

# LIDHOLM: RITES   ROSENBERG: Overture MARIONETTES

## BLOMDAHL: CHAMBER CONCERTO

### THE LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

### SIXTEN EHRLING Hans Leygraf, piano

It is often difficult historically to evaluate events and lines of development which happen in our own time. This is not least true concerning music, which in Sweden during the last two decades has undergone a great period of extension and expansion. The fifties were a particularly active and important period: Karl-Birger Blomdahl's Third Symphony ("Facets"), his first large scale work, appeared in 1950 and his opera "Aniara" received its world premiere in 1959. Hilding Rosenberg was composing considerable numbers of string quartets (now regarded as his finest works), and Dag Wirén's Fourth Symphony and Fourth String Quartet appeared. Sven-Erik Bäck and Allan Pettersson were writing, and new horizons in the radical movement were reached in the works of Ingvar Lidholm, Bengt Hambraeus and Bo Nilsson, etc. The output of these and many others was large and checkered. But, (for the first time) a dominating influence in the development of Swedish music was engendered through an intensive contact with the international avant-garde, and in two main aspects was this mostly German and Italian modernism, inspiring; the renaissance of serial technique and the realisation of new colouristic possibilities.

The two main works on this record, Lidholm's "Rites" and the Chamber Concerto of Blomdahl, are each in their own way significant and enlightening examples of this.

INGVAR LIDHOLM'S music for the ballet "Rites" was written in 1959 and performed for the first time by the Royal Swedish Ballet in 1960. It is based on a libretto by the poet Erik Lindegren (who was also the librettist of Blomdahl's "Aniara"). It is described as "a ballet with action, not in the narrative spirit of a short story, but rather in the associative, manifold spirit of poetry". Its basic theme is that Cruelty (synonymous with Power) is eternal, and that there is no escape for the human being — the *Victim*. The story begins with the *Youth*, an Idealist dancing in innocence and pure joy with his love the *Virgin*. The *Shaman*, Keeper of Power, and the central figure of the action, seduces her and this corruption transforms her into a witch in the *Youth's* eyes. He flees to the *Sacrifice* and becomes impassioned to save the *Sacrifice* and end cruelty. But he fails.

The personification of *Suffering* appears, and in urging the *Youth* to revolt against *Power* she endows him with strength to kill the *Shaman*, and the *Youth* now strong, is crowned *Shaman*. His first action is to kill his followers and then, alone and despairing, he casts off his crown and dies. Through the disappearance of *Power* the witch is transformed back into a *Virgin* but it is too late. The greatest sacrifice has been fulfilled — the *Youth's* own.

Lidholm has written that his main intent in writing this music was for 'movement' and 'interplay between dance and music'. With this as the basis for choreography he has avoided constant changes of tempo and has striven for a simplification of rhythm. At times there is an almost improvisatory, *al fresco* quality in his construction, and within this framework there are many lyrical sections of an impressionistic, shimmering sound.

The recorded version is a Concert Suite arranged by Lidholm. It starts with a pronounced rhythmical section in which the percussion is rapidly augmented by the rest of the orchestra. After a quiet *lento* passage when the *Virgin* is transformed into a witch, the movement ends with the lascivious dance of the *Shaman* with her. The next section is the procession to the sacrifice led by three *Virgins* and three *Youths*, when follows the first Sacrificial Dance. After a short *cadenza* for solo flute there is the entrance of the sacrifice and the second Sacrificial Dance. The Suite ends with an Epilogue.

HILDING ROSENBERG occupies the position of the leading and most productive modernist of the older generation in Sweden. It is not within the scope of this note to discuss his enormous contribution to the art. Suffice it to say that he can be regarded as a type of 'father' of modern Swedish music in his pioneering path-finding.

His opera *buffa* "Marionettes", which received its premiere in 1939, was inspired by Benavente's play, with the old *commedia-dell'arte* characters. It appeared several years after his austere, monumental "Sinfonia Grave" and a year before his great confessional symphony "The Revelation of St. John".

The Overture is written in the same spirit as the play, and after a sinister and menacing introduction the music becomes light, full of fun and brilliantly gay.

Rosenberg must be regarded as one of the most remarkable figures in 20th century Swedish music. His creative breadth is one of his greatest gifts to its development, a fact topical not least for the works here recorded. The tradition from Rosenberg to Blomdahl and Lidholm has proved one of the strongest in Swedish music today.

KARL-BIRGER BLOMDAHL studied composition with Hilding Rosenberg and trained further in Rome, Paris and Switzerland. During the 1940s he was a member of the so-called "Monday Group", a school of composers which included Hilding Rosenberg, Ingvar Lidholm, Sven-Erik Bäck and Hans Leygraf. This group was first influenced by Hindemith and consequently became known for its search for a deromanticised, linear style. Since that time however Blomdahl has emerged as the standard-bearer of the latest musical trends on the continent, having adopted twelve-tone and serial principles. He frequently employs pointillist methods, and composes electronic music.

His Chamber Concerto for piano, woodwind and percussion was written in 1954. It was conceived in close cooperation with Hans Leygraf, the pianist in this recording, and the work is dedicated to him. Its point of departure is a twelve-note series which does not however entirely avoid centres of tonality. One can not only detect thematic similarities to Bartok or Hindemith but also details and techniques which may be considered typical of the 1950s, e.g. his use of pointillism in the middle of the second movement. Nevertheless there is nothing of the lyrical, meditative atmosphere which pointillistic style often evokes, for it is used here to build tone by tone a successively denser, and melodically more and more pronounced structure. Each individual moment serves only one purpose — to increase the dynamic intensity. Blomdahl's scores seldom exhibit any luxuriance of tone colour, and this work is no exception. It is austere, harsh and astringent. The concerto is played without a break, but within this entity it is possible to discern four distinct movements. The first is filled with dynamic strength, the second is stubbornly rhythmical. The third, an *Adagio*, lays emphasis on melodic phrases, and the fourth is light-hearted and playful.

#### SIDE ONE

INGVAR LIDHOLM (b. 1921)

#### RITES

1. Ritual Dance
2. Procession
3. Sacrificial Dance 1
4. Sacrificial Dance 2
5. Epilogue

#### SIDE TWO

HILDING ROSENBERG (b. 1892)

Overture: "MARIONETTES"

KARL-BIRGER BLOMDAHL (b. 1916)

#### CHAMBER CONCERTO

for Piano, Woodwind and Percussion

SIXTEN EHRLING is today chief conductor and musical director of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, the first Swedish conductor to reach such an important position abroad. Born in Malmö in 1918, he began his musical activities at the Royal Opera House in Stockholm in 1940, was appointed chief conductor there in 1953 and remained in this post until 1960 when he left his native country to make guest appearances in the concert halls of Europe and the United States. Apart from opera, he has regularly conducted symphony concerts in Stockholm since 1942. In addition he is an excellent pianist and accompanist.

Sixten Ehrling is a much admired interpreter of modern music, Swedish as well as international, and has performed the works here recorded on many occasions.

HANS LEYGRAF, one of Sweden's most prominent pianists, was born in 1920 and has been internationally acclaimed for his sympathetic interpretations of Mozart's music. He started his career as a musical prodigy and was only ten years old when he performed for the first time with the Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra. Leygraf is also a well-known teacher, and he has reached an exceptionally large audience all over Sweden through his interesting televised talks with his pupils.

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Cover photo: Enar Merkel Rydberg  
(Björn Holmgren and  
Yvonne Brosset in the  
ballet "Rites".)

