

**Stenhammar - Tivoli Concert Hall
Politiken, 15 June 2013**

THE SWEDE SET THE PIANO ON FIRE!

My goodness what a pianist the Royal Danish Conservatory piano professor is. Forget about dusty professor fingers. This Swede is an artist with capital A! That Sivelöv this evening in Tivoli also showed us his technical capacity and his romantic-virtuoso sense of style with warmth, strength and at the same time soft and fascinating way of extracting sound from the Steinway piano, made the experience of hearing the piano part in Wilhelm Stenhammar's piano concerto to something, which in itself had deserved top marks.

Thomas Michelsen

**Stenhammar - Tivoli Concert Hall
Berlingske, 15 June 2013**

..."One says Stenhammar was a piano virtuoso of international class, but he did not care to travel and live in a suitcase. He settled in Gothenburg, transformed the city orchestra to an elite ensemble and stayed there until his death in 1927.

Is that why nobody knows his ambitious concertos for piano and orchestra? Niklas fortunately does. He has even recorded them with the orchestra in Malmö a few years ago. And when one has heard him play number two on a Thursday in Tivoli, one does not easily forget it. Sivelöv is Swedish professor at the Royal Danish Music Conservatory and is an artist of Stenhammar's kind.

He is partly equally virtuoso: Quiet passages are heavenly poetic in his hands, fast passages slick as eels, powerful sections quite Russian and without filter.

He is partly equally creative. When he thanked the audience for their even, rhythmic applause it was with an encore of his own. He begins with five seconds romance as Schumann and continues with improvisations as Keith Jarrett.

Søren Schauser

**Stenhammar - Tivoli Concert Hall
Jyllandsposten, 15 June 2013**

"The Swedish pianist Niklas Sivelöv filled the hall and the audiences' hearts with genuine Nordic light when he interpreted his countryman Wilhelm Stenhammar's second piano concerto.

The 45 year old pianist is piano professor at the Royal Danish Music Conservatory, and parallel to his professor career he has an impressive soloist career. Dividing equally between power and passionate poetry, he formed the melancholy introductory theme. He deftly shifted between moods throughout the intense piece and was thoroughly convincing in the colourful cadenza".

Christine Christiansen

Luxurious And Sparkling Pianomania, 1 December 2012

Here is a plausible pub quiz question from Stockholm: Which is the most often played Swedish piano concerto? That would be the Piano Concerto No.2 in D minor by Wilhelm Stenhammar (1871-1927). Exactly. Almost everyone knows the national composers of Norway (Grieg), Finland (Sibelius) and Denmark (Nielsen), but Sweden calls for some head-scratching. Stenhammar probably comes closest to that epithet, but it is his solid Germanic musical training from Berlin, often untouched by folk influences, which makes him somewhat less distinctive. Both of his piano concertos are however totally enjoyable examples of Romantic piano writing.

The shorter Concerto No.2 of 1908 unusually begins with a solo introduction by the piano (like in Beethoven's Fourth and Rachmaninov's Second), which never gets heard again (like Tchaikovsky's First). Its movements play without a break (like Liszt's) but contain memorable moments and melodies, including a romping finale with Schumannesque themes. The 4-movement Concerto No.1 in B flat minor of 1893 plays for a monumental 42 minutes. The influence is clearly Brahms's Second Concerto, but he does not slavishly copy. There is enough individuality and wealth of ideas to sustain its length. The slow movement radiates beauty and warmth, before the work closes with an almost-folksy spell of lightness. Swedish pianist Niklas Sivelöv breathes a blend of lyricism and virtuosity that makes the music luxuriate and sparkle. This is the only combination of both concertos at budget price, a must for lovers of romantic concertos.

Stenhammar - 5 Stars Opus Magazine, 1 December 2012

"It is possible to find real treasures amongst Naxos' many releases such as Malmö Symphony Orchestra's recording of Wilhelm Stenhammar's two piano concertos with Niklas Sivelöv as adventurous soloist. It is without doubt the piano professor and not the conductor Mario Venzago who is in command in this recording. And when one like Sivelöv has performed Ice Piano (Fredrik Högberg) he has apparently no fear of venturing out on the ice in Stenhammar - without slipping".

Excellent Klassiekshop Weblog, 26 June 2012

Its not a work from a youngster, but a finely structured and balanced composition.

Both compositions have in common that they are very much written for the vast possibilities and challenges of the piano and that a pianist can let himself go on it.

This quality comes through in this recording as well. Niklas Sivelöv is an excellent pianist who knows how and has the ability to reproduce the atmosphere of the piano concertos. He's being supported by an, for us not so well known, orchestra but which it ought to be, considering the quality of it.

A First Class Performance
Musica, 20 April 2012

(...) Maybe the artistic and compositional values in a work will then get more attention, regardless of its historical impact. Especially when it is repeated in a first class performance like this by pianist Niklas Sivelöv and Swiss conductor Mario Venzago with Malmö Symphony Orchestra.

Riccardo Risaliti

BBC Music Magazine

"This is one for rare repertoire junkies...Some beautifully applied golden-age style from Sivelöv"

Formidable
Ritmo, 1 April 2012

On this disc one can compare two different styles in Stenhammar's work. The first concerto is late romantic and highly influenced by Brahms. The second and better concerto is from a different period and with a more personal style which can remind one of Liszt's adagios. In order to perform and interpret both pieces it is necessary to have a pianist who can take on the great challenges, as the degree of technical and expressive difficulty is very high. Sivelöv is formidable in both concertos. extremely virtuoso in the Moderato movement in the second concerto and intense in the first concerto's Maestoso movement. Overall he is constantly convincing and communicating. The Swede is brilliantly accompanied by Malmö Symphony Orchestra and is presented as a serious and enthusiastic piece of work. Venzago induces the best from soloist and orchestra and he conducts with the passion which is essence for this kind of music. The cd is - particularly seen in the light of Sivelöv's performance - to be recommended to those who have a special passion for romantic piano concertos.

Second To None
Musikguide, 2 February 2012

The two concertos are touching and under Venzago's baton never exaggerated.

Sivelöv's elegant flight over the deep and dark expanses reminds one that the inheritance from Wagner also could be transformed to sensitive melancholy.

And with a sharp Sivelöv at the keyboard, one is constantly reminded how much there was at stake for the elegant Swedish composer with only 45 opus numbers.

One cannot find a better performance of these concertos.

Jens Povlsen

Stenhammar
Gramophone, 1 February 2012

Niklas Sivelöv negotiates the torrents of octaves and other rhetorical gestures with aplomb.

Expressive Stenhammar
Norran, 18 January 2012

Niklas Sivelöv plays with great expression, blends romantic elegance with heartfelt energy, and one is struck by his fast tempi. The duration of the second concerto is almost five minutes shorter than Tanyel/Manze's version on the Hyperion label. Yes, it is fast, but never too fast.

Mikael Bengtsson

Two Terrific Concertos
Pizzicato, 2 January 2012

The Swede Wilhelm Stenhammar is an outsider in the concert life. Lucky then to have these two concertos.

"The expansive romantic and differentiated playing of Niklas Sivelöv and the tense orchestra contains sufficient power of interpretation to give an appealing performance."

"Together with Malmö Symphony Orchestra under Mario Venzago the Swedish pianist does second concerto great credit."

Remy Franck

Absolutely Superb
Music Web International, 21 December 2011

"Listening to this instantly appealing and well-crafted music put a query in my head. I wondered how many times one of Sweden's greatest composers had been performed at the self-styled "The World's Greatest Classical Music Festival" - the BBC Proms. The answer - in over 100 hundred years might surprise - seven pieces."

"Although there is recorded competition for this music - I have not heard the recent Hyperion disc (review review) in their Romantic Piano Concerto series - at the Naxos price advantage and deploying the idiomatic and ever excellent Malmö Symphony Orchestra this is a winner. Soloist Niklas Sivelöv has a Stenhammar pedigree having recorded a solo recital disc of the composer also on Naxos."

"Naxos place the larger sprawling Piano Concerto No. 1 Op. 1 second on the disc. Sivelöv makes a very convincing and muscular case for the work. Certainly, by taking a good five minutes less time than Mats Widlund on Chandos (an epic 47:18) he (Sivelöv) minimises the discursive elements in the work. I have not heard the Brilliant/BIS (review) first concerto but

this current recording's 2nd Concerto is considerably finer than Cristina Ortiz's performance. Simply put Sivelöv has a more impressive technique. This is most clear in the quicksilver scherzo which is interpolated into the first movement proper. Here the kinship with Rachmaninov in general and the Rhapsody on a theme of Paganini in particular stands out. Important to note though that the Stenhammar is the earlier work by some twenty-seven years. Sivelöv is absolutely superb here; all fleet gossamer passage-work and dextrous cross-rhythms. Conductor Mario Venzago is totally at home in this idiom and the Malmö orchestra sound very fine."

"Certainly it remains both absurd and shameful that institutions like the Proms have yet fully to embrace the music of this most talented yet modest man.

For all lovers of romantic piano concertos this disc will bring great pleasure."

Nick Barnard

Startling
Dagens Nyheter, 9 December 2011

My main and favourite Naxos recommendation is Niklas Sivelöv's startling new interpretation of Stenhammar's 2nd. Piano Concerto with Mario Venzago and Malmö Symphony Orchestra. It is so far the most inspiring and most beautiful piano music by a Swedish composer.

Martin Nyström

Not All Black And White
Upsala Nya Tidning, 9 December 2011

One can certainly sense more than black and white - even red - in Wilhelm Stenhammars dramatic and emotional piano concertos. It becomes extra apparant with the dynamically gifted Niklas Sivelöv at the piano and Mario Venzago conducts the excellent Malmö Symfony Orchestra. In the first concerto Brahms sits on the composer's shoulder and is quite dominating regarding originality, even though it is a very enjoyable concerto. The second concerto on the other hand is composed a number of years later, one meets a powerfull and independent composer and which is counted as one of the most important pieces written by a Swedish composer in the 19th century. One can't help noticing that Stenhammar was a piano virtuoso.

Björn G Stenberg

The Finest Performance
The Guardian, 10 November 2011

These wonderful recordings of Stenhammar's piano concertos make a superb introduction to his music, too much of which is unfamiliar outside his native Sweden. The Second Concerto (1908) is a masterpiece; the First (1894) isn't quite. Both try to negotiate between the perceived polarities of Liszt's and Wagner's experimental chromaticism on the one hand and Brahms's tempered romanticism on the other. While Stenhammar's colossal First Concerto expands on Brahms's symphonic technique, the tense, if extraordinarily beautiful Second uses Lisztian cyclic structures to constrain its complex material within a single musical span. Stenhammar specialist Niklas Sivelöv plays them in a no-holds-barred, high Romantic way, while the Malmö Symphony under Mario Venzago is tremendous. Some might prefer the harder edge and comparative detachment of Seta Tanyel with the Helsingborg Symphony and Andrew Manze on Hyperion. But it's hard not to be swept away by the Naxos disc, and the performance of the First Concerto is the finest I know.

Tim Ashley

Cleanly Defined And Pleasing
Naxos.com - David's Review Corner, 1 November 2011

Though composition had to take second place to a performing career as a pianist and conductor, Wilhelm Stenhammar left to the world two fine piano concertos. It was, however, together with his Second Symphony and the Serenade, to prove the peak of his compositional career. Whereas the First was a lengthy score, the Second was relatively short, its three movements linked to form one long span. It is a work full of joy, and though it was already in an outdated style for the early 20th century, it gives great pleasure in a style more related to Rachmaninov than Brahms. It was thought that the score and parts of the First Concerto were destroyed in a Second World War fire, until another copy was discovered in the 1990's.

I think I have heard all the recorded performances of both works, and would certainly place this one from Niklas Sivelov as my recommendation. He goes deep into both scores, with every dynamic and rhythmic nuance keenly observed. He also has the most persuasive partners in the Malmö Symphony and Mario Venzago, and if the recorded sound needed more air around it, it is cleanly defined and pleasing.

David Denton

