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NIELSEN
CLARINET CONCERTOS

Paolo Beltramini *clarinet*
Orchestra della Svizzera italiana · Alain Lombard

Clarinet Concertos

Jean Françaix 1912-1997

Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra

(1967-68)

- | | |
|---------------------|------|
| 1. I. Allegro | 7'33 |
| 2. II. Scherzando | 5'37 |
| 3. III. Andantino | 5'03 |
| 4. IV. Allegrissimo | 6'06 |

Carl Nielsen 1865-1931

Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra

- | | |
|----------------------------|------|
| 5. I. Allegretto un poco | 8'58 |
| 6. II. Poco adagio | 5'06 |
| 7. III. Allegro non troppo | 6'24 |
| 8. IV. Allegro Vivace | 5'58 |

Paolo Beltramini *clarinet*

Orchestra della Svizzera italiana

Alain Lombard *conductor*

At age twenty, the Danish composer Carl Nielsen (1864-1931) was a first-year student of the Royal Conservatory of Copenhagen. At age twenty, the French composer Jean Françaix (1912-1997) had already been awarded a *Premier Prix* in piano at the Conservatoire in Paris and was triumphally premiering his *Huit Bagatelles* at an international festival in Vienna. This striking comparison immediately reveals the markedly dissimilar upbringing of the two musicians; however, in spite of this, of the difference in age, character and cultural provenance, the two Clarinet Concertos they composed, and which are recorded on this Brilliant CD, are not only the two finest and probably most difficult works in the twentieth century repertoire, but have also many other elements in common.

The senior of the two musicians, Nielsen, came from a numerous family with very limited economic means, but with a pronounced love for music: Carl's father, a house painter, used to play in a country band, and the child joined him rather soon, after having received the first rudimentary notions of violin-playing from his mother.

Music brought young Carl away from home: at 14, he played the trombone for a battalion band. Only later, Carl started his formal musical training, with the financial help of his former colleagues. From then on, he started his career as a classical musician, gaining a solid reputation as a violin player, a composer, and later as an internationally appreciated conductor. His oeuvre comprises works for a variety of instrumental and vocal ensembles, including his great Symphonies, operas and chamber music.

In 1921, Nielsen happened to listen to a rehearsal of Mozart's *Sinfonia concertante* for wind instruments, performed by members of the Copenhagen Wind Quintet. The composer was so intensely impressed by the technique, ensemble and musicianship of the performers that he decided to compose a work for them: the plan was accomplished the following year, when his *Quintet* saw the light. In the last movement, a theme with variations, the individual skills and the personal traits of the performers are under the spotlight.

These qualities, however, seemed to demand something than a miniature-portrait; therefore, Nielsen decided to compose a solo concerto for each of the wind players in the ensemble, in order to showcase in a – so to speak – life-size tableau their skill and artistry. In the end, however, only two of the musicians actually received the promised homage: in 1926, Nielsen wrote his *Flute Concerto* for Gilbert Jepsersen, and in 1928 the *Clarinet Concerto* saw the light.

The dedicatee and first performer was Aage Oxenvad (1884-1944), the leading Danish clarinetist of the era, who reportedly had a “somewhat choleric temperament, irascible but warm at heart”. If the Concerto’s mood seems to mirror these personal traits, its writing certainly reflects his astonishing technical mastery and musical accomplishment. Oxenvad cooperated closely with the composer during the work’s gestation, sometimes trying out for him a complex passage, sometimes providing him with new and fresh inspiration. According to the oboist of the quintet, the result “was not only a concerto for clarinet, it was a concerto for Aage Oxenvad. The composer was so deeply inspired by Oxenvad’s immersion in the essence of the instrument and by *his* peculiar manner of expressing the soul of the clarinet, that one may safely say that Carl Nielsen would never have written *this* work if he had not heard Oxenvad. No verbal characterization could be more vivid than Carl Nielsen’s musical one. It tells everything about Aage and his clarinet”.

The work was premiered privately in September 1928, and publicly the following month, with Nielsen’s son-in-law, Emil Telmányi, conducting the orchestra. The reception was mixed. Some critics appreciated a composition which had “liberated the soul of the clarinet, not only the wild animal aspect but also its special brand of ruthless poetry”, and thought that Oxenvad’s performance was “in tune with the trolls and the giants” of the Scandinavian lore. Others seemed puzzled by the innovative concept of tonality or by the idiosyncratic relevance given to the snare-drum, which frequently disrupts the clarinet’s most lyrical passages.

The eventual recognition of Nielsen’s Concerto as one of the milestones of the

clarinet repertoire came with time; and, indeed, a similarly slow appreciation marked also the first reception of Françaix’s work.

In contrast with the long and tortuous path which led Nielsen to academic musicianship, Jean Françaix was born in a family of professional musicians: his father was the director of the local conservatoire, while his mother taught singing. Under their guidance, Jean grew up as a child prodigy, who profited from the teaching of one of the leading French pedagogues, Nadia Boulanger. During his long career, a constant flow of new works enriched the repertoire of twentieth-century music; along with his stage works, ballets, film music and chamber pieces, he composed a high number of solo concertos for most, if not all, of the orchestra instrument.

His Clarinet Concerto displays a perfect knowledge of the technical potential and musical resources of the instrument; indeed, it can be said that its composition actually enlarged the horizon of the viable possibilities on the clarinet. Just as Oxenvad had half-jokingly complained with Nielsen that the composer seemed to be a clarinet player himself, so skillfully he had selected precisely those notes which are most difficult to play, in the case of Françaix the Concerto was defined as “a work for the future, possibly, when the instrument has developed further or the human hand has changed”.

The composer, with a typically French humour, was aware of its demands: “This concerto is, or at least I hope it is, amusing to listen to. It is a kind of aerobatics display for the ear, complete with loops, wing-turns and nose-dives which are fairly terrifying for the soloist, who needs to have a good stomach and several thousand flying hours under his belt. I must say the poor fellow has been given the full treatment, including a slow movement full of phrases with great charm but little time for breathing— rather like a long glide in a plane which is constantly on the verge of stalling. Finally, the pilot starts his noisy engines again, but remains carefree to the point of swapping his airforce cap for the revolving wig of a clown”.

This four-movement work, which seems to reinvent the classical forms of the

concerto and symphonic repertoire, and which is interspersed with dynamic contrasts, bizarre accents, comical passages and lyrical ideas, was premiered in July 1968 by Jacques Lancelot, a student of the work's dedicatee, Fernand Oubradous; the orchestra was conducted by Louis Fourestier. It took some time, however, before its seeming unplayability started to be convincingly overcome by many daring musicians, and today it is considered as one of the most beautiful clarinet solo concertos.

Together, these two works make a fascinating diptych: both in their similarities (the technical complexity, the Neo-classical flavor, the innovative use of tonality, the rhythmic vivacity, the brilliant orchestration, the humorous component) and in their differences (the more dramatic quality of Nielsen's work, the clearer formal structure of Françaix', to name but two), they constitute together a magnificent opportunity for exploring the instrument's possibilities, and for enjoying an hour of beautiful and delightful music.

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After winning the First Prize at the Prague Spring International Music Competition (1996), the International Chamber Music Competitions in Paris (1996) and in Trapani (1997), **Paolo Beltramini** established his reputation as one of the most exciting wind-instrument virtuosos on the international concert circuit.

As a soloist, Mr. Beltramini has appeared throughout the United States, Europe, Asia, Africa, and South America. As a chamber musician, he has collaborated with Martha Argerich, Yury Bashmet, Heinz Holliger, Giuliano Carmignola and Bruno Giuranna, among others.

Paolo Beltramini joined the Orchestra della Svizzera italiana, Lugano, as Principal Clarinet, in 2003. Previously he performed as

principal clarinet with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Orchestra Filarmonica del Teatro alla Scala, Orchestra Nazionale della RAI, Orchestra di Santa Cecilia of Rome, Mahler Chamber Orchestra, under the baton of conductors such as Giuseppe Sinopoli, Bernhard Haitink, Georges Prêtre, Neeme Jaarvi, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Myung-Whun Chung, Mariss Janssons, Alain Lombard, and Eliahu Inbal.

Paolo Beltramini received his degrees from the Giuseppe Verdi Conservatory in Milan and obtained a Diploma from the Accademia Chigiana in Siena, Italy. In demand as a teacher, he serves on the faculty of the Music Academy in Lucerne, Switzerland, and has given master classes throughout the United States, Europe, and Japan and is regularly invited as a jury member of international competitions. His discography includes recordings for Brilliant Classics, Chandos, EMI, Fonit Cetra, Stradivarius, as well as broadcasts for RAI, RSI and Radio France, among others.

Mr. Beltramini is an exclusive Ripa Music Clarinets, Silverstein and Legère Artist.



Alain Lombard won a gold medal at the Dimitri Mitropoulos Competition in 1966, immediately afterwards becoming assistant to Karajan in Salzburg and later to Bernstein in New York. There followed an intense period of activity during which he was guest conductor of a number of important orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Chicago Symphony, the Boston Symphony, the London Symphony and the Berlin Philharmonic. He was permanent conductor at the

Metropolitan in New York, at the Strasbourg Philharmonic Orchestra and at the Opéra National du Rhin. From 1981 to 1983 he directed the Paris Opera, going on to direct the Opéra National de Bordeaux, where from 1988 to 1995 he conducted around 200 performances a year between operas and concerts. In 1999 he began a close relationship with the Orchestra della Svizzera italiana as principal conductor, and in 2005 he was made its honorary conductor. In the same year he was awarded the Karajan Prize in Paris in recognition of his career. His many recordings have won prestigious international awards, some of them with the OSI.

Orchestra della Svizzera italiana (OSI)

An orchestra in continuous artistic evolution, the OSI is Italian Switzerland's flagship musical ensemble.

Internationally renowned conductors and soloists. Concert programs that are always new and creative, opera and dance co-productions, open-air concerts, cine concerts and summer festivals. An extraordinary commitment to children and to the musical education of young people. The OSI is Resident orchestra at LAC Lugano Arte e Cultura.

Founded in 1935 as the Radio Orchestra of Italian Switzerland, the orchestra assumed its current name in 1991. It has been directed by such conductors as Ansermet, Stravinsky, Stokowski, Celibidache and Scherchen, and has collaborated with many composers including Mascagni, Richard Strauss, Honegger, Milhaud, Martin, Hindemith, and, more recently, Berio, Henze and Penderecki. Richard Strauss dedicated his Duet-Concertino for clarinet, bassoon, strings orchestra and harp to the orchestra (1947). With Markus Poschner, principal conductor since 2015, it has been making its mark on the European music scene with performances that are both innovative and persuasive, and with multi-award-winning CDs (ICMA international discographic award in 2018).

For almost twenty years the OSI has enjoyed a special relationship with Martha Argerich, who in the past has chosen to make Lugano the home of her Martha Argerich Project.

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Recording: 7 May 2013 (François), 3-5 July 2006 (Nielsen), RSI Radiotelevisione svizzera, Auditorio Stelio Molo RSI, Lugano, Switzerland

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