

LIVE IN BREMEN

Hilde Torgersen - mezzo-soprano
Kenneth Karlsson - piano



LOOKING BACK

Hilde Torgersen and I were invited to hold a concert in Bremen back in June of 1992. The Norwegian pianist Darlén Bakke had moved to Germany after studying at the Norwegian Academy of Music in Oslo and had already established a successful career for herself there. She wanted to acquaint the German audience with the music of her homeland and decided to organise a festival called “Bremen meets Oslo”. In addition to German musicians, Hilde, myself, and other Norwegian musicians and composers were invited, and the concert was held in the Bremen Radio concert hall.

This was a time of great activity for Hilde and me, with a full schedule of concerts as well as commissions from a number of composers to build up a fresh repertoire. We aimed to push the boundaries of music for voice and piano and were after music for this combination that felt modern and contemporary. With the exception of Antonio Bibalo’s piece, all the



music from this concert was composed for us.

We spent a few nice days in Bremen, not only performing the concert but also holding seminars about the music at the music college. We played to a packed concert hall and the atmosphere

during the concert was fantastic. Rolf Wallin’s piece went down particularly well. At the reception afterwards, I got to speak to several people in the audience, and oddly enough, many of them were convinced that we’d been improvising during the Wallin piece. When I assured them that we read

the notes and that the piece had conventional notation, they could hardly believe it. The piece was clearly something new at the time.

- Kenneth Karlsson

Asbjørn Schaathun *Dualis*

Dualis, *Liederbuch nach Texten von Pablo Neruda und Fernando Pessoa* emerged from the ruins of another 'Liederbuch' I had written in 1987 over text fragments from Müller/Schubert's *Die schöne Müllerin*. I found many of the practical and musical solutions in this first version rather unsatisfactory (with fragments deformed and manipulated by a computer program, percussion instruments for the singer, etc.). So I made a conscious decision to take the basic idea of the piece, two vastly different musical characters that can't immediately be reconciled - emphasised in this version by two very different texts - and I gave it all a clear, formal progression.

However, I can recall the mixed feelings of joy and trepidation I had in 1987 when Hilde and Kenneth originally suggested I write a work for vocal and piano. I felt this way for several reasons, but the main one was probably that the medium itself - voice and piano - was a heavy burden to carry back then, not least in a country predisposed to romance, such as Norway. How on earth was I supposed to get my teeth into the relationship between the voice and the accompany-

ing instrument, let alone 'solve' it, and also deal with the possible problems the lyrics would give me, with such a tension between the pathetic and the realistic? This challenge involuntarily occurs every time you have to set existing texts to music, which would undoubtedly have managed very well without my help. But I did have at my disposal two highly engaged and invested performers!

Looking back on this music 33 years later, it moves delicately (and occasionally falls deep into the crevices) between being grounded in the sensitivity of the lyrics and the sometimes almost instrumental use of the voice. This is like round pegs in square holes. I don't even really know if I have managed to 'solve' anything in *Dualis*. Strangely enough it seems that the friction between the presented texts and the joy of the instrumental and singing virtuosity I had at my disposal provided the magic moments. This is where the music transcends the score and expresses in a few fleeting glimpses at least something of what it is like to be human, even today. This is in no small part thanks to these two eminent performers. Hearty thanks!

- Asbjørn Schaathun

Jon Balke *Virr*

Virr was composed in 1990 both for and in collaboration with Kenneth Karlsen. It was composed during a period in the contemporary music environment in Oslo where there was a great deal of open experimentation with collaborations across the musical genres. I had been involved with various projects with conductor/pianist Christian Eggen and what was then *My Musikk* in Oslo, and I met Kenneth in several of these settings. It did not take long for us to find mutual respect and fields of interest, and we agreed to work on a piece for piano and electronics. I had been involved with synths, midi and computers ever since the release of the Mac 128K, the first of Apple's personal computers, and I was very much stimulated by what was going on at Henie Onstad Art Centre just outside of Oslo, where I had developed a number of projects with pioneer video artist Kjell Bjørgeengen and sound wizard Mats Claesson.

Artistically speaking, with *Virr* I aimed to investigate and expand the flux and flowing energy I'd gleaned from my jazz background, and to develop a piano voice that could relate in various ways to a kind of expanded time concept, drifting on and off the

'beat'. Central questions were: what makes music create the impression of forward motion? How can a fixed composition remain flexible and elastic? How do the frequency spectrums of the acoustic piano and synthesised sound interrelate?
- Jon Balke

Bjørn Kruse *Altra risposta*

My first encounter with Salvatore Quasimodo (1901-1968) was when, in the 1970s, I heard the work *Epitaffio* (1963), by Arne Nordheim, where text material was taken from Quasimodo's *Ed è subito sera* (And suddenly it is evening). The text struck a chord with me, and I later read several poems by Quasimodo and used texts written by him in two works. One was *Altra risposta* (1989) and the choral work *Quasi un madrigale* (2006). Along with other Italian poets, such as Giuseppe Ungaretti, Antonio Allegra and Eugenio Montale, Quasimodo is considered a "verist", who wrote about people's daily struggles and lives. I haven't read all of their poems, but certainly enough to be fascinated firstly by the melody of the language and then the language itself. Several of my works have since been in Italian. *Altra risposta* was graciously commissioned by

Kenneth Karlsson and Hilde Torgersen, with the first performance taking place at the Henie Onstad Art Center on 23 April 1989.

In this work I have used Quasimodo's poem *Altra risposta*, an epigram entitled *Dalla rete dell'oro pendono ragni ripugnanti*, as well as the longer poem *Vento a Tindari*. I greatly admire the way he approaches the chasm between the little human and the universe, (similar to what I experience in Hans Børli's poems). For me, this invites a personal musical interpretation that I find particularly appealing.

- Bjørn Kruse

Antonio Bibalo *Cantico*

Antonio Bibalo composed *Cantico* in 1983, taking the text from Paolo and Francesca's illicit love story in Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy*. In 1275, Francesca was married to the "deformed and ugly" Gianciotto, but fell in love with his brother Paolo and the two began to carry on an adulterous affair. On discovering their infidelity, Gianciotto stabbed them both with his rapier. The *Inferno* part of the epic poem is depicted as nine concentric circles of torment, and Paolo and Fran-

cesca's 'Lust' ended up in the second circle, along with heathens, gluttons and the greedy.

The piece in this score was written for mezzo-soprano and 5 synthesisers. Bibalo recorded the whole thing so it could be performed for mezzo-soprano and prepared tape. His synth of choice was the Roland Jupiter 8, but in this case he also used other analog synths by Arp and Korg. In the 1990s, I thought it would be a good idea to perform this piece live for mezzo and 5 synthesisers, though unfortunately nothing ever came of it. One reason for this was that it was not easy to find instruments that actually worked and they were also considered to be out of fashion. Digital synths such as the Yamaha DX7 were on their way in, and analog synths were on their way out. As we now know, the analog ones have come back again.

- Kenneth Karlsson

Rolf Wallin *...though what made it has gone*

Welcome to a time machine that takes you back to a turning point in Norwegian music history - where a new process has begun to unfurl. Gone are the

days of a contemporary music which is *passé*, performed in front of a smattering of 'specialist interest' attendees with rows of benches all to themselves. Instead we are heading towards a time when festivals such as *Ultima* have gained a large and increasingly younger audience, and is brimming with exciting music groups - small and large - at an international level, with a fantastic diversity of aesthetic expressions.

The locomotive was a particularly serendipitous constellation of performing musicians, composers and organisers, all with a burning enthusiasm and curiosity about what was happening in contemporary music, not only up here in Norway, but also internationally.

Hilde Torgersen and Kenneth Karlsson who were absolutely central and indispensable in this process and, personally, encountering them was absolutely decisive for my own development as a composer. It was intoxicating to collaborate with them on *...though what made it has gone*. Not only did they tackle the most technically challenging piece I've written with gusto, but they also made it their own, performing it countless times in concert and always finding ever deeper layers in the music. They were really on song that night in Bremen, a concert with five Norwegian composers from a wide range

of musical styles performing for a German audience, both in the hall and on the radio. Now, several decades later, they're performing for you.

- Rolf Wallin

HILDE TORGENSEN MEZZO-SOPRANO

Hilde Torgersen was a pianist from a young age, but when applying to the Norwegian Academy of Music in Oslo she was surprised to be accepted for her singing. Though she did apply for both, she had only recently started focusing on her singing, and a whole new world opened up for her. After completing her master's degree in 1984, she began working as a freelance musician, which included Swedish contemporary group Aquarius, as well as playing baroque music with Rolf Lislevann. In the 1990s, she worked closely with the ensemble Cikada, the Oslo Sinfonietta and formed the Cikada Trio with Bjørn Rabben on percussion and Kenneth Karlsson on piano. She has been a soloist with several Scandinavian orchestras, worked with multimedia and video, made films, recorded several albums and toured the world.

Torgersen has premiered several works. She has toured with major works such as *Circles* by Berio, *Indianerlieder* (American Indian Songs) by Stockhausen, as well as Giacinto Scelsi's vocal music. Even as early as her years at the Academy she toured Schönberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*, which she also took for her master's exam. Torgersen has worked closely with composers such as

Alessandro Vinao, Rolf Wallin, Arne Nordheim, James Clark, James Dillon, premiering Dillon's major work *L'évolution du vol* and recording several of his pieces.

Her collaboration with Kenneth Karlsson also began at the Norwegian Academy of Music, initially with classical music before moving towards contemporary music. They have performed concerts both as a duo and with various chamber music ensembles. Together they've received several commissions.

In 2004, Torgersen was involved in a car crash and has found it challenging to continue performing on stage, and since then has focused mainly on her work as a singing teacher.





KENNETH KARLSSON PIANO

Born in Åmål, Sweden, Kenneth Karlsson started playing improv/rock with friends in his youth before his interest in classical music was awoken, and after a few years he started studying at the Norwegian Academy of Music in Oslo, with further studies in the Netherlands. Since then, Karlsson has worked as a pianist in the fields of contemporary classical and classical music. In the 1980s and 90s, he was a member of groups such as Ensemble K4, Oslo Sinfonietta, Aquarius, and has since enjoyed a collaboration with mezzo-soprano Hilde Torgersen for over 20 years. He has also played in several improvisation based groups over the years, most notably the quartet Point 4, alongside Jon Balke, Ingar Zach and Bjørn Rabben.

Kenneth Karlsson has been the pianist and artistic director of the 10-piece ensemble Cikada since 1989. He currently plays in an improvisation duo with percussionist Ingar Zach. He also has a duo with the soprano Elisabeth Holmertz and together they lead the group Vollen United, an experimental cross-genre group mixing baroque contemporary-classical, pop, and improvisation.

Karlsson has toured the world and recorded a number of albums, and in 2001 he received *Spellemannprisen* - the Norwegian Grammy - for his solo album *Sofferte Onde Serene*. In 2005, his ensemble Cikada received the Nordic Council Music Prize.

Karlsson has also worked with video, dance and multimedia and is behind a number of commissioned works and premieres. He has collaborated with musicians and composers such as Klaus Lang, Clara Ianotta, James Dillon, Carola Bauckholt, Liza Lim, Bent Sørensen, Richard Barrett, Lasse Marhaug, Rolf Wallin. In addition to piano, Karlsson plays the Indian harmonium and the synthesiser.

TEXTS:

Dualis, Liederbuch nach Texten von Pablo Neruda und Fernando Pessoa (1987/1991)

Asbjørn Schaathun (*1961)

Text: Excerpts from Pablo Neruda: “La muerte”, *Canto General* (1950); and Fernando Pessoa: *Autopsicografia* (1932)

Altra risposta (1989)

Bjørn Kruse (*1946)

Text: Excerpts from Salvatore Quasimodo: “Altra risposta”, *La terra impareggiabile* (1958); “Dalla rete dell'oro”, *Tutte le poesie* (1965); and “Vento a Tindari”, *Acque e terre* (1930)

Cantico (1983)

Antonio Bibalo (1922-2008)

Text: Excerpts from Dante Alighieri: *La divina commedia* (*The Divine Comedy*)

...though what made it has gone (1987)


Rolf Wallin (*1957)

Text: Excerpts from Osip Mandelstam: Нашедший подкову (1923), English translation, *Whoever Finds a Horseshoe*, by Burton Raffel

RECORDED IN SENDESAAL BREMEN,
13 JUNE 1992
PRODUCTION:
RENATE WOLTER-SEEVERS / RADIO BREMEN
EDITING:
VEGARD LANDAAS
MASTERING:
THOMAS WOLDEN
BOOKLET NOTES:
KENNETH KARLSSON
ENGLISH TRANSLATION:
PAUL HOLDEN
BOOKLET EDITOR:
HEGE WOLLENG
COVER DESIGN:
ANNA-JULIA GRANBERG / BLUNDERBUSS
COVER PHOTO:
ANNA MARGARETA BERGMAN

THIS RECORDING HAS BEEN PRODUCED WITH
KIND PERMISSION OF RADIO BREMEN, PRODUCTION 1992

THIS RECORDING HAS BEEN MADE POSSIBLE WITH
SUPPORT FROM THE NORWEGIAN SOCIETY OF COMPOSERS

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ASBJØRN SCHAATHUN (*1961)

Dualis, Liederbuch nach Texten von Pablo Neruda und Fernando Pessoa (1987/1991)

- 1) I. ... como un traje que me espera, del color que amo ... / 01:34
- 2) II. ... y la lucha desgrana sus martillos ... / 00:54
- 3) III. ... Cuando el amor gastó su materia evidente ... / 01:46
- 4) IV. ... en otras manos de agregada fuerza ... / 01:00
- 5) V. ... viene a borrar la muerte las señales ... / 01:44
- 6) VI. Intermezzo - transition (piano solo) / 00:34
- 7) VII. ... que fueron construyendo tus fronteras. / 02:45

JON BALKE (*1955)

Virr (1990)

- 8) I. / 02:34
- 9) II. / 02:55

BJØRN KRUSE (*1946)

- 10) Altra risposta (1989) / 09:32

ANTONIO BIBALO (1922-2008)

- 11) Cantico (1983) / 14:06

ROLF WALLIN (*1957)

- 12) ... though what made it has gone (1987) / 15:28