

AMULETS

MATRE/NESS/REHNQVIST

NoXaS
Nordic Voices
Berit Norbakken

ØRJAN MATRE (*1979):
***Six Orphic Amulets* (2017)**
for vocal sextet and saxophone quartet

In Ørjan Matre's piece *Six Orphic Amulets*, the composer uses texts from the Orphic Gold Tablets, thirty-five small pieces of gold foil that have been found in graves scattered throughout ancient Greece and Rome. The tablets are inscribed with texts in ancient Greek that vary in length from one word to sixteen lines of poetry. These fragments of text have inspired Matre to find musical objects and small phrases of music which also seem to have existed around humanity for thousands of years. *Six Orphic Amulets* is filled with emotions, supplying the power to provide voice to deeper needs. Listening deeply to this and thinking about the mystery of life will reap its rewards and provide an insight into how people have always tried to ensure a smooth transition to the underworld. The saxophones and the voices both cultivate the mysterious, closed, and incomprehensible texts and dissolve it in music. Matre recreates old occult thoughts, makes a connection from antiquity to what we experience here and now, and succeeds in bringing out this atmosphere in the music.

The longer texts provide instructions and information to guide the soul of the deceased as it makes its way through the underworld, ensuring that it receives preferential treatment from the rulers down there.

The first movement uses text from a gold tablet found in the ancient city of Pherae, Greece. It dates back to the middle of the fourth century BC. The rather peculiar word *andrikepaidothyron* has no significant meaning though it does contain the ancient Greek words for man and child. The whole word also recalls Erikepaïos, an enigmatic name of the primordial god from the rhapsodic theology of Orpheus.

The text in the second movement is not derived from any gold tablets, but rather from three tiny bone tablets found in Olbia. They are dated to the fifth century BC and contain pairs of antonyms; life/death, peace/war, truth/lie and body/soul. The sentence "I am a child of Earth and starry Heaven" (third movement) is a formula found in several of the gold tablets. It is thought to be a password the deceased should respond with when asked who she is by the guardians of the spring of Mnemosyne (memory).

The golden plate of Thuri contains a stream of seemingly nonsensical words and syllables, but hidden inside are several names of ancient Greek gods. Movement four uses the nonsense words, with movement five including an incantation of the godly names.

The final movement, *Chaconne: The lake of Mnemosyne*, is an instruction on how to behave when arriving in the underworld. Only parts of the text are preserved, but we glean from it that the initiate is discouraged from drinking from the streams of Lethe (forgetfulness), and should instead drink from the lake of Mnemosyne (memory).

JON ØIVIND NESS (*1968):
***Wræþþ* (2016/2018)**
for saxophone quartet

This new piece by Jon Øivind Ness for NoXaS is rhythmic, fun, and engaging, and can be listened to in any way you may desire. I recommend using your own personal pendants and musical references. It's simply good music of our time.

You may of course dig deeper and listen to the rhythms, the use of microtonality, or to the links between classical music and pop culture. You may also listen to the polytonal harmonics or the symmetrical chords. You could explore

the musical phrases and colours, or listen to all the musical references hidden in the music. Alternatively you could listen to a relevant voice describing daily musical influences in our time through a skilled, witty composer and played by outstanding musicians.

Or you could simply listen!

KARIN REHNQVIST (*1957):
***Ock av törnen* (2001-02)**
lament for saxophone quartet and female voice

Karin Rehnqvist's piece *Ock av törnen* (And also Thorns) has a true connection to the north and Scandinavia, in the form of singer Berit Norbakken and NoXaS. Berit Norbakken's voice and the saxophone quartet have a lot in common when they perform this music, sharing a clear interpretation of the timbre and breathe inherent in Karin Rehnqvist's music. This is especially apparent when the voice uses 'kulning', an archaic style of singing or calling. This is a technique used in Swedish folk music, traditionally employed outdoors, to call animals or to communicate with other people over long distances. In the musical material of this piece some old Swedish traditional chorals are hidden. The texts come from The Book of Psalms and the Swedish Hymnal. Listening to Karin Rehnqvist's music evokes northern landscapes and the northern silence. Scandinavian psalms may be a misleading term, as 'psalms' in Swedish are more accurately translated as 'hymns'. The music of these old songs often suggests a sense of vulnerability that has its own quality. Nature and folksong are everywhere you turn in Nordic music, and the church is not far behind. Karin Rehnqvist creates vivid musical images and a strong emotional experience that everyone is free to interpret in her music.

1) Klagosång / Lament

Sion klagar med stor smärta, / Ropar i sin tröstlöshet, / Gjuter ut sitt sorgsna hjärta, / För den som dess hjärta vet, / Säger "Herren haver sig / Bortvänt övergivit mig. / Han ej mer sig låter finna, / Fångat mina tårar rinna". / Rädda mig Gud / Jag har sjunkit ner i bottenlös dy / Vattnet når mig till halsen / Jag har inget fotfäste / Strömmen vill dra ner mig / Jag har ropat mig trött / Min strupe är hes / Jag har väntat länge på min Gud

(Heerman, 1937 års svenska psalmbok, nr. 168 *Rädda mig Gud* / Psaltaren 69)

Zion laments forth great pain / Weeps in desolation / Pours out suffering and shame / To the heart's creation. / Says the Lord my God / Abandoned me on this shore / To be rescued nevermore / Bereft of staff and rod. / Save me, O God, / for the waters have come up to my neck. / I sink in the miry depths, where there is no foothold. / I have come into the deep waters; the floods engulf me. / I am worn out calling for help; / my throat is parched. / My eyes fail, looking for my God.

(Swedish Hymnal / Book of Psalms 69:1-4)

2) Jag lyfter blicken / I lift up my eyes to you

Jag lyfter blicken mot dig / du som bor i himmelen / Jag lyfter ögat mot himmelen / Jag lyfter mina händer / Var är min hjälp?...

(Psaltaren m.m.)

I lift up my eyes to you, / to you whose throne is in heaven / I lift up mine eyes / I lift up my hands / Whence cometh my help?

(Book of Psalms 123:1 and more)

3) Måste ock av törnen vara / ...and also thorns

Måste ock av törnen vara / Här din krona, o min brud, / Tårar dina pärlor klara, / Suckar dina sångers ljud, / Lyft dina ögon upp ock se / Över jordens kval ock ve / Himlen öppnad, palmen vunnen / Livets krona saligt funnen

(Pauli, Wallin, 1937 års svenska psalmbok, nr. 168)

It must also thorny be / This thy crown, my
bride. / Thy tears the brightest pearls of the
sea / Mournful songs, thy sighs / Raise up
now thine eyes and see /
Beyond this worldly misery / Heavens
opened, palm conceived / Blessed crown of
life achieved.

(Swedish Hymnal)

4) **Rädda mig ur dyn /**
Rescue me from the Mire

Rädda mig ur dyn

(Psaltaren 69)

Rescue me from the Mire

(Book of Psalms 69:14)

– Bjarne Kvinnslund

NoXaS Saxophone Quartet was established
in 2007 and since then has distinguished
itself as a high-quality ensemble with sev-
eral collaborations with elite Norwegian mu-
sicians and ensembles. Its main objective is to
perform the best possible repertoire for this
type of ensemble format while simultaneous-
ly building up a new repertoire together with
composers and other performers. Through
this work, NoXaS has cemented its position
as a significant asset to the Norwegian mu-
sic scene. Since its inception, the quartet has
maintained an ongoing dialogue with com-
posers regarding the development of new
works for this exciting form of ensemble. This
has resulted in several new pieces specifically
commissioned for NoXaS. The quartet has
collaborated with composers such as Olav
Anton Thommessen, Ørjan Matre, Jon Øivind
Ness, Ketil Hvoslef, and Henrik Hellstenius. In
recent years, NoXaS has worked to develop
new repertoire in a variety of constellations
with various orchestras, free ensembles, and
individual musicians, including with the pia-
nist Sergej Osadchuk, the singer Berit Nor-
bakken, the vocal sextet Nordic Voices, the
Saturnalia Chamber Orchestra, and the Oslo
Philharmonic Orchestra. NoXaS consists of
René Wiik (baritone saxophone), Roger An-
dreas Holme (tenor saxophone), Ida Kristine
Zimmermann Olsen (alto saxophone), and
Lars Lien (soprano saxophone).





Formed in 1996, the six-voice a cappella group **Nordic Voices** is comprised of graduates from the Norwegian Academy of Music and the Norwegian Academy of Opera who, in addition to their singing backgrounds, have a broad range of experience from choral conducting to teacher training and composition.

Already from the start it was an aim to explore the possibilities within the human voice and to make composers write more demanding and exciting music for vocal ensembles.

The singers are classically trained, they are familiar with different extended vocal techniques, and always challenge themselves to expand their expressions. Their close work together with a wide range of composers have led to more than 70 world premieres. Nordic Voices master a wide spectrum of musical styles, ranging from folk music and renaissance music to new works commissioned by composers from all over the world.

In concert, Nordic Voices often presents programme concepts revolving around themes, for example, historical figures or textual links, bringing the music to life in sometimes unexpected ways.

Artistic creativity, communication, versatility, technical precision are the primary ingredients of the perfect recipe for a performing arts ensemble, and these are precisely the elements that make up Nordic Voices. The group has been making waves not only in Norway and Europe, but in places as far afield as South Africa, Japan, Bolivia as well as frequent tours to the USA and Canada.

Nordic Voices are:

Tone Elisabeth Braaten (soprano)
Ingrid Hanken (soprano)
Ebba Rydh (mezzo-soprano)
Per Kristian Amundrød (tenor)
Frank Havrøy (baritone/tenor)
Rolf Magne Asser (bass).

Berit Norbakken is one of Scandinavia's leading sopranos. Her versatility and flexibility of voice have allowed her to master a repertoire ranging from Baroque to contemporary, including folk music. She regularly appears in performances of oratorios, passions, and masses, and continues her work with leading ensembles, orchestras and conductors in major concert halls all over the world.

Her many recordings have garnered high critical acclaim both in Norway and abroad. In particular her recording of Arriaga's vocal music, together with the BBC Philharmonic under the baton of Juanjo Mena has received glowing reviews internationally.

Norbakken has appeared at the Sydney Opera House, the Tokyo Opera City Concert Hall, at the Cincinnati May Festival as well as in several programmes touring throughout Europe.

As a research fellow through The Norwegian Artistic Research Program, she has worked closely with the Swedish composer Karin Rehnqvist.



ØRJAN MATRE (*1979)

Six Orphic Amulets (2017)

for vocal sextet and saxophone quartet

Conductor: Kai Grinde Myrann

- 1 ___ I. Brimo! Brimo! ___ 05:01
- 2 ___ II. Boneplates of Olbia ___ 05:04
- 3 ___ III. ...a child of Earth and starry Heaven ___ 03:58
- 4 ___ IV. Golden plate of Thuri 1 ___ 05:21
- 5 ___ V. Golden plate of Thuri 2 ___ 06:14
- 6 ___ VI. Chaconne: The lake of Mnemosyne ___ 09:41

JON ØIVIND NESS (*1968)

- 7 ___ *Wræbb* (2016/2018) ___ 14:33

for saxophone quartet

KARIN REHNQVIST (*1957)

Ock av törnen (2001–02)

lament for saxophone quartet and female voice

- 8 ___ I. Klagosång ___ 07:02
- 9 ___ II. Jag lyfter blicken ___ 04:19
- 10 ___ III. Måste ock av törnen vara ___ 02:36
- 11 ___ IV. Rädda mig ur dyn ___ 04:04

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