

BIS

HENRIK HELLSTENIUS **IN MEMORIAM**

PETER HERRESTHAL VIOLIN

STAVANGER SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

ROLF GUPTA



HENRIK HELLSTENIUS

Photo: © Bård Gundersen



HELLSTENIUS, HENRIK (b. 1963)

- [1] **LIKE OBJECTS IN A DARK ROOM** (Edition Wilhelm Hansen) 9'38
for orchestra (2007, rev. 2014)
- [2] **IN MEMORIAM (VIOLIN CONCERTO No. 2)** (Edition Wilhelm Hansen) 21'58
for violin solo, string orchestra and percussion (2012, rev. 2013)
Dedicated to the memory of Erik Hellstenius (1930–2011)
Written for Peter Herresthal

TT: 32'04

PETER HERRESTHAL *violin*
STAVANGER SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
ROLF GUPTA *conductor*

INSTRUMENTARIUM

Violin: G. B. Guadagnini, Milan 1753.
Bow: Benoît Rolland ‘Signature bow’

In Memoriam commemorates Henrik Hellstenius's relationship with his father, to whose memory the piece is dedicated. But it also marks his ongoing creative relationship with Peter Herresthal, an association of mutual musical inspiration in which both composer and violinist have catalysed each other's imaginations, a partnership that has already produced a catalogue of pieces that push the limits of violinistic possibility. Nevertheless, *In Memoriam*, the second of Hellstenius's violin concertos, and the second written for Herresthal, creates its own distinct musical consciousness, in a sound world of vivid but liminal beauty, of fragile yet elemental extremes of dynamic, register, and expression.

And consciousness, or rather a fragmentation of it, is at the heart of the work's personal inspiration for Hellstenius, and is even thematised in the fabric of the concerto, which is scored for strings and percussion. Hellstenius's father Erik died of Alzheimer's disease, with the dissolution of consciousness that terrible condition produces. Hellstenius says the 'the way the world blurs, and becomes less present for you when you have Alzheimer's is kind of a model for the piece, the way you're trying to get a grip on the world to make sense of it, but it is becoming more and more like nonsense, and finally it's not possible to get a hold of it. You do have memories of things, but your perception is really distorted. And of course there is a lament from my side which is present throughout the piece.' But for Hellstenius, these ideas aren't turned into programmatic representation. Rather they provide the basis for a composition whose formal and structural ideas simultaneously carry those distinct ideas of fragmentation and continuity, of gesture and line, of sonic rupture and searing melodic intensity.

That contrast between different states of sound and being is embodied right at the start of the concerto, when Herresthal's violin line veers from a static, high-register, colourless pitch to material that traverses the boundary between noise and articulated sound: sonic objects of harmonics, quarter-tones, and *sul ponticello*

tremolos, or marked ‘ricochet’, with Herresthal’s bow bouncing across the instrument producing the effect of a sound being shivered into being. That sound world is amplified by the orchestral string parts, which function like a chamber of warped musical memories and premonitions. It’s a language of visceral ethereality that this recording captures in forensic detail, and it’s also an idiom designed for Herresthal’s exploratory musicianship. Herresthal says that he asked Hellstenius to make this second concerto ‘more virtuosic’ than the first (*By the Voice a Faint Light is Shed* contains much music of deep, slow concentration) – and it is, in terms of the sheer technical control and precision that the solo part demands. But this is the opposite of a virtuosity of display or extrovert energy. ‘Henrik never wants things to sound traditional’, Herresthal says, ‘he wants to avoid all kinds of showing-off, and he never wants to paint an old picture again, instead finding new sounds’. The solo part demands a virtuosity of intimacy (that’s true even in the cadenza, about three-quarters of the way through the piece) and of architectural and emotional control. The lamenting, falling melodies that are the lyrical antipode of the violinist’s ricochets and tremolos are oases of musical utterance, moments when the soloist finds moments of clarity and consciousness. And yet the whole concerto’s trajectory – and despite the multi-layered fragmentation of this music, there is a mysterious cumulative momentum that the piece builds, thanks partly to the ritualistic marking of time in the percussion writing, a tolling litany of bells and drums – ends not with an image of consciousness claimed, but rather of indelible lament. Herresthal describes the last few minutes as being the work’s most obviously grief-laden: ‘You can imagine that this music could have been played at the funeral’, and responding to its expressive directness, he even talks about it as ‘almost like modern Chopin – it’s very beautiful. It’s very deep, very moving’.

Hellstenius revised *In Memoriam* after its first performance in 2012, changing what was an expressionistic outburst of ferocious energy in the music before the

soloist's cadenza to something much stranger: a black hole of musical stasis, underscored by a dark percussive pealing. Hellstenius's compulsion to revise his pieces is even more pronounced in his orchestral work *Like Objects in a Dark Room*. He says he has reworked this piece 'maybe four times' since 2007, always striving to make the best version of it possible; the latest version was made last year. The title is Hellstenius's own. 'The formal idea is in the title: I had this image of composing sound objects that really have the presence of physical objects – the snare drum idea, the horn chords. My image was a merry-go-round, with the different objects circling around at different speeds. They return, but not at the same time, sometimes they collide, sometimes they expand, so that it's something in between a static and spiral experience in time.' Hellstenius says that 'some of the objects in the piece are clearly inspired by other composers: there's an inspiration from Sciarrino in the rhythmical string tremolo [Sciarrino is also an influence on some of the gossamer-fine violin writing of *In Memoriam*], and the snare drum idea is clearly inspired by Bernd Alois Zimmermann, one of his beautiful pieces that is very seldom performed, *Stille und Umkehr*'.

But what you will hear in these ten minutes – a span of clock time seemingly contradicted when you listen to the work, since it creates an experience that seems vaster in scope and scale and space – is a spiralling sonic sculpture is something that is distinctly Hellstenius's own. He also speaks of Luigi Nono as an influence – 'his language, especially in his later pieces, is really crystal clear and very condensed', he says – and yet *Like Objects in a Dark Room* is far from compositional homage. 'I tried to be naked in this piece. I tried to do as little as I could, in a way. In fact both of the works on this recording are trying to do things that are fragile but which also have forward motion, but all done without trying to dress up too much'. *Like Objects in a Dark Room* is about the exposure of its sonic ideas in as concise form as possible, but it amounts to a heightened experience: a merry-go-

round it may be, but this a musical carousel of existential ideas. And thanks to this recording you can realise at home the performance conditions for the piece that Hellstenius has always dreamt of, but never yet managed to create: that it should be played in total darkness, with the orchestra surrounding the audience on all sides. Now though, we can all enter Hellstenius's mysterious Dark Room of strange and wonderful sound objects with only our ears and curiosity to guide us...

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Henrik Hellstenius studied musicology at the University of Oslo and later composition with Lasse Thoresen at the Norwegian Academy of Music. In 1992–93 he studied with Gérard Grisey at the Paris Conservatoire. Hellstenius's output encompasses a large range of works: chamber music, orchestral works, opera, electro-acoustic music and music for theatre and ballet. His music is frequently performed at concerts and festivals around Europe. *Sera*, his first opera, received the Norwegian Edvard Award in 2000, and has been staged in Oslo and Warsaw. His second opera, *Ophelias: Death by Water Singing* was premièreed in Oslo in 2005, and has also been staged in Poland and Germany. Henrik Hellstenius is a professor in composition at the Norwegian Academy of Music in Oslo.

For further information please visit www.hellstenius.no

Peter Herresthal is recognized as a brilliant and inspired interpreter of contemporary violin music, strongly associated both in concert and recordings with works by composers including Per Nørgård, Arne Nordheim, Henri Dutilleux, Thomas Adès, Olav Anton Thommessen, Henrik Hellstenius and Jon Øivind Ness. He has appeared with orchestras and ensembles including the Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Oslo, Bergen and Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestras, Remix

Ensemble Porto, Tapiola Sinfonietta, the symphony orchestras of Melbourne, Navarra, Stavanger, Trondheim and Helsingborg, Oslo Sinfonietta, Norwegian Radio Orchestra, Asko|Schönberg, Ensemble Ernst and Bit20, with conductors such as Andrew Manze, Anu Tali and Sakari Oramo. Peter Herresthal has given the Austrian, Norwegian, Spanish and Australian premières of Thomas Adès's violin concerto *Concentric Paths*, the last of these conducted by the composer at the 2010 Melbourne Festival. Other festival appearances include the Bergen Festival, where Herresthal currently curates an annual series, Risør Chamber Music Festival, MAGMA 2002 Berlin, and the Schleswig-Holstein and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern festivals. His previous recordings for BIS include acclaimed discs with works by Nordheim, Thommesen and Nørgård. Released digitally in 2014 his recording of Adès's violin concerto *Concentric Paths* has received a warm welcome, with reviewers finding 'an objective intelligence and sonic beauty' (BBC Radio 3 *CD Review*) and 'great subtlety and refinement' (MusicWeb-International) in Herresthal's performance. Peter Herresthal is a professor at the Oslo Academy and visiting professor at the Royal College of Music, London, and at the NYU Steinhardt School in New York.

For further information please visit www.peterherresthal.com

The **Stavanger Symphony Orchestra** (SSO) has become one of the most successful orchestras in Scandinavia. In recent years it has achieved an outstanding artistic development, attracting an ever-growing following, both inside and outside Norway. This success is partly due to the orchestra's move, in 2012, into its present home, Stavanger's new, state-of-the-art concert hall.

Christian Vasquez is the orchestra's current chief conductor, while Fabio Biondi is artistic director for baroque and classical music. This shared artistic leadership has been in place since 1990, testifying to the orchestra's particular focus on authen-

tic performance practice of earlier repertoire. Biondi's predecessors in the post were Frans Brüggen and Philippe Herreweghe.

The orchestra has visited several European countries, Japan and the USA, including a successful appearance in the Carnegie Hall. The SSO discography to date includes more than 40 CDs, including complete series of orchestral music by the 20th-century Norwegian composers Harald Sæverud, Geirr Tveitt, Fartein Valen and Arvid Kleven. A number of these discs have received international awards.

Since 1990, Statoil has been the principal sponsor of the orchestra, whose patron is HRH Crown Prince Haakon.

Following composition, piano, organ and harpsichord studies in Norway and the Netherlands, **Rolf Gupta** studied conducting with Jorma Panula at the Sibelius Academy as well as with Ilya Musin and Herbert Blomstedt. His composition teachers have included Olav Anton Thommessen, Lasse Thoresen and Per Nørgård. Rolf Gupta has been chief conductor and artistic director of the Kristiansand Symphony Orchestra, and also chief conductor of the Norwegian Radio Orchestra and of the Norwegian Baroque Orchestra. In addition, he works with orchestras such as the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra, the Frankfurt and Stuttgart Radio Symphony Orchestras, Konzerthausorchester Berlin, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra and Sydney Symphony. Rolf Gupta has made a number of recordings, including programmes of music by Per Nørgård and Olav Anton Thommessen for BIS. His repertoire extends from baroque and classical music, on both modern and period instruments, through to contemporary works, and he has collaborated closely with several composers including Hans Werner Henze, Luciano Berio, Magnus Lindberg and Bernhard Lang. Gupta's background as a composer-conductor has also formed the basis for critically acclaimed readings of the standard repertoire.

A STRING OF RELEASES FROM PETER HERRESTHAL



THOMAS ADÈS

Violin Concerto 'Concentric Paths'
Three Studies from Couperin
BIS-8003

NORWEGIAN RADIO ORCHESTRA
ANDREW MANZE

'This compact 20-minute concerto grips the ear throughout.' *Financial Times*
«L'équipe artistique réunie est superlatif... Leur complicité est indéniable.» *ResMusica.com*

[Concerto:] 'Herresthal and Manze bring that more objective intelligence
and sonic beauty...' [Three Studies:] 'a delight' *BBC Radio 3 CD Review*

'Factor in Herresthal's full-toned and beautifully spun lines, incisive orchestral playing and
a top-notch recording... and you have a winning combination.' *MusicWeb-International*

Digital-only release: available as high-quality download from eClassical.com and other providers.

ALSO AVAILABLE, ON DISC AND DIGITALLY:

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Violin Concerto · Duplex · Partita für Paul BIS-1212

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PER NØRGÅRD

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STAVANGER SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA / ROLF GUPTA

Innspillingen er utgitt med bidrag fra Norsk Kulturråd og Norges musikkhøgskole.



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Arts Council
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The present recordings are currently (May 2015) available only for downloading / streaming.
For information about our physical products (CDs and Super Audio CDs), please visit www.bis.se.

RECORDING DATA

Recording: August 2014 at the Stavanger Concert Hall, Norway
Producer: Marion Schwebel (Take5 Music Production)
Sound engineer: Jens Braut (Take5 Music Production)

Equipment: BIS's recording teams use microphones from Neumann and Schoeps, audio electronics from RME, Lake People and DirectOut, MADI optical cabling technology, monitoring equipment from B&W, STAX and Sennheiser, and Sequoia and Pyramix digital audio workstations.
Original format: 24-bit / 96 kHz

Post-production: Editing: Marion Schwebel
Executive producer: Robert Suff

BOOKLET AND GRAPHIC DESIGN

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