



THE LAUNY GRØNDAHL LEGACY

Volume 7



Beethoven

Tchaikovsky

Schubert

CD 1

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 61 (1806) 40:23

Soloist: Adolf Busch

[1] I. Allegro ma non troppo 21:50

[2] II. Larghetto 9:24

[3] III. Rondo. Allegro 9:07

Live Thursday Concert, March 17, 1949

Danish Broadcasting Corporation, Studio 1

Nikolai Rimski-Korsakov (1844-1908)

Mozart and Salieri, Op. 48 36:38

Mozart: Christian Blanke, tenor

Salieri: Henry Skjær, baritone

Adapted in Danish by Thyge Thygesen

[4] Scene 1 23:16

[5] Scene 2 13:45

Radio Opera, November 25, 1954

Danish Broadcasting Corporation, Studio 1

CD 2

Carl Nielsen (1865-1931)

[1] **Overture to the opera Maskarade 4:04**

Broadcast from the Radio Exhibition in Forum,
Copenhagen, August 11, 1950

Piotr Iyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Piano Concerto No. 1 in B flat minor,

Op. 23 32:24

Soloist: Victor Schiøler

[2] I. Allegro non troppe e molto maestoso –
Allegro con spirito 18:52

[3] II. Andantino semplice – Prestissimo –
Tempo 1 6:42

[4] III. Allegro con fuoco 6:18

Live Concert, September 24, 1951

Royal Festival Hall, London

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Symphony No. 9 in C major,

D944 'The Great' 27:20 (incomplete)

[5] I. Andante – Allegro ma non troppo 13:24

[6] II. Andante con moto 13:57

Live Thursday Concert, December 11, 1952

Danish Broadcasting Corporation, Studio 1

**The Danish Radio Symphony Orchestra
Launy Grøndahl, conductor**

In many ways the career of Launy Grøndahl (1886-1960) – first as a violinist, then as conductor and composer – was typical of many Danish musicians at the turn of the last century. If they landed a post in one of the larger orchestras in Copenhagen, such as the Royal Danish Orchestra or Tivoli Symphony Orchestra, they would still have to find work out of season: a holiday job with the Copenhagen Zoo orchestra, perhaps, or cinema orchestras (from about 1920), private music associations or theatres. They might also satisfy creative urges by composing.

This career path had sufficed for the young Carl Nielsen during the 1880s, and Grøndahl pursued it for himself hardly more than a decade later. At the tender age of 13 he played his first concerts with the Casino Theatre orchestra in the Danish capital, becoming a permanent member of the ensemble seven years later and continuing his studies with Axel Gade (violin) and Ludolf Nielsen (composition). In 1919 Grøndahl left the Casino Theatre, having developed his conducting talents. However, his life was shortly to take a career-defining turn.

In 1925, Danish State Radio made its first broadcast. Its founding director was the singer-turned-administrator Emil Holm, and he was determined that the radio station should be equipped with its own orchestra (this was three years before the BBC began exploring plans for its own symphonic ensemble). The previous year Grøndahl had embarked on a series of study trips to Paris, Rome and Vienna, funded by a scholarship from the Copenhagen Orchestra Association. His travels yielded a series of pieces on the European orchestral scene in a Danish music journal, and these pieces caught the eye of Holm. He appointed Grøndahl the director of the new orchestra, only 11 strong at this stage, on a permanent, full-time basis.

Conductor and orchestra made their first broadcast together on October 28, 1925. As the size of the orchestra grew, so did Grøndahl's reputation, but he remained faithful to his post. From 1925 until his retirement in 1959, he led the Danish Radio Symphony Orchestra in 289 public concerts and a scarcely believable 5528 studio broadcasts. No other conductor of the DRSO comes even close to challenging that record.

As broadcast technology became more sophisticated in the early days of Danish Radio, Holm's ambitions for the orchestra expanded accordingly. The roster of conductors soon included (from 1927) the composer and conductor Emil Reesen (1887-1964), and then distinguished visitors from abroad, principally the Russian Nicolai Malko (1883-1961) and the German Fritz Busch (1890-1951). Celebrated foreign soloists also began to appear at the orchestra's regular Thursday Concerts – such as Adolf Busch (1891-1952), younger brother of Fritz, who joined them for the Violin Concerto of Beethoven in March 1949, before Rued Langgaard's Sixth Symphony in the second half. The two brothers had appeared together in Copenhagen for the first time back in 1934, with Mendelssohn's Concerto. By 1949, Adolf was placed in the top rank of the most searching Beethoven interpreters, alongside the pianist Artur Schnabel and the conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler, thanks to his leadership





of the string quartet that bore his name, and to their recordings of Beethoven's quartets (in particular the late masterpieces) made by HMV/Columbia during the 1930s. The salient qualities of this performance include buoyant articulation and a close relationship between soloist and orchestra. Though nearing the end of his career, Busch plays with undimmed vigour, not least in his own cadenzas. Beethoven wrote the Concerto for the violinist Franz Clement in 1806, and Clement gave its first performance in December the same year. However, the performance was not a success: apparently Clement practically sight-read the solo part, and played a fantasy of his own after the first movement. It took the later advocacy of Joseph Joachim, who first played it as a 12-year-old under the direction of Felix Mendelssohn, for the Concerto to enter the repertoire.

From the opening drum-taps onwards, there are distinct French influences on the Violin Concerto which come into even clearer focus when soloists play the cadenza written by the composer for a later piano transcription, with its popular, military character. At the same time, the key of D major became for Beethoven a sanctuary for some of his most spiritually devoted music, and the Violin Concerto is remarkable (like the F major 'Pastoral' Symphony) for its placid tonal structure, which is not so much disturbed as deepened in the expansive first movement by a profound G minor episode. It was not long after Mozart's death in 1791 that scurrilous rumours began to spread of Antonio Salieri's hand in his demise. Our best modern guess attributes cause of death to rheumatic fever, but the possibility of a malign actor doing away with one of humanity's great geniuses out of envy and spite has continued to grip fertile imaginations. Six years after Salieri's own death in 1830, Pushkin produced a little verse tragedy on the subject, which Rimsky-Korsakov adapted for the lyric stage in 1897. For this Danish radio broadcast of *Mozart and Salieri*, a local-language text was made by the singer Thyge Thygesen, who produced several operas for radio and television. The two roles are taken by the baritone Henry Skjær (1899-1991, a company member of the Royal Chapel), and the tenor Christian Blanke (1914-97) as Mozart.

Rimsky-Korsakov did not call *Mozart and Salieri* an opera but 'dramatic scenes'. There are just two of them, opening with Salieri alone, troubled by Mozart's genius. Resolving to do away with him, he invites Mozart to dinner. They meet (in Scene 2) at a tavern, where Salieri poisons the wine. Mozart inquires about Salieri's work, the opera *Tarare*, written to a libretto by Beaumarchais, and Mozart asks if it is true that Beaumarchais once poisoned someone; something that Mozart finds hard to believe, as genius and crime are incompatible. Beginning to feel the effects of the poison, Mozart departs and leaves Salieri alone with his thoughts once more.

The style is an individual synthesis of neoclassical and Romantic idiom, cast in melodic recitative without expanding into arias. The declamation of the protagonist is embellished by naturalistic touches in the orchestra: when Salieri speaks of 'a simple scale', a scale is duly heard; when he mentions an organ, a pedal point is introduced into the accompaniment. The harmonic language

belongs to the 18th century, and Rimsky rivals Tchaikovsky for Mozartian pastiche when the younger man plays the piano to his deadly rival. There are also direct quotations from the Requiem and *Don Giovanni* which make ironic comment on the unwitting proximity of the composer's demise.

CD2 opens with a legendary performance of Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto, given on the occasion of the DRSO's London debut in 1951, a year after Fritz Busch had conducted its landmark debut at the Edinburgh International Festival. Busch was again booked to conduct in London, but died ten days before the concert. Despite being in poor health himself, Grøndahl agreed to take over. The day of the concert found both soloist and orchestra on edge, according to Schiøler, who had an observer thrown out of the morning rehearsal for reading a newspaper. Just before the concert in the evening, Grøndahl was pacing around nervously, observed by the orchestra's tuba player, Erik Åkerwall. In his tuba case he had tucked away two beers, which each DRSO member had received from the Tuborg brewery before leaving for London. He gave one to Grøndahl, who downed it and then went on stage to make his own, belated but eventually triumphant, UK debut.

According to the *Musical Times*: 'The excellent impression made by the Danish State Radio Symphony Orchestra at last year's Edinburgh Festival was confirmed by its first visit to London. Its playing at the Festival Hall on 21 and 24 September was lively, sensitive, and luminous in tone... Mr. Grøndahl, a newcomer to Britain, opened the second concert with an enchanting performance of Weber's *Oberon* Overture, and managed skilfully the accompaniment to Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1, in which the Danish pianist Victor Schiøler was a commanding though not entirely accurate soloist. After the interval Mr. Grøndahl performed Carl Nielsen's Fourth Symphony. This was the climax of the two concerts, and a reminder of Britain's loss in its general unfamiliarity with this Danish composer. It was enthusiastically received, and the conductor added as encore Nielsen's light-hearted *Maskerade* overture.'

The source of the present recording was a Danish-made tape of the BBC transmission. The performance of the overture appended here derives not from that London concert but from a concert given by Grøndahl and the DRSO at an exhibition marking the 25th anniversary of Danish Radio, which took place at the Forum exhibition hall, opposite the Radiohuset.

Finally, we have a frustratingly incomplete account of Schubert's 'Great' C major Symphony. The first two movements are all that survive of Grøndahl's powerfully built account from another Thursday concert in December 1952: enough to confirm what a fiery and clear-sighted interpreter he could be of the Austro-German classics when granted the rare opportunity to conduct them. Since, however, Schubert himself was prepared to send the two completed movements of his earlier B minor Symphony to the Styrian Musical Society for performance in Graz, there is a slender historical justification for taking this second 'Unfinished' on its own terms.





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2 CD

Total playing time:
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First release
CD 1 [4] - [5]
CD 2

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The Launy Grøndahl Legacy, Volume 7

Three major additions to the Grøndahl discography, newly recovered from the archives of Danish radio, remastered from the original tapes and released here for the first time. Beethoven's Violin Concerto and the first two movements of Schubert's 'Great' C major Symphony confirm what an exhilarating interpreter Grøndahl was of the Austro-German classics. A Danish-language version of Rimsky-Korsakov's neoclassically styled tragi-comedy on the subject of Mozart and Salieri complements a celebrated account of Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto, given on the occasion of Grøndahl's belated UK debut in September 1951.

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