

HEAR AND NOW 22.05.04

One of the many exuberant voices of Norwegian electronica, Sir Duperman who'll be joined by other young Bergen-based technological whiz-kids in the second half of tonight's programme. And we stay in Norway for the rest of the show with pieces featured at last year's Ultima festival in Oslo and works by older and younger generation composers Rolf Wallin, Jon Øyvind Ness and the multi-talented composer and performer Maja Ratkje, all featured at last year's festival. I spoke to the festival director Geir Johnson about the inception of Ultima, which this year bore the motto 'echoes of an era':

Interview: Geir Johnson

And demonstrating this point precisely is Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Mixtur*, one of the pieces featured at the final concert of last year's festival. This smaller version of the piece was completed in 1967 and makes resourceful use of 4 sine-wave generators and 4 ring modulators, along with a more conventional orchestra. In case you're wondering, a sine wave is a sound wave - the simplest possible periodic wave form. It's made up of a single frequency and it has a very clean, neutral sound which you may have heard used as a test signal for audio equipment, for example. It's used to great effect in *Mixtur* in conjunction with the ring modulator, where the four sine wave generators are used to modulate the waves produced by groups of instruments in the orchestra to produce complex and eerie difference tones that whistle above the orchestral texture. These simple electronic devices are used to great effect in a piece that still retains its vitality and communicates an unbridled spirit of invention almost forty years after its completion.

Karlheinz Stockhausen: *Mixtur*

Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Mixtur* performed by the Norwegian Radio Orchestra at the Ultima festival for contemporary music in Oslo in October last year. The conductor was Christian Eggen.

Despite its international profile, last year's festival also set out to showcase some of the current developments in Norwegian contemporary music and we'll be doing the same in tonight's programme. I asked the festival director Geir Johnson who he had selected to represent these developments and what it is about their music that particularly interests him.

Interview: Geir Johnson

One of the composers who is certainly seeking a new path by digesting or assimilating the past is Jon Øyvind Ness. One of his main concerns is with intervals and chords that have

historical or stylistic connotations be they romantic, popular or contemporary. By building his own music from these very chords or intervals he is claiming this historical material as his own, converting it into new forms. And his piece *George Gets a Makeover* does precisely this. As the subtitle informs us, it consists entirely of misreadings of Gershwin, fragments reworked and stitched together to form a scintillating tapestry in which the orchestral colours of Gershwin's music are heightened but the narrative of his music is shattered to form a kaleidoscopic rather than linear musical form.

Jon Øyvind Ness: *George Gets a Makeover*

George Gets a Makeover (Misreadings of Gershwin) by Jon Øyvind Ness was performed there by the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Christian Eggen as part of the opening concert at last year's Ultima festival in Oslo.

One of the slightly older generation of Norwegian composers represented at the festival was Rolf Wallin. Along with the rest of Norwegian culture, the music scene in Norway has undergone dramatic changes in the past twenty years as all aspects of life have started to reap the benefit of Norway's relatively recently discovered oil resources. I joined Wallin in the garden of his house just outside Oslo and asked him what changes he had experienced as a composer in Norway in the last two decades.

Interview: Rolf Wallin

We'll be hearing the version for 3 balloons now. And if you're as intrigued as I was to hear what music one 3 people can make with 3 bils of latex, you'll be pleasantly surprised, if not amazed by the complexity and quality of sounds produced here by ensemble Sisu.

Rolf Wallin, *Scratch*

Rolf Wallin's *Scratch* for 3 balloons was performed there by the ensemble Sisu.

A common feature at many festivals these days is the installation, and last year's Ultima was no exception, with a number of projects dotted around the city of Oslo. By their very nature, installations invite some level of audience participation, even if it's only on the most basic level of walking through or around the piece. However, Rolf Wallin's installation called *Feelings* not only depended in the participation of the public but, quite literally, read the mind of each participant.

Feature

And that's what my brain came up with! I have to say, Wallin's *Feelings* was a fascinating project but it was also pretty disconcerting to have my brain exposed to me and to other people as I'd never seen - or heard! - it before.

Well, Rolf Wallin's use of balloons and midi pianos is just one facet of Norway's adventurous musical spirit. The young composer and performer Maja Ratkje has had great international success in recent years, winning a prize at the Ars Electronica festival last year, as you may have heard on Hear and Now. In her work *Sinus Seduction (Moods 2)* the sine wave once again makes an appearance, as we heard in Stockhausen's *Mixtur*. This time it acts as the cool musical antithesis to the saxophone and its raunchy connotations. The courtship between these two opposed sounds is a poised and self-contained affair - bringing to mind a highly ritualistic dance in which some of the most fundamental components of music - the sine wave itself and the intervals of an octave and a 5th are used as objects which are choreographed in time and space.

Maja Ratkje: *Sinus Seduction*

Maja Ratkje's *Sinus Seduction (Moods 2)*, illustrating the more paired-down aspect of this composer's personality. Ratkje's work covers everything from electronics to improvisation, very often using her own distinct voice and performance style as a starting point. So it's no surprise that one of her recent projects has been a music theatre piece which was premiered at last year's Ultima festival. As the work is paradoxically entitled *No Title performance and Sparkling Water*, the first thing I wanted her to tell me when we met at the festival was what the music theatre project was about.

Interview: Maja Ratkje

And we hope to bring you the opera soon. She's still mixing it, so in the mean time, here's an extract from *Insomnia* which appears on that Voice cd.

Extract, Maja Ratkje, *Insomnia*

And extract from Maja Ratkje's *Insomnis* there, performed by the composer.

Well, somewhat like Norwegian culture itself, Rolf Wallin's piece *Strøk* straddles history, looking both to the past and the future. Here, the Hardanger fiddle - a traditional Norwegian instrument from the West of the country - takes centre stage in an electronic work that enfolds the old in the new to create broad expanses of sound that never move far from their instrumental origins.

Rolf Wallin: *Strøk*

Strøk, by Rolf Wallin. And the Hardanger fiddle was played there by Nils Økland.

Just south of Hardanger Fjord lies the Norwegian city of Bergen. It's a wonderful place with painted wooden houses, narrow cobbled streets and a vibrant cultural life in which new ideas are embraced and developed with a speed, dedication and imagination with which any of Europe's leading capital cities would be proud. I spent some time in Bergen last year, finding out all about the electronica and noise music scene that thrives in the city. First off, I spoke to Jørgen Traen, alias Sir Duperman, and asked him if there was anything in particular that defined the noise music scene in Bergen.

Interview: Jørgen Traen

Jørgen Traen: *Hjelpe Elpe*

Sir Duperman's *Hjelpe Elpe* - the more playful side of Bergen electronica.

Someone who struck me as taking a very different approach to the design of his compositions was Tom Maeland, also known as Bad Bikini. I met up with him in a cafe in the centre of town and asked him how he put his pieces together.

Interview: Tom Maeland

Bad Bikini: Extract

Bad Bikini in action there!

One of the invigorating things about electronic music today is that it has opened up the possibility for making music to people from all kinds of backgrounds. One of these is local student of Japanese, Inge Olmheim. I asked him when he first began making music.

Interview: Inge Olmheim

Inge Olmheim: Extract

Inge Olmheim making haunting music with glass and water.

Electronic music - and the laptop culture in particular - has also transformed the method by which music is made, with collaborations becoming more and more common amongst artists.

Lasse Marhaug and John Hegre are two Norwegian musicians from very different backgrounds who collaborate as Jazzkammer. I asked them how they work together.

Interview: Lasse Marhaug and John Hegre

Jazzkammer: Extract

Lasse Marhaug and John Hegre, the two halves of Jazzkammer there.

And we end tonight's programme by reminding ourselves that classical acoustic instruments are still thriving in the electronic music world. Bjørnar Habbestad uses piccolo, but given that the sounds he produces could rarely be recognised as being made by any kind of acoustic instrument, I asked him what kind of electronic processes he used.

Interview: Bjørnar Habbestad

Bjørnar Habbestad: Extract

End.

