

## LEIF SOLBERG Orchestral, Choral and Organ Music

### *Fantasy and Fugue on the Folk-Tune 'Se solens skjønnne lys og prakt'* (1936) 13:27

- |   |         |      |
|---|---------|------|
| 1 | Fantasy | 8:31 |
| 2 | Fugue   | 4:56 |

### *Good Friday Meditation* (1948)\* 22:58

- |   |   |      |
|---|---|------|
| 3 | I Det ropar frå krossen i solmyrkje-kvelden: <i>Andante sostenuto</i>                           | 3:59 |
| 4 | II Ei røyst, som um mannheimens samvit og sakna: <i>Andante tristezza</i>                       | 3:43 |
| 5 | III Det ropar frå krossen i solmyrkje-kvelden: <i>Andante sostenuto</i>                         | 1:04 |
| 6 | IV Å langfredags under! å Golgata gåta!: <i>Larghetto dolendo</i>                               | 6:32 |
| 7 | V Kven fatar den evige frelse-rådgjerd: <i>Lento espressivo – Allegretto – Lento espressivo</i> | 5:33 |
| 8 | VI Gud gjev eg med hjarta sitt løyndvit må skilja: <i>Moderato</i>                              | 2:57 |
| 9 | VII Chorale: Å sæle meg! her, gjennom natti, eg nemer: Chorale                                  | 1:10 |

### 10 *Norse March* (1941)\* 5:07

### 11 *Pastorale in D major* (1930, orch. 1954–55)\* 7:21

### 12 *Ver Sacrum* (1947, transcr. 2003; ed. Paul Mann, 2014) 3:39

### *Symphony* (1950–51)\* 27:32

- |    |   |       |
|----|---|-------|
| 13 | I <i>Andante con espressione – Allegro e deciso</i> | 11:00 |
| 14 | II <i>Andante</i>                                   | 9:32  |
| 15 | III <i>Allegro moderato</i>                         | 7:00  |

TT 82:07

\*FIRST RECORDINGS

Tim Collins, organ 1–9

Anna Sundström Otervik, mezzo soprano 5

Magnus Ingemund Kjelstad, baritone 4

Solberg Centenary Singers 3, 5–9

Marit Tøndel Bodsberg, conductor 3–9

Liepāja Symphony Orchestra 10–15

Paul Mann, conductor 10–15



# Leif SOLBERG

## Orchestral, Choral and Organ Music

Symphony  
Norse March  
Pastorale

Good Friday Meditation  
and other works

Liepāja Symphony Orchestra  
Paul Mann, conductor

Solberg Centenary Singers  
Marit Tøndel Bodsberg, conductor

Tim Collins, organ

INCLUDES FIRST RECORDINGS

# LEIF SOLBERG, MASTER CRAFTSMAN

by Martin Anderson

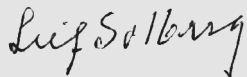
Don't blame yourself if you don't recognise the name Leif Solberg: when in his early eighties he turned up at the Christmas party of the Norwegian Composers' Union, they didn't know who he was either. Solberg has been at best a marginal figure in Norwegian musical life, cut off from the committees of Oslo which decide who gets heard. His isolation has been both stylistic – his traditionalist craft sitting ill with the modernism that ruled Nordic roosts in the second half of the twentieth century – and literal, since he contented himself with the low-profile rewards of galvanising musical activity in Lillehammer, three hours' train-ride north of Oslo.

Yet for all the obscurity which has attended his career, Leif Solberg is an important composer – a minor master since, in all honesty, his influence is negligible and his output small, but a master nonetheless, a craftsman whose sure-handed command of his material and transparent sincerity of purpose mark him out as one whose music merits a wide audience. Nor is it only as a composer that he deserves respect: although formally retired since 1982, Solberg is the last living representative of the Scandinavian Romantic tradition of organ-playing represented at its peak by men like the Norwegian Arild Sandvold (1895–1984), Solberg's teacher, and the Swede Otto Olsson (1879–1964).

Leif Solberg was born on 18 November 1914 in Lena, a small village close by Lake Mjøsa, near Gjøvik, to the south of Lillehammer; by the age of seven he was already playing in the marching band conducted by his father, an ex-military musician who had taken up the post of organist at near-by Hoff church. The eldest of what were to be nine children, Leif received organ lessons from his father and by the age of ten was sufficiently familiar with notation to copy out the flute parts for the band. By the age of thirteen he was a proficient enough player to deputise for his father, although he was acutely aware

Denne CD er overraskende og uventet og veldig morsomt, og jeg setter veldig pris på det.

This CD is surprising and unexpected, and great fun, and I really appreciate it.



Recorded on 6–8 August 2014 (orchestral works) in Liepāja Latvian Society House, Liepāja, Latvia, and on 26 May (Fantasy and Fugue) and 21 August 2014 (Langfredagsmeditasjon) in Lillehammer Church, Norway  
Recording engineers: Normunds Slava (orchestral works) and Ola Dahl (organ and choral works)

Booklet notes: Martin Anderson, Paul Mann and Tim Collins  
Langfredagsmeditasjon (Nesse) translated by Paul Robert Wilmot  
Design and layout: Paul Brooks, paulmbrooks@virginmedia.com

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Executive producer: Martin Anderson

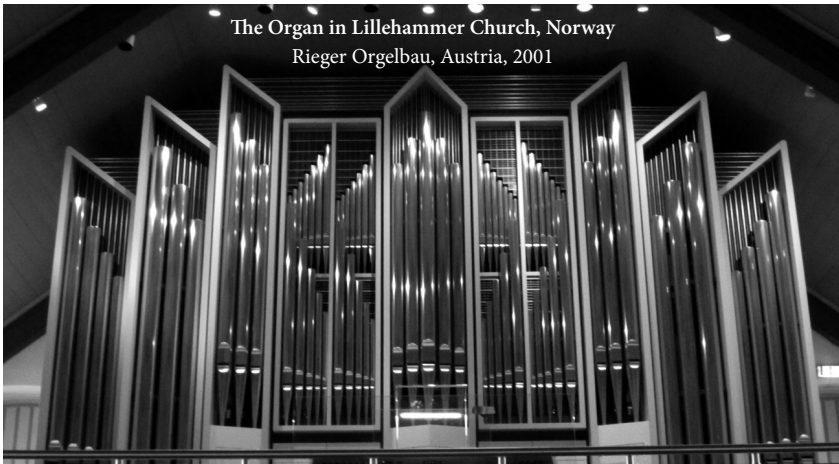
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The Organ in Lillehammer Church, Norway  
Rieger Orgelbau, Austria, 2001



<b>I. Hauptwerk</b>	<b>II. Positiv</b>	<b>III. Schwellwerk</b>	Hautbois 8'
Bourdon 16'	Holzgedackt 8'	Montre 8'	Voix humaine 8'
Principal 8'	Salicional 8'	Bourdon 8'	Tremulant
Gedackt 8'	Principal 4'	Gambe 8'	
Flûte harmonique 8'	Rohrflöte 4'	Voix céleste 8'	<b>Pedal</b>
Octave 4'	Sesquialtera II 2 2/3'	Octave 4'	Untersatz 32'
Spitzflöte 4'	Octave 2'	Flûte traversière 4'	Principal 16'
Superoctave 2'	Scharff III 1'	Nazard 2 2/3'	Subbaß 16'
Mixtur IV 1 1/3'	Krummhorn 8'	Flûte à bec 2'	Octave 8'
Cornet V 8'	Tremulant	Tierce 1 3/5'	Flöte 8'
Trompette 8'		Plein Jeu IV 2'	Choralbaß 4'
Clairon 4'		Basson 16'	Posaune 16'
		Trompette harm. 8'	Trompette 8'

of the responsibility: he was, he says, 'crushed by every wrong note'<sup>1</sup> and remembers sneaking out of the church one Sunday and heading home across the fields to avoid meeting anyone after he had overlooked the repeat signs in a chorale.

At fourteen the young Solberg, already a very promising musician, began to journey regularly to Oslo to take lessons with Arild Sandvold,<sup>2</sup> first privately, in Fagerborg church, where Sandvold was the organist, and later at the Oslo Conservatory. Sandvold, then only in his early thirties but already established as one of the most important church musicians in Norway, had been a student of Karl Straube in Leipzig and was thus a direct inheritor of the tradition of Max Reger – though an earlier Leipzig master, Bach, was as important an influence on Sandvold as he later was on Solberg.

It was Sandvold, a solicitous teacher, who encouraged Solberg to begin composing, and the young student would regularly arrive at lessons with several variations on some Norwegian folk tune or chorale in his bag. He made rapid progress: one of his first major compositions, the *Variations on the Folk tune 'Eg veit I himmerik ein borg'* ('I know a castle in heaven') dates from 1933, at the end of his period of study with Sandvold, who gave the work its first performance in that year in a recital which was broadcast live. Sandvold hailed the work in a newspaper interview:

Leif Solberg's organ composition is a work of enormous talent. The folk tune he has chosen gives it a genuine Norwegian colour, and his skilful employment of counterpoint retains one's interest. The composer binds the work together, among other means, by using double counterpoint at the tenth, particularly in the last variation, a fugue where in the stretto passages he simultaneously brings in the chorale as a cantus firmus in the bass, revealing a considerable ability and substantial gift for polyphonic style.<sup>3</sup>

Solberg's first performance in a major public concert came also in 1933, when he attracted critical acclaim in Bach's C minor Passacaglia, BWV 582, given in a recital to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Oslo Conservatory. After taking his organ degree in the same year, now aged nineteen he went on to study

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Olav Egil Aune in the notes accompanying Halgeir Schiager's recording of six Solberg organ works – the Introduction and Passacaglia in B minor (1942), *Variations on the Folk tune 'Eg veit I himmerik ein borg'* (1933), *Prelude, Passacaglia and Fugue on the Folk tune 'Gå varsomt, min sjel'* (1941), *Fantasy on 'Av dypest nød'* (1938), *Ciacona* (1943–44) and the *Fantasy and Fugue on the Folk tune 'Se solens skjønne lys og prakt'* (1936) – on Hemera HCD 2920 (1996).

<sup>2</sup> Sandvold (1895–1984) was a substantial composer for the organ as well as being a major organist, teacher and choir-master. His sizable output naturally includes a good many organ works, many of them on some scale (and often with their starting-point in Norwegian folk-music), and much vocal, especially choral, music.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*

counterpoint with Per Steenberg,<sup>4</sup> conducting with Trygve Lindeman<sup>5</sup> and, slightly later, orchestration and Schoenberg's theory of harmony with Karl Andersen.<sup>6</sup>

Something of Solberg's independence of mind was revealed in 1938 when, during his counterpoint exam, the examiner Sigurd Islandsmoen<sup>7</sup> handed him a subject on which to construct a four-part fugue for a *cappella* SATB chorus in the style of Palestrina. Solberg examined the theme and rejected it as unsuitable for a composition in Palestrina's style. The objection was upheld, a new theme found, and Solberg's fugue, composed without recourse to any instrument, won him full marks.

By this time Solberg had already composed some of his most impressive organ works, including the *Fantasy and Fugue on the Folktune 'Se solens skønne lys og prakt'* ('See the sun's beautiful light and splendour') of 1936 and the *Fantasy on 'Av dypest nød jeg rope må'* ('From deepest distress I must call') of 1938. Between then and the end of the 1950s he composed the series of nearly twenty contrapuntal masterworks for organ on which his reputation will ultimately rest. In these towering edifices Solberg shows, besides his flair for natural counterpoint, a sense of dramatic pace and instrumental colour and a sure handling of Bachian fugal texture that makes his organ output a worthy successor to Reger's mighty corpus – a less anguished and chromatic one, perhaps, but distinguished by the same nobility of purpose and capable of stimulating the same sense of physical excitement in the listener.

On 31 August 1938, at the age of 24 and in preference to 30 other applicants, he took up the post of organist in Lillehammer.<sup>8</sup> It meant that the concert he had given, in Fagerborg church in Oslo on 22 February, was both a debut and a farewell recital (it included the *Fantasy on 'Av dypest nød'* and the early *Pastorale* from 1930 that in a later arrangement has the distinction of being one of Solberg's very few orchestral works and is recorded on this disc).

<sup>4</sup> Steenberg (1870–1947) studied in Oslo, Leipzig, Berlin and Copenhagen before becoming organist in Oslo and a teacher at the Musikkonservatoriet there. His own compositions are mainly of church and organ music.

<sup>5</sup> Lindeman (1896–1979), the grandson of the pioneering folksong-collector Ludvig Mathias Lindeman, studied first as a civil engineer before moving to the Oslo Musikkonservatoriet and then to Copenhagen, where he was a student of Carl Nielsen. He made his debut as a cellist in 1925 and three years later succeeded his father, Per Bruynie Lindeman, as director of the Musikkonservatoriet.

<sup>6</sup> Andersen (1903–70) was a member of the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra from 1924 and its solo cellist from 1932 to 1962. His music includes a symphony for chamber orchestra (1936), a suite (1937) and *Festspill* (1951) for orchestra, and two string quartets (1934 and 1962).

<sup>7</sup> A student of Reger in Leipzig, Islandsmoen (1881–1964) was an important composer of church music, with five large-scale works to his name, the best known of which is the Requiem of 1943; he also composed two symphonies, an opera, and a number of other orchestral, chamber and keyboard works.

<sup>8</sup> Solberg's appointment caused considerable local controversy. Until recently the system in Norway was that church councils chose their employees, who were paid by the *kommune*. The Lillehammer Church Council had its own preference as organist, but the Town Council insisted that the job go to Solberg.

Her tanken må tegja, her hjarta lyt råda,  
Her barnsauga einast kan underet skoda.  
Di vil på mitt andlit ved krossen eg falla  
og han med dei utbreidde armar påkalla.

[7] V *Lento espressivo* – *Allegretto* –  
*Lento espressivo* (chorus)

Kven fatar den evige frelse-rådgerdi:  
– den skuldlause lid for den skuldige verdi!  
Å under! står so, ved hans offer åleine,  
for Gud alle søkjande syndarar reine?

Kva veit eg? Kva treng til mi frelsa eg vita?  
Kvi stå yver visdomens djupner og gjeta!

[8] VI *Moderato* (chorus)

Gud gjev eg med hjarta sitt løyndvit må skilja:  
at her, her gror kjærleikens lækjande lilja.

[9] VII Chorale (chorus)

Å sæle meg! her, gjennom natti, eg nemer  
at himmelens smil attum Golgata dæmer.  
I myrkret kring krossen fekk tvilaren skoda  
at Ljoset frå himlen er livsens uppstoda.

Here thought must keep silent, here the heart must prevail,  
Here a child's eye alone may behold the miracle,  
Therefore will I fall prostrate before the cross  
and call upon him with outstretched arms.

Who may know the path to salvation:  
The innocent suffer for the guilty world!  
O wonder! By his sacrifice alone,  
do all searching sinners thus stand cleansed before God?

What do I know? What must I know to be saved?  
Why look down into the depths of wisdom!

God, may I understand with my heart:  
that here Love's healing lily grows.

O blessed me! Here through the night I sense  
heaven's smile visible behind Golgotha.  
In the dark around the cross the doubter saw  
The light from heaven is the resurrection of life.

### Langfredagsmeditasjon

Text: Sigurd Nesse (1852–1955)

#### 3 I *Andante sostenuto* (chorus)

Det ropar frå krossen i solmyrkje-kvelden  
ei røyst or Guds rettferds den heilage elden  
ei røyst, som um naudi i menneskesvarmen  
var knua i hop i den einaste barmen.

#### 4 II *Andante tristezza* (baritone)

Ei røyst, som um mannheimens samvit og sakna  
hjá ein, for all verdi, til medvit har vakna  
hjá ein som for Gud tek alt andsvaret på seg  
for sjælerne som han i elden har hjå seg.

Her domar-røyst talar som alegg og vreid er;  
her kjærleiken tjeld yver syndarar breider.  
Her brenn den fortærande Sinai-harmen;  
her fagnar ein far meg med tilgjevings-varmen.

#### 5 III *Andante sostenuto* (chorus)

Det ropar frå krossen i solmyrkje-kvelden.

#### 6 IV *Larghetto dolendo*

(mezzo soprano and chorus)

Å langfredags under! å Golgata gåta!  
Eg stirer inn i deg, så augo må gråta:  
Den krenkte byd fredshand til fienden på jordi  
og ritar med blodprent dei sonande ordi.

Her nedyver ætti gudskrafterne dalar:  
Gud ofrar, og Ordet frå opphavet talar  
Og alt som i ålvor på krosstalen lyder,  
Får sanna kva synd mot den heilage tyder.

### Good Friday Meditation

English translation: Paul Robert Wilmot

From the cross in the evening dusk  
A voice cries out from God's just holy fire,  
A voice, as if man's plight  
Was clasped in the only breast.

A voice, as if mankind's conscience and loss,  
the whole world wakened in One,  
In One who for God shouldered every burden  
For souls who dwell in him in fire.

Here the judge's voice sounds with might and fury;  
Here love spreads its cloak over sinners.  
Here burns the devouring Sinai wrath  
Here a father welcomes me with forgiving warmth.

From the cross in the evening dusk a voice cries out.

O wonder of Good Friday, O mystery of Golgotha!  
I stare into you, so my eyes must weep:  
The Defiled tends the hand of peace to earthly enemies  
and in blood writes words of conciliation.

Here God's power descends over mankind:  
God sacrifices, and the primordial word sounds.  
All those who listen earnestly to words from the cross  
realise what sin against the Holy One means.

Solberg's new appointment took almost all his time. As well as his responsibilities in the organ loft, he conducted the choir and the local orchestra, and when he took up a teaching post at the local high school, he acquired an army of students, sometimes as many as seventy or eighty at a time. Unsurprisingly, his composing had to take a back seat, and after the rush of compositions in his early twenties, he settled into relative quiescence. The modernism that was beginning to take over Norwegian musical life after the Second World War didn't help: Solberg, who is an excessively modest man and who already felt physically cut off in Lillehammer, began to feel himself something of a stylistic anachronism – a sentiment that around the same time brought silence to several tonal composers, Berthold Goldschmidt and Einar Englund among them.

Nonetheless, Solberg was still expanding his horizons, although in ways he felt were going to be to of some musical profit to him. In 1949 he spent three months in London, studying with William McKie, organist of Westminster Abbey,<sup>9</sup> and in 1951 he went to Copenhagen on a three-month stipend to study composition with Jørgen Jersild.<sup>10</sup> At this point his former teacher, Karl Andersen, suggested that Solberg attempt a symphony, and the work which resulted, composed in 1951–52, is Solberg's only original orchestral work. In 1954 Solberg travelled to Salzburg for a summer school for organists, to study organ with Franz Sauer and composition with Egon Kornauth, thereafter continuing to St Baavo in Haarlem to study the techniques of improvisation with Heinz Biehn and Anton Heiller.

By the time of Solberg's return to Norway, the climate for his brand of unadulterated tonality – the bread and butter of his daily music-making in the church and community – had become distinctly chilly. Up on his organ bench Solberg kept out of sight, and Norway gradually forgot about him. In 1948 the Brodal/Hindar Quartet, Lillehammer natives, had premiered Solberg's eighteen-minute String Quartet in B flat minor (1945), a delightful Haydnesque work flavoured by Norwegian folk-music, and gave it a number of performances, in Lillehammer and Bergen and on the radio, after which it disappeared from the repertoire until revived in a recent recording;<sup>11</sup> and in 1953 the Symphony was given a run-through – nothing more – by Odd Grüner-Hegge and the Orchestra of the Oslo Philharmonic Society.

Solberg's compositions up to this time, the organ works apart, include a *Berceuse* for violin and piano

<sup>9</sup> Sir William McKie (1901–84), Australian-born, was appointed Organist and Master of the Choristers at Westminster Abbey in 1941 (although war service meant he took up the post only in 1946), remaining until his retirement in 1963. He was director of music for the marriage of Princess Elizabeth in 1947 and again, six years later, for her coronation.

<sup>10</sup> Jersild (1913–2004) studied with Poul Schierbeck and Albert Roussel, which left its mark on his Neoclassical compositions. He was also an important teacher and music-theoretician.

<sup>11</sup> By the Engegård Quartet, on 2L 053 (2008). It is coupled with the Haydn String Quartet No. 64 in D major, Op. 76, No. 5, and the Grieg String Quartet in G minor, Op. 27 – Solberg keeps good company.

from 1938, stimulated by his love for Reidun Haug, whom he was to marry two years later. His *Norønna Marsj* ('Norse March') for military band won third prize in a 1941 competition run by the *Norsk Ukeblad* ('Norwegian Weekly'). His only other instrumental work is a sonata for violin and piano from 1948. The first of Solberg's two major choral works, the *Maihaug Cantata* for soprano and baritone soloists, SATB chorus and chamber orchestra, to a text by Tore Ørjaseter, had been written in 1944 for the fortieth anniversary of the Maihaugen, the world-famous open-air museum in Lillehammer; the second, Solberg's *Langfredagsmeditasjonen* ('Good Friday Meditation') for contralto and baritone soloists, SATB chorus and organ, now followed, sharing second prize in a 1948 competition for a choral composition.

None of Solberg's subsequent compositions has been in a free-standing concert format such as the symphony or quartet, and almost all his original choral compositions, like the bulk of his organ works, also date from his student years. Instead, he continued quietly to arrange choral music for his church, for 'Klang', the male-voice choir he directed in Lillehammer, as well as for other local choruses; a number of arrangements of organ chorales also stem from this time. The odd performance of an organ piece would bring Solberg's name up in Oslo and occasionally carry it abroad, and his choral music kept it current in the closed circles of the church. The ten-minute *Missa Brevis for a cappella* SATB chorus – a delicate, unassuming work, written in 1985 and apparently his first original work in many years – was a surprise that briefly reminded audiences of his continued existence. Apart from that, the silence closed around him.

My first encounter with Solberg's music came in 1996 when I was sent the Hemera disc of Halgeir Schiager's Solberg recital – the trigger for the recent revival of interest in his music – for review in the magazine *Listen to Norway* and was astonished by the quality of the music; it is only natural that it went on to be nominated for a Preis der deutschen Schallplattenkritik. I noticed in Olav Egil Aune's notes that Solberg had composed a symphony and contacted the Norwegian Music Information Centre to see if they could supply a score and, if possible, a tape. Fortunately, that 1953 run-through had been recorded, though even before I had played the cassette, I knew from a quick read-through of the score that this was an exceptional work, lucidly contrapuntal, vigorously energetic, expertly scored and with more than a hint of Norwegian colouring – Haydn meets Nielsen in the fjords.

My next step was to take the score to the conductor Gary Brain, a neighbour in Paris, where I then lived. I stuck the music in front of him without revealing the name of the composer and put on the cassette; before three pages were past he had slapped the table with excitement and enthused unprintably about the work, and at the end of that first audition had vowed to give the work its first professional performance. An engagement to conduct the orchestra of Norsk rikskringkasting (NRK), the Norwegian broadcasting

was artistic director and chief conductor. He expanded the range of activities considerably: in addition to regular concerts in Riga, Liepāja and other Latvian cities, the Orchestra also went on frequent tours abroad, playing in Germany, Great Britain, Malaysia, Spain, Sweden and elsewhere. During this period a number of important recordings were made, some of them during live appearances on Latvian radio and television.

The Liepāja Symphony Orchestra hosts two important festivals. The International Piano Stars Festival was started by Imants Resnis in 1993 and by now more than 150 pianists from about 30 countries have taken part in it, among them Freddy Kempf, Noriko Ogawa, Cristina Ortiz and Mikhail Voskresensky. Another valuable tradition is the series of 'Liepāja Summer' concerts which began when Valdis Vikmanis took his inspiration from the sold-out summer seasons in the Liepāja Symphony Orchestra's earliest years, and so since 2010, 'Liepāja Summer' has renewed the tradition of hundred summers ago; it includes sacred and chamber music and open-air concerts

The Liepāja Symphony Amber Sound Orchestra holds a special place in the national cultural life of Latvia. It received the highest national music award, the 'Great Music Award', in 2006, as well as the Latvian Recordings Award in the years 1198, 2000, 2001, 2004, 2006 and 2008. In 2010 Liepāja Symphony Amber Sound Orchestra was granted the status of national orchestra. The current chief conductor, Atvars Lakstīgala, made his debut with the Orchestra in 2010 and received the 'Great Music Award' at the end of the same year.

This is the first of a series of recordings planned with Toccata Classics.

The **Solberg Centenary Singers** were brought together specially for this recording. The singers are mostly students at the Norwegian State Academy of Music, supplemented by members of Vestoppland Kammerkor and Kvindelige Studenters Sangforening.

<b>Sopranos 1</b>	<b>Tenors</b>
Liv Astrid Dahl	Leif Aass
Guro Utne Salvesen	Lars Adelsøen
<b>Sopranos 2</b>	Jon Berg
Synnøve Sætre	Marius Berg
Margrete Tandberg	<b>Basses</b>
<b>Altos</b>	Haakon Hille Hustad
Hedvig Haugerud	Magnus Ingemund
Sofie Hoff Jørgensen	Kjelstad
Idunn Vindspoll	Carl-Christian Kure



He first came to international attention as first prizewinner in the 1998 Donatella Flick Conducting Competition, as a result of which he was also appointed assistant conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra. He made his LSO debut shortly afterwards, and subsequently collaborated regularly with the Orchestra both in the concert hall and recording studio. Special projects with the LSO included the Duke Ellington Centenary Concert at the Barbican Hall with Wynton Marsalis, and a famous collaboration with the legendary rock group Deep Purple in two widely acclaimed performances of Jon Lord's *Concerto for Group and Orchestra* at the Royal Albert Hall, the live DVD and CD of which remain international bestsellers. Among his most recent recordings is the first-ever studio recording of Lord's *Concerto*, with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, in collaboration with Jon Lord himself and a star-studded cast of soloists, and the live recording of *Celebrating Jon Lord*, a special concert which took place at the Royal Albert Hall in April 2014 with an all-star cast paying tribute to the late composer.

This is his first recording for Toccata Classics.

The Liepāja Symphony Orchestra – also known as the Amber Sound Orchestra – is the oldest symphonic ensemble in the Baltic States still in operation: it was founded in 1881 by Hanss Hohapfel, who also served as its conductor. The orchestral strength in those early days was 37 musicians, joined in the summers by guest players from Germany and Poland. With time both the structure and professionalism of the Orchestra grew, as did its standing in the eyes of the general public.



After World War II the Orchestra recommenced its activities in 1947, under the wings of the Liepāja Music School, and was conducted for the next forty years by the director of the School, Valdis Vikmanis. A new chapter in the life of the Orchestra began at the end of 1986, when it was granted the status of a professional symphony orchestra, becoming only the second in Latvia. That formal recognition was made possible by the efforts of two conductors, Laimonis Trubs (who worked with the Liepāja Symphony Orchestra from 1986 to 1996) and Jēkabs Ozoliņš (active with the Orchestra from 1987 to 2008).

The first artistic director of the Liepāja Symphony Orchestra, as well as its first chief conductor, was the Leningrad-born Mikhail Orehov, who took the ensemble to a higher level of professionalism, during his years there (1988–91). Another important period for the Orchestra was 1992 to 2009, when Imants Resnis



*Leif Solberg and Reidun Haug in 1938, two years before their marriage*

organisation, in October 1998 provided the occasion to do so. Solberg's reserve is such that Brain's request for a meeting to discuss interpretative detail went unanswered; he almost had to be summonsed to go through the score with the conductor before the sessions. (At one point Solberg, who didn't then have a score of the work at home – 'I



think I lent it to someone' – remarked calmly: 'Actually, it's better than I realised'.)

At dinner after the recording Brain asked Solberg, then aged 83, to write him an *Elegy* for strings. Solberg spent the rest of the meal deep in thought before looking up and stating firmly: 'I will do it'. But he didn't: that boat had sailed – although a commission from the Gjøvik Sinfonietta in 2003 did generate a transcription for strings of the 1947 motet *Ver Sacrum*. He should, of course, have been asked to write more music in the course of his long life, but events decreed that he should compose only when he knew there was a local audience. Yet both Goldschmidt and Englund, who likewise fell silent, lived long enough to see 'the verdict of history' reversed by less narrow-minded judges. Since this recording is being released to celebrate Solberg's 100th birthday, he too has lived into an age where good music is appreciated as good music, whatever its style. The 1996 organ CD that triggered the Solberg revival (although the 're' is rather an exaggeration), the 2008 recording of his string quartet and this centenary tribute including his entire output for orchestra<sup>12</sup> make the best of his music available to an international audience, which can take a view on its quality. Solberg may have borne his fate without complaint, but the rest of us may ask in fairness what might have changed if his music had been given the attention it deserves at the time it was written.

*Martin Anderson writes for a variety of publications, including Tempo, The Independent, International Record Review, International Piano, Fanfare in the USA, Klassisk Musikkmagasin in Norway and Finnish Music Quarterly. He runs Toccata Press and its sister company, the recording label Toccata Classics, and is a committee member of the International Centre for Suppressed Music and several other London-based musical organisations.*

<sup>12</sup> The *Maihaug Cantata* requires a chamber orchestra.

Marit Tøndel Bodsberg was born in 1981 and studied for a bachelor's degree at the Conservatoire in Kristiansand, specialising in composition, singing and flute. In 2005 she was the only student accepted for the Masters course in conducting at the Norwegian State Academy of Music, graduating from there in 2008. During this time she was also assistant conductor to Grete Pedersen with the Norske Solistkor.

She has worked with several of Norway's leading choirs and ensembles, among them the Norske Solistkor, Vocal Art, Gjøvik Sinfonietta, Mjøs musikk, Oslo Kammerkor and Musikkhøgskolens Kammerkor. She is artistic director and conductor of the Kvindelige Studenters Sangforening, chorus master of the Ringsaker Opera, and conductor of Vestoppland Kammerkor.

Marit has taken part in many recordings as singer, conductor and flute-player, and has won several national and international competitions with her choirs. In autumn 2012 she was presented with the conducting prize at the Norwegian National Choir Competition.



Paul Mann is a regular guest-conductor with many orchestras throughout Europe, the USA, Australia, and the Far East. Those with which he has worked include the BBC Orchestras, the Orquesta Ciudad de Barcelona, Bergen Philharmonic, Orquesta Sinfónica de Bilbao, Orchestre de Bretagne, Britten Sinfonia, City of Birmingham Symphony, Copenhagen Philharmonic, Flemish Radio, Orquesta Ciudad de Granada, Hallé, Lahti Symphony, Luxembourg Philharmonic, Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, St Petersburg Philharmonic, Royal Scottish National, Real Orquesta Sinfónica de Sevilla, RAI Torino and Orchestra dell'Arena di Verona, among many others. His debut with the Queensland Orchestra in 2003 resulted in regular re-invitations to Australia, with the Adelaide Symphony, Melbourne Symphony, Tasmanian Symphony and West Australian Symphony Orchestras, as well as the Auckland Philharmonia in New Zealand, and the Malaysian Philharmonic.

His work as chief conductor of the Odense Symphony Orchestra in Denmark achieved considerable critical success, particularly in the symphonies of Beethoven, Elgar, Mahler, Schumann and Shostakovich, and with whom he also made numerous recordings of a wide range of repertoire, for such labels as Bridge, DaCapo and EMI.





**Tim Collins** received his first organ lessons from Kenneth Ryder at St Peter Mancroft, Norwich, where he was later also Assistant Organist. While still at school he gained the Associateship diploma of the Royal College of Music, in organ performance.

In 1977 he entered the Royal College of Music, studying organ with John Birch, and harmony and counterpoint with William Lloyd Webber; further study at London University followed later. Amongst several diplomas, he holds the Fellowship of the Royal College of Organists and is a Graduate of the Royal Schools of Music.

While a student in London he was Organ Scholar at St Bride's Church, Fleet St, where he accompanied the choir, broadcasting on both BBC and ITV. Later he was organist at St Saviour's Church in Knightsbridge, before moving to Norway in 1985.

Since 1995 he has been organist of Lillehammer Church. There he directs the choir, which has enjoyed tours to the UK and Ireland under his leadership, as well singing on Norwegian radio.

He was responsible for planning the new Rieger organ of Lillehammer Church, which is heard on this recording. He organises an annual summer concert series which attracts organ recitalists from all over the world. As a recitalist himself he has given countless concerts on the organ, as well as appearing elsewhere in Norway, and in the UK, Germany and Italy.

**Anna Sundström Otervik**, mezzo soprano, hails originally from Lit, in Jämtland, Sweden, but now lives in Brumunddal, Norway. She trained as a singer at the Trøndelag Conservatoire and at the Norwegian State Academy of Opera. After completing her education she has worked as a freelance singer and teacher. She often appears as a soloist in both operas and oratorios. She now works at Toneheim Folk High School as a teacher of singing.

**Magnus Ingemund Kjelstad**, baritone, was born in 1991, and is at present studying for a B. Mus. at the Norwegian State Academy of Music, with Svein Bjørkøy as his singing teacher. He is a versatile and promising singer, who is often hired as a soloist, as well as a chorus-singer, including singing in the Norske Solistkor.



## THE ORCHESTRAL MUSIC

by Paul Mann

The most substantial of the orchestral works recorded here is the three-movement Symphony, composed in Lillehammer in 1950–51 and scored for a standard orchestra of double woodwind, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, harp and strings. This is its first recording (other than Gary Brain's NRK broadcast), and there is no obvious musical explanation for its neglect. Lasting a little under half-an-hour, the three movements are terse and direct, but they inhabit an emotional world which is far from straightforward. The music is paradoxical in that it is both unpredictable and rigorously organised. Volatile, quirky and constantly surprising, the work seems to have one foot in Norwegian folklore and another in something far more individual and less easy to define, as if the spirit of Grieg were suddenly possessed by the imagination of Carl Nielsen. It is undoubtedly one of the most compelling symphonies of the post-War years.

The unusual tonal design of the work is one of its most novel features – the first movement is in G minor, but the rest of the work is unequivocally in D. It is one of many indications of the sureness of Solberg's instincts that the coherence of his structure does not suffer for this apparent lack of conventional symphonic symmetry.

The initial impulse for the work was the death of Solberg's brother Rolv Einar at the age of only 29, following a war injury.<sup>1</sup> The sonata-form first movement opens 13 with a short introduction, *Andante con espressione*, in which the strings play a canonic theme which might be understood as representative of the young man's spirit; it pervades and unifies the outer movements of the score in a multiplicity of guises. The theme is inflected with expressive *appoggiature*, lending an air of spontaneous vocal lament, and the cadential phrases are evocative of liturgical ritual.

By contrast, the lilting 6/8 first-subject group, marked *Allegro e deciso*, dances with a gentle but energetic elegance, perhaps suggestive of the virile youthfulness soon to be laid waste; the sighing second subject is more reflective. These two elements co-exist, often in disquieting proximity. The meter frequently shifts playfully into a hemiolaic 3/4 and there is even a mischievously brief fugue. After a first

<sup>1</sup> On 6 September 2014 Liv Solberg, the composer's daughter, wrote to Tim Collins:

Now we – father, mother and I – have sat and listened to the CD [...]. I've never heard father's orchestral works better played, and father was very impressed and moved. We talked a little about what he was thinking when he wrote the symphony, and I think the interpretation Paul Mann wrote in his blog [online at <http://blog.tocataclassics.com/paul-mann-solberg-sessions-a-report-from-liepaja/>] is correct, and that the more violent passages are trying to drown out his melancholy and grief.

climax, the two subjects are ingeniously combined, and the canonic 'brother theme' from the introduction proceeds to re-insinuate itself in the bass. Before the recapitulation, the music suddenly erupts into a short-lived 3/4 folk-dance, which is abandoned after only seven bars in favour of something considerably more bad-tempered. There is a full recapitulation, after which another wild dance confirms that the unnerving volatility of the music is after all a genuine threat to its apparent good nature. As this final outburst dies away, the disembodied appoggiature of the 'brother theme' are briefly heard in the lower strings, and the theme itself now returns in a slower tempo in an uneasy *pianissimo*. Marked *dolendo* ('grieving'), the music comes to rest on a hushed G minor chord.

The slow movement, *Andante* [14], immediately initiates the listener as participant in a funeral rite, in music of extraordinary vividness and emotional directness, harrowing and unflinching in the depiction of public and private grief. Modal harmonies heighten the liturgical atmosphere. Gently arpeggiated harp chords and hushed lower strings accompany the heavy tread of the timpani. A solo clarinet laments, apparently oblivious to the pulse of the music and, as this phrase comes to an end, the strings break out in unrestrained mourning with their own impassioned version of the clarinet theme. After a powerful climax, with the clarinet theme brutalised in the bass line, forcing the music into the relative major for a brief suggestion of communal hymn-singing, the opening music returns. As at the outset, the harp, strings and timpani are heard, but this time the solo clarinet is replaced by a trio of solo wind instruments, each weaving its threnodies around the others in music which might suggest the image of a grieving family. A long passage of gentle rumination follows in which the strings interact with the trio of wind instruments, as if trying to comfort them. Another sudden outburst sees the clarinet theme thrown out *fortissimo*, in canon, just as the 'brother theme' was heard at the beginning of the Symphony, and as the mood calms once more, the clarinet lament appears, as if transfigured, in the divided violins with a gentle touch of harp harmonics. After one final *fortissimo* outpouring, the music ebbs away inconsoably.

In considerable contrast, the finale begins, *Allegro moderato*, with music of obsessive rhythmic regularity [15]. It raises images of the trolls of Norwegian folklore, a twentieth-century re-imagining of Grieg's 'Hall of the Mountain King', and possessed of much the same spirit of dark irony. (It's not a comparison to be taken too far, though: it's well-known how Grieg came to hate his piece, which he thought 'reeking of cowpats and ultra-Norwegianism'.) Solberg's music is sardonic, biting, and at times aggressive. The 'brother theme' from the first movement, now transformed into 4/4, begins to invade the texture, first buried in the violas, and then sung out by the whole string section in an almost Tchaikovskian unison, but undermined by the woodwinds who cannot allow the listener to forget the obsessively taunting rhythmic figure.

vocal range; reaching a climax where high E sharps and F sharp declare the 'devouring Sinai wrath'. After a short recapitulation of the opening movement [5], the mezzo soprano reflects with quiet piety over the wonder of Good Friday [6] – though interrupted by the choir singing in unison of God's power and sacrifice. The middle choral movement, 'Kven fatar' [7], mostly homophonic, is calm and beautiful, asking 'What must I know to be saved?' 'Gud gjev eg med hjarta' [8] once again shows Solberg as contrapuntist, using counterpoint to build intensity, and to underline the words of this prayer. The work concludes peacefully and serenely, with a chorale by Ludvig Mathias Lindeman [9], who was cathedral organist in Oslo for many years of the nineteenth century. Lindeman was Norway's most prolific composer of hymn-tunes (this chorale is in the present Norwegian hymn book, to the words of the hymn 'Å prektige himler og jorderiks hærer').



Photo: Erik Lindholm Hansen

Solberg models for the the sculptor Svein-Tore Kleppan in 2008



Solberg founded the Kapp mixed choir in 1935 and conducted it for many years

Solberg's writing in the *Meditation* is inspired by a similar composition, the *Misjonskantate*, by his organ-teacher Arild Sandvold, written for the 100th anniversary of the Norwegian Missionary Society in 1942,<sup>2</sup> and which has been performed several times by Solberg in Lillehammer. The use of key-colour (much of it is written in E flat minor, F sharp major, D sharp minor, etc.) and enharmonic writing harks back to another of Solberg's sources of inspiration, César Franck. The *Meditation* was written to be performed liturgically as part of the Good Friday Devotion, and as such has been performed many times in Lillehammer Church.

The opening movement, 'Det ropar frå krossen' [3] begins quietly with an organ introduction, before the choir takes over, using *fugato* to intensify and heighten the text, as Jesus cries from the cross. A baritone solo follows [4], where the composer highlights the contrasts in the text by using the singer's

<sup>2</sup> Its full title is *Kantate ved Det Norske Misjonsselskaps 100-års jubileum*.

A development of all the elements then follows, with the music fracturing and deliberately dislocating itself: although it never leaves the 4/4 meter, its phrases begin half-way through bars, and ideas seem to collide with one another. As its temper rises, there is a recapitulation of sorts, but a solo trombone is superimposed, playing the 'brother theme' with a kind of maudlin sentimentality.

Two final fragments of the 'brother theme' in clarinets and bassoons herald the coda. One suspects that the composer's disposition would not have allowed him to end the work negatively, and the caustic trolls are now driven into the major key. In an impressive *coup de théâtre* Solberg keeps part of the orchestra dancing while the rest celebrate a *grandioso* major-key apotheosis of the 'brother theme' before the final rush to a life-affirming conclusion.

The orchestral portion of this recording is completed by three short works, all of which are transcriptions of various kinds. The vigorous but charming *Norse March* [10] is replete with Solberg's love of uneven phrase-lengths: real warriors would have had trouble marching to his three- and seven-bar periods. The piece follows the standard three-part structure (march-trio-march) and though it contains plenty of military vigour, there is also a surprising degree of warmth and gentle lyricism.

The beautifully touching *Pastorale* [11] is an orchestral version of a short organ piece which Solberg composed at the age of only sixteen. Although the orchestration is mature (it was made in 1954–55), the wonder of this young man's music is in the sagacity and dignity of its simplicity. A lilting 6/8 *siciliano*, replete with a range of delicate orchestral colours (and even a hint of naturalism in clarinet 'cuckoos'), it is exactly the kind of thing over which Thomas Beecham would have lavished his attention, as one of his famous encores.

Finally, and perhaps most affecting of all, is a string transcription of the choral motet *Ver Sacrum* ('Sacred Spring'). Since the work did not exist in full score, I made a new edition for this recording, based on the handwritten parts. A number of small anomalies of harmony and detail were resolved, and I took the spontaneous decision in the studio to match the solo cello with a solo violin in the second stanza. The clarity and directness of the music, the 'whiteness' of its appearance on the page (there are almost no 'black notes' at all) belies its profoundly expressive depths, perhaps the most enduring paradox of this most fascinating and unaccountably undervalued of composers.

# THE ORGAN AND CHORAL MUSIC

by Tim Collins

Leif Solberg composed the bulk of his organ music while still at student in Oslo. He describes these compositions modestly as the 'sins of youth' – although sin is probably the last thing that springs to mind on hearing these powerful pieces. Written in the late-Romantic tradition, Solberg's organ music shows a sure grasp of counterpoint, and takes its inspiration from Bach, Franck and Reger. Generally, indeed, his writing for organ suggests a more diatonic version of Reger, with the further difference that in Solberg's work the German chorales are replaced with the melodies of Norwegian folk-music, which are central to the Norwegian hymn-book and church life.

Most of Solberg's organ music demands a relatively large instrument, of which there were few in Norway until recently (indeed, when he arrived in Lillehammer himself in 1938, he was met by an old organ of only fifteen stops). This dearth of suitable instruments, allied with the considerable technical demands made on the player, can in part explain why his organ music has been little performed, even in his home country.

The first of Solberg's 'sins' was the *Pastorale*, written while still at school at the age of sixteen (heard on this CD in a subsequent orchestration). Later, aged nineteen, he wrote the *Variations on the Folk-Tune 'Eg veit i himmerik ei borg'*, and his teacher Arild Sandvold performed the piece live on NRK, on the then new 102-stop Walcker organ in Oslo Cathedral.

Other larger organ pieces include the *Introduction and Passacaglia* in B minor (1942), and the *Fantasy on 'Av dypest nød'*, performed in his debut concert in Oslo in 1938, shortly before coming to Lillehammer.

Several of his organ works, including the one on this recording, were written as part of a sort of 'duel' fought with his friend and fellow organ-student Magne Elvestrand:<sup>1</sup> their weapons of choice were organ pieces instead of swords at dawn.

<sup>1</sup> Elvestrand (1914–91) likewise studied organ with Sandvold; Per Steenberg was another teacher he had in common with Solberg. Although employed as organist in a number of prominent Oslo churches in the first part of his career, he also made a debut as pianist in 1956 and, in Copenhagen, as harpsichordist in 1961. He was an important teacher, too: Halgeir Schiager, whose 1996 CD of Solberg's organ music launched the Solberg 'revival', was a student of his. Elvestrand retired in 1981. His organ 'duel' with Solberg notwithstanding, his published compositions are mainly choral.

## *Fantasy and Fugue on the Folk-Tune 'Se solens skjønnne lys og prakt'*

The *Fantasy and Fugue on the Folk-Tune 'Se solens skjønnne lys og prakt'* was written in 1936, when Solberg was only 21, and although there is perhaps a certain immaturity in the counterpoint at times, there is otherwise little that indicates the 'sins of youth'. The traditional folk-tune used, '*Se solens skjønnne lys og prakt*' ('See the sun's beautiful light and splendour'), from an evening hymn, comes from the mountain village of Vang, in the Valdres valley, not far from where Solberg grew up. Typically for Solberg, the work lay forgotten, unplayed and unpublished for decades, until 1980, when he was prevailed upon to perform it at the Norwegian Organists' Association conference. Publication soon followed.

The Fantasy [1] begins quietly, before the melody is introduced in D major, leading to a set of three variations. First a statement of the theme is heard, accompanied and interspersed by flowing triplets; it then ebbs out, ending on the dominant. A calm *arioso* variation in D minor follows, building into a *maestoso* variation in the major, with a mighty *fortissimo* statement of the second half of the theme in the pedals, before subsiding as the music leads to the fugue. It opens [2] with an exciting subject; later, in the middle section, the folk-tune reappears, combining with the fugue subject. After an episode in B minor, the work builds to *fortissimo*, with a triumphant statement of the folk-tune and fugue-subject in the pedals leading to a powerful conclusion.

## *Langfredagsmeditasjon*

Although a church organist for all of his working life, Leif Solberg has left few works of significance for church choir, although there are a good number of secular choral pieces. His church music includes the *Missa Brevis*, a couple of psalm-settings, and the cantata *Langfredagsmeditasjon* ('Good Friday Meditation').

The *Langfredagsmeditasjon* was written for a composition competition run by NRK in 1948, where it came second. It was first performed on NRK in 1949 by the NRK Chamber Choir, directed by Rolf Karlsen, with Solberg's friend Magne Elvestrand at the organ.

The inspiration for the work was the composer's friendship with the author and poet Sigurd Nesse (1852–1955). Nesse, then nearly 100 years old himself, took a shine to the young organist and composer, and supplied him with a series of texts to set. Solberg recalls, with his typical deprecating humour: 'Well, he was always coming round with new texts, ideas and suggestions. So in the end I had to do something!'

Nesse wrote in *Nynorsk* or 'New Norwegian' – not actually a new language, but created in the nineteenth century from traditional rural dialects. *Nynorsk* is more poetical than the main Danish-influenced Norwegian known as *bokmål*. The form used by Nesse, though, is very old-fashioned, and indeed modern Norwegians can have some trouble understanding everything.