

Sinfonia Concertante
for cello and orchestraERLAND v. KOCH
Nordic Capriccio, op. 26

During his years of pilgrimage and wandering, Gösta Nystroem came to spend some time on the grassy slopes of Garmisch, studying the harmonics of Schönberg. It wasn't just by coincidence that he brought musical theory with him into Nature. Flowers and grass, forest and sea, are as much a part of Nystroem's personality as is any technicality of art.

Analysis, effect, agility and nimble virtuosity are not characteristics of Nystroem's art. When, in the dynamic twenties, he met with the works of Schönberg, Stravinsky and Honegger, he would surely have agreed with Krenek: "The person who has been struck by lightning will not be calmed by the explanation that it was all just a result of well understood electrical tensions."

His development as a composer did not follow any set, goal-directed pattern — it took years of search and synthesis before his means of artistic expression matured into the unique style that became his own. He never tried for agility or technical nimbleness. His message was entirely too urgent to afford any arty elegance or brilliant virtuosity.

The **Sinfonia Concertante for cello and orchestra**, composed in 1941, is not a cello concert for a show-off stage lion. As indicated in the title, the cello voice is only a part of the whole and the soloist is rather subservient to the orchestra.

The **Sinfonia Concertante** is an excellent introduction into Nystroem's work, for those interested in the grammar, the syntax and the "unspoken" in the language of serious music. It is "friendlier", stilistically, than many of his other orchestral works and its melodious lyricism seems to point ahead towards the famous Sinfonia del mare.

Nystroem sacrifices agility and nimbleness in a different sense as well: The core of his work is seldom obvious at the beginning and it usually takes some search on the part of the listener before the sources of the music are uncovered. This may not hold true in the case of single melodies or thematic groups but it normally does in regard to the work as a whole.

This characteristic may be expressed in the changes of tempo: A *lento* phrase usually introduces and engulfs a major work. The **Sinfonia Concertante** begins with a heavy *grave* and fades away in a mild *lento*. Nystroem's forms develop along characteristically tight and balanced lines — his major works stand like bridges spanned over white water. Even in the middle of a work, in the center of the dramatic action, the

opposing forces are balanced in an inner "frame". This is the case with the **Sinfonia Concertante**: The rapidly developing central movement forms into corresponding equivalents, an inner "frame" for the entire work. The rapid phrases are grouped around yet another elegiac *lento*. And within each allegro phrase, a new framework "bridge" can be distinguished: Even these are (through the inclusion of a side-theme) divided into three parts.

The musical thunderbolt which struck Nystroem and other young European composers after World War I, was followed by a series of chain reactions. Many composers were caught in the movement towards a revival of baroque and classical forms. Others were enthused by French impressionism, yet others by the struggles of atonal music.

It is remarkable that Nystroem, despite his intimate contacts with all the "isms" of the period, was able to form them, in time, according to his own artistic needs. Indeed, few Swedish composers can show a production as even and stilistically homogenous as that of Nystroem.

The **Sinfonia Concertante**, like Nystroem's other works in the vein of tonal neo-romanticism, is alive with the same attitudes, the same musical "behavior pattern", as the contrapunctually more severe compositions. Already the first bars show the piercing frenesy of Nystroem and his resounding, penetrating expressiveness. The second movement is like a little symphony all by itself — the main theme rushes forth in tremendous, energy-laden charges, all engulfed in the slower *lento*. The melody, with its pale aura of beauty, is, with the exception of a single tone, identical with one theme in the **Sinfonia Espressiva**.

As in the first movement, the final *lento* is dominated by a single melody, which here becomes a broadly resounding *cantilena* which gradually cools the burning heat of the first phrases. There is indeed somewhat of the freshness of the sea in the increasing calm that terminates the concert — reminiscent, perhaps, of the serenity of Nature. The melody was written during a canoe trip in the archipelago south of Gothenburg, among the flowers of the rocky beaches.

Erland von Koch's Nordic Capriccio is easily accessible and easily understood. A rhythmic thread is spun around a few melodies, each wittily formed in a spirit of folk music. The melodies playfully chase one another, in a single sweep across constantly dancing rhythm figures. *Lennart Reimers.*

Cover: "Från Särö"
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Gösta Nystroem (born 1890): **Sinfonia Concertante for cello and orchestra.** (Composed 1945).
Grave / Allegro bucolico / Lento
Soloist: Erling Blöndal-Bengtsson
The Stockholm Radio Orchestra
Stig Westerberg, Conductor
Recorded April 20, 1958, in the Auditorium of the Royal Academy of Music, Stockholm
Length of recording: 32 minutes, 26 seconds.
Score from Nordiska Musikförlaget, Stockholm.

Erland v. Koch (born 1910): **Nordic Capriccio, op. 26.** (Composed 1943).
The Stockholm Radio Orchestra
Stig Westerberg, Conductor
Recorded April 20, 1958, in the Auditorium of the Royal Academy of Music, Stockholm
Length of recording: 5 minutes, 56 seconds.
Score from Edition Suecia, Stockholm.

Recorded according to R.I.A.A. frequency characteristics.