









# New Music for New Ensemble

Trio Brax explores the possibilities of a unique combination of instruments. Ola Asdahl Rokkones explains, 'Our ensemble is an odd flower, consisting of viola [Julia Neher], tenor saxophone [Ola Rokkones] and piano [Sergej Osadchuk]. The name Trio Brax emerged as we combined the words "bratsj" (viola in Norwegian) with "saxophone". There used to be just one original and well-known piece for this ensemble, the Hindemith Trio, Op. 47. This piece is beautiful, crazy, and fantastic, and very complex—but of course one work is too little for a full concert. So, we challenged three Norwegian composers to write for us, Håvard Lund, Helge Iberg and Kjell Habbestad. Although they were initially presented with Hindemith's work, they all came up with works that point in quite different directions.'

**Kjell Habbestad** (b. 1955) has collaborated before with Ola Asdahl Rokkones. Habbestad's saxophone concerto *Un rêve Norvégien* was commissioned by Rokkones in 2002. The original version was for wind band, but Habbestad later arranged the work for full orchestra, and Rokkones recorded this version in 2018 (LAWO LWC 1162). The composer began his career in liturgical music. He studied church music at the Norwegian Academy of Music, where he is now a professor, and from 1977 to 1987 was active as an organist. His large-scale works include four operas, *Hans Egede's Night*, *The Maid of Norway*, *Nenia* (in memory of composer Fartein Valen) and *Karlstad 1905*, *Une Page d'Histoire de la Civilisation*—and *The Møster Pageant*, music for a historical play about the coming of Christianity to Norway. This was performed annually in Bømlo, in southwest Norway, 1983–2015. As well as his saxophone concerto, Habbestad has written concertos for organ, Hardanger fiddle, flute, oboe and clarinet, two string quartets and many other chamber and choral works.

Habbestad often takes inspiration from literature. 'Sometimes', he says, 'that inspiration is so strong it deserves to be mentioned in the title or the liner notes. At other times the inspiration works more like a secret catalyst.' Trio Brax is made up of three nationalities, Russian (Osadchuk), German (Neher) and Norwegian (Rokkones). Habbestad's first idea was to base each movement on a poem from one of these countries, with a prominent role for the respective player.

'I used Aleksandr Pushkin's poem *The Prophet* as the basis for the first movement, Friedrich Nietzsche's *Die Sonne sinkt* (The Sun Goes Down) for the second movement, and André Bjerke's *Syngende jord* (Singing Earth) for the last movement. However, after some preliminary help from these poems, the connection to the literary dimension faded out so much that these poems could not be of use as titles. So too my idea to feature each of the instruments ... instead the music took over.'

Soon a different theme emerged, linking each movement to flowers. 'It must have been "viola" that gave me the first suggestion for a flower theme—and then the word games began. From "viola", *Viola cornuta* [horned pansy, Movement 2], and from "saxophone" *Saxifraga* [Movement 1]. More tricky was *Digitalis grandifloris* [foxglove, Movement 3]; this is for the grand piano, as it is played with the fingers—digitalis. In the end these titles came to bear on the overall work and gave it the name *Tres flores* (Three Flowers), and even demanded a portrait in a frame!' (Photographs of the three flowers grace the cover page of the score.)

**Håvard Lund** (b. 1970) is a composer and jazz musician who performs on both saxophone and clarinet. He studied on the Jazz Programme at Trondheim Musikkonservatorium and has played saxophone in the jazz ensembles Farmers Market, Frode Fjellheim's Jazzjoik Ensemble, and the Trygve Seim Ensemble. Lund began his career as a composer writing music for theatre plays for several Norwegian

companies. He is a leading member of the artistic community of the Troms region of Northern Norway, where he organises artist residency schemes in remote locations.

Lund gives his works descriptive titles, but he cautions that these are only his starting point, 'I construct, I move the pieces around until I get the best fit. I work with distractions as an important tool, and sometimes by associating an appropriate title I can make the creativity spin again. I let my subconscious mind guide me, as my Indian friends say: follow your gut feeling, it is a higher consciousness than the conscious you.'

The starting point for *The Magpie & I* was a grim encounter with a flock of birds, 'A flock/school/pod of young magpies, a Kindergarten, had wandered into my house. I killed one of them and laid it out to scare the others away. This was something that we have always done: you hang up dead birds to make an example. But then it started. I was plagued by a series of accidents, and

they continued for many months. It was wild. Never again will I ignore the old sayings about harming animals. I learned a lesson. In the piece, every possible point of view on the events is expressed: from the birds' angle, from my angle, from the angle of the leader of the flock. The catch, the murder, the remorse and, not least, the view of my children, are all here.'

**Helge Iberg** (b. 1954) is another musician equally at home in the worlds of jazz and classical. Iberg attended the University of Oslo, where he studied comparative religion and the history of ideas as well as music and has pursued a parallel career as a writer on culture. His compositions include orchestral works, concertos for piano, violin, and trumpet, as well as chamber music, songs, musicals, and a comic opera. Iberg is also active as a jazz pianist, collaborating with musicians including Bendik Hofseth, Sidsel Endresen and Nils Petter Molvær.

The title of Iberg's piece *Ut å stjæle hester* translates as 'Out Stealing Horses'. The

composer explains, 'It is inspired by the title of Per Petterson's famous novel, but I have chosen a different spelling (in Norwegian) to distance myself from its content. The title came about after a revision of the piece in connection with this recording. I have given the two movements their respective quasi-dramatic titles (*The Sting*, *The Ride*) to emphasise the lightness and unpretentiousness of the idea.'

'The piece is percussive and has a constant groove that drives it forward. The formal impetus is an insistent, ascending 16th-note figure that acts as an engine throughout. This is accompanied by three smaller motifs. Each of these is an independent expression, but they all become tangled together with the main character of the piece. In movement 2, a motif is launched that gives a more dance- or, tango-like feel. In parts of this movement, Ola removes the mouthpiece from his saxophone and plays directly into the tube, creating a flute-like sound. Sergej at the piano contributes some *hypnotic horse-riding rolls*, while Julia plays *alla chitarra*



(like a guitar) on her viola. Trio Brax is an untraditional ensemble where viola and piano must find their role against the saxophone's somewhat dominant pondus.'

**Paul Hindemith** (1895–1963) composed his Trio, Op. 47, in 1928. The original instrumentation was viola, heckelphone and piano, although he also endorsed the tenor saxophone in place of the heckelphone. Both combinations are highly unusual and reflect the composer's interest in the soloistic possibilities of neglected and obscure instruments. Hindemith was himself a virtuoso viola player, and his chamber music includes many works for solo viola. The heckelphone is a kind of baritone oboe. It was developed by Wilhelm Heckel (1856–1909) and his sons Wilhelm Hermann and August, at the request of Richard Wagner. The instrument first appeared in 1904, after Wagner's death. It was later taken up by German composers including Richard Strauss, Carl Orff, and Hans Werner Henze.

Replacing the heckelphone with tenor saxophone offers new possibilities for the Trio. Ola Asdahl Rokkones writes, 'In my opinion the saxophone offers more depth, dynamic range and a more flexible sound pattern. Neither the tenor saxophone nor the viola are much used as solo instruments in chamber music. In the domain of classical saxophone, it's mainly the alto saxophone that has a lead role. As for strings, violin and cello are more frequently used than viola. So, when both the viola and the tenor saxophone are featured in this work, we experience something new in terms of sound, timbre and also register. While the parts for both viola and piano are extremely virtuosic, and demand high precision at very high tempi, the tenor saxophone part is mainly melodic and lyrical.'

During the 1920s, Hindemith wrote many chamber works that combined traditional baroque textures with more modern harmonies. In the Trio, Op. 47, the three instruments play independent lines, in the spirit of baroque counterpoint, but the harmonies

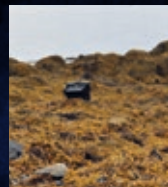
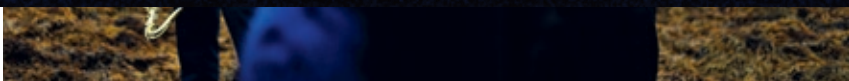
between them are more modern. The work is in two movements, of which the first is divided into three subsections, *Solo* for piano, *Arioso* for saxophone and piano, and *Duet* for viola and saxophone accompanied by piano. Although the instrumentation changes, the three sections are closely linked, as each is based on the motifs presented by the piano at the start of the work. The second movement is in four sections, all fast, *Schnelle Halbe* (in fast minims), *Lebhaft* (lively), *Schnelle Halbe* and *Prestissimo*. In the first two sections, the saxophone follows the viola in close imitation, in the third and fourth the relationship between the instruments is looser. But a sense of inner propulsion energises the movement from one section to the next, gradually building to an emphatic coda.

Chamber music was a major preoccupation for Hindemith through the 1920s, and the ideas that he developed found full expression in the Trio, Op. 47. In the 1930s, his focus changed, towards orchestral music and large-

scale works. The Trio therefore stands as a culmination of Hindemith's chamber music, embodying his most radical ideas of form, harmony, and instrumentation.

— Gavin Dixon







# Kjell Habbestad

## Composer

Kjell Habbestad (b. 1955) is Professor emeritus of Music Theory and Composition at the Norwegian Academy of Music in Oslo. His catalog of works, which as of Autumn 2022 comprises 104 opuses, includes dramatic works (operas, oratorios), concertos, chamber and organ music, and a large number of motets and other choral works. Habbestad often finds his initial inspiration in archaic musical sources, including Jewish or Samaritan chant, plain chant, Nordic medieval tunes, folk music, other composers' works (e.g., Beethoven, Fartein Valen). Sometimes he finds his starting point in non-musical sources: Bible verses, poetry, short stories, paintings. His musical language can be characterized as free tonal with a hint of jazz.

Habbestad was nominated for the Norwegian equivalent of the Grammy Award (Spellemannprisen) in 2018 for the album *Et nox in diem versa* (LWC1136) with the Latvian Radio Choir. Habbestad's works are also available on the CDs *Gaudeamus* (LWC1031) with organ music, *Quattro Stazioni* (LWC1193) with music for strings, *Norwegian Saxophone* (LWC1162), *Singing Oboe* (LWC1186), *Something New* (LWC1076), and *Akrostikon* (ACD 5091).



# Håvard Lund

## Composer

Håvard Lund (b. 1970) combines his career as a renowned jazz saxophonist and clarinetist, with composing classical music for orchestras, ensembles, and theatre plays. As a musician he has been a part of the famous projects Farmers Market (founding member), Jazzjoik and Trygve Seim Ensemble, and he has also worked with musicians and ensembles such as Jon Balke, Arve Henriksen, Ståle Storløkken, and Trondheim Jazz Orchestra.

His worklist includes music for more than 15 theatre plays, as well as commissions from The Norwegian Radio Orchestra, Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, Bodø Sinfonietta, and Cairo Symphonic Orchestra. He has a large discography within a wide range of genres and collaborations.



# Helge Iberg

Composer

Helge Iberg (b. 1954) moves effortlessly between the scores of contemporary music and the modern landscapes of jazz. His worklist includes orchestral works, solo concertos, chamber music, opera, songs and musicals. His piano style reflects the jazz musician's spontaneity and the composer's respect for form and expression. As an original and genuine voice in Norwegian cultural life, Helge Iberg is concerned with culture and humanism, as a musician, but also as a writer of books, essays, and articles.

Iberg has received the Norwegian Music Publisher's Award 2020, the Norwegian Grammy Award (Spellemannprisen) 2019, the Work of the Year (NOPA) 1991, as well as

Prix Italia 1990. Furthermore, he has been nominated for the Edvard (Grieg) Prize in 2001, 2016, and 2020, for the Norwegian Grammy in 1991, and 1994.



# Paul Hindemith

Composer

Paul Hindemith (1895—1963) was one of the most significant German composers and music theorists in the 20th century, particularly with his concept of *Gebrauchsmusik* (Utility music), and as a part of the larger art movement *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity). With the use of traditional forms, counterpoint, and polyphony in combination with modern harmonies and jazz elements, his music could be both playful and complex, often described as neoclassical. The Nazi regime condemned most of his music as *Entartete Musik* (Degenerate Music), and in 1938 he emigrated from Germany—first to Switzerland, and then to the U.S. in 1940. There he started teaching at Yale University, and in 1946 he got a U.S. citizenship.

His worklist is extensive, and comprises operas, ballets, symphonic works, concertos, chamber music, choral works, lieder, and piano works. Hindemith was renowned for his virtuosic viola playing, and in his late years he also had a career as a conductor, mainly conducting his own music.









# Trio Brax

## Ensemble

Trio Brax is a chamber music ensemble based in Tromsø, Northern Norway. With the unusual combination of viola, tenor saxophone and piano, the trio represents a distinctive direction in the Norwegian chamber music tradition. They have built their repertory in close collaboration with some of Norway's leading contemporary composers. The result is playful without being experimental, as well as expressive and virtuosic on multiple levels. While classical music for regular piano trios traditionally points towards older works, the instrumentarium of Trio Brax is open to brand new sounds and musical landscapes.

# Julia Neher

## Viola

Julia Neher (b. 1983) studied in Freiburg with the famous Wolfram Christ, and in Cologne with Antoine Tamestit. She has played in some of the key European orchestras, such as the Munich Philharmonic Orchestra, the Lucerne Festival Orchestra (since 2005), the Berlin Philharmonic, the Mahler Chamber Orchestra, as well as the Chamber Orchestra of Europe. From 2008 until 2011 she was principal viola of the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra, and from 2011 until 2021 she was principal viola of the Arctic Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra. Since 2022, Neher has been principal violist of the Trondheim Symphony Orchestra.

She is the recipient of several prestigious awards and grants, including the Wittner Förderpreis (2000), the Music Prize

Schloss Waldthausen (2005), the grant of the Märkische Kulturkonferenz (2006), the Villa Musica grant (2005—2008), the 1. Carl-Seeman Prize of the Hochschule Freiburg (2007), and the promotion prize of the Mendelssohn-Bartholdy Wettbewerb, Berlin (2008). She has also appeared as a soloist with numerous orchestras, such as Camerata Hamburg, Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra, and the Arctic Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra Tromsø.





# Ola Asdahl Rokkones

Tenor Saxophone

Tenor Saxophone without mouthpiece

Ola Asdahl Rokkones (b. 1983) is one of the few saxophonists working within the fields of both classical music and jazz. He studied with several acclaimed teachers including Lars Lien, Vibeke Breian, Jean-Yves Fourmeau and John-Pål Inderberg. In 2012 he received the culture prize of Tromsø Municipality, and in 2018 he was the laureate of the artist grant of the Troms region. In 2019 he was selected as one of the four recipients of the Barents Scholarship, "for valuable and outstanding contribution to the cultural life and cooperation across borders in the Barents Region".

As a classical musician, he has appeared as a soloist with several orchestras

in Norway, Russia, Germany, and France, among them the Arctic Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra, Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Mariinsky Symphonic Orchestra. He has commissioned and premiered music by numerous composers, such as Helge Iberg, Kjell Habbestad, Martin Romberg, Torstein Aagaard-Nilsen, Erik Stifjell, Lars Skoglund, Håvard Lund, Bodvar Drotninghaug Moe, Alexander Manotskov and Bjørn Breimo. His discography includes nine releases, including the album *Norwegian Saxophone* (LWC1162) with Fabio Mastrangelo and The St. Petersburg Northern Sinfonia.



# Sergej Osadchuk

Piano

Sergej Osadchuk (b. 1957) studied at the Moscow Conservatory with Professor Pavel Messner (student and assistant to Emil Gilels) and has thus continued the long-established Russian piano tradition. He has had an extensive career as a soloist, chamber musician, and accompanist, and has been a soloist with the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra, Moscow Radio Orchestra, Jönköping Symphony Orchestra, Kristiansand Symphony Orchestra, Arctic Philharmonic, and Oslo Camerata, among others.

He combines his concert career with teaching and has given masterclasses in Norway, Sweden, Finland, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, and Russia.

Osadchuk has released a number of CD recordings in collaboration with various artists including Morten Carlsen (viola) and Marianne Beate Kielland (mezzo-soprano). Osadchuk is Professor of Piano at the Academy of Music, University of Tromsø—The Arctic University of Norway.







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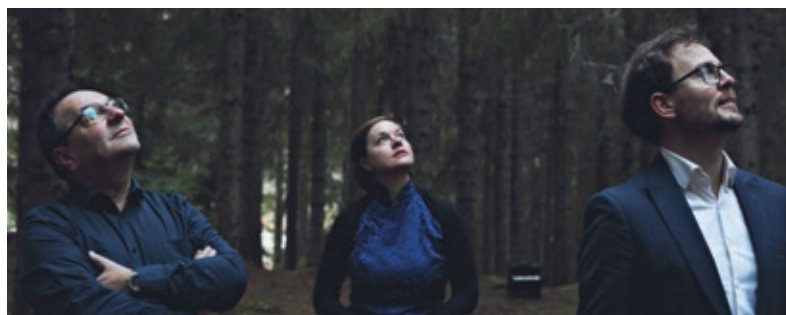
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# Trio Brax

KJELL HABBESTAD (\*1955)

*Tres flores for Viola, Tenor Saxophone and Piano, Op. 97*

- 01. \_\_\_\_ I. Saxifraga squarrosa—04:57
- 02. \_\_\_\_ II. Viola cornuta—06:51
- 03. \_\_\_\_ III. Digitalis grandiflora—05:39

HÅVARD LUND (\*1970)

04. \_\_\_\_ *The Magpie & I*—09:37

HELGE IBERG (\*1954)

*Ut å stjæle hester*

- 05. \_\_\_\_ I. The Sting—05:31
- 06. \_\_\_\_ II. The Ride—09:21

PAUL HINDEMITH (1895—1963)

*Trio for Viola, Tenor Saxophone and Piano, Op. 47*

- 07. \_\_\_\_ I. Solo. Sehr lebhaft, stürmisch—01:22
- 08. \_\_\_\_ II. Arioso. Sehr langsam—04:07
- 09. \_\_\_\_ III. Duett. Lebhaft—01:30
- 10. \_\_\_\_ IV. (Potpourri). Schnelle Halbe—02:41
- 11. \_\_\_\_ V. Lebhaft. Ganze Takte—01:47
- 12. \_\_\_\_ VI. Schnelle Halbe—01:36
- 13. \_\_\_\_ VII. Prestissimo—01:33