

GLASS — BJERKESTRAND
PATIENTIA

SARA ÖVINGE — VIOLIN, EDWARD GARDNER — CONDUCTOR,
NORWEGIAN CHAMBER ORCHESTRA



FOLLOW THE SOUND

Just who is the modern performer? Such an open question has many answers, not least because it's so nebulous – a performer of what? Experimental jazz, raga, fado? And while we're there, what exactly does 'modern' mean? For a start, genre-wise, the players on this release mainly come from the Western classical tradition. And while 'modern' can mean many things, in the context of this non-academic text, let's say that it basically means what is 'now'. It's not that simplistic though, and the aim here is that eventually we'll be able to draw something more general from this fairly specific starting point.

Having said this, modern classical performers of Western traditional music live their lives with all the modern trappings and accessories, yet they play old music. I doubt if many of these performers would want to get rid of their fridge even though they play music by Bach, Beethoven or Schönberg. Classical musicians fly around the world to play canonical works in settings almost identical to those they're used to from home. The classical music itself can be evocative of a UNESCO-listed medieval city that over time has been equipped with the infrastructure it needs to function today. You have all the mod cons, while the facades are well-preserved and unchanged. Brahms's 1st Symphony, for example, sounds pretty much the same it has since its premiere in 1876. It is both contemporary and historical at the same time, performed by generation after generation of modern people for almost 150 years. This is the way it sits in the canon of Western classical music, a tradition cultivated every day in thousands of concert halls worldwide. How this tradition has come to be this way and what it resembles is a question that, fortunately perhaps, this column space will not allow a deep analysis of. In short though, throughout its centuries-long history, this venerable tradition has gone through a long series of phases and schisms, has had its hermits, iconoclasts and high priests, its revolutionaries and reactionaries. It has both literally and figuratively come with its orders of monks and nuns, and has ultimately castrated young boys to preserve the purity of their voices.

The duality between conservatism and radicalism is reflected both in the tradition's relationship to itself and to the rest of the world. Over time, it has also become rather meaningless to talk about 'classical music' as something with a binary relation to, for example, 'contemporary music'. Contemporary music is derived from the classical music nexus, and the canon expands as a result of new compromises between conservative and radical currents. The musicians change, as does the audience. Therefore, the distinction between 'art music' and 'popular music' is becoming increasingly blurred, though this is by no means a new phenomenon. Haydn, Mo-

zart and Rossini all used the hits of their day in their works, while at the same time making melodies that people could walk around humming to. In more recent times, Leonard Bernstein would conduct Mahler's symphonies in the evening, after a day of producing timeless hits such as "Somewhere" and "Maria" – or this is at least the impression you get.

It could perhaps therefore be said that any hierarchy between 'classical music' on the one hand, and 'folk music', 'popular music' or whatever it may be on the other, is a strawman that's primarily constructed just so it can be refuted or at least to provide a point of argument. Does classical music really hold a hegemonic position when it exists in a reciprocal exchange relationship with past and contemporary popular culture? The answer is – and I'm aware this will be deeply unsatisfying for the querulous types – both yes and no. 'Yes', because thousands of purpose-built concert halls and music conservatoires worldwide prove there's a willingness to invest in and a desire to carry on the traditions based on state and/or private patronage. And 'no', because these investments are not exclusively geared towards embalmed old masters, and the world's attention and the most illustrious fame is usually reserved for the stars of popular culture. The whole debate is gradually becoming a side issue, rendered irrelevant by demographic and socio-cultural changes. If I were to allow myself some optimism here, I'd rather say that the increasingly blurred lines between the 'classical', 'modernist', 'popular cultural' etc. lead to a symbiotic pluralism where music is afforded new platforms for relevance, and new opportunities to combine musical codes where previously never the twain would meet. So yes please to Brahms, yes please to Bauckholt, and yes please to black metal.

So let me (finally) repeat that question – who is the modern performer? It is someone who operates in this cultural landscape. It could be Sara Övinge, for example. In a sense, this release marks a musical homecoming for her, since she has chosen a slightly more convoluted career path than most violinists. Sara has sought out and immersed herself in contemporary music, Iranian music, composition, improvisation, and art-pop amongst several other musical pursuits. Her entire M.O. points to a strong and intrinsic need to be a *co-creating* musician, one who leaves her mark on the musical expression in a more comprehensive way than simply playing the notes on the stand. This record is no exception, being a result of her commissioning, her curating, and a substantial dose of willpower. More on that later.

Meeting with Kjetil Bjerkestrand in 2019, Sara found something she was looking for. He is the epitome of the symbiotic musician, drawing on experience and inspirations from a wide

range of musical styles, from rock, pop through to contemporary. He describes the composition process as one part search for fixation points in a series of possible events, and one part exploration of friction caused by the union of the elastic and the mechanical. Harmonically, he often starts with Messiaen's third mode. If you're reading this with an instrument handy, from C this would be C-D-Eb-E-F#-G-Ab-Bb-B. There are three identical movements from each major third, C, E and Ab, which are also the only notes that appear in all three possible modulations. From this he derives three-chord sequences, with a penchant for triads, which he then stacks according to his desire and need to fill the soundscape. Count to three, and try it yourself!

However technical this may sound, Kjetil manages to distill a music of his own which seems both familiar and foreign; instantaneous, yet profound. Where many would succumb to the saccharine and pathos-filled, he creates an undercurrent of something that, for want a better definition, I would call a sensitive matter-of-factness.

A theme that Sara aimed to pursue in the project was the juxtaposition of the electronic and the organic. **Philip Glass's 2nd Piano Concerto** is arranged for synthesiser and strings, a kind of updated version of Vivaldi's string orchestra with continuo. But where previous recordings have gone for an electronic sound resembling the baroque harpsichord, Sara wanted to create a more electro-acoustic soundscape, thus achieving a common thread between the two works. If you want to do this with the intellectual property of a living artist, you'll of course have to ask for permission. In communication with Glass's representatives it was made clear that the voice called "keyboard" in the score was allowed to be a sound "chosen by own judgment and taste".

This kind of flexibility can not be taken for granted, but the music of Phillip Glass brings with it a kind of instrumental neutrality that accommodates changing instrumentation. And on the whole, Glass allows the performer a great deal of freedom in his *American Four Seasons*, such as with the order of the movements – if the soloist feels *this* particular movement should be *Winter*, then so be it. There is something disarming and accessible about the fact that one of the grand old men of music today entrusts his work with the musicians to such an extent, and it's a golden opportunity for Sara to take the work in the direction she desires. The synthesiser sound you hear on this record was developed in collaboration with Anja Lauvdal, the Norwegian jazz pianist/composer, who has collaborated with both Sara and Kjetil on several projects. It is of course up to the experience of each individual, but this particular listener feels that the timbre accentuates the sen-

sation of otherness one gets when hearing Glass's music; the flicker of a forgotten world just out of reach, something that exists beyond the familiar and can only be glimpsed.

I'd like to conclude with a few words about how an album can transpire. You can have considerable talent, a creative imagination and a sizeable network, but to get a release like this out there – by your own initiative and on your own artistic premises – also requires a willingness and application that very few are blessed with. Not least because it's mixed up with everything else in life. The work/life balance is challenging for everyone, but the life of a freelancer is so hyperactive, fragmented and sensory overloaded that it can sometimes feel like you're a long way from home. And it is often a long way home too. It's possible that working on a project like this can be an anchor point, something that moves slowly while the rest of life whirls around you. This is not to say that Sara has had to deal with relentless opposition, neither from the record company, nor the musicians or conductor (the conductor has been particularly keen to cooperate, if only to preserve domestic peace). But anyone who has engaged in this type of work knows that the goal can often feel far-flung, that there are snags and obstacles, and that your constant source of drive is the necessity to convey something you're carrying inside. If the opening question here should have any answer then, it could also be this: the reality for many modern performers is to navigate through an endless stream of grant applications and project pitches, and then there's the minor detail of having to play the violin too. It is a balancing act between the artistic and the entrepreneurial, frustrating and rewarding as the case may be.

If this album release is to be understood as part of a self-realisation process (which I think it can), it is perhaps about synthesising where you come from and where you are going, both artistically and personally. In this sense, it becomes a snapshot of a performer and a person finding their own way, exploring the space between tradition and innovation. It is convenient for the cover note writer that Philip Glass himself once said something astute about this: "The past is reinvented and becomes the future. But the lineage is everything."

Bendik Bjørnstad Foss
(translated by Paul Holden)



ABOUT THE COMPOSERS:

PHILIP GLASS

Born in Baltimore, Maryland, Philip Glass is a graduate of the University of Chicago and the Juilliard School. In the early 1960s, Glass spent two years of intensive study in Paris with Nadia Boulanger and, while there, earned money by transcribing Ravi Shankar's Indian music into Western notation. By 1974, Glass had a number of innovative projects creating a large collection of new music for The Philip Glass Ensemble and for the Mabou Mines Theater Company. This period culminated in *Music in Twelve Parts* and the landmark opera *Einstein on the Beach*, for which he collaborated with Robert Wilson. Since *Einstein*, Glass has expanded his repertoire to include music for opera, dance, theater, chamber ensemble, orchestra and film. His scores

have received Academy Award nominations (*Kundun*, *The Hours*, *Notes on a Scandal*) and a Golden Globe (*The Truman Show*). Glass's memoir *Words Without Music* was published by Liveright Books in 2015.

Glass received the Praemium Imperiale in 2012, the U.S. National Medal of the Arts from President Barack Obama in 2016, and 41st Kennedy Center Honors in 2018. Glass's recent works include *Symphony No. 12*, a completion of three symphonies based on David Bowie's Berlin Trilogy, Glass's first *Piano Sonata*, and a circus opera *Circus Days and Nights*. Glass' 85th Birthday season featured programming around the globe, including world premieres of Symphonies No. 13, 14 and 15.

KJETIL BJERKESTRAND

Born in the city of Kristiansund in 1955, Kjetil Bjerkestrand was educated at the Norwegian Academy of Music from 1974 until 1978.

In the 1980s, he worked on a number of albums and was at the forefront of the use of electronics in the studio. Beyond the 80s and 90s, his studio work has expanded into Sweden, France and England. Bjerkestrand has arranged and written music for several artists and bands including Ray Charles, Dee Dee Bridgewater, A-ha, Ute Lemper, Jon Lord, Ian Hunter, Keith Emerson, Arve Tellefsen, Sissel Kyrkjebø, Ole Edvard Antonsen and Herborg Kråkevik.

Bjerkestrand has also composed for a total of 15 full-length feature films, the first being 1987's *Veiviseren* (*The Pathfinder*), for which he received an Oscar nomination. In collaboration with A-ha's Magne Furuholmen in 1988, he received the Edvard Prize for the music for the TV-series *Hotel Oslo*.

Bjerkestrand had a long-standing association with the film director Ivo Caprino, composing for 12 of his nature films, featuring Caprino's self-developed cinema technology called *Supervideograf*. In addition to film and TV, Bjerkestrand has written for around 20 theatre performances, including the renowned Peer Gynt festival in the mountain village of Gålå.

Works by Bjerkestrand have been recorded by orchestras including St. Martin in the Fields, the Norwegian Radio Orchestra, the Trondheim Soloists, Liverpool Symphony Orchestra, and the Munich Radio Orchestra.

Over the past 10 to 15 years, Kjetil Bjerkestrand's compositional style has focused more on the juxtaposition between both electronic and acoustic instruments, and between the 'rhythmic' and 'classical' music traditions.

SARA ÖVINGE
VIOLIN

Sara Övinge started playing the violin at four years old and had her first soloist performance with her local Symphony orchestra in Norrköping at the age of nine.

At 16 she started her Bachelor at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm, followed by Solo Diplomas at the Norwegian Academy of Music in Oslo and the Royal College of Music in London.

During her education Sara was a multiple prize-winner; she was the youngest ever diploma graduate from Oslo, she won "The Listeners' Prize" in the Swedish Soloist Prize and the Ljunggrenska competition for Young Musicians in 2010.

Sara has performed as a soloist with many of Scandinavia's leading orchestras, including Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, the Norwegian Radio Orchestra and Trondheim Symphony Orchestra.

Sara was appointed Associate Concertmaster at the Norwegian Opera & Ballet in 2014, a position she left to fulfill her passion for an eclectic range of performance and music making.

She is a member of the Norwegian Chamber Orchestra and the contemporary music ensemble Cikada and has been guest Concertmaster for Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, Kristiansand Symphony Orchestra and the Norwegian Radio Orchestra.

Sara has personally collaborated with many of Norway's leading artists, including Bugge Wesseltoft, Nils Bech, Kjetil Bjerkestrand, Trygve Seim, Anja Lauvdal and Eivind Aarset.

Besides working with non-classical musicians, Sara has also explored the possibilities in movement combined with violin playing and created, in 2018, a solo performance with choreographer Gunhild Bjørnsgaard that had its premiere at the Contemporary art center in Armenia. She also had the main role in the music theatre performance of *Verklärte Nacht* with the Norwegian Chamber Orchestra, winning the YAMawards in 2019.

Sara engages passionately in education, teaching at Barrat Due Institute of Music, the Norwegian Academy of Music, and Voksenåsen Summer Academy.

Sara currently plays on a Giovanni Battista Guadagnini from 1754, generously loaned to her from Dextra Musica.





EDWARD GARDNER CONDUCTOR

Chief Conductor of the Bergen Philharmonic, Edward Gardner, has led the orchestra on multiple international tours. He is also Principal Conductor for the London Philharmonic Orchestra (from 2021) and takes over as Music Director at the Norwegian National Opera and Ballet in 2024.

In demand as a guest conductor, he conducts orchestras like the New York Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin, Wiener Symphoniker, the Royal Opera House, Gewandhausorchester Leipzig and the Philharmonia Orchestra. Music Director of English National Opera for ten years (2006–15), Gardner has an ongoing relationship with several opera houses; New York's Metropolitan Opera,

La Scala, Chicago Lyric Opera, Glyndebourne Festival Opera and Opéra National de Paris.

Born in Gloucester in 1974, Edward was educated at Cambridge and the Royal Academy of Music. He went on to become Assistant Conductor of the Hallé and Music Director of Glyndebourne Touring Opera.

His many accolades include being named Royal Philharmonic Society Award Conductor of the Year (2008), an Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in Opera (2009) and receiving an OBE for Services to Music in Queen Elisabeth II's Birthday honours.

NORWEGIAN CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

Since its formation in 1977, the Norwegian Chamber Orchestra has established itself as one of the foremost chamber orchestras on the international classical music scene. Renowned for its refined sound and innovative approach to concert presentation, the NCO is made up of Norway's finest instrumentalists including its 26 core members who work together as a collective, thereby developing its distinctive performing style and dynamic culture.

With the inspirational artistic director Pekka Kuusisto at the helm, the NCO continues to push the boundaries of play-directed performance to new heights. The Orchestra's founder Terje Tønnesen served as artistic director of the NCO since its inception until August 2021 when he was succeeded by Kuusisto and became leader laureate in recognition of his visionary leadership and impact on the Orchestra during his 44 year-long tenure. The Orchestra has also explored artistic partnerships with guest directors and leaders including Iona Brown, Leif Ove Andsnes, Martin Fröst, Steven Isserlis, Anthony Marwood, François Leleux, Pekka Kuusisto and Lorenza Borrani.

Sharing the transformative power of music with audiences has always been at the heart of the NCO, by delivering exceptional musical performances with a strong commitment to renew the classical concert format. Recent flagship projects include memorized performance of Grieg's *Holberg Suite* with choreography, Janáček's *Kretuzer Sonata* with the dramatic readings from Tolstoy's novella of the same name and *Gates of Hell*, a musical exhibition with the performance of Strauss' *Metamorphosen* by heart.

In addition to its core repertoire of symphonic and chamber orchestral works, the NCO is dedicated to bringing new music closer to the wider audience. Recent seasons have featured commissioned works by composers including Nico Muhly, Julian Anderson, Bent Sørensen, Bryce Dessner, Olav Anton Thommessen and Synne Skouen.

As essential part of Norway's cultural landscape, the NCO currently presents concert series at the University Aula and Sentralen in Oslo and regularly performs in venues across the country. The orchestra's international tours to Europe, Asia and North America have received outstanding reviews at many of the world's prestigious concert halls and festivals.

MUSICIANS:

Philip Glass
Violin Concerto No. 2, American Four Seasons

Norwegian Chamber Orchestra

1st Violin:
Sara Övinge (soloist)
Cam Kjøll (leader)
Bård Monsen
Atle Sponberg
Edvard Erdal

2nd Violin:
Alex Robson
Bjarne Magnus Jensen
Ingvild Habbestad
Silje Haugan

Viola:
Marthe Husum
Hanne Skjelbred
Aine Suzuki

Cello:
Ole Eirik Ree
Audun Sandvik
Erlend Habbestad

Double bass:
Marius Flatby

Synthesizer:
Olga Jørgensen

Kjetil Bjerkestrand
Violin Concerto No. 1, Patientia

1st Violin:
Sara Övinge

2nd Violin:
Cam Kjøll

Viola:
Marthe Husum

Cello:
Ole Eirik Ree

Synthesizers:
Anja Lauvdal
Kjetil Bjerkestrand

PHILIP GLASS (*1937)

VIOLIN CONCERTO NO. 2 — *THE AMERICAN FOUR SEASONS*

01	Prologue	01:39
02	Movement I	06:13
03	Song No. 1	03:16
04	Movement II	10:25
05	Song No. 2	01:59
06	Movement III	06:22
07	Song No. 3	03:28
08	Movement IV	06:53

KJETIL BJERKESTRAND (*1955)

VIOLIN CONCERTO NO. 1 — *PATIENTIA*

09	Våghals	05:59
10	En & tyve	03:32
11	Descent & Ascent	05:42
12	Seven	05:20
13	Ups & Downs	06:11
14	Patientia	04:51

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