



THOMAS JENSEN LEGACY

VOLUME 5



MENDELSSOHN
SYMPHONI 3 • A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM • VIOLIN CONCERTO
MOZART PIANO CONCERTO 21 *WITH ANNIE FISCHER*
HANDEL • DVOŘÁK • GADE

CD 1

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

[1] A Midsummer Night's Dream – Overture, Op. 21 12:24

Violin Concerto in E minor, Op. 64 26:38

[2] I. Allegro molto appassionato 12:43

[3] II. Andante – Allegretto non troppo 7:35

[4] III. Allegro molto vivace 6:13

Henrik Sachsenskjold, violin

Symphony No. 3 in A minor, Op. 56 'Scottish' 37:03

[5] I. Andante con moto – Allegro un poco agitato 13:36

[6] II. Vivace non troppo 4:34

[7] III. Adagio 8:52

[8] IV. Allegro vivacissimo – Allegro maestoso assai 9:52

Live broadcast, January 21, 1962, Danish Radio Concert Hall

CD 2

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

Concerto grosso, Op. 6 No. 1 in G major, HWV319 12:55

[1] I. A tempo giusto 2:52

[2] II. Allegro 2:18

[3] III. Adagio 2:15

[4] IV. Allegro 2:36

[5] V. Allegro 2:48

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Piano Concerto No. 21 in C major, K467 30:06

[6] I. Allegro maestoso 15:30

[7] II. Andante 7:31

[8] III. Allegro vivace assai 6:58

Annie Fischer, piano

Live broadcast, October 31 1963, Danish Radio Concert Hall

Niels W. Gade (1817-1890)

Novelettes in F major, Op. 53 18:31

[9] I. Andantino - Allegro vivace e grazioso 5:58

[10] II. Scherzo: Moderato 4:48

[11] III. Andantino con molto 3:38

[12] IV. Allegro vivace 3:57

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904) *9:00*

[13] Carnival Overture, Op. 92

Live broadcast, June 5, 1962, Danish Radio Concert Hall

Danish Radio Symphony Orchestra

Thomas Jensen, conductor

Born on 25 October 1898 in Copenhagen, Thomas Jensen entered the Royal Danish Conservatoire of Music in 1913 where he studied with, among others, Carl Nielsen. Between 1917 and 1919 he was a solo cellist of the Northwest Skåne Orchestra in Helsingborg in Sweden. From 1920 to 1927 he played in the Tivoli Symphony Orchestra in Copenhagen, first as 3rd, then 2nd cellist. The cellist Jensen nurtured ambitions as a conductor which he began to fulfil in 1923, as conductor of the amateur Euphrosyne orchestra. Two years later, his conducting of Stravinsky's *L'histoire du soldat* at Det Ny Theater (The New Theatre) attracted attention, and he decided to further his conducting career with periods of study in Paris and Dresden, returning once in a while to conduct at the Nørrebro Theatre, and at the Tivoli in the event of its permanent conductor Frederik Schnedler-Petersen being indisposed.

When Johan Hye-Knudsen left the Scala Theatre in 1925 to join the more prestigious Royal Theatre, Jensen was encouraged to apply for the vacancy. He chose instead to become conductor of the Philharmonic Society in Aarhus. The post enabled him to take on more purely orchestral repertoire, even

when coupled with work at the Aarhus Theatre, but he probably also saw the opportunities afforded by the city's cultural potential. Plans were afoot for a university (founded in 1928) and even a permanent symphony orchestra. This ambition took another decade to bear fruit with the Aarhus Civic Orchestra, founded and named in January 1935 by Jensen himself. In the meanwhile, Jensen did not restrict his work to the relatively provincial Aarhus. In 1931 he was invited by the head of Danish radio, Emil Holm, to apply for a new post as a second conductor to the radio's symphony orchestra, assisting the work of Launy Grøndahl and Erik Tuxen. Even though several board members suggested hiring him without further ado, the management (mostly Holm) insisted on an open audition. Jensen came third, and the post went instead to the Austrian conductor Fritz Mahler, whose father was a cousin of the composer Gustav Mahler. Jensen's reputation had preceded him, however, so that he nevertheless returned to the DRSO as a guest conductor.

1935 was a watershed year for Jensen. As well as founding the Aarhus City Orchestra he made his debut with the DRSO in November with a programme of light popular music. The two ensembles continued to lie at the centre of his work for the next two decades. With 26 permanent members, the Aarhus Civic Orchestra was a Classically constituted ensemble, whereas the radio orchestra was more than twice as large, expanding from 55 musicians in the 30s to an 'international standard of 92 musicians in 1948. From 1936 to 1948 he also led regular concerts with the Tivoli Orchestra, acting as deputy to Svend Christian Felumb during the Aarhus orchestra's annual summer break.

Jensen's background as a cellist surely influenced his repertoire choices as

a conductor. He had played in the Danish premieres of Beethoven's Ninth and Mahler's Fourth and Ninth symphonies, given by the Tivoli Orchestra with Schnedler-Petersen. He had also played in the first performances of Nielsen's Fourth and Fifth symphonies, as well as most of the symphonies by Sibelius, under the baton of the composers. From 1937 onwards he gave only symphonic concerts with the DRSO, declining invitations to take on light-music programmes. His debut in the DRSO's regular Thursday concert series, the most prestigious of their engagements, took place on 2 December 1937 with a programme including the First Cello Concerto of Saint-Saëns and the Symphony by César Franck, and thereafter he gave one or two concerts in the series each season.

Jensen's connection with the DRSO deepened during the early 50s. The orchestra had come to international attention in concerts led by Fritz Busch at the 1950 Edinburgh Festival, and given a critically acclaimed account of Nielsen's Fourth in London under Launy Grøndahl the following year. In 1952 they embarked on an ambitious tour of the US, giving 39 concerts in 38 cities over 47 days. The punishing schedule did not suit the ageing Grøndahl, and the orchestra's members petitioned for Jensen to replace him. Sharing duties with Erik Tuxen, Jensen conducted 20 performances of Nielsen's Fourth Symphony, as well as works by Dvořák, Grieg and Richard Strauss. This led to a part-time post with the orchestra in 1953, and when Grøndahl retired in 1956 and Tuxen died the following year, Jensen was finally offered the coveted chair of permanent conductor in the autumn of 1957.

The offer came at a propitious time for Jensen. His relations with the management of the Aarhus Civic Orchestra had become frosty over time,

and he departed in anger in the spring of 1957. Standing in front of the DRSO musicians for his first rehearsal as permanent conductor a few months later, he was welcomed with applause. However, Jensen, now close to 60, was not the conductor he had been a quarter of a century earlier at that unsuccessful audition. He had begun to suffer from progressive deafness, and he quietly remarked to the musicians that his appointment with them might have come a little too late. The orchestra itself was beginning to feel the pressure of success, which demanded both more concerts and a more challenging repertoire, leaving its musicians less time to rehearse and perform the international repertoire that had made them renowned both in Denmark and beyond.

However, until Jensen's sudden and early death in 1963, he and the orchestra made a heroic effort to preserve and pass on a fast-vanishing heritage. They were the guardians of a performing culture derived from Nielsen, and from the orchestra's distinguished early conductors. After 1963, years passed without the DRSO engaging a permanent conductor, and both its playing and *esprit de corps* suffered accordingly. Thus the recordings in this series represent something of a last gasp of a lost tradition.

The music of Felix Mendelssohn had long enjoyed a central place in the repertoire of the DRSO. While CD1 presents a concert from January 1962, the orchestra had played the very same programme back in 1925, shortly after their formation. Even during the first three years of the German occupation in 1940-45, the DRSO had continued to include Mendelssohn in

its concerts at a time when the Jewish composer's music was widely banned elsewhere.

The desirability of featuring more German (or the 'right' kind of German) music and musicians had been pointed out more than once to F.E. Jensen, who had succeeded Emil Holm as head of Danish Radio in 1937. On each occasion, however, Jensen demurred and pointed out that the initial command had been to uphold the standard and the ethos of the station's output from before the occupation. Therefore, the DRSO carried on playing the *Italian* and *Scottish* symphonies, the Violin Concerto and orchestrations of the *Songs without Words*. One of these perennially attractive miniatures was among the most frequently played Mendelssohn items in the repertoire of the DRSO, *Frühlingslied* (Spring Song, Op 62 No 6), alongside the Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Late in August 1943, however, the Germans lost patience and imposed a list of prohibited composers on the Danish broadcasting company. This list included Mendelssohn, and so his music largely disappeared from the schedules – only to return with all the greater fervour after the occupation, when both the *Scottish* Symphony and the *Midsummer Night's Dream* Overture were played by the orchestra in its first post-war season of regular Thursday concerts.

Henrik Sachsenskjold (1918-2016), soloist in the Violin Concerto, first appeared with the DRSO in 1944. During the war he had studied composition with Poul Schierbeck, several of whose works featured in Volume 4 of this Jensen series. Soon after the war, however, he began to take up conducting, first of all under the guidance of the Danish pedagogue Svend Christian Felumb and later with Paul van Kempen. Thereafter he became a regular conductor

of the Tivoli Orchestra, concurrently with a successful career as a concerto soloist. In 1961 he took up a professorship at the conservatoire in Copenhagen and thereafter maintained an element of teaching to his career until his retirement in 1988. He was married to another notable figure in Danish musical life, the pianist Amalie Malling, and together they recorded the violin sonatas of Nielsen.

On CD 2, the C major Piano Concerto K467 of Mozart enjoyed particular success in Denmark and more widely in Scandinavia after its *Andante* played a central role in the 1967 movie based on the life of the Danish circus performer Elvira Madigan. The film itself portrayed her brief and ultimately tragic affair with the Swedish nobleman and cavalry officer Sixten Sparre. Heavily in debt, Sparre persuaded Madigan to leave her family and her life with the circus and elope with him. Just a few weeks later, however, Sparre shot both Elvira and himself on the Danish island of Tåsinge, where their graves are found today.

This performance took place four years before the film's release, and features the Hungarian pianist Annie Fischer as soloist: a renowned Mozartian who had begun playing the concertos while still in childhood and had made a celebrated EMI recording of the concerto in 1958 with the Philharmonia Orchestra and the young Wolfgang Sawallisch.

In the early 1960s it was still commonplace to hear Baroque repertoire played with full Romantic weight of performing forces and spacious tempi. Jensen's account of Handel's Concerto Grosso Op 6 No 1 is therefore all the more cutting-edge, with its light and springy articulation, clear melodic line and a transparent instrumental palette. Both the Handel and Mozart performances derive from Thomas Jensen's very last Thursday concert,

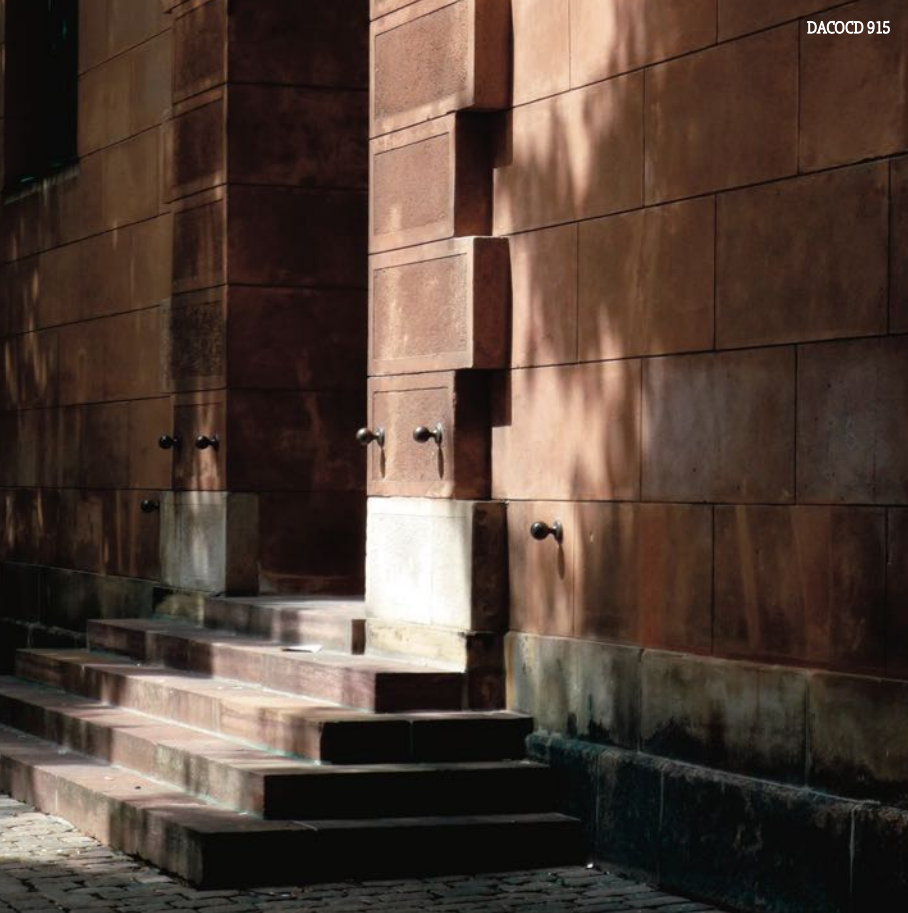
given 14 days before his death, but there is nothing weak or decrepit about the performances, which buzz with life and energy.

The Novelettes of Niels W. Gade brings us obliquely round again to the composer celebrated on CD 1. Gade was an ambitious 24-year-old when he sent two orchestral scores to Mendelssohn, then conductor of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, in the hope of performance. Both *Echoes of Ossian* and the First Symphony won favour with the fastidious ear of the older man, who not only conducted them but invited Gade to Leipzig. Gade stayed and made so positive an impression on Mendelssohn and his circle (including Robert and Clara Schumann) that he became a teacher at the city's conservatoire and an assistant conductor of the Gewandhaus.

The year after Mendelssohn's death in 1847, however, Denmark and Germany went to war over the perennially vexed Schleswig-Holstein Question in the First Schleswig War (as the Viscount Palmerston may or may not have said: 'Only three people have ever really understood the Schleswig-Holstein business – the Prince Consort, who is dead – a German professor, who has gone mad – and I, who have forgotten all about it.') Gade accordingly returned to his homeland and proceeded to remodel and organize Danish classical music after the model he had encountered in Leipzig, as chairman and conductor of the Musical Society in Copenhagen, as the organist at the Garrison Church, as co-founder and teacher of the Royal Conservatory of Music, and finally as the uncontested leader among Danish composers of his day.

This Op 53 set of four Novelettes for string orchestra, dating from 1874, seems to connect the legacy of Mendelssohn with the bright, Nordic sound of Gade's later output. The Novelette is a quintessentially Romantic form,

hinting at a latent extra-musical narrative but satisfying on the level of 'pure' music, which found its high noon in the piano cycle by Schumann. Gade had composed a similarly tight-knit set of four in the medium of piano trio (op 29) several years earlier. Sharing the scoring of Mendelssohn's early string symphonies, however, Gade's Op 53 bears an even closer resemblance to a pocket symphony with its brief and graceful introduction easing into a smiling main Allegro. The humour of the Scherzo is more gentle than biting, and the *Andantino* belongs to the string-serenade world of later masterpieces by Tchaikovsky and Dvořák, before the finale combines busy counterpoint with rustic humour with winning exhilaration. Two of Dvořák's overtures enjoy a legendary place within the history of the DRSO. The very first work to be performed by the fledgling 11-man band in its debut live broadcast (on October 28, 1925) was the Overture to *The Cunning Peasant*, under the baton of Launy Grøndahl. First staged in 1878 but a dramatic failure like most of the composer's operas, the opera's plot is a rehash of *The Bartered Bride*. Almost a quarter of a century later, Fritz Busch conducted the *Carnival* Overture to begin a concert at the 1950 Edinburgh Festival which marked a watershed moment for the orchestra's international reputation. Dvořák wrote *Carnival* as the second part of a triptych of concert overtures, originally entitled 'Nature, Life and Love'. Later on he separated the triptych's constituent panels and gave each of them its own opus number. Busch had apparently driven the overture at a terrific speed in 1950, challenging the musicians to keep up, but there is a palpable harmony between Jensen and the ensemble in this 1962 performance.



The Thomas Jensen Legacy, Volume 5

All-new remasterings of live and previously unissued recordings: a Mendelssohn concert from 1962 demonstrates Thomas Jensen's undimmed power to galvanize an orchestra towards the end of his life. From his very last concert, given a fortnight before his death in 1963, works by Handel and Mozart find him (and pianist Annie Fischer) on fluent, sparkling form. Novelettes by 'the Danish Mendelssohn' Niels W. Gade make a neat coupling, and the set closes with the Dvořák overture which launched the DRSO on the international scene. Another landmark album in the wider appreciation of a conductor whose legacy has been too narrowly restricted to the music of his homeland.

CD 1

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756-1791)

[6]-[8] Piano Concerto No. 21 in C major, K467 30:06
Annie Fischer, piano
Live broadcast, October 31 1963,
Danish Radio Concert Hall

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

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[13] Carnival Overture, Op. 92
Live broadcast, June 5, 1962,
Danish Radio Concert Hall

Live broadcast, January 21, 1962,
Danish Radio Concert Hall

CD 2

Danish Radio Symphony Orchestra
Thomas Jensen, conductor

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)
[1]-[5] Concerto grosso, Op. 6 No. 1
in G major, HWV319 12:55



2 CD

The Thomas Jensen Legacy, Volume 5

DACOCD 915

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2 CD

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