

NAXOS

# STENHAMMAR

## Serenade in F major Florez and Blanzeflor • Ithaca

Karl-Magnus Fredriksson, Baritone  
Gävle Symphony Orchestra  
Hannu Koivula



## Wilhelm Stenhammar (1871–1927)

### Serenade in F major (Revised Version) • Florez och Blanzeflor • Ithaka Sången: Mellanspiel (Interlude) • Prélude and Bourrée

Wilhelm Stenhammar was born in Stockholm on 7th February 1871, the son of an architect father and draftsman mother who strongly encouraged his musical leanings. Fluent on the piano and organ from an early age, he never formally studied composition, focusing instead on the piano both in Stockholm (with Richard Andersson) and latterly in Berlin (with Heinrich Barth). The 8th February 1892 saw his début as a pianist, as soloist in Brahms's *First Concerto* and in recital with the Aulin Quartet, and as a composer with his cantata *I rosengården*. He made his conducting début in 1897 and later held appointments with the Stockholm Philharmonic Society (1897–1900), the New Philharmonic Society (1904–6) and, above all, the Gothenburg Orchestral Society (1906–22) which he turned into the most ambitious and enterprising such institution in Northern Europe. He took up an appointment at the Royal Opera in 1924 but his health was by now fast declining and he died, following a stroke, in Stockholm on 20th November 1927.

Although he attained early success with his *First Piano Concerto* (1893) and first opera *Festival at Solhaug* (1893), Stenhammar's output decreased markedly after 1900. This was partly because of conducting commitments but also increasing uncertainty, notably after the failure of his second opera *Tirfing* (1898), over the direction he wished to pursue. Moving away from an outwardly Wagnerian manner, he strove for a style that embodied his Swedish inheritance without being overtly nationalistic. The “idyllic Bruckner” (his description) of his *First Symphony* (1903) dissatisfied him after its première and went unheard again in his lifetime. Only with the *Second Piano Concerto* did he arrive at a wholly personal idiom, refined in a sequence of orchestral and chamber works as well as several scores for the theatre. His final decade saw only a handful of pieces as years of tirelessly promoting the music of others, both as pianist and conductor, took their toll.

Along with the *Second Symphony* [Naxos 8.553888], the *Serenade* is Stenhammar's greatest orchestral work. He

began it while on vacation in Italy in 1907, but completed it only in 1913. Its Stockholm première the next year was not a success and the composer duly withdrew it for revision, transposing the outer movements from E major to F major and omitting the second movement (though this *Reverenza* has since been performed as a separate work), in which new guise the work was well received in Gothenburg on 3rd March 1920. Although avowedly non-symphonic, the *Serenade* has both a motivic intricacy and textural finesse that transcend the modest and unassuming nature of its title.

The *Overture* springs to life with a lively idea on strings, followed by more pensive woodwind writing. The initial music resumes before leading to a suave theme for strings, given gravitas when continued by cellos. Both are developed at length, the former enhanced by brass fanfares and the latter by chorale-like woodwind. After a brief allusion to the pensive music near the start, the music darts to a close. The *Canzonetta* centres on a waltz-inflected theme for woodwind above hesitant strings. Solo violin spins an enticing melodic line, then the initial theme continues more fully on strings. The music now heads into a brief postlude featuring horns and cellos before its wistful close. Without pause, the *Scherzo* takes off with effervescent music for woodwind and upper strings, the latter heading into a martial idea with fanfaring brass and percussion to the fore. This reaches a crescendo, curtailed to reveal the strings musing gently on earlier ideas. The initial music resumes with mounting anticipation, at the height of which, the martial music bursts in with renewed impetus. Aspects of this and other themes are freely superimposed, the excitement gradually dying down to leave the violins ascending slowly into space. Again without pause, the *Notturmo* begins with a tranquil idea shared by woodwind and strings, which latter invest the music with elegiac intensity as it unfolds. Distant recollections of the martial theme heard earlier sound out on horns, the music building gradually to a heightened

resumption of its opening ideas. This time, the elegiac string writing brings about a regretful close. The *Finale* begins uncertainly, but takes on greater animation with capering music for woodwind and strings. A contrasting note is sounded by a lyrical woodwind theme; over pizzicato strings, this gradually brings about the work's climax. Earlier ideas are recalled, before calm is restored and the lyrical theme stated nobly by strings. A final return of the initial music brings with it a fleeting farewell.

Oscar Levantin (1862-1906) was among the leading Swedish poets of the later nineteenth century and Stenhammar set his verse on several occasions. His setting of the ballad *Florez and Blanzeflor* (1891) was one of his first successes as a composer and remains among his most representative early works. It opens impassively, woodwind arabesques gently coalescing into the noble melody with which the soloist intones the first verse. The music gains in intensity over the next three verses, detailing the youth, wedding, reign and then death of the royal couple, before returning to the mood of the opening. Here, the soloist reflects impassively on the renewal of life as brought by the coming of spring.

Unlike the earlier ballad, *Ithaca* (1904) unfolds as a continuous setting, its depiction of storm-tossed ocean and the related stresses of human life underpinned by a constant eddying motion on the lower strings. There are many evocative touches, though the prevailing mood is one of a ceaseless striving for the 'ideal', emphasized when the music touches on the major key at the mention of the mythical isle and the protagonist's arrival there, giving the closing bars a hard-won affirmation.

Completed in 1921, the cantata *The Song* was Stenhammar's last major work and its combination of

Wagnerian harmonic richness with Handelian contrapuntal dexterity secured it a decidedly equivocal reception. The *Interlude* that links its two halves is the only portion heard at all frequently today, and stands as an impressive summary of the composer's late style. Beginning in the lower strings and woodwind, the music unfolds in spans of calm polyphony that feature some of his most sonorous orchestration. A noble brass chorale emerges towards midpoint, yet neither this nor the finely wrought climax disturbs the prevailing mood, which draws to its subdued conclusion.

Composed from October to December of 1891, *Prélude and Bourrée* is a hitherto unknown work recently located at the Swedish Music Library in Stockholm, here receiving its first recording and most likely first performance (in an edition prepared by the composer Mattias Lysell). Although Stenhammar seems to have intended a larger suite, further movements never materialized. The *Prélude*, marked *Andante moderato*, opens with restful music for strings that gains animation as woodwind gradually come to the fore. This results in a restatement of the initial music across the whole orchestra, without disrupting the mood established at the outset, one that solo clarinet, followed by other woodwind, draws to a ruminative close. The *Bourrée*, marked *Allegro*, strikes an immediate contrast with the lively rhythmic profile of its main theme and teasing suggestion of a drone bass within the texture. The central section is given to a folk-like theme for woodwind, soon rising to a brief climax before the resumption of the initial theme that, in due course, sees the piece through to a vigorous conclusion.

**Richard Whitehouse**

## Gävle Symphony Orchestra

The Gävle Symphony Orchestra is one of the oldest in Sweden, dating back to 1912. The first artistic director of this 25-man orchestra was the composer Ruben Liljefors but now numbers 52 full-time members. The orchestra is based in the provincial capital of Gävle, but tours regularly both in its home province and elsewhere in Sweden. The Gävle Symphony Orchestra has also toured in The Netherlands, Finland, Norway and the former Yugoslavia. There was a unique collaboration with the symphony orchestra in Dubrovnik during the 1990s when the two orchestras performed Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem* in support of the suffering people in war-torn Croatia. Since its inception the Gävle Symphony Orchestra has had a succession of distinguished conductors as Artistic Directors including Stig Westerberg, Rainer Miedel, Göran W Nilson, Hannu Koivula, Carlos Spierer, Petri Sakari and Robin Ticciati. The Gävle Concert Hall was dedicated in January 1998, marking the completion of a project first proposed in the 1930s. The custom-built hall has allowed the orchestra to make more in-house recordings than was possible previously. In addition to the music of Franz Berwald, the orchestra has recorded works by composers such as Bo Linde, Wilhelm Stenhammar, Hugo



### Hannu Koivula

Hannu Koivula was born in Finland and gained first class diplomas at the Sibelius Academy both in trumpet and conducting. After winning first prize at the Nordic Conducting Competition he has held the position of principal conductor in nine Scandinavian orchestras including the Gävle Symphony Orchestra and Danish Radio Sinfonietta. He is currently artistic director of the Vaasa City Orchestra, Östgöta Blåsarharmoniker and Jönköping Sinfonietta. Koivula has also been a frequent guest in Scandinavian and German opera houses and has been acclaimed for his wide repertoire recordings.

### Karl-Magnus Fredriksson

The baritone Karl-Magnus Fredriksson was one of the youngest singers ever to be awarded the title of Royal Court Singer in 2004. Since 1999 he has been employed at the Royal Opera in Stockholm, where he has performed an enormous number of rôles, including Figaro in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, the Count in *Le nozze di Figaro*, Fritz in *Die tote Stadt*, Onegin in *Eugene Onegin*, Count Luna in *Il trovatore* and Germont in *La traviata*. He has performed with conductors such as Sir Colin Davies, Andrew Davies, John Eliot Gardiner, Frans Brüggen, Alan Gilbert, Jesús López-Cobos and Eric Ericson, and has a close collaboration with Gustaf Sjökvist, resulting in many world premières of newly composed music and a long tradition of performances of Handel's *Messiah*, among other works. He has made many recordings with labels including Chandos, Vanguard Classics, BIS, Deutsche Grammophon and Naxos. He has made frequent appearances on television and in broadcasts where he has performed both contemporary music as well as previously unrecorded music.



## Florez och Blanzeflor

*by Oscar Levertin (1862–1906)*

När aftonrodnan sin rosenkorg tömde  
i den flyende dagens spår,  
och maj i sitt värliga töcken gömde  
allt hagtornens blomsterspår,  
om blommans och vitblommans kärlek jag drömde  
om Florez och Blanzeflor.

Det var två konungabarn, som lekte  
med spiror och äpplen av guld,  
varandra som bi och blomma smekte,  
då våren av doft stod full,  
och äppelblommornas snöfall blekte  
all örtagårdens mull.

Det var två konungabarn som redo  
till bröllop en sommar dag,  
medan lekarna nyckelharporna vredo,  
och burgundern rann röd över lag,  
och ängarnes klöver ängorna spred  
i starka, kryddade drag.

Det var ett konungapar, som i gamman  
vid härden i högsätet satt,  
njöt tårarnas sorgdryck samman  
och samman festernas skratt,  
tills döden slog aska på spiselflamman  
och tog dem en kärleksnatt.

När aftonrodnadens facklor blänkte  
vid den döende dagens bår,  
och maj i sin skymningsslöja sänkte  
min ensamma vandrings spår,  
på blomma och vitblommans kärlek jag tänkte,  
på Florez och Blanzeflor.

## Florez and Blanzeflor

When evening loosed its rosy grasp,  
The day grown long and worn,  
And May embraced with vernal clasp  
The hawthorn's flowery store  
And I dreamed of flowers, the white flowers' mask  
Of Florez and Blanzeflor.

Of royal birth, two children played  
With sceptre and orb of gold.  
Like bee and bloom the two caressed  
As scents of spring enfold  
And snow of apple blossom laid  
On every lovely world.

Of royal birth two children rode  
To their wedding one summer's day,  
While fiddlers gallant reels bowed  
And wine made tempers gay  
And the scents of the clover flowers implode  
Strong scent of an evening lay.

A royal pair, a happy pair  
They sat upon their throne;  
Together tasted life's despair  
And life's delights condoned  
Till death threw ash upon the fire  
And took them, flesh and bone.

When flames of evening flaming shine  
And the bier of the day explore  
And the misty veil of May confines  
My lonely wanderer's door,  
I think of the love of white flowers fine,  
Of Florez and Blanzeflor.

*Translated by William Jewson*

## Ithaka by Oscar Levertin

Jag drömt som främpling på en främmande strand – Gud vet hur många år.

Nu vill jag hem. Jag redan lagt från land. I silkesseglet stormen slår.

Framåt mot obefarna vattendrag, förbi Herakles' stoder, mot fjärran ö i blå arkipelag jag vrider skeppets roder.

Där ligger solskenslyst i havets mitt, mitt Ithaka, den ö, där fruktträdssvalven evigt lysa vitt

och dyningarna dö i säven som en mattad aftonsång från kärleksdomnad lyra, dit, vore färdan än så hård och lång, vill jag min farkost styra.

Där står det vita, marmorsvala hus, i vilket jag vill bo. Där silverpoppeln har det högtidssus som hägnar med sin ro.

Ack världens vägar, jag är trött på dem!

Jag hör det dunkla kravet mot längtans Ithaka, mitt hjärtas hem, min vita ö i havet.

På hemfärd stadd jag lyssnar förstrött på livets lust och larm som på en man som av en slump mig mött och håller fast min arm.

I bröder, än jag går som en bland Er, men ren mot slag som smekning med avskedsstundens gåtfullhet jag ler. Jag har gjort upp min räkning.

Blott starkare förnimmer jag var dag den manande musik, som eko är av kvällens böljeslag emot min hemöns vik.

Jag drömmar lutad över skeppets toft. I skum delfiner skalkas.

Än syns ej ön, men luftens mandeldoft förtäljer, att jag nalkas.

Så vill jag bära allt, vad än en man kan bära utav ve, ty ett jag vet, ej evigt räcka kan mitt hjärtas odyssey.

Min sorgs, min glädjes skiljemynt; allt glöms som mull, i mull begravet,

när skeppet när sitt Ithaka, min dröms vårvita ö i havet.

## Ithaka

I've dreamed as a stranger on a strange shore – God knows how many years.

Now I want to go home. I have already cast off. The storm strikes the silken sail.

Onward, towards uncharted waters, past the pillars of Hercules, Towards the distant isle in the blue archipelago I set the ship's course.

There lies, bathed by the sun in the middle of the sea, My Ithaca, the island, where the arches of the orchards always shine white

And the water's swell dies amid the sedges like a faltering evensong from a love-weary lyre,

However arduous and long the journey, there is where I yearn to steer my vessel.

There stands the white, marble-cool house where I wish to dwell. Where the silver poplar utters the solemn sigh that protects us with its peace.

Oh, the roads of this world, I am weary of them!

I hear the obscure calling

Towards my longing's Ithaca, home of my heart, My white isle in the sea.

On the journey home I listen aloofly to life's cravings and clamour

As if listening to a man who met me by chance, and who holds me tightly by the arm.

Ye brothers, I still walk as one among you, But at punches as well as caresses

I smile with the inscrutability of the hour of departure.

I have settled my account.

Ever more clearly day by day I hear the beckoning music:

The echo of the evening waves lapping in the bay of my island home.

I dream, leaning over the ship's thwart. In the foam dolphins are frolicking.

The island is not yet in sight, but the scent of almond in the air tells me that I am drawing near.

Thus I will accept whatsoever a man can bear of misery,

For I know one thing: my heart's odyssey cannot last forever.

The small coins of my sorrow and joy; all will be forgotten like dust, buried in the dust,

When the ship approaches Ithaka, the spring-white isle of my dreams in the sea.

*Translated by Andrew Barnett*

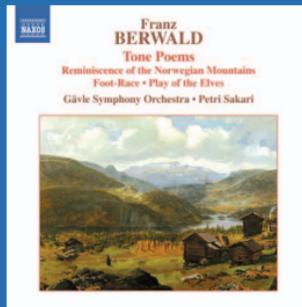
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Booklet notes in English  
Swedish sung texts with English translations  
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This disc offers a fascinating selection of both famous and little-known works by Wilhelm Stenhammar. The *Serenade* ranks among his finest works, and is considered a classic instance of the 'white nights' that characterize summer in Northern Europe. Of the remaining works, the ballads *Florez and Blanzeflor* and *Ithaca* are notable examples of his vocal writing, while the *Interlude* derives from his cantata *The Song*. *Prélude and Bourrée* is a hitherto unknown work here receiving its first recording. Stenhammar's *Second Symphony* is available on 8.553888 and piano works on 8.553730.

Wilhelm  
**STENHAMMAR**  
(1871–1927)

**Serenade in F major, Op. 31 (Revised Version) 37:55**

- |   |  |              |
|---|--|--------------|
| 1 | I. Overtura  | 6:46         |
| 2 | II. Canzonetta   | 5:25         |
| 3 | III. Scherzo   | 7:39         |
| 4 | IV. Notturmo   | 8:43         |
| 5 | V. Finale  | 9:15         |
| 6 | <b>Florez och Blanzeflor, Op. 3</b> Text by Oscar Levertin | <b>9:20</b>  |
|   | (Andante sostenuto – Andante moderato – Andante sostenuto) |              |
| 7 | <b>Ithaca, Op. 21</b> Text by Oscar Levertin               | <b>10:27</b> |
| 8 | <b>Sången, Op. 44: Mellanspel (Interlude)</b>              | <b>7:14</b>  |
| 9 | <b>Prélude and Bourrée *</b>                               | <b>14:50</b> |

\* WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDING

Sung texts and translations may also be downloaded from [www.naxos.com/libretti/572186.htm](http://www.naxos.com/libretti/572186.htm)



**Karl-Magnus Fredriksson, Baritone** <sup>6,7</sup>  
**Gävle Symphony Orchestra • Hannu Koivula**



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