

LAWO
CLASSICS

EWA
JACOBSSON

HEARBARICUM FIELDS

Kenneth Karlsson
piano



JARRING SOUNDS

TRANSFORMING A GRAND PIANO

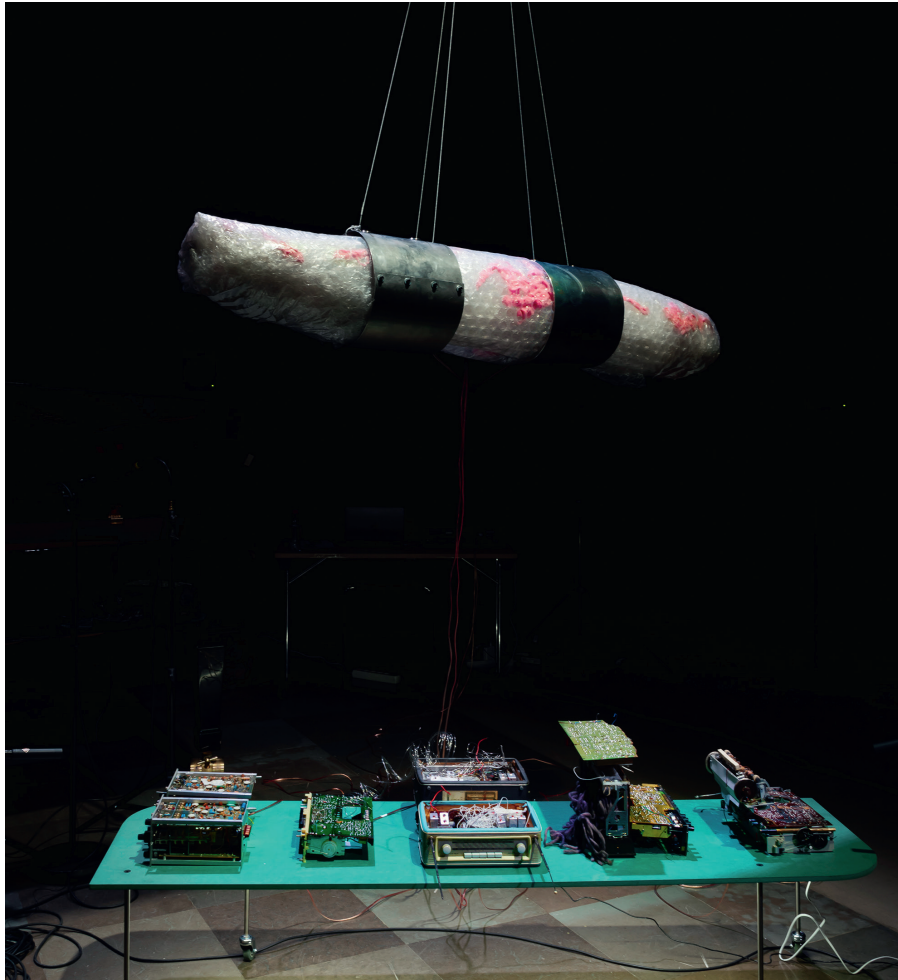
The transient, delicate qualities of Ewa Jacobsson's visual installations are reminiscent of scenography. In the course of conversations we had in preparation for this article, Jacobsson, visual artist and composer, talked about her student days and her encounter with Danish Fluxus traditions and Jerzy Grotowski's ideas about a "poor theatre".

Jacobsson's music operates in a complex wilderness of presence and absence, past and present that arises in performance spaces when they come alive. In *Jarring Sounds* two Steinway grand pianos meet. One of the pianos is situated in the Marble Hall at Sentralen in Oslo, the space in which the music on this CD was recorded. That instrument is activated by Kenneth Karlsson who gives life to Ewa Jacobsson's musical score. The other piano is invisible yet present in the room in the form of pre-recorded material.

This second instrument was made in Germany around 1948 and belonged to Ewa Jacobsson's parents. It went missing for several decades before reappearing with something of a dark history, according to the composer. *Jarring Sounds* elaborates the almost magical aspect of this tale when the two instruments are connected. At the same time, the old piano seems to disappear again, diffused through a multi-branched system of speakers. All sounds in the work that are not the composer's own voice or field recordings, originate from this old German grand piano. When *Jarring Sounds* was first performed, both pianist and audience were surrounded by these recordings projected over 24 loudspeakers creating another acoustic space within the concert hall.

The title comes from an anonymous text set to music by the English renaissance composer John Dowland,





in which a musician looks upon life as a slow death: *My musicke hellish jarring sounds to banish friendly sleepe /... / O let me living die, till death doe come.* Both the poet's words and Dowland's music enable this yearning for death to survive its author and become accessible to us today. And in some sort of contrary motion, it is the transitory music that keeps the poem's "I" alive.

Pianos are generally not that good at jarring, however. Each time the hammer on a piano key strikes the

strings inside the instrument, small disturbances are caused and an acoustic process that is not completely controllable takes place. Nonetheless, performance practice and historical repertoire for this instrument is more about minimizing any jarring, as a rule. The system that Johann Sebastian Bach expounds in *The Well-Tempered Clavier* from 1722, cultivates the reverberation of these collisions and small displacements in the balance between them. At the same time, there has always been music that intentionally pushes instruments beyond their physical comfort zones. Bach

and his audience, for example, had the resonance of the pipe organ in their bodies and their ears; it is an instrument with a keyboard but which can really bellow and roar since it produces sound in a completely different way from the piano.

Ewa Jacobsson's composition does a little of both. The vivid piano part in *Jarring Sounds* contains sharp, insistent dissonances that cause the mechanical sound of the keys to blend and bleed into one another. Open intervals also occur with some frequency too, as well as various brief, articulated motifs and figures; the latter coming across as residue from harmonic progressions and echoes of historic keyboard music.

Jarring Sounds lasts for more than half an hour and is divided into four movements. In the first two, pianist Kenneth Karlsson plays from the score, precisely synchronized with the adapted recordings. In the third movement, the 24 loudspeakers take over the stage with electronic sound and text fragments. This section merges into the final movement, an intimate dialogue between improvising pianist, prerecorded material, and four spatial objects with built-in sound sources. Ewa Jacobsson activates the sound sources in real time before an electronic final part mixes with the music and rounds off the work.

The four movements are entitled *Zerstörung*, *Demdrang*, *Tiergestalt* and *Schaden*. The titles are borrowed from a text about werewolves by the German author Wilhelm Hertz, quoted from Norwegian author Aksel Sandemose's eponymous novel *Varulven*:

Er nimmt die Tiergestalt an, einzig und allein um Schaden zu stiften.

In popular superstition a werewolf is a person that is transformed into a hybrid between human and animal at full moon. In the transformed state, bestial traits surface and werewolves may attack and cause harm. When a person is bitten by a werewolf, they become a werewolf themselves, and so the curse is passed on.

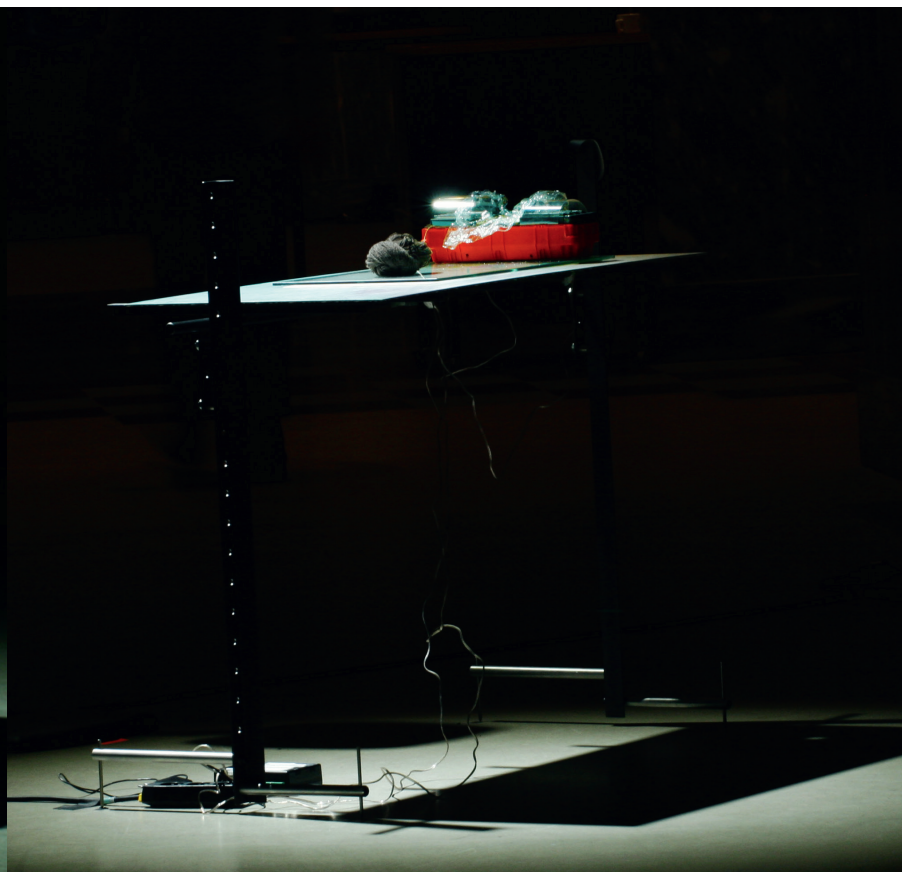
The concept of transformation is closely related to creative practice with its ritual and performative elements. The idea of material or identity suddenly or gradually transforming into something else is found perhaps most often in art forms that unfold in time: a mask falls, a piano disappears and returns in a different form.

At the start of the piece, the sound of the live piano grows from the sound of the older, recorded piano. The two instruments enter into a dialogue in which the invisible piano in particular continually changes character. For a brief period, they both play the same motif – a clear, vivid piano sound followed by bright, distorted music box-like electronic echoes. Somewhere deep within this material we find the recorded voice of the composer. In the second and third sections, similar performative alternations occur between here and there, near and far. At the same time, darkness and drama begin to build. The pianist is sent to do battle with deep, jarring drones in which it becomes increasingly difficult to recognize the piano as the source of the sound. The live music occasionally makes abrupt changes of direction, as if it were governed by the wind. In the movement entitled *Tiergestalt* we hear the composer's recorded voice repeating the quote about the werewolf in her native Swedish, incantation-like: *Han tar djurgestalt, endast och allena.*

Surrounding all of this are the spatial installations: boxes with circuit board-like surfaces that perhaps conceal some kind of electric micro-activity; a grey, Zeppelin-shaped object floating above the boxes hanging by wires suspended from the ceiling. Something about the material the Zeppelin is made of gives me the impression that it absorbs rather than emits sound. Wires in bright colours protruding from pipes and frames look like hair, roots, piano strings, intestines. It is impossible to do justice to these objects in a sound recording, and I catch myself dreaming about a way of documenting them that can fully reproduce the music and the objects together. Also as a spatial experience these installations avoid revealing how they are connected to one another and to the music we hear. In a similar manner to the two pianos they secretly continue to work their magic throughout the piece.

– Hild Borchgrevink
(translated by Andrew Smith)

Hild Borchgrevink (b. 1975) is a writer, artist and musicologist from Oslo. She studied art and public spaces at Oslo National Academy of the Arts and musicology at the University of Oslo. She is currently a postgraduate at the Norwegian Academy of Music.



HEARBARICUM FIELDS

THE WEAK ANGLE

There are so many different ways to listen or express things in today's world. Putting oneself in a position in order to listen or say something, being attentive to others, remains nonetheless unchanged. It requires positioning oneself in a certain way, making it possible to comprehend situations and states of mind beyond the transient and purposeful impression that is so attractive. Ewa Jacobsson calls this position "The Weak Angle" when describing how she conjures up a temporary situation or force field that gives way to insight in another: "A careful gaze capturing what is most important. Caution in how we approach an envi-

ronment, a human being, a people, a nation, our earth. A method that is so little used that we are killing everything around us."

Take this CD release, for example: as a medium, it has an inherent presumption of being a work of which you can take physical possession, while at the same time you might sit down to listen, or perhaps move around with your ears stretched towards the audio source. Perhaps you read the texts, study the booklet and the pictures, while your attention is simultaneously turned towards the sound and a new type of attention arises, in competition with itself, entangled with all the other impressions. Or take the premier performance of *Hearbaricum Fields* at NOTAM's 25th anniversary celebration during the Ultima festival in

2019: The audience was gathered inside an installation consisting of a dome rigged for ambisonic sound with 40 loudspeakers, surrounded by four prepared objects or sound sculptures, so that the three-dimensional space itself was the medium. After the audience had experienced the 40-minute long ambisonic composition, the dome was emptied of sounds, and as the surrounding objects were activated one by one, the audience moved out of the dome towards the quieter soundscapes. Perhaps they talk about their experience afterwards – the memory of a sequence of sounds or a brief bit of film that was difficult to explain down there inside the "knitted box" (*Stickad box, klot*) as one of the prepared sound sources was named. This sound object, together with the others, *Europatelefon*, *Parasoll och partiturrebus*, and *ISA*

215 mm JS7, made up the four corners of the world around the edge of the main sound rig. In a similar manner to a CD and a CD player, these objects form delimited fields for an anarchistic yet thoroughly examined economy of attention.

The decisive factor is therefore not which body (or mind) is invested in this economy, but which organs are involved and activated upon encountering scores, sound sources, symbols and objects, according to whether Ewa is working visually, as a sound artist, or as a composer. The title *Hearbaricum Fields* refers to the fact that the sound material used in the composition comes from five different "fields" – from central Europe to the continent's periphery – creating a collision of possible original hierarchies of meaning



that are transformed and moved around. Or they can be experienced as a dramatic performance without a script, in which sounds are sent flying across the room and they either hit you or remain as unexploded shells in your subconscious.

I could make further attempts at describing or explaining constellations of forgotten stories, found objects and discarded technology, and still not be able to communicate adequately how these situations make me a passenger in Ewa's audiovisual *Hearbaricum*. At the same time, this text is inevitably an attempt at understanding, or at the very least not misunderstanding, the musical prerequisites for Ewa's works, ideas and discourse – all those things that form the basis of her work as an artist and a composer. To describe a

tour of this landscape of music puzzles and prepared objects might perhaps only produce a mumbling, contradictory or unreliable voice, similar to the state of mind to which Ewa transports her audience, and which involves being in a situation where there are ears listening, and hands exploring prepared objects such as a CD player.

It should be added that this interpretation of attention in listening to *Hearbaricum Fields* is closely linked to having met Ewa at the Harpefoss poetry festival in 2016. Ewa had been invited by curator Maja S.K. Ratkje who was responsible for the music segment of the programme under the theme "Oppmerksomhet" (Attentiveness) – inspired by Toril Moi's book *Språk og oppmerksomhet* (Language and attention) published

in conjunction with the hundredth anniversary of the women's right to vote in 2013. While working on her commission "ETT TOMT RUM AV INGENTING" (An empty room of nothing) during her residency, Ewa collected sounds from birds, construction sites, river banks and goods trains, as well as objects that would become part of the installation and performance concert. With its ingenious title and the meticulous process behind its creation, the work seemed most of all to be a "presentation of evidence" for the possible presence of a series of "empty rooms". Just listening to the work and being inside the installation gave me an experience of estrangement in time and the world. The objects were typical things that had been left behind or overlooked, found among discarded tools and utensils from previous cycles of function, production and consumption.

In a similar way, the sound recordings could also be taken as obsolete, cast-off stage decorations from contexts in which they no longer played a part, like new and significant items of trash from the forests, river banks, building sites, scrap yards and lumber rooms of Harpefoss. It sounds disturbingly fragmented, yet at the same time mediated and arranged in such a careful way that we trustingly enter into that pandemonium of meaning: "Everything I do contains intricate and meaningful transitions and transformations of meaning, sometimes containing puzzles, scores with instructions, a look of intellect. Beneath all this lies a critique of those things that are taken to be important and are granted power politically, economically, existentially."

Discussing Ewa's work without having a formal basis in music theory, these are the things that have caught my attention. As in a dream in which you find yourself in an unfamiliar setting and, without any prior experience, are strangely able to play an instrument. Participation and acceptance at the deepest level are perhaps about risking something, which is the nature of performance. I believe that this is touched upon at the core of Ewa's work; that she prepares a space in which boundaries are shifted and there is greater room for play. A listener might be uncertain of where something begins and where it ends, since the force field in which his/her attention is active, shifts the creative process and his/her relationship to that process over to the listener. As for example happens in the transition from spatial installation to playback unit, although this can only take place as a translation – but that is precisely why it enables us to view the compact disc as a transformed version of *Stickad box*, *klot* or the *Europatelefon*, for example. Knit a CD cover if you like, raise the booklet as an anti-flag for the final battle of the *Europatelefon*, sent out from an obsolete command centre where yet another head of state reaches Napoleonic heights in his inaugural address to the people. Continue along the dying screeches of the train track, pull out the cables of the world wide web – a foreign planet – and study the unfathomable beauty in a blade of grass.

– Eivind Slettemeås
(translated by Andrew Smith)

Eivind Slettemeås (b. 1974) is a producer, curator and writer living in Sør-Fron in Norway. He is a graduate of the Bergen Academy of Art and Design, and is manager of the Harpefoss hotel kunsthallen which hosts exhibition spaces, artist residency opportunities, and TILT publishers – with a particular focus on artist-driven practices and land art.

EWA JACOBSSON

Ewa Jacobsson is a composer and visual artist. She has been sound collecting since the early 80s. She also collects visual castaway elements from actual sites, and uses materials such as marzipan, oil, steel, wire, photographs, drawings. Her work includes site-specific installations with visuals, sound and preparation of spaces, pure sound composition, collaborations with musicians, physical sounding objects and live performance at exhibitions, museums, concert spaces and in other contexts, including works for public spaces or participatory works. Advanced techniques and materials combined with the lowtech is a reflection of her interest in the transmission of importance and meaning, existentially or politically, through different media, ignoring the hierarchies commonly used.

KENNETH KARLSSON – PIANO

Kenneth Karlsson was born in Åmål, Sweden. He started out playing impro/rock with a few friends in his youth. He went on to develop an interest in classical music, and after a few years he became a student at the Music Academy in Oslo, followed by further studies in the Netherlands. Since then Karlsson has been active as a pianist specializing in the areas of contemporary and classical music, and improvisation. During the 1980s and 90s he was a member of groups such as Ensemble K4, Oslo Sinfonietta and Aquarius, and has collaborated with mezzo-soprano Hilde Torgersen for more than 20 years. He has also played in various improvisation groups over the years, including the quartet Point 4 with Jon Balke, Ingar Zach and Bjørn Rabben.

Since 1989 Kenneth Karlsson has been pianist and artistic director of Cikada, and is still active in several smaller ensembles. He has toured all over the world and recorded several albums. In 2001 he received a *Spellemannpris* (Norwegian Grammy) for his solo album *sofferte onde serene*, and in 2005 Karlsson's ensemble Cikada was awarded the Nordic Council Music Prize.

Karlsson has worked with video, dance, multimedia and is responsible for a considerable number of commissioned works and premier performances. He has collaborated with other musicians and composers including Klaus Lang, Clara Ianotta, James Dillon, Christian Wallumrød, Carola Bauckholt, Liza Lim, Bent Sørensen, Richard Barrett, Lasse Marhaug, Elisabeth Holmertz, and Rolf Wallin. In addition to the piano, Kenneth Karlsson plays Indian harmonium and synthesizer.

EWA JACOBSSON (*1956)

Jarring Sounds (2019) Live Recording

- 1 Zerstörung__07:39
- 2 Demdrang__08:27
- 3 Tiergestalt__06:41
- 4 Schaden__07:02

Hearbaricum Fields (2019)

- 5 Field I: Gaps, train.__05:17
- 6 Field II: The castle's garden, birds.__03:17
- 7 Intermezzo I: Mechanical Orchestra, kototama-gnats.__03:54
- 8 Field III: Macron Europe.__06:40
- 9 Intermezzo II: Mechanical Orchestra.__01:51
- 10 Field IV: A cave, water, Marietta runs.__05:13
- 11 Intermezzo III: Mechanical Orchestra.__01:20
- 12 Field V: Wind from Rev, construction trucks. I knock on the dome. Scratch.__09:11
- 13 Objects I-IV. Visual objects with 13 small sound sources.__08:49

Jarring Sounds

All recordings from instruments, voice and field recordings, processing and studio work: Ewa Jacobsson.
Studio settings and rendering: Mads Kjeldgaard, Notam.
Premiered 3rd of November 2019. EAU Electric Audio Unit concert, Marble Hall, Sentralen, Oslo.
Concert documentation and mix: Audun Strype.

Hearbaricum Fields

All recordings from instruments, voice and field recordings, processing and studio work: Ewa Jacobsson.
Studio settings and rendering: Thom Johansen, Notam.
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