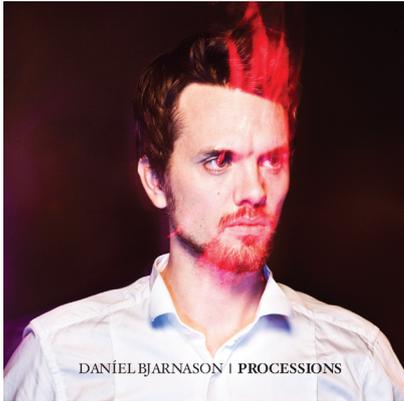


DANIÉL BJARNASON

PROCESSIONS



Daniél Bjarnason - Processions

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Bedroom Community

TEL: +354 557 2377

herro@bedroomcommunity.net

Press Photos:

<http://bedroomcommunity.net/Site/HVALUR7EPK.html>

HVALUR7EPK.html

Distribution:

Kompakt Distribution

TEL: +49 221 94995 0

www.kompakt.fm

distribution@kompakt-net.de

Press & label contact:

US:

First Chair Promo

Amanda Ameer

amanda@firstchairpromo.com

UK:

Hermana PR

Ken Lower

tel: 0208 - 771 8800

ken@hermana.co.uk

ROW:

press@bedroomcommunity.net

www.bedroomcommunity.net

www.danielbjarnason.com

Blurring the line between electronic and chamber music—a familiar style for the Icelandic Bedroom Community collective—the constructions of this recording's emotional triggers are wholly unique. In Daniel Bjarnason's *Processions*, the composer marshals all the technical forces at his disposal to accomplish a musical goal rather than an ideological statement.

Daniél Bjarnason is 'the other classical composer' on our label, a throne he now shares with the omnipresent Nico Muhly. Daniél and Nico may both conjure their magic and craft via black dots on manuscript paper and swinging of the arms & upper-body, but their music is as fundamentally different from each other's as it is from that of Ben Frost or Sam Amidon. If anything else connects it—apart from allowing me to cast my own spell on it—it is that it is all brand-new; taking nothing as given while being fully informed of the past and the possibilities of now. As the fifth member of Bedroom Community, Daniél Bjarnason promises to share his bewitching alchemy with our troupe and our listeners.

—Valgeir Sigurðsson, Reykjavík 2009.

Daniél Bjarnason's music is so intelligently crafted, it makes you want to pause the concert every second and look at a score. At the same time, the craft whizzes by organically, and you don't have enough time to pause and contemplate. His music is thoughtful without being overthought, and obsessive without being persnickety. As an outsider in the Icelandic music scene, I've observed that Daniél is a musician trusted by all: he is just as happy and effective conducting the Icelandic opera as he is strolling down the street; one night, I saw him fidget with a new arrangement of All Sounds to Silence Come and then rush off to conduct a series of ecstatically huge arrangements for the band Hjaltalín. His album is just a small peek into the life of his mind.

—Nico Muhly, NYC 2009.

Bow to String, composed for multi-tracked cello, was written for Sæunn Þorsteinsdóttir. This is a piece that not only evokes feelings of tension or tenderness, it dares to signal them. The unapologetically, relentlessly direct harmonic progression grounding "sorrow conquers happiness" and the melody singing out in the concluding "Air To Breath" lay themselves bare, inviting the audience into the score by demonstrating an awareness of emotion without crossing over into irony. The violently percussive performance techniques, the moments of ghostly timbre or asynchronous attack, are not there as commentary on the piece's emotional vocabulary but as an extension thereof.

Processions, Bjarnason's second concerto written for pianist Víkingur Ólafsson, performs a similar balancing act of self-consciousness versus earnest appeal in both its genre and harmonies. True to the archetype of the concerto form, *Processions* begins with an extravagant statement; a statement Bjarnason takes to new heights in his thunderous exposition "In Medias Res." Its subsequent development recalls a traditional Slavic concerto, remarkable for its virtuosic elements and deeply earnest melodies. The propulsive rhythms of the last movement ("Red-Handed"), like the syncopations in *Bow to String*, project a certain quasi-primitive energy reminiscent of electronic or rock music.

"Skelja", a darker, more introspective score for harp and percussion, in a sense suggests what might remain behind if the comforts of form and more overt forms of expression were somehow extracted from *Bow to String* and *Processions*. The dense texture of the electronic cello choir and the massed resources of the orchestra are replaced with the strict economy of a plucked and e-bowed harp. But even here, glimpsed in the harp's obscurity and the percussion's subtle halos of color, the style of the composer, now introverted, persists.

ABOUT DANÍEL BJARNASON



Daniel Bjarnason is already a veteran of Iceland's music scene and his compositions have received international acclaim in recent years. As co-founder and chief conductor of the Isafold Chamber Orchestra, the 30-year-old composer has recorded two discs of modern classical music on the 12 Tónar label. Strikingly, there is no discontinuity between his work's grounding in musical conventions of the past and the elements that mark it as unmistakably contemporary. He has lent his talents to artists on the other side of the alleged classical/rock divide—Ólöf Arnalds, Pétur Ben, Hjaltalín, and most famously, Sigur Rós, collaborating with that band at their Abbey Road sessions with the London Sinfonietta—before creating this disc with producer Valgeir Sigurðsson.

Bedroom Community is an Icelandic record label/collective formed in 2006 by Valgeir Sigurðsson with Nico Muhly and Ben Frost: like-minded yet diverse individuals from different corners of the globe who all creatively orbit around an inconspicuous building and its inhabitants on the outskirts of Reykjavik, Iceland. Their work is predominately recorded and created at Greenhouse Studios.