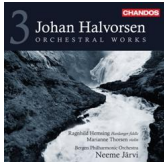


## Johann Halvorsen – Orchestral Works Vol.3 (Nervi) [2011]

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Symphony No. 3 in C major 26:12 1 I *Poco andante* - *Allegro moderato* - *Tranquillo* - *Poco più mosso* - *A tempo*. 10:01 2 II *Andante* - *Allegro moderato* - *Tranquillo* - *Allegro molto* - *Andante*. 7:58 3 III *Finale. Allegro impetuoso* - *Poco meno mosso* - *Tranquillo* - *Stretto* - *Animando* - 8:46 4 *Sorte Svaner (Black Swans)* 4:54 *Andante* - *Piu mosso* - *Un poco animato* 5 *Bryllupsmarsch, Op. 32 No. 1 (Wedding March)* 4:13 for Violin Solo and Orchestra Til Arve Arvesen *Allegretto marziale* - *Coda* 6 *Rabnabryllaup uti Kraakjalund (Wedding of Ravens in the Grove of the Crows)* 3:59 Norwegian Folk Melody Arranged for String Orchestra *Andante* *Fossegrimen, Op. 21* 29:49 *Dramatic Suite for Orchestra* 7 I *Fossegrimen. Allegro moderato* - *Meno allegro* - *Piu lento* - *Piu vivo* - 6:29 8 II *Huldremoyarnes Dans. Allegretto grazioso* 3:01 9 III *Bruremarsch. Allegretto marziale* - *Coda* 5:51 10 *Danse visionaire (Maneskinsmoyarne)*. *Andante* - *Allegretto molto moderato* - 7:15 11 IV *Melodrame og Auds Sang. Allegro* - *Andante* - *Andante con moto* 4:32 12 V *Fanitullen. Allegro con fuoco* - *Coda* - *Andante* 2:35 13 *Bergensiana* 10:17 *Rococo Variations on an Old Melody from Bergen Moderato (Tempo di Menuetto)* - Tema - Variation I. *Stesso tempo* - Variation II. *Un poco piu mosso* - Variation III. *Allegretto* - Variation IV. *Allegro con brio* - Variation V. *Andante religioso e molto cantabile* - Variation VI. *Allegro giocoso* - Moderato (*Tempo di Menuetto*) - Tema - Pesante - *Sostenuto* Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra Neeme Jarvi – conductor

This is my first encounter with the music of Halvorsen. Given his dates (1864-1935) - practically the same as Nielsen's (1865-1931), and same generation also as Sibelius, although Sibelius died much later (1865-1957), but his last significant composition was Tapiola, in 1926 - and the dates of composition of the various works gathered on this CD, vol. 3 of Chandos' four-volume traversal of his orchestral works by Neeme Järvi, Johan Halvorsen wasn't very modern. He writes in a post-Grieg/post-Tchaikovsky language that was Sibelius' point of departure rather than his point of arrival. It sounds, in the Third Symphony from 1928, very balletic - the music Lanchberry or Minkus could have composed for the court of Saint Petersburg. It sounds like that also in Bergensiana, from 1913 - an information that the otherwise very informative liner notes fail to provide - subtitled Rococo Variations on an old melody from Bergen (track 13), but the

first variations sounds even like Spohr or Crusell, which brings us almost one hundred years back stylistically.

Now, if you don't care about historical perspective and don't mind listening, say, to a symphony in the style of Mozart even if it was composed as a pastiche 200 years after Mozart's death, provided that it is as good as a Mozart symphony, and if you love the symphonies of the late 19th-Century Russians (Tchaikovsky, Borodin, Rimsky) so much that you can never get enough, you can enjoy the music of Halvorsen with no nagging second thoughts. The Third Symphony is romantic, lyrical, impetuous indeed in the Finale (rather than dramatic - its character indication is *Allegro impetuoso*), tender and at times sentimental in the slow movement, full of tunes although none seem to leave a strong imprint, unlike those of Tchaikovsky. In his conservative outlook Bruch also comes to mind, but Bruch was of an earlier generation (1838-1920), and I've found Bruch's symphonies more enjoyable, with more memorable tunes (see my review of Bruch: The 3 Symphonies, Swedish Dances (*Schwedische Tanze*)). Sibelius' Fourth Symphony dates from 1911 and the final version of the Fifth from 1919, and Nielsen completed his *Inextinguishable* (Symph. No. 4) in 1916 and his 5th in 1922. Now I know why Sibelius and Nielsen are the major composers they are, oft-recorded, and Halvorsen a minor figure for the specialist with conservative tastes.

"Wedding March/Bryllupsmarsch" (track 5) is a folk-inspired "pops" for violin and orchestra, very suitable as a display piece for Andre Rieu, or maybe in a recital with Saint Saens' *Havanaise* and *Rondo Capriccioso*. That said, there is much atmosphere in and enjoyment to be derived from "Black Swans" (track 4) from 1921, dark and intense, somewhat reminiscent of Sibelius' *Valse Triste* and *Swan of Tuonela*, and "Wedding of Ravens", an early piece (in fact Halvorsen's debut as an orchestral composer, in 1891), is even more beautiful, three short variations for strings alone on a folk theme, sombre, brooding, aching, recalling the slow movement from Tchaikovsky's *Serenade for strings*, and in that league (track 6). Much too short (less than 4 minutes) for its value.

But the real house-rouser is *Fossegrimen*, the orchestral suite from the incidental music written by Halvorsen in 1905 for some now forgotten play about Fossegrimen, "the mythical music master of all underground creatures", and Torgeir Augunsson, "Norway's most celebrated fiddler". **FANS OF COUNTRY FIDDLE, DON'T MISS THIS!** In it Halvorsen not just orchestrates and develops symphonically Norwegian country dances, but uses the Hardanger fiddle, "the most common folk music instrument in Norway" (re the liner notes), an instrument prone to playing drones and double stops, to great effect. The Suite alternates between such country dances with fiddle (1, 3, 6), and purely orchestral movements, very evocative of Grieg's *Peer Gynt* in the tender and airy second and fourth movements, and with the 5th sounding, in its opening section, like a kind of Saint Saens *Danse Macabre* or Mussorgsky *Night on the Bare Mountain*. The score is available from the International Music Scores Library Project, bless them

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again. And to boot, Neeme Järvi, Chandos, Halvorsen, Norway and ourselves are also lucky to have, in the person of Ragnhild Hemsing (22 when the recording was made in 2010), not only an accomplished violinist, but the world specialist of Hardanger fiddle, and, judging from the photo that adorns the booklet's back cover of her in a light red gown standing on Norwegian ice, a stunning beauty. She doesn't yet have her entry on Wikipedia English (only Norwegian), but it shouldn't be long. --- Discophage, amazon.com

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