



RUBICON

# ALISON LUTHMERS

**J.H. Roman**

ASSAGGI FOR  
SOLO VIOLIN

# Johan Helmich Roman 1694-1758

## ASSAGGI FOR SOLO VIOLIN

### Assaggio in E minor BeRI 312

1	I.	5.57
2	II.	2.50
3	III.	5.32
4	IV.	1.42
5	V.	5.12

### Assaggio in A major BeRI 301

6	I.	3.51
7	II.	4.39
8	III.	6.38
9	IV.	1.27

### Assaggio in G minor BeRI 314

10	I.	3.19
11	II. (Allegro)	3.01
12	III.	3.22
13	IV. (Non troppo Allegro)	2.09

### Assaggio in G minor BeRI 320

14	I.	3.56
15	II.	5.39
16	III.	1.40

**ALISON LUTHMERS** baroque violin



Johan Helmich Roman, one of Sweden's most important composers (known as 'the father of Swedish music' and 'The Swedish Handel') was as cosmopolitan as they come. As a young man, he spent six years in London playing in Handel's orchestra at the King's Theatre. His two extended trips around Europe brought him in contact with composers in England, France, Italy and Germany, where he purchased sheet music to bring home. He also became thoroughly up-to-date on the modern musical trends, drawing influence especially from Italian composers such as Giovanni Bononcini and Francesco Geminiani. His extensive contribution to 18th-century Swedish musical life was therefore very much a product of his exposure to many different musical styles and cultures. In this way his life mirrors that of a modern musician. As a Canadian-American living and working in Sweden, I feel an affinity with this adventurous musician who must have been driven so strongly by his own curiosity and enthusiasm that he dared to strike out from home again and again. He undertook long and arduous journeys in order to keep on discovering, exploring and developing, eventually assimilating all of these experiences into his own very unique and personal musical language.

An advertisement in *Stockholms Post Tidningar* from 12 May 1740 described one of his compositions as 'a beautiful musical piece or so-called assaggio a violino solo', telling the reader that the composer 'intends to continue with such work in the keys most in vogue.' There are about 20 *Assaggi* in varying forms - some are full-fledged works with four or five movements, while others are just fragments. Most were probably composed in the 1730s. The *Assaggi* are the only musical works in existence with this title, and the unusual nomenclature was one of the things that initially piqued my interest. The word '*assaggio*' has been translated as 'sample', 'essay', 'experiment' or 'study', as well as 'attempt'. I love the invitational implication here, and imagine it as an invitation both to himself, to try new compositional forms and techniques, and also to the performer, to take the pieces as a starting point for experimentation. (The fact that Roman intended to publish the *Assaggi* shows that they were meant to be performed.) These were Roman's violin exercises, what he used to explore and improve his playing as well as his musical imagination, which is precisely what I was aiming to do when I set out to make a solo recording.

The four *Assaggi* were recorded in two separate sessions. I chose to record the A major first because I liked how the music conjured up such evocative images of Swedish nature. When I decided on the following three to be recorded, I looked for as much variety of character as possible. Some, like the E minor BeRI 312, feel more compositionally unfinished and left bigger decisions to be made regarding actual notes and rhythms. I took the liberty of adding cadenzas as well as repeats or da capos in many of the pieces. The beautiful acoustics of Garnisons Kirke in central Copenhagen – simultaneously resonant and detailed – gave me a chance to explore the extremes of my instrument. In an intensely collaborative process with my wonderful *tonmeister* Ragnheiður Jónsdóttir, I experimented with a wide pallet of sound qualities in order to evoke the images that came to me. I imagined dark water flowing under ice in the third movement of BeRI 312, the still surface of a lake on an early summer morning in the first movement of BeRI 301, and a full starry night sky in the magical ‘nocturn’ (my own title) third movement of BeRI 301. Elements of Swedish folk music crept into the last movement of BeRI 314 – although Roman’s colleague Per Brant called this movement a ‘Minuetto,’ I feel in it a hint of the traditional ‘polska’ dance rhythm.

Performing can often feel like flying – the euphoric feeling of being on stage, living fully in the moment and in the music, the electricity of communication between musicians and audience. However, this often comes with a crash landing afterwards, and the sense that what we create is so fleeting and intangible that sometimes I ask myself if it really happened or if it was all in my imagination. Recording is an opportunity to actually create ‘something’ – an object to hold and share, a culmination of an entire process that doesn’t just melt into thin air. There is nothing like live performance, but recording offers its own gifts. It gives me great joy to offer this recording to the world.

## ALISON LUTHMERS

### Sources:

Brunner, Ernst: *Likt ett skeletton: Johan Helmich Roman – Hans Liv*, Albert Bonniers förlag, 2019.

Bengtsson, Ingmar and Lars Frydén (eds.): ‘Introduction’ in *Johan Helmich Roman Assaggi à Violino Solo*, ‘Swedish Society for Music Research’, 2018.



I ncreasingly in demand as leader and soloist with early music ensembles throughout Europe, Canadian-American Baroque violinist **Alison Luthmers** performs with Concerto Copenhagen, Camerata Øresund, Höör Barock, Göteborg Baroque, Eslövs Kammarorkester and Nivalis Barokk. She has recorded for Da Capo, Channel Classics, Berlin Classics, Naxos and ECM. She has been leader of the Ensemble in Residence at Trigonale Festival several times, and has appeared at many other major early music festivals in Europe and the United States.

Alison Luthmers is a founding member of the Bellevue String Quartet, Scandinavia's only full-time period instrument quartet, which engages audiences through their unique, conceptual programs and intimate concert environment.

As a two-time recipient of a grant from the Canada Council for the Arts, Alison Luthmers studied the connection between folk music, early music and dance in Scandinavia. She studied modern violin with Robert Lipsett at the Colburn School in Los Angeles, and Baroque violin with Peter Spissky and Arek Goliński in Copenhagen.



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