

## Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra



Photo: Chris Zuidyk

Founded in 1893, the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra has worked with many famous composers, conductors and musicians including Elgar, Sibelius, Holst, Stravinsky, Vaughan Williams and Thomas Beecham; and more recently with Michael Tippett, John Tavener and Peter Maxwell Davies. Principal conductors since the founder Sir Dan Godfrey have included Charles Groves, Constantin Silvestri, Andrew Litton, Marin Alsop and now by the dynamic young Ukrainian, Kirill Karabits. The BSO has toured worldwide, performing at Carnegie Hall, New York, the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Vienna Musikverein, and Berlin Philharmonie, as well as regular British appearances at the Royal Festival Hall and Royal Albert Hall in London, the Symphony Hall in Birmingham and the Bridgewater Hall in Manchester. The BSO is known internationally through over three hundred recordings, and continues to release numerous CDs each year with Naxos. Recent critically acclaimed recordings have included CDs of Bernstein, Bartók, Sibelius, Glass, Adams and Elgar, and three discs featuring arrangements of Mussorgsky, Bach and Wagner by Stokowski were nominated for GRAMMY® awards in 2004, 2005 and 2006.

## Bjarte Engeset



Photo: Ulf Palm

The Norwegian conductor Bjarte Engeset completed his training with Jorma Panula at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki in 1989. In 1990 he was a prize-winner in the Nordic Conducting Competition and since his participation in the 1991 Tanglewood Seminar he has conducted leading orchestras throughout Scandinavia, as well as in Britain, Germany, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Romania, Slovakia, Estonia and the United States. He made his London debut with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in 1997, while at home continuing to play a leading part in festivals throughout Norway, working both in the concert-hall and in the opera-house. He has frequently conducted the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra and shared conducting duties with Mariss Jansons during the orchestra's three-week tour of Asia. He has been music director of the Tromsø Symphony Orchestra, the Norwegian Wind Ensemble, artistic director of Northern Norway's Northern Lights Festival and Opera Nord, and permanent guest conductor of the Flemish Radio Orchestra. Since 2007 he has served as chief conductor of Sweden's DalaSinfonietta. His acclaimed recordings for Naxos include works by Svendsen, Tveitt, Grieg, Sibelius and Sinding.



# Ludvig IRGENS-JENSEN (1894-1969)

## Symphony in D minor Air • Passacaglia

**Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra • Bjarte Engeset**



## Ludvig Irgens-Jensen (1894-1969)

### Symphony in D minor • Air • Passacaglia

The two main works on this recording are among the peaks of twentieth-century Norwegian orchestral music, and for many years they received frequent performances and a great deal of attention, both nationally and internationally. The *Passacaglia* (original version 1928) and the *Symphony in D minor* in its original three-movement form (1942) are completely different in their fundamental existential messages. Both works grow, through formal techniques like variations and fugues, towards big chorale climaxes. The *Passacaglia*'s chorale closes in a radiant G major and leads to an elysian epilogue. The *Symphony*'s original third movement arrives at a 'catastrophe-chord' after a dark minor-key chorale has battled with fugato thematic fragments, then closes in a quiet, elegiac coda. The pessimism of the *Symphony* is every bit as strong as the optimism of the *Passacaglia*.

Ludvig Irgens-Jensen was born on 13th April 1894 in Christiania (as Oslo was then called) and died on 11th April 1969 during a trip to Italy. Many Norwegian composers have had close connections with folk music and have aimed to create a national musical identity. Irgens-Jensen on the other hand could be described as European, with more of a focus on form and other musical elements in their own right. He was powerfully influenced by German and French culture, and spent extended periods in Berlin and Paris. He learnt the piano, but never tried to study composition at a conservatory. Nevertheless he was regarded by his composer-colleagues as one of the most skilful among them. He was something of a humanistic philosopher, with an all-embracing vision of art. Throughout his life's work he grappled with the big questions about human existence. He also wrote poetry, and was accomplished at drawing and watercolour painting. Friends tell of a quiet man, wise and deeply empathetic. He loved nature and the outdoor life, and often went climbing in Norway's highest mountain range, Jotunheimen.

Much of Irgens-Jensen's music has a characteristic elegiac melancholy. As well as being a sensitive lyric poet he was also a sceptic and rationalist: 'there are no shortcuts in art', he said. When asked which earlier composers he admired, he replied: 'I have my heroes, Bach and Palestrina, Chopin and Brahms, everyone who wrote music of real importance'. He said that his goal was a universal, classical art, growing not from an 'individualistic state of mind' but from a mentality like that of Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750), 'where humility and a desire to serve were profound realities'. When young, Irgens-Jensen was viewed as one of the modernists, together with composers such as Fartein Valen (1887-1952), Pauline Hall (1890-1969) and Harald Saeverud (1897-1992). Later some saw him as a conservative classicist.

### Passacaglia (1928)

The international success of the *Passacaglia* gave it for a time the status of a kind of ideal in Norwegian music. Irgens-Jensen originally conceived it as a large-scale piece of church music for chorus, soprano and organ. For the centenary of Schubert's death in 1928 the Columbia record company organized a composing competition, and the *Passacaglia* took second prize in the Nordic section, behind the eventual winner of the competition as a whole, the *Symphony No. 6* (1927-28) by the Swede Kurt Atterberg (1887-1974). The *Passacaglia*'s first performance was given in Oslo on 19th January 1929, at a concert for which three composers – Pauline Hall, Irgens-Jensen and Arne Eggen (1881-1955) – hired the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra. The conductor was Odd Grüner-Hegge (1899-1973). The immediate response to the work was extremely positive, and in 1929 alone it was played several more times in Oslo. Within a few years it had been heard as far afield as Bergen, Stockholm, Kiel, Helsinki, Berlin (1930 and 1933, played by the Berlin

movement. It has also been argued that it repeats too much of the same thematic material. But there is plenty of successful music that has a high degree of thematic interrelationship. Most likely it was quite a practical intention that lay behind Irgens-Jensen's decision: to ensure that the symphony was not too long. But there are many signs that he was not sure he was doing the right thing, and felt under pressure from others. In the early post-war period, many people in Norway were keen to focus on the positives: they felt a need to make sense of life's losses and sacrifices. A hymn to peace giving the symphony an optimistic ending would chime with that. There was a need to remember heroes, but above all to look forward, and to forget. From a humanistic point of view, one can of course focus on works of art that convey a sense of hope. Having something to fight for, creatively, is just as important as having access to objective information about suffering. In the words of the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860): art is the answer.

But to demand that music *should* give us hope, consolation and equilibrium in a painful world can also be limiting, coercive, even totalitarian: no difficult questions are asked, and no true answers are found. The pessimism inherent in Irgens-Jensen's original concept of his symphony also points forward towards the terrible knowledge and cataclysms that came after 1942. We

have seen that twisted forms of idealism can lead to unimaginable tragedy, and there are certainly ideologues who want to 'clean up' the world by getting rid of people they regard as 'undesirable'. Irgens-Jensen evokes a terrifying, merciless picture of the natural world he knew so well: sailors were too often lost at sea, freezing storms on the high moors took many lives, avalanches and landslides crushed countless homes. The destructive maelstrom of nature is every bit as Norwegian as the tourist brochure view of sunshine on green birch leaves. The symphony's original three-movement form is a powerful and profoundly musical expression of something fundamental to human existence. No ideologically 'happy ending', but subtle and nuanced music that searches for truth, and thereby sets itself free from totalitarianism. For me, there is great hope in this truth-seeking, symphonic expression of human solidarity.

**Bjarte Engeset**

*Translated by David Gallagher*

<sup>1</sup> I have in fact recently rediscovered the original ending of the second movement, but unfortunately too late for it to be included on this recording.

The second part of Irgens-Jensen's poem brings a hope of peace, a dream. The corresponding second movement of the symphony begins with quiet harmonies, and a peaceful horn theme. The exchanges between the strings and the wind instruments are reminiscent of the third movement of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*. Irgens-Jensen's typical use of modal material is particularly clear here. The theme is developed and repeated in variation form until the mood is shattered by fanfares and dramatic tremolos. At the first performance the trumpets and snare-drum were placed offstage at this point, something that was soon changed on practical grounds. After several similar, almost theatrical and Mahlerian outbursts the music pitches into a large-scale fugue, crowned by a chorale-like conclusion. Irgens-Jensen felt that a fugue could give great intensity to the end of a movement: 'To my mind, symphonic music cries out for polyphony. Each new entry gives an enormous stimulus. A movement that culminates in a fugue can have greater strength and grandeur than any other.'

Some years later, Irgens-Jensen withdrew the last movement, and this final version with only two movements was performed for the first time in 1952, by the Oslo Philharmonic conducted by Grüner-Hegge. The key of the very last bars of the second movement was altered from the original E major (the dominant of A minor, which is the main key of the third movement) to A major.<sup>1</sup> Since 1945 Irgens-Jensen had also made some cuts and revisions in the first two movements. Grüner-Hegge later recalled: 'I was absolutely determined to make the work more concentrated, to bring points out more clearly, and I trimmed a lot of material that I thought was superfluous. And Ludvig complained: "You're cutting into my flesh!" "No, just the fat!" I said.' The third movement was performed separately in 1972, after the composer's death, under the title *Rondo marziale* (Rondo in March-Form). With this recording it is once again possible to hear the initial three-part concept, as formulated in words in the poem *Maelstrom*. In its original form, the symphony was an existential expression of the forces of destruction at work in nature, in ourselves, in all 'brothers'.

The third movement has a relatively long, sombre introduction, reminiscent of the *Passacaglia*: it is based on a repeated theme low on the cellos and double basses, pizzicato. The march section itself begins with a distorted version of the beautiful theme of peace from the second movement, *à la* Hector Berlioz (1803-69), who likewise distorts the love theme (*idée fixe*) in his *Symphonie fantastique* (1830). Irgens-Jensen's resulting 'fate' theme is rhythmically similar to the hammering *leitmotif* of another D minor symphony, the *Symphony No. 2, 'Fate'* (1924) by an earlier Norwegian composer, Johan Halvorsen (1864-1935). As a result it becomes almost a national fate-motif. Irgens-Jensen was by no means the first to use a march in connection with deadly and destructive forces. March form can express health and creativity, heroism and courage, but also the menacing power of evil. These two possibilities are only a hair's-breadth apart. So this finale, which for me has something demonic about it, can perhaps conversely be heard as an expression of a heroic, fighting spirit, with elements of elegance. Themes from the first two movements often surface in what is a fusion of rondo and sonata form, with a central section – dominated by a quiet E minor chorale – and a recapitulation. At the end of the movement this dark chorale returns, *forte*, in a hectic, fugal buildup. The chorale cannot entirely defeat the dramatic orchestral music, and their struggle ends in a long-held 'catastrophe-chord'. After a similarly long pause comes the resigned final section, which returns to the thematic material and atmosphere of the beginning of the symphony. Everything is and will remain as it has always been: the forces of destruction are everywhere. Edvard Grieg (1843-1907), too, at the climax of his great variation-work, the *Ballade, Op. 24* of 1876 (Naxos. 8.557854), wrote a chorale that is deliberately ambiguous and a kind of 'catastrophe-chord' that changes everything, leaving only a quietly nostalgic, elegiac final reflection.

We do not know for sure why Irgens-Jensen removed the last movement. Did it benefit the symphony? Some writers have argued that the third movement was too long. But it is shorter than the first

Philharmonic), San Francisco, Philadelphia, New York (1932, broadcast by CBS), Chicago and Venice. International critics experienced the *Passacaglia* as a 'sacred song' with a profoundly noble and ethical character. They praised its formal mastery while at the same time finding it emotionally powerful and moving. One of the most famous conductors in the world and one of the most famous composers, Arturo Toscanini (1867-1957) and Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971), were both enthusiastic about it. The conductor Issay Dobroven (1891-1953) was an important champion of the work, along with Grüner-Hegge. Both before and after the final published version appeared in 1952, Grüner-Hegge was in dialogue with Irgens-Jensen about minor changes, especially to the orchestration. Grüner-Hegge was a close friend of the composer and gave him important advice about revisions to many of his works.

Irgens-Jensen's use of the *passacaglia* places him in a European tradition from the Baroque period and J. S. Bach: the work is based on a minor-key theme in the bass register in triple time, just as the tradition dictates. The form is handled in a way that is very reminiscent of the final movement of the *Symphony No. 4* (1885) by Johannes Brahms (1833-97), but it also has more contemporary parallels in the works of Carl Nielsen (1865-1931), Alban Berg (1885-1935), Anton Webern (1883-1945) and Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951). Irgens-Jensen himself characterized the introduction as 'jagged', 'chaotic' and 'improvisational'. It presents a wide range of musical material, including a signal-motif low on the bassoons, a recitative-like passage first presented by the cellos, horn fanfares and a chorale. The music builds towards the chorale in two waves, then takes more dramatic twists and turns until it pauses as if on a quiet question mark. Now, almost five minutes into the work, the *passacaglia* theme is introduced, softly, by cellos and bass clarinet in unison. After its first presentation this bass theme of sixteen bars is repeated in sixteen variations, staying at first for a long time in E minor but later moving through many other keys too: D minor, A minor, B minor, A major and F sharp minor.

To make the beginnings and ends of the variations less rigid, they are often blurred and concealed by other melodic phrases that begin before or after the *passacaglia* theme, producing overlaps and displacements. In Variation 10 the oboe has a pastoral, almost folksong-like counter-melody. After the first twelve variations Irgens-Jensen launches a complex triple fugue, into which he works (among other material) both the pastoral theme and the recitative idea from the introduction. The fugue drives on into the final four statements of the *passacaglia* theme (Variations 13 to 16). Then a transition passage leads to the great chorale that crowns the work. The strict polyphony dissolves and the lines come together in a climax on a chord of G major. After a long timpani roll there follows the ethereal, paradisaical coda, led by a solo violin, flutes and muted trumpet. Here the original *passacaglia* theme is repeated, followed by the chorale, *pianissimo*. The work closes in the dominant, on a quiet chord of B major.

### Air (1959)

The little 'song' for orchestra, *Air*, is closely connected with Irgens-Jensen's Opus 2, the highly-regarded song-cycle *Japanischer Frühling* (Japanese Spring). The cycle's texts are very old Japanese lyric poems in German versions made by Hans Bethge (1876-1946), best known for his translations of Chinese poetry that Gustav Mahler (1860-1911) used in *Das Lied von der Erde* (The Song of the Earth, 1909). Irgens-Jensen's *Japanischer Frühling* first appeared as nine songs for voice and piano in 1920, which he revised and orchestrated nearly forty years later (1957). *Air* is a shortened version for orchestra alone of the fourth and longest song, 'An einen Freund' ('To a Friend'). Irgens-Jensen thereby marked this song out as having particular importance. In the cycle, the singer is accompanied only by the strings, after a long and expressive instrumental introduction. The original Japanese text was written by Ōshikōchi no Mitsune (c. 860-925).

## An einen Freund

Du kommst nur, um die Blumen blühen zu sehen  
Bei meinem Hause. Sind sie erst verwelkt,  
So weiss ich wohl, dass ich mich Tag für Tag  
Umsonst nach deinem Kommen sehnen werde.

## To a Friend

*You only come to see the flowers bloom  
Around my house. Once they are withered,  
I know too well that I, day after day,  
Shall yearn in vain for you to come.*

## Symphony in D minor (1942)

Irgens-Jensen had already conceived the idea of writing what was to be his only purely orchestral symphony before the Second World War. In later life he did not want the symphony to be too closely associated with the war or with a literary 'programme'. He probably felt that it touched on existential questions, but avoided giving a simplistic explanation of what it was 'about'. Before the first performance in 1945, however, he allowed the Oslo newspaper *Dagbladet* to print a poem which, he said, 'I wrote down (on 10th April 1940) at exactly the same time that the plan of the symphony became clear in my mind'. It was the day after the outbreak of war in Norway, and the title *Dragsug* (Maelstrom) is particularly striking. The poem is in three parts, and so – originally – was the symphony.

## Dragsug

I.  
Glimt av skavler langt der ute,  
skumdrev i lange flak.  
Du går i fjæren – og foten trår  
i rester av gamle vrak.

Flom fra fjellene, skred mot dalene  
– ond er alt som skjer.  
Her lå en grend og søkte ly  
– du finner den aldri mer.

Ja skred må løсне, vil mot dyppet  
– ungt er jordens blod!  
Hører du kreftenes ville hymne:  
Aldri eide vi ro.

## II.

Da fatter du menneskehetens smerte.  
Gjennom sekler i gravkoldt mørke  
holdt det en hellig kjerte:  
Drømmen som tentdes i knuste sinn,  
drømmen som flammet da slektene led,  
drømmen som trosser livet, –  
drømmen om fred.

## III.

For det er en drøm – men er det mer?  
Se deg da om, vår gode bror,  
og si oss hva du ser:  
De gamle krefter trives godt,  
de er våre trofaste mødre.  
Bølger i hav,  
storm i fjellene,  
flom og skred  
ser du her,  
ser du hos deg, hos meg.  
Vold og drap og sjelemord  
ser du hos dine brødre.

## Maelstrom

## I.

*The glint of breakers far out at sea,  
drifts of foam in long flocs.  
You walk on the shore – and your foot treads  
on the remnants of old wrecks.*

*Floods from the fells, avalanches into dales  
– everything that happens is wrong.  
Here stood a farmstead in hope of shelter  
– you will never find it again.  
Yes, avalanches must break and hurtle down  
– the earth's blood is young!  
Listen to the savage hymn of the hidden powers:  
We have never had peace.*

## II.

*Now you understand the pain of humanity.  
Through centuries of darkness, cold as the grave,  
we kept a sacred candle burning:  
the dream that kindles in crushed spirits,  
the dream that blazed as generations suffered,  
the dream as strong as life itself, –  
the dream of peace.*

## III.

*For it is a dream – but is it more?  
Look around you, good brother,  
and tell us what you see:  
the ancient powers are prospering,  
they are our faithful mothers.  
Ocean waves,  
mountain storms,  
flood and avalanche,  
you see them here,  
you see them in yourself, in me.  
Brute force, butchery and murder of the spirit  
you see amongst your brothers.*

In 1942 the musical world in Norway was gradually moving towards a 'general strike' to oppose the Nazi occupation and oppression. That year the Norwegian Composers Association launched a secret internal competition in connection with its 25th anniversary. Irgens-Jensen's symphony won first prize, but only when the war ended did the work receive its premiere: on 1st October 1945, in a 'Norwegian Music Week' celebrating the country's liberation. During the war Irgens-Jensen had written tunes for patriotic texts and

unquestionably took an anti-Nazi stand. Yet very few critics focussed on the national elements in the symphony when it was eventually performed. They responded above all to its engagement with existential questions and its sure feeling for symphonic form.

The symphony opens in the same landscape as many other D minor symphonies, with an expanse of long-held chords over a pedal point, until it finally breaks loose into fast movement. The same sense of stillness and vast horizons can be heard at the start of the great *Symphony No. 9 in D minor* (1824) of Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827), and in two D minor symphonies by Anton Bruckner (1824-96), *Symphony No. 3* (1873-89) and *Symphony No. 9* (1896). Irgens-Jensen's first movement is in sonata form, but the main subject group is itself quite extended and varied, with two distinct types of material: one is elegiac, in small intervals; the second is more dramatic, with four phrases, and is repeated many times in different forms. Only three and a half minutes into the symphony do we reach a transition into the second subject, which is first heard on solo violin, intense and softly songful, in E major. It continues via an especially beautiful phrase for solo celesta in simple triads. The development section follows immediately, beginning in a very special quiet atmosphere, founded on accented long notes for the double basses and harp. Horn and oboes play short signal-motifs. The mood here may call to mind the fourth movement of another D minor symphony, Mahler's *Symphony No. 3* (1896), a setting of the *Midnight Song*, 'O Mensch! Gib acht!' ('O Man! Take heed!') from his *Also sprach Zarathustra* (Thus Spake Zarathustra, 1885) by Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). The development uses most of the main thematic material and eventually also the second subject, now forte. As in Beethoven's Ninth, the development leads dramatically, fortissimo, into the recapitulation, where the melodic material of the quiet opening bars returns at full blast. Just as the end of Beethoven's first movement has a fatalistic, march-like character, Irgens-Jensen's movement too closes in a dramatic, implacable coda with frenetic forward thrust.