

Duo Brillante - Engegård, Sundquist, Hansen



[Lawo Classics](#) LWC1080
Stereo/Multichannel Hybrid
Classical - Orchestral

Bottesini: Gran Duo Concertante; Grande Allegro "Alla Mendelssohn"
Svendsen: Romance for violin, Op. 26
Borgstrøm: Romance for violin, Op. 12
Wieniawski: Polonaise brillante

Arvid Engegård, violin
Knut Erik Sundquist, double bass
Norwegian Radio Orchestra
Terje Boye Hansen

"Ever since first performing Bottesini's Gran Duo Concertante in Bodin Church in Bodø, we have dreamed of recording this crazy, yet brilliant work. And when presented with the chance to use the Norwegian Radio Orchestra (KORK), Norway's most convivial orchestra, with our long-time hero and good friend Terje Boye Hansen as conductor, it was an opportunity too good to pass up.

This recording was made in the main studio of the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) over the course of a fantastic week in the autumn of 2013, and it is flavoured with some of our favourite works. Knut Erik plays Bottesini's Grande Allegro 'Alla Mendelssohn', and Arvid offers his renditions of three gems for violin and orchestra: the violin romances of Johan Svendsen and Hjalmar Borgstrøm, together with Henryk Wieniawski's Polonaise Brillante."

Review by John Miller - September 30, 2015

The Duo Brillante (or should it be Brillante?) is the name of a pair of Norwegian string players who both came from towns above Norway's Arctic Circle. They met as students in Austria in the early 1980s and became friends. Arvid Engegård (b.1963), from Bodø, at the age of 11 led his first string quartet in concerts all over Norway; he later studied violin at the Trondheim Conservatory and the Eastman School of Rochester, NY. In 2006 he founded the Engegård Quartet, which plays all over Europe and is one of Scandinavia's most sought-after chamber music ensembles.

His colleague, Knut Erik Sundquist (b.1961) is a double bass player, trained in Vienna and played principal bass with the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra until 1993, when he returned to Northern Norway to manage his international activities as soloist and chamber musician.

The Norwegian Radio Orchestra comprises highly trained classical players and is extremely versatile, as are others of its kind. Its conductor for this event (and a friend of the Duo) is Terje Boye Hansen, similarly versatile. The principal bassoonist for Norwegian National Opera, he is a guest conductor in Scandinavia and abroad, and also conducts the NNO's touring ensemble.

Terje also researches Norwegian musical history, resurrecting some fine pieces for concerts and recording. Indeed, the almost unknown Hjalmar Borgstrøm (1864-1925) is much admired by Hansen, so Borgstrøm's Romance for violin and Orchestra (track 4 on this disc) is presented here for its first recording.

Duo Brillante add a note to the booklet that this recording was made in the main studio of the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation "over the course of a fantastic week". A convivial relationship between the orchestra and the three friends appears to have contributed to a successful programme of three violin romances and two star virtuoso pieces by Giovanni Bottesini (1821-1889). Although rarely appearing in concerts these days, Bottesini's works are kept alive mostly by double bass players. As composer and virtuoso bass player, Bottesini left a stack of repertoire pieces for double bass players. His staggering technique as a player used only three strings on his double bass, rather than the usual four, thus making his skills even more impressive.

In the first two tracks, the Duo soloists present their solo credentials. Engegørd takes on Henryk Wieniawski's spectacular Polonaise Brillante no. 2 in A major. His zestful and chirpy interpretation of Wieniawski's traditional polonaise rhythm bring a truly terpsichorean feeling. The orchestra themselves obviously enjoy their own brilliant response as accompanists.

Sundquist's introductory piece is a substantial work of Bottesini, the Grande Allegro "Alla Mendelssohn" (for double bass and string orchestra), a homage to Mendelssohn from Bottesini, taking elements of Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto's first movement. Sundquist handles the virtuoso passages and cadenzas with aplomb, and his cantabile lyricism affirms the romance of Mendelssohn's concerto style. Once more the orchestral strings offer lively support, with some sweet poetic passages from the violins in particular.

The next two tracks are romances for solo violin and orchestra, with the return of Engegørd and the full orchestra. These are superbly played by all concerned, every nuance adding to the colour of these delightful pieces, ranging from tongue-in-cheek humour to tender poetry and fizzing virtuosity. Unfortunately there is a slight error in the last bars of the Borgstrøm Romance, where the solo violin has a rapt farewell cadence as an upward diminuendo scale, landing softly on a long-held high note. Unfortunately the long note isn't steady, and this might have been fixed with a replay edit.

Last in the programme is Bottesini's most famous piece, the Gran Duo Concertante for Violin, Double Bass and string orchestra. In their book introduction, the Duo refer to this piece as "crazy, yet brilliant". Presumably this refers to its precipitous technical effects, some of which are almost non-playable. This is the Duo's first recording of a work which they have played many times, and they attack it with vigour and a clarity which is noteworthy. They are fully aware of Bottesini's essentially majestic operatic writing, using drama, comedy and romanticism, as well as frequent dialogues between the two instruments, which often try to outdo each other.

It is very obvious that the recording venue was a studio (that of the Norwegian Radio Orchestra), as the sound is fairly close and a touch dry, but has a dim halo of reverberation on the 5.0 multichannel track. However, the soundstage has good depth perspective and plenty of detail, helping the articulation of sizzling runs and wide-spread arpeggio accompaniments. The orchestra has a very sharp presence and is well-balanced with the frontal soloists, and the solo instruments sound quite natural in size. A different kind of soundstage in a performance of the two Bottesini works can be heard in Channel Classic's magnificent recording 'Capriccio di Bravura', featuring Rick Stotijn, principal double bass of the Amsterdam Concertgebouw with Liza Ferschtman on violin, accompanied by the Amsterdam Sinfonietta ([Bottesini: Capriccio di Bravura - Rick Stotijn](#)). Its venue is the Concert Hall in Leiden, Netherlands, which has a wonderful ambience which enhances the richness of sound from all the instruments, particular the double basses. Stotijn relishes the depth of tone of his solo bass, in a performance of the Gran Duo which is more overtly romantic than that of the Duo Brillante.

A well-produced and executed programme which gave me much pleasure. Recommended.

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