

Claus Ogerman | Symphonic Dances • Some Times (Ballet)

Claus Ogerman was born in Ratibor, Germany on April 29, 1930. He studied music in Nuremberg. In Germany, he scored several films from 1956 through 1959. He then moved to the United States, where he became one of the most prolific and in-demand arrangers/orchestrators for some of the most iconic artists of the 1960s, including Antonio Carlos Jobim, Wes Montgomery, Kai Winding, Cal Tjader, Stan Getz, Al Hirt, Wynton Kelly, Jimmy Smith, Oscar Peterson, and others, as well as singers such as Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis, Jr., Astrud Gilberto, Lesley Gore, and Connie Francis. Additionally, he had several albums under his own name recorded for RCA. One of his finest achievements during that decade was his collaboration with the great jazz pianist Bill Evans, which resulted in the classic *Bill Evans Trio with Symphony Orchestra*, an album of astonishing depth and beauty, with Evans' poetic piano weaving in and out of Ogerman's magnificent arrangements of classical pieces by Faure, Bach, Chopin, and others. However, with no slight to the above-mentioned masters, the most beautiful track on the album is "Elegia," written by Ogerman himself. During the next two decades, Ogerman was still in demand as an arranger/orchestrator, making recordings with such disparate artists as Barbra Streisand, George Benson, Michael Franks, Stephane Grappelli, Freddie Hubbard, Dr. John, and Stanley Turrentine, as well as being reunited for two classic albums with Antonio Carlos Jobim. But he mostly devoted himself to serious composition. Some of his major achievements during that time included his ballet score *Some Times*, *Symbiosis for Piano and Orchestra* (recorded with Bill Evans), the song cycle *Tagore – Lieder*, *Symphonic Dances*, and *Preludio and Chant* (recorded with Gideon Kremer). In 1977 he reworked his *Some Times* ballet score and in so doing came up with a hit album, an instant classic, *Gate of Dreams*. After *Gate of Dreams* came another classic, *Cityscape* with Michael Brecker, as well as the stunning *Aranjuez* with guitarist Jan Akkerman. He continued writing serious music, but always found time for interesting arranging projects and in the 2000s did two great albums with Diana Krall as well as a Danilo Perez album, *Across the Crystal Sea*. In 2004, his *Symbiosis* was used to memorable effect in the film *Sideways*.

According to Ogerman, Modernism was not his primary aim. Rather, his desire was to evoke warm emotional response ("to

reach the listener"). His two big influences were Max Reger and Alexander Scriabin, two composers whose music he adored.

I first issued these performances on CD back in 1992 on my then-label Bay Cities. I can't remember exactly how I got in touch with Claus Ogerman, but I think I spoke to someone who knew him and I think I asked that person to tell him I was a huge fan of his and that the Bill Evans Symphony Orchestra album was in my top ten desert island albums. And then one day the phone rang and it was Mr. Ogerman, calling to thank me. We had a lovely chat that went on for quite some time, and at one point I asked him if he had anything we could release. He sent me the contents of what became the CD we released. I was very enamored of *Gate of Dreams* but I had no idea it had begun life as *Some Times*, so that was a very pleasant surprise. I'd heard *Symphonic Dances*, but liked this performance better. And so we put it out and it was one of my favorites of all our Bay Cities releases. Over the years that CD has become quite the collector's item, so I thought it was high time to reissue it again and give it a fresh mastering, to celebrate the brilliance that was Claus Ogerman.

SYMPHONIC DANCES

Footfalls echo in the memory
Down the passage
which we did not take
Towards the door we never opened
Into the rose-garden.
My words echo
Thus, in your mind
But to what purpose
Disturbing the dust
on a bowl of rose-leaves
I do not know.

Those lines by T.S. Eliot from *Burnt Norton* are printed on the first page of the score to *Symphonic Dances*. Written in three movements for large orchestra in 1971, *Symphonic Dances* was premiered and first recorded by the Stuttgart Radio Orchestra that same year. As defined by Ogerman, "All three movements are written within the Major-Minor principals. Twelve-tone rows are used merely for coloration (as Bartok used them occasionally). I am only trying to stir the listeners' emotions. Therefore the choice of a technique is a secondary problem to me. Stravinsky made the point thus: 'Theory in musical compositions is hindsight. It doesn't exist. There are compositions from which it is deduced. Or, if

this isn't quite true, it has a by-product existence that is powerless to create or even justify. Nevertheless, composition involves a deep intuition for theory.'"

In the end, however, we have the music. Whatever technique or theory one can go on about is ultimately irrelevant to the listener. The mind and heart respond to the music and that response is, of course, different for each listener. *Symphonic Dances* is a beautiful, textured, and haunting work that does exactly what Ogerman intended – stirs the emotions. Its moods and orchestral colors are hypnotic and mesmerizing. It's like a film score to whatever film plays across your mind as you listen.

SOME TIMES

Some Times, a ballet score for large orchestra and jazz group, was commissioned by the American Ballet Theatre. The world premiere took place on July 14, 1972 at the New York State Theatre at Lincoln Center. The choreography was by Dennis Nahat, with settings and costumes by Ruben Ter-Arutunian. The *New York Daily News* called it "a daringly original ballet," the *American Press*, "a cool, modern, together, now, attractive work," and *New York Magazine*, "a charming, jazzy piece." Since its premiere it has been performed by many other ballet companies such as The National Ballet of Canada and the Cleveland Ballet. It is heard here for the first time on CD in its original form as performed by the ABT.

The combining of symphonic music, jazz, and even a bit of rock, was fairly unique in the ballet world of 1972 and Ogerman did a masterful job of it. In its pre-*Gate of Dreams* form, it's a little leaner but just as evocative and beautiful.

Claus Ogerman passed away in 2016 at the age of 85. This reissue is dedicated to his memory and his music and our brief friendship.

— Bruce Kimmel