
LAWO
CLASSICS
LASSE
THORESEN
Adventuring
the Intangible
Symphonic Concerto
For Violoncello and Orchestra:
Viaggio Attraverso Tre Valli
ΩN: BEING
AMALIE STALHEIM
INGAR BERGBY
PETER SZILVAY
OSLO PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA
OSLO PHILHARMONIC CHOIR
ENSEMBLE 96

LASSE THORESEN:

Symphonic Concerto for Cello and Orchestra. "Viaggio attraverso tre valli"

(Journey Through Three Valleys)

I met the cellist Truls Mørk in the late 1990s after a Nobel Prize ceremony where he had been performing. Truls asked me if I could write a cello concerto for him. He was supposed to contact his agent about this, but several years passed without any further word. In 2003, I received an inquiry from director René Bosc of Radio France's major annual music festival, *Festival Présences*, about whether I'd be interested in being the composer-in-residence for the festival for a three-year period (2004-2006). In this context, the radio wanted to commission a piece from me, and I suggested they commission the cello concerto with Truls Mørk as the soloist. Although there was immediate agreement on this, Truls wasn't approached until it was too late—he was already bound to other contracts.

In 2006, the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra was invited to the festival to perform a piece of mine, with then-director Morten Walderhaug attending a sensational performance of my violin concerto with L'Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, conducted by Kazushi Ono and with Hélène Colerette as the soloist. (I don't use words like 'sensational' lightly, but the seven minutes of continuous applause from the audience was quite overwhelming). This led to the Oslo Philharmonic offering to co-sponsor the cello concerto I was planning to write, which would then be premiered in both Oslo and Paris. My years as composer-in-residence had now ended, so a performance under Radio France's auspices would have to happen at a later date. Festival director René Bosc was dismissed shortly after this on the grounds that his programming choices had caused massive protests from French avant-garde composers, who had complained about not being appropriately represented. (René had in fact achieved exceptionally good audience attendances thanks to his programming, and would later take legal action for wrongful dismissal, which he won—but that's another story.)

As a result, the cello concerto was never performed in France. The Oslo Philharmonic did however take on the project and scheduled the piece. During rehearsals, I realised that some sections of the piece were dragging on a bit long and I decided to make some major cuts. I gathered all the musicians' parts after the rehearsal on Tuesday. By 8am the next morning, I was still making the last corrections when the concert hall manager opened the door and found the meeting room filled with music scores and a very tired composer. The world premiere of the concerto took place in the autumn of 2008 with OFO's chief conductor Jukka-Pekka Saraste, and featuring Truls Mørk as the soloist. NRK TV (Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation's Television) showed the entire piece on their programme *NRK Hovedscenen*, and the reviews were positive.

After the premiere, I was still not completely satisfied with the piece's structure, particularly the ending of the second movement and the beginning of the third. I got the chance to try out a new version of the work in Finland in 2013 when the Tampere Symphony Orchestra performed it under the baton of Santu-Mattias Rouvali, with Tuomas Lehto as the soloist.

A few years later, I received a call from the composer and accordionist Jostein Stalheim, who informed me that his young daughter, Amalie Stalheim, was keen to perform the piece with the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra. We met and discussed the work and Amalie ended up performing this very demanding piece perfectly! The performance of the cello concerto took place in 2020 during the Ultima Festival, to a rather sparsely-populated Oslo Concert Hall—it was still the pandemic after all. Thankfully, a recording was made of it the following day by LAWO, and a digital release was issued the following year. Again, to glowing reviews—such as the following:

> *"The title 'Journey through Three Valleys' may indeed raise some concerning associations. Given Thoresen's orientation toward folk music, one might fear that the piece would verge dangerously close toward an uncomfortable celebration of 'Norwegian-ness' at a time when you could hardly think of a more contentious subject.*
>
> *However, this cello concerto is a wolf in sheep's clothing. Behind the postcard-like title hides a dark beast of a work that slowly builds up to one of the more terrifying climaxes I can ever recall hearing in a concert hall. The valley turns out to be an abyss, a bottomless darkness. According to the composer himself, each of the three movements is a journey through a 'mental landscape where the sides are so steep that you can't even see over the horizon.'*
>
> *Darkness, however, does not reign alone in the psychic valleys of this work. More than any other, Lasse Thoresen is a composer who deals in light and ecstasy, something I suspect may stem from the composer's devotion to the Baha'i faith. With the slow and meditative second movement, you will already notice that light and darkness are maintaining a somewhat unstable balance, that is at least until the violent catastrophe occurs toward the end of the movement. Not unexpectedly, it is in the final movement that the fog truly lifts, and the hillsides are bathed in shimmering radiance.*
>
> *'Journey through Three Valleys' showcases the breadth of Thoresen's mastery, where an almost naïve spontaneity is complemented by an enormous orchestral palette. Thoresen is, above all, a world class sonic artist and was supported by an orchestra that was brilliant under Ingar Bergby's solid leadership."*
>
> (Eystein Sandvik, NRK. 17/9/2020)

This review conveniently serves as an introductory description of the work, but allow me to elaborate. The first movement is called *Ricercare,* although not in the traditional musical sense or form of a *ricercare.* Instead the title alludes to the word's original meaning 'to search out/to seek'. A confused, lonely soloist eventually finds terra firma in a cascade of overtones toward the end of the movement. The second movement is called *Serenata*—and it is essentially a love song. This is an idealised love—there is a darkness beneath it that is unleashed in a scene where the soloist desperately flees (the subtitle *fuga* does not refer to the musical form but simply means "flight") and, after enormous tension is created, it descends into catastrophe. However at the end of the movement—in the aftermath of this catastrophe—the lovers are united as a solo violin enters into the cello's overtones. The

last movement is simply called *Finale,* for the lack of any other words that could be used to describe phenomena that follow the resolution of the second movement.

For those interested in the details, it should be mentioned that this piece is written in a compositional technique which I call "spectrotonality". I have described this elsewhere, including in my large theoretical work entitled *Emergent Musical Forms. Aural Explorations*.

The cello concerto marks the beginning of a larger musical journey through spiritual landscapes. I have given the works that belong to this series Italian titles. The journey continues through a viola concerto (*Valle della unitá*—Valley of Unity) and a piano concerto (*Cittá della luce*—City of Light), and a large opus inspired by the Arctic (*La terra meravigliosa*—Land of Wonder). Only the latter work has a published recording. The work found on this particular CD release is the end of this journey (though here, it is indeed a Greek, and not an Italian word in the title):

Lasse Thoresen:
ΩN: Being (*ΩN: Det værende*)

This work was commissioned to be part of the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra's 100th-anniversary season 2019–2020 and was scheduled for a world premiere in April 2020. A video production was also in the works to chronicle the creation of the piece and my compositional activity as part of the documentation of the anniversary, but then of course the pandemic broke out. Alas the premiere of the piece was postponed indefinitely, and the video was never completed.

The piece finally saw the light of day at the Ultima Oslo Contemporary Music Festival in the autumn of 2022, with Peter Szilvay conducting the Oslo Philharmonic featuring members of the orchestra's choir as well as Ensemble96. A CD production with LAWO was also scheduled. Although the piece was originally written for the general public, a performance at Ultima in front of a smaller, more specialised audience was probably the only viable solution to get the work on stage at a time heavily affected by the pandemic.

I mention this to shed light on an aesthetic guideline I subscribe to in my work as a composer. While I have always remained reasonably interested and up-to-date on the many exciting musical innovations of modernism, I have consistently aimed to write music where the non-specialised listener is given cues that enable him/her to follow the musical progression, and thus experience it as meaningful. I believe many listeners appreciate new experiences even in concerts predominantly featuring classical music. Very little of my music belongs to the most advanced avant-garde elite. The downside of this is that a piece written for the classical music scene immediately finds itself in an involuntary competition for space on the programme, pitted against some of the masterpieces of the great musical geniuses. Unfortunately most contemporary music is doomed to come out poorly in this context. I have often experienced this, and it has occasionally led me to consider quitting music altogether. When I have continued, it is because I have something on my heart to express. However, I have made one clear decision: ΩN: Being will be my last work for a large orchestra. The reason for this is not only that the workload associated with writing large orchestral works is disproportionate to the number of performances one can expect, but also that this work summarises and fulfils many of my musical and spiritual aspirations. It contains references to several of my previously written works.

ΩN is Greek for '*being*'. In philosophical discourse, this is a concept that stands in contrast to *τα όντα* – meaning *existing things*. The *existing things* encompass everything we experience with our senses, everything we have concepts of and can imagine, everything that has a defined and specific mental content. *Being* is what underlies everything that *exists*, in other words the underlying unity of the universe. *Being* is undifferentiated but can spring into existence – that is, it can become the *existing things*. These things rely on *Being* but they also conceal it from us. Such thoughts on the relationship between *Being* and the world can be found in all major religions and classical philosophical traditions. The experience of *being* can be a state of awareness of mindful presence, without mental content.

How to convey this in music is hardly something that comes with a definitive answer. Perhaps we approach an experience of *Being* when we simply become aware of our existence. This probably happens more often when are resting or in meditation rather than when we are heading somewhere. So I have composed a piece consisting of a series of extended sound fields that are predominantly presence-oriented – i.e. not directed towards any musical goals. I wanted to envelop the listener in an atmosphere where the human voice is central. The human voice is after all closely connected to our inner sense of being in the world, to the self, and to the deeper identity. To achieve an all-encompassing sound, I conducted a little experiment during the premiere, namely conveying a subdued choral sound into the hall through speakers that surrounded the listeners. Immersed in the vocal sound, the listener could then truly experience the orchestral texture. Recreating this in stereophonic sound turned out to be rather challenging, but in 'surround' production this becomes a superior experience, given the right listening equipment.

The actual theme of the work is first heard in an almost unaccompanied choral movement that comes at the very end. The thematic element is primarily the harmony: Each chord is drawn from an overtone scale (in equal temperament) and the chord progression is connected by means of one central pitch in such a way that all the different tonalities in the piece have an E in their overtone spectrum. The long soundfields develop this harmonic foundation in various ways. The central pitch is already presented as a unison in the opening section of the piece, along with simple melodic contours that recur throughout the piece in the form of small fanfares which represent invocations.

Lasse Thoresen. Røa,
February 2024.
www.lassethoresen.com

LASSE THORESEN

Lasse Thoresen (b. 1949) is one of Norway's most active and versatile composers. Teaching at the Norwegian Academy of Music he has influenced a whole generation of composition students, and has contributed to a rich academic environment through lectures, research and publications. Thoresen's music has achieved wide recognition both in Norway and internationally, and he has received a number of awards including the Norwegian Music Publishers Award 2023 as Composer of the Year (Classical/Contemporary music), the prestigious Nordic Council Music Prize (2010) for *Opus 42.* In 1998 the Oslo Philharmonic received Spellemannprisen—often referred to as the Norwegian Grammy—for the CD *The Sonic Mind* with compositions by Lasse Thoresen. In 2019 Thoresen was awarded the King's Medal of Merit (Norwegian: Kongens fortjenstmedalje) for his contributions to Norwegian cultural society.

Many sources of inspiration may be detected in Thoresen's music; Norwegian folk music, just intonation, French spectralism, electroacoustic music and the Bahá'í faith—to name but a few. His production is broad and varied, ranging from solo and chamber pieces to large choral and orchestral works. From the 1970s and onward Thoresen has been central to developing the field of aural sonology—the analysis of sonic and structural aspects of music-as-heard, inspired by Pierre Schaeffer's theories. In 2015 the book Emergent Musical Forms: Aural Explorations was published—the result of four decades of research on the subject.

After retiring from his professorship at the Norwegian Academy of Music Thoresen remains active with commissioned works, research and guest lectures.

AMALIE STALHEIM
CELLO

Award winning cellist Amalie Stalheim (b. 1993 in Norway) has appeared with orchestras and ensembles such as the Gulbenkian Orquestra, the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, the Swedish Radio Orchestra, the Gothenburg Symhony Orchestra, and the Iceland Symphony Orchestra.

In addition to performing the traditional cello concertos, Amalie is very passionate about commissioning and playing contemporary classical music. She is collaborating with some of the biggest composers today, resulting in several new cello concertos being dedicated to her.

Amalie is the winner of the Norwegian Soloist Prize 2021, the Swedish Soloist Prize 2018, the Ljunggren Competition 2015, and the Nicholas A. Firmenich Prize 2015 at the Verbier Festival.

Amalie performs on a Francesco Ruggieri cello (Cremona, 1687) generously lent to her by the Anders Sveaas' Charitable Foundation.

INGAR BERGBY
CONDUCTOR

Ingar Bergby is one of Norway's leading conductors, with many achievements within classical music, opera, contemporary and crossover music. He has distinguished himself as an artist with the power to shape ideas and with great dedication to his work.

Bergby was born in 1964 in Sarpsborg, Norway, into a musical family and grew up playing in the local wind bands. He studied clarinet with Richard Kjelstrup at The Norwegian Academy of Music, and later orchestra conducting with Karsten Andersen, as well as with Jorma Panula at the Sibelius Academy. He graduated as conductor from the Norwegian Academy of Music in 1991.

PETER SZILVAY
CONDUCTOR

Peter Szilvay began his career as a violist. He spent three years with the Oslo Philharmonic, where he met Mariss Jansons, for whom he served as an assistant conductor for three years. Years as a musician were quickly supplanted by constant demands to conduct. This was followed by a position as assistant conductor in the Stavanger Symphony Orchestra until Szilvay took over as conductor on his own.

Szilvay has conducted orchestras and opera in Norway and abroad. In his home country, he has led the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra, the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, The Norwegian Chamber Orchestra, the Stavanger Symphony Orchestra, the Trondheim Symphony Orchestra, the Kristiansand Symphony Orchestra, the Arctic Philharmonic Orchestra, The Norwegian Opera, The Norwegian Radio Orchestra (KORK) and all the military wind-bands.

He has also worked with the sinfoniettas of Oslo, Trondheim, BIT20 Bergen, as well as the Arctic Sinfonietta and the Bodø Sinfonietta. Szilvay has conducted productions at the Norwegian Opera Ballet and Opera South.

Internationally, he has conducted the St. Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra in Russia, the Gothenburg, Helsingborg, Umeå, and Malmø symphony orchestras in Sweden, the radio orchestra in Paris, the Royal Danish Orchestra, and at the opera in Würzburg, Germany.

Early in his career, he made an impressive contribution to contemporary music and performed more than 150 original works with the best ensembles at home and abroad. However, his interest in classical and romantic music has grown steadily. Szilvay is passionate about working with singers and puts the art of opera high on his priority list.

Szilvay is a distinguished communicator, and his pretalks at performances set the mood for the crowd. Contact with the public, in Szilvay's opinion, is one of the most crucial things we can give priority to. It is impossible to stress the importance of attracting audiences and sharing our amazing cultural legacy.

OSLO PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

On September 27, 1919, the Orchestra of the Philharmonic Company – later to be known as the Oslo Philharmonic – took to the stage in the "Gamle Logen" hall in Kristiania to hold its first public concert. The creation of an independent symphony orchestra in the city was a major event. Among the prominent guests at the concert were King Haakon VII and Queen Maud.

In its first season, the orchestra played 135 concerts, most of them sold out. The Oslo Philharmonic quickly became a powerhouse in the capital's music scene, attracting both international stars and a large local audience. In 1921, Jean Sibelius conducted a series of concerts with his own works, and the same year, the chief conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic, Arthur Nikisch, conducted a series of concerts with all of Beethoven's symphonies. The following year, the orchestra held its first outdoor concerts - events that were just as popular then as today.

In the decades that followed, the Oslo Philharmonic gained a reputation as a symphony orchestra of international standard. In the 1960s and 1970s, there were several tours abroad with the chief conductors Herbert Blomstedt, Øivin Fjeldstad, Miltiades Caridis and Okku Kamu.

In 1979, Mariss Jansons took over as chief conductor – the start of an exceptional success story. From 1984, the Oslo Philharmonic recorded all Pyotr Tchaikovsky's symphonies on the British record label Chandos. The recordings were extraordinarily well received by both critics and audiences, and the orchestra's tours in following years went to increasingly prestigious concert venues in Europe and the United States. Mariss Jansons was chief conductor untill 2002. Together with his successors André Previn and Jukka-Pekka Saraste, the orchestra continued to create enthusiasm on their tours around the world in the new millennium.

Vasily Petrenko became chief conductor of the Oslo Philharmonic in 2013 and led the orchestra into their 100th anniversary season 2019/20, which culminated with an anniversary concert on the centenary date and a major European tour. Petrenko also led the orchestra in a number of critically acclaimed recordings, including the complete symphonies of Aleksandr Scriabin and major works by Sergei Prokofiev, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov and Richard Strauss on LAWO Classics.

In August 2020, Klaus Mäkelä took over as chief conductor and artistic advisor. He made his debut with the Oslo Philharmonic in May 2018. The Oslo Philharmonic has 108 permanently employed musicians and an administration of 25.

ofo.no

OSLO PHILHARMONIC CHOIR

The Oslo Philharmonic Choir's main task is to accompany the Oslo Philharmonic and regularly participates in concerts with Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra under some of the world's most renowned conductors. The

choir performed on stage for the first time in 1921

Over the past ten years, the Oslo Philharmonic Choir has participated in around 170 concerts with the Oslo Philharmonic under some of the world's most acclaimed conductors. The choir has performed most of the major symphonic choral works in the musical literature; over the last decades, it has consistently improved in quality. Today, considered one of the best symphonic choirs in the Nordic region, the choir receives positive reviews from critics, audiences, and conductors.

The choir currently consists of approximately 100 dedicated singers, and in addition to participate in concert with the orchestra, they hold annual acappella concerts both abroad and in Norway with their conductor of the past 15 years, Øystein Fevang, in order to reach a wider audience.

ofo.no/oslo-filharmoniske-kor

ENSEMBLE 96

The chamber choir Ensemble 96 consists of 26 highly qualified singers and is one of Norway's leading vocal ensembles. The choir has gained its reputation through many critically acclaimed concerts, premieres and CD recordings.

Ensemble 96 has a particular focus on contemporary music and seeks to expand the traditional choir concert by means of collaborations with other artists, including dancers, actors and visual artists. The ensemble often presents a mix of contemporary music and classical songs. The musical director and conductor is Nina Therese Karlsen, who holds an MA in Choir Conducting from the Norwegian Academy of Music.

The recording *Immortal Nystedt* conducted by Øystein Fevang was nominated for Best Choral Performance in 2006, and in 2011 the album *Kind* was nominated in the same category, conducted by Kjetil Almenning. *So is my love was* nominated for Best Surround Sound Album in 2018. In the category Best Immersive Audio Album Morten Lindberg/2L was nominated for *Pax*, featuring – Ensemble 96 & Current Saxophone Quartet, the two latter recordings both conducted by Nina T Karlsen.

Ensemble 96 has made first performances of works by, amongst others, Knut Nystedt, Synne Skouen, Antonio Bibalo, Wolfgang Plagge, Jon Balke, Andrew Smith, Kjell Mørk Karlsen, Kjetil Bjørnstad, Trond Lindheim, Olav Anton Thommesen, Julian Skar, Marcus Paus, Frank Havrøy, Martin Ødegaard and Tyler Futrell.

ensemble96.no

ØYSTEIN FEVANG
CONDUCTOR

Øystein Fevang (b. 1963) is a Norwegian conductor, singer and musician.

After founding the chamber choir Ensemble 96 in 1996, Fevang quickly established the choir in the elite amongst Norwegian choirs, with numerous premiere performances and recordings. In 2006 Øystein left Ensemble 96, to take over the Oslo Philharmonic Choir, where he has served as the conductor and artistic director to date.

Along with his practicing career, Øystein Fevang has been teaching choir, conducting, vocal and piano at Rud senior high school. At the first day of school year in August 2019 he made a spontaneous sing along with his students, performing Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody*. A video of this went viral, and Queen themselves shared the video. It has now surpassed 30 million views.

LASSE THORESEN

Concerto Sinfonico per Violoncello e Orchestra

1. *La prima Valle I. Ricercare* 10:58
2. *La secunda Valle II. Serenata e Fuga* 15:39
3. *La terza Valle III. Finale* 15:01
4. *Det værende Op. 63* 29:34

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