

Sonata for Cello and Piano No.1

The first movement 'Quasi un Fantasia' was composed in Hamburg in 1989/1990 with dance choreography in mind. The opening theme is catapulted forward for a short burst going through a number of distantly related keys, before a strongly contrasting theme appears in response. I was particularly keen on exploring the circle of mediants as can be heard in the waltz-like theme in the middle of the movement. In 2006 I made major revisions to the work, adding strong passages with much freer writing and ruthlessly cutting out other themes and passages.

The second movement Largo e Mesto brings an air of simplicity and depth to balance the complex form of the first movement. Finding the power in the combination of tempo, melodic gesture and sense of creating space was very exciting. It was a real relief to compose such a piece and it remains one of my personal favourites.

The last movement Allegro con Brio came about under pressure, I had less than two days to complete the Sonata before the performance and wanted to contrast the first two movements with a strong sense of forward driving movement in the finale. So I took up the challenge of creating a duo out of a solo piece (the finale for the Suite for Solo Cello) as I had felt for some time that a rendition of that movement would be possible for two instruments.

String Quartet no.2 'Good and Evil'

All of the movements of the Quartet No. 2 started life in other works. However, the quartet is dedicated to the Bergersen Quartet (Jonathan Truscott, Craig Stratton, Elisa Bergersen and Rachel Firmager) in May 2009.

The first movement 'Grave, Allegretto, Grave' was originally for double bass, cello, viola and violin. In this movement there is a deliberate attempt to deal with the question of how evil can arise out of good, hence the name.

The second movement 'Mysterioso' is taken from a short piece for choir, solo-soprano and string quartet to a poem by the Danish Poet Halfdan Rasmussen. The poem paints a vivid picture of the sound of soldiers at night marching in the distance where the cities are burning, and how a spark from one of the boots becomes a star in the night-sky.

The third movement Allegro ma non troppo was originally scored for three violins and a French horn, but fares just as well as a string-quartet. The piece was inspired by the Christian festival of Ascension and simply attempts to evoke a feeling of ascending into the clouds on an up-swinging current of pentatonic simplicity.

The last movement Lento was in another life the second movement of the Flute-quartet. This movement gives the first violin a great deal of scope for individual expression with many solo passages.

Sonata for Cello and Piano No.2

I have dedicated this Sonata to cellist Rohan de Saram and pianist William Hancox. William and I had been working for a couple of years on my Lieder-repertoire, and he suggested taking the compositional aspect of our collaboration a step further. I invited Rohan de Saram to join this venture and upon his agreement the music just flowed with a freedom I have seldom experienced.

The first movement Moderato con Espressione is built upon a theme of seventh, prime and third (BCE) which is a warm-up exercise for Eurythmy (a form of expressive dance). It is an exercise to help the Eurythmist tune their soul-body configuration by moving from the tension of the seventh, through the stability of the prime to the clear direction of the major third. The music unfolds by repeatedly moving through the theme. In the middle of the movement the voices come into a passage which contains a quality of ease and simplicity out of which there is a breakthrough into a different dimension, before finally returning to the opening theme with exchanged parts.

The Second movement 'Lento Ostinato' slowly evolves its theme out of a complex polyrhythmic interplay. The theme is almost hidden in the texture. I always felt it had an Indian feel to it, which no doubt was inspired by Rohan. Again the tempo is vital to the tranquillity of the music and the unison passages within the complex rhythmical framework create a combination of tension with a sense of ease.

The third movement is an adagio. An 'Interlude' which breathes an air of delicacy at first and depth later in the unison passage before launching into the 'Finale'. The urgency of this last movement provides a contrast to the introspective and relaxed moods of the preceding movements. Again the theme is based on a Eurythmy exercise called the Tao. This exercise uses the notes BAED in a descending order, where the first two notes are played in quick succession and the lower two come more slowly leaving the tonic C to be anticipated rather than heard. This can be experienced most strongly at the end of the movement, which should leave the listener hearing the resolution. Inwardly - hence the listener performs the final note!

Gregers Brinch

I draw my musical inspiration from many sources. In particular I am inspired by the quality of the musical intervals, which by association make me commit to a sense of tonality in general. But also the timbre of voices and instruments drives my musical ideas resulting in my experiencing the instruments and the elements of music as being human expressions without intellectual content, more like concentrated soul-expression and soul-experience undergone by the human being. In my composition I aim to invite the listener to anticipate and yet I allow the music to challenge as well.

In a compositional process I experience an interplay between myself and 'the will of the piece itself'. I have the experience of an entity that wishes to express itself and yet does not dictate. It is at one and the same time a riddle and a guide. In turn, my task is to discern its nature and reveal this to the audience. As a result of my study into the basic elements of music and my appreciation of all genres of music, my tonal language is a synthesis of various genres.

In addition, my inspiration is stimulated by my passion for drama. As well as being an aspiring painter in my teens, I was a keen actor. Before devoting myself to composition at age 20 I appeared in a number of Shakespeare plays (including appearing in Macbeth at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival) leading to a life-long love of the Shakespeare's works. Playing the part of Peer in Ibsen's Peer Gynt in 2011 has given me a new boost in that direction.

My native Denmark, with its coastline of long beaches and rolling sand dunes that were the joy of my childhood, provides me with a feeling for a wide natural landscape. It was here I developed a lifelong love of birds and nature. These elements find their way into the music, I suppose, but I don't consciously attempt to portray them.

Upon completing an intensive period autodidactic training of 2-3 years from the age of 20 with the help of Cecil Cope and Louis Alvanis, I entered the Musikseminar in Hamburg to study composition with Elmar Lampson. Here I graduated with diplomas in composition and piano in 1992 and went on to teach in adult Education both in Hamburg and at Emerson College, Sussex, England. During this time I continued to devote more time to developing my compositional direction. In 2001 I gave up my secure post there in order to pursue composing more fully, and my compositional output has increased from this time onwards.

I am member of Brighton New Music in the UK and Komvest in Copenhagen, Denmark.

My works have been performed frequently in the UK (including the Wigmore Hall) as well as in Denmark, Germany and France. In addition to the CD 'Blue Harmony' which features my piano-works recorded by internationally acclaimed pianist Diana Baker, the CD 'Harmonious Dissonance' which includes my String Quartet No.1 was released on Parma Records in USA in June 2010. The Collaboration with award-winning Flautist Julie Groves and Whitbread-Prize winning author Lindsay Clarke has resulted in a CD of works PARZIVAL for Baritone and Flute and Flute solo.

Rohan de Saram made his name as a classical artist until his thirties, but has since become renowned for his involvement in and advocacy of contemporary music.

Rohan de Saram was born to Ceylonese parents in Sheffield, Yorkshire, England. At age 11 he studied with Gaspar Cassadó in Siena and Florence. At 17 he won the Guihermina Suggia Award to study in the UK with Sir John Barbirolli and in Puerto Rico with Pablo Casals. Casals said of him "There are few of his generation that have such gifts".

Rohan was invited to give his Carnegie Hall debut in 1960 with the New York Philharmonic, playing Khachaturian's Cello Concerto under the baton of Stanislaw Skrowaczewski. From 1979 to 2005 de Saram was a member of the Arditti Quartet but now works with other artists to pursue his own artistic vision. He has also toured and recorded with Markus Stockhausen's "Possible Worlds" group. He worked personally with Zoltán Kodály, Francis Poulenc, Sir Adrian Boult, Sir William Walton and Dmitri Shostakovich. He has performed with the major orchestras of Europe, USA, Canada, Australia and the former Soviet Union with conductors such as Barbirolli, Sir Adrian Boult, Zubin Mehta, Seiji Ozawa and William Steinberg.

In ensemble or as a soloist, he has premiered works by Luciano Berio (Il Ritorno degli Snovidenia; Berio was so impressed that he wrote Sequenza XIV (2002) for de Saram, who gave the first performance and then made the premiere recording), Bose, Benjamin Britten, Sylvano Bussotti, John Cage, Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, Philip Glass, Sofia Gubaidulina, Paul Hindemith, Mauricio Kagel, György Ligeti (Racine 19), Wolfgang Rihm, Alfred Schnittke and Iannis Xenakis (Kottos).

Rohan de Saram and Brinch were introduced to one another by pianist Sylvia Clayton. As Rohan de Saram's studied Brinch's Suite for Solo Cello and the Sonata No. 1 the project to record the works together with pianist William Hancox was born. Subsequently the 2nd Sonata was especially composed for de Saram and Hancox followed by a Sonata Brevis dedicated to de Saram.

William Hancox

A student of the late Joseph Weingarten, pianist William Hancox is in demand both in the United Kingdom and abroad. He has performed concertos, chamber music and solo recitals throughout the country, notably at the Wigmore Hall and Windsor Castle. He has played in all London's major concert halls, and broadcast for Classic FM and the BBC. A commitment to contemporary music has led to involvement in many first performances, and he also has a reputation as an exciting lecture recitalist.

His teaching and accompanying activities have involved positions at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, Trinity College of Music, the Britten-Pears School at Aldeburgh, Dartington International Summer School and visits to Iceland where he has taught, recorded and performed, as well as conducting regular master classes for accompanists.

Recent concert activities include duo recitals in China and at the Cheltenham International Festival of Music where they gave world premieres of song cycles by Roxanna Panufnik and Richard Blackford.

Hancox and Brinch have a rich and varied musical partnership in which Brinch also performs as a Baritone. In addition to premiering Brinch's songs and chamber-works they have recorded a double CD of songs and piano-works by the late German composer Dorothee Fischer.

The Bergersen Quartet was founded in 2007 intent on performing and recording works by living composers. The Quartet now has an impressive repertoire of modern works, many of which have been specifically written for or dedicated to them. One of the world's only string ensembles trained in the extraordinary techniques of spectral music, their other ventures encompass minimalist, contemporary, film, library, pop and world scores.

Brinch Vol. 1 is the Bergersen Quartet's debut CD

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Sonata for Cello & Piano

String Quartet No. 2 'Good and Evil'

Sonata for Cello and Piano

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Brinch Volume 3: CC5996-2 CD & CC5996-6 DVD-Audio HD version

Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 1

Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 2

12 Duos for Violins

After studying in Germany and England, Brinch's compositional striving intensified, helping him achieve a greater sense of freedom and the capacity to embrace the demands of his inspirations. His in depth study of the intervals in particular saw him develop a keen interest into the role of Major and Minor in Classical diatonic tonality. This in turn has led him to view classical music completely afresh. He increasingly experienced the capacity of music to conjure the qualities of another place and time within the soul of the listener.

Brinch's native Denmark provides a feeling for a wide natural landscape including the coastline with long beaches and rolling sand dunes that were the joy of his childhood. These find their way into the music and are the backdrop to a wide spectrum of feelings that feature in his music.

Review - Music Web International

My first review of the music of Gregers Brinch had all the introductory information needed. Here I will focus only on the music on this present DVD-A.

I was comparatively unmoved by what I heard on the previous disc and as expected it has been worthwhile moving onto these two cello sonatas and a string quartet because Brinch the composer does emerge much more strongly. The Cello Sonata No.2 was dedicated to the current player Rohan de Saram. His name leapt off the page as a very significant performer from my musical youth. He came to prominence in the early 60s as one of the most outstanding young cellists but after a short but very successful time doing the young virtuoso circuit he seems to have moved over to chamber music spending many years in the Arditti Quartet amongst other performance activities. I must say his playing has lost none of its shine. He sounds quite marvellous in these two sonatas giving them the very best presentation one can imagine. Both are highly appealing works, both coherent and attractive to the listener. This is the sort of music that makes one wonder why Brinch is not more widely known. He displays both lyrical and dramatic imagination beyond the technical skill of composition. Neither sonata sounds discordantly modern, by which I mean they do not indulge in strange noises and do not sound as though any special techniques are needed to perform them. Brinch is a user of established musical norms and all the better for it. Of the two sonatas I preferred the 2nd for its variety but note that the composer seems to like the first. The String Quartet No.2 "Good and Evil" is not as portentous as the title suggests but it is quite a dramatic piece and repays repeated listening. In his notes Brinch is slightly prone to directing his listeners to find extra-musical impact. Personally I think he is talented enough to let the music speak for itself. The Bergersen Quartet, to whom the quartet is dedicated, are fine musicians and play with energy and dedication.

All this fine music-making is served by another of Colin Attwell's fine recordings. The spaciousness of St Bartholomew's, Brighton is well captured without losing any musical detail. The cellist is placed to the centre right and the large Steinway occupies the space from left to centre. The quartet is placed right across the sound-stage sounding moderately close but far enough back to hear the acoustic of the building. This is fine, natural recorded sound and on this DVD-A the home listener can hear a close facsimile of the performance. No tricks here. Doubtless the CD version is almost as good. The better one's playing system the better this will all sound.

Dave Billinge