



Robert  
**GROSLOT**

The Intimacy  
of Distance

My Green  
Shade Forest

Trittico incantevole

Charlotte Wajnberg,  
Soprano

Brussels  
Philharmonic

Robert Groslot



**Robert Groslot (b. 1951)**

**The Intimacy of Distance • My Green Shade Forest • Trittico incantevole**

In Robert Groslot's vocal music the soprano occupies a special place. In one of his earliest works, *I Giardini della Villa d'Este* (1980), he pairs a soprano alongside an orchestra of 25 clarinets. With *L'Odisea d'Orfeo* (2002) and *Si le Monde ...* (2006) Groslot wrote two extensive compositions for soprano, choir and orchestra. In 2008 and 2009, Groslot composed several shorter works for soprano and chamber ensemble, of which *HCE* also exists in an orchestral version. In 2015 he composed *Le bel aujourd'hui*, a cycle for soprano and string quartet. With *The Intimacy of Distance*, Groslot has created his most ambitious composition for solo voice and orchestra to date. The five-part cycle was composed in 2019 for soprano Charlotte Wajnberg and is dedicated to her and her husband, the pianist Aaron Wajnberg. In a sense, the piece is a sequel in a long series of the composer's concertante works. Groslot has made extensive use of the solo concerto during his previous ten years of composing dedicated works for the vast majority of instrumentalists. *The Intimacy of Distance* continues his exploration of the form with the composer intending this work to be a concerto for soprano and orchestra. Berlin poet Elisa Nathalie Heine has proven to be a like-minded partner for Groslot. Her writing is stylistically comparable to the composer's own uniquely personal art of composition. Her poems deal with distance in a variety of ways and explore the question of how life is intensified by longing, imagination and projections that can only be realised through the experience of distance. Ms Heine describes language as 'a very physical medium, one that, before it appeals to the intellect, should first resonate in the body, a deeply sensual weave that contains musicality and rhythm, which vibrate out from the text and become visceral.'

The tensions between the contrasting (partly fabricated, partly surreal) but always interrelated linguistic images find their echo in Groslot's free dissonance, the surprising changes of the tonal centre, and last but not least in the manifold transformations of his motifs. Of Elisa Heine's five poems, the middle one is written in German, the four others

are in English, whereby the first poem bears a German title – thus building a linguistic bridge to the middle of the cycle – which Groslot has set to music as a prelude to the entire work (*Molto adagio*). The first song (*Andante*), which has a clear concertante character, deals with a poem that presents pictures of roaring city life, but remains grammatically static. Groslot takes this into account not only through sharp dynamic contrasts, but also in the shaping of harmonic tensions. Only in the calmer middle section do we find some temporary relaxation. The second movement (*Lento*) begins with free, two-part imitations. The soprano initially sings a duet with the violins, but soon breaks away and assumes the lead role. At the words 'the bend itself must be bent' the original theme returns and the previous music is repeated in another key. The third chant is unique among the poems, not only due to the German language, but also because the poetic ego, unlike in the other parts of the cycle, does not stand aside contemplatively, but reveals herself. A woman allows readers and listeners to participate directly in the flow of her feelings and thoughts, and ultimately in her self-discovery. The piece begins with an excited orchestral prelude (*Inquieto*). Shortly after the soprano enters, a *lento* section follows, in which the words 'Mutter brannte lichterloh in meiner Iris' ('Mother burned brightly in my iris') are illustrated with percussion tremolo and string flageolet. Again, we hear the restless music from the opening. The complete text is sung twice, the second time for long stretches in staccato style, before the poetic ego reaffirms its return to herself with a passionate cry. 'Kulning' is the name given to the art of singing with which Swedish cowherdesses lure their animals. Using this as inspiration, the text of the fourth song (*Lento*) reflects the human grasp of the world. Just as the cows in the text do not come any closer to the lyrical speaker, the main tonality, which is always encircled, is never fixed in the traditional way. At the end, the soloist imitates a Kulning call, using a theme from the middle of the third movement. Signal-like sounds of the percussion instruments characterise the almost entirely quiet finale (*Inquieto*). The imagery conjured

up by the text – a view of horses standing in the snow – could hardly be more different from that at the beginning of the work, and the character of the music is also transformed. However, an important motif from the first movement returns here both referential and distant at the same time.

The atmosphere of the forest has served as inspiration for a number of composers – one needs only to think of names such as Raff, Dvořák, Glazunov, Sibelius, Roussel and Ciurlionis. Groslot joins this illustrious society with his tone poem, *My Green Shade Forest*, written in 2015 for Cofena, the concert association of Antwerp. The forest – which is actually situated 500 metres from the composer's home – welcomes the listener with calm sounds of nature. Over a pulsating pedal point in the bass, the bassoon plays a simple diatonic motif that is taken up and embellished by other instruments (*Andante*). As the sonic colours blossom, longer melodic lines are developed. Chromatic steps and dissonant chords join the music, which gets dominated by cascades of quavers played staccato. The more we enter the forest, the more it shows the richness of the aural phenomena that it contains. After a general pause, the winds play chord progressions modulating by semitones, after which the action becomes more and more agitated. The music from the beginning reappears now in lively tempo (*Più vivace*), rapidly changing its tonal centres, while the motifs morph into the sounds of hunting signals. The following section contrasts with restrained dynamics. After the staccato quavers have appeared once again, the strings begin to unfold a barrage of fast fluctuating semiquavers, over which a grand, stormy climax is built up. The culmination is reached when nearly all instruments play together – there is not one *tutti* bar throughout the entire piece – then the semiquaver movement vanishes, and after a pause the recapitulation is heard. The first part of the piece reappears in condensed form. A reminiscence of the middle section follows, but what formerly had sounded like a storm has now calmed down into a soft breeze. With a D minor tremolo in the high strings the music disappears into the shades of the forest.

*Trittico incantevole* was completed in 2017 as a commission from the Antwerp Symphony Orchestra. Henk

Swinnen, the orchestra's artistic director, had suggested a piece in honour of Peter Paul Rubens. Enthusiastic about this idea, Groslot immediately studied the paintings of the Antwerp master, especially his typical techniques of colouring and composition. 'Without doubt,' Groslot writes, 'we can call Rubens self-confident, even directly Romantic: there is a striking relationship between his landscapes and these of the 19th-century Romantics. Furthermore we can note that his work is complex, his tableaux full of movement and "arabesques", and yet all remains everywhere crystal-clear!' Soon, the first musical thoughts appeared and began to coalesce, the form of which was characterised by the composer as a 'through-composed triptych'. On two separate occasions, inspiration overcame Groslot while looking directly at a picture. Gazing upon *The Garden of Love* resulted in the oscillation between major and minor harmonies thus forming the beginning of the piece (*Andante*). The whirring figures in the strings at first sound like trills, but soon begin to move up and down in a sinusoidal way over a wide spectrum of tones, forming a pulsating foundation. Signal motifs from the woodwinds follow. The composer first imagined this dotted-rhythm motif while contemplating Rubens' *The Château de Steen with Hunter*, its diatonic melody strongly contrasting with the harsh, dissonant chords which surround it. The music remains for some time orbiting the opening tonality of D, only beginning to move towards other tonal regions after the opening recurs. A *fortissimo* climax in C is followed by quiet dodecaphonic figures in the violins, piano, marimba and vibraphone, which prepare the motifs of the following passacaglia. A rise in tension leads to the middle section (*Più vivo*), which develops the motifs from the first part in a *scherzo*-like way. A calmer episode leads to a shortened recapitulation of the first section, where it becomes clear that in this composition Groslot reverses the tonal procedures of a Classical sonata movement. Although D major/minor, the tonality of the beginning, is established again, the music moves towards F. The varied return of the passacaglia concludes the piece 'in a kind of silent ecstasy' (Groslot) in F minor.

**Norbert Florian Schuck**

## The Intimacy of Distance

Poems by Elisa Nathalie Heine, b. 1982

### 1 In ganzer Gestalt und vor einem großen Himmel

A gargoyle's gaze, Gothic pining petrified, the city that never looks back, clairvoyant horses in blinders, the pack howling against a catatonic moon, God in vigil coma, frankincense smelling better in ink, the woman who loves the man through crowds, the man who loves the crowds, the crowds who love nothing through anything, the phoniness with which the sun warms, the sincerity with which it sinks, Monet's bridge disappearing up close, faces too, towers traumatized by all those who abused them for a jump, the joy to be hidden, the disaster not to be found, an arm's length always longer than an arm, Warhol's opposites remaining unmet, equivalents just the same, I and they and the vastness of pronouns in between, first and third, singular and plural, the difference they might not make, bubbles and butterflies dying upon touch, babies without, giants too tall to reach the grass at their feet in time, troglodytes and angels, the seeking rope between their windows, a knot, a knife, a predestined falling, letters read through telescopes, the word which has already died by the time you hear it, the *and yet*, the *but still*, the eternal dream of convergence, the ecstasy over a fox turning around nodding before running off.

### 2 the centre coils bottomless

discipline and the day  
must both bend backwards  
must bend the bones and the fractals  
must bend croziers and cones  
must bend sclerotic eyes, the stiffened hair of memory  
must bend tethered colours, even numbers, speech in squares  
must bend the sword and the stone, the hard hands who hold them  
must bend telegraph wires and the antennae of the snail  
must bend the coastline and the flight route of the passerines  
the bend itself must be bent  
curl all edges  
into truth  
no poles no perpendiculars at core  
the hunchbacked and bow-eyed  
blacksmiths who forge the iron  
heart helical  
shall be the wise ones of  
this glowing earth  
i know

### 3 Heimkehr

Beim Muttertier hab ich gegessen, an der nassen  
Quelle am zerträumten Bett  
seine zeitgeschwollene Lunge  
geatmet, hautvertraut  
die liebesfiebrigen Mutterhände an meine  
Augäpfel drückend.  
Zischen.  
Mutter brannte lichterloh in meiner Iris.  
(Und ich verstand:  
handbeschwert lodert Schwertlilienfeuer am stärksten.)  
Sie wurde Funken und Kohle und jede Stofflichkeit  
dazwischen  
in meinen verwaist-vergessenen Augen, die ganz weich  
werdend ob der plötzlichen Zurückerinnerung  
sich zähflüssig in mein Sehnsystem ergossen,  
hineintropften,  
woraus ich komme und was ohne mich geht,  
irgendwann,  
es auffüllten mit Ursprünglichkeit,  
bis ich wieder ganz voll meiner selbst,  
Mutter,  
war.

*By the mother deer, the humid source, I've sat  
by the bed, a dream wreckage,  
breathed her time-swollen lungs  
as love-fevered mother hands  
pressed in intimate touch  
against my eyeballs.  
Hissing,  
Mother blazed bright in my iris.  
(And I understood:  
iris fire burns the fiercest when weighted under hand.)  
She became spark and coal and each material  
between  
in my forgotten orphan eyes that, soft-  
ening at the sudden remembrance,  
poured viscously into my yearning system,  
dripped into it  
what I come from and what leaves without me,  
sometime,  
replenished it with origin  
until I was again filled with my own,  
mother,  
self.*

### 4 Blood Moon Kulning

And so we made moon  
man in our making of the world,  
in our meaning-making,  
so moon may mean man, may mean  
what we know, may be  
what we are.  
Look at us,  
how scared we are,  
all of us, always equal  
at least in our limitation.  
Man pulls moon,  
moon pulls water,  
but only sea is moving closer.  
Tidal imitation bound to fail –  
otherness is fixed.  
And yet we pull.  
And pull.  
And pull  
still.

And so we made red  
blood, made carnal  
the celestial body.  
We veined and arteried the moon,  
basalted skin, simulated  
connubial bliss  
instead of honestly saying:  
*We feel nothing for each other but gravity.*

And we did not stop at the stars  
that we named after gods whose faces we wear,  
given when gods made men them – the only  
image they too could imagine,  
or galaxies we milkified like endless udders  
of cosmic cows grazing in the highest pastures,  
familiarily beautiful with their big benevolent eyes  
and long womanly lashes,  
the cows we covet to call with a song  
to hear the bells of the herd echo across the human valley  
as they approach in our fenceless dream.

Look at us,  
how good we are  
pretending that all which we are not  
still pulsates with us  
and we in it.  
We lie so much in naming,  
pouring ourselves like concrete  
into every unknown crack of nature,  
liquid lies solidifying slowly  
until doubt has been paved all even and smooth  
and viscous language hardened to fiction  
we believe we believe.

But from its shadow unchanged,  
objective-angled,  
moon grins back at us,  
mouthless and manless, remaining  
cratered and cracked.  
Because where we think we see systolic skies  
we breathe nothing but anaemic air.  
Pressing our thumbs against world's wrist  
we falsely feel a beat,  
having confused its pulse with ours  
in our intentional mistakings  
made to make meaning and metaphorize moons.

In the end there's as much man in moon as there's sea  
in shell and everything  
outside of us is just  
a resonating chamber  
whose fillings we call reality,  
reverberating with us into being, us being  
mirror-alone  
with our own echoes  
we believe we believe to be bells  
while singing to cows  
that never come closer.

## 5 State of Matter

I was, now, in winter,  
watching horses  
steam and radiate from their moved forms,  
in stillness,  
across the fields  
the fields,  
crystals killed against brief bodies and breath  
lawfully against the law  
within them,  
pale Icaruses falling  
falling,  
going  
out on equine suns below in each  
of their attempts to touch  
to touch,  
and know  
through conversion  
of ice in air  
to ice on fur  
on fur  
of these warm engines of equivocation on whom  
hypotheticals lie thawed, their flanks  
a quiver  
steady-wet with conjecture, and all white  
but the horses  
the horses  
and I, in winter,  
waiting  
for the end  
to see  
a snow-covered horse  
living.

## Elisa Nathalie Heine



Elisa Nathalie Heine is a poet and writer born and raised in Berlin, a city she has returned to after over a decade of travelling. In her work, she has been exploring shifts in states of consciousness, and the blending of the surreal with the real. She is fascinated by paradoxes, contrasts, and forms of half-states, the liminal, the many shapes of almost. Heine is currently working on her debut novel and a new poetry collection.

## Charlotte Wajnberg



Belgian soprano Charlotte Wajnberg is a laureate of the Queen Elisabeth Competition 2018 where she also won the Audience Prize. She has been internationally praised for her performances of 20th-century repertoire, especially works from the Second Viennese School. Her interpretations of contemporary music have also been widely acclaimed. Wajnberg made her debut at La Monnaie at the age of 21 in Massenet's *Cendrillon*, under the baton of Alain Altinoglu. She has performed as a soloist in works including Mahler's *Symphony No. 4*, Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*, and Mozart's *Coronation Mass*, *Die Zauberflöte* and *Le nozze di Figaro*. She has been invited to perform at Carnegie Hall in the US, Crystal Hall in Slovenia, and deSingel, the Concertgebouw and Vlaamse Opera in Belgium, among others. She has worked with Aaron Wajnberg, Quatuor Voce, the Brussels Philharmonic and La Monnaie Symphony Orchestra. As the artistic director of Antwerp LiedFest, Wajnberg is committed to investing in song repertoire and vocal chamber music, with an emphasis on Belgian repertoire. Wajnberg studied under the guidance of Lucienne Van Deyck.

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

Photo: Guy Kleinblatt

## Brussels Philharmonic



Photo: Liesbet Peremans

The Brussels Philharmonic was founded in 1935 by the Belgian public broadcaster NIR/INR. It enjoys an excellent reputation for performing premieres of new works, and has collaborated with world-renowned composers. The orchestra's historic home is the Flagey Building, one of the top concert halls in the world. At an international level, the Brussels Philharmonic has made a name for itself through regular appearances in major European capitals. International representation by IMG Touring has brought further tours and concerts across Japan and the US. In addition, the orchestra is internationally acclaimed for its expertise in film music, one highlight being the Oscar-winning score for *The Artist*. The orchestra's recordings, released on Deutsche Grammophon, Palazzetto Bru Zane, Klara, Brussels Philharmonic Recordings and Naxos, have been warmly received by the international press and received the ECHO Klassik award, Classica Choc de l'année and Diapason d'Or de l'année, among others. The Brussels Philharmonic is an institution of the Flemish Community.

[www.brusselphilharmonic.be](http://www.brusselphilharmonic.be)

## Robert Groslot



Photo: Luc Peeters

Robert Groslot (b. 1951, Mechelen, Belgium) fuses Anglo-Saxon, Germanic and Latin elements into a new and highly malleable language. Form, virtuosity, sound refinement, 'rediscovered' tonality and rhythmical adventure are the keystones of his music. Groslot often draws inspiration from other art forms, especially poetry and painting. His catalogue consists of large orchestral works, 20 concertos, three multimedia works and many solo and chamber music works. As a composer, Robert Groslot is largely self-taught. His broad experience both as a concert pianist and as a conductor, became the perfect breeding ground for his composing philosophy: to give profound joy to the performing musicians, while striving for the strongest possible impact on the listener. Robert Groslot started his musical career as a pianist. After winning the Alessandro Casagrande Competition (Terni) in 1974 and becoming a laureate at the Queen Elisabeth Competition (Brussels, 1978), he undertook concert trips across four continents through more than 20 countries. He has made many studio, radio and television recordings. Robert Groslot taught piano at several distinguished music institutions in Belgium and the Netherlands until 2009. [www.robertgroslot.eu](http://www.robertgroslot.eu)

The soprano voice occupies a central place in Robert Groslot's vocal music, and in *The Intimacy of Distance* he has created his most ambitious composition yet for voice and orchestra. Exploring how elements of life can only be realised through the experience of distance, this concerto for soprano and orchestra moves through various contrasts to huge transformative effect. The calm sounds of nature alternate with melodic lines and dissonant chords in *My Green Shade Forest*, while *Trittico incantevole* is a radiant piece composed in honour of the painter Peter Paul Rubens.

Robert  
**GROSLOT**  
(b. 1951)

**The Intimacy of Distance (2019) 28:16**

(Text: Elisa Nathalie Heine, b. 1982)

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|----------|--|--------------|
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| <b>2</b> | II. The Centre Coils Bottomless                  | 3:43         |
| <b>3</b> | III. Heimkehr                                    | 6:32         |
| <b>4</b> | IV. Blood Moon Kulning                           | 8:08         |
| <b>5</b> | V. State of Matter                               | 3:12         |
| <b>6</b> | <b>My Green Shade Forest (2015)</b>              | <b>13:01</b> |
| <b>7</b> | <b>Trittico incantevole (2017)</b>               | <b>14:22</b> |

WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS

**Charlotte Wajnberg, Soprano 1–5**

**Brussels Philharmonic • Robert Groslot**

Recorded: 1–2 July 2019 **6** **7** and 31 August–2 September 2020 **1**–**5** at Studio 4, Flagey, Brussels, Belgium • Producer: Stoffel de Laet • Engineer: Floren Van Stichel • Editor: Steven Maes

Booklet notes: Norbert Florian Schuck • Publisher: Groslot Music Editions

The sung texts are included in the booklet, and may also be accessed at [www.naxos.com/libretti/579100.htm](http://www.naxos.com/libretti/579100.htm)

Cover photograph by Guy Kleinblatt

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