



*Copenhagen Artists represents Christina Åstrand.*

## CHRISTINA ÅSTRAND, VIOLIN

### Romantic Violin Concertos

Fanfare Magazine

8 January 2010

By 1969, historian Kai Aage Bruun would write the Niels Gade Concerto off as “pale,” an apparently favorite term of dismissal, since he applied the same term to Lange-Müller’s Concerto, as well.

These first-rate performances by Christina Åstrand, leader of the Danish National Orchestra, could change some minds. It is hard to imagine anyone finding these works pale as presented here; a composer could hardly ask for better advocacy than hers. Conductor John Storgårds—he is a violinist, as well—and the fine Tampere Philharmonic are no less committed, especially notable for their heart-felt phrasing and sensitive support of the soloist. Her playing has an alluring sweetness, especially in the warm acoustic of Tampere Concert Hall, soaring strength in all registers, and is flawlessly accurate.

Ronald E. Grames

GADE Violin Concerto in d. LANGE-MÜLLER Violin Concerto in C. LANGGAARD Violin Concerto1 • Christina Åstrand (vn); John Storgårds, cond; Ville Hautala (pn);1 Tampere PO • dacapo 6.220562 (Hybrid multichannel SACD: 61:27)

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### Outstanding

MusicWeb International

13 October 2009

I’ve praised Christina Åstrand for her recent recording of all three Gade Violin Sonatas and I’m not going back on my word. She deals well and justly with its fluent romanticism, its Mendelssohnian lineage. The opening is hyper-romantic in that respect; she also takes the central movement slow, aerating its warmth with great textural facility. The finale is engaging, wholesome and freewheeling if just a bit faceless; the finale problem emerges here, though this is no fault of Åstrand and conductor John Storgårds.

Lange-Muller’s Concerto however is a standout. You must hear it. It was first performed in 1904 by Axel Gade, son of Niels which makes a neat connecting point. As befits this most

voice-rich of composers the themes are decidedly vocalised but there are also distinctive melodic and harmonic forces at work here that lift the work well beyond the ordinary plane. The orchestration is rich and attractive, and not overladen. Maybe Grieg drifts over the slow movement a little too insistently but that's no bad thing in my book; Peer Gynt glimmers delightfully. Åstrand takes her time in the finale and enjoys its reflective passages over rich orchestral pizzicato. If my own preference is for a faster tempo here, there's no doubting the instrumental strengths on offer nor the conviction with which she measures her argument. As I said try to hear this work - it's a real delight.

Finally we have a veritable pocket concerto along the lines of Valen's similar work. This is the very different 1943 Concerto of Rued Langgaard. As usual with him there are exciting things abounding. There's a piano in the texture which provides occasional interludes, cadential violin passages, and a typically quirky and individualist approach to chronology and to style. It's a brilliant nine minutes' worth of your time and money - and has substance.

The SACD recording is first class with a fulsome acoustic in the Tampere Concert Hall. Long may Åstrand continue to retrieve such works and present them to us so richly.

Jonathan Woolf

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### **Romantic Violin Concertos**

Audaphile Audition

*19 August 2009*

"...on its own terms it makes a rewarding half hour, especially when played with tone as beautiful as Christina Åstrand conjures from her instrument."

All three concertos are beautifully executed by Christina Åstrand who shows off the upper register of her instrument with a lovely purity of both tone and intonation. She and the conductor John Storgårds convey the structure of these pieces with attention to long line, and the Tampere Philharmonic accompanies with sensitivity - essential if pieces of this calibre are to have chance of success.

Peter Joelson

[www.audaud.com](http://www.audaud.com)

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**A Winner**

SA-CDnet

*6 August 2009*

Even Danish music-lovers would be hard-put to name composers of Danish violin concertos other than Nielsen. DaCapo have mounted a resurrection exercise for three Romantic concertos of this ilk which have slipped into oblivion. They found an ideal team to perform the resuscitations, and the results truly confound the dismissive views of musical historians. Christina Åstrand is the remarkable soloist; she was appointed leader of the Danish National Symphony Orchestra at the age of 22, a position she has held for 13 years. She has clearly taken to these three works, applying her consummate musicianship and audible enthusiasm, aided and abetted by Finnish conductor John Storgårds (himself a virtuoso violinist) and his excellent Finnish Tampere Philharmonic Orchestra, who are galvanised into playing their hearts out for the project.

Niels W Gade (1817-1880) was one of Denmark's most influential Romantic composers. A virtuoso violinist himself, he had a spell in Leipzig as director of the Gewandhaus Orchestra, where he conducted the first performance of Mendelssohn's First Violin Concerto in 1845. His own Violin Concerto in D minor Op. 56 was written in 1880, a grand, superbly orchestrated work in traditional 3 movement form with the soloist in the spotlight most of the time. Its ardent first movement launches urgently, with the soloist entering almost immediately with a long-breathed yearning melody of fine quality. This takes off into a soaring climax, heralding the warm and truly memorable nostalgic second subject. Åstrand fully has the measure of the movement's poetic lyricism and passionate climaxes, playing with pure, sweet tone and easy athleticism - but with steel where needed to ride the turbulent orchestral climaxes, which are expertly placed by Storgårds and his orchestra. The second movement 'Romanza' arrives with another lovely, gentle solo cantilena supported by lower strings. This develops into a rich, broad melodic tapestry before visiting a swaying dance against breathlessly shimmering violins. Åstrand is captivating in her subtle and eloquent playing of this attractive slow movement. Few violin concertos have finales which can challenge those of the great

masters, but Gade provides one which coheres beautifully with what has gone before; his 'Rondo scherzando' is all about fun and brilliant display, with broad-brushes of strutting Danish folk dances in which the orchestra have vivid and unusual textures to support the soloist. It brings the work to a rousing conclusion. Damning critical reviews buried this concerto before it got its chance to take wing. It is a real discovery. On disc, with such a performance and recording, Gade's Violin Concerto should gain much popularity.

Peter Erasmus Lange-Müller (1850-1926) is best known in Denmark for his vocal and stage works. He sought the advice of Axel Gade (violinist son of Niels) when composing his Violin Concerto in C, Op. 69 (1902). In the autograph of the score held in the Royal Danish Museum (available freely on the internet), it is evident that Lange-Müller ended the first movement without a cadenza, but he did write an alternative and more conventional ending with space for a cadenza. One was provided by Axel Gade (and another by the Swedish violinist Tor Aulin is also bound into the autograph). It appears that the early performances with these ungainly and musically superfluous cadenzas may have been a major cause of the concerto falling into oblivion. However, in these new sympathetic performances, the warmth and open-hearted lyricism of Lange-Müller's invention is immediately appealing. Another feature of the Autograph score is that Lange-Müller frequently adds an alternative ("ossia") solo violin line, which is technically more difficult. Christina Åstrand seems to consistently prefer the more elaborate and expressive version throughout the work. The concerto's wistful slow movement has unmistakable influences of Grieg, with a central playful interchange of woodwind and violin, and its joyful Finale launches a memorably fiery detached-note country dance which is evidently thoroughly relished by all the players. Lange-Müller's is a most interesting and fresh-sounding late development of the Violin Concerto, with undoubted attractiveness.

The final Violin Concerto is by Rued Langaard (1943-1944), whose complete symphonies have recently been issued by DaCapo, and whose star seems at last to be rising internationally. Composed between 1943 and 1944, this short work (under 10 minutes) is characteristically personal, winsome and quirky, avoiding the classical concerto format

and taking the spotlight off the violinist by adding a concertante part for piano. It too is a strongly lyrical and tuneful work, passing rapidly through a number of pastiche-like moods and tempos, navigated very smoothly by Åstrand and Storgårds, with admirable playing by pianist Ville Hautala. The presence of the piano and some "advanced" harmonies indicate the late date of Langaard's further exploration of the Romantic Concerto in this delectably lush but compact incarnation.

Everything seems to come together on this disc. Fine musicianship from all performers melds with a sharply focussed, detailed recording of wide dynamic range, bathed in the Tampere Concert Hall's warm ambience. The soloist's sound is immaculately detailed yet ideally set back somewhat in the hall acoustic, which adds much allure to the violin tone. The 5.0 multichannel gives a realistic and immediate concert experience (although those having full-range speakers will note some deep bass podium rumbles from the conductor).

Few musical resurrections are as successful and rewarding as these three Romantic violin concertos - this disc is simply a winner on all counts.

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