

A Tribute to Erling Blöndal Bengtsson, Vol. 2

Khachaturian Cello Concerto in E minor^a.

Walton Cello Concerto^b.

Erling Blöndal Bengtsson (vic); Iceland Symphony Orchestra / ^aDamian Iorio, ^bZuohuang Chen.

Danacord stereo (M) (D) DACOCD737 (64mins; DDD); rec. Háskólabíó, Iceland, ^b2/5/2002; ^a2/10/2003.

Although both composers are of the second rank, this is the most successful of the three discs of live performances recently issued by Danacord to celebrate the artistry of Erling Blöndal Bengtsson. Second of two based on Iceland broadcasts, sadly

it is a memorial release, because the Danish-Icelandic cellist died on 6 June 2013, aged 81.

William Walton's Viola Concerto is derivative of Prokofiev's First Violin Concerto, and his two subsequent concertos are derivative of the Viola Concerto. The Cello Concerto of 1956 does at least try something different in the longish finale, which the composer headed "Theme and Improvisations". It also shows the influence of Walton's Ischian home in an attractive Mediterranean glow to the large orchestra. It was written for Bengtsson's teacher Piatigorsky and apparently Bengtsson played it many times, on three occasions with Walton conducting. He certainly performs it with assurance, eloquence and an easeful control of *portamento* that is very fetching. The veteran Chinese conductor and the Iceland SO give him sympathetic support.

Aram Khachaturian apparently thought of composing a cello concerto when he was still a student, but did not get round to it until 1946. Perhaps Sviatoslav Knushevitsky pointed out that he had written works for the other two members of the Oistrakh Trio, but not for him. Amazingly, it was one of the pieces that got Khachaturian into trouble with the dreadful Zhdanov two years later. It now sounds straightforwardly Late Romantic, with the usual Armenian folksong inflections and dance rhythms. Dedicatee Knushevitsky made an excellent recording himself and Bengtsson's warm tone has some affinity with his soft-grained sound. Backed by a splendid young English conductor and the willing orchestra, Bengtsson plays all three movements about as well as one has any right to expect.

The sound quality of these Icelandic Radio recordings is very good and the producer of the CD is Bengtsson's widow Merete. **Tully Potter**