

BACH - SHOSTAKOVICH - MADSEN ... ?

It would not be too far-fetched to suggest that Trygve Madsen's cycle of twenty-four preludes and fugues is the most extensive Norwegian piano work to date.

"24 Preludes and Fugues" by Trygve Madsen  
New release on 2L with Jens Harald Bratlie, piano, January 20th 2006

"A substantial work offering considerable musical revenue," says pianist Jens Harald Bratlie who has recorded Madsen's music on this CD. "It is full of excellent themes and motifs so well moulded together that they immediately give musical meaning full of life and character. Despite the total lack of performance instructions the music is clearly shaped, offering many opportunities for variation."

How might one sum up Trygve Madsen's oeuvre? Horn player Frøydis Ree Wekre, who has worked with the composer for almost thirty years, puts it like this: "Trygve Madsen's music is friendly, full of humour, beautiful, elegant, and capable of establishing a direct link to the listener's heart."



Madsen: 24 PRELUDES & FUGUES  
Jens Harald Bratlie | 2L33SACD

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The long story behind the work begins in August 1956 when Trygve Madsen began taking piano lessons from Ivar Johnsen. Johnsen was conscientious enough to point the sixteen-year-old in the right direction: the first pieces Madsen was set to learn were from Johann Sebastian Bach's "Das Wohltemperierte Klavier" Trygve - immediately taken with the music - had soon learnt the first volume by heart; the cycle of pieces, often referred to as the pianist's 'Old Testament', has stayed with him since. Bach's forty-eight became Trygve's musical bread and butter.

At the same time Trygve also began lessons in counterpoint and composition with Egil Hovland. Hovland started off by setting exercises in polyphonic writing; thus Trygve's piano and theory lessons complemented each other in the best possible way. A daring thought crossed the aspiring composer's mind: Why not follow in the footsteps of Johann Sebastian?

This idea was further fuelled when Trygve became acquainted with the Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich's "Twenty-Four Preludes and Fugues". In these pieces Shostakovich is clearly inspired by Bach, although the music is just as clearly Shostakovich's own - he adds a new dimension to the genre by, among other things, introducing twentieth century musical elements.

Thus Bach's and Shostakovich's extensive cycles provided the fundament for Trygve's own "Mount Everest" dream: to compose a collection of preludes and fugues in every key. To realize such a dream Realizing such a project makes many demands on the composer, years of experience in composing for one - a "black belt" in fugue writing is certainly necessary before embarking on a journey in the footprints of the masters! Then one must have time and peace and quiet - luxury commodities which would otherwise be spent on more commercial ventures, earning one's keep.



Trygve Madsen did not have the opportunity to embark on the full cycle until 1995 - here begins the short story. In December of that year Trygve had cleared his desk of commissions, teaching duties and other commitments. Armed with forty years' experience, a pencil, manuscript paper, coffee - and cigarettes - he completed the entire cycle of twenty-four preludes and fugues by the end of January 1996.

What is new in Trygve Madsen's work compared with Shostakovich's? Apart from the indefinable element of musical personality Madsen's music is influenced by twentieth century jazz as much as it is by Bach.

Trygve Madsen stands on the shoulders of two giants whom he honours in more or less obvious ways: A hidden tribute is to be found in motifs derived from Bach's and Shostakovich's names; the last fugue (no. 24) has a theme consisting of the notes D, E flat, C, B, B flat, A C, B; in Norwegian these notes are written d, ess, c, h, b, a, c, h - a combination of "D-S-c-h" (from the German spelling 'Dmitri Schostakowitsch') and "B-a-c-h". Both

composers used their own names in this form in their music. And, in a final symbolic tribute, Madsen's last fugue - and thereby the entire work - ends with this theme.

A comparison of Shostakovich's and Madsen's C major preludes illustrates the difference: both pieces are sarabandes, composed in baroque style. Madsen, however, introduces a syncopation in the second bar which immediately gives the music a jazz feel. Madsen's prelude is just as much a jazz ballad, evoking the combined spirits of J.S. Bach and Oscar Peterson. The jazz influence is particularly audible in the B flat major prelude (no. 23); this is pure jazz! Latin-American rhythms can be heard in the G major prelude (no. 17) which is in the form of a habanera or a tango, depending on the performer's choice of tempo.

In Shostakovich's work there are tempo indications and dynamic markings. Madsen, however, has deliberately omitted such instructions, leaving the choice of tempo and dynamics to the performer. In this he follows Bach's example - and perhaps that of the jazz tradition, too, in which the performer's freedom of choice is an important aspect.

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