

The first disc of this collection embraces two oft-played and -recorded works focussing on the cello, Shostakovich's First Concerto and Richard Strauss's Don Quixote (Fantastic Variations on a Theme of Knightly Character), both scores having attracted many of the greatest cellists from different eras. Bengtsson is of their number, and in the Shostakovich benefits from the experienced conducting

of the late Stanislaw Skrowaczewski (himself a composer). If the tempo for the first movement is a little more moderate than the norm, this aids articulatory and orchestral clarity, and the exposed horn solos are taken well. Conversely the slow movement flows a little more than usual, an eloquent and intimate song without words, its dark side becoming more apparent as the music progresses and grows in intensity. The boisterous finale is linked to by an extensive cadenza, from musing to hectic via calibrated increases in speed. Strauss's graphic musical portrayal of Cervantes's Don Quixote finds Bengtsson as a noble interpreter, and a touching one when the Don passes away, on equal footing with the Danish Radio Symphony Orchestra and Michael Schönwandt with Claus Myrup, principal viola of the ensemble, in attendance as Sancho Panza. This concert also included the first performance of Jan Maegaard's Cello Concerto, which Bengtsson went on to record on DACOCD 417, and this composer also dedicated a solo sonata to the venerable cellist.

The second disc opens with a major score by Luciano Berio, a fascinating trance-like piece, drifting in and out of conscious-

ness, the cello line, played here with the utmost consideration by Bengtsson, integrated into an ensemble that sounds bigger than the 30 specified instruments (including piano and alto saxophone) thanks to Berio's exquisite ear for colour and timbre, and through invention that carries itself engagingly from first sound to last: where do we go when we dream? *Ritorno degli snovidenia* (1977) was commissioned by Paul Sacher for Rostropovich – for these two musicians, many new pieces were created. György Ligeti's *Concerto*, 1966, was written for Siegfried Palm, and opens at the extreme of quietness (*pppppppp*), long-held notes emerging from nothingness, painting surreal images as the music develops in slow-burn terms, the antithesis of a virtuosic concerto. The second movement is similar if different in terms of orchestral tone, the cellist again required to be *primus inter pares* (if eventually with many scurrying notes to negotiate) with the surrounding textures, a typical Ligeti mosaic of sound and gesture.

Of the two concertos included here that are dedicated to Bengtsson, that by the Swede Sven-Erik Bäck (1919-94) is a concise, three-movement affair, passion-

ate, demonstrative, gritty and sinewy; this recording is of the first performance. *Cello Concerto No.3* by the prolific Dane, Niels Viggo Bentzon (1919-2000) – it's his opus 444 (and there are 41 *concertante* works in his catalogue) – is a substantial piece, also in three movements, the music of a lively, always-creating mind, and stylistically at times recalling one of his great countrymen, Carl Nielsen. This is absolute and ambitious music, potentially about nothing but the notes, although of course the imaginative listener can make of it whatever he or she wishes. Bentzon's first cello concerto is available on DACOCD 727.

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Erling Blöndal Bengtsson: Recordings

Antonin Dvorák - Cello Concerto in B minor op. 104. DACOCD 413

Aram Khatchaturian - Sonata-Fantasy for solo cello. DACOCD 425

Bagatelles for Cello and Guitar.
DACOCD 335

Beethoven - Complete Works for Cello and Piano. DACOCD 333-334

Camille Saint-Saëns - Cello concerto in A minor. DACOCD 422

Claude Debussy - Sonata for Violoncello and Piano D Minor (1915). DACOCD 548

Claude Debussy - Scherzo for Violoncello and Piano C Major. Intermezzo for Violon-cello and Piano C Minor
DACOCD 548

Édouard Lalo - Cello concerto in D minor
DACOCD 422

Edvard Grieg - Sonata for Violoncello and Piano in A minor op. 36. DACOCD 644

Eugene Ysaÿe - Sonata for Cello solo, op. 28. DACOCD 372

Frederic Chopin - Sonata for Violoncello and Piano in G minor op. 65.
DACOCD 644

Hans Werner Henze - Serenade for solo cello. DACOCD 425

Herman D. Koppel - »Ternio«, op. 53 b.
DACOCD 565-566

Herman D. Koppel - Sonata for cello and piano, op. 62. DACOCD 565-566

Herman D. Koppel - Suite for Solo Cello, op. 86. DACOCD 565-566

Jan Maegaard - Cello Concerto op. 98.
DACOCD 415

Luigi Dallapiccola - Ciaccona, Intermezzo Adagio for solo cello. DACOCD 425

Max Reger - 3 Suites for Cello solo op. 131c. DACOCD 372

Paul Hindemith - Sonata op. 25 for solo cello. DACOCD 425

Pyotr Tchaikovsky - Var. on a Rococo Theme for Cello and Orch. DACOCD 422

Robert Schumann - Cello Concerto in A minor op. 129. DACOCD 413

Samuel Barber - Sonata for Violoncello and Piano C Minor op. 6 (1932).
Sergei Prokofiev - Sonata for Violoncello and Piano C Major op. 119 (1949) -
DACOCD 548

The Nordic Cello - Works for solo cello
DACOCD 554

Zoltán Kodály - Sonata op. 8 for solo cello
DACOCD 425

Works by Piatti and Niels Viggo Bentzon
DACOCD 478

A DR tribute to Erling Blöndal Bengtsson
Barber, Salomon and Bentzon: Cello
Concertos DACOCD 727

An Icelandic tribute to Erling Blöndal
Bengtsson Vol 1. DACOCD 724

An Icelandic tribute to Erling Blöndal
Bengtsson Vol 2. DACOCD 737

An Icelandic tribute to Erling Blöndal
Bengtsson Vol 3. DACOCD 740

Danish First Performances. Delius,
Britten, Lutoslawski. DACOCD 770

A Gramophone Tribute to Erling Blöndal
Bengtsson DACOCD 738

A SR Tribute to Erling Blöndal Bengtsson.
Hans Holewa, Karl-Birger Blomdahl,
Ingvar Lidholm, Kurt Atterberg, Henry
Eccles, E. Bloch, Dag Wirén, Juli Garreta
DACOCD 778

A NRK Tribute to Erling Blöndal
Bengtsson. Brahms, D. Shostakovich
Klaus Egge, Elgar, Grieg, Ketil Hvoslev.
DACOCD 780

A Tribute to Erling Blöndal Bengtsson.
Dmitri Shostakovich, Richard Strauss,
Luciano Berio, György Ligeti, Sven-Erik
Bäck, N.V. Bentzon. DACOCD 844

A Tribute to Erling Blöndal Bengtsson.
Robert Schumann, N.V. Bentzon, Jan
Maegaard, Gunnar Berg, Gaspar Cassado,
H.D. Koppel, Albert Roussel, Leif Thybo,
Gabriel Fauré, E. Bloch. DACOCD 845

A Tribute to Erling Blöndal Bengtsson.
Bent Lorentzen, Leif Thybo, Svend
Westergaard, Peter Heise, Neruda, Emil
Hartmann, Johan Svendsen, P.
Tchaikovsky. DACOCD 846

Herman D. Koppel - Cello Concerto op. 56
BIS CD-80

Vagn Holmboe - Cello Concerto.
BIS CD-78

Jon Nordal - Cello Concerto. ITM.
ITM6-02 (Iceland Music Information
Center, Reykjavik)

Atli Heimir Sveinsson - Cello Concerto
(Erjur/Bickering) ITM-RUV

Gösta Nystroem - Sinfonia Concertante
for Cello and Orchestra.
SWEDISH SOCIETY. SCD 1015.

Rachmaninoff - Sonata for Cello and
Piano op. 19 g-minor.
KONTRAPUNKT. 32018

Shostakovich - Sonata for Cello and Piano
op. 40 d-minor. KONTRAPUNKT 32018

Ib Nørholm - Concerto for Cello and
Orchestra. KONTRAPUNKT 32099

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Photo: Merete Blöndal Bengtsson



DACORD 844

STEREO ADD

2 CD

Total playing time 145:40

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Executive producer:
Jesper Buhl

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Danacord continues its tribute to the Danish cellist Erling Blöndal Bengtsson. For this volume of recordings emanating from Danish Radio Bengtsson plays two staples of most cellists' repertoire, masterworks by Shostakovich and Richard Strauss, spicing things up with music by Berio and Ligeti, such choices opening up our perceptions of Bengtsson's repertoire, and then going further by including his sympathy for concertos written for and dedicated to him. Thus this programme adds up to a revealing portrait of Bengtsson's versatility and virtuosity.

CD 1 69:13

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)

Cello Concerto No. 1 in E flat Major Op. 107 (1959) 28:39

[1] Allegretto 6:57

[2] Moderato - Cadenza - Allegro con moto 21:41

The Royal Danish Orchestra

Conductor: Stanislaw Skrowaczewski

Live Concert Tivoli Gardens, Copenhagen March 8, 2002

Producer: Henrik Sleiborg. Recorded by Ronald Skovdal

Richard Strauss (1864-1949)

Don Quixote Op. 35 (1897) 40:28

[3] Introduction and theme: Don Quixote, the Knight
of the Sorrowful Countenance 8:18

[4] Var. 1: The Adventures of the Windmills 2:32

[5] Var. 2: The Battle with the Sheep 1:42

[6] Var. 3: Dialogue between Knight & Servant 7:55

[7] Var. 4: Unfortunate Adventure with a Procession
of Penitents 1:54

[8] Var. 5: Don Quixote's Vigil 3:40

[9] Var. 6: Dulcinea's Enchantment 1:06

[10] Var. 7: Ride through the Air 1:07

[11] Var. 8: Ill-Starred Voyage on the Enchanted Boat 1:44

[12] Var. 9: Battle against the Supposed Enchanters 1:04

[13] Var. 10: Duel with the Knight of the Shining
Moon 4:01

[14] Finale: The Death of Don Quixote 5:20

Claus Myrup, viola

The Danish Radio Symphony Orchestra

Conductor: Michael Schønwandt

Live Concert, Danish Radio Studio 1, April 14, 1994

Producer: Claus Due. Recorded by Jan Oldrup

CD 2 76:27

Luciano Berio (1925-2003)

[1] Ritorno degli snovidonia for cello and thirty
instruments (1976-1977) 24:02

Danish Radio Symphony Orchestra

Conductor: Jan Latham-Koenig

Live Concert, Danish Radio Studio 1, October 10, 1983

Producer: Niels Peters. Recorded by Knud Drewsen

György Ligeti (1923-2006)

Cello Concerto (1966) 13:35

[2] I 6:19 [3] II 7:16

Aarhus Symphony Orchestra · Conductor: Diego Masson

Live Concert, Aarhus, April 18, 1988. Producer: Henrik Sleiborg og

Per Erik Veng. Recorded by Torben Movang

Sven-Erik Bäck (1919-1994)

Cello Concerto (1966) 11:43

[4] Lento cantabile - Molto ritmico 3:15

[5] Grave 4:11 [6] Vivo - Adagio 4:17

Danish Radio Symphony Orchestra

Conductor: Miltiadis Caridis

Live Concert, Danish Radio Studio 1, September 29, 1966

Niels Viggo Bentzon (1919-2000)

Cello Concerto No. 3 Op. 444 (1981-1982) 26:42

[7] I 10:23 [8] II 6:33 [9] III 9:52

South Jutland Symphony Orchestra

Conductor: Alexander Lazarev

Live Concert, Idrætshallen, Aabenraa, September 20, 1983

Producer: Henrik Sleiborg

Erling Blöndal Bengtsson, cello