

# BRAGA SANTOS

# **Alfama**

Symphonic Overture • Elegy Variations • Three Symphonic Sketches

Royal Scottish National Orchestra • Álvaro Cassuto



#### Joly Braga Santos (1924-1988)

Following on from the seventeen different orchestral works of Joly Braga Santos released on six CDs on Naxos's sister label Marco Polo, the present recording offers both experienced Braga Santos enthusiasts as well as novices, a bird's eye view of the various musical styles to be found in the music of this outstanding Portuguese composer, focusing on some of his most brilliant works.

The five works included here are not presented in strict chronological order, but almost. Indeed, the Elegy to Vianna da Motta, in memory of the famous Portuguese pianist, pupil of Liszt and Hans von Bülow, who had just died, dates from 1948, and precedes by six years the Symphonic Overture No. 3. The one-act ballet Alfama dates from 1956 while the Variations for Orchestra were written in 1976, fourteen years after the Three Symphonic Sketches. The reason for not adhering to chronological order in presenting these works is musical. One expects to find an overture at the beginning of a concert, as one expects to hear the most exciting and uplifting work at the end. This conventional approach matches, in my view, the character and attitude of Braqa Santos as a composer.

Regarding Braga Santos's biography, suffice it to say, for those who are new to his music, that he was the most outstanding Portuguese orchestral composer of the twentieth century. His compositions include six symphonies, three operas, and a variety of shorter pieces for orchestra written especially after his musical style gradually took up post-war musical trends, starting in the early 1960s with the Three Symphonic Sketches, the final work included here.

The change is clearly audible if we compare the first three works recorded here with the remaining two. Indeed, the Symphonic Overture No. 3 is based on a theme, by the composer himself, but in the character of the Alentejo folk-lore which he frequently adopted, presented in the slow introduction. The main Allegro section follows traditional sonata-form, with an extended development section and a highly amplifying coda.

The *Elegy* is divided into three sections. The first one is elegiac, while the second part is based on a modal theme, starting softly after a first climax over repeated

notes of the timpani and bass drum, constantly repeated by an increasingly louder orchestra, building up to a second climax, and ending with a third section, a reminder of the first one.

The hallet Alfama justifies a personal note on my part Having been a very close friend of Joly (as everyone in Portugal still calls him). I was greatly surprised when at the end of the ceremony held a year ago on the occasion of the public denosit of his original manuscript scores at the National Library of Portugal in Lisbon, Linspected some of the works on display, and saw a large volume. clearly an orchestral score titled Alfama. It struck me that I had never heard of a work by Joly named after the Arab neighbourhood surrounding the mediaeval Castle of St George in the centre of Lisbon, part of which can be seen. in the photograph reproduced on the front cover of this booklet. Unable to open the score and look at the music. on my drive home I called Joly's wife Maria José and asked her what kind of work it was, when it was written. and what it was like. "Oh", she said, "forget it. When we were about to get married. Joly was short of money, so he agreed to write the music for a ballet. He wrote it in haste. and after a first performance he dismissed it, considering it bad, unworthy to be performed." While this explained why I had never heard of the work. Maria José's answer did not convince me. "Joly was unable to write bad musicl" I told her

I then took a serious look at the score and found it to be a most unpretentious sequence of short movements, in an extremely innocent, popular yet most appealing style, clearly not the kind of "profound" music Joly was striving for in his symphonic output. The fact that Joly was striving for money explains why the work's length was partly achieved by frequent repeats of various sections within each movement. I decided to shorten it for this recording, thus presenting it for the first time to contemporary audiences, even in Portugal. I eliminated many repeats and some of its movements to create a suite following examples such as Prokofiev's, who arranged various suites from his ballets.

The suite I thus extracted from Joly's *Alfama* has the following movements:

- 1. Introduction: Largo
- 2. Dance of the sailor: Allegro, Largo ma non troppo
- 3. Pas de trois: Allegro marcato
- 4. Dance of the fishwives: Allegretto
- 5. Dance of the fishwife and the longshoreman: *Un poco più che prima*
- 6. Dance of the girls of the neighbuorhood: Vivace
- Dance of the boys and girls who fill the square;
   Allegro
- 8. Dance of the girls around the fire: Allegro
- 9. Final dance: Allegro vivace

Variations for Orchestra (1976) is a work written in the musical style which Joly developed after incorporating in his former style many aspects of post-war musical developments such as those created in Darmstadt. There is very little in the way of thematic development, and a lot in the area of tone clusters and "Klangfarben", to use Schoenberg's expression, meaning developing musical material on the basis of different combinations of orchestral timbres. The work is clearly divided into various sections. The transitions however are so complex and

the differences between the sections so delicate, that the work sounds more like an informal improvisation rather than a clearly defined series of variations on a specific theme. Yet a theme does exist (in the high line of the violins, right at the beginning of the work, and after the low notes of basses, harp and percussion), just as there is a series of variations.

Much easier to define and to describe are the *Three Symphonic Sketches*. The first sketch (*Allegro*) is based on a rhythmic pizzicato line punctuated by brilliant outbursts of the winds and brass, which is immediately presented at the beginning. It builds up to a climax, then subsides to give way to a lovely musical dialogue between solo strings (two violins and viola) and woodwinds, then building up again before ending in pianissimo. The second sketch (*Lento*) has two sections each one building from a pianissimo to a fortissimo, followed by a short coda leading to the third sketch, which mixes elements of the first sketch with new material based on an *ostinato* line in the timpani and percussion. The short yet brilliant work ends like an orgiastic rhythmic frenzy.

Álvaro Cassuto

### **Royal Scottish National Orchestra**



The Royal Scottish National Orchestra is one of Europe's leading symphony orchestras. Formed in 1891 as the Scottish Orchestra, the company became the Scottish National Orchestra in 1950, and was awarded Roval Patronage in 1991. Throughout its proud history, the orchestra has played an important part in Scotland's musical life, including performing at the opening ceremony of the Scottish Parliament building in 2004. Many renowned conductors have contributed to its success, including Walter Susskind, Sir Alexander Gibson, Bryden Thomson, Conductor Laureate Neeme Järvi Conductor Emeritus Walter Weller and

Conductor Emeritus Alexander Lazarev. Stéphane Denève, who became Music Director in September 2005, concludes his tenure at the end of the 2011-12 Season. This partnership has enjoyed great acclaim, at home and abroad, and has brought one of the most successful periods in the organisation's recent history. British-Canadian conductor Peter Oundjian will take over as RSNO Music Director in September 2012. The orchestra has a worldwide reputation for the quality of its recordings and has been nominated for eight GRAMMY® awards in the last eight years. Over 200 releases are available, including the complete symphonies of Sibelius (Gibson), Prokofiev (Järvi), Nielsen and Martinů (Thomson). The RSNO is one of Scotland's National Performing Companies, supported by the Scottish Government. For more information, please see www.rsno.org.uk.

#### Álvaro Cassuto



Álvaro Cassuto is Portugal's foremost conductor. He has been Music Director of the Portuguese National Radio Symphony Orchestra, the University of California Symphony Orchestra, the Rhode Island Philharmonic, the National Orchestra of New York, the Nova Filarmonia Portuguesa, the Portuguese Symphony Orchestra, the Israel Raanana Symphony Orchestra, the Algarve Orchestra, and the Lisbon Metropolitan Orchestra.

Born in Porto, he studied in Lisbon, and after establishing himself as one of the most promising young composers of the avant-garde of the early 1960s, he went on to study conducting with Herbert van Karajan in Berlin. After graduating in Law from the University of Lisbon in 1964, he obtained his conducting degree in Vienna.

A recipient of the Koussevitzky Prize among many other honours, he has enjoyed a career of high international acclaim.

He has been a frequent guest of many leading orchestras, including the London Symphony, the Royal Philharmonic, the London Philharmonic, the Philadelphia Orchestra, and dozens of others across the world.

In 2009, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of his career, the President of Portugal bestowed on him the commendation of Grand Officer of the Military Order of Santiago de Espada.

He has an extensive discography with a variety of orchestras and for different labels, among which a highly successful ongoing series for Naxos, dedicated to some of Portugal's most important composers.

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8.223879 8.225233 Joly Braga Santos composed in a wide variety of forms, faithfully mirrored in this selection of his highly appealing music. The Elegy was written for his famous compatriot, the pianist Vianna da Motta, whilst the Symphonic Overture No. 3 utilises his own brand of folkloric material. Braga Santos' Three Symphonic Sketches offer colouristic virility, full of supercharged rhythmic energy. The Variations for Orchestra reflects a compositional change, more elusive but highly subtle, and Alfama is a delightful ballet score, 'Don't miss this one!' wrote Classics Today of Álvaro Cassuto's recording of the Second Symphony on Marco Polo 8,225216.



# **Joly BRAGA SANTOS**

(1924-1988)

## **Alfama**

1 Symphonic Overture No. 3 (1954)	13:57
<b>2</b> Elegy in memory of Vianna da Motta (1948)	10:37
Alfama: Ballet Suite (arr. Á. Cassuto) (1956)*	24:23
3 Introduction	3:00
4 Dance of the sailor	3:11
5 Pas de trois	3:47
6 Dance of the fishwives	1:18
7 Dance of the fishwife and the longshoreman	2:20
8 Dance of the girls of the neighbourhood	2:12
9 Dance of the boys and girls who fill the square 10 Dance of the girls around the fire	2:30
10 Dance of the girls around the fire	2:08
11 Final dance	3:58
Variations for Orchestra (1976)*	12:50
Three Symphonic Sketches (1962)	10:49
13 Allegro	2:51
14 Lento	4:31
15 Allegro	3:27
*World Première Recordings	

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Booklet notes in English www.naxos.com

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