

REVIEWS

Niklas Sivelöv

Niklas Sivelöv, Piano

Madison Piano Series, 18 September 2022

For his September 18 concert, Swedish virtuoso Niklas Sivelöv strode out in long tails and gray ascot looking not a little like a clean-shaven Beethoven. As he sat at the vintage Mason & Hamlin 1906 model AA piano, I appreciated that nod to sartorial tradition.

His concert of Bach, Beethoven, Schoenberg, Scriabin and his own compositions wove a musical thread that linked 400 years of musical styles. Each piece he played with physical passion, highlighting forceful movements by tapping his toes and heels, wincing, lunging, and raising his arms aloft.

The man is not lost in the past. He reads his music on an iPad controlled by a floor pedal, and incorporates Scriabin and Schoenberg into his own compositions.

The concert program included Beethoven's 6 Bagatelles, Op. 126, a demanding piece despite its name, with its dense harmonies and knotty rhythms, cross-hand playing, and several sustained trills that sprang airborne into flight.

Compared to that harmonic and rhythmic density, J.S. Bach's Partita No. 2 in C minor, BWV 826 sounded translucent and sparse. But not cold, as Sivelöv phrased some passages with Romantic hesitations. The left hand sometimes played counterpoint to the right, as in the two-part Inventions, then joined the right in close parallel passages.

The Partita set the mood for Arnold Schoenberg's challenging dodecaphonic Suite for Piano, op.25, with its six movements reflecting a Baroque suite. Its dissonant clusters and staccato rhythms suggested at times a scatter of birds, racing chipmunks, sometimes human speech. The resulting tensions were resolved by way of lyrical passages, dynamic contrasts, and motivic development.

Sivelöv's selection of Scriabin included preludes, etudes, and a mazurka. Following the Schoenberg, Scriabin sounded Romantically rich. The gentle swirls and clouds hinted at Debussy and Ravel; some phrasing and harmonies nodded to Chopin. Scriabin's synthesis of Russian music with French Impressionism fed into his larger project of combining all art forms into an ultimate synthesis that would lead the listener/observer into states of mystic rapture.

Sivelöv concluded with a selection from his composition, 24 Preludes (2010–14). One noted the influence of jazz pianists like Cecil Taylor and Keith Jarrett, along with tokens from Schoenberg (clusters and sprinkles) and Beethoven (extended trills, dramatic pauses) and (!) Jerry Lee Lewis (swipes across the entire keyboard and heavy forearm clusters).

A lengthy standing ovation inspired an encore, a wistful reading of a Swedish folk song, whose pastel lyricism recalled Debussy by way of pianist Bill Evans.

Kudos to Sivelöv for an untiring virtuosic performance, and for programming such challenging works by Schoenberg, which the audience clearly enjoyed.

How privileged we are to witness such talent.

– Paul Baker

Sivelöv at the Schönberg Centre, Vienna, 17 May 2022

I have never heard Schönberg played with so much elegance, 'Schwung' – a favourite word of Sibelius, which he often used in his diaries – and delicate touch. His whole recital was impressive – unobtrusively educational by constructing an arc from Bach to his great compatriot Anders Eliasson, for whom Bach was 'almost a god', detecting almost jazzy passages in his early work *Disegno*, and finally, both surprisingly and convincingly, linking Schönberg to sensual Scriabin – and whetting everybody's appetite by playing some of his very own preludes.

– Peter Kislinger, ORF

Stenhammar Concertos nos. 1 and 2

Niklas Sivelöv negotiates the torrents of octaves and other rhetorical gestures with aplomb.

– Jeremy Nicholas, *Gramophone*, 1 February 2012

Borås with the Beethoven Concerto No. 4:

A magical evening

It was a fantastic event when Borås was visited by the piano virtuoso Niklas Sivelöv, who performs worldwide.

The evening's concerto – Beethoven's Fourth – began with a solitary piano, careful, searching... The orchestra responded in due time with the same friendly, restrained timbre, but gained in strength.

It was a magnificent introduction provided by the conductor Joachim Gustafsson and the soloist Niklas Sivelöv. The latter is an internationally renowned pianist, as well as being a composer and professor at the Royal Danish Academy of Music.

This concerto is considered one of the central works in the history of piano concertos, admired for its richness of variety and nuance. It has an additional prominent feature that cannot be ignored, namely the ambition to establish an ongoing dialogue between the solo piano and the orchestra. This quality was clearly revealed in all the participants' handling of the work.

In the calmer parts, the conversation between Sivelöv and the orchestra created some incredibly beautiful music. The soft parts, however, do not last long. Suddenly, restraint is replaced by the furious pace of Sivelöv's formidable runs across the keyboard.

The remaining two movements are diametric opposites of each other. The second movement is a minor-key landscape that Sivelöv convincingly conveyed. The third movement turns from melancholy into a faster, joyous tempo, with fireworks of piano runs, variations, nuances...

Niklas Sivelöv's concert gave an unequivocal message not only about his virtuoso talent but also his ability to be sensitive to new interpretations. Not unexpectedly, this generous musician offered the kind of encore that is something of a specialty for him, namely free improvisations on the piano.

– Bo W. Jonsson, *Borås Tidning*

German premiere of *The Unchanging Sea* by Michael Gordon

MDR Leipzig Radio Symphony Orchestra / Kristijan Järvi (Gewandhaus, Leipzig, 2018)

The melodies in the piano built up to a turbulent culmination using all the strength of the instrument. The strings gently led the initial piano chords back to familiar ground, helping Sivelöv to return to a safe harbour.

– Paul Schuler, *LUHZE*, 20 January 2018

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra / Sakari Oramo in Stockholm, 2016

For the performance of Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy's Piano Concerto no.1 (1831), Niklas Sivelöv took the stage. The work, written by a newly in love Mendelssohn, is full of energy and joy, and the orchestra and the soloist performed it intensively but clearly and precisely. Sivelöv made a convincing display of utmost virtuosity and lightness combined.

– Jenny B., *Kulturdelen.blog*, 16 September 2016

Bach – Beethoven – Scriabin – Bartók

LeFrak Concert Hall, Queens College, 24 September 2018

Wonders never cease! Here is a Swedish pianist (also composer) who has been completely off my radar; indeed, even Google does not tell you much. And yet, this is one of the best piano recitals I have heard.

Right from the declamatory start of the Bach Partita no.2 one knows this is a pianist of substance. Dramatic, finely spun, yet with nothing forced (an absolute no-no in Bach for me), the opening set the tone for the piece. The dance rhythms are naturally rendered, yet at times spontaneous and almost jazzy. The counterpoints and the balance between the two hands are always perfect. This is Bach playing of the highest order, and I have never heard better, live or on record.

The Beethoven op.111 is equally awesome, opening also in a dramatic declaration. Sivelov's excellent technique ensures there is no ugly struggle, yet the uncommonly inventive music is deeply probed and hugely satisfying. The program I have to say is highly intelligent, and his playing makes us aware of the dance and jazzy elements common to both pieces. Bravo!

After a brief intermission, Sivelov plays a group of Scriabin, Sonata-Fantasy no.2, *Deux Morceaux* (opp. 57 and 59), and *Feuillet d'album*, op.58. which are all rendered with the utmost color; the sometimes abruptly shifting vistas always sound interesting and never drifting, as they can be in lesser hands. The last piece was a stirring account of Bartok's Sonata. As before, Sivelov's rhythmic command is unassailable.

The pianist is a bit of an eccentric (perhaps that accounts for his obscurity). His soft shoes do not go with his tux, but one understands why he wears them, as he is prone to tap on the floor. Even more unusually, he vocalizes extensively, but the sounds are not the usual sing-along type (Glenn Gould), nor moaning (Keith Jarrett), rather hoarser and closer to hissing and forceful exhalation. These antics can be distracting, but I'd gladly put up with them when the playing is on such lofty grounds.

This was a free lunch time recital on campus; the small LeFrak Hall is beautiful and cosy, and acoustically excellent. The program is going to be repeated at Town Hall today (also free); I almost feel like going again.

– Doctorjohn, 26 September 2018

An Extrovert's Brisk Dance Through Bach's Arpeggios

Bargemusic Series, 7 January 2010

Mr. Sivelöv approached Book 1 without an apparent agenda: unlike Richard Egarr, whose harpsichord performance at Weill Recital Hall in 2008 explored relatively recent theories about what 'well-tempered' tuning meant to Bach, Mr. Sivelöv played the work on the piano, in the standard modern tuning.

And unlike Daniel Barenboim, who seemed intent on giving each piece a distinct, personalized orchestration when he played the set at Carnegie Hall in 2007, Mr. Sivelöv offered a unified view and varied his timbre and dynamics only subtly.

Mostly, he favored brisk tempos, bright timbres and a clean if sometimes weighty sound. You could question his speediness at times: in the opening C major Prelude, he played the arpeggiated figures so quickly that the lingering overtones made them sound almost like solid chords. Yet here and in several other unusually quick readings, he let the top notes in each arpeggio ring out clearly to create a graceful, floating melody. And particularly in the fugues, he maintained a remarkable transparency of texture.

At times — in the outgoing E major and G major preludes and fugues, for example — he leaned into the music almost like a jazz pianist, tapping his left foot quickly to a rhythm from within Bach's dense contrapuntal texture. But though extroversion was clearly Mr. Sivelöv's preferred mode, he was sensitive to Bach's darker moods as well: his calm, supple performance of the D sharp minor Fugue and the organlike sound he brought to the stormy, chromatic Prelude and Fugue in A minor were among the highlights of his performance.

– Alan Kozinn, *New York Times*, 7 January 2013

Bach and Beethoven

The keyboard of Sthens Church's fine Steinway piano was this afternoon in the hands of one of the greatest pianists in Denmark – Niklas Sivelöv, professor at the Royal Danish Academy of Music. His program was awe-inspiring; two of Beethoven's last sonatas, opp. 109 and 111, and Bach's Partitas nos. 2 and 3.

One gets the impression that Sivelöv can do anything on a piano. His technique is formidable, the fast tempi are perhaps a notch too fast, but it never affects his secure playing. His touch is firm, so each note stands chiselled, but he can also catch the soft and expressive in a movement. He is a man of contrasts.

The Beethoven sonatas are monumental pieces, they are the capstones of his sonata production, and can be seen as a farewell to a genre in which he has made more of an impact than any other composer. Niklas Sivelöv gave the sonatas life and radiance with his personal interpretation of the music.

Bach's partitas belong in another world. They are not less demanding than Beethoven, but they require a different approach. Instead of feelings it is the pulse of the music that dominates.

It was a wonderful concert with music by the two great Bs, Bach and Beethoven.

– Ole Josephsen, *Helsingør Dagblad*, 9 November 2015

THE SWEDE SET THE PIANO ON FIRE!

Stenhammar at the Tivoli Concert Hall

My goodness, what a pianist the Royal Danish Conservatory piano professor is. Forget about dusty professor fingers. This Swede is an artist with a capital A! That Sivelöv this evening in Tivoli also showed us his technical capacity and his romantic-virtuoso sense of style with warmth, strength and, at the same time, soft and fascinating pianistic way of extracting sound from the Steinway piano made the experience of hearing the piano part in Wilhelm Stenhammar's piano concerto into something that alone had deserved top marks.

– Thomas Michelsen, *Politiken*, 15 June 2014

IRRESISTIBLE (UN)PROFESSORIAL COMBINATIONS

The cellist Leonid Gorokhov and the Swedish pianist Niklas Sivelöv together with their first sure-to-be-a-hit CD

The two consummate musicians play music of 200 years by five composers from four countries and two continents. They begin with Bach and continue with Schumann and Poulenc. They finish this cleverly combined, indeed composed, program that emphasises their individual strengths with Schnittke and Villa-Lobos.

The two musicians are similar in that they each hold a professorship: the Russian-born Briton Leo Gorokhov at the Guildhall School of Music in London and also at the University for Music and Theatre in Hannover, and the Swedish Sivelöv at the Royal Danish Academy of Music in Copenhagen. Above all, however, both are convinced that precision and faithfulness to the written music do not suffocate the making of music 'in the moment' but rather allow it to unfold.

The only downside: after almost 60 minutes the enormous listening pleasure has unfortunately come to an end. Consolation and advice: After the breathtakingly beautifully arranged and affecting 'Valsa da Dor' by Villa-Lobos, head straight for the first number. There just remains the hope that the professors will play together again soon.

– Peter Kislinger, ORF

Stenhammar – Tivoli Concert Hall

It is said that Stenhammar was a piano virtuoso of international class, but he did not care to travel and live out of a suitcase. He settled in Gothenburg, transformed the city orchestra into an elite ensemble and stayed there until his death in 1927.

Is that why nobody knows his ambitious concertos for piano and orchestra? Niklas fortunately does. He has even recorded them with the orchestra in Malmö a few years ago. And when one has heard him play no.2 on a Thursday in Tivoli, one does not easily forget it. Sivelöv is a Swedish professor at the Royal Danish Music Conservatory and is an artist of Stenhammar's kind.

He is partly virtuoso: Quiet passages are heavenly poetic in his hands, fast passages slick as eels, powerful sections quite Russian and without any filter.

He is equally creative. When he thanked the audience for their even, rhythmic applause it was with an encore of his own. He began with five seconds of romance *à la* Schumann and continued with improvisations *à la* Keith Jarrett.

– Søren Schauser, *Berlingske*, 15 June 2013

Exotic Soloist

Niklas Sivelöv, a world-renowned Scandinavian pianist who has won numerous awards and distinctions over the years including the Diapason d'Or and a Cannes nomination for best twentieth century recording, performed last Tuesday at the Newman Center to students and the public.

Despite the snowy conditions, the event gathered sixty people to the Frederic C. Hamilton Family Recital Hall where Sivelöv demonstrated his music expertise through a unique performance with style and amazing skill.

Sivelöv played a standard set of works by European composers; however, his recital was anything but standard. Mixed with emotion and movement, Sivelöv's love for the music was evident each time his fingers touched the keys and throughout his hour-and-a-half-long performance, Sivelöv kept the audience spellbound.

The majority of the audience had been respectfully refraining from clapping until after each song was complete; however, the standing ovation at the end proved he had wowed the crowd.

– *The Clarion*, 16 April 2013 [Denver, Colorado]

Drama

Drama was also offered in what was really, although not nominally, the central piece of the evening: the revival of Niklas Sivelöv's piano concerto. This piece is a volcanically rushing collection of artistic outbursts – at one point virtuosic verging on Rachmaninov, at the next point grandiose like Copland, at the next again swinging hard like Kapustin and all the time Sivelöv-like, turning everything upside down inventively.

As soloist Sivelöv stormed the keys in veritable cascades in a part that (including a lot of improvisations) if it were unaccompanied would be a piece in its own right. The ample and extremely responsive work of the orchestra acted like a beautiful edifice to this musical monumental building. Also the encore, the first movement of Beethoven's 30th Piano Sonata, had some small Sivelöv signatures.

– Fredrik Fischer, *Helsingborgs Dagblad*, 25 March 2013

Formidable

On this disc one can compare two different styles in Stenhammar's work. The first concerto is late Romantic and highly influenced by Brahms. The second and better concerto is from a different period and with a more personal style, which is reminiscent of one of Liszt's Adagios. In order to perform and interpret both pieces it is necessary to have a pianist who can take on great challenges, as the degree of technical and expressive difficulty is very high. Sivelöv is formidable in both concertos; extremely virtuosic in the *Moderato* movement in the second concerto and intense in the first concerto's *Maestoso* movement. Overall, he is constantly convincing and communicative. The Swede is brilliantly accompanied by the Malmö Symphony Orchestra and it is presented as a serious and enthusiastic piece of work. Venzago extracts the best from soloist and orchestra and he conducts with the passion that is essential for this kind of music. The CD is – particularly in the light of Sivelöv's performance – to be recommended to those who have a special passion for Romantic piano concertos.

– *Ritmo*, 1 April 2012

Luxurious and Sparkling

Here is a possible pub quiz question from Stockholm: Which is the most often played Swedish piano concerto?

That would be the Piano Concerto no.2 in D minor by Wilhelm Stenhammar (1871–1927). Exactly. Almost everyone knows the national composers of Norway (Grieg), Finland (Sibelius) and Denmark (Nielsen), but Sweden calls for some head-scratching. Stenhammar probably comes closest to that designation, but it is his solid Germanic musical training from Berlin, often untouched by folk influences, that makes him somewhat less distinctive. Both of his piano concertos are, however, totally enjoyable examples of Romantic piano writing.

The shorter Concerto no.2 of 1908 unusually begins with a solo introduction by the piano (as in Beethoven's Fourth and Rachmaninov's Second), which is never heard again (as in Tchaikovsky's First). Its movements play without a break (like Liszt's) but contain memorable moments and melodies, including a romping finale with Schumannesque themes. The four-movement Concerto no.1 in B flat minor of 1893 plays for a monumental 42 minutes. The influence is clearly Brahms's Second Concerto, but Stenhammar does not slavishly copy. There is enough individuality and wealth of ideas to sustain its length. The slow movement radiates beauty and warmth, before the work closes with an almost folksy lightness. Swedish pianist Niklas Sivelöv breathes a blend of lyricism and virtuosity that makes the music luxuriate and sparkle.

This is the only combination of both concertos at budget price, a must for lovers of Romantic concertos.

– Chang Tou Liang, *Pianomania*, 1 December 2012

Stenhammar

★★★★★

It is possible to find real treasures amongst Naxos's many releases, such as Malmö Symphony Orchestra's recording of Wilhelm Stenhammar's two piano concertos with Niklas Sivelöv as the adventurous soloist. It is without doubt the piano professor and not the conductor Mario Venzago who is in command in this recording. And when someone like Sivelöv has performed *Ice Piano* (Fredrik Högberg) he has apparently no fear of venturing out on the ice in Stenhammar – without slipping.

– Johanna Paulsson, *Opus Magazine*, 1 December 2012

Evocative Despite the Burning Piano

Fredrik Högberg's *Ice Concerto* is written for the world-class pianist Niklas Sivelöv, native of Skellefteå, music professor in Copenhagen and one of the few Swedes who has won an award at the prestigious American Independent Music Awards, in the category Classical Album of the Year. Högberg and Sivelöv work very well together – they seem to share the same spirit and they also have the same kind of insubordinate playfulness. With an impressive fearlessness Sivelöv finds his way through Högberg's musical world with an expression and presence that is felt here and now; co-creator and at the same time a technically brilliant soloist.

– Elin Axelsson, *Folkbladet*, 24 November 2012

Plays with Warmth and Spontaneity

Norrlands Operan has again commissioned a new piece and the premiere of Fredrik Höberg's multimedia concerto *Ice Concerto* took place last night. The Swedish world-class pianist Niklas Sivelöv was soloist ... N. Sivelöv's brilliant and sensational playing of the very advanced solo part cannot be praised enough. Here were eruptive cascades, rhythmical long and intensive lines and sensitive rippling playing to impress the most demanding audience. It was a formidable development in one of our most well-known international pianists.

– *Västerbottens-Kuriren*, 23 November 2012

Wide-Ranging Piano

The Swedish pianist Niklas Sivelöv is a musician who loves contrasts. His fondness for contrasts combined with a dazzling technique and a precise touch enables him to tackle the most hair-raising musical challenges, as we were allowed to hear Wednesday evening. His address to the audience explaining the connection between Bach on one hand and the pieces by Liszt, Beethoven and Bartók on the other could not explain away the intense tension emerging between Bach/Liszt before the interval and Beethoven/Bartók after.

Bach's C minor Partita is a marvellous piece containing great contrasts. Sivelöv used his tremendous technical surplus to draw up sharp contrasts already in the introductory parts of the sinfonia, and with his perfect touch he carefully shaped the character of each particular movement; the beautiful melodic duets in the allemande and sarabande, the playful, delicate flow in the courante, and the springy, dancing rhythm in the rondeau and capriccio. Bach's music as structure but also movement and dance.

The contrast to Liszt's *Années de pèlerinage* was marked. The seven movements cast in an orchestral tonal language were light years from Bach's melodic lines. But Sivelöv also masters this challenge to perfection, to shape the sound of the piano as if it were an organic, pliable material and at the same time find the melodic core, which focuses on the musical course. Beethoven's late sonata in E major combines these two approaches as an intense drama in the two first movements and with an unearthly beautiful melodic song in the third movement's theme with variations. This late Beethovenish balance we have also heard previously demonstrated by Sivelöv in the last great sonata in C Minor.

And then there was time for the last somersault of the evening with Bartók's great sonata from 1926. Here Sivelöv chiselled and shaped the first movement into a percussion orchestra – as a 'Sacre' movement for piano, while the second movement stood fragmented in its strange awkward tonal shapes. The last movement was a fireworks of percussive effects that hung in the air at the end like gunsmoke.

With an encore, two Argentinian dances by Ginastera, the world that Bartók had split to atoms was again united into a whole. But only for an instant, until Sivelöv ended a spectacular evening with a final exuberant, pulsing movement.

– Tore Mortensen, *Nordjyske Stiftstidende*, 21 September 2012

Startling

My main and favourite Naxos recommendation is Niklas Sivelöv's startling new interpretation of Stenhammar's Second Piano Concerto with Mario Venzago and the Malmö Symphony Orchestra. It is thus far the most inspiring and beautiful piano music by a Swedish composer.

– Martin Nyström, *Dagens Nyheter*, 9 December 2011

Absolutely Superb

Listening to this instantly appealing and well-crafted music put a query in my head. I wondered how many times one of Sweden's greatest composers had been performed at the self-styled 'World's Greatest Classical Music Festival' – the BBC Proms. The answer – in over 100 years – might surprise: seven pieces.

Although there is competition on record for this music – I have not heard the recent Hyperion disc in their Romantic Piano Concerto series – at the Naxos price advantage and deploying the idiomatic and ever excellent Malmö Symphony Orchestra, this is a winner. Soloist Niklas Sivelöv has a Stenhammar pedigree, having recorded a solo recital disc of the composer, also on Naxos.

Naxos places the larger sprawling Piano Concerto no.1, op.1 second on the disc. Sivelöv makes a very convincing and muscular case for the work. Certainly, by taking a good five minutes less time than Mats Widlund on Chandos (an epic 47:18) he (Sivelöv) minimises the discursive elements in the work. I have not heard the Brilliant/BIS First Concerto but this current recording's Second Concerto is considerably finer than Cristina Ortiz's performance. Simply put, Sivelöv has a more impressive technique. This is most clear in the quicksilver scherzo which is interpolated into the first movement proper. Here the kinship with Rachmaninov in general and the Rhapsody on a theme of Paganini in particular stands out. Important to note though that the Stenhammar is the earlier work by some twenty-seven years. Sivelöv is absolutely superb here; all fleet gossamer passage-work and dextrous cross-rhythms. Conductor Mario Venzago is totally at home in this idiom and the Malmö orchestra sounds very fine. [...]

For all lovers of Romantic piano concertos this disc will bring great pleasure.

– Nick Barnard, *MusicWeb International*, 21 December 2011

Not All Black and White

One can certainly sense more than black and white – even red – in Wilhelm Stenhammar's dramatic and emotional piano concertos. It becomes especially apparent with the dynamically gifted Niklas Sivelöv at the piano and Mario Venzago conducting the excellent Malmö Symphony Orchestra. [...]

– Björn G. Stenberg, *Upsala Nya Tidning*, 9 December 2011

Great Playing by Piano Professor

The first piece was Bach's Partita no.2 with its characteristic dances, followed by Beethoven's richly varied Sonata no.30. Liszt, who was recognised by his peers for his advanced musical ideas and technique, opened the second half of the concert with *Année de pèlerinage, livre 1*, with freshness and full power. Bartok's Sonata, with its driving rhythms and fantasies, ended the concert. The pianist, composer and professor made full use of everything the pieces demanded and displayed it with advanced interpretation and technique. The encore was his improvisation on a song by Bellman.

– Uno Uudelepp, *Helsingborg Dagblad*, 29 May 2012

Fratres [Brothers]

This is the title of the famous piece by Pärt that has given its title to the recital with Polish violinist Szymon Krzeszowiec and Swedish pianist Niklas Siveløv, whose narrative abilities allow the piece to develop naturally. In the beginning of the program the two musicians show an attractive sense of humour in 'L'introduzione' from the *Pulcinella* transcription, and equally the elegance that concludes the cycle.

The final fugue in the Reger was perfect, with clear polyphony and cohesion between the two artists. Also containing a fugal episode, the suite by Alfred Schnittke that followed was interpreted with a character that went far beyond the Baroque prettiness in the opening *Pastorale*. A CD that comes to us as a fresh breath of air.

– Nicolas Deryn, *ResMusica*, 26 March 2012

Satisfying with a great drive

Convincing master concert of Scandinavian works at the Konzerthaus

Only a few people in Germany will be familiar with the Swedish composer Wilhelm Stenhammar; yet his second piano concerto in D minor, op.23 is absolutely worth discovering. Just as fascinating as Stenhammar is his compatriot Niklas Sivelöv, who has released both piano concertos on CD. They [Staatsorchester Rheinische Philharmonie under Garry Walker] have made an excellent choice in the Swedish pianist, who has considerable success as a composer as well, and feels comfortable with both classical music and jazz. Sivelöv dives deeply into Stenhammar's work. His stupendous technique, virtuoso dexterity and vivid articulation even in the fastest runs are remarkable. But what makes it truly exceptional is the level of his immersion. More than just playing the music, he lives through it intensely and functions as both an impulse giver and a catalyst for the orchestra. Thus soloist and orchestra inspire each other to peak performance, which was rewarded with standing ovations by the audience and an improvised encore by Sivelöv. 'A little folklore, a little Debussy, a little Keith Jarrett', he commented about it after the concert.

– Elisa Reznicek, *Badische Neueste Nachrichten*, 26 February 2018

The Finest Performance

These wonderful recordings of Stenhammar's piano concertos make a superb introduction to his music, too much of which is unfamiliar outside his native Sweden. The Second Concerto (1908) is a masterpiece; the First (1894) isn't quite. Both try to negotiate between the perceived polarities of Liszt's and Wagner's experimental chromaticism on the one hand and Brahms's tempered Romanticism on the other. While Stenhammar's colossal First Concerto expands on Brahms's symphonic technique, the tense, if extraordinarily beautiful, Second uses Lisztian cyclic structures to constrain its complex material within a single musical span. Stenhammar specialist Niklas Sivelöv plays them in a no-holds-barred, high-Romantic way, while the Malmö Symphony under Mario Venzago is tremendous. Some might prefer the harder edge and comparative detachment of Seta Tanyel with the Helsingborg Symphony and Andrew Manze on Hyperion. But it's hard not to be swept away by the Naxos disc, and the performance of the First Concerto is the finest I know.

– Tim Ashley, *The Guardian*, 10 November 2011

Second to None

The two concertos are moving, and under Venzago's baton never exaggerated.

Sivelöv's elegant flight over the deep and dark expanses reminds one that an inheritance from Wagner can also be transformed into sensitive melancholy.

And with a perceptive Sivelöv at the keyboard, one is constantly reminded how much there was at stake for the elegant Swedish composer who assigned an opus number to only 45 works.

One cannot find a better performance of these concertos.

– Jens Povlsen, *Musikguide*, 2 February 2012

Sparklingly Clear Steinway

Rarely does one hear piano works presented so sparklingly clearly as with Swedish pianist Niklas Sivelöv, placed solidly at the wonderful Steinway grand piano in Tøjhuset.

The Steinway blossomed superbly under Sivelöv's command. Never have I heard the piano sound so splendid and deeply appealing as last night. Sivelöv is of course represented in Steinway's Hall of Fame in Hamburg, together with pianists such as Rubinstein, Horowitz, Glenn Gould and Barenboim.

Sivelöv's playing is generous. He offers strength and vision in his playing. He interprets formidably and is sure to have his audience with him at all times. The music stands fresh and new in the room as though it is created here and now for listener and artist at the same time. Of the material Francis Poulenc's and Ginastera's pieces are made of, Niklas Sivelöv created musical *haute couture*, which made the listener sit up and prick up one's ears. His interpretations are a must: commanding in expression and imperative in content.

He had not made it easy for himself. All pieces on the programme were extremely demanding. Artful canonic voices in Bach's A minor Partita paired with strong rhythmical explosions in the corrente and the three last movements, where rhythm and harmony enchant. Fantastic.

The piano sounded quite different in Schumann's G minor sonata with the lovely and intensely romantic *andante* movement given voice by Sivelöv. Many pianists make Schumann muddy, but this could never happen for Sivelöv. His playing is cleansed of the unnecessary and his ability to portray the music is clear.

Poulenc's *Soirées de Nazelles* suited Sivelöv's knife-sharp and analytical playing superbly. Poulenc waves his wand within the neoclassical language and Sivelöv is a more than alert interpreter. Again the artist's ability to shape the many motifs did big things to the music. The movements stood delineated energetic and clear in time and space.

Ginastera's Argentinian Dances are inspired by folklore and were a beautiful conclusion to the evening's program and gave yet again a display of Sivelöv's impressive art of interpretation. One left the concert deeply moved with the sound of the encore – his improvisation on a song by Bellman in one's ears.

Unexpectedly, I managed to thank him very, very much. He replied with a smile and a nod. High class.

– Lars Zachariassen, *Fredericia Dagblad*, 28 January 2011

Catching

And although the young Prokofiev's piano test piece [Concerto no.1] has intense passages of simple melancholy, the phrases teetered on the border of ironic comments on the Romantic piano concertos of the past.

Niklas Sivelöv knew all about the complexity in the music and therefore his interpretation of the 15-minute-long piece was both impressive and captivating. He changed between – with highly contrasted tempi – lyric melody, extreme climaxes and small quaint motifs reminiscent of honky-tonk with the greatest ease. Sivelöv is a special personality with a large musical heart, and when he embraces the music with all he has got, wild things happen.

In fact, Sivelöv's attractive playing made it difficult to concentrate on the role of the orchestra, but the passages I heard were very musical and supple.

– Henrik Friis, *Politiken*, 28 March 2011

Cleanly Defined and Pleasing

Though composition had to take second place to a performing career as a pianist and conductor, Wilhelm Stenhammar left to the world two fine piano concertos. [...]

I think I have heard all the recorded performances of both works, and would certainly place this one from Niklas Sivelöv as my recommendation. He goes deep into both scores, with every dynamic and rhythmic nuance keenly observed. He also has the most persuasive partners in the Malmö Symphony and Mario Venzago, and if the recorded sound needed more air around it, it is cleanly defined and pleasing.

– David Denton, David's Review Corner, Naxos.com, 1 November 2011

Pianistic Abundance

Certainly Sivelöv is an intelligent artist. but the way he makes music is intelligent use of emotions more than of science. Here is no cold or mechanic exactness. Here is music to be expressed and a man who is completely absorbed in the execution.

The program consisted of excerpts of Bach's *Wohltemperierte Klavier* that Sivelöv performed in a quiet, meditative state and it seemed like a preparation for Schumann that followed. Schumann's second piano sonata is a journey in hopelessness and darkness of the soul. Sivelöv's emphatic interpretation of this emotional as well as technical mountain climb seemed to be a creation of the moment. Schumann's angst flowed from Sivelöv's hands.

After the interval came another challenge: Three Petrarca sonettes from Liszt's *Anées de pèlerinage*. With the imprint of the Schumann sonata in one's mind it was impressive to hear Sivelöv transform so effortlessly to Liszt's light love odes. Sivelöv's own improvisations on themes by Bellman came next, and Sivelöv used his extensive knowledge of all styles from baroque to jazz and rock.

Alberto Ginastera's Argentine dances ended the concert, and this is a piece where the rhythm holds the main attention. Again Sivelöv mastered the music completely and one could only follow his example and give in to the music.

– *Ystads Allehanda*, 26 September 2011

A Sonorous Ebb and Flow

Niklas Sivelöv: Schumann: Piano Sonatas (A Records / Danacord)

The piano professor Niklas Sivelöv has compared the music soloist to an enormous antenna through which sound waves seek their auditor.

Maybe you could also talk about a sonorous ebb and flow. At least, in this 200th anniversary year, when we are talking about his interpretations of Robert Schumann's three piano sonatas from the 1830s, which deal with the manic-depressive tendencies of Schumann's music. Schumann's romantic piano music prefers to follow the logic of poetry and reflects the composer's alter egos Florestan (a lively character) and Eusebius (a dreamer).

Schizophrenic moods that Sivelöv controls on the border between restlessness and reflection. Especially when the time signature in the second sonata builds up to a lightning speed, with the first movement played in evanescent yet thoughtful haste.

– Johanna Paulsson, *Dagens Nyheter*, 30 June 2010

Great Scriabin

I am becoming increasingly fond of the Caprice label, both in its new issues and historic reissues. This is one of the former, an album recorded in 2005 by Swedish pianist Niklas Sivelöv. Except for *Vers la flamme*, *Feuillet d'album*, the op.57 *Morceaux* and the Sonata no.4, most of this program consists of earlier works by Scriabin. Sivelöv's mission is to show the connections between the earlier works and the later ones, to display, as he puts it in the liner notes, the way in which Scriabin interrupted his lyric moods with emotional outbursts that didn't quite fit in. In this, he succeeds handsomely.

Sivelöv's playing is direct, crisp, and fiery. He takes no prisoners in his forthright approach to the music. Nevertheless, I must disagree with some of his tempos and phrasing. None of the slow preludes in the op.11 set is really slow; *lentos* are turned into *andantinos*, *andantes* into *moderatos*, *andantinos* into *prestos*. Comparing him not only with Mikhail Pletnev in his acclaimed set of the complete op.11 (Virgin Classics 45247), or even another abridged recording of the op.11 by Mayron Tsong (Centaur 2946), I found their slower, legato approach more congenial to music that was clearly inspired by Chopin. Ruth Laredo, who recorded what must be considered one of the definitive sets of the complete Scriabin sonatas way back in 1970, points out that as a piano student Scriabin was criticized for his 'ethereal' playing, and in those years he slept with a copy of Chopin's preludes under his pillow. Of course, his aesthetic and musical approach underwent a tremendous metamorphosis around the turn of the 20th century, and his own 1910 performance of the Étude, op.8 no.12 (also played on this recital by Sivelöv), recorded as a Welte-Mignon piano roll, certainly reveals an approach much closer to the Swedish pianist than to Pletnev or Tsong, but his phrasing is more legato. My point is that both interpretations are valid, and that I prefer a little more backing-off in some of these early works.

And yet Sivelöv certainly does make Scriabin's music on this CD, spanning almost the full chronology of his piano output, sound convincingly of a piece. It is as far from the ethereal Scriabin of 1890 as one could possibly get. I've often wondered where Scriabin may have gone musically had he lived to finish *Misterium*, and of course we'll never know, but Sivelöv's musical and philosophical approach to his music will certainly hold your attention. I personally rank this as one of the great Scriabin issues of all time, despite my caveats.

– Lynn René Bayley, *Fanfare*, 1 July 2010

Poetry and Turmoil

Sivelöv's program consisted of both classical works by Bach and Scriabin as well as contemporary pieces, among these a few of his Sivelöv's own compositions.

At the beginning, he played one of Bach's preludes and fugues from the *The Well-Tempered Klavier*. He played the prelude particularly well, expressing his great musicality, and in the fugue he expressed his poetic sense.

Sivelöv's interpretation of the sonata by Haydn was intensely present and a very moving mixture of extroversion and the kind of thoughtfulness that only comes with true life experience.

With Schumann's great suite *Kreisleriana*, Sivelöv expressed the side of himself he is most famous for: being a virtuoso pianist. His interpretation of the piece was true to the work, but it was less poetic and less delicate. Instead of emphasising the sophisticated nuances, he emphasised the dramatic contrasts between fear, suffering, inner turmoil and the temporary moments of happiness. This interpretation of *Kreisleriana* gave the audience the impression of a man who was haunted by his destiny.

In the Sonata no.1 from 1952 by the Argentinian composer Alberto Ginastera, Sivelöv unfolded his fantastic technique in an explosion of rhythms and sounds in continuous movement.

The encore was an improvisation on a Swedish piece, which served as a good example of Sivelöv's personality. It was music created in the moment, including an explosive and brilliant vitality as well as a poetic tone and sense of melancholy from the large and deserted forests – a very typical expression in Swedish folk music.

– *Amtsavisen*, 4 October 2010

Niklas Sivelöv Masters the Poetic Logic

Niklas Sivelöv has specialised in Schumann and salutes him with strong interpretations of the three sonatas from the 1830s. Pure piano romance closer to Beethoven than Chopin – and closest to the composer himself in the splintered flow of ideas and melodies that was Schumann's sorcerer's brew. A classic analyst of form does not find convincing regularity in Schumann. Here it is the poetic logic in the centre: the playing in contrasts, the abrupt change of feelings. Sivelöv masters this. The tones cascade forward or rest in meditating depths. A fairy tale, a bath in beauty, new views and pleasure awaits the alert listener.

– Carlhåkan Larsén, *Sydsvenskan*, 19 May 2010

Star Pianist Gives Glory to Old Church

The venerable Gustav Adolf Church has found a new purpose. The first concert in the refurbished church brought a real star from the classical music scene. Swedish pianist Niklas Sivelöv was the highlight of the concert series.

He offered an ambitious programme, which he performed with maximum passion and concentration: 24 Preludes and Fugues from Bach's *Wohltemperiertes Klavier* II. Facial expression and gestures betrayed his engrossment. His playing showed his open and sincere understanding of music.

– Katrin Kandula, *Ruhr Nachrichten*, 14 December 2009

Great Pianist

What a pianist. Here is unquestionably a pianistic genius with a touch that functions like a finely controlled tool of precision, which for Sivelöv is not a goal in itself, but a tool to shape the music exactly as he wants it.

Following Scarlatti's clear and pure sonatas, simple and unaffected in expression and character, was Beethoven's very last sonata, which features the great contrast between the two movements; in the first the battle with the substance and violent dynamic detonations set opposite the second movement's expansive variations over one of the most beautiful themes in the history of music. The sonata is a tremendous challenge for all pianists, but with Sivelöv playing, the structure and the extreme range of dynamics stood out with crystalline clarity. And the elderly piano sounded like an almost new Steinway – so much can be accomplished by a great pianist in control of his touch.

Sivelöv's own suite in three movements, 'In modo classico', is composed with small twists, crooked quotations inlaid with irony in the technically brilliant passages.

But it was Schumann's great sonata in four movements, 'Concert sans orchestre', that won the evening. That the restless and thick texture was portrayed with such clarity was no less than a pianistic *tour de force* that was bewitching.

Sivelöv's encore with his own variations on a Swedish folk song were spellbinding and poetic, like sun glittering over a Swedish forest lake.

– *Nordjyske Stiftstidene*, 15 December 2008

Tremendous Musical Surplus

Niklas Sivelöv delivered an intense experience together with the Aarhus Symphony Orchestra.

Both arms and legs came into use when the Swedish piano athlete and professor at the Royal Music Academy Copenhagen appeared as soloist with the Aarhus Symphony Orchestra for the first time. The 40-year-old Sivelöv is a sparkling bundle of energy with a brilliant technical and musical surplus, which he unfolded in a unique, fiery and very personal interpretation of Beethoven Fourth Piano Concerto. His marvellous touch and perfect control of the dynamics were remarkable. With emotional involvement he led us far around in the spectrum of emotions in the concerto from the elegantly playful on the keyboard to the explosive forceful cascades and dramatic passages, from the intensely poetic and dreamlike to the happy and bubbly. And in the very slow and ruminatively played second movement he reached far into the darkness of melancholy and grief.

The finale on the other hand was sparkling fireworks with space to play and joke with the music. Sivelöv's recurring left foot accompaniment was distracting at first but after a while one surrendered completely to the strong artistic and musical performance and the excellent interplay between the soloist and orchestra. There were so many different and exciting details to listen to than are normally heard in this concerto.

As an encore Niklas Sivelöv unfolded a virtuoso improvisation on the opening theme from the concerto, where he gradually let the motif develop both in style and dynamics and built up to a gigantic explosion of sound.

– *Jyllandsposten*, 21 March 2009

Impressive

Niklas Sivelöv impressed the audience in Sthens Church.

On Sunday afternoon we had the pleasure of listening to one of our leading Scandinavian pianists, who has an international career.

Sivelöv played Schumann's wonderful Sonata no.2, op.22. He has the temperament and also the ability to give the music time and space, and his performance gave the audience a very pleasurable experience. Some pieces by Chopin followed, interpreted in Sivelöv's colourful way. The two mazurkas were fierce and elegant, while Nocturne no.16 was given its own sensitive expression. Polonaise no.6 in A flat major is for those artists who have virtuoso fingers, feeling, musicality and understanding for the music's contents and message. Sivelöv has all these qualities.

He also composes. We heard a student play excerpts from his 'Album for the Young' – fun and exciting. It was followed by Sivelöv playing his own improvisations on songs by his countryman Carl M. Bellman. The concert ended with dances by Ginastera, and in Sivelöv's hands the dances were excellent and a pianistic *tour de force*. The audience expressed their admiration and enthusiasm with standing ovations.

– *Helsingør Dagblad*, 3 May 2010

Surprising Improvisations

There is no longer any need for Niklas Sivelöv to prove what an outstanding pianist he is. He made this clear with his recent recording of piano pieces by Skryabin. In his last release he moves into unknown territory where classical star pianists rarely go: into improvisation. He finds his inspiration in Bellman's music and gives it the special Sivelövan sound treatment. The result is a journey through many styles – from classicism via Rachmaninov and back to the folk song. Then jazz, boisterous boogie changing with the finest blues. All these styles swing and flow into each other, and at some point one somehow has no need to separate the styles anymore. It is pure piano music, unbelievably good and it does not matter how it is classified. Again an ear opener from Sivelöv.

– *www.nordische-musik.de*, 2 February 2009

Personal, not extravagant

Niklas Sivelöv – pianist, composer and professor at the RDAM – considered to be one of the most remarkable pianists of our time in Northern Europe and in specialist circles of the US, has distinguished himself with recordings of his own works and those of 'Nordic' composers. And now his latest recording of the late six piano sonatas by Beethoven is outstanding, recommendable and absolutely worth listening to.

As a pianist, the composer Sivelöv doesn't impose himself on the scores. His Beethoven respects the music. His interpretation is never subjective, but personal when the music demands it. These pieces are very often played with 'Romantic' exuberance and in an extremely emotional fashion; not so with Sivelöv. His Beethoven is never 'analytically cold'; his interpretations contain humour, emotion and pathos, but never sentimentality. Even passages that lean towards the improvisatory always adhere closely to the source; from 'sound speech' comes 'sound singing'.

– Peter Kislinger, *ORF*, 27 November 2018

Delightful Star Concert

★★★★★★

After the interval came Beethoven. Niklas Sivelöv, the orchestra and conductor Giancarlo Andretta were on the same wavelength from the beginning, and the further they advanced, the more they became immersed in the music. We got first class piano and orchestral playing, powerful and technically superior solo work, and sweeping cadenzas. The last movement was played with a lot of humour. With the Bellman-inspired improvisation by Sivelöv, where he invited both Debussy and Keith Jarrett to join in the game on the black and white keys, we were not only given an encore but it made the whole concert delightful. The sixth star is for the pianist!

– *Aarhus Stiftstidende*, 21 March 2009

A Master Pianist in Yxtaholm

Niklas Sivelöv's improvisations on songs by Bellman were brilliant, virtuosic and resonant, but it was not easy to define how much was spontaneous and how much had been performed on earlier occasions or in Sivelöv's recently released recording.

He opened his concert with three preludes and fugues from Bach's *Wohltemperiertes Klavier* II, where his interpretations roamed between romantic longing and rustic *forte*. Effortlessly and with no nonsense, Papa Bach's forever timeless piano pieces were portrayed with voluptuous resonance.

The choice of Beethoven's op.30 sonata was very attractive. This E major sonata, which was composed by a totally deaf Beethoven, discloses vital music in many layers. Sivelöv's interpretation was powerful and with charming contrasts in tempi. His elegant touch and supreme sense of form was very impressive.

The three tangos by Piazzolla were a breath of fresh air: finally, composers of the New World have found their way onto our concert programmes! Piazzolla's complicated rhythms and hot folklore style inspired Sivelöv to play as we have never heard it before!

The late Romantic Skrjabin provided the final item of the concert. His rarely heard Fantaisie almost created ecstasy with its intoxicating late-Romantic sound. The piece's hellish tempo in the finale erupted like gigantic mirages in Sivelöv's remarkably sure grip. He thanked the audience with encores by Ginastera. We count Sivelöv as one of our country's leading pianists.

– *Eskilstuna-Kuriren*, 15 July 2008

Colourful *Touché*

In fencing, the term *touché* deals with contact, and in this case it was not only physical. Sivelöv's colourful piece for vibraphone (and other so-called mallet instruments) was carried by dancing changes and melodic whims. Well-calculated changes in tempo gave the piece a character of lightness, where good playing and musical flow gave us a 15-minute demonstration of love of percussion instruments – the composer's and the performers'.

– Carlhåkan Larsén, *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*, 14 November 2008

French Sounds

In a fully packed hall, we had the opportunity to hear cellist Morten Zeuthen and pianist Niklas Sivelöv, who are both old favourites with the audience. It could not have been more intimate, and in addition we heard a finely balanced programme focusing on French music. Debussy's sonata from 1915 constructed with characteristic echoes of the contemporaneous preludes were played with empathy and character. Sivelöv drew the connection from Debussy back to Couperin's clavecin pieces, which with the fine character sketches almost could be regarded as program music.

The refined French style with ample ornamentations was set free by Sivelöv with an exemplary lightness and elegance that was delightful. The César Franck Sonata in A major was originally composed for violin and piano. Zeuthen and Sivelöv suited the piece perfectly. The interplay between the two musicians was enthralling in every respect and perhaps at its most beautiful in the last section of the last movement. A lovely program with two musicians who suited each other.

– Tore Mortensen, *Nordjyske Stiftstidene*, 4 August 2009

The Renoir of the Piano

Sivelöv can, thanks to his great technique, not only expose the structure of the piece, but he also does it with an unerring musical superabundance and a transparency in the sound that seduces and moves. The many layers of melodic lines, rhythmic eruptions and harmonic nuances – everything is summed up and transformed into a stream of colours in constant movement, like a Renoir.

– *Nordjyske Stiftstidene*, 18 January 2009

Virtuoso

Prokofiev aimed to display both his own virtuoso pianistic abilities and superiority to the traditional classical concerto. The crazy, the beautiful, the magnificent and the humorous makes the concerto [no.1] an impressive piece of apprentice's work. Niklas Sivelöv set the piano part free with virtuosity and attention to detail.

Camille Marie Dahlgren, *Information*, 25 March 2011

More CD reviews

Das Wohltemperierte Klavier by J.S. Bach (HVB records) :

I prefer this recording over the one by Angela Hewitt.

– Erik Wallrup, *OPUS* magazine, June 2018

★★★★★

Niklas Sivelöv finds the true playfulness of Bach.

– Martin Nyström, *Dagens Nyheter*, 11 May 2016

Sivelov Symphonies 1 and 5

★★★★★

I did not know Sivelöv's music. I have now discovered it, and he is a wonderful symphonist who can write broadly, darkly and compellingly for orchestra. A lone oriental voice emerges in the Nordic context, because today's world is globalised. But gloominess and conciseness are quite clearly in the music's DNA, and to me this music concerns itself with inwardness. Soul and psyche are condensed into intense notes. After a scream that could have been painted by Edvard Munch, the symphony turns inwards – very Nordic, personal and private, it seems to me – before Sivelöv, inspired by good old Stravinsky, lets the music end in dancing, with neoclassical rhythmic features in an agitated, stomping harbinger of disaster – perhaps only formally long, but clearly an all the more genuinely felt finale ending. And of course, just as in Sivelöv's expressive, fluid and bluesy Fifth Symphony, good use is made of the composer's own instrument, the piano.

– Thomas Michelsen, *Politiken*

Piano Music by Niklas Sivelöv (Toccat Classics) :

He returns to a kind of Lisztian bravura in the *Toccatina Feroce* and finds entrancing sonorities in the *Jeux de Cordes*, which is played standing up so that the pianist can strike the strings of the piano with a mallet ... It is a fittingly interesting and enjoyable way to conclude a delightful recital by this talented young artist.

– Peter Burwasser, *Fanfare* magazine, March/April 2016

He's not only a virtuoso pianist, though; he is also a virtuoso composer and is clearly his own best advocate. He possesses the full virtuoso apparatus. This is a breathtaking achievement.

– *American Record Guide*, April/May 2016

J.S. Bach: Partitas and English Suites, Volumes 2 and 3

★★★★

In this incomparable music, it is as if Niklas Sivelöv celebrates that he is now the first Swede to record all piano works by Bach.

And he does it in a splendid and swinging way!

– Martin Nyström, *Dagens Nyheter*, 27 May 2022

The pianist does things with this music that you have never really heard before.

Niklas Sivelöv turns an ear to the silent infinity.

Sivelöv is an insightful and original interpreter of Johann Sebastian Bach's piano music.

Sensitive and daring.

– Tobias Lund, *Sydsvenskan*

Inertia – Improvisatory CD

There is something immediately exciting about the concept album *Inertia*. For the idea of putting two professors, two pianos, two temperaments together – that's good. Especially when it comes to piano professors from two different worlds – improvisational music and score music. *Inertia* is recorded on neutral ground – in the Danish Radio Concert Hall – with Carsten Dahl at one piano, Niklas Sivelöv at the other.

These are two egos that play up to each other, challenge and subtly also try to dominate. When one wants to play fast, the other will pull the tempo down. When one wants staccato, the other wants legato.

And out of that comes a fascinating, challenging and in places very demanding album with improvised music by one of Denmark's most uncompromising jazz pianists and one of Denmark's most innovative classical pianists.

It's about the music – regardless of genre.

That, in fact, is what *Inertia's* quality is: that the two masters want the naked truth, despite all the vexing dissonance.

– Ivan Rod [blog] 29 October 2021

Late Sonatas by Beethoven (AMC/Amchara Classical) :

Everything one wants in an outstanding Beethoven interpreter is here: a resolute rhythmic pulse, vibrant momentum in the Scherzos, a feeling for the dignity of the slow movements, and the ability to sustain the line in those timeless finales.

– Huntley Dent, *Fanfare Magazine*, 18 October 2019

Early Piano Works by Per Nørgård (Dacapo Records) :

★★★★★

The artistic quality is certainly amazing

– Per Rask Madsen, *Magasinet Klassisk DK*, 16 October 2018

★★★★★★

Man weiss nicht, was man hier mehr bewundern soll: den Einfallsreichtum dieser ebenso originellen wie intellektuellen Werke oder die Art und Weise, wie Sivelöv ihnen zu Leibe rückt – mit einer Mischung aus Spielwitz, Pathos, Entdeckerfreude und Leidenschaft, die einfach nur begeistert.

One doesn't know what one should admire more here: the wealth of ideas of these works, which are as original as they are intellectual, or the way in which Sivelöv sets about them – with a mixture of wit, pathos, joy of discovery and passion that are simply enthralling.

– Burkhard Schäfer, German magazine *Piano News*, 2 May 2018

Argentinian Piano Music (Sanctuary Classical) :

Atlantischer Brückenbau (Bridge Across the Atlantic)

Phantasievoll und poetisch starken pianistischen Rhetorik.

Imaginative and poetically strong pianistic rhetoric.

– Annette Lamberty, *Klassik.com*, 2004

Wlodek GULGOWSKI: 13 Works for Piano (Phono Suecia) :

Nominated for a Swedish Grammy Award

Powerful and at the same time deeply sensitive playing.

– Jönköpingsposten, 2003

THE DREAM AGE: Music of Lars Ekström (Phono Suecia) :

The concerto features Niklas Sivelov as a pianistic hero, no less!

– *Sonoloco*, 2002

Wilhelm PETERSON-BERGER: Flowers of Frösö Island (Naxos) :

On the Best-Seller list in Sweden. Awarded highest rating in the Penguin Guide.

Sparkling performance – Naxos's best.

– *Classical Web*, 2002

PIANO MUSIC Vol. II, Summer Sketches: Rangström, Milveden, Seymer and others

Sivelov proves a bright-eyed and subtle champion of this music.

– Rob Barnett, *MusicWeb*, 2001

Einar ENGLUND, Piano Concerto no.1 with the Turku Philharmonic / Jorma Panula
Nominated for Best 20th-Century Recording in Cannes

I can virtually guarantee that you would enjoy finding yourself part of that audience, and I commend this disc to you with all possible enthusiasm.

– David Hurwitz, *Fanfare* magazine, 2000

A major recording of a major composer, at much less than a major price – what could be better than that?

– *Classics Today*, 2000

Excellent recordings of three of Englund's finest works ... Strongly recommended.

– Guy Richards, *Gramophone*, 2000

... überzeugend, präzise und differenziert im Anschlag.

... convincing, precise and subtly differentiated in attack.

– Christian Vitalis, *Klassik.com*, 2003

BEETHOVEN / LISZT, Transcriptions of symphonies no.1 and no.3 'Eroica'

Impressive Sivelov – makes the immensely difficult piano part sound easy.

– P-G Bergfors, *Göteborgsposten*, 1999

SCHUMANN, Piano Works (Caprice)

New life to the piano music of Schumann – intense and dramatic.

– Mikael Bengtsson, *Norran Västerbotten*, 1998

A lot of Florestanian drama.

– *Fonoforum*, 1999

STENHAMMAR, Piano Works (Naxos)

On the Best-Seller List in Sweden. Awarded highest rating in the Penguin Guide.

... he [Sivelov] clearly has feeling for this music, and his technique is commanding.

– BBC Music Magazine, 1998

... a lucid and dedicated advocate of his countryman's music.

– *Fanfare* magazine, 1998

Like Stenhammar, Sivelov is himself both pianist and composer. This becomes evident listening to this recording. The interpretation is imaginative, very personal and strongly shaped.

– Janos Solyom, *Månadsjournalen*, 1997

BERWALD, Piano Concerto with the Helsingborg Symphony / Okko Kamu

Awarded the French Diapason d'Or

Niklas Sivelöv proves an accomplished and intelligent soloist whose account is thoroughly recommended.

– *Gramophone*, 1996