

KRUSE: Chronotope

Fredrik Fors, cl; Oslo Philharmonic/ Christian Eggen

LAWO 1129—46 minutes

In 2015, Oslo Philharmonic co-Principal Clarinet Fredrik Fors requested a clarinet concerto from the London-born Norwegian composer Bjorn Kruse, now professor emeritus at the Norwegian Academy of Music. Kruse responded with *Chronotope*, a three-movement symphony for clarinet and orchestra that takes its title from the 20th Century Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), a significant voice in the aesthetic conversations that took place in the Soviet Union.

In his 1929 essay “Problems of Dostoevsky’s Art”, Bakhtin presents “dialogism”, a theory that discusses how time (chronos) and space (topos) influence the meaning and evolution of words and language. In a similar vein, Kruse explores how “chronos” and “topos” change the relationship between the solo clarinet and large orchestra.

Over three-quarters of an hour, Kruse unfolds a large canvas of intense neo-modernist episodes that range from escalating rhythmic and harmonic tension punctuated by brass and percussion to dreamy abstract soundscapes painted by strings, horns, and woodwinds. He sets evolving clarinet discourses with and against lush and vibrant scoring, and he tests the soloist with difficult technical outbursts and frequent voyages into the clarion and altissimo registers.

Fors confronts these challenges with a clear tone, reliable technique, and stern confidence, especially when he soars above the orchestra in the stratosphere of his instrument. His extra responsive set-up helps him cut through thick textures and loud volumes, and while he controls his light reed well, it is always somewhat thin, especially in disjunct contours and note-heavy passages. The Oslo Philharmonic handles Kruse’s demanding score with the professionalism and artistic commitment that distinguish the world’s best orchestras.

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