

Jesper Koch
A Twilight Song

Jeppé Solløs Rasmussen
Danish Philharmonic Orchestra
Christian Øland



Jesper Koch (b. 1967)

A Twilight Song

Jeppe Solløs Rasmussen, horn

Danish Philharmonic Orchestra (Sønderjyllands Symfoniorkester)

Conducted by Christian Øland

A Twilight Song (2022, rev. 2024)

Concerto for horn and orchestra

1	I. Intro	2:44
2	II. March	4:28
3	III. Elegy	3:00
4	IV. Cortege	4:51
5	V. Adagio	5:35

World premiere recording

Total 20:37



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Of Hard Fought Engagements

By Andrew Mellor

Jesper Koch once recalled that he spent his 'entire childhood at the piano.' In youth, music gave free rein to the young Dane's imagination. In adulthood, that still-uninhibited imagination spurred him to create his own music powered by wild freedoms and shadowy passions.

Koch studied with Hans Abrahamsen and Ib Nørholm at the Royal Academy of Music, Aarhus and privately with Karl Aage Rasmussen, Olav Anton Thommesen, Andy Pape and Colin Matthews. He won First Prize at the 1992 International Rostrum of Composers with his work for two accordions and percussion, *Ice-Breaking* (1991), one of a series of scores the composer would write for accordion.

Koch's tonal idiom, his regard for instrumental articulation and his strong sense of musical structure soon caught the wind of his regard for storytelling. A series of works inspired by Lewis Carroll includes the wind quintet *Down the Rabbit Hole* (1997), the tone poem *Alice Under Skies* (1998) and *Memory of a Summer Day* (2002) for soprano and orchestra. As the music journalist Jens Cornelius has written, in each of those works Koch 'takes the listener by the hand'.

The symphony orchestra became a natural medium for Koch's aesthetic and he has enjoyed strong relationships with the Odense Symphony Orchestra and the Danish Philharmonic Orchestra (Sønderjyllands Symfoniorkester), including a stint as composer-in-residence at the latter ensemble in Sønderborg.

The poetry of Walt Whitman has provided both inspiration and framework for a number of Koch's orchestral pieces. From 1861 to 1865, the poet worked as a medical orderly during the American Civil War, supporting the forces of the Northern States but tending to wounded soldiers from both sides. Whitman, who had volunteered in New York hospitals in peacetime, found some purpose in his humanitarian work but the conflict's duration took its toll; an emotional chasm separated the blood-soaked, exhausted days of 1865 from the optimism of the war's earliest weeks. Some of the poet's most celebrated verse reflects on that experience.

In writing a horn concerto for Jeppe Solløs Rasmussen, a horn player with the Danish Philharmonic Orchestra, Koch turned to Whitman's war poems. The horn is a natural instrument to inhabit the world Whitman conjures up in those works. The instrument is associated with the hunt – whether the conquest of wild beast or fellow man, even if its military (and male) connotations are tempered by its coiled structure and frequently mellow sound. The horn is also the most difficult instrument of the orchestra to make sound: negotiating its mechanics and resonance is as treacherous as going into battle.

Koch isn't the first composer to hear something of the nocturnal and the mythic in the instrument, both characteristics of his concerto (in which the solo horn plays almost continuously), despite its strong narrative footing. Its title borrows that of one of Whitman's war poems while its final movement refers to another, *Whispers of Heavenly Death*. Both see the poet looking back at the war in retrospect, an idea ripe for Koch's music whose own poetic qualities are derived in part from its viewing of the past from the present. The sense of determined journeying through harsh conditions present in Koch's work also aligns it with another contempo-

rary yet largely tonal horn concerto: Krzysztof Penderecki's *Winterreise*, written in 2007.

Koch writes of his piece (referring to the two poems mentioned above): 'there are two poems in total that I have directly set to music as songs without words (in movements 3 and 5) – the horn sings and the orchestra accompanies – and other poems where I have just been generally inspired by the atmosphere.' The work's journey is one 'from dawn, awakening in the camp, to battle, death, reflection and resurrection.' Distant timpani set the atmosphere in the introductory movement, its shadowy atmosphere punctuated at one point by the soloist's sounding of a reveille. The orchestra's tightly-packed woodwinds are immediately established as the soloist's most obvious adversaries, partners and foils.

Steely percussion and more present timpani season the second movement, whose mustering atmosphere is created largely by frantic woodwinds rippling up ascendant scales. In the music's pert chases we hear the horn embodying its traditional role. The concerto's prevailing melodic ambiguity and restlessness come to the fore in the searching 'Elegy' which underlines the horn's warmth while seeming to channel the spirit of Gustav Mahler, particularly in its melodic contours and writing for harp. Timpani again have a pivotal role in 'Cortege', a mourning march whose sense of defiance steadily gains momentum. The final movement mines deeper into the atmosphere established by 'Elegy' and is traced directly over Whitman's own description of a soul's transition to eternity – heard on the valedictory violin solo – in *Whispers of Heavenly Death*.

Andrew Mellor is the author of The Northern Silence – Journeys in Nordic Music and Culture (Yale University Press)

Jeppe Solløs Rasmussen is a distinguished horn player whose career began with his first lessons in 1994. The following year, he was admitted to the Royal Academy of Music in Jutland, where he studied under Erik Nielsen. His international journey continued in 1998-99 with studies under Hugh Seenan at the Guildhall School of Music in London, followed by multiple residencies since 2002 with the celebrated hornist and professor Gail Williams in Chicago. Since 2003, Rasmussen has been a cornerstone of the Danish Philharmonic Orchestra, while regularly appearing as a guest with leading Danish ensembles. In 2014, he earned global recognition when invited to perform with the World Orchestra for Peace in London. As a soloist, Rasmussen has captivated audiences with performances of works by Reinhold Glière, W.A. Mozart, and Lars Erik Larsson. Beyond the orchestral stage, he is a prolific chamber musician, performing extensively at home and abroad. As a member of the award-winning wind quintet Kirin Winds, he premiered Jesper Koch's *Through the Looking-Glass* in 2024, further cementing his reputation as a versatile and innovative artist.

The **Danish Philharmonic Orchestra** is the orchestra for an entire region. With 65 skilled musicians from around the world, they bring symphonic music to every corner of Southern Jutland, Sønderjylland, and Southern Schleswig. From their home stage at Alision in Sønderborg to the atmospheric concert halls of Kolding, Haderslev, and Aabenraa, as well as intimate church concerts in Tønder, Løgumkloster, and Ribe, and across the border in Flensburg and Schleswig, the orchestra reaches a wide region. Each year, they perform approximately 150 concerts in all formats, from grand symphonic masterpieces to moving chamber concerts, educational school performances, and festive holiday concerts. They collaborate with Den Jyske Opera, perform with regional choirs, and join forces with the Schleswig-Holstein Symphony Orchestra in unique cross-border concerts.

Christian Øland is one of the Nordic region's most promising young conducting talents. From the 2025/26 season, Christian Øland will hold the post of Principal Conductor of the Danish Philharmonic Orchestra. The 2024/25 season includes notable reengagements with the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, the Helsingborg Symphony Orchestra, the Copenhagen Phil, Theater Magdeburg, and the Danish Philharmonic Orchestra. Additionally, Øland will debut with the Danish National Opera, conducting Poul Schierbeck's *Fête galante*. In 2023/24, he conducted the Copenhagen Phil in the world premiere of *Leaning Tree* by Signe Lykke, nominated for the Reumert Prize for 'Best Dance Performance'. That season also included debuts with the Gothenburg Symphony, the Helsingborg Symphony, and the Iceland Symphony. Øland has worked with the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Royal Danish Orchestra, the Royal Swedish Orchestra, the Magdeburg Philharmoniker, and more. He has conducted ballets like Mats Ek's *Juliet and Romeo*, Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker*, and *The World of John Neumeier*. In opera, he has led Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and worked at the Savonlinna Opera Festival. Born in Denmark in 1994, Øland studied conducting at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki, and became Assistant Conductor of the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra after only one year of studies. As a bassonist he has played in the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra. In 2016, he received the Carl Nielsen and Anne Marie Carl-Nielsen Talent Award and the Arne Hammelboe Travel Scholarship. His reputation continues to grow through new artistic collaborations.



Jeppes Solløs Rasmussen © Sønderjyllands Symfoniorkester

Om hårde sammenstød

Af Andrew Mellor

Jesper Koch er blevet citeret for, at han tilbragte ”hele sin barndom ved klaveret”. Musikken gav den unge dansker mulighed for at lade fantasien få frit løb. Også da han var blevet voksen, inspirerede den fortsat utøjlede fantasi ham til at skabe sin egen musik med vild frihed og dunkle lidenskaber som drivkraft.

Koch er uddannet ved Det Jyske Musikkonservatorium i Aarhus hos Hans Abrahamsen og Ib Nørholm og som privatelev hos Karl Aage Rasmussen, Olav Anton Thommesen, Andy Pape og Colin Matthews. I 1992 vandt han førsteprisen ved International Rostrum of Composers med værket *Ice-Breaking* (1991) for to akkordeoner og slagtøj, det første i en række akkordeonværker af ham.

Jesper Kochs tonale udgangspunkt, hans opmærksomhed på instrumenters artikulationsmuligheder og stærke fornemmelse for musikalsk struktur begyndte hurtigt at løbe sammen med hans vilje til at fortælle historier. En række værker inspireret af Lewis Carroll omfatter blæserkvintetten *Down the Rabbit Hole* (1997), tonedigtet *Alice Under Skies* (1998) og *Memory of a Summer Day* (2002) for sopran og orkester. I samtlige værker sørger Koch for, som musikjournalisten Jens Cornelius har formuleret det, ”at tage lytteren i hånden”. Symfoniorkestret er blevet et naturligt medium for Kochs udtryksmåde, og han har arbejdet tæt sammen med Odense Symfoniorkester og Sønderjyllands Symfoniorkester, herunder i en periode som huskomponist hos sidstnævnte i Sønderborg.

Walt Whitmans lyrik har både leveret inspiration til og ydre rammer for flere af Kochs orkesterværker. Under den amerikanske borgerkrig fra 1861 til 1865 arbejdede digteren som sygeplejer i Nordstaternes hær, men behandlede sårede soldater fra begge sider. I fredstid havde Whitman arbejdet som frivillig på hospitaler i New York og dér oplevet mening i sit humanitære arbejde, men krigens lange varighed krævede sin pris, og en følelsesmæssig kløft skilte de blodtilsølede, udmattede dage i 1865 fra optimismen i krigens første uger. Denne oplevelse kommer også til udtryk i nogle af digterens mest berømte linjer.

I forbindelse med at skrive en hornkoncert til Jeppe Solløs Rasmussen fra Sønderjyllands Symfoniorkester vendte Koch sig mod netop Whitmans krigsdigte. Hornet er et oplagt instrument til at skildre den verden, Whitman her fremmaner. Instrumentet forbindes traditionelt med jagt – det være sig på vilde dyr eller medmennesker, uanset at dets militære (og maskuline) konnotationer samtidig dæmpes af dets komplicerede konstruktion og ofte blide klang. Hornet er ligeledes det vanskeligste instrument i symfoniorkestret at få lyd ud af, og det er så at sige lige så vanskeligt at beherske dets mekanik og resonans som at gå i kamp.

Koch er ikke den første komponist, der hører noget natligt og mytisk i instrumentet, og begge dele er kendetegnende for hans koncert (hvor solohornet spiller stort set konstant), uanset koncertens udpræget fortællende udgangspunkt. Titlen *A Twilight Song* er hentet fra et af Whitmans krigsdigte, mens finalen refererer til et andet, *Whispers of Heavenly Death*. I begge digte ser digteren tilbage på krigen og leverer dermed et oplagt afsæt for Kochs musik med dens lyriske kvaliteter, der til dels udspringer af at se fortiden fra nutiden. Følelsen i Kochs værk af en målrettet rejse gennem barske forhold får det også til at klinge parallelt med en

anden nutidig, men ligeledes overvejende tonal hornkoncert: Krzysztof Pendereckis *Winterreise* fra 2007.

Om sit værk skriver Koch selv (med henvisning til de to ovennævnte digte): "I alt har jeg sat to digte direkte i musik uden ord (i 3. og 5. sats) – hornet synger, orkestret akkompagnerer – mens jeg for andre digtes vedkommende blot er blevet generelt inspireret af stemningen." Rejsen i værket bevæger sig "fra daggry og opvågning i lejren til kamp, død, eftertanke og genopstandelse." Fjerne pauker sætter stemningen i åbnings-satsen an, hvor den dunkle atmosfære på et tidspunkt bliver afbrudt af, at solisten spiller reveillen. Orkestrets tætpakkede træblæsere bliver med det samme etableret som solistens mest markante modstandere, partnere og baggrundsmateriale.

Skarpt slagtøj og nu mere nærværende pauker krydrer sats nummer to, hvis karakter af appel primært skabes ved at lade hidsige træblæsere strømme afsted i opadgående skalaer. I musikkens kry jagtskener hører vi hornet indtage sin traditionelle rolle. Koncertens grundlæggende melodiske tvetydighed og rastløshed træder i forgrunden i den søgende "Elegy", der på samme tid fremhæver hornets varme og i særdeleshed i de melodiske konturer og brugen af harpe tilstræber at fremmane ånden fra Gustav Mahlers musik. Pauker spiller tillige en afgørende rolle i sørgemarchen "Cortege", hvor en følelse af trods sætter sig mere og mere igennem. Sidste sats borer sig længere ned i stemningen fra "Elegy" og bygger direkte på Whitmans egen beskrivelse af sjælens vej mod evigheden – den afsluttende violinsolo – i *Whispers of Heavenly Death*.

Andrew Mellor er forfatter til The Northern Silence – Journeys in Nordic Music and Culture (Yale University Press)

Jeppes Solløs Rasmussen begyndte at spille horn i 1994 og blev året efter optaget på Det Jyske Musikkonservatorium som elev hos Erik Nielsen. I 1998/99 studerede han hos Hugh Seenan på Guildhall School of Music i London, og siden 2002 har han haft flere studieophold hos den anerkendte hornist og professor Gail Williams i Chicago. Fra 2003 har Jeppes Rasmussen været fast medlem af Sønderjyllands Symfoniorkester, og han har også løbende gæstet flere danske orkestre. I 2014 blev han inviteret til at optræde med World Orchestra for Peace i London. Som solist har han optrådt med orkestre i værker af blandt andre Reinhold Glière, W.A. Mozart og Lars Erik Larsson. Foruden orkesterarbejdet har han spillet talrige kammerkoncerter både i ind- og udland, herunder som medlem af den prisvindende blæserkvintet Kirin Winds, der i 2024 uropførte Jesper Kochs *Through the Looking-Glass*.

Sønderjyllands Symfoniorkester er hele regionens orkester. Med 65 dedikerede musikere fra hele verden bringer de symfonisk musik ud i hver en krog af Syd- og Sønderjylland samt Sydslesvig. Fra hjemmebanen Alsion i Sønderborg til de stemningsfulde koncertsale i Kolding, Haderslev og Aabenraa, intime kirkekoncerter i Tønder, Løgumkloster og Ribe og videre over grænsen til Flensborg og Slesvig spiller orkestret hvert år omkring 150 koncerter i alle formater – fra storslåede symfoniske mesterværker til gribende kammerkoncerter, lærerige skolekoncerter og festlige højtidskoncerter. Orkestret samarbejder med Den Jyske Opera, optræder med landsdelens kor og forener toner med Slesvig-Holstein Symfoniorkester i grænseoverskridende koncerter.

Den danske dirigent **Christian Øland** er et af Nordens største dirigenttalenter. Fra sæsonen 2025/26 er han udnævnt som chefdirigent for Sønderjyllands Symfoniorkester. I sæsonen 2024/25 vender Øland blandt andre tilbage til Gøteborg

Symfonikerne, Helsingborg Symfoniorkester, Copenhagen Phil, Theater Magdeburg og Sønderjyllands Symfoniorkester. Han debutterer også på Den Jyske Opera med Poul Schierbecks *Fête galante*. Øland har tidligere dirigeret Det Finske Radiosymfoniorkester, Islands Symfoniorkester, Det Kongelige Kapel, Kungliga Hofkapellet i Stockholm, Magdeburg Philharmoniker med flere. Som opera- og balletdirigent har han blandt andet dirigeret Mats Eks ballet *Julie og Romeo* med musik af Tjajkovskij og John Neumeiers ballet *The World of John Neumeier* med Hamborg Balletten samt Brittens *A Midsummer Nights Dream* med Helsinki Sinfonietta og Bizets *Carmen* på Theater Magdeburg. Han blev som 18-årig optaget på Sibelius Akademiet og blev hurtigt assisterende dirigent for Det Finske Radiosymfoniorkester. Han arbejdede her blandt andre med Hannu Lintu, Esa-Pekka Salonen og Herbert Blomstedt. Inden sine studier i Finland studerede Christian Øland klaver og fagot i Danmark og har som fagottist selv spillet i Det Finske Radiosymfoniorkester. I 2016 modtog han Carl Nielsen og Anne Marie Carl-Nielsens Talentpris og samme år modtog han Arne Hammelboes Rejselegat, uddelt af Dansk Kapelmesterforening. Øland fortsætter med at udvikle sit kunstneriske virke gennem nye spændende projekter, samarbejder og dirigentopgaver i ind- og udland, hvilket sikrer hans position som en af sin generations mest lovende dirigenter.

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Orchestra

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