



ONDINE

# ROLF WALLIN

Five Seasons  
Whirl | Stride | Spirit

Wu Wei  
Eldbjørg Hemsing  
Ida Nielsen

Stavanger Symphony Orchestra  
Andris Poga



ROLF WALLIN

## **ROLF WALLIN** (1957)

- |    |  |              |
|----|--|--------------|
| 1  | <b>Stride</b> (2023)   | <b>9:11</b>  |
|    | <b>Whirl</b> (2018), for violin and orchestra                | <b>21:14</b> |
| 2  | I. Nigredo –   | 5:59         |
| 3  | II. Albedo –   | 3:44         |
| 4  | III. Citrinitas –  | 5:34         |
| 5  | IV. Rubedo   | 5:57         |
| 6  | <b>Spirit</b> (2017), for electric bass guitar and orchestra | <b>18:53</b> |
|    | <b>Five Seasons</b> (2022), for sheng and orchestra          | <b>25:59</b> |
| 7  | Introduction – I. Water                                      | 8:39         |
| 8  | II. Earth  | 3:30         |
| 9  | III. Wood  | 2:31         |
| 10 | IV. Metal  | 5:10         |
| 11 | V. Fire  | 6:09         |

**ELDBJØRG HEMSING**, violin  
**IDA NIELSEN**, electric bass guitar  
**WU WEI**, sheng

**STAVANGER SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**  
**ANDRIS POGA**, conductor

## ***Composer's programme notes***

### ***Stride***

for orchestra (2023)

During the past few years, humanity has been punched from many directions, by virus, weather and war. In times like these it's easy to sink into lethargy and passivity. I've felt it myself and I know I'm not the only one.

But I've found a personal cure for getting out of the mental and physical quagmire. To stride – “to walk somewhere with long, decisive steps”, as one dictionary defines it – has been a great therapy for me. Just sheer positive energy, the feeling of moving joyfully forwards on foot or skis through a snowy forest, or simply walking up the street to meet a good friend.

I know it won't change the world, but it makes me see the other side of the coin and the many people moving the world in the right direction, even if their tremendous contributions rarely reach the headlines: aid workers, doctors, campaigners for democracy and rights, and – in another way – musicians! Think of the amazing energy that comes out of all these super-skilled musicians collaborating, listening and adjusting to each other. They might have their disputes offstage, but when they take the big stride into the music they all melt into one astonishing organism. What a wonderful model for a more collaborative humanity!

## ***Whirl***

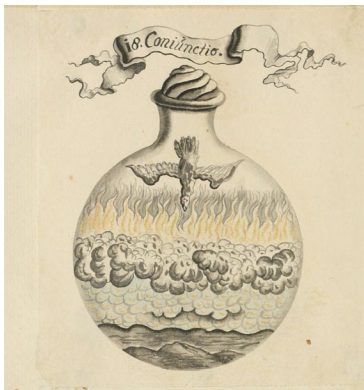
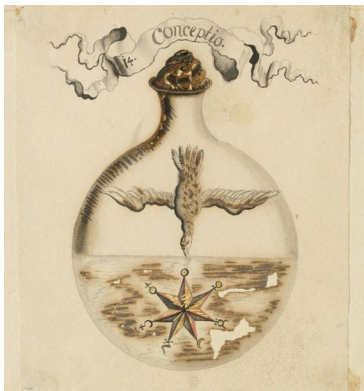
for violin and orchestra (2018)

The world is a whirl, and every whirl is a world, we have been told for thousands of years by ecstatic mystics. And in the last century, our sober scientists have confirmed that it is a fact.

In this violin concerto I have returned to the puzzling and mystifying 'whirl' of fractal mathematics, where the straight rules of numbers open up into the realm of swirling clouds, meandering rivers and mesmerising bird flocks. When these so-called chaotic mathematical patterns are projected onto music, strange melodies come to life; like plants, like animals that move in fascinating, unpredictable ways. The dry numbers give birth to surprisingly emotional melodies – yearning, serene, strident, jubilant.

In the process of making a violin concerto out of these melodies I have felt like the old alchemists, who brought the chaotic *massa confuse* through a process of dissolving and coagulating, evaporating and solidifying, in order to bring forth the magical Philosophers' Stone, to make precious metals, to heal illnesses, or to make life out of dead matter. And more important for many of them, as a process of personal spiritual healing and transcendence.

Sir Isaac Newton, father of modern science, was – surprisingly – one of these magician-scientists who studied alchemy with utmost seriousness. Another of them was Johann Conrad Barchusen, who in his beautifully illustrated *Elementa Chemiae* depicts the alchemical process as a dove flying up and down in the fuming laboratory retort, meddling not only with the four elements, the sun, moon and planets, but also with a lion, a dragon and a self-eating snake. Our soloist is like this bird, flying through the four vessels of *Nigredo* (blackening), *Albedo* (whitening), *Citrinitas* (yellowing) and *Rubedo* (reddening). These four movements are played without interruption, only separated by narrow channels centring around a single pitch.



Illustrations from Barchusen's *Elementa Chemiae* (1718)

## ***Spirit***

for electric bass guitar and orchestra (2017)

I became aware of Ida Nielsen's musicality, her radiant stage presence and exhilarating slap hand technique when she played bass with Prince in his last six years on earth. Like him, Ida has this wonderful ability to spread positive energy, and now she continues to spread love and joy as a singer, songwriter and bassist with her own band. *Spirit* is a celebration of this joy.

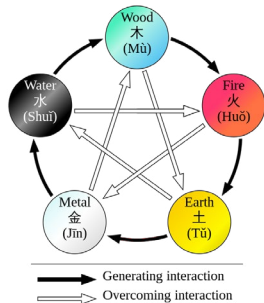
But isn't it thoughtless, almost immoral, to make art about joy and happiness in a time when humanity is reeling on the brink of self-annihilation, in a time when dangerous autocrats rise to power in country after country? As Bertolt Brecht bitterly said: "He who laughs has not yet heard the bad news."

But there is another approach. In a speech after the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963, Leonard Bernstein said: "This sorrow and rage will not inflame us to seek retribution; rather they will inflame our art. Our music will never again be quite the same. This will be our reply to violence: to make music more intensely, more beautifully, more devotedly than ever before. And with each note we will honor the spirit of John Kennedy, commemorate his courage, and reaffirm his faith in the Triumph of the Mind."

So this is my humble contribution to this spirit; the spirit of sharing, the spirit of empowering, the spirit of becoming strong, but not hardened, during hard times.

## Five Seasons

for sheng and orchestra (2022)



When I was invited to write a concerto for the wonderful sheng virtuoso Wu Wei, I used the opportunity to expand my journey into the fascinating universe of Wu Xing. This ancient Chinese philosophy of five elements or 'phases' is still central and vital in most aspects of Chinese life; medicine (for example acupuncture), home-making (feng shui), martial arts and cooking, to mention just a few.

And yes, in a traditional Chinese year there are five seasons, each corresponding to an element: Spring/Wood, Early Summer/Fire, Late Summer/Earth, Autumn/Metal, Winter/Water. And just as the seasons flow seamlessly into each other, so the five elements are in constant flux; either nourishing, as Water feeds a tree (Wood), or destroying, as Water extinguishes Fire.

Reflecting this state of flux, in Five Elements, the music is constantly on the move, always transforming from one musical character (or 'element') to another. And it is all contained within the sheng, this incredibly versatile mouth organ, with its rich and proud centuries-old tradition. And still it is capable of transcending into new and unknown musical territories.

After an introduction presenting the five elements, each element gets its time to shine in the five main sections of this one-movement work, with occasional short detours to other elements. And their characters should be easily recognisable; the flowing and trickling Water, the dark and solid Earth, the upwards-striving Wood (first heard in the yearning glissandi of the piece's very first notes), the shiny Metal and – as the full powers of the sheng are unleashed – the forward-charging and all-consuming Fire.



**Rolf Wallin** was Stavanger Symphony Orchestra's composer-in-residence in the spring season of 2022, following numerous successful projects through several decades. This album is a result of that collaboration.

Rolf Wallin is one of Scandinavia's leading contemporary composers, widely performed and commissioned internationally. His musical background spans from jazz, avantgarde rock and early music to traditional classical training. This versatility is reflected in an exceptionally many-faceted list of compositions. As a composer Wallin freely combines computer-generated systems and mathematical formulae with intuitive approaches. His work list includes both instrumental and electroacoustic works, music for concert halls and for theatre, dance and film; and his continuous crossing of borders between genres and styles has resulted in a number of fruitful cross-fertilizations.

An idea that has proven especially fruitful for Wallin is the use of so-called "fractal" mathematical algorithms to generate a musical raw material, which he refines further by means of a continuous interaction between systematic calculations and his own musical intuition. *Stonewave*, one of his most popular and frequently performed pieces, is made purely from fractal mathematics, but far from being abstract, the music comes across as very physical and organic. As an example, it played an important part in the music for the opening ceremony of the 1994 Winter Olympics, broadcast to millions of sport fans across the globe.

Other examples of fractal works are *Boyl* (1995), commissioned by Ensemble Intercontemporain and the oboe quartet *Ning* (1991). And, last but not least: on this album, in the violin concerto *Whirl*, the very same numbers churning out muscular pulses in *Stonewave* provide the source for an almost romantic expressionism.

Wallin just as often throws all the calculations overboard and composes totally freely and intuitively, like in his orchestral work *Act* (2004), commissioned by The Cleveland Orchestra, and later released on Ondine with the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra.

Also the trumpet concerto *Fisher King*, commissioned and premiered by Stavanger Symphony Orchestra and Håkan Hardenberger, and *Manyworlds* (2010), are made in this intuitive way. Both are on another Ondine album, with the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra.

Speaking of intuition, Wallin has covered all shades from traditional music notation to full on improvisation. In the latter end of the spectrum are two works featuring Wallin himself on stage: *Yó* (1994), where he appeared in a Star Trek-like controller suit with which he controlled the cutting edge hardware and software of the time, and *Scratch*, going to the absolutely opposite end of the high tech/low tech scale: a red balloon, soap water and a knife.

The image of the lonely composer in an ivory tower does not fit Rolf Wallin. In addition to his many orchestral and chamber works, Wallin has worked closely with prominent jazz, rock, improvising and folk musicians, bridging the gap between very different musical languages. He has also collaborated with visual artists, writers, theatre directors and, above all, several outstanding contemporary dance groups and choreographers. His *Urban Bestiary* (2008), composed for the Norwegian National Ballet, was the first work performed in the new Opera House in Oslo when it opened in April 2008.

Many of Wallin's works connect directly with the world around him, most notably in works such as *Strange News* (2007), which tells the story of the rehabilitation of child soldiers, *Concerning King* (2006), modelled around Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1967 Vietnam war speech, and *Large Bird Mask* (2019), posing important ethical and philosophical questions around the accelerating extinction of birds. His opera *Elysium*, commissioned by the Norwegian Opera and premiered in 2016, was the result of a close collaboration with British playwright Mark Ravenhill. It is set in a future peopled by transhumans and brings together topics such as human rights, revolution, salvation and our hopes and fears of artificial intelligence and the possible extinction of humankind – or, like some transhumanists believe, the possibility for humankind's collective consciousness to melt together with the Universe...

rolfwallin.org

One of the most charismatic and leading young violinists on the international scene today, **Eldbjørg Hemsing** is acclaimed for her "radiant and sophisticated performances" (BBC Music Magazine) and is a musician committed to bringing her art form to new and emerging audiences across the globe. Her international career took off quickly, leading to four award-winning albums and world premieres of numerous compositions in many of the greatest halls of the world.

Recent highlights include performances of Mozart's Violin Concerto No. 3 with Orchestre National d'Île de France, Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto with Oslo Philharmonic and Bruch's Violin Concerto with Philharmonia Orchestra under Santtu-Matias Rouvali, as well as Hillborg's Violin Concerto No. 2 with Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra under Esa-Pekka Salonen. Eldbjørg Hemsing regularly collaborates with orchestras such as Bergen Philharmonic, Belgian National Orchestra, MDR Sinfonieorchester Leipzig, Shanghai and Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestras, and is a welcome guest at prestigious venues such as Lincoln Center New York, the Kennedy Center Washington, Wigmore Hall, Verbier Festival and the National Center for the Performing Arts in Beijing.

She has also performed at numerous major global events and venues such as the Nobel Peace Prize Ceremony in Oslo, United Nations, Shanghai Expo, and the UN Security Council. She has developed a close collaboration with the composer Tan Dun with whom she has premiered, toured, and recorded several award-winning works. She is a passionate speaker on the power of classical music beyond its traditional borders.

Eldbjørg Hemsing's first album on Sony was released in February 2023 and is devoted to the rich natural soundscapes of the Arctic. After an astonishing five nominations, the album gained her an Opus Klassik Award in the category Classic without Limits. Her current discography of critically acclaimed recordings includes an album of Grieg's violin sonatas which won the Spellemann Prize in Norway as Recording of the Year 2020. Her second album, Fire Ritual, centers around Tan Dun's Violin Concerto, composed for and premiered by Eldbjørg

Hemsing. Her debut album in 2018 featured Hjalmar Borgström's Violin Concerto and Shostakovich's Violin Concerto No. 1, recorded with the Wiener Symphoniker and Olari Elts.

Born in Valdres, Norway, Eldbjørg Hemsing studied at the prestigious Barratt Due Institute of Music in Oslo and with Professor Boris Kuschnir in Vienna. She plays a 1707 Antonio Stradivari 'Rivaz, Baron Gutmann' violin, on loan from the Dextra Musica Foundation.

[www.eldbjorgmusic.com](http://www.eldbjorgmusic.com)



ELDBJØRG HEMSING

**Ida Nielsen**, born in Denmark in 1975, started playing bass at the age of 16. She studied at the Royal Danish Music Academy of Music from 1993 to 1998 with electric bass as her main instrument. Nielsen released the album *Marmelade* in 2007 using the pseudonym Bassida, and in 2011 she released *Sometimes a girl needs some sugar too* using her own name. She got her life turned upside down when Prince discovered her music online in 2010. Shortly after, she was a member of his band, played, and toured with the New Power Generation and later 3rdeyegirl until the iconic artist passed away in 2016. The bass player, composer and vocalist released her album TURNITUP, in memory of Prince, in 2016 with more albums to follow: *Time 2 Stop Worrying* in 2019, *02022020* in 2020, and her latest album *More Sauce, Please!* in 2023.

[www.idanielsenbass.com](http://www.idanielsenbass.com)



IDA NIELSEN

The artistry of internationally renowned Sheng virtuoso **Wu Wei** reaches far beyond the traditional boundaries of his more than 3000-year-old Chinese instrument and brings it well into the 21st century.

The sheng, a mouth organ formed out of a bundle of bamboo reeds and cased in a metal bowl. In China, it is supposed to sound like the song of a Phoenix from a Chinese legend: silvery and fleeting as the wind. Wu Wei's radiant and transparent tone as well as the infinite possibilities offered by his instrument in terms of melody, harmony, rhythm, polyphony have led him to collaborating with many artists, composers (Huang Ruo, Guus Janssen, Unsuk Chin, Jukka Tiensuu, Bernd Richard Deutsch, Ondrej Adamek, Donghoon Shin, Enjott Schneider, Man Fang, Rolf Wallin...) and ensembles in traditional, chamber or orchestral settings, improvising in solo concerts or with jazz big Bands, playing electronic music as well as taking part in minimal or baroque music performances.

In the new music repertoire, Wu Wei has been invited by orchestras such as the Berlin Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic, Seoul Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, BBC Symphony, Cabrillo Festival, Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, Helsinki Philharmonic, hr-Sinfonieorchester in Frankfurt, Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester, Lucerne Festival Contemporary Orchestra and ensembles such as Holland Baroque, Ensemble intercontemporain, Atlas Ensemble and NDR Big Band.

He is regularly performing at international festivals such as the BBC Proms in London, Festival d'Automne à Paris, Donaueschinger Musiktage, Edinburgh International Festival, Suntory Hall Summer Festival Tokyo, Dresdner Musikfestspiele, Festival Achtbrücken Köln, Grafenegg Festival, Lincoln Center Festival New York and Tongyeong International Music Festival and recently at the Lucerne Festival and Musikfest Berlin.

With Martin Stegner (viola) and Janne Saksala (double bass), both members of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, he founded the Wu Wei Trio which appears

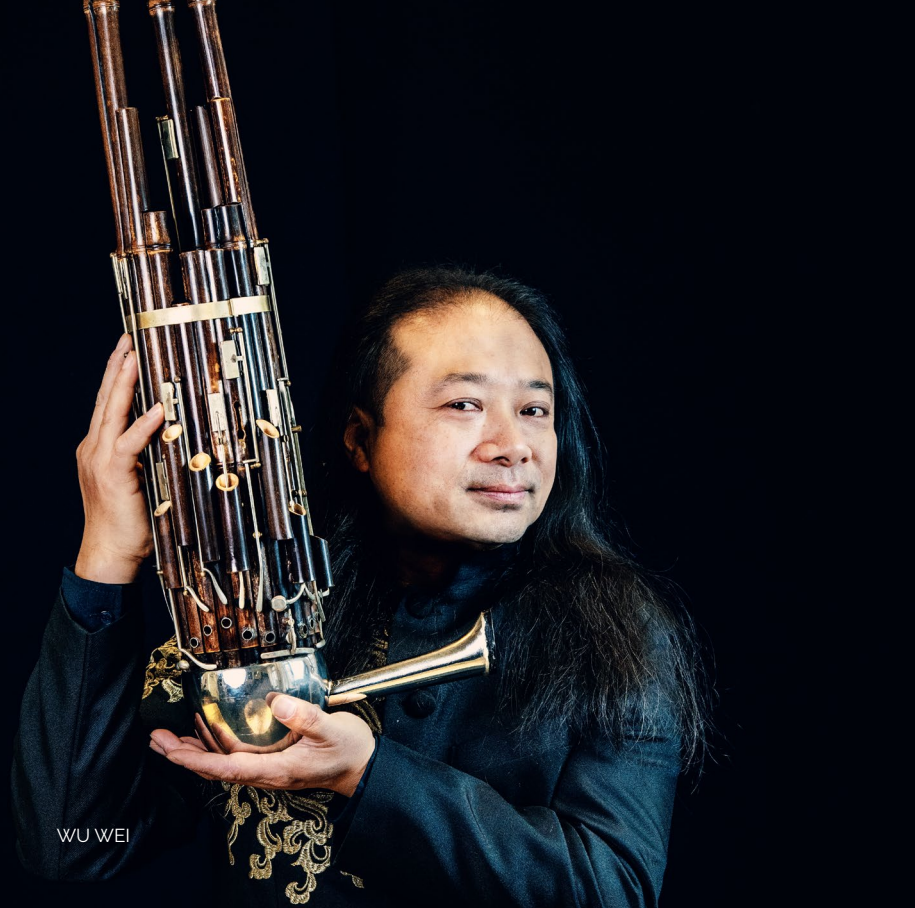


each season in the Chamber Music Hall of the Philharmonie Berlin. As a founder of the Berlin based Ensemble Asianart, he likes to share transcultural programs with instrumentalists from all around the world. For the Morgenland Festival, he forms with the jazz trumpeter Ingolf Burkhardt and pianist Florian Weber, the Trio Silk Blues. He is an ideal partner for interdisciplinary projects involving literature, dance, theatre, and architecture.

His projects include concerts at the hr-Sinfonieorchester in Frankfurt, the Orquesta Sinfónica del Principado de Asturias, the Real Filharmonia de Galicia, and a residency at the NCPA in Beijing, the premiere at the Gyeonggi Arts Centre (Korea) of a new sheng concerto by Il-Ryun Chung and in 2026, the premiere of Philippe Leroux's new concert for sheng, ensemble and electronics with Ensemble intercontemporain and IRCAM.

Wu Wei was born in 1970 in Gaoyou (China). He studied at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music and with the support of the Naumann Foundation, he took part in 1995 to a four-year DAAD scholarship in Berlin, where he is currently living. Since 2013, Wu Wei has been a Professor teaching the Sheng at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. For the entire 2023/2024 season, he is invited as a professor by the Minzu University of China in Beijing.

[wuwei-music.com](http://wuwei-music.com)



WU WEI

**Stavanger Symphony Orchestra** (SSO) performs and has its concerts in the Fartein Valen in Stavanger concert hall in Norway which is considered one of the best concert halls in Europe.

Andris Poga is SSO's Chief Conductor. Tianyi Lu is the orchestra's current Conductor-in-Residence. Recent guest conductors have included Karina Canellakis, Pablo Heras-Casado, James Gaffigan, Stanislav Kochanovsky, Dalia Stasevska and Vassily Sinaisky. Frans Brüggen was the SSO's Artistic Director for early music from 1990–1997; Philippe Herreweghe had the same position from 2000 to 2004 and Fabio Biondi from 2006 to 2016. Ever since then, the SSO has continued to work regularly with exponents of historical performance practice including Kristian Bezuidenhout, Andrea Marcon, Jan Willem de Vriend, Matthew Halls, Ottavio Dantone, Riccardo Minasi, among others.

The orchestra has a recording label of its own; besides, it has recorded several albums of Scandinavian music for BIS, as well as baroque music with Fabio Biondi for Naïve and other record companies. It has been touring in various European countries, Japan and the USA. SSO was nominated for Spellemann in 2018 for Gisle Kverndock's Symphonic Dances and received two Hedda Awards in 2019, including Best Performance for 'The Mute'.

The orchestra was founded in 1938 and consists of 85 musicians from 23 different nations.

ssno.no

**Andris Poga** is the Chief Conductor of the Stavanger Symphony Orchestra. He was the Music Director of the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra from 2013 till 2021 and continues to collaborate with the LNSO as its Artistic Advisor.

He is a regular guest with the leading orchestras in Europe and Asia. After the first successful collaborations he has been invited back to the NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchester Hamburg, WDR Symphony Cologne, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester and Konzerthausorchester in Berlin, Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich, Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, Orchestre National de France, NHK Symphony Orchestra Tokyo and many others. He has also conducted the Wiener Symphoniker, Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in Rome, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in London, Hong Kong Philharmonic, Sydney Symphony. He is working together with the leading soloists such as Gidon Kremer, Evgeny Kissin, Pierre-Laurent Aimard, Matthias Goerne and others.

In 2010, Andris Poga was the First Prize winner of the Evgeny Svetlanov International Conducting Competition, which thrust him into the international scene. He was an assistant to Paavo Järvi at the Orchestre de Paris from 2011 to 2014, and from 2012 to 2014 he served as an assistant conductor for the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

Andris has graduated the conducting department of the Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music. He also studied philosophy at the University of Latvia and conducting at the Vienna University of Music and Performing Arts.

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ANDRIS POGA