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CHRISTIAN SINDING

The Symphonies

Norrköping Symphony Orchestra

KARL-HEINZ STEFFENS



CHRISTIAN SINDING (1881 - 1949)

COMPACT DISC 1 [72:08]

Symphony No. 1 in D minor, Op. 21 (1894)

- [1] I. Allegro moderato [10:55]
- [2] II. Andante [10:20]
- [3] III. Vivace [7:33]
- [4] IV. Allegro [10:35]

Symphony No. 2 in D major, Op. 83 (1907)

- [5] I. Allegro moderato [11:55]
- [6] II. Andante [9:59]
- [7] III. Allegro [10:47]

COMPACT DISC 2 [78:09]

Symphony No. 3 in F major, Op. 121 (1919)

- [1] I. Con fuoco [14:09]
- [2] II. Andante [10:52]
- [3] III. Allegro [7:08]
- [4] IV. Non troppo allegro [13:04]

Symphony No. 4 in E flat major, Op. 129 (1936)

Vinter og Vår (Frost and Spring)

[5]	I. Maestoso	[7:21]
[6]	II. Andante	[6:44]
[7]	III. Moderato	[2:23]
[8]	IV. Vivace	[2:03]
[9]	V. Largamente	[3:50]
[10]	VI. Andante	[2:08]
[11]	VII. Non troppo allegro	[8:20]

Norrköping Symphony Orchestra
KARL-HEINZ STEFFENS *conductor*



Sinding in his home, 1941

A Rustle of Strauss, a Dash of Wagner: Christian Sinding's Four Symphonies

Christian August Sinding – the youngest of four children – was born on January 11th, 1856, in Kongsberg, a silver mining town some 80 kilometres west of Oslo, which was then still called “Christiana” when Sinding came into the world. His father was a mine manager who, shortly after the birth of his youngest, founded a sulfuric acid plant near Oslo and then moved his family to Lillehammer. Two years later he died and the mother moved the family to the capital. His elder brothers both studied law before becoming interested, and successful, in the arts: Otto as a painter and poet and Stephan as a sculptor. (The statue of Ole Bull in Bergen is one of his works.)

At 11, Christian was admitted to the Oslo *Katedralskole*, one of Norway's oldest and most prestigious schools. Still, insufficient effort and subsequent bad grades forced him out in 1872 (three years before Edward Munch enrolled). His uncle suggested he learn something proper and become a cobbler; as a compromise and to stay within the field of music, Sinding managed to find a job at the Brødrene Hals piano factory. When he turned 18, he moved to Leipzig, following in the footsteps of many of his northern European colleagues, to study at the Conservatory. Once again, his efforts in the fields of piano, organ, harmony, and violin were modest and Salomon Jadasson, composition- and piano professor,

commented disapprovingly: “Used to attend occasionally. His talent for music is generally only very limited.” After a brief time playing in the violin section of his hometown orchestra, where he performed under Edvard Grieg and Johan Svendsen, Sinding returned to Leipzig with renewed effort and a greater focus on composition. This time one of his teachers, Ernst Richter, noted more optimistically: “Attends from time to time. His attempts at composition are indicative of talent.” While reading instrumentation under Carl Reinecke he wrote his first compositions (which he subsequently destroyed) and saw them performed.

Despite having relatively little to show, he received a stipend from the state, which enabled him to move to Munich in 1882, where his brother lived (eventually becoming a professor at the Academy of Arts), and where he fell in love with the music of Richard Wagner and Richard Strauss. In 1885, a concert dedicated to his music in Oslo, which included his Piano Quintet op. 5 (which he had started to write in Munich), was his first notable success as a composer. The same work continued to spread his fame after notable performances in Copenhagen (1888) and Leipzig (1889, now with the Brodsky Quartet and Ferruccio Busoni on piano).

By 1886 Sinding had moved back to Leipzig where he soon got started on his **First Symphony**, op. 21. After an unpublished first version, he had it performed in its erstwhile final form in Oslo in 1890. Another four years passed before the heavily revised third version was performed in Dresden. It

received some notable performances and mixed reviews. After hearing the work in Amsterdam, Edvard Grieg commented that it was “played marvellously under Mengelberg's direction”, while a review after a performance in Munich under Felix Weingartner noted: “The instrumentation, as indeed Sinding's entire tonal language, is to some degree of modern spirit and occasionally of considerable lustre and strong colours; but in the long run we could not deem its somewhat weighty nature an advantage.” A 1917 review of his Piano Concerto op. 6, written around the same time, got much right and could be easily applied to his first symphony: “Outwardly pleasing to the senses. A revelling in sweet melodies, ecstatic suspended chords, and rushing passages could suggest Italian authorship if one did not consider that northerners in particular can often be sentimental in their mood. [Much] is based on Rubinstein, Grieg, and Tchaikovsky's models.” And indeed, towards end of the Allegro moderato first movement of the symphony, there's a stronger sense of Tchaikovsky than any other composer to be heard in this heterogeneous but conventionally romantic, occasionally sweeping

symphony. The inner movements – the pastoral Andante and the gay Scherzo – have a touch of Mendelssohn to them. Ominous tones open the fourth movement but the clouds don't take long to dissipate. Even the key of D minor cannot keep the darkness around for too long before the elegant, ebullient Tchaikovskian tone returns.

While his first symphony was a well-regarded child of its time, Sinding's **Second Symphony**, op. 83, was already showing signs of being passed over by the style of the new times. In the twenty years between the former's first sketches and the premiere – in Berlin on March 22nd 1917, under Felix Weingartner – of the next symphony, Sinding had moved less as a composer than his audiences' expectations. We encounter “Mendelssohn-meets-Wagner”, as a review of the premiere niggled. Much depends here on the conductor to lighten the textures and give it the airiness that the Allegro moderato needs to keep it from sinking. For all the Straussian and Wagnerian influences that Sinding absorbed in Munich and afterwards, modern ears might find that influence, so notable to his contemporaries, less obvious in these symphonies – and certainly the Second. And there certainly is none of the harmonic derring-do of Strauss to be found. Yes, in the Andante, there is the faintest glimmer of the *Tannhäuser* overture in the two first notes, but then it's immediately back to the world of Tchaikovsky. A Scherzo is missing altogether and Sinding staggers right from slow movement into the finale with its “rhythmically interesting and broad main theme” (from the aforementioned review).

Sinding's career went on nicely, all the same. In 1909 he was elected into the Prussian Academy of Arts and his stipends were now replaced by an “Artist's salary” from the Norwegian state. Free from the need to work menial jobs to support his

composing, Sinding focused on his sole opera, *The Holy Mountain*, op. 111, certainly his most overtly Wagnerian music, and his violin concertos continued to be championed by great soloists and liked by audiences.

In 1919, in Oslo, having spent the war in Norway, the now 53 years old composer, set out on his **Third Symphony**, op. 121, which was premiered to enormous success by Arthur Nikisch and the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra on November 14th of the next year. (It probably helped that a strike of the stagehands caused the performance to take place in almost complete darkness.) To have returned unchanged after the horrors of World War I must have been a welcome respite to conservative audiences, who wanted to be soothed, not perturbed any further. Sinding did that in style. The work opens with a “sort of brazen splendour, a leaping, exuberant theme which is contrasted with a long-breathed, rather Tchaikovskian second subject” (Christopher Howell) and moves to a shimmering, iridescent slow movement that waxes lyrically. A buoyant Scherzo leads to a finale within which overtones of *Die Meistersinger* come to the fore.

A review of a later performance noted, quite rightly, that “Among the northerners, Sinding is the composer... who is most deeply rooted in the German character. We love much about him. His Third Symphony, another masterpiece, keeps formally with the symphonic tradition.” It could hardly have been more traditional, true. After all, 1921 also saw the publication of works like John

Foulds’ World Requiem, Rued Langgaard’s *Music of the Spheres*, Prokofiev’s Third Piano Concerto, Varèse’s *Amériques*, and Schoenberg’s Suite for Piano. But Sinding should also not be made out as unusually backward. The very symphonic form at the time produced similarly romantic and perfectly beautiful works from Arnold Bax (No. 1), Roussel (No. 2), Vaughan Williams (No. 3), and Howard Hanson (“Nordic”). If anything, Sibelius (No. 6) and Zemlinsky (“Lyric”) were the outliers that broke with convention and expectations within the confines of the symphonic form.

The following years continued to be kind to Sinding. His pension was increased again and he was called upon to teach at Rochester’s Eastman School of Music in upstate New York – a position which he, alas, quit soon after taking it up. He was given free let of an apartment on the royal castle’s grounds in Oslo (very Bruckner-like) and lived for the rest of his days. He also started on sketches for what would eventually become his **Fourth Symphony, Frost and Spring – A Rhapsody for Orchestra**, his creative Last Hurrah. It was, however, not until 1936, two days after his 80th birthday, that the work was premiered in Bergen under Harald Heide. The Fourth is certainly the most Straussian of his symphonies, especially the last – and longest – of its seven segments. Uniquely, for Sinding anyway, the classic Romantic orchestra he used throughout his career is augmented with the tonal colours of the bass clarinet, the harp, and the piano. The reference to Spring (defeating Winter) may well be

a reference to his claim-to-fame composition, the “Rustles of Spring” movement from his *Six Piano Pieces* Op. 32. Sinding wrote four verses to go with the Rhapsody that outline the thematic development of this tone poem in symphonic disguise (or vice versa). Its many beautiful moments remind us of the wealth of creativity and art that existed at the time, of which we know next to nothing these days. And that is eminently worth discovering, even if Sinding is a Grade-B composer.

Saying as much, incidentally, is not a dismissal, it’s merely an assessment to adjust the expectations. He’s not the symphonic Grieg we’ve been missing, nor a Nordic Brahms that’s been overlooked. He’s more of an amiable Stanford, Gernsheim, Raff, or perhaps Glazunov: A symphonist – essentially a German symphonist – of the second water who wrote very pleasing works that we will not hear in the concert halls (sadly) but which will enliven our musical diet on record if we need to take a break from Dvořák, Brahms, and Bruckner. Like many of these composers, the effectiveness of the compositions is dependent on sensitive and enthusiastic interpretations to communicate the fervour that they inherently – if sometimes only at a second glance – contain. That little but imperative boost is exactly what they get from the Norrköping Symphony Orchestra under Karl Heinz Steffens, for whom Sinding has become a composer close to his heart.

Jens F. Laurson

The **Norrköping Symphony Orchestra** has the reputation of being one of the most exciting orchestras in Scandinavia. German conductor Karl-Heinz Steffens is its chief conductor since 2020. Norrköping Symphony Orchestra was founded in 1912 and counts celebrities like Herbert Blomstedt and Franz Welser Möst to its former chief conductors. Through its long and rich history it maintains a special place in the region's cultural life. The orchestra's programming profile focuses on the central symphonic repertoire from Mozart to Stravinsky as well as contemporary music and Swedish/Nordic music. The orchestra's two principal venues are The Louis De Geer Concert Hall in Norrköping, and the Crusell Concert Hall in Linköping.



Now in his fifth season as Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor of the Norrköping Symphony Orchestra, German conductor **Karl-Heinz Steffens** is recognised as a conductor of great distinction in both the symphonic and operatic worlds. In great demand as a guest conductor, recent seasons have seen Steffens work with ensembles such as the Bavarian Radio Symphony, Berlin Philharmonic, Helsinki Philharmonic, Israel Philharmonic, Munich Philharmonic, Orchestre National de Lyon, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, Toronto Symphony and Zurich Tonhalle Orchestras and with the Radio Symphony Orchestras of Berlin, Cologne, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Hannover, Leipzig and Stuttgart. He is also a frequent visitor to the UK, making multiple appearances with the Philharmonia with whom he conducted a Brahms cycle in the Royal Festival Hall, as well as the BBC Scottish Symphony, Bournemouth Symphony, City of Birmingham Symphony and the Hallé Orchestra.

He recently relinquished his post as Music Director at the Prague State Opera, where productions included *Der fliegende Holländer* and Schreker's *Der ferne Klang*, amongst others. Elsewhere in the opera house, Steffens has appeared several times at the Teatro alla Scala leading performances of *Così fan Tutte*, *Don Giovanni*, and *Götterdämmerung*, and has been

regularly invited to the Berlin Staatsoper Unter den Linden. He led the Norwegian premiere of *Pelléas et Mélisande* at the Norwegian National Opera where he has also conducted *Così fan tutte*, *Fidelio* and Calixto Bieito's production of *Tosca*.

In his previous position as Music Director of the Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz, he and the orchestra were honoured with many accolades; they received the ECHO award for Best Orchestra in 2015 for their recording of works by B.A. Zimmermann and in 2016/17 were nominated prize-winners of the Best Concert Programme of the Season by the Deutsche Musikverlegerverband, the German Music Publishers' Association. Their recording of works by George Antheil, an addition to their extensive Modern Times series featuring an array of 20th century composers, was designated Concert Recording of the Year by the Opus Klassik awards.

Prior to his conducting career, Steffens was a highly respected solo clarinettist who also held several orchestral positions culminating in the successive posts of Principal Clarinet with the Bavarian Radio and the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestras. Steffens has recently been awarded the Bundesverdienstkreuz in Germany for his services to music.





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[5]-[7] **Symphony No. 2 in D major, Op. 83 (1907)**

COMPACT DISC 2 [78:09]

[1]-[4] **Symphony No. 3 in F major, Op. 121 (1919)**

[5]-[11] **Symphony No. 4 in E flat major, Op. 129 (1936)**

Vinter og Vår (Frost and Spring) - Rhapsody for Orchestra

Norrköping Symphony Orchestra

KARL-HEINZ STEFFENS *conductor*

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