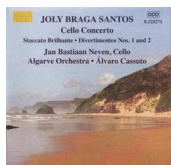


Joly Braga Santos - Cello concerto Divertimenti (2003)

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1. *Staccato Brillhante* 00:02:20 2. *Nocturno for Strings* 00:06:54 Divertimento No. 1 3.
I. *Preludio* 00:07:31 4. II. *Intermezzo* 00:05:06 5. III. *Finale* 00:08:25
Divertimento No. 2
6. I. *Largamente* 00:08:26 7. II. *Allegro vivace* 00:04:52
Cello Concerto
8. *Moderato* 00:06:38 9. *Allegro* 00:07:02 10. *Andante* 00:09:17
Jan Bastiaan Neven - cello Algarve Orchestra Álvaro Cassuto – conductor

I owe a great deal to Walter Wells and Mark Lehman for introducing me to so much fine neglected music. In the 1980s parcels of cassettes winged their way back and forward between various places in the USA and Saltash in Cornwall just over the Tamar Bridge from Plymouth.

Among those parcels was a tape of Braga Santos's Fourth Symphony. I was immediately enthralled by Santos's fine, epic, open-air symphonism. Indulged further by Portugalsom in the early days of this site I reviewed many other Braga Santos discs. Later Marco Polo trounced the marketplace with their Alvaro Cassuto series of which this is the latest volley. Can there be anyone who, as conductor, knows Braga Santos's music as well as Cassuto. He was also the conductor on a number of the Portugalsom series discs and must stand in relation to Braga Santos as Beecham stands to Delius; Bernstein to Schuman, Handley to Bax.

Of the Six Symphonies the first four are melodic-tonal, echoing with styles others will link with Moeran, RVW, Bruckner and Tchaikovsky. The final two symphonies are tough and dissonant. With that backdrop I wondered what the Staccato from 1988 would be like. In fact it is personable, tuneful, flighty without being trivial in mood, brief of course, abounding in chattering activity but with some braw rhythmic work for the brass and a typically euphonious heart-easing melody at 1.30. The Nocturno is grave and melancholy with a solo viola curving out of the

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steady trudge with which the work opens. It recalls Howells' Elogy and the sweeter elegiac moments from the Miaskovsky symphonies. The Divertimento No. 1 is for full orchestra. It has three movements and we are told is one of the composer's few works based on Portuguese folklore. It certainly doesn't show in any potpourri way - at least not in the first movement. The Preludio starts with the same steady trudge as the Nocturno, with the accent on the strings (which in the case of the Algarve Orchestra are here not as succulent as they might be). By the time we get to 2.45 we realise that we are in for another of the composer's trademark melodies. These abound in open air virtue and the freshness of a cool and dazzling morning. The Intermezzo second movement might well have us thinking of Lincolnshire folksongs à la RVW - very close in style. The Finale takes us back to touching melodies of a type similar to the tune that sings out at the peak of Vaughan Williams' Wasps Overture.

The Second Divertimento is definitely tougher - music of haunting and disillusion with a prominent role for string solos. This is music with a souring edge rising to ruthlessness and a cauldron of atonal discontent. Voices paralleling those from Waxman's Concerto for Strings, from Le Sacre and from Rawsthorne can be heard.

The Cello Concerto is in three movements calling out soulfully in discontent, in tension, in anger, fearfully teetering on the edge of the abyss. The concerto does not look back to the music of the first four symphonies. This is certainly not a companion to the Moeran Cello Concerto. The linkages belong more naturally to Boris Tchaikovsky, to Rawsthorne, to Sallinen and to Shostakovich (try the central movement). It is played with grave reverence by the principal cello of the Algarve Orchestra, Jan Bastiaan Neven. The work ends in ambivalent stillness with the muttering of an uncertain heartbeat.

The whole package is definitively supported by Alvaro Cassuto's programme notes. He writes with engaging frankness. Of the Concerto he writes: "It is the kind of work where the music speaks for itself, and trying to write about it I feel completely lost."

This is a disc for those already sympathetic to the mix of styles you get in juxtaposing symphonies 1 and 5 : 3 and 6. The earlier melodic-nationalism jostles elbows with the later tougher dissonance - not that Braga Santos ever loses complete touch with the long line.
---Rob Barnett, musicweb-international.com

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