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**MAHAN ESFAHANI**

HARPSICHORD

**AARHUS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**  
**LEIF SEGERSTAM**  
CONDUCTOR

## POUL RUDERS

HARPSICHORD CONCERTO

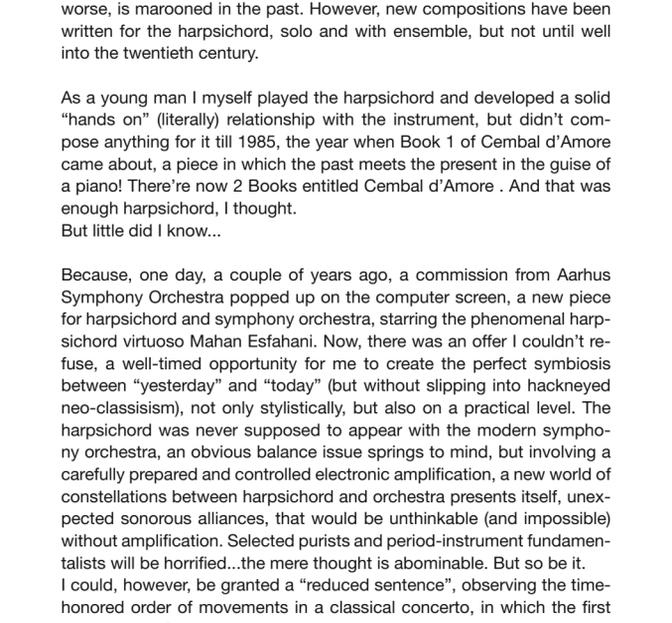
WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING

OUR Recordings

POUL RUDERS (b.1949)

HARPSICHORD CONCERTO (2020)

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|---|-------|
| <b>I. AVANTI RISOLUTO</b> .....                 | 06.54 |
| <b>II. ANDANTE</b> .....                        | 07.06 |
| <b>III. VIVACE. MARTELLATO ALLA BREVE</b> ..... | 06.58 |
| TOTAL .....                                     | 20.58 |



Should one, when listening to my Concerto for Harpsichord and Symphony Orchestra, entertain the suspicion, that the composer has brought the past into the present – and vice versa – then one is not completely off the mark. I've always been fascinated by the form of restoration architecture, with which old, disused, but conservation worthy buildings, such as churches, factories and warehouses, are being given a new identity and purpose through a happy symbiosis between contemporary ideas and inventions, a modernity that hasn't congealed through blind self-indulgence.

The harpsichord is an instrument normally associated with music from the Baroque, in other words a "period instrument", which, for better or worse, is marooned in the past. However, new compositions have been written for the harpsichord, solo and with ensemble, but not until well into the twentieth century.

As a young man I myself played the harpsichord and developed a solid "hands on" (literally) relationship with the instrument, but didn't compose anything for it till 1985, the year when Book 1 of Cembal d'Amore came about, a piece in which the past meets the present in the guise of a piano! There're now 2 Books entitled Cembal d'Amore . And that was enough Harpsichord, I thought.

But little did I know...

Because, one day, a couple of years ago, a commission from Aarhus Symphony Orchestra popped up on the computer screen, a new piece for harpsichord and symphony orchestra, starring the phenomenal harpsichord virtuoso Mahan Esfahani. Now, there was an offer I couldn't refuse, a well-timed opportunity for me to create the perfect symbiosis between "yesterday" and "today" (but without slipping into hackneyed neo-classicism), not only stylistically, but also on a practical level. The harpsichord was never supposed to appear with the modern symphony orchestra, an obvious balance issue springs to mind, but involving a carefully prepared and controlled electronic amplification, a new world of constellations between harpsichord and orchestra presents itself, unexpected sonorous alliances, that would be unthinkable (and impossible) without amplification. Selected purists and period-instrument fundamentalists will be horrified...the mere thought is abominable. But so be it. I could, however, be granted a "reduced sentence", observing the time-honored order of movements in a classical concerto, in which the first movement is fast, the second slow, and the third...well...just you wait...

Poul Ruders  
December 2019

## POUL RUDERS THE COMPOSER



How does one describe a phenomenon like Poul Ruders? No sooner have you found the "mot juste" than something in the music clamours to contradict it. He can be gloriously, explosively extrovert one minute - withdrawn, haunted, intently inward looking the next. Super-abundant high spirits alternate with pained, almost expressionistic lyricism; simplicity and directness with astringent irony.

Try and restrict the language to technical matters and the paradoxes continue: few composers on the contemporary scene are so versatile, so accomplished, so obviously in command of their tools and materials, and yet the music can give the impression of dancing on the edge of a precipice. It is a language of extremes, commandingly integrated and perhaps all the more startling for that.

Finding his voice has taken him longer than many other composers, he admits, but it has also been an adventure - a period of experimentation and discovery which has led him in all manner of directions, metaphorically and literally; confronting American minimalism in the early eighties and developing his own perspective; making London his spiritual home later in that decade and employing the peculiar English technique of 'change-ringing'; exploring - in his own words - female values in the nineties as a vital counterbalance to the world of violence and desolation he had opened up in his previous works.

In the opera *The Handmaid's Tale* (1996-98) more than in any of his other works - Ruders draws together the themes which have preoccupied him for so long: The apocalyptic, the elemental and the human, aching tenderness, grotesque irony, despair - however, also, as in the closing pages of the *First Symphony* (1989), a flicker of hope. For Ruders, perhaps, 'The One True Path' is that there is no path at all. And thus the adventure continues.

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## MAHAN ESFAHANI THE HARPSICHORDIST



Harpsichordist, organist, scholar and musical gadfly Mahan Esfahani stands in the vanguard of the new generation of performers liberating instruments previously regarded as the provenance of the early music specialists and bringing them into 21st century concert halls with music to match.

Esfahani was born in Teheran in 1984 and raised in the United States. His first exposure to the sound of the harpsichord came from a bunch of cassettes an uncle had given him. Esfahani remembers: "One was of Karl Richter [the German conductor and harpsichordist] playing Bach. Well, I listened to it, and I thought: 'This is what I've got to do.' True to his word, he studied musicology and history at Stanford University and later, traveled to Boston where he studied harpsichord with Peter Watchorn before completing his artistic apprenticeship under the celebrated Czech harpsichordist Zuzana Růžicková.

Following his tutelage, Esfahani travelled to London to perform at a private event. This performance would be the first in a series of fortunate events moments for the young artist, for as it would happen, a staffer from the BBC was there and was impressed enough with Mahan to set the wheels in motion. In 2008 Esfahani became the first harpsichordist to be named a BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artist (2008-2010). Following a three-year stint as Artist-in-Residence at New College, Oxford, Esfahani continued to cultivate his academic associations, becoming an honorary member at Keble College, Oxford, and receiving a professorship at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London, but it is Esfahani's work as performing artist and commentator that propelled him to the forefront of the classical music world. His creative programming and advocacy of new works have drawn the attention of critics and audiences across Europe, Asia, and North America, earning him numerous accolades including the Borletti-Buitoni prize (2009), and thrice a nominee for Gramophone's Artist of the Year (2014, 2015, and 2017).

Esfahani has performed solo recitals in most of the world's major series and concert halls, amongst them London's Wigmore Hall and Barbican Centre, Oji Hall in Tokyo, the Forbidden City Concert Hall in Beijing, Shanghai Concert Hall, Sydney Opera House, Melbourne Recital Centre, Lincoln Center's Mostly Mozart Festival, Berlin Konzerthaus, Zürich Tonhalle, Wiener Konzerthaus, San Francisco Performances, the Edinburgh, Aspen and Aldeburgh Festivals, and the Leipzig Bach Festival. As satisfying as solo performances are, Esfahani takes particular pride in showcasing his instrument in the concerto repertoire and has appeared as soloist with the Chicago Symphony, Seattle Symphony, Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, BBC Symphony, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Melbourne Symphony, Auckland Philharmonia, Czech Radio Symphony, Orquesta de Navarra, Malta Philharmonic, Aarhus Symphony Orchestra, Hamby Symphony, Munich Chamber Orchestra, Britten Sinfonia, the Royal Northern Sinfonia, and Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, with whom he was an artistic partner for 2016-2018.

His richly-varied discography includes three critically-acclaimed recordings for Hyperion - the C.P.E. Bach *Württemberg Sonatas*, a 2014 Gramophone Award winner and the Complete Pièces de Clavecin of Rameau which was both nominated for a Gramophone Award and included on the New York Times Critics' List of Top Recordings of 2014. His first album for DG, *Time Present and Time Past*, earned a 'Choc de Classica' in France, while his 2016 release of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* was named to the long list for the Preis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik and won the BBC Music Magazine 2017 Instrumental Award. Esfahani's work as a chamber music partner have proven equally magical, his 2016 recording of Corelli's *Op. 5 Sonatas* in period arrangements for recorder with the legendary Michala Petri was awarded an ICMA Award in 2016.

## LEIF SEGERSTAM THE CONDUCTOR



Leif Segerstam is one of the most versatile and interesting musical talents from the Nordic countries, studying violin, piano, composition and conducting at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki before starting a post-graduate course at New York's Juilliard School of Music. He is Chief Conductor Emeritus of the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra in gratitude for his supremely successful 12-year period as Chief Conductor. He also holds honorary titles with Malmö Opera and Turku Philharmonic Orchestra as well as the Danish National Radio Symphony Orchestra and Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz in Germany following extremely notable periods as chief conductor with both orchestras. He has held positions as Chief Conductor of the Austrian Radio Symphony Orchestra and Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra as well as Music Director and Chief Conductor of the Royal Swedish Opera, and later also re-appointed as Chief Conductor and Director of Finnish National Opera. He is currently Principal Guest Conductor of the St Petersburg State Symphony Orchestra, and honorary conductor of Aarhus Symphony Orchestra.

Leif Segerstam conducts at Wiener Staatsoper, the Chicago Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Toronto Symphony, Detroit Symphony, NHK Symphony Orchestra, in London with the Philharmonia, London Symphony and BBC Symphony orchestras, St Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and he was one of the most important ambassadors for Sibelius's 2015 anniversary year. Apart from being a conductor Segerstam is also a composer, - and have until now composed 335 symphonies. For his amazing work of bringing Nordic music out to orchestras around the globe Leif Segerstam received in 1999 the Nordic Council's Music Award.

ASO AARHUS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA



Aarhus Symphony Orchestra (Aarhus Symfoniorkester) was founded in 1935 and resides in the award-winning Symphonic Hall at Musikhuset Aarhus in Aarhus, Denmark. The Orchestra's 66 permanent musicians are led by the respected French chief conductor Marc Soustrot, with the legendary Leif Segerstam acting as honorary conductor.

Aarhus Symphony Orchestra attracts a large and diverse audience through weekly subscription concerts, family concerts, chamber concerts and large-scale collaborative concerts with festivals and concert halls throughout Denmark. In addition, the Orchestra maintains a permanent cooperation with the Danish National Opera (Den Jyske Opera) and has recorded a substantial amount of both Danish contemporary works and standard classical repertoire on cd.

Deeply invested in the community surrounding it, the Orchestra performs social outreach concerts and arranges free school concerts, playing for more than 10.000 children annually. In 2018, the Orchestra has added a new ambitious family project for pre-school children and their parents to their activity roster called "Musikkens Børn" (The Children of Music).

From 2021-25 the orchestra expands its activities with a series of new concert formats: "KonTAKT" (Contact), "VelLyd" (Wellbeing through sound) and "Fyraftenskonceter" (After hours concerts). These are all formats that expand the regular concert experience by putting the audiences' needs front and center, either offering direct contact and interaction with the orchestra, by providing a space for relaxation and contemplation, or simply by facilitating after hours social setting with music.



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