

## **Bach And Beethoven**

Helsingør Dagblad, 9 November 2014

The keyboard of Sthens Church fine Steinway piano was this afternoon in the hands of one of the greatest pianists in Denmark - Niklas Sivelöv, professor at the Royal Danish Academy of Music. His programme was awe-inspiring; 2 of Beethoven's last sonatas opus 109 and 111, and Bach's Partitas 2 and 3.

One gets the impression that Sivelöv can do everything on a piano. His technique is formidable, the fast tempi are perhaps a notch too fast, but it never affects his secure playing. His touch is firm, so each note stands chiselled, but he can also catch the soft and expressive in a movement. He is a man of contrasts.

The Beethoven sonatas are monumental pieces, they are the capstones of his sonata production, and can be seen as a farewell with a genre, which he has made an impact more than any other composer. Niklas Sivelöv gave the sonatas life and glow with his personal interpretation of the music.

Bach's partitas belong in another world. They are not less demanding than Beethoven, but they require a different approach. Instead of feelings it is the pulse of the music which dominates. "

It was a wonderful concert with music by the two great B's, Bach and Beethoven.

Ole Josephsen

## **Stenhammar - Tivoli Concert Hall**

Politiken, 15 June 2014

### **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 pianistic way of extracting sound from the Steinway piano, made the experience of hearing the piano part in Wilhelm Stenhammar's piano concert to something, which in itself had deserved top marks.

Thomas Michelsen

## **Stenhammar - Tivoli Concert Hall**

Berlingske, 15 June 2014

..."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 á la Schumann and continues with improvisations á la Keith Jarrett.

Søren Schauser

## **Stenhammar - Tivoli Concert Hall**

Jyllandsposten, 15 June 2014

"The Swedish pianist Niklas Sivelöv filled the hall and the audiences' hearts with genuine Nordic light when he interpreted his countryman Wilhelm Stenhammars 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. With equal shares of power and passionate poetry in his fingers, 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

## **Exotic Soloist**

The Clarion, 16 April 2014

Niklas Sivelöv, a world-renowned Scandinavian pianist who has won numerous awards and distinctions over the years including the Diapason d'Or and a Cannes nomination for best twentieth century recording, performed last Tuesday at the Newman Center to students and the public.

Despite the snowy conditions, the event gathered sixty people to the Frederic C. Hamilton Family Recital Hall where Sivelövs demonstrated his music expertise through a unique performance with style and amazing skill.

Sivelöv played a standard set of songs by European composers; however, his recital was anything but standard. Mixed with emotion and movement, Sivelövs love for the music was evident each time his fingers touched the keys and throughout his hour-and-a-half-long performance, Sivelöv kept the audience

The majority of the audience had been respectfully refraining from clapping until after each song was complete; however, the standing ovation at the end proved he had wowed the crowd.

## **Drama**

Helsingborgs Dagblad, 25 March 2013

(...) Drama was also offered in what was really, although not nominally, the central piece of the evening: the revival of Niklas Sivelöv's piano concerto. This piece is a volcanically rushing collection of artistic outbursts - at one point virtuoso verging on Rachmaninov, at the next point grandiose like Copland, at the next again swinging hard like Kapustin and all the time Sivelöv-like, turning completely around inventively. As soloist Sivelöv stormed the keys in veritable cascades in a part that, (including a lot of improvisations), unaccompanied would be a piece in its own right. The ample and extremely responsive work of the orchestra acted like beautiful marble to this musical monumental building. Also the extra, the first movement of Beethoven's 30th Piano Sonata, had some small Sivelöv signatures, kindly modernized.(...)

By: Fredrik Fischer

## **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 Beethovens Fourth and Rachmaninovs Second), which never gets heard again (like Tchaikovskys First). Its movements play without a break (like Liszts) 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 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".

## **Suggestive Despite The Burning Piano**

Folkbladet, 24 November 2012

Fredrik Högberg's "Ice Concerto" is written for the World-class pianist Niklas Sivelöv, native of Skellefteå, music professor in Copenhagen and one of the few Swedes who has received the prestigious American prize "Independent Music Awards" in the category "Classical album of the year". Högberg and Sivelöv work very well together - they seem to share the same spirit and they also have the same kind of insubordinate playfulness. With an impressive fearlessness Sivelöv finds his way through Högberg's musical World with an expression and presence that is felt here and now; Cocreator and at the same time a technically brilliant soloist.

By: Elin Axelsson

## **Plays With Warmth And Spontaneity**

Västerbottens-Kuriren, 23 November 2012

"NorrlandsOperan has again commissioned a new piece and the premiere of Fredrik Höberg's multimedia concerto 'Ice Concerto' took place last night. The Swedish world pianist Niklas Sivelöv was soloist". "N. Sivelöv's brilliant and sensational playing of the very advanced solo part cannot be praised enough. Here were eruptive cascades, rhythmical long and intensive lines and sensitive rippling playing which can impress the most demanding audience. It was a formidable development in one of our most wellknown international pianists."

## **Wide Range Piano**

Nordjyske Stiftstidende, 21 September 2012

The Swedish pianist Niklas Sivelöv is a musician who loves contrasts. The fondness of contrasts combined with a dazzling technique and a precise touch enables him to tackle the most hair raising musical challenges, as we were allowed to hear Wednesday evening. His address to the audience explaining the connection between Bach on one hand and the pieces by Liszt, Beethoven and Bartok on the other could not explain away the intense tension emerging between Bach/Liszt before the interval and Beethoven/Barók after.

Bach's C minor Partita is a marvellous piece containing great contrasts. Sivelöv used his tremendous technical surplus to draw up sharp contrasts already in the introductory parts of the sinfonia, and with his perfect touch he carefully shaped the character of each particular movement; the beautiful melodic duets in the allemand and sarabande, the playful, light flow in the courante, and the springy, dancing rhythm in the rondeau and capriccio. Bach's music as structure but also movement and dance.

The contrast to Liszt's 'Années de pèlerinage' was marked. The seven movements held in an orchestral tonal language were light years from Bach's melodic lines. But Sivelöv masters also this challenge to perfection, to shape the sound of the piano as it were an organic, pliable material and at the same time find the melodic core, which focuses on the musical course. Beethoven's late sonata in E Major combines these two approaches as an intensified drama in the two first movements and with the unearthly beautiful melodic song in the third movement's theme with variations. This late Beethovenish balance we have also heard previously released by Sivelöv in the last great sonata in C Major.

And then there was time for the last somersault of the evening with Bartók's great sonata from 1926. Here Sivelöv chiseled and shaped the first movement to a percussion orchestra - as a 'Sacre' movement for piano, while the second movement stood chopped in its strange awkward tonal shapes. The last movement was a fireworks of percussional effects which hung in the air as gunsmoke in the end.

With an encore, two Argentinian dances by Ginastera, the world which Bartók had split to atoms, as again united in a whole. But only for an instant until Sivelöv ended a spectacular evening with a final excited, pulsing movement.

## **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.

## **Great Playing By Piano Professor**

Helsingborg Dagblad, 29 May 2012

First piece was Bach: Partita no. 2 with its characteristic dances, followed by Beethovens richly varied Sonata no. 30. Liszt who was recognized by his peers for his advanced musical ideas and technique, opened the second half of the concert with Premiér Année de Pèlerinage with freshness and full power. Bartok Sonata with its driving rhythms and fantasies ended the concert. The pianist, composer and professor made full use of what the pieces demanded and displayed it with advanced interpretation and technique.

The encore was improvisation over a song by Bellman.

Uno Uudelepp

## **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

## **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.

## **Fresh**

ResMusica, 26 March 2012

It is the title of the famous piece by Pärt which has given its title to the recital with Polish Szymon Krzeszowiec and Swedish Niklas Siveløv, whose narrative abilities allow the piece to develop naturally. In the beginning of the programme the two musicians show an attractive sense of humour in L' introduzione from the Pulcinella transcription and equally the elegance

which concludes the cycle.

The ending fuga in Reger is perfect with clear polyphony and cohesion between the two artists. The suite by Alfred Schnittke is interpreted with a character which beautifully matches the lovely baroque into the pastoral. A monographic cd which comes to us as a fresh breath of air.

Nicolas Deryn

## **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 countedas 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.

By: David Denton

## **Pianistic Abundance**

Ystad Allehanda, 26 September 2011

Certainly Sivelöv is an intelligent artist. but the way he makes music is intelligent use of emotions more than of science. Here is no cold or mechanic exactness. Here is music to be expressed and a man who is completely absorbed in the execution.

The programme consisted of excerpts of Bach's Wohltemperierte Klavier which Sivelöv performed in a quiet, meditative state and it seemed like a preparation for Schumann which followed. Schumann's second piano sonata is a journey in hopelessness and darkness of the soul. Sivelöv's emphatic interpretation of this emotional as well as technical mountain climb seemed to be a creation of the moment. Schumann's angst flowed from Sivelöv's hands.

After the interval came another challenge: Three Petrarca sonettes from Liszt's 'Anées de pelerinage. With the imprint of the Schumann sonata in one's mind it was impressive to hear



Sivelöv transform so effortlessly to Liszt's light love odes. Sivelöv's own improvisations over themes by Bellman came next, and Sivelöv used his extensive knowledge of all styles from baroque to jazz and rock.

Alberto Ginastera's Argentine dances ended the concert, and this is a piece where the rhythm holds the main attention. Again Sivelöv mastered the music completely and one could only follow his example and give in to the music.

## **Catching**

Politiken, 28 March 2011

..."And although the young Prokofiev's piano test piece has intense passages with a simple melancholy, the phrases balanced on the border of ironic comments on the romantic piano concertos of the past.

Niklas Sivelöv knew all about the complexity in the music and therefore his interpretation of the 15 minute long piece was both impressive and captivating. He changed between - with absurd tempo - lyric melody, extreme culminations and small quaint motifs reminiscent of honky-tonk with the greatest ease. Sivelöv is a special personality with a large musical heart, and when he embraces the music with all he has got, wild things happen.

Actually, Sivelöv's catching playing made it difficult to concentrate on the role of the orchestra, but the passages I heard were very musical and supple.

Henrik Friis

## **Virtuoso**

Information, 25 March 2011

Prokofiev aimed to display both his own virtuoso pianistic abilities and a superiority to the traditional classical concerto. The crazy, the beautiful, the magnificent and the humour makes the concerto an impressive piece of apprentice's work. Niklas Sivelöv released the piano part with virtuosity and attention to the detail.

Camille Marie Dahlgren

## **Sparklingly Clear Steinway**

Fredericia Dagblad, 28 January 2011

Rarely does one hear piano works presented so sparklingly clear as with Swedish Niklas Sivelöv placed solidly by the wonderful Steinway grand piano in Tøjhuset.

The Steinway thrived superbly under Sivelöv's command. Never have I heard the piano sound so splendid and deeply appealing as last night. Sivelöv is of course represented in Steinway's Hall of Fame in Hamburg together with pianists like Rubinstein, Horowitz, Glenn Gould and Barenboim.

Sivelöv's playing is generous. He offers strength and visions in his playing. He interprets formidably and is sure to have his audience with him at all times. The music stands fresh and new in the room as though it is created here and now for listener and artist at the same time. Of the material Francis Poulenc's og Ginastera's pieces are made of, Niklas Sivelöv created musical haute couture, which made the listener draw erect and prick up one's ears. His interpretations are a must. Commanding in expression and imperative in content.

He had not made it easy for himself. All pieces on the programme were extremely demanding. Artful canonic voices in Bach's a minor Partita paired with strong rhythmical explosions in the corrente and the three last movements, where rhythm and harmony enchants. Fantastic.

The piano sounded quite different in Schumann's g minor sonata with the lovely and intensely romantic andante movement given voice by Sivelöv. Many pianists make Schumann muddy, but this could never happen for Sivelöv. His playing is cleansed for the unnecessary and his ability to portray the music is clear.

Poulenc's *Soirées de Nazelles* suited Sivelöv's knife sharp and dissecting playing superbly. Poulenc waves his wand in the neo classicist language and Sivelöv is a more than alert interpreter. Again the artist's ability to shape the many figurines did big things to the music. The movements stood printed energetic and clear in time and space.

Ginastera's *Argentinian Dances* are inspired by folklore and were in beautiful elongation of the evening's programme and gave yet again a display of Sivelöv's impressive art of interpretation. One left the concert deeply moved with the sound of the encore - an epistle by Bellman in one's ears.

I managed unexpectedly to thank him so very much. He returned with a smile and a nod. High class.

Lars Zachariassen

## **Poetry And Turmoil**

Amtsavisen, 4 October 2010

“ Sivelöv’ s program consisted of both classical works by Bach and Skrjabin as well as contemporary pieces, among these a few of his Sivelöv’ s own compositions.

At the beginning, he played one of Bach’ s preludes and fugues from the piece “ The Well Tempered Piano” . He played the prelude particularly well, expressing his great musicality, and in the fugue he expressed his poetic sense.

Sivelöv’ s interpretation of the sonata by Haydn was intensely present and a very moving mixture of extraversion and the kind of thoughtfulness that only comes with true life experience.

With Schumann’ s great suite “ Kreisleriana” , Sivelöv expressed the side of himself he is most famous for: being a virtuoso pianist. His interpretation of the piece was very close to the original, but it was less poetic and less delicate. Instead of emphasizing the sophisticated nuances, he emphasized the dramatic contrasts between fear, suffering, inner turmoil and the temporary moments of happiness. This interpretation of the “ Kreisleriana” gave the audience an impression of a man who was haunted by his destiny.

In the Sonata no. 1 from 1952 by the Argentinean composer Alberto Ginastera, Sivelöv unfolded his fantastic technique in an explosion of rhythms and sounds in continuous movement.

The encore was an improvisation of a Swedish piece, which served as a good example of Sivelöv’ s personality. It was music created in the moment including an explosive and brilliant vitality as well as a poetic tone and sense of melancholy from the large and deserted forests – a very typical expression in the Swedish folk music.

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## **Interesting Bach Interpretation**

Politiken, 3 July 2010

Niklas Sivelöv, Swedish pianist and professor conquers the music with his whole body and personality. He rocks gently back and forth, gestures and quietly sings with the music. Sivelöv's style is always personal. There is no doubt that it is a person of flesh and blood with will power and energy sitting by the piano. Not only in Tivoli's intense Bach presentation but certainly also in the even more successful new recording of Schumann's three piano sonatas.

Although one almost sensed the pain it caused Sivelöv to draw 48 pieces from both books of the Wohltemperierte Klavier out in the extreme tension in both ends of the giant speedometer, one also sensed at the same time how much thought Sivelöv was able to transfer into his fingers. Each of the preludes and fugues was given its own sustaining idea.

Fugues in a tempo where the usual structured chase between three voices were dissolved to piano thunder. Melodic preludes as light romances or jazzy songs, flowing like improvisations. Or clear baroque mechanics drawn out of the regular pulse with space to hear all details. Sivelöv did not play as much pure, motorised baroque as one expects to hear in a time where the musicians more and more try to copy the style of early music with offset in the more limited instruments which were available to the composers. His violent tempos did give some mistakes but it did definitely not make the small units less interesting.

100 years after Bach's ground-breaking work the composers had had time to purify the sonata form and time to break it down again. Here Robert Schumann found the medium to fill a work with fragments which together, but without a clear thread, could communicate some of the man's rather violent challenges to his soul. Both the carnal love and the more existential. This world is clearly a perfect universe for Niklas Sivelöv's inclination and ability to pour his whole being into the music on his new release on the little ARecords label.

The three piano sonatas become great raids on temperaments forever changing. Powerful outbursts with long stretched lines are succeeded by simple miniatures to change into delicate chorales or straightforward manifestations. Sivelöv is obviously never afraid to draw the knife fully through, and the consistent thinking makes the cd a small masterpiece amidst the grand portrayal of feelings. It would be fitting for Tivoli to programme the three sonatas as a follow-up on Bach.

Henrik Friis

## **Great Scriabin**

Fanfare, 1 July 2010

I am becoming increasingly fond of the Caprice label, both in its new issues and historic reissues. This is one of the former, an album recorded in 2005 by Swedish pianist Niklas Sivelöv. Except for *Vers la flamme*, *Feuillet d'* album, the op. 57 *Moreceux*, and the *Sonata No. 4*, most of this program consists of earlier works by Scriabin. Sivelöv's mission is to show the connections between the earlier works and the later ones, to display, as he puts it in the liner notes, the way in which Scriabin interrupted his lyric moods with emotional outbursts that didn't quite fit in. In this, he succeeds handsomely.

Sivelöv's playing is direct, crisp, and fiery. He takes no prisoners in his forthright approach to the music. Nevertheless, I must disagree with some of his tempos and phrasing. None of the slow preludes in the op. 11 set are really slow; lentos are turned into andantinos, andantes into moderatos, andantinos into prestos. Comparing him not only with Mikhail Pletnev in his acclaimed set of the complete op. 11 (Virgin Classics 45247), or even another abridged recording of the op. 11 by Mayron Tsong (Centaur 2946), I found their slower, legato

approach more congenial to music that was clearly inspired by Chopin. Ruth Laredo, who recorded what must be considered one of the definitive sets of the complete Scriabin sonatas way back in 1970, points out that as a piano student Scriabin was criticized for his “ ethereal” playing, and in those years he slept with a copy of Chopin’ s preludes under his pillow. Of course, his aesthetic and musical approach underwent a tremendous metamorphosis around the turn of the 20th century, and his own 1910 performance of the Étude, op. 8/12 (also played on this recital by Sivelöv), recorded as a Welte-Mignon piano roll, certainly reveals an approach much closer to the Swedish pianist than to Pletnev or Tsong, but his phrasing is more legato. My point is that both interpretations are valid, and that I prefer a little more backing-off in some of these early works.

And yet Sivelöv certainly does make Scriabin’ s music on this CD, spanning almost the full chronology of his piano output, sound convincingly of a piece. It is as far from the ethereal Scriabin of 1890 as one could possibly get. I’ ve often wondered where Scriabin may have gone musically had he lived to finish *Misterium*, and of course we’ ll never know, but Sivelöv’ s musical and philosophical approach to his music will certainly hold your attention. I personally rank this as one of the great Scriabin issues of all time, despite my caveats. Lynn René Bayley

### **A Sonorous Ebb And Flow**

Dagens Nyheter, 30 June 2010

Niklas Sivelöv: Schumann: Piano Sonatas  
A Records/Danacord

The piano professor Niklas Sivelöv has compared the music soloist to an enormous antenna which with sound waves seeks its receiver.

Maybe you could also talk about a sonorous ebb and flow. At least when we are talking about his interpretations of Robert Schumanns three piano sonatas from the 1830's which deals with the manic-depressive musical tendencies of the 200-years jubilee. Schumanns romantic piano music prefers to follow the logic of poetry and reflects the composers alter egos Florestan (a lively character) and Eusebius (a dreamer).

Schizophrenic moods which Sivelöv controls on the limit between restlessness and reflection. Especially when the time signature in the second sonata builds up to a lightning speed with the first movement in evanescently and thoughtful haste.

Best track: The finale of sonata no. 3 and no. 1.

Johanna Paulsson

### **Niklas Sivelöv Masters The Poetic Logic**

Sydsvenskan, 19 May 2010

Niklas Sivelöv has specialised in Schumann and hails him with strong interpretations of the three sonatas from the 1830's. Pure piano romance closer to Beethoven than Chopin - and closest to the composer himself in the splintered flow of ideas and melodies which was Schumann's sorcerer's brew. A classic analyst of form fdoes not find convincing regularity in Schumann. Here it is the poetic logic in the centre: the playing in contrasts, the abrupt change of feelings. Sivelöv masters this. The tones cascade forward or rest in meditating depths. A fairy tale, a bath in beauty, new views and pleasure awaits the alert listener.

Carlhåkan Larsén

## **Impressive**

Helsingør Dagblad, 3 May 2010

Niklas Sivelöv impressed the audience in Sthens Church.

Sunday afternoon we had the pleasure of listening to one of our leading Scandinavian pianists who has an international career.

Sivelöv played Schumann's wonderful Sonata no. 2, Op. 22. He has the temperament and also the ability to give the music time and space and his performance gave the audience a very pleasurable experience. Pieces by Chopin opened for Sivelöv's colourful interpretation. The two mazurkas were fierce and elegant, while Nocturne no. 16 was given its own sensitive expression. Polonaise no. 6 in A flat Major is for those artists who have virtuoso fingers, feeling, musicality and understanding for the music's contents and message. Sivelöv has all these qualities.

He also composes. We heard a student play excerpts from his 'Album for the Young' - fun and exciting. It was followed by Sivelöv playing his own improvisations over songs by his countryman Carl M. Bellman. The concert ended with dances by Ginastera and in Sivelöv's hands the dances were excellent and a pianistic tour de force. The audience expressed their admiration and enthusiasm with standing ovations.

## **An Extrovert Brisk Dance Through Bachs Arpeggios**

New York Times, 7 January 2010

Mr. Sivelov approached Book 1 without an apparent agenda: unlike Richard Egarr, whose harpsichord performance at Weill Recital Hall in 2008 explored relatively recent theories about what “well-tempered” tuning meant to Bach, Mr. Sivelov played the work on the piano, in the standard modern tuning.

And unlike Daniel Barenboim, who seemed intent on giving each piece a distinct, personalized orchestration when he played the set at Carnegie Hall in 2007, Mr. Sivelov offered a unified view and varied his timbre and dynamics only subtly.

Mostly, he favored brisk tempos, bright timbres and a clean if sometimes weighty sound. You could question his speediness at times: in the opening C major Prelude, he played the arpeggiated figures so quickly that the lingering overtones made them sound almost like solid chords. Yet here and in several other unusually quick readings, he let the top notes in each arpeggio ring out clearly to create a graceful, floating melody. And particularly in the fugues, he maintained a remarkable transparency of texture.

At times—in the outgoing E major and G major preludes and fugues, for example—he leaned into the music almost like a jazz pianist, tapping his left foot quickly to a rhythm from within Bach's dense contrapuntal texture. But though extroversion was clearly Mr. Sivelov's preferred mode, he was sensitive to Bach's darker moods as well: his calm, supple performance of the D sharp minor Fugue and the organlike sound he brought to the stormy, chromatic Prelude and Fugue in A minor were among the highlights of his performance.

By Alan Kozinn

## **Star Pianists Gives Glory To Old Church**

Ruhr Nachrichten, 14 December 2009

The venerable Gustav-Adolf-Church has found a new purpose. The first concert in the refurbished church brought a real star from the classical music scene. Swedish pianist Niklas Sivelöv was the highlight in the concert series.

He offered an ambitious programme which he performed with full passion and concentration: 24 Preludes and Fugues from Bach's „Wohltemperierten Klavier II". Facial expression and gestures betrayed his engrossment. His playing showed his open and sincere understanding of music.

Katrin Kandula

## **French Sounds**

Nordjyske Stiftstidene, 4 August 2009

In a fully packed hall we had the opportunity to hear cellist Morten Zeuthen and pianist Niklas Sivelöv, who are both old favourites with the audience. It could not be more intimate, and in addition we heard a finely balanced programme focusing on French music.

Debussy's sonata from 1915 structured with characteristic echoes of the contemporary preludes were played with empathy and character. Sivelöv drew the connection from Debussy back to Couperin's clavecin pieces, which with the fine character sketches almost could be regarded as programme music. The refined French style with ample ornamentations was released by Sivelöv with an exemplary lightness and elegance which was delightful.

The Cesar Franck Sonata in A Major is originally composed for violin and piano. Zeuthen and Sivelöv matched the piece perfectly. The interplay between the two musicians was enthralling in every respect and perhaps at its most beautiful in the last section of the last movement.

A lovely programme with two musicians who suited each other.

## **Music Delivered With Suede Gloves**

Sydsvenska Dagbladet, 17 April 2009

Niklas Sivelöv lets his neck bend down over the grand piano. Silence. The music which just was a prattling character is suddenly lifeless. It is the fast part of Wilhelm Stenhammar's Piano Concert no. 2 - one of the many sections where the pianist explores the edges of the composition. The picture of Stenhammar as an aristocratic composer shatters and forward steps something passionate, almost wild. The struggles are found within the piece. First the piano part is lyrical and at the same time the orchestra plays something which reminds one of Tchaikovsky's Pathétique symphony. Towards the end the orchestra shines and the soloist turns inward. Also typical for Stenhammar he weaves a fine net of themes. If he should be completely consistent Sivelöv ought to have played the low-voices passages even drier, but then it had probably begun to remind of theatre. I am pleased that Sivelöv bares his soul. Stenhammar has the potential to shake his listeners, to spread the message.

Matti Edén

## **Delightful Star Concert**

Aarhus Stiftstidende, 21 March 2009

After the interval came Beethoven. Niklas Sivelöv, the orchestra and conductor Giancarlo Andretta were on the same wavelength from the beginning, and the further they advanced, the

more they turned up for the music. We got piano- and orchestral playing of first class, powerful and technically superior solo work, sweeping cadenzas. The last movement was played with a lot of humour. With the Bellman inspired improvisation by Sivelöv, where he invited both Debussy and Keith Jarrett to join in the game on the black-and-white keys, we did not only get an encore but it made the whole concert delightful. The sixth star is for the pianist!

## **Tremendous Musical Surplus**

Jyllandsposten, 21 March 2009

Niklas Sivelöv delivered an intense experience together with the Aarhus Symphony Orchestra.

Both arms and legs came into use when the Swedish piano athlete and professor at the Royal Music Academy Copenhagen appeared as soloist with the Aarhus Symphony Orchestra for the first time. The 40-year old Sivelöv is a sparkling bunch of energy with a brilliant technical and musical surplus, which he unfolded in a unique, fiery and very personal interpretation of Beethoven 4th Piano Concerto. His marvellous touch and perfect control of the dynamics were remarkable. With emotional involvement he led us far around in the spectre of emotions in the concerto from the elegantly playful over the keyboard to the explosive forceful cascades and dramatic passages, from the intense poetic and dreamlike to the happy and bubbly. And in the very slow and ruminatively played second movement he reached far into the darkness of melancholy and grief.

The finale was on the other hand a sparkling fireworks with space to play and joke with the music. Sivelöv's reoccurring left foot accompaniment was distracting at first but after a while one surrendered completely to the strong artistic and musical performance and the excellent interplay between the soloist and orchestra. There were so many different and exciting details to listen to than is normally heard in this concerto.

As an encore Niklas Sivelöv unfolded in a virtuoso improvisation over the opening theme from the concerto, where he gradually let the motif develop both in style and dynamics and built up to a gigantic expansion of sound.

## **Surprising Improvisations**

www.nordische-musik.de, 2 February 2009

There is no longer any need for Niklas Sivelöv to prove what an outstanding pianist he is. He made this clear with his recent recording of piano pieces by Skriabin. In his last release he moves into unknown territory where classical star pianists rarely go: into improvisation. He finds his inspiration in Bellmann's music and gives it the special Sivelovian sound treatment. The result is a journey through many styles - from classicism via Rachmaninov and back to the folk song. Then again jazz, boisterous boogie changing with the finest blues. All these styles swing and flow into each other, and somehow one at some point has no need to separate the styles anymore. It is pure piano music, unbelievably good and it does not matter how it is classified. Again an ear opener from Sivelöv.

## **The Piano's Renoir**

Nordjyske, 18 January 2009

Sivelöv can, thanks to his great technique not only expose the structure of the piece, but he also does it with an unerring musical surplus and a transparency in the sound which seduces

and moves. The many layers of melodic lines, rhythmic eruptions and harmonic nuances, everything is summed up and transformed to a stream of colours in constant movement, like a Renoir.

## **Great Pianist**

Nordjyske Stiftstidene, 15 December 2008

What a pianist. Here is an unquestionable pianistic genius with a touch which functions like a finely controlled tool of precision, which for Sivelöv is not a goal in itself, but a tool to shape the music exactly as he wants it.

Following Scarlatti's clear and pure sonatas, simple and unaffected in expression and character, was Beethoven's very last sonata which features the great contrast between the two movements; in the first the battle with the substance and violent dynamic detonations put opposite the second movement's expansive variations over one of the most beautiful themes in the history of music. The sonata is a tremendous challenge for all pianists, but with Sivelöv playing the structure and the extreme balance of sound stood out with a crystal clarity. And the elderly piano sounded like an almost new Steinway - so much can be accomplished by a great pianist in control of his touch.

Sivelöv's own suite in three movements 'In modo classico' is composed with small twists, crooked quotations inlaid with irony in the technical brilliant passages.

But it was Schumann's great sonata in four movements 'Concert sans orchestre' which won the evening. That the restless and thick texture was portrayed with a clarity was no less than a pianistic tour de force, which was bewitching.

Sivelöv's encore with own variations over a Swedish folk song were spellbinding and liberating, like sun glittering over a Swedish forest lake.

## **Colourful Touché**

Sydsvenska Dagbladet, 14 November 2008

In fencing the term touché deals with contact and in this case it was not physical only. The colourful piece for vibraphone (and other so called mallet instruments) was carried by dancing changes and melodic whims. Well calculated changes in tempo gave the piece a character of lightness, where good playing and musical flow gave us a 15 minute demonstration of love of percussion instruments - the composer's and the performers'.

Calrhåkan Larsén

## **A Master Pianist In Yxtaholm**

Eskilstuna-Kuriren, 15 July 2008

'Niklas Sivelöv's improvisations over songs by Bellman were brilliant, virtuoso and resonant, but it was not easy to define how much was spontaneous and how much had been performed on earlier occasions or in Sivelöv's recently released recording.

He opened his concert with three preludes and fugues from Bach's Wohltemperiertes Klavier II, where his interpretations roamed between romantic longing and rustic forte. Effortlessly and with no nonsense Father Bach's for ever timeless piano pieces were portrayed with voluptuous resonance.

The choice of Beethoven's sonata op. 30 was very attractive. This E Major sonata which was composed by a totally deaf Beethoven discloses vital music in many layers. Sivelöv's



interpretation was powerful and with charming contrasts in tempi. His elegant touch and supreme sense of form was very impressive.

The three tangos by Piazzolla were a fresh breeze: finally composers of the New World have found way to our concert programmes!. Piazzolla's complicated rhythms, hot folklore style inspired Sivelöv to play as we have never heard it before!

The late romantic Skrjabin made up the final of the concert. His rarely heard Fantaisie almost created ecstasy with its intoxicating late romantic sound. The piece's hellish tempo in the finale erupted like gigantic phantoms in Sivelöv's remarkable sure grip. He thanked the audience with encores by Ginastera. We count Sivelöv as one of our country's leading pianists.

## **Terrific Strauss**

Jyllandsposten, 8 July 2008

Niklas Sivelöv joined the Aristos Trio in Strauss Piano Quartet in C minor in the Hindsgavl Castle Concerts. It is an early work closer to Brahms in character than the later Strauss himself. When has one actually heard this quartet played so determinedly well with all the richness and power of the romantic period? Strauss' composition is without his later elegant transparency but it is easy to distinguish the originality. The acoustics in the garden hall held, but the musicians played to the limit. It was terrific.

## **Bach Á La Sivelöv**

Norra Västerbotten, 27 May 2008

"He plays Bach's Sonatas for viola da gamba and cembalo with the Danish cellist Morten Zeuthen. I must be honest, I was doubtful. Sivelöv and Bach. How would they match? Sivelöv is above all known as an excellent interpreter of the romantic repertoire. But I was mistaken. The recording is definitely very good. It is contemplative, alive and precise'.

## **A Jazzy Stenhammar**

Svenska Dagbladet, 10 May 2008

Pianist Niklas Sivelöv released a CD last year where he improvises over Bellman's music. As soloist in Stenhammar's Piano Concert no. 2 he was nearly as much a co-composer as performer. Sivelöv offered a powerful, personal interpretation with a soft Nordic dreaming atmosphere. This gave us a Stenhammar brought up to our own time - occasionally also with an excellent jazzy feeling in the playing. The much hailed encore in improvised style was a logical follow-up.

Cd Reviews

Various Sources from 1996 - 2004, 15 July 2007

ARGENTINIAN PIANO MUSIC:

“ ”Phantasievoll und Poetisch starken pianistischen Rhetorik.“

„ Atlantischer Brückenbau”“

Klassik.com, Annette Lamberty 2004

W. GULGOWSKI: 13 Works for Piano

**Nominated for a Swedish Grammy-Award**

**“ ”Powerful and in the same time deeply sensitive playing””**

Jönköpingsposten 2003

THE DREAM AGE- Music of Lars Ekström

**“ The concerto features Niklas Sivelov as a pianistic hero, no less!”**

Sonoloco 2002

W. PETERSON-BERGER, Flowers of Frösö Island.

**On best selling list in Sweden and highest mark in the Penguin Guide.**

**” ”Sparkling performance- Naxos best””**

Classical Web 2002

PIANOMUSIC Vol. II , Summer Sketches. Rangström, Milveden, Seymer a.o

**“ ”Sivelov proves a bright-eyed and subtle champion of this music”**

Music Web 2001

ENGLUND, First Piano Concerto Turku P.O. / Jorma Panula

**Nominated for Best 20-Century recording in Cannes**

**” ”I can virtually guarantee that you would enjoy finding yourself part of that audience, and I commend this disc to you with all possible enthusiasm””**

Fanfare 2000

**“ ”A major recording of a major composer, at much less than a major price-what could be better than that?””**

Classics Today 2000

**” ”Excellent recordings of three of Englund’ s finest works..Strongly recommended”.”**

Gramophone 2000

**” ”überzeugend, präzise und differenziert im anschlag””**

Klassik.com 2003 Christian Vitalis

BEETHOVEN/LISZT, Transcriptions of Symphonies nr. 1& 3 Eroica

**“ ”Impressive Sivelov-makes the immensely difficult pianopart sound easy””**

Göteborgsposten 1999

SCHUMANN, Piano Works

**“ ”New life to the piano music of Schumann-intense and dramatic””**

Norra Västerbotten 1998

**” ”A lot of Florestanian drama””**

Fonoforum 1999

STENHAMMAR, Piano Works.

**On Best Selling List in Sweden. Received highest mark in the Penguin guide.**

**” ”he (Sivelov) clearly has feeling for this music, and his techniqe is commanding””**

BBC Music Magazine 1998

**” ”a lucid and dedicated advocate of his countryman´ s music”” .**

Fanfare 1998

**“ ”Like Stenhammar, Sivelov is himself both pianist and composer. This becomes evident listening to this recording. The interpretation is imaginative, very personal and strongly shaped.””**

Janos Solyom in Månadsjournalen 1997

BERWALD, Piano Concerto Helsingborg S.O. / Okko Kamu

**Rewarded with the French Diapason d'Or**

**“ ”Niklas Sivelöv proves an accomplished and intelligent soloist whose account is thoroughly recommended””**

Gramophone, 1996

**” ”Niklas Sivelöv is surely one of those players one hears first on Naxos, and later on in higher-priced spreads. He has a definite, active and distinctive point of view concerning this concerto, which is largely responsible for its effectiveness and high character””**

Fanfare 1996

**“ ”One can hardly believe the level of performance by Sivelov. The Berwald concerto reborn!””**

Dagens Nyheter 1996

