

REVIEW  
RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Plain text for smartphones & printers

**Wilhelm STENHAMMAR (1871-1927)**

Sonata No. 4 in G minor [24:54]  
Intermezzo [3:01]  
Impromptu [4:52]  
Impromptu-Valse [4:14]  
Fylgia [2:12]

**Jean SIBELIUS (1865-1957)**

Valse triste [5:12]  
Romance op.24, No. 9 [4:02]  
6 Impromptus op. 5 [17:38]  
Finlandia [10:09]  
Cassandra Wyss (piano)  
rec. 4-6 August 2014, Andreaskirche am Wannsee,  
Berlin, Germany.  
**CAPRICCIO C5229** [76:14]



Support us financially by purchasing this from



This is the second disc in which Cassandra Wyss offers us the music of Wilhelm Stenhammar and excellent it is too. The first featured the *Tre Fantasier*, *Sensommarnätter* and the unnumbered *Sonate op. 12* (Capriccio C5112). On this new disc however, Stenhammar has to share the limelight with Sibelius, the record company obviously linking this recording with the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Finnish composer's birth. This for me is a real shame, as from the opening of the Sonata No. 4 you become aware of how unjustly neglected this music is. Yes there are recordings out there, with Lucia Negro's three CD survey on Bis being the highlight (BIS-CD-554; BIS-CD-634; BIS-CD-764). However, I can't help but long for another recording of the first three numbered sonatas. Let's hope that Capriccio give Cassandra Wyss the opportunity to record them soon.

Stenhammar's Fourth Sonata, which dates from 1890, makes a big bold Romantic statement, with its four movements taking up nearly a third of the disc. The notes tell us that the composer was "likely" to have had the wonderful G minor Sonata of Schumann in mind when he composed this sonata and one can see why. It follows the traditional four movement Romantic sonata structure and one can detect a foretaste of what was to come in his better known symphonies and piano concertos. The sonata is followed by a series of short works which whilst they do not have the power and imagination of the sonata still have a grace and charm. These are not masterpieces but neither are they mere salon pieces.

The Sibelius half of the disc opens with *Valse triste*. This is among his best known works and was transcribed from an orchestral score originally composed for his Arvid Järnefelt's stage work *Kuolema* or *Death*; Järnefelt was his brother-in-law. In this performance one can hear why it has gained such popularity. The *6 Impromptus op. 5* can be found among Sibelius' early piano compositions and as such are usually overlooked. This is a shame as they contain some charming and attractive music. The final work is the ever popular *Finlandia*, although the piano version may be new to some. Originally composed in 1899, Sibelius revised it the following year. He followed this revision with the transcription performed here. Yes, you tend to miss the grandeur of the orchestra, but the transcription is quite effective.

Wyss's performances, especially in the Stenhammar, mark her out as a real talent and someone to watch. She has a real feeling for this music, one which gives her the edge over Lucia Negro. Her performances of the Sibelius are also strong, especially in the better known pieces; here she is slightly slower than Folke Gräsbeck on Bis (vol. 1; vol. 2), giving her more time to accentuate the different passages within the music. She is backed up by excellent recorded sound and good booklet notes. This disc is a real winner. I can only hope for more Stenhammar from this wonderful young artist.

**Stuart Sillitoe**