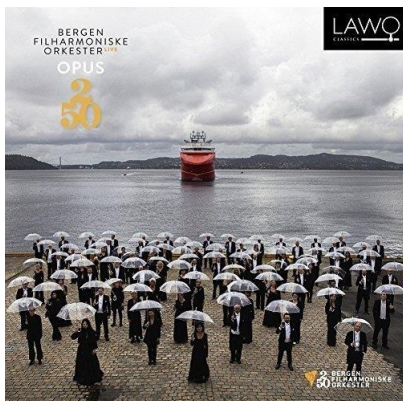


BERGEN PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA: Opus 250 • ^{1,4} Andrew Litton, ² James MacMillan, ³ Edward Gardner, cond; ¹ Ilze Klava (va); ² Christian Stene (cl); ⁴ Håkon Kartveit (timpani); Bergen PO • LAWO 1089 (72:46) Live: Bergen 1/15/2015; ¹ 2/15/2015; ² 3/26–27/2015; ³ 2/19–20/2015⁴

¹ **O. BERG** Viola Concerto. ² **ULVO** *Shadows and Shields*. ³ **SØDERLIND** *Horns in Landscapes*. ⁴ **PAUS** ³ Timpani Concerto



Founded in 1765, the Bergen Philharmonic stands as one of the world's oldest orchestras. For its 250th anniversary, the group commissioned more than 20 works. This kaleidoscopic new sampler brings us four of them.

Although they're all concertos by Norwegian composers, the stylistic range is fairly wide, as is evident even from the first two pieces. The single-movement Viola Concerto by Olav Berg, informed by what we might call post-tonal lyricism, unfolds nearly as a single span; inspired by a dream, it's (not surprisingly) slow and moody, often intense and darkened by melancholy, but without the pain of, say, the Shostakovich First Violin Concerto. In contrast, Therese Birkelund Ulvo's single-movement *Shadows and Shields* for clarinet and orchestra, which follows, gives us a prismatic series of less clearly connected moments, an ever-changing exchange between soloist and orchestra. Hans H. Rowe's notes point out that although Ulvo and clarinetist Christian Stene went to school together, they moved in different directions aesthetically; and this work (which involved, apparently, close collaboration) was a way of coming to terms with their differences. As Rowe puts it, "the composer's and performer's worlds collide. The soloist must adjust to an unfamiliar musical language, and the composer compromises by accommodating to his taste for order and system." Whether or not you agree with me that the soloist changes more than the orchestra, you'll be fascinated by the way, in their often-contemplative conversation, the clarinet's lines are infused with trills, bent tones, and multiphonics. A challenging work, but far from inaccessible.

Whatever their differences, though, the Berg and Ulvo have more in common with each other than they do with the more exuberant, conventional and resolutely tonal works on the second half of the disc: *Horns in Landscapes* (a concerto for six horns) by Ragnar Söderlind and the Timpani Concerto by Marcus Paus. Each is in three movements with a quieter, central movement flanked by two more outgoing displays, and both are full of references and recollections. You'll hear "In the Hall of the Mountain King" and the *Dies irae* quoted in the Söderlind, while the hymn to Saint Hubert (patron saint of hunting, we learn from the notes) that dominates the finale has more than a bit in common with the finale of the Glazunov Violin Concerto; Dukas, Holst, and John Williams are evoked, less explicitly, in the Paus. Despite their conservatism, however, these are both exceptionally imaginative and well-made concertos, virtuoso crowd-pleasers that bear repetition well.

Four composers, three conductors, nine soloists (counting the six horn players who, surprisingly, are not named in the hard-to-read program book): What holds this collection together? In part, the spirit of adventure—but even more, the conviction and quality of the playing. All of the soloists are first-rate—and under the inspired leadership of Litton (who was at their helm from 2003 to 2015), the Bergen Philharmonic has obviously flourished (I expect good years ahead under their new conductor Edward Gardner, too). Strongly recommended. **Peter J. Rabinowitz**

This article originally appeared in Issue 39:6 (July/Aug 2016) of *Fanfare Magazine*.
Fanfare magazine