

Karl Aage Rasmussen

(b. 1947)

Etudes and Postludes (1989-90) (34:45)

- 1 Course (:53)
- 2 Clocks (2:00)
- 3 Shimmer (3:21)
- 4 Lamento (6:48)
- 5 Shifts (2:09)
- 6 Echo (und Chopin ist auch) (1:49)
- 7 Echo II (Chopin) (1:18)
- 8 Canto (Stravinsky) (1:53)
- 9 Clouds (1:42)
- 10 Rags (1:32)
- 11 Chaconne (2:22)
- 12 Chords (5:40)
- 13 Chorus (Ives) (2:21)

14 Barcarole (1996) (9:16)

15 Contrary Dances (1992-93) (15:32)

Rolf Hind, piano

Etudes and Postludes (1989-90)

The title suggests two kinds of music: something which is far away, maybe almost out of reach, but which you nevertheless try to embrace; and something close and familiar which you are taking leave of. Thus, in a sense, the pieces form a diary. The Postludes allude to other musics, former music of my own and of others. The Etudes open new doors--they make use of working strategies and mind models that were quite new to me at the time.

Pieces by Ives, Stravinsky and Chopin, together with a ragtime and a mournful melody form the basis for a music pointing backwards--the Postludes. The Etudes are all based on different kinds of "multiplication" where a few notes or a tiny musical module repeatedly twists back on itself and closes a loop. The general name for this is self-reference, and the Etudes reflect themselves endlessly, the way a mirror mirrors another mirror. The result is that rhythmic and melodic patterns emerge, unpredictably, like gifts from unknown muses.

Etudes and Postludes was commissioned by the late Yvar Mikhashoff,

and they are dedicated to his memory. And between lines, also to György Ligeti, the re-discoverer and sophisticated master of the classic etude for piano.

The pieces can be played in any number and in any order. It is left to the discretion of the player to group pieces in 'suites', respecting simple rules of variety.

Barcarole (1996)

It has happened only very rarely that things from the "real" world make a mark on my music, but this piece may be one of those rare instances. In 1995-96 I spent several months in Venice. On an ice-cold morning in January of 1996, in this tourist-pestered, sinking city where beauty and decay merges, I suddenly became aware of a churchbell, ringing incessantly in a mechanical, unreal way, like a clockwork.

Maybe it was this absurd, senseless precision which gave the bell an alarming, almost scary effect on me. I dreamt about it the next night, and it does seem to ring on throughout this piece.

(Writing the last measures of the piece, I got the news that “La Fenice”, the splendid old Venice operahouse, had burned down to the ground.)

--Karl Aage Rasmussen



During the Charles Ives Centennial Festival in New Haven in 1974, the late Gilbert Chase urged me to meet a Danish composer named Karl Aage Rasmussen, one of a specially invited group of young European musicians thoroughly conversant with Ives' music and able to bring a fresh European perspective to American music. (Chase was not given to overstatement and seldom offered unqualified praise.) Though never having previously traveled to either England or America, Rasmussen, in what seemed to me flawless Oxford English, offered provocative opinions on topics ranging from Ives to ragtime composer Joseph Lamb, from the obscure experimentalist John J. Becker to the world famous John Cage, from pop and folk music to Stravinsky and Schoenberg, from the then flowering American minimalism to the latest trends of the European avant garde. If urged, he would even describe his own work. But he preferred, then as now, to acquaint new audiences with the music of outstanding Danes such as Rued Langgaard, Per Nørgård and Pelle Gudmunsen-Holmgreen and with the

new generation of Scandinavian composers such as Poul Ruders, Hans Abrahamsen, and Hans Gefors. The younger Danes were at that time experimenting with “Style Pluralism,” the North's effort to move away from the Teutonic and Gallic musical (i.e. serial) dominance of Darmstadt and Donaueschingen, and to establish a more eclectic, less doctrinaire style open to all kinds of musical materials from the past and to Denmark's own musical heritage. Rasmussen's reluctance to promote his own work has ironically placed him somewhat in the shadow of many composers whose reputations he helped establish.

Born in Kolding (Jutland) on 13 December 1947, Rasmussen graduated in 1971 from the Royal Academy of Music in Aarhus, where he studied with Nørgård and Gudmunsen-Holmgreen. In 1975 he established the chamber music ensemble, the Elsinore Players, and in 1978, initiated the NUMUS Festival, serving as its director and artistic advisor for many years. Both through the NUMUS Festival and his many writings in the *Dansk Musiktidsskrift* (*Danish Music Journal*), he has introduced the music of numerous American composers to the Scandinavian public. Since 1988 he has been a full professor at the Royal Academy in Aarhus.

Music and its relationship to present and past time has been Rasmussen's artistic obsession. Mixing musical quotations and older

styles freely in his music, Rasmussen has consistently questioned the concept of music as an art existing only in the present time and subject to judgment only by current standards of "modernity." In one of his most striking early works, *Genklang* ("Echoes") of 1972, he used a mistuned piano, a prepared piano à la Cage, a normal piano performed by a conventional parlor duet team, and a celesta, to create a dreamlike atmosphere in which remnants of Mahler's famous "Adagietto" float strangely through the texture, intermingling past and present both culturally and stylistically. All tonal logic is surrendered in a search for a new innocent way of listening to Mahler's familiar classic. The result is a tragi-comic marriage of tradition and renewal with, as Hans Gefors has observed, "only Mahler's melody mournfully reminding us of the lost past and of time slipping by."

A versatile composer, Rasmussen's many subsequent experiments to accomplish a "complementarity of time and space" have been skillfully realized in such works as *Love Is in the World* (1976), a Schumannesque de- and reconstruction of a Lieder cycle replete with quotations from Schumann; *A Symphony in Time* (1982), in which the four movements of a conventional symphony compete for tempi and traditionally expected musical sentiments; and *Fugue/Fuga (Encore VIII)* (1984), wherein the composer recomposes and reconstructs the fugue of Beethoven's "Hammerklavier" Sonata - for the modern

medium of piano, vibraphone and clarinet. Rasmussen's style lends itself well to the theater, and has found a perfect home in his recent opera *Titanic*, in which reality and myth, nearness and distance, present and past musical styles all merge in a reconstruction of one of the most famous human calamities of the early twentieth century.

Humor and irony also have their place in Rasmussen's compositions. But his music invites active participation rather than passive pleasure, and it suggests that we should approach complexity without abandoning naïveté, and that there are no definite solutions, but only fascinating ambiguities in an art so adrift in time as music. Gilbert Chase's confidence in the young Dane's originality of outlook has been justified over time. One can always expect to discover an astonishing fusion of the new and the old in the work of Karl Aage Rasmussen.

--Don Gillespie

The young British pianist **Rolf Hind** has quickly come to be regarded as a leading force in the performance of contemporary piano music. György Ligeti, Iannis Xenakis, Poul Ruders, Magnus Lindberg, Karl Aage Rasmussen, Bent Sørensen, Simon Holt, Vic Hoyland, David Sawer, and James MacMillan are composers featured among Hind's list of premiere performances.

A regular soloist with leading orchestras, Hind made his debut with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra under Vladimir Ashkenazy in May 1992. Recent engagements have included the BBC Symphony Orchestra, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and The London Philharmonic with whom he recently gave the world premiere of Poul Ruders' *Concerto for Piano*.

Rolf Hind's recordings include solo discs for *Factory Classics*: Ligeti, Carter, and Martland; Janáček, Bartok, and Finnissy; a recording of Messiaen's *Trois Liturgies* for Virgin Classics; and Xenakis' *Eonta* and Ruders' *Break-Dance* for Teldec. Born in 1964, Rolf Hind studied at the Royal College of Music in London with Kendall Taylor and John Constable. He went on to study in Los Angeles with Johanna Harris-Heggie. He now lives in London.

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