

KARL AAGE RASMUSSEN

(b. 1947)

1 *Movements on a Moving Line (1988, rev. 1994)* (16:43)

Speculum Musicae

Susan Palma, flute/piccolo/alto flute Allen Blustine, clarinet

Daniel Druckman, percussion Erik Charlston, percussion

Aleck Karis, piano David Starobin, guitar

Curtis Macomber, violin/viola Eric Bartlett, cello

Donald Palma, conductor

BENT SØRENSEN

(b. 1958)

2 *The Deserted Churchyards (1990)* (8:26)

Speculum Musicae

Susan Palma, flute/piccolo/alto flute Allen Blustine, clarinet/Eb clarinet

Daniel Druckman, percussion Aleck Karis, piano

Curtis Macomber, violin Eric Bartlett, cello

David Starobin, conductor

HANS ABRAHAMSEN

(b. 1952)

Winternacht (1978, arr. 1987) (13:01)

3 I. Winternacht—to G. Trakl (4:36)

4 II. Drei Welten—to M.C. Escher (3:44)

5 III. Septet—to Igor Stravinsky (2:10)

6 IV. Im Frühling—to G. Trakl (2:19)

Speculum Musicae

Susan Palma, flute/piccolo/alto flute Allen Blustine, clarinet

Erik Charlston, percussion Aleck Karis, piano David Starobin, guitar

Curtis Macomber, violin Eric Bartlett, cello

William Purvis, conductor

POUL RUDERS

(b. 1949)

7 *The Bells (1993)* (17:52)

text by Edgar Allan Poe

Lucy Shelton, soprano

Speculum Musicae

Steven Taylor, oboe Allen Blustine, clarinet/Eb clarinet/bass clarinet

William Purvis, horn Carl Albach, trumpet Aleck Karis, piano

Curtis Macomber, violin Lois Martin, viola Marji Danilow, contrabass

David Starobin, conductor

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total time: 56:30

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Karl Aage Rasmussen's *Movements on a Moving Line* was first composed in 1987 in a version for 14 instruments, commissioned by the Danish Radio Symphony Orchestra and first performed with Oliver Knussen conducting. The version recorded here was made in 1988 for the Elsinore Players, and was revised in 1994 for the present recording.

The British mathematician and astrophysicist Stephen Hawking provocatively states in his 'A Brief History of Time', that it is quite inexplicable that we remember the past and not the future. Rasmussen's *Movements on a Moving Line* posits a similar metaphor. In this work, the composer creates movements which are circles within circles, cross-cutting them in different tempos throughout the length of the piece, a single line running uninterruptedly throughout. Movements enter and recede—the end is also the beginning.

Traditional musical "flow" as exemplified in sonata form often fulfills certain expectations. But like the musings of an astrophysicist, *Movements on a Moving Line* questions such convention. And yet "convention" of other sorts is for Rasmussen a cutting stone. His reverence for the material that generates what the composer calls "the four traditional 'movements' or character-types which emerge throughout the work—an *allegro*, a *slow waltz*, a fanfare-like *scherzo* and a raggedly rhythmical *finale*" interact kaleidoscopically with the modern virtuosity of Rasmussen's compositional palette.

In Rasmussen's music we are never in doubt that a genuine musician is at work: the instrumental blending and virtuosic orchestration emphasize the obvious fact that music is first of all an event in sound, an entertainment of the mind, a challenge to our emotional 'soundboard,' and a true gift to those who know how to appreciate and enjoy truly professional craftsmanship—as Time goes by...

—Poul Ruders, December 1994

Bent Sørensen is one of the most independent voices in the younger generation of Danish composers. The Italian word "chiaroscuro" (a concept from the world of painting, and his title for an earlier piece) may work as a clue to his style and technique: a music where ever-changing shades of light and darkness are used to create refined emotive effects.

His music evokes mood and atmosphere, but never in a simple, descriptive way—more like distant echoes from the realms of the unconscious. It may communicate an almost tangible feeling of presence, but it remains "out of this world" in as much as it is music and nothing but music. Sørensen's titles typically refer to shadows, water, angels, funerals etc., unveiling a musical mind which shares something with Ligeti, but whereas Ligeti is fascinated mainly by the mysteries of hidden patterns and structures, Sørensen's music is unabashedly, if not outspokenly, "programmatic" in a way that shows more of an affinity to Hans Abrahamsen, not to mention such romantics as Mahler and E.T.A. Hoffmann. There is, however, nothing romantic about his finely wrought textures with their wide range of dynamics, colors, and inventive use of modern playing techniques.

Ambiguity is also felt in the way Sørensen comments on his own works. *The Deserted Churchyards* was conceived as a kind of prelude to an earlier piece (called *Funeral Procession*). The title refers to some rural churchyards along the western coast of Northern Jutland. Originally quite safe from the sea, they are now slowly being swallowed by the perpetual waves. But as Sørensen writes, "The title is nothing but an association, and to account more closely for a relation between my piece and these windy areas would be impossible."

Hans Abrahamsen's *Winternacht* was composed between 1976 and 1978. In 1987, Abrahamsen re-scored the version heard on this recording for Denmark's Elsinore Players. In the less than twenty years of its existence, *Winternacht* has nevertheless attained the status of a classic—a masterpiece of Danish music. One of its movements refers to an etching of Rudolph Escher called "Three

Worlds." It shows naked trees around a pond, fallen leaves on the surface of the water, and a fish in the water. The trees are reflected by the water, and through the reflection in the water one sees the fish; the two worlds, air and water, meet in a third world: the reflection. Abrahamsen's music seems to emerge from a similar double mirror; it is based on rigid constructions—grids, networks and logically built structures of pitches and durations. But as the mind winds, and loses itself in the labyrinths of construction, images emerge, unpredictably, magically, like discoveries. The music comes to life as Abrahamsen searches for meaning, memories, associations and warmth in the cold nooks and crannies of construction. He likes to lose himself entirely in strategies and rules, totally committing himself to their commands, but likewise always insists on finding the *music*, on crystallising beauty and sense into every musical instant. What Abrahamsen finds belongs to yet a 'third' world: images of pure music, music you might once have heard, from other times and places, real or dreamt.

The first movement of *Winternacht* refers to the German poet Georg Trakl, one of whose surreal images of nature gave the work its title. Faint fanfares evoke a recurring symbol in Trakl's poetry—the trumpet. The second is the Escher movement, where three well known accompaniments from the musical past are ingeniously superimposed, creating the effect of a mirror of a mirror. The third movement quite obviously relates to the music of Igor Stravinsky. They all seem to meet in the fourth and last movement, but the listener instantly becomes aware that on a deeper level this has already happened; in fact, everything was there all the time, the single movements reflecting each other in a multiple whole. Past and present merge in this music, not only stylistically, but in a highly personal conception of time.

Poul Ruders is the most widely noted figure to have emerged in Danish music during recent years. The core of his versatile and spontaneous musical language may be that he is something as old fashioned as a "natural". He maintains the delicate balance between passion and calculation (that which Schoenberg

referred to as 'heart and brain' in music) with apparent ease because neither seems placed before or after the other; they hang together as one whole.

Confrontation—collisions of contrasts, of light and shadow, chords and discords, the old and new, experiment and tradition—is the prevailing climate in Ruders's creative world, and he casts these opposites on wide colorful canvasses. Like a teller of tales, a creator of visual images or a sheer dramatist, his comment that he is "a film composer without film" is his favorite way of putting it. Ruders is, however, a highly skilled professional who uses his artistry and musicianship not only to speak his mind, but also to create a multi-layered music ripe with multiple meaning. Though sometimes subdued, intimate, even lyrical, his music is usually aggressive, rhythmical and captivating. It is put together in clear-cut episodes or developed in gradual, meticulously calculated overarching shapes, all orchestrated with a seemingly inexhaustable imagination. Ruders often employs an original technique of variation, derived partly from the English "ringing of the changes", but on the whole, his compositional strategies elude generalization, as they are always merely tools. His music knows of no "automatic pilot".

The Bells (1993) was commissioned by England's Nash Ensemble, and is dedicated to soprano Lucy Shelton. *The Bells* is yet another of Ruders's musical "films without film", and it is not the first time that the poetry of Edgar Allan Poe has set his imagination afire. It may have to do with the unique way in which Poe merges strict form, symbolic content, and emotional intensity. Poe's *The Bells* presents a richly musical text, a virtuoso performance of sliding rhythm and color, where the recurring "rhyming and chiming of the bells" literally keep time flowing. Ruders's music relates closely to the poem, culminating in the pounding of deep, muted piano strings—"the groaning of the bells".

—Karl Aage Rasmussen, December 1994

THE BELLS

I

Hear the sledges with the bells—
 Silver bells!
What a world of merriment their melody foretells!
 How they tinkle, tinkle tinkle,
 In the icy air of night!
While the stars that oversprinkle
All the heavens, seem to twinkle
 With a crystalline delight;
 Keeping time, time, time,
 In a sort of Runic rhyme,
To the tintinnabulation that so musically wells
 From the bells, bells, bells, bells,
 Bells, bells, bells—
From the jingling and the tinkling of the bells.

II

Hear the mellow wedding-bells—
 Golden bells!
What a world of happiness their harmony foretells!
 Through the balmy air of night
 How they ring out their delight!—
 From the molten-golden notes,
 And all in tune,
 What a liquid ditty floats
 To the turtle-dove that listens, while she gloats
 On the moon!
Oh, from out the sounding cells,

What a gush of euphony voluminously wells!
 How it swells!
 How it dwells
 On the Future!—how it tells
 Of the rapture that impels
 To the swinging and the ringing
 Of the bells, bells, bells—
 Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,
 Bells, bells, bells—
To the rhyming and the chiming of the bells!

III

Hear the loud alarum bells—
 Brazen bells!
What a tale of terror, now, their turbulency tells!
 In the startled ear of night
 How they scream out their affright!
 Too much horrified to speak,
 They can only shriek, shriek,
 Out of tune,
In a clamorous appealing to the mercy of the fire,
In a mad expostulation with the deaf and frantic fire,
 Leaping higher, higher, higher
 With a desperate desire,
 And a resolute endeavor
 Now—now to sit, or never,
By the side of the pale-faced moon.
 Oh, the bells, bells, bells!
 What a tale their terror tells
 Of Despair!
How they clang, and clash, and roar!

What a horror they outpour
On the bosom of the palpitating air!
Yet the ear, it fully knows,
By the twanging
And the clanging,
How the danger ebbs and flows;
Yet the ear distinctly tells,
In the jangling
And the wrangling,
How the danger sinks and swells,
By the sinking or the swelling in the anger of the bells—
Of the bells—
Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,
Bells, bells, bells,—
In the clamor and the clangor of the bells!

IV
Hear the tolling of the bells—
Iron bells!
What a world of solemn thought their monody compels!
In the silence of the night,
How we shiver with affright
At the melancholy menace of their tone!
For every sound that floats
From the rust within their throats
Is a groan.
And the people—ah, the people—
They that dwell up in the steeple,
All alone,
And who, tolling, tolling, tolling,
In that muffled monotone,

Feel a glory in so rolling
On the human heart a stone—
They are neither man nor woman—
They are neither brute nor human—
They are Ghouls:—
And their king it is who tolls:—
And he rolls, rolls, rolls,
Rolls
A paean from the bells!
And his merry bosom swells
With the paean of the bells!
And he dances, and he yells;
Keeping time, time, time,
In a sort of Runic rhyme,
To the paean of the bells—
Of the bells:—
Keeping time, time, time,
In a sort of Runic rhyme,
To the throbbing of the bells—
Of the bells, bells, bells—
To the sobbing of the bells:—
Keeping time, time, time,
As he knells, knells, knells,
In a happy Runic rhyme,
To the rolling of the bells—
Of the bells, bells, bells:—
To the tolling of the bells—
Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,
Bells, bells, bells—
To the moaning and the groaning of the bells.

Work on the present disc—a modest survey of recent Danish ensemble music—was a labor of considerable pleasure. In selecting and preparing a program of music from little Denmark (the entire country's population the same size as two or three of New York City's boroughs!) Speculum Musicae encountered a wide-ranging group of composers, many exhibiting a refreshing openness in matters of style—an admirable independence of spirit!

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New York City based Speculum Musicae's recordings on Bridge include: **Stefan Wolpe** (BCD 9043); **Poul Ruders** (BCD 9037); **Elliott Carter** (BCD 9014); **Charles Wuorinen** (BCD 9008); **George Crumb** (BCD 9028); **Stephen Jaffe** (BCD 9047)

Lucy Shelton's performances of Arnold Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*, op. 21 (in German and in English) and *Herzgewächse*, op. 20 are available on Bridge (BCD 9032).

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