

LAWO
CLASSICS

ENSEMBLE ALLEGRIA



BRITTEN
HAGEN
STRAUSS

METAMORPHOSIS, VARIATION AND FRAGMENT

Ensemble Allegria presents here a combination of works as an invitation to enjoyment as well as reflection. We are offered variations, metamorphoses and fragments, three different artistic working concepts. Variation and metamorphosis are similar artistic tools inasmuch as the material to be used is workable and encourages modification. At the same time, the basic material is recognizable or, in any case, reconstructible. Music cannot be created out of nothing. Whether deliberate or not, we find metamorphosis and variation in all compositions of a certain scope. Of course in the works heard here the motif of transformation is intended. And whereas musical variations — as with Benjamin Britten — typically retain a theme's form and length more or less unaltered, a metamorphosis — as Richard Strauss calls his work — can by contrast pertain to everything from the shortest motifs to entire movements. A fragment — a form often associated with Romanticism — is on the other hand an idea that has not reached a final form and remains an intimation of something more. Lars Petter Hagen's *Strauss Fragments* were commissioned by Ensemble Allegria.

Metamorphosis is a Greek expression simply meaning transformation. We find the motif of transformation in other art forms of course. Especially well known is

the Roman Ovid's sweeping narrative poem *Metamorphoses* from the beginning of the Christian era, and Franz Kafka's story "Die Verwandlung", published in 1915, about Gregor Samsa, who one morning awakens in the body of a huge and hideous insect.

All three composers on this CD stand in debt to an older colleague. Britten had a close association with his teacher Frank Bridge and reveals this through his variations. Strauss explicitly cites Ludwig van Beethoven's third symphony in his *Metamorphoses*, and Hagen's composition is based on this latter work. Composing on the basis of music one does *not* hold in high regard often results in a caricature. This is by no means the case here.

Benjamin Britten (1913—1976):
Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge,
Op. 10 (1937)

This score bears the following inscription: "To F. B. [Frank Bridge] A tribute with affection and admiration." It is Britten's way of thanking Frank Bridge for many hours of private instruction over the years, and for his friendship and understanding. Bridge (1879–1941) was himself an outstanding composer and violist — incidentally an instrument Britten also played — and he

came to mean a lot for his pupil's faith in himself and his own compositional abilities. It was not long after completing his studies at the Royal College of Music that he was commissioned to write a work for the Salzburg festival, the last one to be held in an independent Austria before the war. The festival was to open in three months, so there was no time for hesitation.

Britten based his variations on the second of *Three Idylls for String Quartet*, Op. 6. The theme is in $\frac{3}{4}$ time and the association with a waltz is clear. With Britten it is presented after a short introduction in approximately the same timbral quality as the original. It is not easy however to follow the theme's transformations through the ten variations. The character of each is very different based on classical forms — often with a humorous quality. The march (variation two) can be interpreted as a caricature, perhaps the pacifist Britten letting himself be heard. The romance (variation three) sings flatteringly in $\frac{3}{4}$ time, although the rhythmic accompaniment seems to prefer a different time signature. Variation four — *Aria italiana* — lets the accompanying parts play mandolin (or guitar?), while the first violin plunges headlong into phrases reminiscent of Rossini and Paganini. A "Bourrée classique" (variation five) has the concertmaster cavorting in virtuosic

passages, not wholly unlike one of Bach's bourrées for solo violin. A Viennese waltz (variation six) greets Ravel (La Valse), while Moto perpetuo alludes to the many virtuosic instrumental pieces based on the idea of perpetual motion — a dream nineteenth-century physicists showed was unrealistic. The funeral march in variation eight ends the merriment abruptly with its somber triplet motifs and broken bass chords, similar to those found in the funeral march of Beethoven's *Eroica* symphony. "Chant" (variation nine) suggests the singing of David's psalms as heard in the Anglican Church. Taken together, these variations are almost like a catalogue of classical musical forms that Britten is also otherwise fond of using. And a large-scale, tradition-bound work of this kind must of course end with a fugue. The highly confident handling of musical tradition by a 23-year-old master makes this one of the classic works for chamber orchestra.

Lars Petter Hagen (b. 1975):
Strauss Fragments (2020)

Lars Petter Hagen is a Norwegian composer active in multiple arenas. Recent roles have been as chair of Arts Council Norway and Head of Development of Oslo Philharmonic

Orchestra, and he now serves as Director of the Bergen International Festival. In addition, he was director of the Ultima Oslo Contemporary Music Festival and had a wide range of tasks as curator. He has built up a large catalogue of works for a wide variety of ensembles — chamber music, orchestral and vocal works, and electronic music. He studied composition with Asbjørn Schaathun and Rolf Wallin at the Norwegian Academy of Music.

Several of Hagen's works are based on the music of other composers. For this writer he is a decidedly *listening* composer. His point of departure on this recording is Richard Strauss's *Metamorphoses*. The orchestra has two violin parts as usual, but also two viola and cello parts besides double bass. There are six quiet fragments that glide almost fully into one another. The fragments are based on condensed material from Strauss. Hagen utilises harmonics in large measure and puts together sounds of carefully matched timbres. The last two fragments have titles in parentheses: "Transfiguration" leads us to think of the English title of Strauss's early symphonic poem *Tod und Verklärung* (*Death and Transfiguration*), and, rather surprisingly, the last fragment is entitled "Opening".

About his own music Lars Petter Hagen says: "There are perhaps those who find

in it a nostalgic tendency, a feeling of lost time, things were better in the past, and so on. There is a certain truth to this, but I contend it's not the whole truth. I regard my own practice of composing as a basically optimistic project in which the core of my activity is about relations. I believe that music comes into being in relation to something, like an encounter, at times a confrontation, always in connection with people, the world, history."

Richard Strauss (1864—1949):
Metamorphoses (1945)

Richard Strauss's *Metamorphoses* for 23 solo strings is in itself an immersion in surges and streams of sound that can leave the listener bewildered. There are at the same time questions associated with this work that cannot be answered with certainty, and yet one cannot avoid asking them nonetheless.

The instrumentation is unusual. It appears that the work was originally intended for a smaller ensemble, and others have later attempted to reconstruct a more intimate version of this kind. But Strauss was aiming for something monumental. He had previously operated with a chamber-musical treatment of the orchestra in his later

operas. The opera *Capriccio*, originally a collaborative effort together with Stefan Zweig, is an example. Here, too, we find a sextet for two violins and an equal number of violas and cellos. Otherwise, octet instrumentation has been used by composers such as Felix Mendelssohn and Max Bruch. But ten violins, five violas, five cellos and three double basses — it is unparalleled.

Twenty-three wholly separate parts is an impossibility, so Strauss finds various ways of combining the musicians' parts. There are tutti-like sections in which all contribute in an orchestral manner. Concertino sections with few soloistic parts can, alternating with the tutti sections, evoke associations with concerti grossi, like, for example, Johann Sebastian Bach's third Brandenburg Concerto (three violins, three violas, 3 cellos and bass). To a lesser extent, instrumental groups are set up against each other, just as Bach does it. But the opening lets the cello and bass set the funereal mood before the violas introduce one of the important themes with heavily repeated quarter notes. Not until bar twenty-six do the violins enter with a more comforting motif. A long, fiery middle section yields in the end to the initial soundworld.

The soloistic duties are divided among the different musicians, though the main emphasis rests with the lead parts. Yet all

find themselves at some moment alone with their parts, an unusual challenge for most orchestra musicians. The large apparatus requires also thorough preparation, especially when a conductor is not involved — as here. This is by far the best practice.

One might reasonably wonder about the ideas veiled within this great work. It was written in the southern German town of Garmisch between 13 March and 12 April 1945, when Nazi Germany's "Third Reich" was being brought to its knees. Nine bars before the end Strauss writes "In Memoriam" in the score, while letting cello and bass parts cite the beginning of the funeral march from Beethoven's *Eroica*. Several of the themes here can be regarded as transformations of this theme. What lies behind this?

As one of the leading representatives of German culture, Richard Strauss had had to find a way to work with the powers that be. That his daughter-in-law was of Jewish descent and thus his grandchildren as well is, in this context, a mitigating circumstance. Statements from Strauss make it clear that he — when he was composing *Metamorphoses* in any event — regarded Hitler and his cronies as a criminal gang. Does his work reflect the grief he feels for the loss of countless innocent lives? For the destruction of German culture that was so

highly esteemed, including opera houses in which he himself had conducted and where his works had been performed — in Dresden, Munich, Vienna? Or are his thoughts troubled in a more general way by the loss of *The World of Yesterday*, which had caused his Jewish friend Stephan Zweig to take his own life? We cannot know ...

— Morten Carlsen,
The Norwegian Academy of Music
(Translated by Jim Skurdall)





ENSEMBLE ALLEGRIA

Ensemble Allegria ranks among Norway's finest music ensembles and is known for combining its high artistic standard with spontaneity and flexibility. The orchestra consists of 25 permanent musicians and has from the beginning been managed by the musicians themselves under the artistic direction of Maria Angelika Carlsen.

In addition to its own concert series "NÅ" in Oslo, Ensemble Allegria has performed at large music festivals in Norway and appeared with some of the world's leading soloists, including Tine Thing Helseth, Martin Fröst, Truls Mørk, Lawrence Power, Kathryn Stott and Benjamin Schmid. The ensemble has released four recordings on the LAWO Classics label, two of which were nominated for Spellemannprisen, Norway's Grammy. In recent years the ensemble has worked closely together with the Norwegian Soloists' Choir on a number of concert projects and recordings. In 2018 the orchestra received the prestigious Diapason d'or de l'année award for its recording of Bach's motets.

MUSICIANS

Violin

Maria Angelika Carlsen
Oda Gihle Hilde (Britten/Strauss)
Sunniva Carmen Fossum
Vilde Sandve Alnæs (Hagen)
Miriam Bergset
Nora Myrset Asheim (Britten/Strauss)
Andreas Haug
Maria Eikefet
Amanda Håøy Horn
Emilie Heldal Lidsheim (Britten/Hagen)
Guro Asheim (Strauss)
Leah Tagami Meredith (Strauss)
Daniel Lyngstad (Britten)
Emilie Haagenrud (Britten)
Patrycja Blazsak Bienkunska (Hagen)
Ragnhild Kyvik Bauge (Hagen)

Viola

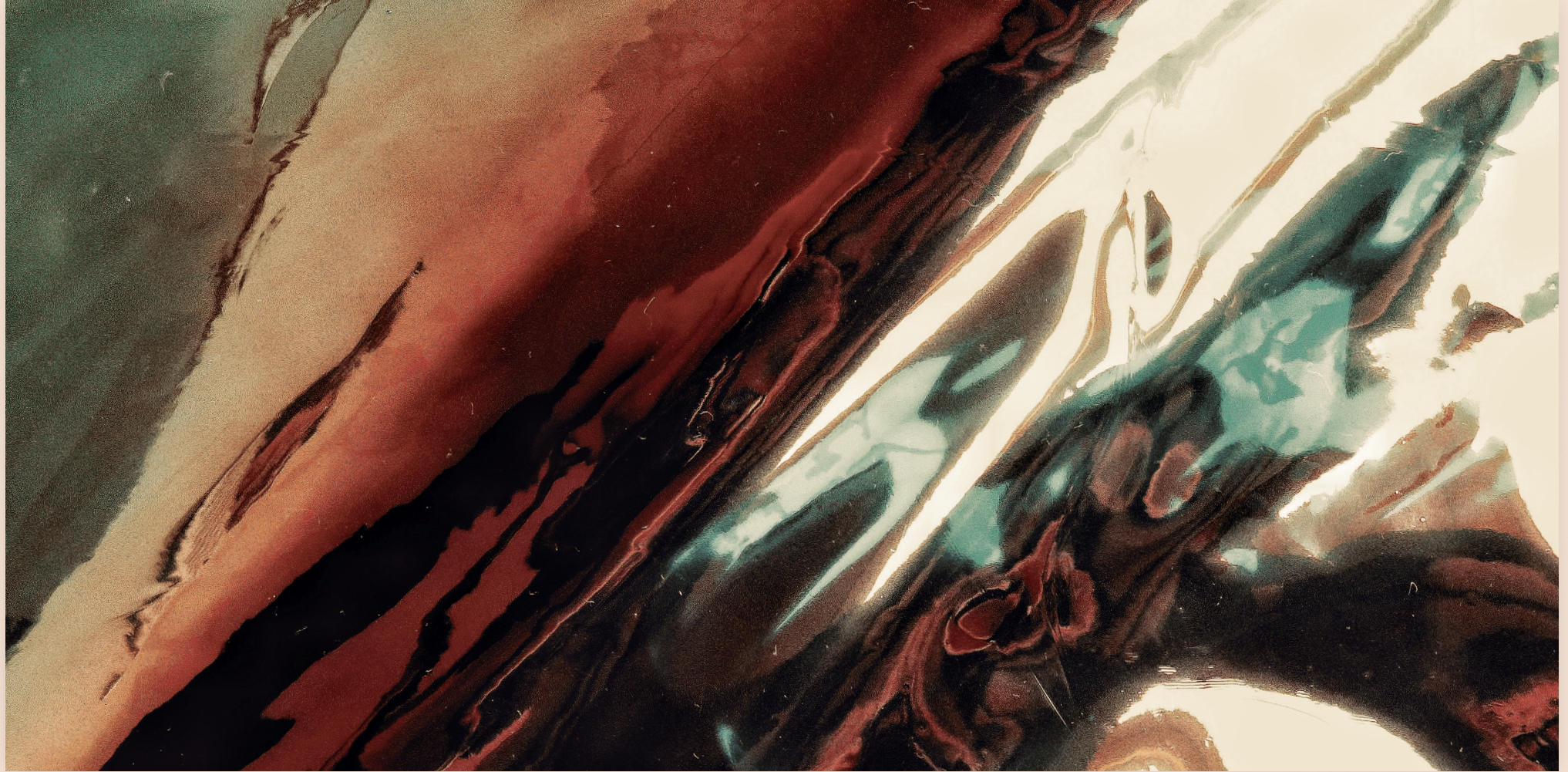
Marthe Grimsrud Husum (Britten/Strauss)
Einar Kyvik Bauge (Hagen/Strauss)
Christine Oseland (Britten/Strauss)
Torunn Blåsmo-Falnes
Nanna Sørli
Eivind Holtmark Ringstad (Britten)
Ingvild Finset Spilling (Hagen)

Cello

Frida Fredrikke Waaler Wærvågen (Britten/Strauss)
Jan-Øyvind Grung Sture
Sverre Kyvik Bauge (Strauss)
Benedicte Alstveit Årslund (Britten/Strauss)
Ulrikke Henninen (Britten/Strauss)
Frida Skaftun (Hagen)
Andreas Øhrn (Hagen)
Marek Bienkunski (Hagen)

Bass

Nikolai Matthews
Inga Margrete Aas
Henrik Bondevik (Strauss)





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ENSEMBLE ALLEGRIA

BENJAMIN BRITTEN (1913—1976)

Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge, Op. 10 (1937)

01. _____ Introduction and Theme — 01:52
02. _____ Variation 1. Adagio — 02:13
03. _____ Variation 2. March — 01:00
04. _____ Variation 3. Romance — 01:22
05. _____ Variation 4. Aria Italiana — 01:15
06. _____ Variation 5. Bourrée Classique — 01:10
07. _____ Variation 6. Wiener Walzer — 02:35
08. _____ Variation 7. Moto Perpetuo — 01:08
09. _____ Variation 8. Funeral March — 03:51
10. _____ Variation 9. Chant — 01:27
11. _____ Variation 10. Fugue and Finale — 06:33

LARS PETTER HAGEN (*1975)

Strauss Fragments (2020)

12. _____ I. Adagio — 01:18
13. _____ II. etwas fließender — 00:51
14. _____ III. sehr langsam — 01:36
15. _____ IV. etwas bewegter — 03:26
16. _____ V. Transfiguration — 02:28
17. _____ VI. Opening — 04:55

RICHARD STRAUSS (1864—1949)

18. _____ *Metamorphosen (1945)* — 24:44

