



## The Arctic

Living in the Arctic for more than half of my life has certainly changed my perspectives. A region where the days never end during the summer months, and where the dark winter allows the sky to be filled with the play of the northern lights. I live in the city of Tromsø, about 500 km north of the Arctic Circle and about 2000 km south of the North Pole. It's a place surrounded by the sea and snowy mountains, and with fresh air and a rich wilderness. Yes, it's not so crowded here, but Tromsø is nevertheless a melting pot where indigenous culture blends with Norwegian and European cultures. This place has undoubtedly had a significant impact on my artistic development.

In spring 2021, in the middle of the COVID-pandemic, there were hardly any concerts. Nobody could foresee how the coing months would evolve and, as it was neither possible to work nor to socialise, the lockdown we experienced was both painful and frustrating. But, in the end, some good things came out of it. In just six weeks, the Arktisk Filharmoni (previously the Arctic Philharmonic), conductor Per

Kristian Skalstad, myself and LAWO Classics managed to set up the recording session of this album. In a normal concert season, this could never have been possible without years of planning beforehand. During five intensive days in the end of April, we rehearsed and recorded almost 80 minutes of music in Grønnåsen church in Tromsø.

This album is my second release with saxophone and orchestra, and also the second release where I premiere three new saxophone concertos that I have commissioned. The title *Arctic Saxophone* is not only a reference to Tromsø but also to the three composers on this recording that all have some link to the Arctic. The two Norwegian composers Alexander Aarøen and Terje Bjørklund both originate from Northern Norway, and the Russian composer Alexander Manotskov caught his inspiration from the Russian city of Arkhangelsk.

Ever since I started playing the saxophone as a child, the instrument's immense range has fascinated me. The saxophone opens to a large variety of timbres, dynamics and articulations, and seems to find its place in almost any style of music. As it was invented too late to be embraced by the most famous

classical composers such as Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and Brahms, it has been even more important for saxophonists to challenge living composers to write new music for the instrument.

An advantage of contemporary music is that it is open to a broader range of musical expressions and to new ways of using the instruments, and I find this exciting and important. The three composers that are presented on this record all make use of extended techniques on the saxophone, such as overtones, multiphonics, slap-tongue as well as the saxophone being played without mouthpiece, as a brass instrument. While Aarøen is quite restrained with the use of such effects, and uses only a few overtones in his work, Manotskov and Bjørklund both seek towards the limits of the instrument, e.g., Manotskov has an entire movement where the saxophone plays like a trumpet, and Bjørklund has written some very demanding and virtuosic parts in the upper register of the saxophone. Still, unlike many contemporary works for saxophone, none of these three concertos appear as experimental in their style. All three composers have integrated these extended techniques in subtle or organic ways into their works, and I believe

this is a positive asset for the music, making it more accessible for both the audience and other performers.

Alexander Aarøen (b. 1993) is a young composer from Balsfjorden, just outside Tromsø. When I first heard his music, I was immediately impressed by his natural and solid treatment of the orchestra. Whereas other composers may often feel obliged to write something radically new and previously unheard, Aarøen fearlessly places himself in the classical tradition. He has already achieved a lot of recognition for his music, particularly in the American film music-world. This is apparent in this saxophone concerto, The Heart, It Soars, which is quite romantic and classical in style. I commissioned this concerto in 2018, when Aarøen was just 25 years old. The final work was premiered in 2019, together with the Austrian ensemble Wiener Kammersymphonie at Nordlysfestivalen in Tromsø.

With very recognisable melodies and themes, the work by Aarøen easily reaches the listener, and it is clearly a joyful ode to life and love. *The Heart, It Soars* is divided into three movements: 1. *The Autumn of Childhood*, 2. *Spring*, and 3. *All Seasons Must Pass*. Aarøen explains: "*The Heart, It Soars* is a





portrayal of growing up, where the music puts an autumnal frame to the inevitable end of the childhood. The listener is carried through a cascade of feelings and moods, a voyage from darkness to light, and from melancholia to acceptance."

The first movement, The Autumn of Childhood, has a calm character, with the strings starting very softly without the saxophone. The tempo indication "Triste" (sad) underlines the melancholic mood of the music. The saxophone takes over alone with a short melody, followed by a sombre and descending cello solo. This leads to the tutti part, where the saxophone is supported by a rich orchestration in the strings. We hear clear musical references to the great romantic composers such as Edvard Grieg. After a short cadenza in the saxophone, the music builds up through a long and emotional crescendo towards a solemn climax. At the end of the movement, the soft character returns, with tremolo and small movements in the strings, and a sweet melody in the saxophone.

The second movement *Spring* begins attacca, and with the tempo indication "Allegro con brio" it creates a clear contrast to the first movement. Unison melodies in both saxo-

phone and strings bring forth a playful and dancing character and remind us of Irish folk music as well as the French composer Darius Milhaud. Several passages have jazz-like phrases, and the melodic fragments are frequently exchanged between the orchestra and the saxophone. The expression is joyful and innocent, and we picture children running around and playing. In the further musical development, Aarøen brings us through many tonal shifts and moods. A climax with long and lingering notes is achieved before a long saxophone cadenza takes over. When the orchestra returns at the end of the movement, the character changes to "Misterioso" with very soft dynamics and long chords.

The third movement *All Seasons Must Pass* is, like the first, calm. But this time, it is "Con amore"—with love. It starts with a sweet melody in solo violin. Then the orchestra comes in and the melody is repeated in the saxophone. This movement is tender and cantabile throughout and is also the shortest of the three movements.

Alexander Manotskov (b. 1972) comes from Saint Petersburg in Russia. In recent years he has been collaborating with Ukrainian musicians, writing and performing songs to poems by Ukrainian poets. Thus, after the start of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Manotskov left Russia and is currently based in Düsseldorf in Germany. We got in touch for the first time in the beginning of 2011, and I commissioned a concerto from him to be premiered with the Arktisk Filharmoni (then Tromsø Chamber Orchestra) the same autumn. I was quickly amazed by his playful approach to the saxophone and the orchestra, with all the timbres and possibilities of the instrument being thoroughly explored.

Because of the tight bonds between Northern Norway and North-western Russia at the time, Manotskov used the city of Arkhangelsk (also known as Archangel) as a spark of inspiration. As there are seven archangels in the Eastern Orthodox Church, this served as a frame for seven movements, or portraits: 1. *Michael*, 2. *Jegudiel*, 3. *Gabriel*, 4. *Barachiel*, 5. *Sealtiel*, 6. *Raphael*, and 7. *Uriel*. Although the final work is not strictly programmatic music, the titles of the movements point in a very clear direction towards the initial concept for the composing process.

The first movement *Michael* is inspired by the traditional and liturgical *demestvenny* 

chant, and hence we are immediately put into the religious context in which the angels also belong. Michael is considered to be the chief of all of the angels and archangels, and also appears on the coat of arms of the city of Arkhangelsk. Musically the demestvenny chant may remind us a little of the Gregorian chant, and it's easy to recognize the character of a solemn, religious mass. No single part is more important than the others, with the focus being on a powerful flow and with very little accentuation. The sound of the saxophone merges and disappears into the sound of the strings, both in unison and in more complex harmonies created by multiphonics in the saxophone. Manotskov harmonises the modal melodic lines to emulate the chaotic overtone effect one may experience in a church room with a long reverb.

The second movement *Jegudiel* is built around the effects of slap tongue on the saxophone, and pizzicato and con legno in the strings. In the icons of Jegudiel, we often see him holding a whip, and these effects are a clear parallel to this. Musically the percussive sounds repeatedly cut off the melodies, as if it was a person who is unable to speak in full sentences. Jegudiel is known to be the patron of hard work, and the bearer of "God's





merciful love". We feel the music as joyful, but still thrifty, precise and sober, just like a conscientious labourer.

The third movement depicts Gabriel, the angel of revelation and commander of powers. In the New Testament, it is for instance Gabriel who announces the birth of Jesus. The movement starts with the orchestra tuning up to the low sounding D on the saxophone (B on the instrument). When the saxophone is overblowing this fundamental, we get an audible effect similar to that of an Indian trumpet. Manotskov uses many references to Indian music in this movement, and the choice of major instead of minor underlines the announcing character of the music.

In the fourth movement *Barachiel*, we are introduced to the archangel of blessings. Manotskov deliberately wrote an intricate part for the strings in this movement, in the hope that the listener will sense an ongoing struggle. Long, soft and soothing notes in the saxophone contrast the orchestral part, as if an angel is flying over it all.

*Sealtiel* is the patron of prayer and worship. In this fifth movement, we imagine a monk or a priest in deep concentration over his prayer

wreaths, counting knots and never ceasing to repeat his prayers. When repeating prayers for a long time, there are times when they feel like just empty and meaningless sounds, until they suddenly shift and there is a feeling of something deeper and more significant, or tragic. Inspired by such prayer wreaths, Manotskov has created musical phrases of different lengths. This creates an unpredictable polyphony, where the music just occasionally creates short moments of unison before again drifting apart. The saxophone plays the longest phrase, and this part is presented only once. The shorter phrases are distributed among the strings, and these are repeated until the saxophone is back to the beginning.

In the sixth movement *Raphael*, Manotskov has used an old folk melody from Northern Norway, called *Sulli Lulli Lillebror*, often sung as a lullaby to children at night. Raphael is the angel of trumpet, and his name means "God has healed". Because of this, the saxophone is played without the mouthpiece, and the sound is produced directly on the instrument neck as when playing a brass instrument—like a trumpet. The produced sound is, however, much softer. The orchestra is also challenged to play inversely, by the members holding their instruments and

bows in the opposite hands of their norm. Manotskov wanted to establish a completely helpless situation for the musicians, and this is exactly what we hear in the music. It's almost impossible for the musicians to keep the tuning and to play precisely, an effect that would not have been possible to create through regular music notation. The music is broken, and the "trumpet" is trying to heal it.

To end this voyage through the orthodox world of archangels, we have *Uriel* as the last movement. Uriel is said to be the angel standing at the gate of Eden with a fiery sword, and his name means "God is my flame". He is known to be the archangel of knowledge and wisdom, and is the patron of arts and sciences. There have been few references to Uriel in catholic and protestant tradition, but he was central to the neo-gnostic Bulgarian bogomilism of the 11th century. As a reference to this, Manotskov has used several different odd meters that are typical of Bulgarian folk music, and through the movement he shifts back and forth between these without losing the dancing character: 5/8, 7/8, 4/8, 6/8, 17/16, and 12/16. Despite this confusing complexity, the music flows unhindered through the work, as if it was just a common folk dance.

Terje Bjørklund (b. 1945) is originally from Narvik, just a few hours' drive south of Tromsø. After an extensive career as a jazz pianist, he established the famous jazz department at the Conservatory in Trondheim in 1979—an institution that has formed several strong generations of Norwegian jazz artists. Around 1980, he shifted towards composing classical music. Several of his works have received high recognition internationally, such as the Carmina for strings that was nominated for three American Grammys in 2009. I have always been a fan of his music, but I did not dare to contact him before 2019 after we were introduced through common friends. Although Bjørklund has performed together with some of the greatest jazz saxophonists of our time, such as Jan Garbarek and Dexter Gordon, I was surprised that he had not previously composed anything for classical saxophone.

Bjørklund liked my suggestion of composing a saxophone concerto and decided to write *Arctic Lines* as an ode to the Arctic. Although it is a concerto for classical saxophone, there are many elements in the work that remind of the modern Scandinavian jazz tradition. At the same time, we feel musical relations to Vivaldi as well as modern Baltic composers.





The work consists of 6 movements: 1. Short Sami Song, 2. Arctic Winds, 3. Arctic Landscapes, 4. Fighting with the Polar Bear, 5. Arctic November, 6. Sami Song.

Both Short Sami Song and Sami Song (the first and the last movements) share the same melodic material, a joik-like melody inspired by Sami music. The Sami are the indigenous people of Northern Scandinavia and Northwestern Russia, and the Sami area we call Sápmi stretches across these four countries in the North. Tromsø is also situated in Sápmi. Particular to the tradition of joik is that it is cyclical, and therefore the sami song composed by Bjørklund fits well for both the beginning and the end.

In the second and third movement Bjørklund seeks towards nature. In *Arctic Winds*, Bjørklund is inspired by the sometimes harsh weather of the north, a weather that is both fascinating but sometimes fatal. The winds in this region are unpredictable, and we may even have snow in July. In the reprise we hear the saxophone uses slap tongue and the string orchestra plays *col legno battuto*—a percussive technique where the musicians use the stick of the bow on the strings instead of the hair. In *Arctic Landscapes* the weather has cleared up,

and we experience the spectacular nature with dramatic mountains and fjords.

The fourth movement invites to a fight with a polar bear. Bjørklund makes use of quick and extremely demanding movements in the altissimo register on the saxophone to increase the intensity of the music. The polar bear is considered to be one of be the most dangerous and aggressive mammals in the Arctic, and while there are none to be found on the Norwegian mainland, it is compulsory to carry a rifle when moving outside the urban areas on the archipelago of Svalbard. Bjørklund wrote about this movement: "While most people bring a rifle if they fear a polar bear, Ola has only got his saxophone." Because of climate change and loss of habitat, the polar bear is now classified as a vulnerable species.

Before the concerto ends with *Sami Song*, Bjørklund describes the arrival of winter and the dark period in *Arctic November*. The pizzicato in the strings reminds us of snowfall, and an overall melancholic character in the movement refers to the period where the sun is not visible – a period when light is all important, and when people seek together and socialise more. In the case of Tromsø, we

don't see the sun at all between 21 November and 21 January. As a reward, we have the midnight sun between 21 May and 21 July.

Commissioning music from these three composers and working with them has been a 12-year journey, full of inspiration, new insights and new discoveries. An intriguing challenge for me has been how to interpret the music in the best possible way. Both Aarøen and Bjørklund have a background as jazz pianists, which is clearly audible in their music. Likewise, Manotskov borrows heavily from different folk music traditions. This demands for small but significant changes of sound and character, something I have wanted to highlight but without breaking the classical style and expression of the music. Now, I'm so proud to finally be able to present this music to the world, music that has been conceived right here in the Arctic.

> Ola Asdahl Rokkones (Translated by Rob Barrett)





# **The Composers**

Alexander Aarøen (b. 1993) is a composer from Northern Norway, living in Oslo. He has composed music for orchestra, chamber ensembles, choir, big band, jazz groups and rock bands.

In 2018, Aarøen was awarded the prestigious *Steve Kaplan*-prize from the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers for his work with the Hollywood Studio Orchestra at 20th Century Fox in Los Angeles.

Aarøen started his musical career as a rock pianist in his hometown Storsteinnes, but quickly discovered his passion for film music. Soon he fell in love with classical music and jazz, leading him to a bachelor's degree in jazz piano and composing, and then a master's degree in film music. Since finishing his studies, he has completed several works, such as a concerto for trumpet, a concerto for alto saxophone, a sequel of symphonic poems, a children's ballet, and music for three dance performances, as well as music for the conceptual recording Bivrost.

Aarøen is also frequently used as an arranger of music, and has collaborated with artists such as Tonje Unstad, Vokal Nord, Moddi, Lisa Skoglund, Hollow Hearts, Pristine, KORK (The Norwegian Radio Orchestra), Arktisk Filharmoni, and Stavanger Symphony Orchestra.

Through his artistic career, Aarøen has highlighted the strong connection between storytelling and music, and he continuously strives to create imaginative works with resonating and human qualities.

Alexander Manotskov (b. 1972) is a Russian composer from Saint Petersburg. He studied Anthropology at the St. Petersburg University (1989—93, Master) and at the Anthropology Museum (1993—94, Postgraduate studies). Manotskov has also studied musical composition with A. Yusfin and V. Guyvoronsky (1992—00) and various national musical traditions from the Middle East, Central Africa, the Don region, the Caribbean and southern India (Carnatik) music. After the start of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, he left Russia and is currently based in Düsseldorf, Germany.

Manotskov has been working as a full-time freelance composer since 1995.

He has composed a large number of chamber and orchestral works, and over 20 operas that have been performed and staged in Russia, Ukraine, Norway, Kazakhstan, USA, Germany and other countries. Some of his scores (including Seven Portraits) have been published by the Dutch publisher Donemus. He occasionally works as choirmaster, conductor for choirs and orchestras, and as a music producer. He has participated as a multi-instrumentalist, vocalist, leader and conductor in many groups and projects of both contemporary and early music, as well as jazz, traditional music and other genres.

His opera *Gvidon* received the *Best Experimental Production*-award at the 2011 *Golden Mask Russian National Theatre Festival* and has been played regularly by theatres since.

In recent years Manotskov has been collaborating with Ukrainian musicians, writing and performing songs influenced by poems by Ukrainian poets.

Terje Bjørklund (b. 1945) is a composer from Narvik in Northern Norway, currently living in Trondheim. After studying musicology at the University of Oslo, he studied composition with Finn Mortensen at the Norwegian Academy of Music (1971—73). Immediately

afterwards, he gained employment at the music conservatory in Trondheim, and in 1979 he started the well renowned jazz-branch *Jazzlinjen*. Until about 1980, he was an active jazz pianist and was awarded the prestigious *Buddy*-prize in 1983 for his contribution to Norwegian jazz.

Since 1980, Bjørklund has primarily focused on composing serious art music. The way in which he handles harmony and sound is often reminiscent of modern jazz. He has composed numerous commissions for choir, orchestras, as well as various solo- and chamber music-works.

The work *Sarek* (1989) for string orchestra was reviewed in 1992 by the American magazine Fanfare who wrote: "Terje Bjørklund's brief tone poem [...] with vistas of breath-taking expanse and lyrical outpourings that sound, in their strong melodic profile, almost like updated Grieg". His work *Carmina* (1994) for string orchestra was released on the album Divertimenti by the Trondheim Soloists in 2008, and this CD was nominated for three Grammy awards in 2009.

In January 2016 Bjørklund was awarded *The Royal Norwegian Order of Saint Olav* (Knight 1st class).



### Ola Asdahl Rokkones

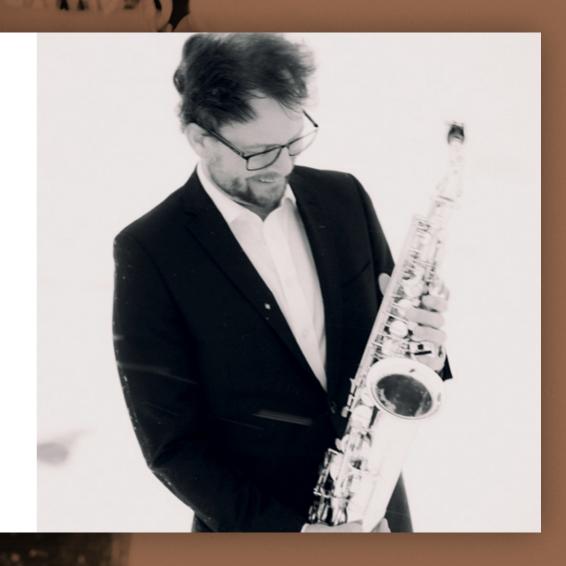
#### Alto Saxophone

Ola Asdahl Rokkones (b. 1983) is one of few saxophonists working within the fields of both classical music and jazz. He has studied with several acclaimed teachers including Lars Lien, Vibeke Breian, Jean-Yves Fourmeau and John-Pål Inderberg. In 2012 he received the culture prize of Tromsø Municipality, and in 2018 he was the laureate of the artist grant of the Troms region. In 2019 he was selected as one of the four recipients of the Barents Scholarship, "for valuable and outstanding contribution to the cultural life and cooperation across borders in the Barents Region". In 2022 he was awarded an artist grant from Ingerid, Synnøve og Elias Fegerstens Stiftelse.

As a classical musician, he has appeared as a soloist with several orchestras in Norway, Russia, Germany and France, among them Arktisk Filharmoni, Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra and the Mariinsky Symphonic Orchestra. With various constellations he has toured internationally, and performed in Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Germany, France, Austria, Russia, Poland, The Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania, Turkey, and Brazil. He has commissioned and premiered music by numerous composers, such as Alexander Aarøen, Alexander Manotskov, Terje Bjørklund, Agnes Ida Pettersen, Tine Surel Lange, Herborg Rundberg, Rakel Nystabakk, Helge Iberg, Kjell Habbestad, Martin Romberg, Torstein Aagaard-Nilsen, Erik Stifjell, Lars Skoglund, Håvard Lund, Bodvar Drotninghaug Moe, and Bjørn Breimo.

His discography includes eleven releases of various genres, including the albums *Trio Brax* (LWC1248) with Julia Neher and Sergej Osadchuk, and *Norwegian Saxophone* (LWC1162) with Fabio Mastrangelo and the St. Petersburg Northern Sinfonia.

Ola Asdahl Rokkones is an endorsed artist and official ambassador of Henri Selmer Paris Saxophones.





## Arktisk Filharmoni

Inside the Arctic Circle you find Arktisk Filharmoni, the world's northernmost professional orchestra.

Throughout the year, you can hear the orchestra play more than 200 concerts in Bodø and in Tromsø, as well as in other towns in Norway and abroad.

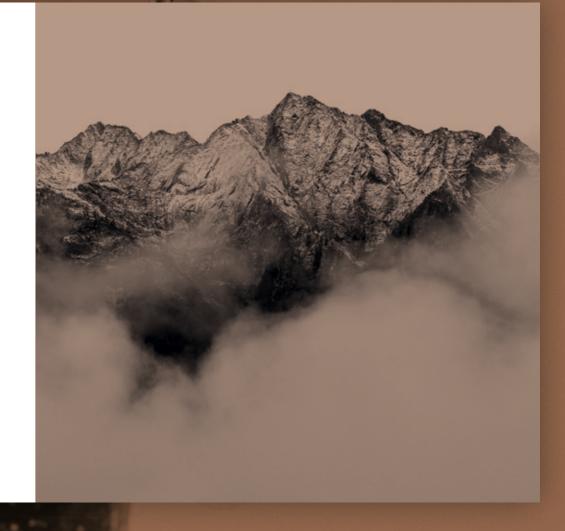
Arktisk Filharmoni is built on a unique model. It has a chamber orchestra in Tromsø and a sinfonietta in Bodø, and when the musicians join forces 8-10 times a year, you can experience the full symphony orchestra, as well as opera performances.

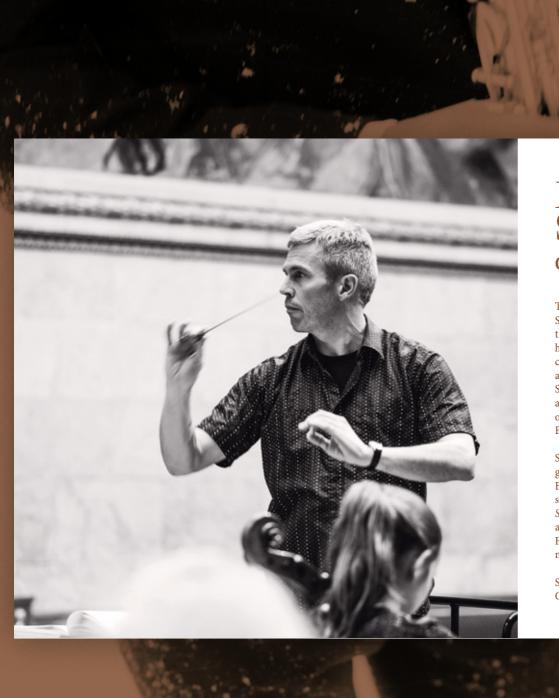
Members of the orchestra play classical music in small chamber groups, as well as in the full symphony orchestra and in opera productions. You can also hear them play with different artists in many other genres.

The orchestra aims to present contemporary Norwegian music with particular focus

on the High North, while at the same time managing a broad spectrum of the shared musical heritage, including the Sami and Kyen music, culture and traditions.

Together with bands and artists from Norway and abroad, within genres such as pop, rock, folk music and joik, Arktisk Filharmoni contributes to regional, national, and international musical stages.





### Per Kristian Skalstad

#### Conductor

The Norwegian conductor Per Kristian Skalstad (b. 1972) works regularly with the major Norwegian orchestras. Since his debut as a conductor in 2002, he has conducted a large number of ballets, operas and symphonic concerts all over Norway, Sweden, Finland, The Netherlands, Germany and Austria, and participated in chamber orchestra tours to Denmark, England, Belgium, Russia and the US.

Since 2004, Skalstad has been a frequent guest conductor for the Norwegian National Ballet, conducting more than 30 productions such as *Giselle*, *The Nutcracker*, *Swan Lake*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Carmen* and *Don Quijote*, along with works by Balanchine, Kylian, Forsythe and Lightfoot & León, and a number of world premiere productions.

Skalstad has conducted the Norwegian Chamber Orchestra (NCO) a number of times, with soloists like Leif Ove Andsnes, Isabelle Van Keulen, Ian Bostridge, Gidon Kremer, Paul Lewis, Lars Anders Tomter, Truls Mørk, Martin Frost, Tine Ting Helseth and Jean Guihen Quyeras. He premiered the piano concerto *La Mattina* by Bent Sørensen with Andsnes and the NCO in 2009 and has since then taken this work on tours to the Bergen Festival, Musikhalle Hamburg, the Proms in the Royal Albert Hall and the Ojay Music Festival in California, USA.

Skalstad is artistic director of the Telemark Chamber Orchestra (TKO) where he normally leads as a violin player. For 12 years he was assistant concertmaster of the Norwegian Opera Orchestra, and a long-time member of the Norwegian Chamber Orchestra, as well as the Oslo String Quartet.





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