

**MIKALSEN:** Clarinet Concerto; **CRUSELL:** Concerto 2; **DEBUSSY:** Premiere Rhapsodie  
Bjorn Nyman, cl; Norwegian Radio Orchestra/  
Olari Elts & Thomas Sondegard  
LAWO 1099—63 minutes

Rising Norwegian composer Jan Erik Mikalsen and Norwegian Radio Orchestra Principal Clarinet Bjorn Nyman are part of the newest generation of classical musicians in Scandinavia. The clarinet concerto, commissioned for Nyman, was finished in 2009 and had its premiere in January 2010 at the Oslo Opera House. This is its first recording.

Mikalsen weaves a dizzying web of strange hues and timbres through three long movements and a full half hour of music, writing quarter-tone harmonies, requesting unusual percussion instruments, and evoking his favorite influences—Mahler, Stravinsky, Messiaen, and Ligeti. Danish conductor Thomas Sondegard takes the podium for this challenging score. In a separate recording session, Nyman performs the Debussy Premiere Rhapsodie and Crusell Concerto No. 2 with Estonian maestro Olari Elts.

Nyman plays with a beautiful and resonant tone, exquisite phrasing, and superb technique, and the orchestra handles each piece with expertise and authority. The opening Debussy is a breathtaking achievement in precision, balance, instrumental color, and sublime expression. The Crusell is also excellent, a perfect balance between elegant classical touch and fiery romantic character that recalls the musical atmosphere of post-Mozart Vienna.

The Mikalsen is a radical departure, immediately throwing the listener onto an alien planet that is creepy, startling, and violent.

Each movement is an abstract tone poem that begins in the ether and grows into a cacophony of anxious strings, screeching woodwinds, and terrifying brass. Each of the first two movements builds to such an astounding intensity that the music succumbs to its own power, crashing and burning with amazing ferocity. Only in the final movement do the soloist and the orchestra retain their wits amidst the hostile soundscape, quietly slipping into the mist and exiting with a nervous whisper.

The album may vex readers who prefer to keep the established canon separate from the avant-garde. Even so, Nyman and his colleagues render each selection with a rare combination of skill and artistic commitment.

HANUDEL

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