

SOLO ALONE AND MORE

1 **CARL NIELSEN** (1865-1931)
Cadenza from Clarinet Concerto (1928) 2:04

IGOR STRAVINSKY (1882-1971)
Three Pieces for Clarinet Solo (1919)

2 **No. I** 1:43

3 **No. II** 1:14

4 **No. III** 1:21

5 **BENT SØRENSEN** (b.1958)
Lontanamente Fragments of a Waltz (2012)* ..6:04

6 **METTE NIELSEN** (b.1985)
Alone for basset clarinet
(2021; written for Jonas Frølund)* 11:09



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7 **OLIVIER MESSIAEN** (1908-1992)
Abîme des oiseaux (1940)
from Quatuor pour la Fin du Temps
(1940-1941) 9:17

8 **GUNNAR BERG** (1909-1989)
Pour clarinette seule I (1957)* 14:54

9 **POUL RUDERS** (b.1949)
Tattoo for One (1984) 7:08

10 **RICHARD WAGNER** (1813-1883)
Solo from Act III of Tristan und Isolde
(1859)** 3:09

11 **SIMON STEEN-ANDERSEN** (b.1976)
De Profundis (2000/2019)*** 15:15

Total 73:40

*World premiere recording.

**Originally written for cor anglais; world
premiere recording as played on bass clarinet.

***Originally written for soprano saxophone; world premiere
recording of the 2019 version for bass clarinet.

SOLO ALONE AND MORE

JONAS FRØLUND



JONAS LYSKJÆR FRØLUND

is a young Danish clarinetist, born in 1996 in Himmelev near Roskilde.



Jonas Frølund's formal musical education began in Copenhagen with John Kruse as his principal teacher. An international prizewinner, he moved on from the Royal Danish Academy of Music (DKDM) to the Paris Conservatoire (CNSMDP) with Pascal Moragues and Philippe Berrod as his principal teachers, graduating with flying colours in Paris 2022.

Jonas Frølund's repertoire includes everything from the late 1700s till today – he is equally fond of solo work, chamber music and concertos and is busy exploring these fields as an active and sought-after musician as well as an inventive first-mover and back-stage worker, notably as co-founder and member of the rising Copenhagen-based international wind quintet and concert organiser V Coloris. He is principal clarinet and board member in The Danish Chamber Orchestra, a perfect match for him both artistically and in matters of values and standards. Already in his student years he worked as an interim group leader in the Malmö Symphony Orchestra – an experience that proved highly rewarding but paradoxically also helped him settle for a rising career as an artist-entrepreneur with goals other than mainly playing in opera and symphony orchestras (which he is very skilled at, actually). His brilliant technique is matched by an inquisitive and inventive mind, and it is only natural that on one hand he inspires contemporary composers to write challenging new stuff for him while on the other he will dive into the sea of music older than the clarinet as an instrument to find pieces that might fit his concert activities and widen his circle of musical partners. His acute ear and lively spirit allow him to also explore the world of improvisation and jamming; a precise and structured approach to music and to life serves him well as a budding organiser of practical music-making such as festivals and events, etc.

SOLO ALONE AND MORE is the first album to present Jonas Frølund the clarinet virtuoso, the musician and indeed the programme editor who aims to take the listener on an hour-long musical journey. A notable chamber music recording is the Ruders album issued by OUR Recordings in 2022, and in May 2023 Dacapo released a Mette Nielsen portrait album, *Frozen Moments*, comprising among other works three chamber music pieces from 2021, *Alone*, *Together*, and *Apart*, closely related and in the first two instances written for and played by Jonas Frølund. As an orchestral clarinet leader he can be heard in the Naxos box of the Brahms symphonies released by The Danish Chamber Orchestra in 2022; 2020 saw the appearance of an independent Dinu Lipatti release from V Coloris, who in 2023 even released a single of Bartók's *Six Romanian Folk Dances* in their own arrangements. Two videos of Jonas Frølund performing Gunnar Berg's *Pour clarinette seule* I and II in a unique Jutland setting of landscape, architecture and modern art are offered by the Edition Svitzer YouTube channel (2023).

SOLO ALONE AND MORE SAME BUT DIFFERENT

9 pieces and 3 clarinets An intro and 9 texts

*Played by Jonas Frølund; Written for this album by
recorded in Malmö, 2021 Svend Ravnkilde in 2021*

When he planned this programme for international release on his debut album, the then 25-year old Danish clarinetist **Jonas Lyskjær Frølund** had three goals in mind – to present himself as an instrumentalist and, indeed, as a musician; to present the clarinet ‘as such’, choosing to work his way downwards from the soprano in Bb and A to the alto (basset) and the bass; and, finally, to present all of the above in music written during a century of New Music, spanning from immediately after WW1 to literally a few months before the recordings took place in June 2021 ... that is, with one exception: a certain timelessly ‘New’ woodwind solo turns up from a mid-19th century German opera that many observers regard as the mother of all Modern Music, in that respect challenged only by Stravinsky’s *Sacre* from 1913, namely Wagner’s *Tristan* from 1859. All music presented on this album is played on a solo clarinet ... again, with one exception: in the *De Profundis* by Simon Steen-Andersen the woodwind soloist is even expected to handle a number of percussion instruments. It was in fact Jonas Frølund who gave the world-first performance of that remarkable piece in its new version for bass clarinet rather than soprano saxophone – this happened on 11 May 2021 in Copenhagen, on which occasion he also gave the world premiere of a piece newly written for him by Mette Nielsen, the basset clarinet solo *Alone*.

In May 2021, the event in KoncertKirken at Blågårds Plads was named SOLO ALONE TOGETHER – aptly so, in that for some pieces Jonas Frølund was joined by a pianist or played against himself in a pre-recording. The present album, however, is called SOLO ALONE AND MORE – it comprises the seven solo pieces from the concert and adds another two, making eleven tracks in all (the Stravinsky item is cast in three separate movements). Seven of those tracks offer genuinely free-standing pieces of concert music for solo clarinet – in addition, however, there is a complete solo movement from a quartet (Messiaen) and a complete solo cadenza from a concerto (Carl Nielsen), in the original score neatly set off from the orchestral music by a tiny pause at either end; there is even a uniquely long instrumental solo that originally grows imperceptibly from the dying sound of the orchestra in the opera pit and in the end touches ground on a hushed tremolo in the strings, who are entering again to usher in the first sounds of human voices on the stage (Wagner); and finally, a solo piece (Steen-Andersen) where the clarinetist must

also engage a small array of percussion instruments. Mette Nielsen’s piece is yet another special case – it is a clarinet solo that stands alone and proves perfectly capable of holding its ground without the string trio that surrounds the very same woodwind music in her quartet, *Together*.

Six out of nine composers here are Danish, and among those at least one is a household name to apprentice and master clarinetists all over the world: Carl Nielsen. How come, then, that he should figure with a single track lasting but two minutes? Well, first of all because, sadly, Carl Nielsen never composed any free-standing pieces for solo clarinet; then, because this single page, lifted from his *Clarinet Concerto*, is a solo cadenza that works admirably as an item on its own; and, not least, because in this tiny solo Carl Nielsen manages to capture and unfold so much of what the clarinet is, and what the clarinet can do – which is why his *Cadenza* chimes in so well with all other pieces offered on this album. And artistically speaking, Carl Nielsen (like his exact contemporary in Finland, Sibelius) to this day stands undisputed as the towering figure in the musical history of his country, meaning that even today any Danish composer is somehow or other up against Nielsen as a delightful, frightening, inspiring, boring presence, be it in the latterday composer’s own mind or in that of audiences and critics. For Jonas Frølund the performer it was pure joy to be able to sneak Carl Nielsen in here ... side by side with Wagner, so often claimed to be Nielsen’s absolute opposite.

The Danish pieces are distributed fairly evenly in time from Carl Nielsen 1928 over Gunnar Berg 1957 and Poul Ruders 1984 to Simon Steen-Andersen 2000, Bent Sørensen 2012 and finally Mette Nielsen 2021. Lots of new stuff there to catch the ear and interest of anyone with a fondness for the clarinet – and to balance all that, two modern classics by two modern classics, the *Three Pieces* by Stravinsky 1919 and the *Abîme* solo 1940 from Messiaen’s Quatuor ... not forgetting Wagner 1859, of course: his “traurige Weise”, a gem at all times but perhaps from now on headed for clarinet fame away from its original setting in *Tristan*, where it is a solo for the cor anglais.

Now, what is it about the clarinet that makes it so special? As a single-reed woodwind instrument it is ancient and can be played by anyone; in its modern, highly developed form it is very demanding and incredibly versatile. Kurt Weill offered fourteen ways to describe the rain – surely it takes many more to describe the clarinet, and the tracks on this album invite us in to look around in a world of very diverse sounds: everything from mellifluous warblings to strident howls; from swelling and waning on one long-held note to showers of rapid notes that are sharp as tacks; from microtonal shadings and absolute diatonic purity to latterday multiphonics and even controlled noise produced by engaging the metal parts

mounted on the hard-wood tube that constitutes the body of the instrument. As a musician and a performer, the clarinetist is more than doubly challenged by a selection of pieces such as these: he is expected to adhere precisely and exclusively to the written score, or he is allowed the exacting freedom of calibration: judging from the time, the place, the situation how the flow of the piece should go, or he is even called upon to decide for himself (Jonas, with his own clarinets, the basset newly made to order) what specific sounds to base his personal rendition on.

Regardless of a composer's personal style, general style, practice(s) and technique(s), the range and scope offered by the clarinet are really very wide, and this album is a catalogue of ways the clarinet can sound, and ways that music can be written for it – but Jonas Frølund would not be himself had he not planned the programme to offer, first of all, a listening experience that is musical more than anything else: a listener's voyage in a varied landscape, meeting oneself at every turn, losing oneself in unexpected vistas, or taking time to examine novelties. Jonas Frølund sees himself as a musician who happens to be a virtuoso clarinetist – and so his debut solo album on the clarinet merits being viewed also as a statement about music: a statement in music about music, and a discourse on music as something vital and wholesome in this troubled day and age.



**SAME BUT DIFFERENT
DIFFERENT AND SAME**

Eight composers plus one
A hundred years plus one
1919-2021 and 1859

Eight composers plus one
Nine pieces, eleven tracks
A listener's guide



Track 1

CARL NIELSEN (1865-1931)

Cadenza from *Clarinet Concerto* (1928)

Among Mozart's works for the clarinet, two late pieces have rightfully achieved iconic status: the Quintet, KV 581, and the Concerto, KV 622. Both were written for Anton Stadler and his basset clarinet – and charmingly, the ardent Mozart admirer **CARL NIELSEN** (1865-1931) also wrote two important late works calling for the clarinet and having a particular musician in mind. In Nielsen's case, the instrument was the soprano clarinet, and the master playing it was Aage Oxenvad; even the works in question match those by Mozart – one is chamber music, the Woodwind Quintet, opus 43 / CNW 70, from 1922, and the other is the Clarinet Concerto, opus 57 / CNW 43, from 1928. Sadly, no recording exists of Oxenvad playing 'his' Concerto (or the two works by Mozart), but he can be heard in Nielsen's Woodwind Quintet and in his little humorous *Serenata in vano*, CNW 69, from 1914 – and it is worth noticing that Oxenvad passed the art of playing Nielsen (not least the Concerto) on to his pupils, one of whom was Tage Scharff, who would become another important Danish clarinet teacher himself and for whom Gunnar Berg fashioned his *Pour clarinette seule II* (1961; see note for Track 8, *Pour clarinette seule I* from 1957). As a matter of academic fact, a golden chain of Danish master clarinetists links Jonas Frølund directly backwards in time and local tradition, as his teacher, John Kruse, was trained by Jens Schou, who was trained by Tage Scharff, who was trained by Aage Oxenvad.

By the way – worth noticing and indeed exploring is a 7-minute *Tema med Variationer*, opus 14 (subtitled *Studie for Solo-Clarinet*; published by Edition Wilhelm Hansen) from 1927, written by one of Nielsen's few pupils, Jørgen Bentzon (1897-1951), and dedicated to Aage Oxenvad. The work points in two, maybe even three directions – it is a study of the soprano clarinet (Bb or A) and possibly (like in Nielsen) a character study of Oxenvad; then there is the element of training of clarinet technique, and finally this might even be preparatory work on the part of a young composer looking forward to writing a concerto for the instrument and for that particular player? If so, Nielsen's novel masterpiece of 1928 would have stopped Jørgen Bentzon in his tracks, but the other meanings of the word study may well lie behind

the fact that he does not allow his fancy to carry the music along in any rhapsodic manner in this work – on the contrary, there is method to the way he uses the single variations for his examinations and deliberately sets the course of a music that unfolds in time, in a landscape of rhythms and phrases and in a space defined by the ambitus and the registers of the soprano clarinet.

We know that Aage Oxenvad even played the *Three Pieces* by Stravinsky (they were published in 1920) (Tracks 2-4), and at the spectacular all-Stravinsky gala concert on 2 December 1925 in Copenhagen Oxenvad and his Royal Danish Orchestra colleague Peder Lynged joined the composer for a performance of the trio suite from the *Soldier ...* with Carl Nielsen enjoying the whole thing from his seat in the first row, before going on to enjoy the company of Stravinsky at a gala supper afterwards (when he should have been at home, putting the final touches to his Sixth Symphony, due to be premiered at his own gala concert on 11 december, tsk tsk).

Mozart's Clarinet Concerto is considered to be unsurpassable, but it is not unparalleled in as much as Nielsen's Concerto is seen as its latterday counterpart, no less a challenging presence on the curriculum of any serious student of the clarinet and in the repertoire of any clarinet virtuoso. Also, like with Mozart, Nielsen's Clarinet Concerto is considered to be one of the composer's finest achievements and a work that seems to both sum up and prophesy – in this it follows the Sixth Symphony and the Flute Concerto and is followed by the mighty *Commotio* for organ and the tiny overture for *Amor og Digteren*. Mozart's Clarinet Concerto reigns supreme – it is not in any way challenged by Nielsen's, nor would it have crossed Nielsen's mind to try and make it do so. On the contrary, Mozart's unerringly beautiful Concerto is complemented and balanced by Nielsen's and its marvelously precise otherness. Distilling the miraculous achievement of a short life, Mozart's 1791 Concerto was of its time and in its time yet was born with the mark of a timeless classic; distilling the achievement of a much longer life, Nielsen's 1928 Concerto was of its time and in its time and offers a kind of modernity that must impress even observers who did not, and do not, like 'serious' music to misbehave, least of all music flowing from the pen of 'their' Nielsen, at the time firmly established as the nation's leading figure in music but already also on his way to be (mis)used as a bulwark against Wagnerism on one hand and modernistic radicalism on the other.

It was through sonatas of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven as well as Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* that Carl August – the spiky-haired little son of a humble house-painter-cum-fiddler-and-cometist in rural Funen – had gained entrance to the world of great music and thereby irrevocably stepped into his own world of great new music. His late works in their 1920s setting show that he managed to keep right on

track, going forward and forward, toiling on in the face of many worrying signs o' the times, but also being rightly hailed by much younger composers abroad as one of theirs.

Nielsen's *Clarinet Concerto* clearly falls in three movements, but they are interlocked and intimately connected. The **Cadenza** comes in the first movement and is set neatly apart yet forms integral part of the development of the thematic material; it is allowed time to let silence be audible at both ends, and in-between it offers a meditative spell, claiming a moment for itself between what was and what follows, a slim finely arched bridge between larger areas of intense involvement of the clarinet with the surrounding chamber orchestra, including that novelty, a lively snare-drum (– even if, unlike the situation in Nielsen's 5th Symphony of 1922, where an ordinary military snare drum is let loose and threatens to disrupt the proceedings, the composer in 1928 asks for a snare drum that is as small and high-pitched as possible: a wee thing that is well-mannered and 'concertante', at times charmingly engaged in a dialogue with the woodwind soloist. By quirky yet telling coincidence, the concluding track on the present solo clarinet album of New Music was composed by Nielsen's Danish later-day Akademie successor in Berlin (see note for Track 11) and demands that the performer, all alone on the stage, can manage to effortlessly and meaningfully offer us a modern interplay of sounds from clarinet and percussion instruments).

– All music by Carl Nielsen is available from the Carl Nielsen Udgaven in a new critically revised edition, the **Clarinet Concerto** included.



Tracks 2-4

IGOR STRAVINSKY (1882-1971)
Three Pieces for Clarinet Solo (1919)

In the years leading up to WW1, the scores that composers like Ravel and Stravinsky made to order for Diaghilev and his Ballets Russes were extremely precise and fastidious yet unashamedly lavish and quite extraordinary in the demands they made on the huge orchestral forces amassed in the pit. In the case of **IGOR STRAVINSKY** (1882-1971) it is fascinating to see him proceed directly from the glittering world of grand Russian turn-of-the-century ballet still present in *The Firebird* 1909/10 into an almost uncanny anticipation of modern European 1920s style(s) in *Petrushka* 1910/11 and then seemingly taking a quick step back in order to be able to perform his phenomenal headlong dive into unknown, unknowable worlds of New 20th-century music with *The Rite of Spring* 1911/13. After which the Great War of 1914/1918 forced, allowed, and taught him to exploit his innate gift for simplicity (gentle or brutal, but always impressive and telling; the craftsmanship always impeccable, always inventive) – and so it came about that after sketches made in 1918 Stravinsky could present a state-of-avantgarde-art masterpiece such as the ***Three Pieces for Clarinet Solo*** of 1919, a tiny born classic in the repertoire for soprano clarinet, preferably in A for the first two movements and in Bb for the last; he dedicated them to Werner Reinhart, a friend and collaborator who played the clarinet.

The first piece is muted and moody, moving quietly about in the deepest range of the instrument without exploiting the characteristic 'chest notes' of the chalumeau register when it is played above the sempre piano level prescribed here. The second piece likewise never rises above mezzoforte, but it moves quickly, it flies high and trots deep, and where the first piece was calm and measured, the second piece is volatile and perhaps nervous, having Stravinsky decide against putting bar lines in the score. The third piece, finally, is something different altogether and comes as a release of pent-up energy. After the built-in short break for a change of instrument from A to Bb we are abruptly treated to insistent music that speaks in no uncertain terms: assertive and forte from start to finish, keeping to the high register, sputtering a lot of sharply articulated notes and maintaining a jazzy drive all the way to what is actually the proud

first fortissimo marking in the entire set of **Three Pieces** ... followed by a quiet turn round the corner: There! Where?? Gone!!!

– **Three Pieces for Clarinet Solo** is published by Chester Music Ltd



Track 5

BENT SØRENSEN (b.1958)

Lontanamente *Fragments of a Waltz*
(2012; world premiere recording)

To come from Nielsen's *Cadenza* (Track 1) to Stravinsky's *Three Pieces* (Tracks 2-4) is not really to enter another world – a decade apart in time, they share the same cat-like delicate, attentive way of moving through musical time and musical space, now lingering, now carefully putting first one paw down, then another; now jumping with graceful élan, now skipping along in a sudden burst of speed and energy. Together, these four solo pieces inhabit a gentle nocturnal landscape with a moon and at least a Pierrot and an Arlequin, maybe even a Colombine – and in such a landscape rise the melancholy strains of **Lontanamente** by **BENT SØRENSEN** (b.1958), a true lyricist, nationally as well as internationally regarded as one of the key figures in today's Danish classical music, both as a composer and as a teacher. The Italian adverb 'lontanamente' means 'distantly' or 'vaguely'. The piece explores the searching qualities already present in the pieces by Nielsen and Stravinsky, and finally arrives at a little tune of the kind you would almost expect to find in the treasure trove of sublimely simple strophic songs composed by Nielsen and immediately embraced by the Danish people as theirs. And actually – in the years before he entered the Royal Danish Academy of Music in 1983 to study and immediately made his name with the string quartet *Alman*, Bent Sørensen's life with music had been quite a modest one like Nielsen's in his time, Sørensen likewise joining folk music people of the day and bringing along, well, not a violin like Nielsen but a guitar and a ... clarinet.

Sørensen has given his set of variations-on-their-way-towards-a-theme a subtitle, namely **Fragments of a Waltz**. The piece is for soprano clarinet in Bb, it falls in six sections with no break between them, and it was commissioned by the 5th Carl Nielsen International Clarinet Competition for their early-summer event in Odense in 2013 – that year, Jonas Frølund at 17 was the youngest competitor and like everyone played this obligatory new piece of contemporary solo music for the first time; ten years later he is even the first to issue a recording of it.

– **Lontanamente** is published by Edition Wilhelm Hansen.



Track 6

METTE NIELSEN (b.1985)

Alone for basset clarinet

(2021; written for Jonas Frølund; world premiere recording)

As mentioned above (Track 1) Mozart wrote his Quintet, KV 581, and his Concerto, KV 622, for the newly invented alto clarinet, the basset. Its timbre is different from that of the soprano, and the downward range is interestingly wider. The moment Jonas Frølund received the basset in A that he ordered in 2020 (actually, it was a prize he won in 2019) he started re-practising his Mozart on it and also looked around for someone to write him new music for the instrument. Right away he landed a double catch – because for their second round, in July 2021, the enterprising young *Festival & Friends* event in Copenhagen commissioned a quartet for basset and string trio, *Together* (premiered on 13 July 2021), whilst for the 40th ‘Modern Monday’ concert of New Music (held on 11 May 2021; yes, a Tuesday) as well as for release on this very album the Copenhagen-based Working Group Gunnar Berg commissioned a solo piece, ***Alone***. One month apart, these two world premieres took place at KoncertKirken at demotic Nørrebro in central Copenhagen. The lucky composer in either case was **METTE NIELSEN** (b.1985; a Dane and from Funen like Carl Nielsen but no relative of his) and she chose to cast the two works as companion pieces, a pair of near-identical twins working the very same material differently with a view to explore the potentials of the basset in company and on its own: Together and alone.

Alone was finished in April 2021 and took much inspiration from consultations with Jonas Frølund about the specific characteristics of his new instrument and what specifically he could do with it. In its structure, the piece is fairly simply based on a spiral of notes, explored both by the solo basset clarinet – again, exploring its individual arsenal of sounds, including multiphonics – and by the solo performer, allowing him to judge from the time and the place how best to address the listener with a finely balanced alternation between sounded music and its volatile shadows, the pause that is not just silence; the halt that means no stop.

The composer says: “The clarinet is alone. That is not necessarily a bad thing. When left to itself it can be both lonely and free. It has been placed in a sound world that it must be content to inhabit on its own, moving through the rooms, watchful, searching.” (Mette Nielsen, April 2021; translated by Svend Ravnkilde).

Alone falls in three parts but unfolds in a single slow flow – the first part is very brief, the second is longer, and the meditative third is the longest. Whereas clarinet multiphonics are called for in the third part, the second part engages the clarinetist’s singing voice for a number of short duo passages. In the present recording we hear the male voice of Jonas Frølund at one octave below the written notes – it goes without saying, however, that a female voice in the same register as the clarinet will make the same passages sound rather different, and that is precisely the point: ***Alone*** is a piece that embraces and exposes the characteristics of the particular player and those of their chosen instrument at this particular performance in this particular venue before this particular audience.

The clarinet plays exactly the same music in ***Alone*** and in *Together*, except that there are more pauses in the clarinet part in the quartet.

It merits mentioning that in the summer of 2021, a third commission engaged Mette Nielsen, one that came from Nyborg Slotskonserter for their concert on 15 August already. Writing for the full NOVO Quartet, this time, not just three of them as in *Together* in Copenhagen on 13 July, the composer decided to delete the basset clarinet part entirely from that mixed quartet score and introduce yet another violin part, at the same time working the material and the scope of the music so as to come up with already now a third investigation of her basic concept here. The younger sibling thus joining the already existing pair of near-identical twins is a ‘normal’ string quartet work, aptly named *Apart* – it stands a little *à part*, to a side, and it falls apart in the end ... as all things must.

– ***Alone*** is published by Edition•S, as are its two companion pieces.

In recordings made by Jonas Frølund and the NOVO Quartet, the complete 2021 trilogy of *Alone*, *Together*, and *Apart* can be heard on the Mette Nielsen album *Frozen Moments* from Dacapo (May 2023).

This album is dedicated to the memory of producer Hjarne Fessel (1970 - 2021) who sadly passed away during the planning of the recording session.





Track 7

OLIVIER MESSIAEN (1908-1992)

Abîme des oiseaux (1940)

(*Abys of the Birds* from *Quatuor pour la Fin du Temps*,
1940-1941)

Europe's darkest hour of all could have proved fatal even for one of the rising stars on a music scene that had managed to take up from 'yesterday's world' after the cataclysmic Great War of 1914/1918: **OLIVIER MESSIAEN** (1908-1992). As of 28 July 1940, this young French multi-talent found himself held captive at the newly-established Stalag VIII A at Görlitz in Nazi Germany. A *Stalag* was not one of the many Third Reich concentration camps, effective since 1933 and widely distributed; nor indeed was it one of Hitler's killing centres, later on in WW2 to be located primarily in occupied Poland – no, a *Stalag* was the standard *Wehrmacht* (German Army) prisoner-of-war encampment and as such a thoroughly tested and pretty grim affair already; situated outside the present-day Polish town of Zgorzelec, this new *Stalag* at Görlitz took some 30,000 enemy captives. The story about how Messiaen's *Quatuor pour la Fin du Temps* (Quartet for the End of Time) came to be and was premiered at the camp on 15 January 1941, and the story about how the composer was able to leave, that same year – those are tales as pitiful as they are touching and inspiring. As for the *Quatuor* as such, it has proved seminal in so many respects and even offers a fine way into the spiritual and musical world of Messiaen as a towering figure in music after WW2, truly a seminal presence himself.

Quatuor pour la Fin du Temps is scored for violin, clarinet, cello and piano – but the four of them come together in the usual chamber music fashion for three out of eight movements only (not counting the apocalyptic unison of the *Danse de la fureur*). Very striking is the long clarinet solo ***Abîme des oiseaux*** (*Abys of the Birds*) that forms the third movement but was the first piece to have been written, namely during the first half of 1940.

Messiaen had been mobilised as a soldier in the French army from September 1939; in the early summer of 1940, however, he had been captured by the Germans and placed in a prison camp in France before entering the Görlitz *Stalag* on 28 July. It was during his time as a free French soldier that he began sketching his clarinet solo and also met Henri Akoka, a Jewish-Algerian French clarinetist, as well as the

cellist Etienne Pasquier. The three of them kept together, when they were taken to the prison camp in France before the transfer to Görlitz. During that interim period, Messiaen continued work on the solo, and it was first performed – however tentatively – by Akoka with Pasquier in the role as music stand and the composer offering moral support: "Don't worry, you'll nail it, trust me!"

So, the story of ***Abîme*** as a self-contained clarinet piece is essentially a pre-Görlitz affair. Eventually, however, ending up as the third movement of the *Quatuor* and technically demanding in the extreme, this almost hypnotic solo piece moves at an impossibly slow pace, with one endlessly long swelling note in the middle-high register stopping the show again and again to daringly recreate sound and time from nothing to something – on one hand contrasting with sprays of quick figures that inhabit the upper ranges of the ambitus of the Bb soprano clarinet, and on the other, contrasting with muted ruminations in the deep register of the instrument (– the signature stark 'chest note' potential of the soprano clarinet is saved for a concluding fortissimo four-note figure).

Any similarity between moments in this soliloquy and in that from the opening of *Tristan III* (cf. ***Solo***, Track 10) may well have been intentional on the part of the young French composer, or maybe he was guided by his well-informed subconscious – for indeed that particular Wagner opera and the age-old story behind its plot held a deep fascination for Messiaen.

In his comprehensive preface to the *Quatuor*, printed in the score, Messiaen offers a brief note on ***Abîme***, saying that if the abyss is Time with its sadness and weariness, the birds are quite the opposite: our desire for light, for stars, for rainbows, and for jubilant lines of song without words.

Messiaen – an authority on bird song, local as well as exotic – was heard to say that the clarinet is a blackbird, and indeed Henri Akoka's hair was black as a blackbird's feathers. One more connotation comes to mind – the *Journal : 1935-1939 : Derniers beaux jours* by Julien Green; published in 1939, it could well have been known, indeed owned, by Messiaen at the time, as Green was quite a presence in the teeming French intelligentsia of the 1930s.

Latterday ace clarinetist Martin Fröst relates how a teacher of his once spent time with Messiaen and on the subject of this solo heard the composer mentioning big birds hovering above an abyss. As for Green – in his concluding chapter, *Journal sans date*, he thinks back on his first concert experience, in the old Trocadéro in Paris, towards the end of the Great War. The programme, so far, had been popular items all-sorts till, after the interval, a new world was revealed to Green by those magical first measures of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, with the orchestra now guiding the unsuspecting young person towards a

lifechanging new fascination. Green remembers that moment ever so clearly – within a profound silence, a uniform and deep murmur and the flight of a black bird above the abyss.

– *Quatuor pour la Fin du Temps* is published by Editions Durand et Cie.



Track 8

GUNNAR BERG (1909-1989)

Pour clarinette seule I

(*For Clarinet Solo I*, 1957; world premiere recording)

Jens Rossel at 75, thinking back, says to Jonas Frølund at 25, recording the fast sections of Pour clarinette seule I on 11 June 2021: “You know, Jonas, Gunnar was a man who liked to go to extremes!” Jonas, in a flash: “That commends him to me!”

There is no denying that the word “uncompromising” seems to spring to mind when people in the know are asked to characterise the music of **GUNNAR BERG** (1909-1989) and the person behind it: Gunnar Berg as a figure in Danish and international New Music but also the man himself. Others – to this day a majority, and they can be ever so knowledgeable – will say, Gunnar Who?? or they will put you right, going ‘Berg? His first name was Alban! He wrote those amazing four pieces for clarinet and piano, but that was in 1913, and Alban died in 1935, so what might we be talking about here, please?’

Gunnar Berg was a rather unique figure in the history of Danish 20th-century music, and for many he still remains a rather obscure figure in the field of New Music, his working space as a diligent and original composer, eking out a harsh artist’s life of worries and isolation. He was a crucial 10 years younger than Danish post-WW1 Nielsen adepts such as Jørgen Bentzon and Finn Høffding, and he was a crucial 20+ years older than the Danish post-WW2 triad of stars, Ib Nørholm (b.1931), Per Nørgård and Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen (both b.1932). And when the towering figure of Carl Nielsen himself passed away, late in 1931, who but young Gunnar Berg (a business student, actually) would decide, in 1932, that his future was in music, grabbing his bicycle and riding all the way to Salzburg for the first of many ventures abroad in search of new vital, worthwhile musical scenes away from Copenhagen?

The following decades saw Gunnar Berg heading south, again and again, to get personally acquainted with the kind of international avant-garde music that had been and was being written, studied, played and taught in hot-beds such as Salzburg, Vienna, Paris, and Darmstadt, securing for himself a first-hand and hands-on knowledge of the scenes (even if, surprisingly, it would seem that Gunnar Berg never visited the actual city of Vienna), the seminal works (past and present, but mostly unknown in Denmark at

the time), the experiments, the ideas and techniques, the important composers, teachers and movers, the first-movers and the visionaries ... in the process notably encountering music and musicians from those still so distant United States across the Atlantic. In so doing, Gunnar Berg left behind the stagnant, smug and stifling national Danish post-Nielsen musical life of the 1930s and 1940s, only to find – upon finally settling in Denmark in 1958 after a full decade spent in Paris – that nothing much had changed at home.

All his international insider's knowledge made even more of an outsider of Gunnar Berg than he was already as an ugly duckling who had defiantly chosen the world over the village pond and after his return could so easily be dismissed and left to his own modernistic devices. From the very start of his career as a composer Gunnar Berg had distinguished himself through technical and artistic precision and restraint combined with an impressive power of expression, and as of 1950 he stuck to a personal way with serial composition, steadfastly committed to a life's work of mainly instrumental music. Probably prodded by a number of national and international markings of his centenary in 2009, Gunnar Berg's isolated position has finally started to shift – his music is being played, published, studied, understood, nay even enjoyed!

As for Jonas Frølund, making his name, he had just turned 21 when he first played music by Gunnar Berg, the *Pour clarinette seule II*. This was at one of the 'Modern Monday' concerts in Copenhagen in 2017, and the young musician spoke about how he was attracted by such an "abstract but wonderful universe, intriguing and exciting with its clear ideas and fine perception of what the clarinet can do at its best. This makes the piece a challenge in a positive way, and it takes a high level of concentration. Gunnar Berg never compromises, not even on the slightest detail, and I really appreciate that in him. He is a very inquisitive and adventurous composer, and he makes it sound as if it is the clarinetist himself who stands there examining the possibilities of his instrument and being inspired by what he finds."

The soprano clarinet holds a prominent place in Gunnar Berg's chamber music. Three pieces that are among the most frequently performed of those works also neatly trace his way in the 1940s and 1950s. The three-movement *Sonata* 1942 for flute and clarinet is neo-classical; the *Filandre* 1953 for flute, clarinet and violin is static and flickering, and the piece quaintly called – *pour clarinette et violon* 1959 (yes, that – forms part of the title) is expressionistic and shows the prominent position that Webern had won on Gunnar Berg's inner firmament.

Gunnar Berg brought his *Pour clarinette seule I* along, when he returned to Denmark after his long stay in Paris – it was written for Gloria Ramsey, an American clarinetist, and it is dated Neuilly-sur-Seine, 1957. Duration: around 15'.

Pour clarinette seule II is dated July 1961 in Hellerup, just north of Copenhagen, because during that summer, Gunnar Berg stayed at the house of composer Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen while he wrote this piece for the Danish clarinetist Tage Scharff on the occasion of three Gunnar Berg portrait concerts, organized by the three Scandinavian ISCM sections to be held in Copenhagen, Stockholm and Oslo in the autumn. Duration: around 12'.

The two works are independent yet related – a pair of siblings that share a common subtitle, **Quatre aspects et trois mouvements pour clarinette seule** (*Four Aspects and Three Movements for Clarinet Solo*). Neither score uses bar lines, and the formal layout is the same: ABABABA: four areas of quiet musings in the deep range and three longer stretches of a much more lively character, exploring the soprano clarinet within a much wider ambitus and scope.

The main differences between the two versions of *Pour clarinette seule* are Gunnar Berg's changed situation and the way the music presents itself to the listener.

The version from 1957, *Pour clarinette seule I*, was written with Gunnar Berg still nesting in 'his' Parisian environment, enjoying no little interest from Americans there – the piece is clearly laid out, separating what is more 'dreamy' (the aspects) from what is more 'enterprising' (the movements); it is spectacular and differentiated, and it makes full use of its quarter of an hour's playing time. A weighty statement on the part of a Paris-based composer of absolutely modern music, the piece addressed the kind of interested and/or open-minded performers and listeners he knew existed in central parts of the Old World and across the Atlantic.

The version from 1961, *Pour clarinette seule II*, found Gunnar Berg having returned from the sophisticated, well-informed avant-garde scene *là-bas* to the chillingly cloistered world of Danish musical life after WW2. Thanks not least to the efforts of the Norwegian Knut Wiggen of Fylkingen in Stockholm, Sweden, Gunnar Berg the Dane was offered the unique chance of seeing his latest solo and chamber music presented in one sweep in the three Scandinavian capitals, performed by eminent Danish players taking an active interest in contemporary music – and what did he do, uncompromising as always? He decided to modify his Paris clarinet solo, letting it meander its way in time and musical space without the road signs of the 1957 version – shorter indeed by several minutes, the 1961 Copenhagen version is trimmed and

slimmed but also less 'listener-friendly' than its Paris 1957 predecessor in that it comes across as a long, flowing soliloquy rather than an elegant extended rondo of sorts.

Seemingly the first Dane to produce a work based entirely on the dodecaphonic technique, Gunnar Berg put "Paris 1950" against the concluding fortissimo chord of that *Suite pour violoncelle seule*. With its obvious historical interest, the 14-minute 6-movement piece is perhaps less interesting from a musical point of view; much more enjoyable is that other Gunnar Berg first, the wholly serialistic trio *Filandre* from 1953 ... and by 1957, Gunnar Berg's *clarinette seule* is all ease and confidence, joining Messiaen's universe birds in the magical garden of an iconoclastic and ordered New Music that was of its time and in its time whilst also looking forward, into the future – a complex garden laid out by groundbreaking masters such as Arnold, Anton and Alban, that brilliant Team Forward from a lost Vienna steeped in tradition; an enticing world of wild invention and strictest rules; a creative playground and arena that now, after the apocalypse of the Second World War, attracted composers from near and far with their diversity of hopes for music, for art, for humanity.

"*C'est la mer mêlée / Au soleil*," Rimbaud wrote of Eternity – sea and sun as one. Way back in the world of the 19th century the same young genius also famously demanded that one be absolutely modern. There is no denying that Gunnar Berg was a resolute modernist – armed with the ideas, the skills and the guts it took.

– *Pour clarinette seule I* and its sister work are published together by Edition Svitzer. Two videos that show Jonas Frølund playing the two pieces in unique settings of landscape, architecture and modern art at Birk Centerpark in Herning, Jutland, are available on the YouTube channel of Edition Svitzer.



Track 9

POUL RUDERS (b.1949)

Tattoo for One (1984)

As the true showpiece of the show, this *tour de force* highlights the fact that not every item on a circus programme is necessarily the right thing for those faint at heart or for unsuspecting kindergarten toddlers on their first visit. The composer's career has taken both him and his scores far abroad from Denmark, and early on already it was clear that **POUL RUDERS** (b.1949) even possesses the instinct, the knowledge and the technique(s) of a born performer. Here is a composer who, with a never-failing assessment of what is called for and when, really knows how to captivate and steer his audience, expertly employing everything from huge modern orchestral forces to a band as slim as the solo soprano clarinet in Bb of this exhilarating *Tattoo for One* from 1984, needless to say a contemporary touching stone in the world of ambitious clarinet playing today. As always in Ruders, the writing is both clever and idiomatic, and as for entertainment, let's say there's more on the performer's plate than he can manage with any sleight-of-hand sense of easy fun for himself – and easy listening is not what the audience is offered here either. One spectacular detail near the end of the piece – indeed: of the show, the performance – is best savoured in real life, actually. In two places, you see, the clarinetist is asked to spin two times over on his heels whilst blowing a long high note ... and to boot he is expected to proceed with the next bars without revealing any signs of dizziness! The high and long-held note itself is mobile in as much as the player is directed to employ two different fingerings for it whilst blowing and spinning around ...

Clarinet people may be interested to learn that Ruders wrote a sister work for *Tattoo for One* later on in 1984, namely his *Tattoo for Three*, featuring the classic trio of clarinet, cello and piano. Jonas Frølund has been involved in the experimental choice of marimba over the cello there: a novel configuration that was tried out in 2020 and met with the composer's approval. To date there is no *Tattoo for Two*, but a *Tattoo for Four* by Ruders is announced, written for the now classic ensemble featured in Messiaen's *Quatuor pour la Fin du Temps*: violin, clarinet, cello and piano. • *Tattoo for One* is dedicated to the Danish clarinetist Mette Bugge Madsen.

– *Tattoo for One* is published by Edition Wilhelm Hansen.



Track 10

RICHARD WAGNER (1813-1883)

Solo from Act III of *Tristan und Isolde*

(1859; written for cor anglais;

world premiere recording as played on bass clarinet)

The place was Munich, the date was 10 June 1865 (the day after the birth of Carl Nielsen in the countryside of Funen in Denmark), and you had the scene arrange itself – as it would seem to do – with a doleful, dark and measured orchestral prelude from the pit and then the curtain going up for the third and final act of a mind-blowing new opera by **RICHARD WAGNER** (1813-1883) that was being world-premiered at long last, *Tristan und Isolde* from 1859.

The curtain rose on a desolate out-of-doors scenery with two motionless male figures, one recumbent and the other at his side like a concerned attendant. Not a word. And the public, prepared for something and getting nothing like whatever they might be expecting, was left to sit just listening for minutes, while from somewhere invisible on the stage the long plaintive cantilena of a solitary deep oboe instrument filled the hall and their minds with spellbinding music of a kind they had never heard before.

According to Ernest Newman in his *Wagner Nights* (London, 1949), this long unaccompanied cor anglais melody is one of the strangest and most poignant ever imagined by man.

The melody is played by an as yet unseen shepherd. Afterwards he steps into sight on the stage to quietly ask Kurwenal how it is with their master, Tristan, who lies there, mortally wounded. It is only now that the action sets slowly in motion, and here we leave the magical world of the theatre and turn to that timelessly 'new', indeed novel, woodwind solo of 1859 in its present album setting as an unexpected but welcome guest in the company of latterday modern music for the clarinet alone.

Like the *Cadenza* from Nielsen's Clarinet Concerto (cf. Track 1), the operatic Wagner **Solo** for the cor anglais is neatly distinct from, but not deviating from the surrounding orchestral music, and

likewise it manages to create a magical moment of its own without disturbing or diverting the greater flow of things. A coveted jewel in the crown for any oboe player in the academy, in the symphony orchestra, in the orchestral pit or indeed actually on stage, this cor anglais solo has the potential to also prove a gem in the hands of any perceptive recital clarinetist playing the mellow basset or the wilful bass – not the slightest detail in the score needs adjusting, and the change from a nasal alto oboe to one of the deep clarinets only serves to highlight, from a new angle, the unique splendour of such groundbreaking and indeed perfect music.

(Interestingly, one only has to go back to the grief-stricken monologue of King Marke at the end of *Tristan* Act II to find one of many examples of how Wagner would turn to the bass clarinet when at key moments he needed an instrumental solo voice to sing, nay almost speak to us from the pit.)

In the theatre, the **Solo** is meant to be perceived as a seamless flow of slightly alien lofty music, improvised on a shepherd's shawm, and it takes off from somewhere invisible on the stage during the last phrase of the orchestral prelude to *Tristan* Act III, with the orchestra then being silent till a few strings enter again on a pianissimo tremolo in unison with the final deep and strong note of that long melancholy yet intense musing coming from far away above the pit.

Heard on its own, the tightly-knit cantilena of 1859 perfectly matches the much much younger pieces that it joins on this album, which would appear to offer the world-first recording of Wagner's operatic cor anglais solo as a self-contained item played on the bass clarinet.

– Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* was first published by Breitkopf & Härtel.



Track 11

SIMON STEEN-ANDERSEN (b.1976)

De Profundis

(2000; world premiere recording of the 2019 version for bass clarinet)

So far, the Akademie der Künste in Berlin have admitted two Danish composers only: Carl Nielsen in his time and **SIMON STEEN-ANDERSEN** (b.1976) today. They are alike in that their personal presence, their ideas and their works not only make an impression on both experts and laymen, but also inspire fellow composers and creative people in other fields to work out what *they* can do, what their own profile might be. In 2000, Steen-Andersen wrote *De Profundis* for an art exhibition of that same name, in his own words “loosely basing his composition on the themes and works presented there, then” ... which again means that one should not go too literally into digging for allusions to the Bible and to single art works – perhaps the human condition and the power of music are the true subject of this interesting and moving composition.

In its original state, dating from 2000 and still perfectly valid, *De Profundis* was conceived as an ‘auto-duo’, requiring the soprano saxophone player to also work a percussion set-up surrounding him, mostly tuned or at least ringing instruments; the soprano clarinet is permitted as an alternative for the saxophone. A chance encounter with videos of three different recent performances of the soprano-sax-cum-perc version gave this writer a clear indication of the wide range that the score offers to anyone capable of fashioning an authentic reading for themselves. On one hand, a player who kept everything neatly and respectfully under the lid, listening carefully, never showing off, seemingly tuned in to the ritualistic side of the proceedings and so allowing the audience to forget about him and lose themselves in the slow flow of what they were offered from the stage. On the other hand, a player who looked like he was ‘doing’ the piece as a major and indeed crowning part of his graduation concert, joyfully and eagerly playing out and performing on behalf of himself and on behalf of music itself as a sensuous experience. In the middle, so to speak, there was the cool delivery of a cool guy who with expert deliberation went through the motions in order to ensure that every requirement was met, every option considered, nothing left to chance: Never a dull moment though!

In 2019, however, the composer proposed an alternative more radical than the mere shift from soprano saxophone to soprano clarinet – and on 11 May 2021 in Copenhagen it was Jonas Frølund who gave the world-first performance of *De Profundis* as played on the bass clarinet in Bb; it follows that this album, recorded but one month later on, offers the world-first issue of the bass clarinet version on a phonogram. Interestingly, Jonas Frølund enjoyed a nerdy exchange with Steen-Andersen about details in the score, but the composer is adamant that this is still the 2000 piece, not in any way a new piece or a version that leaves the old one behind as redundant; it is worth noticing, however, that in as much as the original percussion set-up is left pretty much unchanged when it is a bass clarinet that is on, the dialogue of timbres proves markedly different from the interplay of sounds arising from a soprano saxophone or clarinet interacting with the very same percussion (– and to boot the double-tasking is more cumbersome with the bass beast to handle than with either little sibling in hand: My kingdom for a third arm, the version of 2019 will have the soloist mutter under his breath).

Evolving slowly, the 15-minute *De Profundis* at first establishes its basic character in a series of intonations, searching, seeking, calling. A late climax attains an impressive mixture of wild joy and existential *angst* – after which the music reverts to the quiet simplicity of the beginning, but now with those isolated notes strung together almost like some half-hidden chorale, if ever so discreetly: as a calming gesture or a blessing, maybe (an immediately accessible formal device well-known from someone like Stravinsky).

A final note on a final note and on the beginnings of a new era. In the context of this 11-track album, the Wagner *Solo* (Track 10) may be meaningfully heard as a prelude to Track 11, the *De Profundis* by Simon Steen-Andersen – the more so when one realizes that the concluding note in Wagner is the same as the opening note in Steen-Andersen, if an octave apart. In 2020, Steen-Andersen was quite uniquely allowed to create a spectacular multi-media work at the Festspielhaus in Bayreuth, *The Loop of the Nibelung*. And in 1860, Wagner set New Music rolling by programming the supremely important prelude to the First Act of his as yet unknown and indeed unheard-of opera *Tristan und Isolde* – this was in January-February at his three concerts at the Opéra-Théâtre in Paris, a metropole that proved to be a hotbed for New Music alongside with Vienna and Berlin.

– *De Profundis* is published by Edition•S. Jonas Frølund has been commissioned to furnish a critically revised score for the bass clarinet version of 2019, having studied, played and recorded the music himself and having discussed a number of details with the composer.

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The instruments used by Jonas Frølund for this album:

Buffet Crampon Tradition Clarinet in Bb;
acquired as new in 2019.
Buffet Crampon Tradition Clarinet in A;
acquired as new in 2018.
Buffet Crampon Prestige Basset Clarinet in A;
made to order and acquired in 2020.
Buffet Crampon Tosca Bass Clarinet in Bb;
acquired as new in 2019.