

THE ART OF

EMIL REESEN

(1887-1964)

HIMMERLAND, DANISH RHAPSODY

VARIATIONS ON A THEME OF SCHUBERT

GREENLANDIC FOLK MUSIC

INTERMEZZO FROM THE STORY OF A MOTHER

ARIAS FROM FARINELLI

- FEATURING AKSEL SCHIØTZ

FANTASY ON SOUTH JUTLAND MEMORIES

FANTASY ON DANISH CHRISTMAS MELODIES

RADIO EXHIBITION FANFARE

RADIOFONIA, RAPSODIA BURLESQUE

LIVE AND STUDIO RECORDINGS FROM THE 1950'S

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cord

Emil Reesen (1887-1964)

[1] **Himmerland** (Danish Rhapsody, 1926) 12:12

Decca LX3125, mtx DRL 1731, rec 1953

[2] **Variations on a Theme of Schubert** (1928) 15:10

Live Concert, October 3, 1959

[3] **Grønlandsk Folketone** (Greenlandic Folk Music, 1934) 6:46

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[4] **Intermezzo from Historien om en moder**

(The Story of a Mother, 1941) 5:54

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Arias from **Farinelli** (first performed 1942)

[5] **Sangen har vinger** (The song has wings) 2:48

[6] **Den som har livets mildhed søger**

(He who has pursued life's gentleness) 3:20

[7] **Livets glæder** (The pleasures of life) 3:25

[8] **Der er en sang** (There is a song) 3:08

HMV X 6830/31, OCS 2008-1, 2009-1, 2011-1, 2010-1. Recorded November 25, 1941

[9] **Fantasy on South Jutland Melodies** (1930) 8:52

Polyphon z 60128 A/B, mtx AHDKE 59 – 60, rec 1946

[10] **Fantasy on Danish Christmas Melodies** (1933) 6:19

Live Concert, December 14, 1957

[11] **Radio Exhibition Fanfare** (1950) 2:00

Live Concert, August 31, 1956

[12] **Radiofonia** (Rapsodia Burlesque, 1950) 5:38

Live TV production, 1969

Aksel Schiøtz, tenor [5] - [8]

Danish Radio Symphony Orchestra [1] - [11] conducted by

Emil Reesen [1], [5] - [9] Thomas Jensen [3], [4], [10]

Arne Hammelboe [2], Erik Tuxen [11]

Danish Radio Concert Orchestra / Hans Peder Aase [12]

Emil Reesen was born on 30 May 1887 in Copenhagen. His father, Julius Reesen, was a military musician who became a conductor. His son showed early musical promise on several instruments; Emil made his concert debut in 1911 as a pianist. His piano teacher was Siegfried Langgaard (a former pupil of Franz Liszt and father of the composer Rued Langgaard), and he was taught theory by the composer Vilhelm Rosenberg.

Reesen took a career path shared by other Danish conductors such as Launy Grøndahl (later his colleague at Danish State Radio) which began by working in restaurants and theatres, where he played, arranged and

composed music. He conducted at the Tivoli Gardens for the first time in 1917, then at the Dagmarteatret two years later. In 1921 he became the conductor of revues organised by the impresario Frede Skaarup at the National Scala, an entertainment venue opposite the Tivoli.

At the Scala, Reesen put on a polished show, sprinkled with humour in the manner of Gerald Hoffnung's concerts in London. A few bars of a children's song might suddenly be heard on the harp, or an orchestra musician might crawl under the stage for another musical surprise, often disconcerting the performers as well as entertaining the audience. He crafted beautiful-sounding, easy-to-use arrangements, and composed in similarly fluent fashion.

In 1925, Reesen left the Scala after a disagreement with Skaarup and spent a period in Paris, which evidently left its mark on his music. However, he soon returned home in order to further his conducting ambitions; back in 1920, Reesen had made his debut as a symphony orchestra conductor at a concert in the Odd Fellow Palace in Copenhagen. By 1927 the head of Danish radio, Emil Holm, was looking for someone to join Launy Grøndahl, who had until then conducted all the DRSO broadcasts. Reesen took over half of Grøndahl's work, presenting the orchestra with two contrasting styles of leadership: Grøndahl's careful and thorough work and Reesen's more flamboyant style.

Reesen made his debut with the orchestra in a live broadcast, having declined a rehearsal: he determined that his first meeting with the orchestra should be a surprise for both parties. However, having taken on work outside his contract with the radio orchestra, Reesen was dismissed from his post in 1936. Looking further afield, he began to conduct the Copenhagen Orchestra Association, Det Ny Teater and from 1950 the Royal

Theatre. However, Holm's retirement in 1937 allowed Reesen to return to the radio on several occasions as a guest conductor.

Reesen's energy as a conductor manifests itself in his music. He switched easily between genres such as stage music and ballets, orchestral music, jazz-inspired dance music, and lighter songs and revues. His outstanding gift for attractive melodies is shown to best advantage in the present collection by four arias from his operetta *Farinelli*. In 'classical' works Reesen often borrowed material such as the native and foreign melodies heard in this collection, and exercised his particular talent for orchestration. In his 'Danish Rhapsody' *Himmerland* of 1926, Reesen clothed local fiddler tunes with light orchestral textures in the manner of H.C. Lumbye. Named after a part of the North Jutland landscape, *Himmerland* opens in gentle simplicity, gathering momentum and ebullience with a sequence of melodies before returning to the opening mood. The composer conducted this performance in 1953, at a time when the orchestra was beginning to enjoy international acclaim after its Edinburgh Festival debut under Fritz Busch. Several fine works were written to mark the centenary of Schubert's death in 1928, among them the Third Symphony of Franz Schmidt and the Sixth of Kurt Atterberg. Taking his theme from a work for piano four-hands, Reesen goes further than Schmidt in commemorating Schubert in the vein that Brahms struck so happily to celebrate Haydn in the St Antoni Variations, notably in the first slow variation around five minutes into the piece, and the succeeding whirl of wind-led writing. There is a characteristically Schubertian march before the Variations culminate in a solemn chorale transformation of the melody. This broadcast performance is led by Arne Hammelboe, who taught conducting at the Royal Danish Academy of Music

from 1957, and in 1962 took over the chairmanship of the Danish Conductors Association, an association that Reesen had founded a quarter-century earlier.

A pioneer in the discovery of Greenland and Eskimo culture, Knud Rasmussen died of pneumonia in December 1933 on his seventh 'Thule Expedition', having contracted severe food poisoning from eating *kiviaq* (fermented auk). For a memorial concert the following year, Reesen wrote the *Grønlandsk Folketone* (Greenlandic Folk Music), a dignified rhapsody based like *Himmerland* on local melodies.

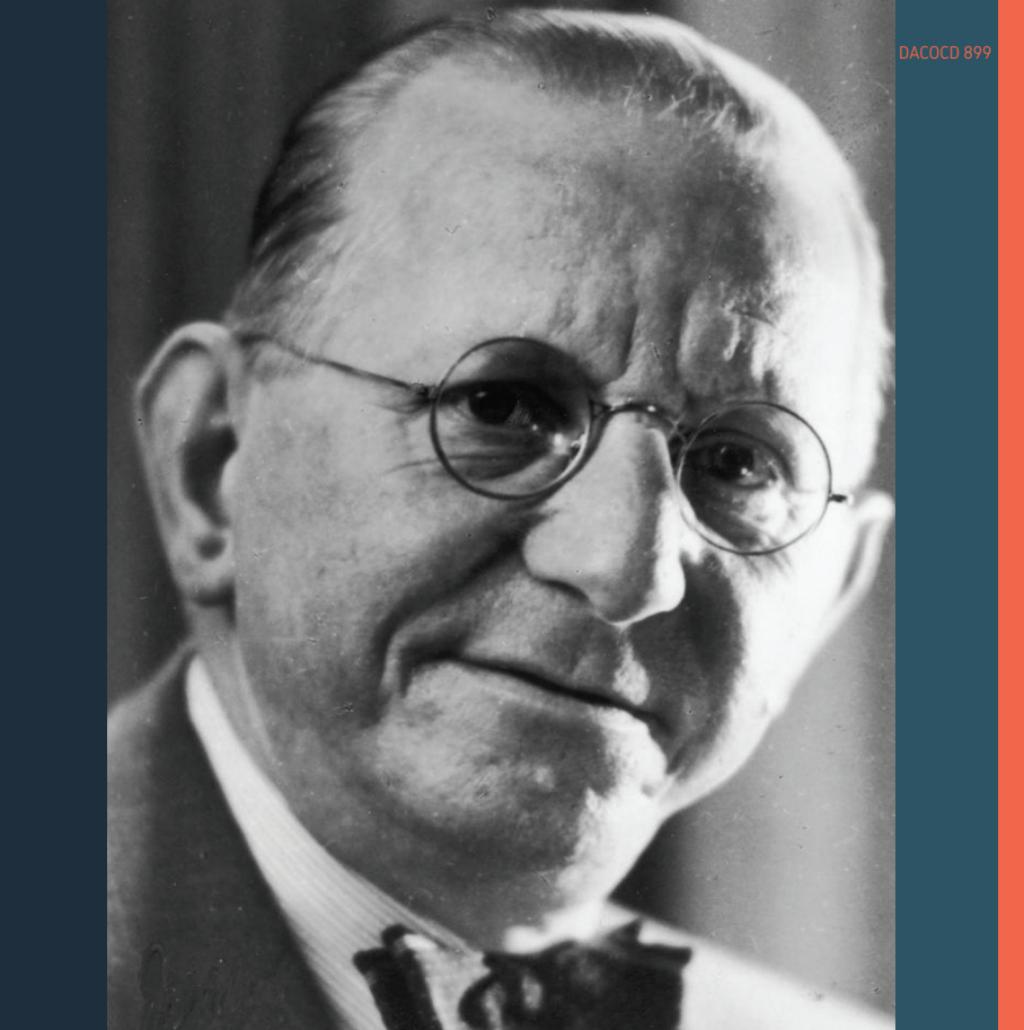
A similar, melancholy mood pervades the Intermezzo from *Historien om en moder*, composed by Reesen in 1940 for the soprano Tenna Kraft in the title role. Carl Gandrup's libretto is based on Andersen's black tale of a mother who loses her sick child and eventually gives up negotiating with Death, when she realizes that the child – were it returned to her – might face a life of misery. The performance is led by Thomas Jensen, who first conducted the DRSO in the 30s and took charge of it after Grøndahl's retirement in 1956 until his own death in 1963.

Reesen's following work for the stage achieved more enduring popularity: the operetta *Farinelli*, staging the life and loves of the 18th-century's 'Great Castrato' and first staged at the Royal Theatre in January 1942. Castrati being in short supply by the 1940s, Reesen composed the title role for the great Danish tenor of the day, Aksel Schiøtz, who made these recordings with the composer some weeks before the operetta's stage premiere.

Johan Ludvig Heiberg had adapted a French comedy about Farinelli for a vaudeville in 1837; in Reesen's version, the lyrics are by the revue writer and journalist Mogens Dam.

The composer again doubles as conductor in a subtly political *Fantasy on South Jutland Melodies*. Of the 10 melodies featured, some are vernacular, some original, but they all assert Danish identity against the backdrop of a troubled history for this region on the border with Germany (the Danes won a war over the territory in 1848-50 only to lose it again in 1864 before the country was reunified for good in 1920). Among the quoted songs, 'Long enough I have been a peasant girl' makes direct criticism of Germany. So does 'It has so recently rained', in an allegorical comparison between the invaders from the south and the weeds 'that have crossed the fence'. The last melody, 'Our mother tongue is lovely, it has a mild sound', is a direct commentary on the oppression of the Danish language that took place in North Schleswig from 1840 onwards.

For his *Fantasy on Danish Christmas Melodies*, Reesen drew on four popular 19th-century hymns, by C. Balle, J.G. Meidell and A.P. Berggreen as well as the German-born J.A.P. Schultz, and framed them with the sound of ringing bells. The last two works are more offbeat. The 25th anniversary of Danish radio was marked by an exhibition held at the Forum in Copenhagen, directly opposite the Radio House. Reesen was commissioned to supply a fanfare for the exhibition's opening, though it was conducted by Erik Tuxen, his replacement as the DRSO's conductor in 1936. *Radiofonia* is a montage of radio sounds organised into a short piece and first broadcast on New Year's Eve 1950, though this performance dates from almost 20 years later.

A black and white close-up portrait of an elderly man with a receding hairline. He is wearing round-rimmed glasses and has a serious, slightly furrowed brow. He is dressed in a dark suit jacket over a light-colored collared shirt. The background is dark and out of focus.

DACOCD 899

Composer, arranger, conductor, entertainer: Emil Reesen (1887-1964) cut a dash through Danish 20th-century music. His own pieces were always stylishly crafted for the occasion, whether to commemorate a Polar explorer or celebrate a famous castrato. Danacord's wide-ranging tribute includes many live and broadcast recordings never previously issued.



DACOCD 899 ADD MONO

Total playing time:
76:24

First release
[2] - [4],
[10] - [12]

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