



THOMAS JENSEN LEGACY

VOLUME 18



BRAHMS
TRAGIC OVERTURE • ALTO RHAPSODY • HAYDN VARIATIONS
BEETHOVEN PIANO CONCERTO 4 *WITH* GEORG VÁSÁRHELYI
TCHAIKOVSKY NUTCRACKER SUITE • 1812 OVERTURE

CD 1

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

[1] **Tragic Overture Op.81** (1880) *12:30*

[2] **Schicksalslied, Op. 54** (1868-1871) *13:36*

Danish Radio Choir

Live broadcast October 19, 1961, Danish Radio Concert Hall

[3] **Alto Rhapsody Op.53** (1869) *12:53*

Gurli Plesner, alto

Danish Radio Male Choir

Live broadcast September 8, 1963, Danish Radio Concert Hall

[4] **Haydn Variations Op.56a** (1873) *17:17*

(Variations on the St Anthony Chorale)

Live broadcast June 4, 1962, Danish Radio Concert Hall

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Serenade for strings in C Op.48 (1880)

[5] II. Valse *3:35*

TONO 2558 Mtx. 25039

Symphony No. 5 in E minor Op.64 (1888)

[6] II. Andante cantabile con alcuna licenza *12:02*

TONO 2555-2557 Mtx. 25038-39

Studio recording, January 1945

Royal Danish Orchestra

CD 2

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Piano Concerto No. 4 in G Op.58 (1805-06) *30:35*

[1] I. Allegro moderato *16:52*

[2] II. Andante con moto *4:17*

[3] III. Rondo: Vivace *9:20*

Georg Vásárhelyi, piano

Live broadcast October 19, 1961, Danish Radio Concert Hall

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

The Nutcracker Suite Op.71a (1892) *21:50*

[4] I. Miniature Overture *3:21*

[5] IIa. March *2:27*

[6] IIb. Dance Of The Sugar-Plum Fairy *1:37*

[7] Russian Dance (Trepak) *1:09*

[8] Arabian Dance (Coffee) *2:41*

[9] Chinese Dance (Tea) *1:14*

[10] Dance Of The Reed-Pipes (Mirlitons) *2:07*

[11] III. Waltz Of The Flowers *6:57*

[12] **1812 Overture Op.49** (1880) *16:41*

Live broadcast March 11, 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 Emil Reesen (and from 1936 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 on November 13, 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.

Volume 17 of this series presented Jensen as an under-rated interpreter of Classical repertoire, while the present collection adds to his discography with canonic works from the Romantic period. At the Thursday concert October 19, 1961, he conducted a pair of Brahms's most turbulent works, the Tragic Overture and *Schicksalslied* (Song of Destiny).

The Tragic Overture was introduced to Danish listeners in 1935 by the Austrian conductor Fritz Mahler, who conducted two live broadcasts in January and April. The son of Gustav Mahler's cousin, Fritz Mahler was closely associated with the DRSO in the 1930s. The overture made its first appearance within the orchestra's regular Thursday concert series under the direction of Fritz Busch in 1939; Jensen first conducted it in 1949 with the Aarhus Civic Orchestra, and the present recording

marks the first occasion on which he worked on the piece with the DRSO. Written in the summer of 1880, the Overture is a companion work to the Academic Festival Overture from the same period, and worked up from sketches made around the same time as the Alto Rhapsody a decade earlier. It will be noted that the Rhapsody and *Schicksalslied* are neighbours in terms of opus number, and the history of their composition is tied up with each other. Brahms began *Schicksalslied* in the summer of 1868 but broke off without a sense of an ending. Then the Schumanns' daughter Julie became betrothed, and Brahms wrote the Rhapsody as a 'wedding gift', though a typically double-edged one that betrayed his own deep feelings for her. Both works eventually find consolation in the midst of despair, setting Hölderlin in *Schicksalslied* and Goethe in the Rhapsody. In this sense they are satellite pieces to the *German Requiem* (conducted by Jensen in Volume 3 of this series, DACOCD913). Hölderlin's poem is the song of his hero Hyperion from a Hellenistic novel subtitled *The Hermit in Greece* and published in 1799. Hyperion's fortunes are at their lowest ebb. He has been rejected by his closest friend and by the woman he loves. He recalls a lute song from his 'happy, heedless youth', in which the poet envies the heavenly spirits as free of destiny or fate. By contrast, the third stanza describes, in a tumultuous C minor tonality, how mankind is destined to suffer and to be dashed endlessly into the abyss like cascading water.

Dating from 1777, *Goethe's Harzreise in Winter* (Winter Journey in the Harz Mountains) was written as a response to the frenzy generated by his novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, when a spate of suicides resulted from young men emulating their eponymous hero (we might now call them incels). The poem depicts a hunting expedition in the mountains, symbolising humanity. Most of its members find and follow the path marked by 'Fortune', but the poet observes one who has become lost in the 'wilderness'. He feeds on his own self-love and -loathing. Only the 'Father of love', it seems, can set him back on the right path, and Biblical imagery invokes the well-springs hidden from the thirsty man in the desert. Perhaps inspired by this redemptive conclusion, Brahms then found a similar spirit of radiance in which to end the *Schicksalslied*: 'I am indeed saying something which [Hölderlin] does not say,' he wrote in a letter of October 1871, 'and, of course, it would be better if its absence had been the main idea for him.'

The solo part in the Rhapsody is sung here by the Danish contralto Gurli Plesner (1934-93), a company member of the Royal Theater in Copenhagen, and familiar to DRSO audiences from her many broadcasts. Under Fritz Busch, the orchestra had given a memorable earlier performance of the Rhapsody in its breakthrough concerts at the 1950 Edinburgh Festival, where the soloist was Kathleen Ferrier (having given it together in Copenhagen the previous year, a performance reissued on DACOCD301). Dating from 1874, the Haydn or St Anthony Variations had regularly featured in the DRSO's programming since 1928. The famous theme is probably by Ignaz Pleyel as part of a wind-band piece once attributed to Haydn in which it is labelled the 'St Anthony Chorale', though no older source for the chorale has ever turned up. At any rate, the sober, quintessentially Protestant character of the theme, as well as its unusual 2 x 5-bar form, might readily have appealed to the Hamburger Brahms; he treats it as masterfully as his earlier piano variation sets dedicated to Schumann (1854) and Handel (1861). CD 1 ends with a pair of Tchaikovsky slow movements played by the orchestra of the Royal Theater and captured in the studio by the pioneering Danish record label TONO, and in good sound for the time: on a set of two 78rpm records, the Moderato from the Fifth Symphony with its famous horn solo took up the first three sides, with the Waltz from the Serenade for Strings included as a filler.

CD2 returns to the broadcast concert of October 1961, when the Brahms Overture and Rhapsody were programmed with the Fourth Piano Concerto of Beethoven. The soloist is the Danish-Hungarian pianist Georg Vásárhelyi (1915-2002), a pupil of Béla Bartok and Edwin Fischer. First arriving in Denmark at the same time as the violinist Emil Telmányi in 1937, Vásárhelyi was invited to give three concerts in the smaller hall of the Odd Fellow Palace. Like Telmányi, Vásárhelyi made his home in the country and became familiar to Danish audiences both in concert and over the radio. His fingers occasionally run away from him in the outer movements (especially a coltish account of the finale) but the rest of his discography is almost exclusively confined to solo works, and so this concerto performance holds historical value as an important adjunct to the 3CD collection of recordings remastered on the Classico label (CLASSCD 548-550). Much has been made of the Concerto's radical opening, which dispenses with a rhetorical introduction and leaves the soloist to pose a question which the rest of this long movement

will be occupied in answering. In fact Mozart got there 30 years previously, with his 'Jeunehomme' Concerto of 1777. What has been underestimated is the newness of the rest of the concerto: the soloist takes up residence at the top of the piano and rarely leaves; the sheer richness of melodic incident, presenting the other side of the coin to the contemporary Fifth Symphony - though both make valuable use of repeated notes; and Beethoven's persistent gaze above the storms and stresses that are the everyday traffic of Classical-era music, towards the transcendental trills and contemplative coming-to-terms of his last piano sonatas.

The album concludes with an all-Tchaikovsky broadcast from March 1962 in which Jensen shapes the *Nutcracker* Suite and the 1812 Overture with the same supple feeling for melody and well-pointed rhythms that distinguish the excerpts on CD1. The DRSO's history with the Overture began in January 1929, almost by chance. Nicolai Malko had been booked to lead the orchestra in an all-Russian concert at the Axelborg Hall in Copenhagen, but he was denied an exit permit from Soviet Russia. Emil Reesen replaced him at the last minute, and the 1812 Overture was programmed to the great excitement of the audience.

During the autumn of 1880, Tchaikovsky was enjoying a period of relative stability, and he wrote the Serenade for Strings in a matter of weeks, partly to distance himself from what he regarded as the tawdry labour involved in the 1812 Overture. His own sense that the Serenade (unlike the overture) was 'not lacking in real qualities' was gratifyingly confirmed for him when Nikolay Rubinstein declared to a mutual friend in June 1881 that 'I think this is Tchaikovsky's best piece'.

We can afford to be more generous than Tchaikovsky to his ceremonial Overture, which dramatizes the heat of Napoleonic conflict and General Kutuzov's triumph with an old Orthodox hymn winning out over the Marseillaise. A noisy climax is scored for cannon (replaced here by bass drum) and bells to satisfy the intended commission of the piece for the consecration of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow, though the eventual premiere took place in August 1882 in a tent nearby the nearly finished cathedral. Early in 1891, Tchaikovsky was commissioned by the Mariinsky Theatre to write a ballet and a one-act opera. He based the ballet on a tale by ETA Hoffmann, *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King*. Before starting work, he set off for a US tour via Paris, where he

was stricken with the news of his beloved sister Alexandrova. Once home, however, he made rapid progress, and incorporated within the suite of dances in the second act a brand-new instrument which he had discovered in Paris: the glittering sound of the celesta which appears in the Dance of the Sugar-Plum Fairy. High secrecy surrounded the instrument in the lead-up to the premiere on December 18, 1892, and the celesta would be moved in and out of the theatre shrouded in cloth. The story concerns Clara, a little girl who receives for Christmas what looks like an ordinary nutcracker. Late at night – in her dreams, perhaps – the Nutcracker comes to life, and leads a battalion of tin soldiers to vanquish an invading army of mice. The Nutcracker then changes into a prince, and he and Clara fly off to the Kingdom of Sweets, where the Sugar-Plum Fairy welcomes them as her guests and organises a grand entertainment in their honour. The Suite which the composer extracted soon after the ballet's premiere comprises a Miniature Overture and then a sequence of dances led off by the march of the tin soldiers. After the Sugar-Plum Fairy's dance, Russian, Arabian and Chinese scenes are all memorably evoked before a pair of flutes and oboe weave an exquisite Dance of the Reed-Pipes, and the climactic Waltz of the Flowers brings the high point of Tchaikovsky's symphonic writing for the ballet.

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Schicksalslied

Ihr wandelt droben im Licht,
Auf weichem Boden, selige Genien!
Glänzende Götterlüfte
Rühren euch leicht,
Wie die Finger der Künstlerin
Heilige Saiten.

Schicksallos, wie der schlafende
Säugling, atmen die Himmlischen;
Keusch bewahrt
In bescheidener Knospe
Blühet ewig
Innen der Geist,

Holy spirits, you walk up there
in the light, on soft earth.
Shining god-like breezes
rest upon you gently,
as a woman's fingers
play over blessed strings.

Like sleeping infants the gods
breathe without thought of fate;
the spirit flourishes continually
in them, chastely kept,
as in a small bud,

Und die seligen Augen
Blicken in stiller,
Ewiger Klarheit.

Doch uns ist gegeben
Auf keiner Stätte zu ruhn;
Es schwinden, es fallen
Die leidenden Menschen
Blindlings von einer
Stunde zur andern,
Wie Wasser von Klippe
zu Klippe geworfen,
Jahrlang ins Ungewisse hinab.

Friedrich Hölderlin

Alto Rhapsody

Aber abseits, wer ist's?
In's Gebüsch verliert sich sein Pfad,
hinter ihm schlagen die Sträucher zusammen,
das Gras steht wieder auf,
die Öde verschlingt ihn.

Ach wer heilet die Schmerzen dess,
dem Balsam zu Gift ward?
Der sich Menschenhass aus der Fülle der Liebe trank!

Erst verachtet, nun ein Verächter
zehrt er heimlich auf seinen eignen Wert
in ungnügender Selbstsucht.

Ist auf deinem Psalter, Vater der Liebe,
ein Ton seinem Ohre vernehmlich,
so erquickte sein Herz, so erquickte sein Herz!
Öffne den umwölkten Blick über die tausend Quellen
neben dem Durstenden in der Wüste.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

and their holy eyes
look out in still
eternal clearness.

A place to rest
is not given to us.
Suffering humans
decline and blindly fall
from one hour to the next,
like water thrown
from cliff to cliff,
year after year,
down into the Unknown.

But who is that apart?
His path disappears in the bushes;
behind him the branches spring together;
the grass stands up again;
the wasteland engulfs him.

Ah, who heals the pains
of him for whom balsam turned to poison?
Who drank hatred of man from the abundance of love?

First scorned, now a scorner,
he secretly feeds on his own merit,
in unsatisfying egotism.

If there is on your psaltery,
Father of love, one note
his ear can hear,
then refresh his heart!
Open his clouded gaze
to the thousand springs
next to him who thirsts
in the wilderness!



The Thomas Jensen Legacy, Volume 18

More buried treasure newly remastered from the archives of Danish radio, enhancing the recorded legacy of Thomas Jensen. Gripping accounts of four mid-period Brahms masterpieces complement an impulsive performance of Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto and a Tchaikovsky sequence which comes to a fitting climax with a fiercely driven 1812 Overture.

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Live broadcast October 19, 1961

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Studio recording, January 1945

Royal Danish Orchestra

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Live broadcast March 11, 1962

Danish Radio Symphony Orchestra

Thomas Jensen, conductor



DACOCD 928

2 CD

Total playing time:
72:42 + 69:25

First release

CD 1 [1] - [4]

CD 2 [1] - [12]

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