

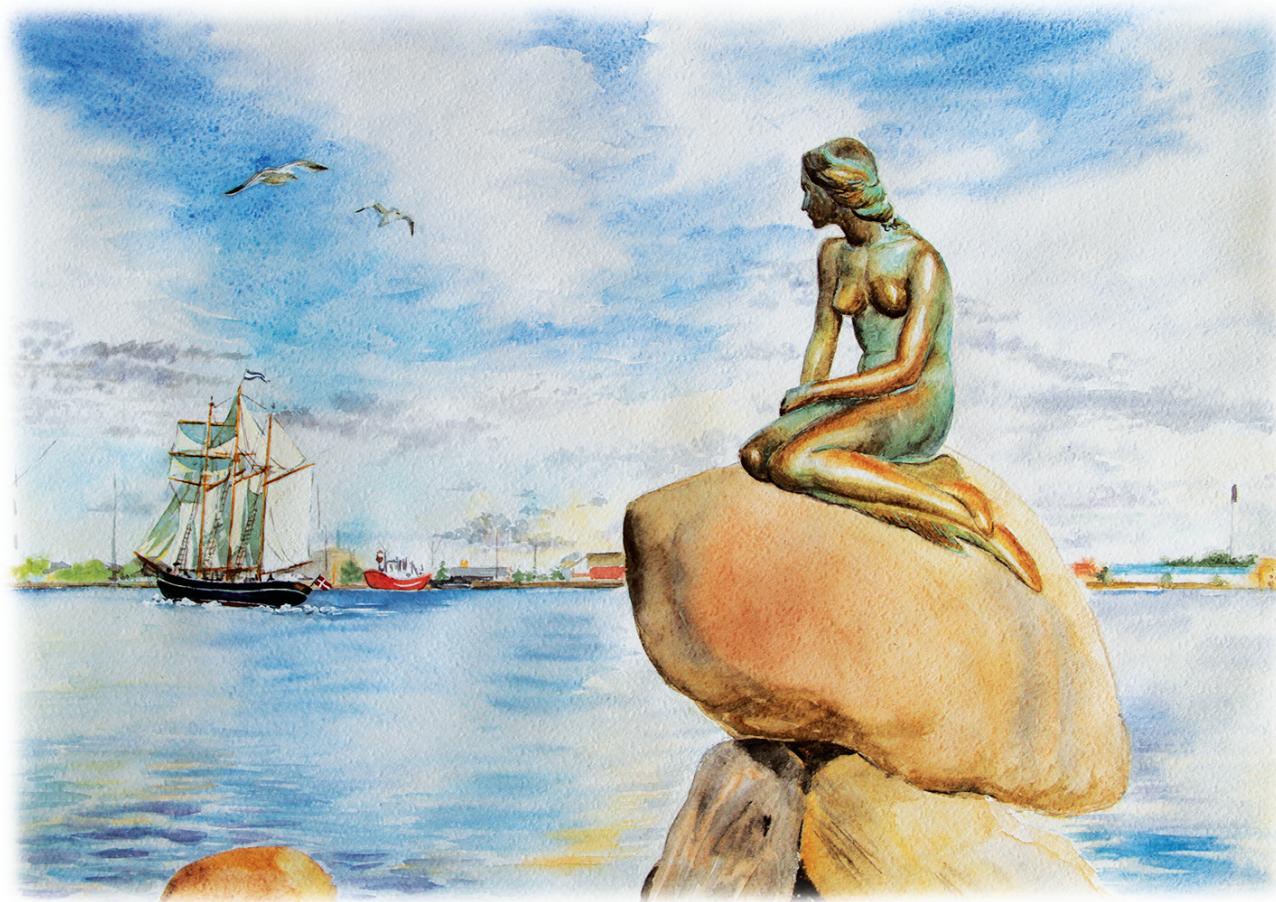


ON THE PATH TO H.C. ANDERSEN

Contemporary Danish Works for Accordion

Martin Lohse • Jesper Koch • Bent Lorentzen • Svend Aaquist

Hanzhi Wang, Accordion



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Although it might still occupy a niche position within the context of contemporary music, the accordion has gained a sizeable repertoire particularly in the Nordic countries and not least in Denmark, where numerous composers have followed the example of Per Nørgård in creating some of their most personal expression for this instrument. The sound of the accordion suggests music of a fanciful nature, which makes it the natural conduit for pieces which have been inspired by the fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen (1805–1875), whose writings have long become a Danish national institution – even while most of the pieces here evoke his writing in overtly abstract terms rather than depicting any more specific narrative.

Born in Copenhagen on 29 May 1971, Martin Lohse studied at the Royal Danish Academy of Music with Hans Abrahamsen and Niels-Rosing Schow, and is active both as a composer and visual artist. The accordion features prominently in his output as a solo instrument, also in chamber and orchestral contexts. Composed in 2014 (though arranged for two guitars the next year), *Menuetto* was written for and premiered by Bjarke Mogensen in Copenhagen on 11 August 2015. The piece opens in a wistful manner, though its underlying rhythmic line propels the music through several varied episodes, to which the opening theme re-emerges as refrain. The mood remains relatively subdued throughout, with the main theme returning after a suddenly more pensive episode to guide this piece towards its poignant conclusion.

If *Menuetto* seems restrained in its approach to accordion technique, the three pieces which comprise *Passing* are demonstrably more adventurous. The sequence emerged during 2011–12, once again for Mogensen – who gave their respective premieres in Humlebaek on 27 September 2011, Copenhagen on 7 March 2012 then Birkerød on 28 September 2014. These pieces are ‘mobiles’ which, for Lohse, entails ‘a ... technique where different layers of music in individual tempos, metric and musical style are combined in a

simple pattern of chords, which slowly modulate through all the keys in a never-ending sequence and creating a music with no or very few dissonances.’ Each makes recourse to post-minimalist elements along with those of the new simplicity crucial to an earlier generation of Danish composers.

Although composed and premiered separately, these three pieces can equally well be played as a sonata-like composite, when their similarities and contrasts are thrown into greater relief. Marked as *Allegro con passione sostenuto*, *Passing I* commences with deft passagework in the instrument’s highest register, gradually descending through the compass from where a lively counter-melody makes a first appearance. These interrelated ideas continue, prior to returning to the initial music and register. *Passing II*, marked as *Andante con dolore sostenuto*, functions as the ‘slow movement’ of this sequence – not least in the way that its main theme proceeds contemplatively and with a fatalistic undertow; there being little in its various turns of phrase to indicate any lightening of mood. *Passing III*, *Moderato maestoso*, duly unfolds as a lively finale whose vampish main theme drives the music onwards; its unceasing vigour evident in the way that its rhythmic outline remains constant despite several appearances of a more reflective theme, until the music at length heads towards its decisive closing gesture.

Among Lohse’s most recent pieces for accordion, *The Little Match Girl* (2015) is based on the short story that is also one of Andersen’s most enduring creations (its setting at New Year perhaps intended to complement that of Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*). Instead of attempting to summarise this story, let alone evoke its alternately ironic and moralising tone, the piece seeks rather to encapsulate a mood of sadness through depicting the tragic protagonist when she encounters neglect and indifference to her fate. There is also a feeling of reaching towards a sense of fulfilment as is suggested by the animated central section, though this proves to be

short-lived when the music returns to its earlier sombreness on route to the questioning close. Lohse conveys in five minutes what other composers have sought to do in full-length operas.

Born on 5 September 1967 and another graduate from the Royal Danish Academy of Music, Jesper Koch has himself written extensively for the accordion. His best-known piece for this instrument, *Jabberwocky* was written for the Norwegian accordionist Geir Draugsvoll in 1995, and demonstrates the concern for sonority as a means of structuring the musical argument typical of this composer. As befits the nature of its inspiration – albeit in Lewis Carroll – this piece abounds in expressive contrasts that are often quixotic, allied to writing in a way that utilises the instrument’s full technical armoury. What might easily have been a purely gestural study is given focus by accumulation of detail and incident towards a scintillating close where the musical ‘action’ seems to be taking place over several layers. After this, a lengthy and conclusive exhalation seems to be the only natural response.

Bent Lorentzen, born on 11 February 1935 at Stenvad in eastern Jutland, and educated at the universities of Aarhus and Copenhagen, ranks among the most significant Danish composers of the older generation – not least for his extensive contributions to the genres of music-theatre and electroacoustic music. Although he quickly confronted the challenges of the post-war avant-garde head on, his mature output is characterised by a refusal to be bound by considerations of stylistic uniformity, while informed by his belief in communication as a guiding aesthetic.

Composed in 1992 and dedicated to Geir Draugsvoll, *Tears* fully typifies this approach. Although its title might sound generalised enough, this likely refers to lines from Andersen’s *The Little Mermaid* – ‘But a mermaid has no tears, and therefore she suffers so much more.’ It commences with sustained gestures which successively

swell then fade in an evocative manner. At length, the music suddenly erupts into darting gestures and deft passagework which open out its expressive range accordingly, as it moves towards a glowering culmination from which any hint of sentimentality, as might be evoked by the title, has been completely banished. The final bars then provide for an ending as speculative as it is poetic, evoking the aura of bittersweet inevitability that characterises the end of Andersen’s tale.

Born on 7 December 1948 and educated in Copenhagen, Svend Aaquist has long been active as a conductor (primarily with the Frankfurt-based Ensemble Modern) as well as a composer – in which latter capacity he has contributed to all the major genres. He was also among the first of his generation to embrace computer technology as a means of composition. Written in 1992, again for Geir Draugsvoll, *Saga Night* is the longest of these pieces and seems intent on evoking that mood which is found in numerous Andersen tales rather than any specific story.

Although it unfolds continuously, the piece falls into several interrelated sections – opening with an undulating rhythm over which various gestures gradually emerge into prominence. While not evocative in any scenic sense, these ideas are characterful in themselves as they enable the music to gain expressive tension as it builds to a brief climax (a third of the way in), before heading into a passage of questioning calm. From here it bounds forward into an energetic dialogue between the higher and lower registers, and given clarity by the bass line which grounds the discourse. This culminates in shimmering trills that move up the compass, ushering in a final phase which brings ideas from across the piece into uneasy accord and so makes possible the fatalistic close. The scenario being evoked has evidently come full circle.

Richard Whitehouse

Hanzhi Wang



Photo: Matt Dine

The classical accordion is rapidly growing as a concert instrument, thrilling audiences in new ways. Up and coming artist, Hanzhi Wang, is the accordion's perfect ambassador. Praised for her engaging stage presence and performances that are technically and musically brilliant, her career has already taken her around the globe with performances in Europe and Asia. As First Prize winner of the Young Concert Artists International Auditions in New York, she is now introducing US audiences to the accordion with recitals throughout the country, including debuts in New York at Carnegie Hall's Zankel Hall and in Washington, DC at the Kennedy Center. Other distinctions include first prizes in several music competitions around the world.

www.hanzhiwang.org

With this unique programme Hanzhi Wang takes us into the ‘fairy-tale world of the accordion’ in works by Danish composers that explore both the darkness and luminosity of Hans Christian Andersen’s famous stories. Poignant reflection and tragic depiction infuse Martin Lohse’s *Menuetto* and *The Little Match Girl* (dedicated to Hanzhi Wang), while his post-minimalist *Passing* series forms adventurous ‘mobiles’ of dancing light. From Jesper Koch’s quixotic *Jabberwocky* to Svend Aaquist’s evocative *Saga Night*, this new repertoire for a relatively recent concert instrument is both dramatic and uplifting.

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1 Martin Lohse (b. 1971): *Menuetto* (2014) 7:31

Martin Lohse: *Passing* (2011–12) 13:14

2 Passing I: Allegro con passione sostenuto 4:05

3 Passing II: Andante con dolore sostenuto 4:56

4 Passing III: Moderato maestoso 4:06

5 Martin Lohse: *The Little Match Girl* (2015)* 4:41

6 Jesper Koch (b. 1967): *Jabberwocky* (1995) 5:52

7 Bent Lorentzen (b. 1935): *Tears* (1992) 8:31

8 Svend Aaquist (b. 1948): *Saga Night* (1992) 14:38

*WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING

Hanzhi Wang, Accordion

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