

PIANO
CLASSICS

Stenhammar

PIANO MUSIC

Paolo Scafarella

CARL WILHELM EUGEN STENHAMMAR

1871-1927

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Tre Fantasier Op.11 (1895)		Tre Små Klaverstycken (1895)	
1. I. Molto Appassionato	5'35	<i>(Three small piano pieces)</i>	
2. II. Dolce Scherzando	5'06	9. I. Molto Tranquillo	2'26
3. III. Molto espressivo e con intimissimo sentimento	5'16	10. II. Allegro	1'27
		11. III. Polska (en miniature)	1'17
Sensommernätter Op.33 (1914) <i>(Nights of Late Summer)</i>		Sonata No.4 in G minor (1890)	
4. I. Tranquillo e soave	4'06	12. I. Allegro vivace e passionato	9'54
5. II. Poco Presto	2'33	13. II. Romanza. Andante quasi Adagio	4'46
6. III. Piano. non Troppo Lento	3'25	14. III. Scherzo. Allegro molto - Trio. Meno mosso	
7. IV. Presto Agitato	3'55	(un Pochettino)	3'16
8. V. Poco Allegretto	2'44	15. IV. Rondo. Allegrissimo	6'27

Paolo Scafarella *piano*

“Modern music is not necessarily new, and new music is not necessarily modern”: this motto by Nicolas Slonimsky might be perfect for Carl Wilhelm Eugen Stenhammar (Stockholm, 1871 - Jonsersed, 1927), a Swedish composer whose music at first glance does not appear modern for his time, but is certainly new and inspired.

Stenhammar began composing even before receiving a formal education. At a very young age, he became interested in Wagner's music and philosophy, but he never became his epigone. It is rather in Beethoven, Schumann and Brahms that we can trace the major influences of the young Stenhammar, who later broke away from the German model to impregnate himself with the music of his Swedish compatriots (starting with Berwald) and especially Sibelius and Nielsen. He studied piano with Richard Anderson - a student of Clara Schumann - and was considered the most refined Swedish pianist of his time (among his warhorses, the Brahms Concerto No.1). Although he was a virtuoso, he avoided the cliché of the pianist-composer prone to egocentrism: apart from four Sonatas, a cluster of piano pieces and two Concertos for piano and orchestra, his production goes beyond his instrument, to concentrate on symphonic, operatic, choral and chamber music (having played for a long time with the Aulin Quartet, he knew this formation very well: he wrote six quartets for strings).

Rediscovered in 2008, the **Sonata in G minor** (1890) is the passionate work of a nineteen-year-old full of romantic transport but already a master of the form. The first movement *Allegro vivace e passionato* opens with a two-chord motto followed by a pattern of ascending triplets that we will find again as the Leitmotif. After these six bars, the first theme is stated with open passion, with a pathetically styled chant silhouetted against a pattern of arpeggios. Although feverish and Dionysian, the writing - as is also the case in Stenhammar's symphonism - is never overloaded. An animated

transition leads to the second theme, of opposite character: the singing here is quieter and meditative, and recalls the most dreamy moments of Schumann's creativity (in particular, the coda of *Dichterliebe* - but also the incipit of *Humoresque*). But Stenhammar knows how to maintain a personal tone, for example in the sudden silences of the accompaniment that recall a voice broken by emotion, leaving the singing bare. A third motif then appears, entrusted to the tenor register. The development, based on the first theme, opens with an optimistic momentum in C major. After a play of registers, between dark and bright, a new motif derived from the first theme peeps out, a little quieter: it is the elegiac step of a Wanderer to show itself in the undulating development, until we reach the reprise, in which the first theme reappears more triumphant and titanic than it was presented. The second theme returns in G major and the coda presents a few surprises: the first theme returns once again, but in a triple progression in which, with a visionary effect, it descends each time by degree: G minor, F minor, E flat minor.

The *chiusa*, which affirms the cyclical nature of the movement, explodes the initial 6-bar motto into an *fff*. The romance also has a traditional structure, a simple A-B-A, but one that Stenhammar fills with original content. This Andante quasi Adagio is a collected, affectionate piece that seems to seek peace after the searing passion of the first movement. Yet the simplicity of the dreamy, almost *Lieder*-like theme is not totally naïve: the hesitant curve, alternating between joint degree and *Sehnsucht* outbursts, is continually fragmented, quite unlike what would happen in an opera romance. It is as if the fable-like tone were interrupted by the concreteness of the everyday. Part B, a little more animated, moves between melancholy and Nordic luminosity - almost in the manner of Grieg. Section A then returns, but with some more finesse in the close and an original concluding cadence from E-flat minor to B-flat major.

Synthetic, the third movement is a *Scherzo in D minor*, with a strong vitalistic impulse: a rhythmic motif made up of two quavers and two half-quavers is obsessively repeated, in a context of chromatic modulations. The less moved Trio presents a circular melody, in an atmosphere of comfortable domestic laziness, broken by the explosive return of the Scherzo, which closes on a jubilant *piccarda* cadenza.

The *Allegroissimo finale* is reminiscent of the perpetual motion of Schumann's Sonata Op.22 (also in G minor), but manages to immediately find its own originality in the sinuous cellist theme on the left hand, which then passes into dazzling broken octaves on the treble. This rondo alternates between different takes of the varied theme and more lyrical, martial or introspective couplets. The fiery coda is opened by an original triple "false start", with the head of the theme three times interrupted by abrupt silences.

The originality of Stenhammar's writing becomes more acute with the **Fantasies Op.11** of 1895: the first one, in particular, presents a passionate theme that flares up in rushing flashes on a dark sea of arpeggios; a very sweet central episode constitutes a parenthesis before the return of the initial *stürmisch* climate. Mendelssohnian elves and creatures seem to inhabit the second Fantasy, *Dolce scherzando*, in which the dotted rhythms of a light march are interspersed with softer sections, but no less restless in rhythm. The various motifs alternate as in a *Sérénade interrompue*, until the solemn final chorale. The third Fantasy is a clear homage to the *Intermezzo* Op.117 No.3 by Brahms, with its gloomy dactylic progression: however, Stenhammar does not retreat into crepuscular tones, but transforms the motif making it bucolic, heroic and finally sublimated, with a coda between voluptuous and ecstatic.

In the same year of the Fantasia are composed the **Three small Piano Pieces**: an epigraphic triptych but anything but banal. The first piece seems to seek the freshness of childlike candor, almost recalling Déodat de Séverac or certain pages of Tchaikovsky's Album for Youth. After the contemplation, the second piece, of a volitional character, is all action. The third one is a miniature representation of Poland, with a mazurka's pace more austere than Chopin's.

The **Late Summer Nights Op.33** are perhaps Stenhammar's piano masterpiece. We are in 1914 and, one year after Stravinsky's *Le sacre du printemps*, Stenhammar writes a music apparently out of time: the first piece, quiet and gentle, is a polyphonic invention with organ sounds, with such a serene composure that it becomes poignant. The second piece is dominated by chivalrous rhythms, of Schumannian origin, while in the third Stenhammar finds mysteriously ineffable sounds and harmonies, close to the sensuality of Fauré. The vaporous effluvia of late summer gives way, in No.4, to a return of the flames: almost symphonic in its writing, this page opens with a chase of scales between the two hands and with arpeggios in contrary motion close to the finale of Schubert's Sonata D 784. But it is on tiptoe that Northern Summer concludes, with a *Poco Allegretto* that recalls the light dance rhythms of Grieg and Schubert again (*Moments musicaux*, No.3), until it evaporates into an enchanted final *ppp*.

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Paolo Scafarella was born in 1993 in Puglia (Apulia), one of southern region in Italy. He completed his courses at the Conservatory "N. Piccinni" in Bari with highest honors. Scafarella has attained first place in many piano competitions and is regularly invited in important concert seasons in Italy and abroad. He is currently engaged in the recording of the complete Stenhammar concertos for piano and orchestra with the Orchestra Filarmonica Campana. Scafarella has undertaken many concert tour, festivals and events in great halls, such as the Theater Impero in Trani, Principal Theater in Corato, Theater Auditorium in Pordenone, Eutherpe Hall in Leon, Auditorium "N.Rota" in Bari and Sala degli Affreschi in the University of Bari. He is also busy working as a concert transcriber for Momenti Edizioni and at the moment he as a collaboration with Zecchini Editore for the release of a monographic book on composers of the Romantic and post-Romantic periods. He is currently part of the artists of the classical music agency "Reggio Iniziative Culturali", playing both as a solo pianist and in chamber music ensembles.

