

BJØRN BOLSTAD SKJELBRED
THE BEE MADRIGALS



NORDIC VOICES
NILS PETTER MOLVÆR

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01 **STILL IN SILENCE** 09:36
FEAT. NILS PETTER MOLVÆR

THE BEE MADRIGALS

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NORDIC VOICES

THE MUSIC OF BEES

—— by David Rothenberg ——

Human beings and honeybees have much in common. We two are the only species that use symbolic communication. Sure, you all know humans talk and write and invent strange signs to stand for things, but it is rather surprising that honeybees dance out information telling each other where the flowers and pollen can geographically be found. They are nature's original GPS creatures, as their movements stand for specific

information, a feat no other animals besides us have achieved.

Bees we know are also essential for vast pollination work throughout the flowering world. And we love them for the many kinds of honey they can produce. With all this admiration, it is so shocking that human transformation of the planet seems to be leading to the bees' demise; a mysterious ailment called Colony

Collapse Disorder has overtaken the world of honeybees and their numbers decline alarmingly each year.

So, what is a composer to do about this dire situation? Music is in a way a non-symbolic form of communication – all kinds of animals including humans make it, from nightingales to humpback whales, from crickets to cicadas. Music is that sound focused around its own form and shape, not needing to stand for anything outside itself. Yet composers want to respond to what they learn about the world, be it beautiful or tragic. Let us sing a requiem for the dying bees, and surround ourselves with beautiful sounds that might save them.

Bees are more dancers than musicians, but their hums and buzzes suggest all kinds of sonic possibilities. The Finnish entomologist Olavi Sotavalta was able to identify different species of bees solely by the pitch of their hums, as he was one of few bug scientists who also had a degree in music. The composer of *Bee Madrigals*, Bjørn Bolstad Skjelbred, certainly knows his bee science, and the uncertainty of the situation has inspired him: “The 6 madrigals approach this phenomenon from different angles, from the call of nature (‘The Warning’), through the shamanic vision from within

the bee hive (‘I Was No Alien’) and the hectic discussion in an online commentary following a documentary on the subject (‘It Adds Up/The Blog’) and the final ‘Still in Silence,’ which reflects on the future possibility of a silent nature after all these valuable insects have disappeared.”

But is the buzz of a bee actually useful musical material? I wrote a whole book *Bug Music* around the idea that humans may have learned our love for rhythm and noise from insects, and though I wasn’t really thinking of bees, their importance in our lives suggests that their whirring sound certainly matters. Skjelbred starts his thrummingly beautiful piece with a simple bee-like tone but soon moves to searching harmonies and swirling human overtones. The second moment emerges with whispers, hushed words that fear the absence of bees, and we yearn for the hum that we know will soon come. The fourth movement starts with everyone’s swirling confusion around the issue; as with almost everything else to worry about, there is no shortage of information. What we lack is any idea of how to cut through the mess of it with some kind of certainty. Skjelbred softens the agitation by setting the spoken argument above querying parallel harmonies. Next comes the scurrying whispers saying

c-c-c-c-colony collapse and chills run through the listeners' spines. The end sounds terrifying, hearkening back to the 1960s fear in the works of Rachel Carson, who warned us that unless we scaled back the rampant spraying of pesticides, in the near future no birds would sing. The world listened, some chemicals were banned, and our birds still sing. But pesticides are one of the big threats to bees, and we are still transfixed all these years later by a fear of silence. In the final movement, our thoughts of the future remain transfixed on this sad possibility, 'still in silence.' The phrase is repeated, overlapping in many voices in a canonical form, resembling an ancient Gregorian chant that echoes unceasing devotion to God.

Today we have many great forces to choose to exalt, and the value of nature is certainly one that needs our adoration. Disappearing bees may be just one tragedy in the midst of our rampant destruction of the natural world in which we and all other creatures evolved. We need to save them. Sing all around this problem and the gravity of this problem will stay with you in the lap of beauty. Witness this beautiful piece and keep the challenges faced by bees close to your heart.

01 «Still in Silence»
ft. Nils Petter Molvær

Still in silence (repeat)

02 «I The Warning»

03 «II Spring Without Voices»

*There was a strange silence
It was spring without voices
The apples trees were coming into bloom
but no bees
Droned among the blossoms*

*There was a strange silence
It was spring without voices*

04 «III I Was No Alien»

*I was at the heart of the hive
I was terrified
It was a wonder
I was not already dead
and then I knew why*

*It was a wonder
I was not already dead*

*and then I knew why
I was no alien*

05 IV «It Adds Up! / The Blog»

*Robert 1: I watched the news today and it
was a big eyeopener. I think this should
be a bigger global concern than global
warming.*

*Charlie: That's alarmist bullshit. Global
warming is a hoax.*

*Robert 2: It's just so sad, that people just
don't care. Why isn't this garbage that is
killing our bees being banned?*

*Joshua: You ask why we aren't banning?
Because our politicians are owned by the
big companies. We must take back our
government!*

CORPORATIONS!

*Bill: I don't understand this. We have so
many bees on our property! My grandson
and I are both allergic. I would love to
have someone come out here and take
them away.*

*Byron 1: I agree with Joshua here - it's the
corporations!*

*Robert 2: Why is a problem as important
as disappearing bees not more out in the
open?*

Byron 2: Rothchilds, Rockefellers and Morgans run everything. It's so evil what they are doing.

IT'S THE CORPORATIONS!

Davin: I've never heard of this bee-problem before. Oh, I am so confused.

Gary: It's most likely a combination of many factors. Chemicals are most likely, but also extreme weather can't be good for them.

Snaggletooth: We have to solve this mystery as soon as possible! I haven't seen a local honeybee all summer yet.

Gerald: In the last few years, I have not seen any hornets, wasps, honeybees...

Keith: You won't get any fruits, and you won't get any vegetables. We're scared to death!

SCARED TO DEATH!

Carey: I feel bad for the bees.

Victor: It's sad that people don't pay attention to this wonderful creature.

Jim: I feel we as consumers should give up honey for 5 years so the bees can eat food meant for them.

Bobby: This whole bee-mystery here is just more evidence OUR PLANET is in trouble. Why don't we DO SOMETHING?

Berryl: Glow clover. There's no clover anywhere anymore. It used to be everywhere.

Christian: This is clearly a case of genetic engineering due to corporate greed.

Pat 1: Can't understand why they keep saying that colonycollapsedisorder is a 'mystery' when we know the answer is chemicals.

Tessa: I mean seriously does anyone really expect there NOT to be problems when we play around with the genetics.

Bob: The culprit appears to be a class of chlorinated nicotine based neurotoxin pesticides called neonicotinoids.

Wesley / Todd: What about the earths magnetic field? What about GMO's?

Chris: I'm surprised no one has even considered radiation.

Sara: I also would not be surprised if the global expansion and use of cell phones are having a strong impact.

Pat 2 / Bob: I am highly suspicious that there is a strong chemical lobby at work here that is controlling the research of the pesticides called nicotinoids.

Deidre 2: The study I found was funded by T-Mobile. As usual, FOLLOW THE MONEY.

Jerry: Hey! Everybody! Hey!

HEY!

Jerry: We are talking about bees, right. Let's back up and remember that the United States is killing millions of babies. God created babies. And bees. If we kill his babies, then do you blame him for allowing the bees to be killed? Think about it, god rules everything.

Well, I can say that everyone has a different theory as to why the bees are disappearing. (Repeat)

Jonathan: Honeybees are not dying due to pesticides nor global warming mobile phones or masts or any other man made product. Bee-hives are ok, but must be placed in the right position. I have proved it, it's in my book «An Holistic Way of Saving the Honey Bee».

John: Sometimes the answer is right in front of us.

Fipronil (repeat)

What we are looking for is a stealthy colony killer.

This chemical is so powerful and lethal to insects that one only needs minuet trace amounts for it to work.

One small bottle of thermidor containing fipronil can treat a large area for nine years.

Colony killer (repeat)

Do some research

Is it a coincidence that it's designed to contaminate workers unknowingly so they infect the entire colony. Because this stuff is virtually invisible.

I believe the bees getting lost and confused are simply exhibiting the lethal affects of the chemical. Do the math.

IT ADDS UP!

I'm sorry...

Two and two, is looking a lot like four.

06 «V Colony Collapse»

Colony (repeat)

Collapse (repeat)

Colony (repeat)

Collapse (repeat)

Colony colony collapse disorder

Order

Colony collapse disorder

Colony collapse, colony collapse disorder

07 «VI Still in Silence»

Still in Silence (repeat)



Photo: Frank Evensen/FHE Photo

Bjørn Bolstad Skjelbred (b.1970 - Norway) has a varied and broadly spectered musical background. He is active as a composer, arranger, improviser and teacher, with experience from several genres and musical environments. Skjelbred's list of works contains more than 70 titles, where music for other arts and music for young musicians are largely present. Skjelbred has written for such artists as percussionist Eirik Raude, Oslo Philharmonic, the Swedish ensemble Pärlor för svin, The London Schubert Players, accordionist Rocco Jerry (US), the Norwegian vocal group Nordic Voices and saxplayer Claus Olesen (DK).

www.skjelbred.no



Nordic Voices was formed in 1996 and consists of the singers Tone Braaten, Ingrid Hanken, Ebba Rydh, Per Kristian Amundrød, Frank Havrøy and Rolf Magne Asser. All of the members are graduates of either the Norwegian Academy of Music or the Opera Academy in Oslo, and together they share a broad experience from chamber music, opera, composition, church music and conducting. Nordic Voices' repertoire ranges from medieval to contemporary music, and they have recorded numerous albums to great critical acclaim. The ensemble's well-conceived and creative concert programming – often involving a subtle element of humour – has led them to become a much sought-after group on the international scene.

www.nordicvoices.no



Photo: Peder Otto Dybvik

The Norwegian trumpeter, composer and producer **Nils Petter Molvær** has changed the face of improvised music in Europe in the past few decades. Besides leaving a mark as a trumpeter, creating his own unique sound, he has also recorded soundtracks for a number of films, TV-films, documentaries and plays, and has released nine albums under his own name. His debut album “Khmer” (ECM) sold over 250,000 copies worldwide and established his reputation as one of the leading voices of the new European jazz movement. Molvær stretches himself out at will in time and space, subjecting himself to the new technology of the moment in order to give ever new expression to his timelessly unbridled romanticism.



More from Nordic Voices on Aurora

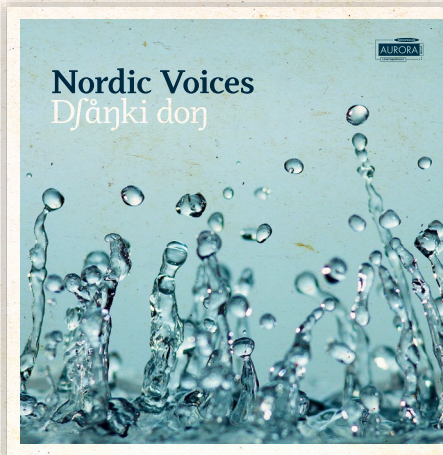


Gisle Kverndokk: Fuge der Zeit

ACD5077

Mass for six voices · The seven last words of Christ – for six singers, two string quartets and piano · Fuge der Zeit – for six singers, string orchestra and organ. Text from The Book of Ecclesiastes and poems by Paul Celan

– The complete spectre of Kverndokk's expressional power is revealed in one of his major works. The performances of Nordic Voices are outstanding.
[Guy Rickards/Klassisk Musikkmagasin]

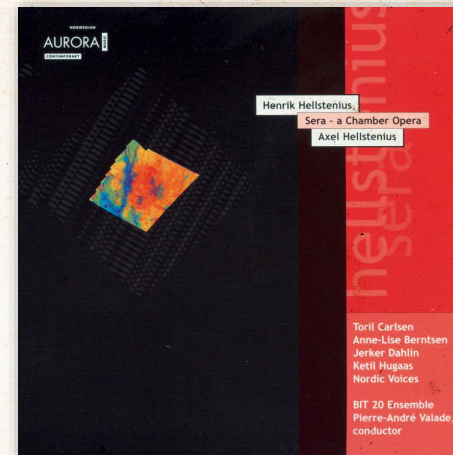


Djånki don

ACD5055

LASSE THORESEN: Diophonie I · DAVID BRATLIE: Lamentations · ASBJØRN SCHAATHUN: Verklörung · HENRIK ØDEGAARD: O Magnum Mysterium · CECILIE ORE: Schwirren · KÅRE KOLBERG: Plym-plym for 6 voices

– The SACD sound on this release is incredibly spacious, the recording set in a perfectly resonant acoustic which enhances the already marvellous Nordic Voices into a production which should be on every contemporary vocal-music fan's wish list. If I can persuade just a few of you to try this instead of yet another version of, let's say Handel's Messiah, then we'll all have evolved just a little step further towards an enlightened connection with what some of the best of today's music has to offer.
[Dominy Clements/MusicWeb]



Henrik Hellstenius: Sera (opera)

ACD5024

Toril Carlsen, soprano · Anne-Lise Berntsen, mezzo-soprano · Jerker Dahlin, tenor · Ketil Hugaas, bass · Nordic Voices · Pierre-André Valade, conductor · BIT20 Ensemble

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