

## Nielsen, Sibelius - Violin Concertos (2015)

Written by bluesever  
Friday, 21 April 2017 15:01 -

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Jean Sibelius: Violin Concerto in D Minor, Op. 47 1 - *I. Allegro moderato* 2 - *II. Adagio di molto* 3 - *III. Allegro ma non tanto* Jean  
Sibelius: 2 Serenades for Violin & Orchestra, Op. 69  
4 - *Serenade No. 1 in D Major, Op. 69a* 5 - *Serenade No. 2 in G Minor, Op. 69b*  
Carl Nielsen: Violin Concerto, Op. 33, CNW 41  
6 - *Ia. Praeludium - Largo* 7 - *Ib: Allegro cavalleresco* 8 - *II. Poco adagio* 9 - *II. Rondo: Allegretto scherzando*  
Baiba Skride (violin) Tampere Philharmonic Orchestra Santtu-Matias Rouvali (conductor)

A small point to begin with: because Orfeo has decided to include the two Serenades the programme length (87 minutes) requires a second CD, thus necessitating the use of a gatefold sleeve. The good news is that the gatefold is only fractionally wider than a conventional jewel case and the price bracket is that of a single disc.

Baiba Skride has enjoyed many a good review of late (Shostakovich; Mozart; Brahms; Szymanowski; Stravinsky) and is one of a phalanx of formidably equipped young violinists. She's not the only player to bracket these two Scandinavian concertos and she does so with the 30-year old conductor Santtu-Matias Rouvali, who is not much older than she is. If that implies youthful high-spirits and a sense of unbridled freedom, then listening to the performances suggests that other facets and aesthetics will be encountered. Skride is attentive to dynamics but one can hear from her opening paragraphs that she is strangely unwilling to let the line unfold with tension generated from within. Instead she buttresses it with a battery of inflections with the result that the music sounds destabilised from the very start, and a too overtly expressive feel is generated. If the presentiments of a serene kind of intensity are your ideal, you may well find Skride bumpy and over-colouristic.

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Yet this is not necessarily a feeling that often recurs. Orchestrally, we hear plenty of the inner part writing, those rhythmically galvanising running string figures that are promoted in the balance by Rouvali, as well as teak-based orchestral sonority. Having noted the over-emoted start, Skride's playing actually retains a rather small-scaled position, very consonant throughout, and not at all extrovert. The first movement is rather slow, giving it a rhapsodic profile, the music coming to punctuation points several times. It's a world away from Heifetz, Wicks, Oistrakh, Stern, Telmanyi and Spivakovsky - though interestingly she's only half a minute slower than one of the concerto's greatest exponents, Anja Ignatius, whose wartime reading, however, constructs a far more compelling narrative. Broader vibrato marks the central movement, at another basically but not unconscionably slowish tempo, though she has the phraseology here to sustain things. In the finale the insistent lower string drumming patterns are forcefully brought out, and Skride makes time for some sympathetic lyricism, but these two implied features - the concentration on the propulsive features in the accompanying writing and a lack of heroic heft in the solo part - tend to define at least part of this performance. It's a very worthwhile reading nevertheless, and seldom less than rewarding - but not, to my mind, a compelling one.

The Serenades make for enjoyable companions, especially the folkloric Hardanger moments of the second with the folkloric fiddle colours especially nicely done by Skride. It suits very well her tight, bright tone.

With a recording that - like the Sibelius - seems somewhat to spread, she plays the opening paragraph of the Nielsen with beautiful long phrases, though thereby missing the more interventionist approach taken by the composer's son-in-law, Telmanyi in his 1947 recording with Egisto Tango. The main concern is the strangely leaden approach to the Allegro cavalleresco which sounds dogged, the passagework taken so scrupulously that all spirit of adventure is dissipated. Both Menuhin, with Wvldike and Telmanyi himself, take a full two minutes off Skride's timing in this movement alone. Indeed they're both much quicker in the finale as well. Speed in itself is not a recommendation, but characterisation and rhythmic flexibility are, and those older recordings, despite the dated sonics, have those qualities in profusion. ---Jonathan Woolf, musicweb-international.com

Born in 1981 into a musical Latvian family violinist Baiba Skride won First Prize at the 2010 Queen Elisabeth Competition, held annually in Belgium. Ms. Skride's natural approach to her music making has endeared her to some of today's most important conductors and orchestras. Following her debut at the BBC Proms with the Oslo Philharmonic and Vasily Petrenko playing

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the Szymanowski Concerto No. 1, The Times noted, 'Latvian violinist Baiba Skride sailed over the orchestra with long lines of melody, silver and sweet.' She was immediately re-invited, and at the 2014 Proms played the Stravinsky Concerto with the BBC Symphony and Ed Gardner. Baiba Skride debut recording with Orfeo of the Szymanowski Concertos and Myths was nominated for the 2015 BBC Music Magazine Awards in the Concerto section. For her Orfeo CD follow up she has recorded two Scandinavian violin concertos truly exciting, fresh and innovative – Jean Sibelius's well-loved concerto and Carl Nielsen's unjustly neglected companion work – with the Tampere Philharmonic and conductor Santtu-Matias Rouvali. ---arkivmusic.com

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