

**A Tribute to Erling Blöndal Bengtsson
- Volume 3**

Dimitri KABALEVSKY (1904-1987)

Cello Concerto No. 1 op. 49 (1949)

[17:21]

Felix MENDELSSOHN (1809-1847)

Cello Sonata in D major op. 58 (1843)

[25:22]

André JOLIVET (1905-1974)

Suite en concert pour violoncello (1965)

[14:56]

Erling Blöndal Bengtsson (cello)

Iceland Symphony Orchestra/Jean-Pierre
Jacquillat (Kabalevsky)

Anker Blyme (piano) (Mendelssohn).

rec. 5 Oct 1973, Háskólabíó

(Kabalevsky); 11 Oct 1980, Nordic

House, Reykjavik (Mendelssohn); 1970

(Jolivet)

DANACORD DACOCD 740 [58:39]



Erling Blöndal Bengtsson as a cellist of high renown turns heads ... and ears. He is best known as a student and friend of Gregor Piatigorsky and having been conducted by Pablo Casals. He is the subject of a statue by Olof Palsdottir erected in the entrance to Iceland's main concert hall. He made his debut at the age of four with Saint-Saëns' *The Swan*, adding Popper, Nolek and Beethoven to his repertoire at five and appearing as the soloist of the Tivoli Symphony Orchestra at ten. Danacord's *in memoriam* recordings of the great Erling Blöndal Bengtsson pay tribute to a man whose life was music.

When asked in an interview for *The Strad* about his early musical memories, Bengtsson shared this story: 'There was music in the home but I don't think he (Bengtsson's father) influenced my playing. When I was about three years old, my father brought me a violin and showed me how to put it under my chin. Even though I never had seen a cellist, I immediately wanted to put the violin between my legs. I don't know why. My mother was on my side, so my father arranged to have an endpin put in a viola. A few months later, when he saw that I was serious, he had a little cello made for me. Somehow I just took very naturally to the cello.'

As soon as Bengtsson played the first few bars of Dimitri Kabalevsky's *Cello Concerto No. 1 op. 49*, I was won over. After a pizzicato opening from the string section of the *Iceland Symphony Orchestra*, Bengtsson enters arco with an affirmative and energetic melody. This quickly soars into the upper register, kept afloat by the pulsing orchestra. Unlike the opening march, the contrasting theme is beautifully melodic and emerges with an unexpected aria quality. The brief cadenza flaunts the cello's infinite range of textures as double-stops and deep, mellow vibrato prepare the listener for the B major folksong melody in the second movement. During the dialogue with the horns in this section, Bengtsson plays with untrammelled feeling and exquisite sincerity. Written in dedication for fallen Russian soldiers, the *Largo molto espressivo* gives the cello a solo voice. Again, Bengtsson, by allowing the rests and swooning final melody to speak for themselves, produces a captivating sound. Following the clarinet's lyrical melody - based on a well-known Russian tune - Bengtsson traverses between soft and sharp. With chiaroscuro definition, he opens out the contrasting dialogue between the understanding and agitated sensibilities in Kabalevsky's composition. With a fading trill picked up by the clarinet, Bengtsson's soft sensitivity adds to the range of dynamics within this piece. Not perturbed by the alacrity required of this final movement, Bengtsson is rhythmically tight and retains characteristically precise intonation in the skittish, spirited passages. In this recording the Iceland Symphony Orchestra under Jean-Pierre Jacquillat offers sublime accompaniment.

With a demure opening, Bengtsson's understated approach adds intelligence and contemplation to Mendelssohn's swooning melody in the *Cello Sonata in D major op. 58*. Accompanied by the pianist Anker Blyme, Bengtsson's top notes are rounded so that they fall back into the open embrace of the piano. Two lovers cajoling, this piece leaves one with a skip in the step and a heart full of merry cheer.

Bursting with personality, the pizzicato opening to the *Allegretto scherzando* is played with a quirky edge before giving way to a wealth of sumptuous vibrato, only to return sneakily to jaunty pizzicato and ricochet back and forth between laughing and loving. The *Adagio* consists of a chorale in Bach-style, alluding to Mendelssohn's admiration for J.S. Bach. The arpeggios are played with fullness by Blyme and their openness leaves space for Bengtsson tentatively to enter with recitative passages. A little cough and splutter in the final movement - and here I do not speak metaphorically - shakes the listener out of the Bengtsson-trance. However, technical ease and a determination to 'play each piece as though it were the first time' shine through in the vitality of the *Molto allegro e vivace*.

André Jolivet's *Suite en concert pour violoncello* consists of five terse movements. Between each piece there is a feeling of strained tension. The silences and contrasts between pizzicato and bowing, registers and volume result in a composition which forms a shape and concept through texture and atonality. This is achieved by contrast with the melodious re-emerging themes of the other two recordings on this CD. Bengtsson plays this challenging set of five interrelated segments with seriousness and wit, bringing out the percussive attitude of the cello.

Lucy Jeffery