ALBUM FOR ASTOR

BJARKE MOGENSEN ACCORDION

All my life I have admired, studied and performed the music of the extraordinary Argentinian composer, Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992). It is a great pleasure to release a whole instrumental Piazzolla album for the centenary of his birth. I decided to base my tribute solely on Piazzolla titles but also dived headlong into designing a varied and comprehensive listening experience, an hour of interchanging accordion solos, instrumental duos, and pieces that I arranged for myself and a small group of mixed instruments.

The music is all Astor but with a touch of Bjarke here and there and maybe everywhere, in fact. There are no singers involved, but Piazzolla's music sings, and our instruments sing, and at every corner there is melancholy, tripping feet, fast figures, and an atmosphere of Buenos Aires.

Bjarke Mogensen

THE MAN

by Joshua Cheek

Astor Piazzolla was born on March 11, 1921 in the ocean resort town of Mar del Plata, located some 250 miles south of Buenos Aires. While his parents were themselves Italian immigrants, his life work would forever connect him to the national dance of his adopted homeland, the Argentinian Tango! Piazzolla had little interest in music as a child, until one day, at the age of eight, his tango-loving father bought him a bandoneón at a pawn shop. Around this time, his family relocated to New York City, living in Greenwich Village during the period 1925–36. As a teenager, Piazzolla's interest in music deepened and he experienced an increasingly broad range of influences from jazz, classical and popular music. In 1936, the family returned to Argentina, and before he was twenty Piazzolla was already playing in Buenos Aires' top-notch tango orchestra led by Aníbal Troilo. Piazzolla acquired practical experience from countless nights in smoky clubs, but he already had a hankering for innovation which proved to be a problem during this golden age of the cabaret tango. Its aficionados tended to be ultra traditionalists, resistant to any adulterating the now familiar formulas of tango culture (an irony, considering how dramatically the tango had evolved in just a few decades). Piazzolla would often recount how Buenos Aires taught him the secrets of the tango. The fiery, handsome youth carving out his niche and learning his craft "in a cold room in a boarding house, in the cabarets in the 1940s, in the cafés with balconies and orchestras, in the people of yesterday and today, in the sounds of the streets." But Piazzolla's restless spirit and quest to bring the Tango into the World, would eventually lead him to study with two giants of 20th century classical music: Nadia Boulanger and Alberto Ginastera.

His studies with Nadia Boulanger at the Les Ecoles d'Art Américaines de Fontainebleau in 1954 led to an epiphany. The legendary composition teacher knew only of her new student's classical ambitions, and she judged the pieces he had shown her as well-constructed but somehow disguising his true spirit, "well written, but it lacks feeling," she told him. Discouraged by this

assessment Boulanger asked him what music he played in Argentina. Piazzolla sheepishly admitted it was the tango. "I love that music!" she exclaimed. "But you don't play the piano to perform tangos. What instrument do you play?" Embarrassed by the humble and even disreputable associations attached to the bandoneón, Piazzolla reluctantly confessed. Again, Boulanger reassured him: she had heard the instrument in music by Kurt Weill, and even Stravinsky appreciated its qualities. She said, "That's the only instrument that Paul Hindemith couldn't play." He played one of his tangos, *Triunfal*, for her on the piano. "When I had finished," the composer recalls, "she said, 'Astor, this is beautiful. Here is the true Piazzolla – do not ever leave him.' It was the great revelation of my musical life." And with that, the validity of his creative engagement with the tango had been affirmed, and would become the basis for his life's work.

Filled with renewed confidence, Piazzolla returned to Argentina and in 1955 formed *Octeto Buenos Aires*, a tango octet containing two bandoneóns and an electric guitar amongst the instruments. With this new ensemble, he introduced the world to his nuevo tango, a novel innovation incorporating elements of jazz and classical music into traditional tango forms launching what Piazzolla was to call "the great tango revolution."

Inevitably, Piazzolla stirred up resentment with his new tango hybrids. His approach was iconoclastic and when combined with Piazzolla's love of confrontation and controversy, dipped in sarcasm and nor shying away from political opinions that were rather perilous in a nation whose leadership vacillated between different military dictatorships, Francoism and of course, the legacy of the Perons! A contemporary reviewer made it clear: "Piazzolla...has dared to defy a traditional Establishment that is greater than the State, greater than the Gauchos, greater than Soccer. He has dared to change the Tango." Piazzolla's return to New York in 1958, was an experience that was both financially and creatively unfulfilling. While held in esteem by musicians and critics on the cutting edge, the economic realities of booking Piazzolla and his "Jazz-Tango" band simply lacked box office draw. Disappointment would finally turn to tragedy when Piazzolla received the news of the death of his father, Vicente, who he affectionately referred to as "Nonino" (Granddaddy). The story goes that upon hearing the news of his father's death, Piazzolla began to improvise the work that would become his most famous tango, "Adiós Nonino."

Returning to Argentina, Piazzolla continued to develop as both a performer and a composer, as well as scoring films and working as an arranger to help ends meet. In February 1963, the Asociación *Amigos de la Música* awarded him its *Alfredo Hirsch Prize*, and commisioned Piazzolla to write an original orchestral composition. The result was "Tres movimientos tanguísticos porteños" which received its premiere in 1963 at the *Teatro Coliseo* under the direction of Polish-American conductor Paul Kletzki. Piazzolla's renown continued to spread and he and his *Quintet* were selected by then-President Arturo Illia to tour both the United States and Brazil as Argentine cultural ambassadors. The tour was a tremendous success, concluding with a critically acclaimed performance at *Avery Fisher Hall*. Following his triumphant return, Piazzolla would go on to collaborate with Argentina's greatest modern writer, Jorge Luis Borges. The resulting production was the legendary album *El Tango*. While one of Piazzolla's most artistically accomplished scores to date, the poet Borges was a tango traditionalist and was ambivalent to Piazzolla's avantgardisms.

A more satisfying collaboration would be with the Uruguayan-Argentine poet, broadcaster, reciter and tango lyricist Horacio Ferrer, the first fruits of which would be Piazzolla's masterful operita ("little opera") *María de Buenos Aires*. With a plot comprised of equal parts verismo, surrealism, sensuality, and obsessive elements of the Latin Catholic devotion to the Virgin Mary, Ferrer and Piazzola's *María* is by Ferrer's own admission the embodiment of Buenos Aires and undoubtedly inspired Piazzolla to pen some of his finest pages. No fewer than THREE of the tracks on this programme come from that innovative score: *Contramilonga, Tangabile*, and the famous *Fuga y Misterioso*. The early seventies were active for Piazzolla, with successful tours of Europe and fraught with interpersonal drama and many conflicts resulting from the maestro's own explosive temperament, including missing the opportunity to score Bernardo Bertolucci's "Last Tango in Paris" (what a waste) and an undignified row between Piazzolla and Brazilian Jazz maestro Gato Barbieri. A heart attack in October 1973 was less of a wake-up call than an interruption and upon recovery, Piazzolla resumed many of his former habits.

With the political situation in South America generally worsening, the opportunity of an extended European tour was more than welcome – and successful – and Piazzolla found himself a celebrity to a new generation of fans and musicians. Piazzolla continued to explore and push the boundaries of the Tango, and forming the first of two electronic octets was the closest Piazzolla ever came to attempting a fusion with the rock tradition. An experiment that even Piazzolla admitted was a misstep. In the closing months of 1979 he was hard at work on a more ambitious project, nothing less than a *Concierto for Bandoneón and Orchestra*, commissioned by the Banco de la Provincia de Buenos Aires. For his new scheme of world conquest, Piazzolla once again chose Paris as his base of operation and in 1980, returned to the City of Lights. Among Piazzolla's tasks during his first summer at the *Chalet El Casco* was the composition of "Le Grand Tango," a ten-minute piece for cello and piano commissioned by Efraín Paesky, Director of the *OAS Division of Arts*, and dedicated to Mstislav Rostropovich, to whom Piazzolla sent the score. Rostropovich had not heard of Piazzolla at the time and did not look seriously at the music for several years. "Le Grand Tango" had its world premiere in New Orleans eight years later on April 24, 1990.

Piazzolla turned 60 in 1981, a celebrated artist and as active as ever. Touring Europe and South America almost constantly while organizing new bands and composing, including many film scores, including winning the *Cesar Award* for best film music for *Tangos, l'exil de Gardel* (Tangos, the *Exile of Gardel*) beating out music by French Jazz Pianist and composer Claude Bolling. Another famous film score from this period was the music Piazzolla composed for Marco Bellocchio's film *Enrico IV* which featured the famous *Oblivion*, – one of Piazzolla's true gems. 1984 would prove to be another breakout year for the Tango master following a brilliant appearance at the *Montréal Jazz Festival*. Piazzolla soon found himself in the company of Jazz elites, sharing the stage with musicians such as Miles Davis, Lionel Hampton, Pat Metheny, Michel Petrucciani, Anthony Braxton, Wayne Shorter, and Jim Hall, introducing entirely new audiences to Tango. The extraordinary success of the stage production of *Tango Argentino* – which featured five of Piazzolla's compositions – fueled both new opportunities and burnished Piazzola's fame as a master. Health problems and quadruple bypass surgery in August 1988 was a serious blow

to Piazzolla and his punishing routine, yet he managed to form his last ensemble: *Sexteto Nuevo Tango*, comprised of the unconventional instrumentation of two bandoneóns, cello, guitar, double bass, and piano. Piazzolla would make his final venture into the recording studio in in December 1989 to record his *Five Tango Sensations* with the *Kronos Quartet*. The following year was filling up fast with opportunities and commitments, including collaborations with jazz musicians Chick Corea and Michel Petrucciani, plans for an opera, and finally, the long-awaited BIG piece promised to the *Kronos Quartet* and several prestigious films scores. Alas, on August 5, 1990 Piazzolla suffered a cerebral hemorrhage, leaving him paralyzed on the right size. Health complications continued to cascade and Piazzolla died in a coma in July 1991.

It's no exaggeration to say that Ástor Piazzolla is the most important creator in the history of tango. While the subject of controversy during his lifetime, Piazzolla was undoubtedly Argentina's greatest cultural export, taking the earthy, sensual, music of the "low places" and elevating it into high art. He was also a virtuoso musician whose mastery of an impossibly difficult instrument inspired generations of aspiring artists. Just as Scott Joplin did with the similarly disreputable idiom of "Ragtime," Piazzolla transformed what was previously a dance form into concert music, borrowing freely from jazz and even the classical avantgarde. Piazzolla's prolific output of original compositions (some 750 in all) celebrates an unmistakable Argentinian identity.

THE MUSIC

Adiós Nonino. (Farewell, Granddaddy) was written in October 1959 while in New York, in memory of his father, Vicente "Nonino" Piazzolla, a few days after his father's death. The piece uses rhythmic material from Piazzolla's earlier tango *Nonino* – also written in honor of his father – composed in Paris in 1954. Its breathy, melancholy would earn many fans, and it would prove to be one of Piazzolla's most well-known and popular compositions, and has been recorded many times with many different arrangements and with various instruments.

Vibraphonissimo. The great jazz vibraphonist Gary Burton first heard Piazzolla in Milan during his European tour in 1986 and was consumed by the music that was described by one local critic as "nostalgic, bitter and tender, sorrowful and joyous, restless and serene." Two days later, at Ravenna, Burton played with the quintet for the first time. A series of wildly successful and frenzied performances would follow and Piazzolla would arrange a program of works especially for Burton. Initially called *Suite for Vibraphone and New Tango Quintet* it is better known as the classic album *The New Tango* recorded live at the *Montreux Jazz Festival* in July 1986.

Café 1930 from *Histoire du Tango*. Among the numerous suites Piazzolla composed, his *Histoire du Tango* is one of his most famous. Originally scored for flute and guitar in 1985 (published 1986), it has been arranged countless time for almost every conceivable combination of instruments. As the title implies, *Histoire du Tango* attempts to convey the history and evolution of the tango in four movements: *Bordello 1900, Café 1930, Nightclub 1960,* and *Concert d'Aujourd'hui*. Piazzolla's own description is as follows:
"This is another age of the tango. People stopped dancing it as they did in 1900, preferring instead simply to listen to it. It became more musical, and more romantic. This tango has undergone total transformation: the movements are slower, with new and often melancholy harmonies. Tango orchestras come to consist of two violins, two concertinas, a piano, and a bass. The tango is sometimes sung as well."

Tristango. Piazzolla's 1974 album *Libertango* (a portmanteau incorporating 'Libertad' and 'Tango'), marks a change in style for Piazzolla from classical tango to nuevo tango and as a transitional work, some of the grave seriousness of earlier iterations of the style is evident, especially in the moody harmonies of *Tristango*.

Aconcagua. Given Piazzolla's classical aspirations, it was inevitable, that he would eventually compose a full-scale *Concerto for bandoneón and orchestra*. A conventional three-movement work was written in response to a commission from the Banco de la Provincia de Buenos Aires, and first performed (by the composer) at the city's *Auditorio de Belgrano* in December 1979. As was the case with many classical compositions, it would be the publisher rather than the composer that would bestow a nickname on a work, and in this case Piazzolla's publisher Aldo Pagani christened the score *Aconcagua* because "this is the peak of Astor's oeuvre, and the [highest mountain]". Bjarke Mogensen's arrangement is build upon Piazzolla's own score of the concerto's first movement.

Fuga y Misterioso. Undoubtedly one of Piazzolla's most popular and instantly recognizable works, the *Fuga y Misterioso* also comes from *María de Buenos Aires*. One can't help but think that Piazzolla was showing off what he learned with Boulanger, as well as his love of the music of Bach in this one-of-a-kind fugue. In the context of the opera, "Fugue and Mystery" underscores the scene where María dances with a neighborhood thief and goes off with him while the ever-present El Duende watches and bides his time. Indeed, this devilishly difficult fugue has some devilry going on in the background.

Coral. This love song to Piazzolla, Bjarke Mogensen has selected from the *Suite Punta del Este* a tango Nuevo, a work originally scored for bandoneón and chamber ensemble in 1982. *Punta del Este* is a Uruguayan resort where Piazzolla spent many summers and particularly enjoyed

the rather perilous sport of shark fishing. In fact, among the composer's curious quirks was a passionate hatred of all things "sharky." The music has been used as a signature theme for the 1995 science fiction film *12 Monkeys* as well as a model for music in a scene in the TV show, *The Simpsons*.

Allegro Tangabile comes from Part 2, Scene 14 of *María de Buenos Aires*. The pregnant heroine, María has reached her breaking point and begs for help in the streets, but is mocked when she is recognized by her former admirers. She has a contraction, and El Duende, the shape-shifting unreliable narrator hands her a gun. Piazzolla's frenetic music perfectly underscores María's desperation.

Contramilonga (a la funerala por la primera muerte de María). Throughout his career Piazzolla was fortunate to have worked with many brilliant collaborators. Among the most fruitful was his collaboration with Horacio Ferrer. The first flowering of their work together was one of Piazzolla's indisputable masterworks, the tango opera *María de Buenos Aires*. The *Contramilonga* appears in Part 2, Scene 9 as El Duende, the story's narrator watch mothers place candles on the graves of their children. Here Piazzolla and Ferrer commemorate victims of the "Dirty War" (1976-83) in which suspected dissidents often disappeared.

Novitango. Filled with spiky syncopations, complex motivic relations and propulsive minimalistic rhythms, *Novitango* makes good on its promise in proclaiming the composer's intent to transform the tango into something new. Bjarke's orchestrations add a symphonic dimension only hinted at on Piazzolla's 1974 release of the album *Libertango* previously mentioned.

Despertar (cadenza). In 1987, the executive producer of the *Kronos Quartet*, Robert Hurwitz, took Piazzolla, to see the quartet perform. Backstage, violinist David Harrington asked if he could call him in a few days and to Harrington's surprise, when he finally called Piazzolla a few days later, he had already composed *Four, For Tango* for them. At the time, there

were discussions of further collaborations and the promise of a major work especially composed for Kronos. Piazzolla's health problems would interrupt the project several times but he did complete *Five Tango Sensations* (Asleep–Loving–Anxiety–Despertar–Fear) for bandoneón and string quartet written in 1989. The suite premiered at *Alice Tully Hall* on 25 November 1989 and was recorded a couple of days later. It would be Piazzolla's final recording.

THE INSTRUMENTS

"Everything can be played on the bandoneón." - Pablo Casals
"The vengeance of some German." - Astor Piazzolla

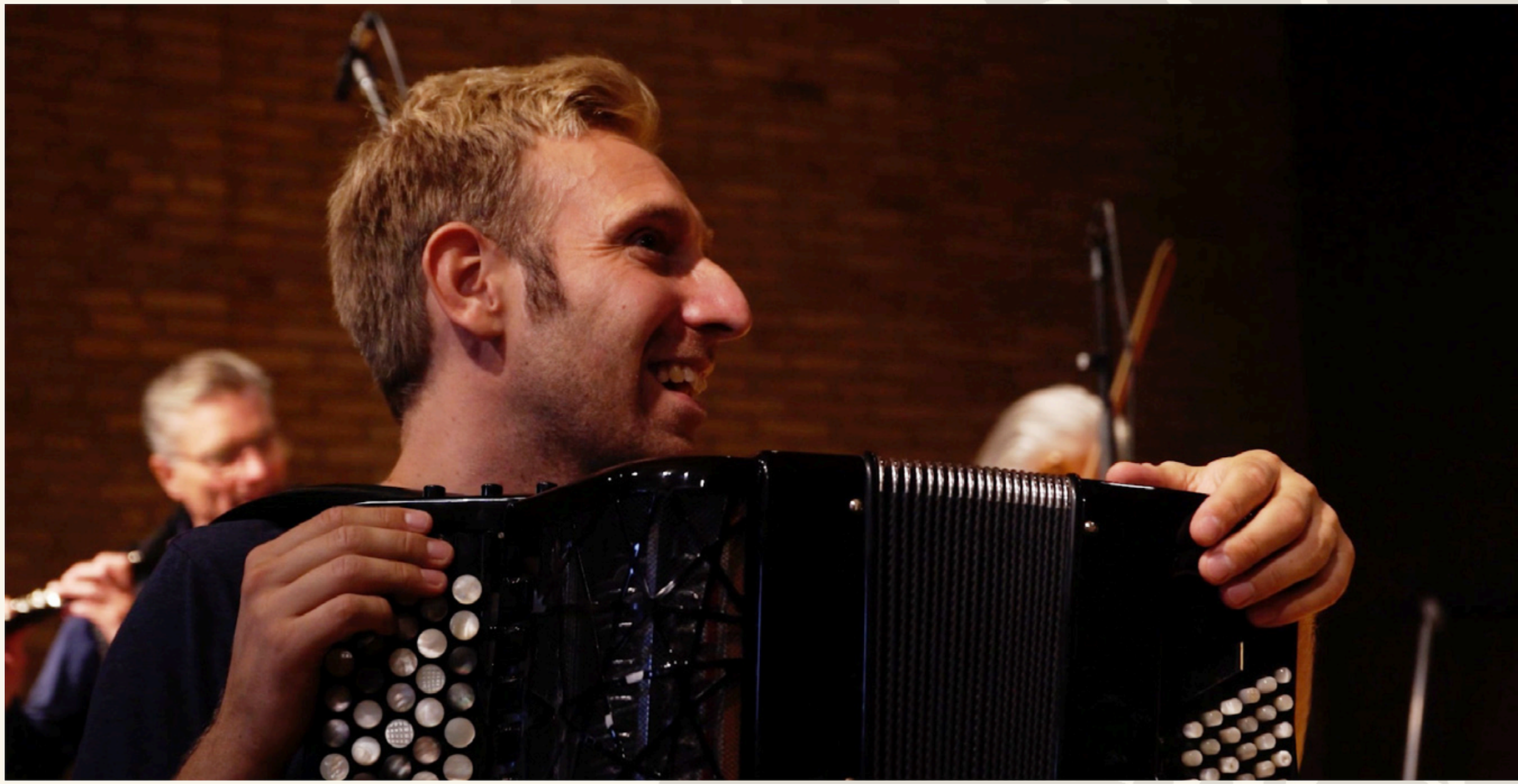
The bandoneón - as it was originally known - started life as sort of a "poor man's organ" and had its roots in the Chemnitzer Concertina. It is a "bisonoric instrument," which means it plays one note when compressed and a different note when it is drawn apart. The truly devilish part of this push-and-pull arrangement is that there really was no rhyme of reason to how the notes were organized! In contrast, the tonal and dynamic range and combinations of registration of the Mythos unisonoric accordion (same note on push and draw) allows Mogensen rich possibilities for arranging Piazzolla's works in new inventive settings including the duo combination with vibraphone and the chromatic harmonica, both of which share metal as a sound producing material. On this recording Mogensen has chosen a standard registration of the single octave, similar to the fixed octave of the bandoneón, but in different shapes and varieties, with and without 'cassotto', to colour the different characters in the music.
The bandoneón ranges from the deepest note of the double-bass E to C#7; only a few octaves less than a Grand Piano.

Also related to the bandoneón with its free vibrating metal reeds is the harmonica, played here by Mathias Heise. Together, these two instruments perfectly convey the sweet melancholy of *Cafe 1930* from *Histoire du Tango*, originally scored for flute and guitar.
On this recording Bjarke Mogensen uses a 1994 Pigini Mythos No 5, specially tuned by master reed maker, Viktor Melnyk. Mogensen notes:
"The free bass accordion has a lot of similarities with the bandoneón, for example the possibilities of playing single tones in both manuals. The Mythos model by the Italian accordion maker Pigini has a particular set of reeds which are produced in Russia by the finest reed makers in the world. Similar to the bandoneón and unlike the traditional western accordions the reeds are collected on single plates

which gives a special sensitive connection with the dynamic colors of the instrument. From a very soft pianissimo to very rich forte."

Johan Bridger uses Zildjian Cymbals and is a sponsored Zildjian Artist.

The chromatic harmonica on track no. 3 is a Suzuki G-48w made by the Hohner Factory in Trossingen, Germany.



BJARKE MOGENSEN

Born on the Danish island of Bornholm in 1985, Bjarke Mogensen quickly made a name for himself as an internationally acclaimed accordion virtuoso and a versatile musician with a keen ear for diverse styles. His repertoire spans from the renaissance to the avant garde, and his playing has inspired composers at home and abroad to write new concertos, solos and chamber music especially for him. Mogensen's catalogue includes many critically acclaimed releases, including solo recitals, chamber music, concertos with orchestra as well as smaller formations playing music across the entire spectrum from folk to experimental. Mogensen, the performer, does not restrict himself to music originally written for the accordion – he has extended his instrument's repertoire with his own arrangements, some for the accordion on its own and some for him to play with other musicians. The present disc is Mogensen's first CD featuring the seductive music of Astor Piazzolla occasioned by the centenary of the great tanguerist's birth. Piazzolla's own instrument was the bandoneón, closely related to the free-bass accordion that Mogensen plays, using an instrument that belongs to a very restricted number of exclusive Mythos accordions built by the Pigini firm in Italy.
www.bjarkemogensen.com

Photo: Nikolaj Lund

Photo: Julia Severinsen

THE DANISH CHAMBER PLAYERS

Svend Melbye, flute, Som Howie, clarinet, Gunnar Eckhoff, bassoon, Stéphane Tran Ngoc, violin, Piotr Zelazny, viola, Tobias Lautrup, cello, Mette Franck, harp, Jakob Westh, piano.

The Danish Chamber Players, based in the modern art and music house *KUMUS* at the Fuglsang Manoron Lolland, are one of the five Danish ensembles that provide a substantial presence for professional classical music in otherwise remote areas of Denmark. The ensemble was founded in 1991 and consists of eight high profile chamber musicians in a unique instrumental composition: three string players, three wind players, piano and harp. With first-class classical concerts and an active music outreach effort, the ensemble creates great classical moments through various activities. The ensemble holds between 80-100 concerts and events every year. Alternative performance spaces and formats bring the music to a diverse audience. Over the years, more than 110 new works have been commissioned by the ensemble from prominent composers. With more than 30 CD recordings, numerous radio broadcasts and international collaborations, the *Danish Chamber Players* act as cultural ambassadors for Danish chamber music both nationally and internationally. The ensemble is supported by the *Danish Arts Foundation*, the Cultural Region of Storstrøm and its four municipalities, Næstved, Faxe, Lolland and Guldborgsund.
www.ensemblet.dk

Photo: Nicklas Raab

JOHAN BRIDGER

Johan Bridger studied at the *Malmø Academy of Music* and *Northwestern University* in Chicago IL. In 2004 Johan was awarded 1st Prize at the *Swedish Soloist Competition* and the *International Marimba Duo Competition* in Belgium and has since performed at prestigious festivals all over the world as well as appearing regularly as soloist with orchestra in newly written works often dedicated to him. He has recorded for *Caprice Records* in addition to making several recordings for both Swedish radio and television. In addition to his own ceaseless exploration of all things percussive and the marimba in particular, Bridger seeks to inspire others by giving lectures and master classes in Sweden and abroad. He also teaches at *The Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts* in Odense, *The Malmø Academy of Music* and *Sundsgarden School of Music*.

www.johanbridger.com

Photo: Ulrik Jantzen

All arrangements by Bjarke Mogensen
(tracks 2, 3 and 4 arranged in collaboration with Johan Bridger and Mathias Heise)

Recorded September 2021 Kumus Fuglsang track 5-10,
Norra Mellby Kyrka, track 2 and 4, Sct. Jørgensbjerg Kirke track 1, 3 and 11.

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OUR Recordings releases:

OE Orchestra/Ensemble
PH Petri/Hannibal Duo
LP Vinyl
VG Violin/Guitar
EP Digital only
CR Choir/Recorder
OM Organ music
VE Danish National Vocal Ensemble
RH Recorder/Harpsichord
SW Spoken words
CH Chinese
RC Recorder Concertos
GS Guitar solo
BJ Borup-Jørgensen

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OE 6.220680

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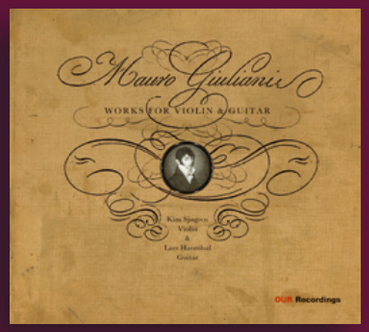

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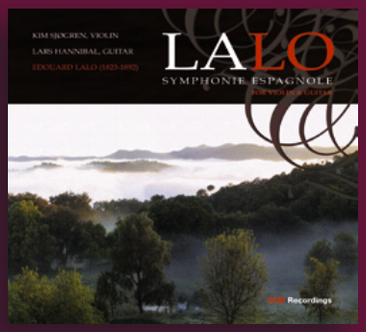

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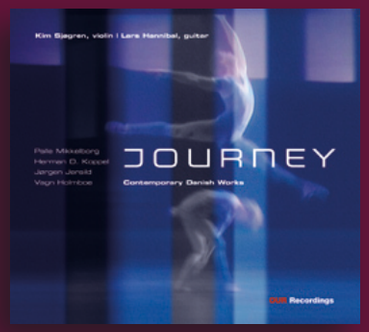

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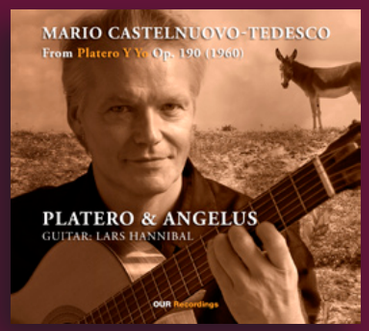

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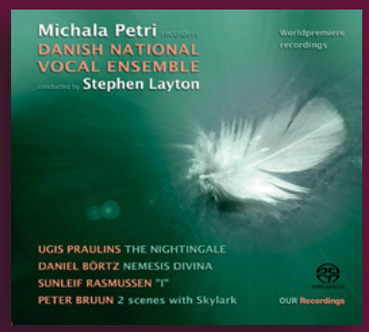

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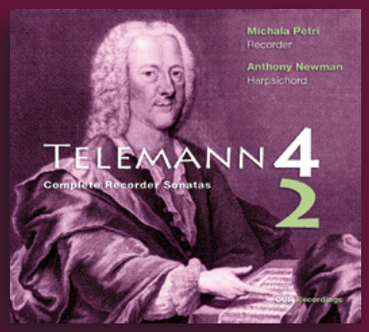

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1	ADIÓS NONINO (accordion solo)	7.21
2	VIBRAPHONISSIMO (accordion, vibraphone)	6.02
3	CAFÉ 1930 (accordion, harmonica)	7.49
4	TRISTANGO (accordion, vibraphone/percussion)	7.11
5	ACONCAGUA 1st movement (accordion, chamber ensemble)	7.39
6	FUGA Y MISTERIO (accordion, chamber ensemble)	4.08
7	CORAL (accordion, chamber ensemble)	10.24
8	ALLEGRO TANGABILE (accordion, chamber ensemble)	2.55
9	CONTRAMILONGA A LA FUNERALA (accordion, chamber ensemble)	5.44
10	NOVITANGO (accordion, chamber ensemble)	4.01
11	DESPERTAR cadenza (accordion solo)	2.19

Total: 66.07

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