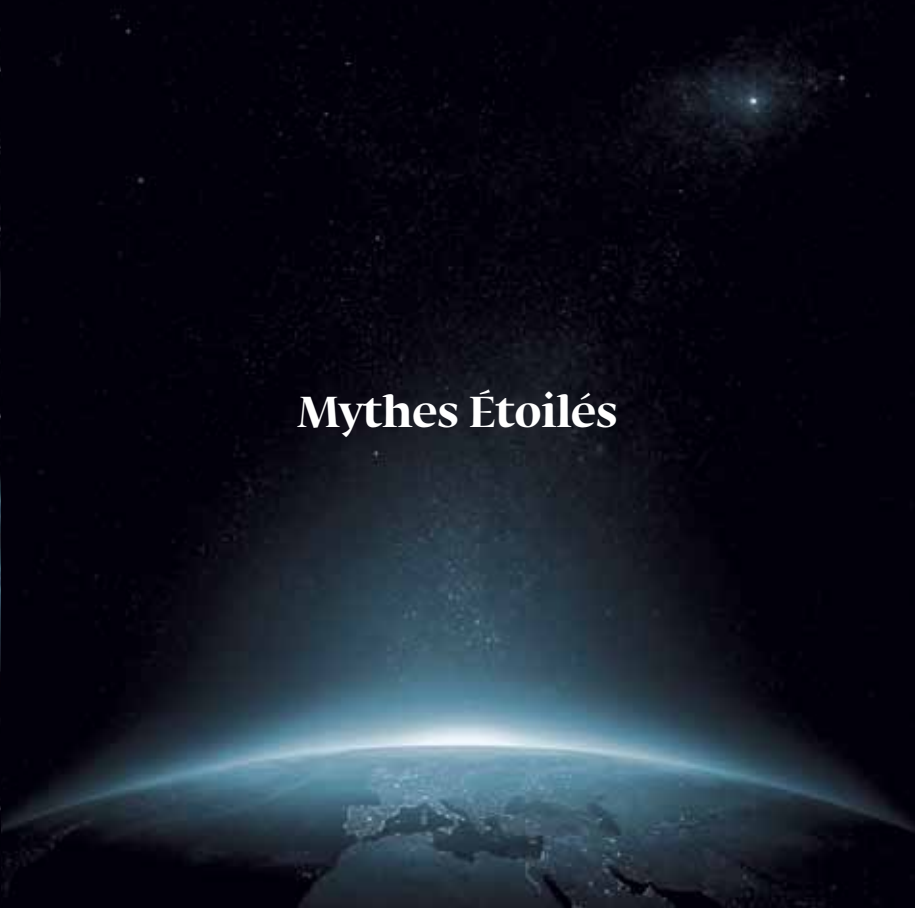




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## Mythes Étoilés

**LASSE THORESEN**

**Mythes Étoilés 24:02**

1 I Voici l'heure 11:08

2 II Ombres et Images 07:00

3 III Une Présence Miraculeuse 05:54

**GYÖRGY LIGETI**

4 Lux Aeterna 09:11

**MĀRTIŅŠ VIĻUMS**

5 Gāw ēk-dād kārđ 12:34

**JOHN CAGE**

6 Four2 07:18

**ANDERS HILLBORG**

7 Mouyayoum (for mixed choir) 13:14

**TOIVO TULEV**

8 Tanto Gentile 12:10

**LATVIAN RADIO CHOIR**

Kaspars Putniņš, conductor (1-3, 5, 8)

Sigvards Kļava, conductor (4, 6, 7)

Recorded 2012 in St. John's Church, Riga

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**Kaspars Putniņš** has been the conductor of the Latvian Radio Choir since 1992. In 1994, he formed the Latvian Radio Chamber Singers, an ensemble of soloists formed from the members of Latvian Radio Choir. He regularly appears as a guest conductor with leading European choirs such as the BBC Singers, RIAS Kammerchor, Netherlands Chamber Choir, Swedish Radio Choir, Netherlands Radio Choir, Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir, Flamish Radio Choir and others.

Whilst Kaspars Putniņš work encompasses a wide range of choral repertoire from Renaissance polyphony to works of the Romantic period, his foremost goal has always been that of promoting new outstanding choral music. This new repertoire challenges and develops the abilities of his performers and takes their vocal sound to entirely uncharted territories.

He has forged close relationships with many composers in the Baltic States and elsewhere; developing new works whilst also exploring new musical language and expression. These composers include Andris Dzenītis, Maija Einfelde, Mārtiņš Vīlums, Gundega Šmite, Toivo Tulev, Lasse Thoresen and Gavin Bryars.

Putniņš has conducted at the Lincoln Centre in New York, Muziekgebouw of Amsterdam,

Berliner Philharmonie and Konzerthaus, Cité de la musique in Paris, Berwaldhallen in Stockholm, Dresdner Frauenkirche etc., and often lectures and gives master classes internationally.

**Sigvards Kļava** is one of the most outstanding Latvian conductors, also a professor of conducting and producer, music director of the Latvian Radio Choir since 1992. As a result of Sigvards Kļava's steady efforts, the Latvian Radio Choir has become an internationally recognized, vocally distinctive collective, where each singer possesses a creative individuality. Under Sigvards' guidance, the choir has recorded a number of choral works by little known or completely forgotten composers of the past, as well as formed a friendly collaboration with a number of notable Latvian composers. Sigvards Kļava is an associate professor at the Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music and a teacher of conducting at the Riga Cathedral Choir School. Kļava is a multiple winner of the Latvian Grand Music Award. He has performed at the Concertgebouw and Muziekgebouw of Amsterdam, Berliner Konzerthaus and Philharmonie, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris, Berwaldhallen in Stockholm, Dresdner Frauenkirche, New York Lincoln Centre a. o.

# Latvian Radio Choir – Concrecence Project

by Malcolm MacDonald

Since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there has been an exponential development in new vocal techniques as applied to choral singing, and many specialized virtuoso choirs were established to perform the new repertoire that was being (and still is being) created by leading progressive composers in Europe, Asia and the USA. The Latvian Radio Choir, which has earned an enviable reputation for its interpretations of new music, has united with the Norwegian composer Lasse Thoresen to take part in his 'Concrecence Project' which aims to enrich possibilities for Western-trained singers through training in other vocal techniques, most of them of ethnic origin. These

techniques include new vocal timbres, non-tempered tonality, ornamentation techniques from Scandinavian folk songs and Mongolian overtone singing.

Lasse Thoresen studied under Finn Mortensen at the Oslo Music Conservatory, and afterwards studied electro-acoustic music and composition at the Institute of Sonology in Utrecht. He has taught Aural Sonology at the Norwegian State Academy of Music since 1975 and from 1988 to 2000 occupied the principal chair of composition there. He is among Norway's most frequently performed and widely-known contemporary composers and has been the

recipient of many prestigious awards. His orchestra works include a *Symphonic Concerto* for violin and orchestra (1984), *Illuminations* for cello and orchestra (1987), *Emergence* (1987) and *Symphonic Concerto for Violoncello and Orchestra. Viaggio attraverso tre valli* (2008/2013), as well as the oratorio *Terraces of Light* (2001) and the multi-media work *As Waves of One Sea* for 230 performers (2000), commissioned for the Millennium celebrations. He has written in many other genres, including electro-acoustic and synthesized music. Thoresen has been increasingly influenced by Norwegian folk music, both folksong and the literature of the Hardanger fiddle – as for instance in his major cycle for folk singer and ensemble *Løp, Løkk og Linjer* (*Chases, Cattle Calls and Charts*) (2001-3) which uses cattle-calls and transcribed birdsongs, as well as folk songs, for its basic material and also in the exuberant *Double Concerto for Hardanger Fiddle and Swedish Nyckelharpa* (keyed fiddle), *To the Brother Peoples* (2005). He also cites *musique concrète*, contemporary French *musique spectrale*, other microtonal systems including the intonational systems of Harry Partch, and his Baha’i religious faith, among his most important influences. With the results of the Concrescence project his aim has been to create a vocal music where it is possible to move by means of microtones from merging spectral chords to differentiated musical intervals.

*Mythes Étoilés* was commissioned by Norway’s Ultima Festival and was partially premiered there in 2010. It is a large-scale, three-movement setting of a poem by Giacinto Scelsi, better known as one of the original composers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. (The text comes from Scelsi’s poem ‘L’Heure H’ in his collection *L’Archipel Nocturne*, published in 1954.) Thoresen has written that ‘Scelsi gave important impulses to the two founding figures of spectral music, Gerard Grisey and Tristan Murail, during their respective stays in Rome as laureates of the Prix du Rome. [These composers] have been among the most influential in my own musical development. To me it seems that Scelsi’s compositional ideas were consummated by spectral music: The idea to expose the listener to the interior worlds of the single sound. For Scelsi, the opening up of the inner sound to the listener certainly was connected to his interest to open the hidden worlds of the human soul and the greater spiritual cosmos. In choosing to write music to a poem by Scelsi I affirm my sympathy for both of these objectives’.

In his setting of Scelsi’s deeply Symbolist poem, Thoresen has surely created a major utterance for unaccompanied voices, a masterpiece of similar importance to Olivier Messiaen’s *Cinq Rechants* or Iannis Xenakis’s *Nuits*. The text of the poem is generally sung

## The Latvian Radio Choir

**The Latvian Radio Choir** is regarded as one of the best professional chamber choirs in Europe. The Latvian Radio Choir could be called a sound laboratory – the singers regularly enhance their vocal skills, turning to the mysteries of traditional singing, also the art of quartertone and overtone singing. The Latvian Radio Choir actively popularizes the music of Latvian composers around the world. The choir’s recordings of works by Ēriks Ešenvalds, Kristaps Pētersons and Mārtiņš Vīlums have won the international UNESCO composers’ composition ROSTRUM. The Latvian Radio Choir regularly receives the invitations to perform in prestigious international

musical forums (including Baltic Sea Festival, Klangspuren Festival, La Musica, Ultima, Venetian Biennial) and in renowned concert venues, including Concertgebouw and Muziekgebouw in Amsterdam, Konzerthaus in Berlin, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris, New York Lincoln Centre etc. The choir successfully collaborates with such outstanding maestros like Heinz Holliger, Lars Ulrik Mortensen, Stephen Layton, Tõnu Kaljuste, James Wood. The Latvian Radio Choir records for BIS, GB Records, Ondine, Naïve, ECM a. o. The Latvian Radio Choir has received Latvian Grand Music Award six times.

# Tanto gentile

## Tanto gentile e tanto onesta pare

Tanto gentile e tanto onesta pare  
La donna mia quand'ella altrui saluta,  
Ch'ogne lingua deven tremando muta,  
E li occhi no l'ardiscon di guardare.

Ella si va, sentendosi laudare,  
Benignamente d'umiltà vestuta;  
E par che sia una cosa venuta  
Da cielo in terra a miracolo mostrare

Mostrasi sì piacente a chi la mira,  
Che dà per li occhi una dolcezza al core,  
Che 'ntender no la può chi no la prova;

E par che de la sua labbia si mova  
Un spirito soave pien d'amore,  
Che va dicendo a l'anima: "Sospira".

Dante Alighieri from *La Vita Nuova*.

## So Winsome and So Worthy Seems to Me

So winsome and so worthy seems to me  
my lady, when she greets a passer-by,  
that every tongue can only babble shy  
and eager glances lose temerity.

Sweetly and dressed in all humility,  
away she walks from all she's praised by,  
and truly seems a thing come from the sky  
to show on earth what miracles can be.

So much she pleases every gazing eye,  
she gives a sweetness through it to the heart,  
which he who does not feel it fails to guess.

A spirit full of love and tenderness  
seems from her features ever to depart,  
that, reaching for the soul, says softly "Sigh."

Translated by A.S.Kline

or recited by solo voices, so the words are never allowed to be obscured. Meanwhile, the chorus mostly creates extraordinary, magical sonic landscapes using sounds and single words or syllables extracted from the text. Thoresen's sheer inventiveness with these vocal sounds is apparently inexhaustible. In the first movement there are continual effects of sound-curtains being pulled aside to reveal further, more distant soundscapes beyond and within. There is a constant sense of the intermingling of the human and the unearthly. The second movement, 'Ombres et images', is more dramatic, a vision of light and dark that counterpoises evocations of Gregorian chant and medieval organum against a whole battery of sharp, intense rhythmic attacks, bell sounds and mocking, animalistic sounds, like a demonic vision out of a painting by Hieronymus Bosch, before the movement closes quietly, disappearing 'outside time'. In the third movement the initial harmonic glow becomes a vocal conflagration, rising to a tremendous climax with ululating solo voices as if driven to an ecstasy of joy. When the dynamics subside there is a definite, unexpected echo of folksong – perhaps even a cattle-call across the mountains – as the music comes to an end.

A modern classic of advanced choral repertoire, György Ligeti composed his **Lux**

**Aeterna** for 16 solo voices in the summer of 1966, almost as a sequel to his *Requiem* for soli, choruses and orchestra (1963-65). Commissioned by Clytus Gottwald for the Schola Cantorum of Stuttgart, it too sets a portion of the Latin Mass for the Dead, and is one of the first works in which Ligeti began to move from the cluster harmonies which had been characteristic of his music since the late 1950s towards clear, specific intervals. Gottwald's request reached Ligeti when he was gravely ill in hospital with a perforated intestine, but he immediately had a clear vision of the piece. Although clusters – growing outward from the initial F intoned by the female voices – are still largely used, so are certain chords, creating specific areas of harmony and adding to the aura of a piece which is tonal yet highly chromatic. The work is organized around a highly chromatic cantus firmus, with the 16 voices divided into four quartets, each singing in micropolyphonic canon. The slow speed and the overlapping of the individual voices render the words of the text virtually inaudible. Instead, Ligeti said that in the piece 'I synthesize a sort of imaginary bell with human voices'; and, true to its title, *Lux Aeterna* achieves a rare sense of luminosity, shining with an opalescent light.

Mărtinș Viļums, both a composer and an accordion player, was born in Riga. From 1991 to 1996 he studied accordion at the

Mediņš Music School and from 1996 to 1997 at the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Composition with Osvaldas Balakauskas. Having already studied composition at the Vītols State Academy of Music in 1995-96 he continued his studies at the Lithuanian Academy with Julius Juzeliūnas and Rimantas Janeliauskas until 2006, researching aspects of time in music of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century. He performed in concerts and festivals in Latvia and abroad and has appeared in several short Lithuanian feature films. He first came to international notice with the success of his prize-winning string quartet *Sansara*, which was performed at the UNESCO *International Rostrum of Composers* in Paris (1997) and the Luciano Berio Festival in Japan (at the Tokyo Opera), as well as at concerts in Lithuania, and in Russia.

Vīlums' choral work *gāw ēk-dād kard* ('On the conflict waged with the primeval ox') was inspired by the cosmological texts of the *Bundahishn* (which means 'Primal Creation'). This is the title traditionally assigned to an encyclopaedic collect of Zoroastrian cosmogony written in Pahlavi (Old Persian) dialect that relate how life was created out of a primeval ox. In this work non-traditional singing techniques (overtone and micro-interval singing, merged with different means of sound

production) are combined with a bi-modal, symmetrically constructed scale that is based on micro-interval relations.

This is a highly dramatic piece that seems to evoke the rituals of a remote primeval past. It falls into two parts, each beginning with maximum dynamic force and with the thud of a drum. Both parts are structured more or less as a long *diminuendo*. Repeated chant-like melody, vocables, percussive consonants, extremes of vocal range and dynamics and radical means of voice production all combine to create a mesmerizing sound-picture that seems to transport us to a world at once ancient and timeless. In the second of the two parts more melodic writing comes to the fore, both with a sense of lament and of communal worship, but increasingly subsides into mysterious small sounds, as if of nature, of the wind, of the susurrations of sand.

During the last six years of his life (1986-1992), the American composer John Cage wrote a large number of so-called 'number pieces'. These works are titled by a number (written as a word) indicating the number of performers, qualified by a small superior number (written as a numeral) to indicate which composition it is, chronologically, for that number of performers. Four<sup>2</sup>, composed in 1990 for the

## Lux aeterna

Lux aeterna luceat eis, Domine,  
cum Sanctis tuis in aeternum,  
quia pius es.  
Requiem aeternum dona eis, Domine,  
et Lux perpetua luceat eis,  
cum Sanctis tuis in aeternum,  
quia pius es.

Let eternal light shine on them, Lord,  
as with Your saints in eternity,  
because You are merciful.  
Grant them eternal rest, Lord,  
and let perpetual light shine on them,  
as with Your saints in eternity,  
because You are merciful.

## “gāw ēk-dād kard”

English translation of the texts:

### “On the conflict waged with the primeval ox”

1. As it passed away, owing to the vegetable principle (*chiharak*) proceeding from every limb of the ox, fifty and five species of grain and twelve species of medicinal plants grew forth from the earth, and their splendour and strength were the seminal energy (*tokhmih*) of the ox.
2. Delivered to the moon station, that seed was thoroughly purified by the light of the moon, fully prepared in every way, and produced life in a body.
3. Thence arose two oxen, one male and one female; and, afterwards, two hundred and eighty-two species of each kind became manifest upon the earth.
4. The dwelling (*manist*) of the birds is in the air, and the fish are in the midst of the water.

### 3. Une miraculeuse Présence

Silencieux

Tourbillonnent  
éblouis d'innocence  
les mythes étoilés  
balancant les feux  
d'une miraculeuse Présence.

Entre les pierres noires  
où un dragon veille  
sur la dure expérience  
inquiets contre le soleil  
jaillissent les éclairs.

G. Scelsi : L'ARCHIPEL NOCTURNE (1954). *L'heure H*. Reprinted in  
'Giacinto Scelsi. *L'Homme Du Son*. Poésies recueillies et commentées  
par Luciano Martinis avec la collaboration de Sharan Kanach.'  
ACTES SUD. 2006. p. 153 -156. Excerpt.

### 3. A miraculous Presence

Silently

stunned in their innocence  
the star-studded myths swirl  
balancing the fires  
of a miraculous Presence.

Between the black rocks  
where a dragon watches  
over the hard experience  
restlessly, towards the sun  
lights burst forth.

(Translation: LT.)

Madrigal Choir of Hood River Valley High School, Oregon is a partial exception to this rule: it is indicated as the second work for four performers but in this case the 'performers' are not the individual singers but the four vocal lines of an SATB chorus. (*Four*, written the previous year, is for string quartet.) Like most of these works *Four*<sup>2</sup> was composed using Cage's time bracket technique: the score consists of short fragments (frequently just one note, with or without dynamics) and indications, in minutes and seconds, of when the fragment should start and when it should end. Time brackets can be fixed (e.g. from 1.15 to 2.00) or flexible (e.g. from anywhere between 1.15 and 1.45, and to anywhere from 2.00 to 2.30). In an interview with Joan Retallack, Cage described the effect of the time-brackets in performance as like a vision 'Of an anarchist society, yes. That they would have no common idea, they would be following no common law. The one thing that they would be in agreement about would be something that everyone is in agreement about . . . and that is, what time it is.'

In *Four*<sup>2</sup> there are three time brackets for the sopranos, four for the altos, six for the tenors, and six for the basses. The score also supplies a pronunciation table for vowel sounds. Each section of the chorus (sopranos, altos, etc.) may be divided into two or more groups, so that one group

starts the sound and the other continues it. The effect of this beautiful and indeed radiant piece is of sustained, extremely long-held sound-continuums to which voices are added or subtracted, creating vibrant overtones and mysterious inner motion within the sounds.

In recent years Anders Hillborg has emerged as a commanding figure in Swedish contemporary music. Born in Sollentuna just to the north of Stockholm, he gained his first musical experience singing in choirs and was also involved in various forms of improvised music. From 1976 to 1982 he studied counterpoint, composition and electronic music at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm, where his teachers included Gunnar Bucht, Lars-Erik Rosell, Arne Mellnäs and Pär Lindgren. Another significant source of inspiration was the British composer Brian Ferneyhough, who was a guest lecturer at the College on several occasions. Apart from occasional teaching positions, Hillborg has been a full-time freelance composer since he left college in 1982 and he has been strikingly prolific. His output encompasses orchestral, choral and chamber music as well as music for films and pop music.

When he left music college, Hillborg says he made a promise to himself: he wouldn't take another permanent job for ten years

and would devote all my time to composing. 'I was very hard up at times, but it was a learning experience and I avoided the trap of getting a job that would prevent me from composing just for the sake of financial security.' It was during this period, in 1983-85, that he wrote the minimalist choral piece *Mouyayoum*, on a commission from the National Institute of Concerts. Like Ligeti's *Lux Aeterna*, this piece from Hillborg's twenties, scored for 16-part mixed choir (there is also a version for male chorus) has attained the status of a modern classic and has become his most frequently performed work. Described as 'cosmic trance' music, it is a wordless – but vowel-full – exploration of vocal texture.

Immensely slow-moving, it opens with a deep, subdued drone of throaty sounds (many of the sounds that Hillborg creates during the piece seem more electronic or instrumental than the product of human voices, the sounds perhaps of an interstellar orchestra). Gradually individual voices emerge, intoning on nonsense words and phonemes, with vocal glissandi, tight chromatic figures, stabbing repeated tones. (The title seems to be a contraction of one of these nonsense words, 'muocaaeyiywcoum'.) As with many works based on single, static, long-held harmonies, the ears gradually distinguish the rich cloud of overtones and the inner

life of the individual tones within the vertical mass, and any real or apparent change of harmony assumes the status of a dramatic event. There are two dynamic peaks in the work's 12-minute progress – not so much climaxes as points of maximum agglutination of sounds – before it dies into silence as if melting into the vastness of space.

Toivo Tulev, currently head of the Composition Department at the Estonian Academy of Music, was born in Tallinn. His teachers have included Eino Tamberg and the Swedish composer Sven-David Sandström; during 1996 he studied electro-acoustic music at the Cologne Hochschule der Musik. But he also acknowledges the strong musical influence and encouragement of such composers as Tõnu Kaljuste and Erkki-Sven Tüür, and the experience of singing in various early music vocal ensembles such as the Estonian Philharmonic Choir, Vox Clamantis, the Chœur Grégorien de Paris and Heinavanker; in fact, the study of Gregorian Chant has been a decisive element in the formation of his own musical language. In 1995 he founded the liturgical music ensemble Scandicus, of which he is Artistic Director.

It seems to be generally agreed that Tulev's works – which include orchestral and chamber music as well as choral pieces –

## 2. Ombres et images

Très haut

Au-dessus  
des incrustations  
où macèrent les monstres

Au-dessus  
de la chair pâle  
qui ouvre un nouvel âge

Au-dessus  
des cloches ardentes  
qui font monter la terre

Seul

J'avance  
ombre et image  
vers trois  
cercles immenses  
hors du temps

## 2. Shadows and images

Very high

Above  
the incrustations  
where the monsters macerate

Above  
the pale flesh  
that opens a new age

Above  
the ardent bells  
which cause the earth to ascend

Alone

I advance  
shadow and image  
towards three  
immense circles  
outside time.



# Mythes Étoilés

## 1: Voici l'heure

Voici l'heure  
de ta naissance ineffable

Effort atroce  
qu'anime  
en long frissons  
la dureté  
de l'infini

Paysage nourri d'éternité  
délivrant  
vers l'aube  
un monde désert  
où la souffrance abat  
l'hymne inachevé

Remonte  
l'heure est finie  
de l'instinct noir  
couché sur la terre

Par-delà  
l'admirable nuit  
où s'enfonce ton corps dense  
pénètre l'ombre  
du mystère original  
et dans un vertige ébloui

Reçois la première clarté.

## 1. Now is the hour

Now is the hour  
of your ineffable birth

The atrocious effort  
That animates  
In transports of joy  
The hardness  
Of the infinite

landscape nurtured by eternity  
delivering  
at dawn  
a deserted world  
where suffering crushes  
the unfinished hymn

Arise  
the hour is gone  
for the black instinct  
sloping on the earth

Beyond  
the admirable night  
where your dense body is poised  
penetrate the shadow  
of the original mystery,  
and in a dizzying flight

receive the first light.

often possess a mystical, incantatory dimension, as for instance in *Songs*, a polychoral piece for singers and instruments distributed round the auditorium, written for Paul Hillier. His language strives to balance the expressionistic aspects of contemporary music with the sense of the eternal to be discovered in sacred music, not without struggle, and this sometimes leads to ecstatic climaxes.

Tulev's *Tanto gentile* is an eloquent illustration of these qualities. Composed for Riga Chamber Singers and Kaspars Putnins, it was inspired by the extraordinary sound and capabilities of the choir. The text comes from the sonnet *Tanto gentile e tanto onesta pare* from Dante Alighieri's *La Vita Nuova*.

Originally conceived in 2009, the final version of the music was completed in May 2010. Tulev's work clearly relates to well-established choral styles (his grounding in Gregorian chant and the sacred and secular polyphonic repertoire is absolutely evident), but these are subtly and fantastically modified to create a lustrous and haunting sonic tapestry, extremely rich in harmony and texture. Though the words of Dante's poem are fairly clear at the outset, they soon tend to become reified and interwoven into the sound-fabric of Tulev's multi-threaded setting. The sense of mystical ecstasy, of the voices inhabiting a sacred space, is almost palpable, eventually dying away as if with the final exhalations of breath.

# The Concrecence Project: A Brief Description

The Concrecence Project is an aesthetically orientated research project that intends to bring about innovations in vocal practise and composition. It was initiated by Lasse Thoresen and the Norwegian Academy of Music in 2004. Through stimulating the synergy between highly different, seemingly contradictory vocal traditions - ethnic as well as contemporary - new musical expressions come into existence. So far the project attempts to combine Western classical singing with harmonic chant ("diphonic" chant) and Scandinavian traditional singing styles (kveding, kulning etc). To these sources is added a spectromorphological perspective (derived from the French Musique Concrète). Further reflection on

the compositional possibilities of these elements makes evident the need for a theoretical understanding of microtonality and the series of harmonics ('Just Intonation'). During the project a Microtonal Ear Training Method is being developed at the Norwegian Academy of Music (Professor Gro Shetelig).

The first phase of the project involved the vocal group Nordic Voices and culminated in a series of world performances during the Ultima Festival in Oslo 2005. The second phase of the project (2008-2010) involved the Latvian Radio Choir, and terminated with a number of first performances during the Ultima Festival 2010, and the Arena Festival in Riga the same year.

<http://www.lassethoreesen.com/concrecence/index.html>

