

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a vibrant blue sleeveless dress, stands on a large, dark, layered rock formation. She is holding a cello and looking towards the camera. The scene is set on a rocky coastline with a calm body of water in the foreground that perfectly reflects her and the cello. The background shows a vast expanse of similar rock formations under a pale, overcast sky. The overall mood is serene and artistic.

ONDINE

PER NØRGÅRD  
POUL RUDERS

WORKS FOR SOLO CELLO

WILHELMINA SMITH



PER NØRGÅRD



POUL RUDERS

**PER NØRGÅRD** (b. 1932)

**Sonata No. 1** (1951–53) 16:23

- 1 I. Lento ma espansivo – Allegro non troppo 6:06
- 2 II. Tranquillo 5:52
- 3 III. Allegro con brio 4:25

**Sonata No. 2, "In due tempi"** (1953–54/1980) 19:42

- 4 I. Solo intimo (Sonata, quasi una fantasia per cello, Op. 8) (1953–54) 10:51
- 5 II. Solo in scena (1980) 8:51

**Sonata No. 3, "What – is the Word!"** (1999) 7:30

*Sonata breve*

- 6 I. Prayer I 2:20
- 7 II. Outcry 3:12
- 8 III. Prayer II 1:58

**POUL RUDERS (b. 1949)**

**Bravourstudien**

**(L'Homme Armé Variations) (1976)**

	<b>18:46</b>
9 Overture	2:21
10 Recitative	1:09
11 Serenade 1	2:50
12 Potpourri	0:51
13 Etude	1:25
14 Intermezzo	1:37
15 Fantasia	1:28
16 Serenade 2	3:24
17 Finale: Variation classique	2:50
18 L'Homme armé	0:51

**WILHELMINA SMITH, cello**

## DEPTH IN EVERY SENSE

– on the music of Per Nørgård and Poul Ruders for solo cello

Denmark is a large country turned small. For a long time, we were a seafaring nation with thousands of kilometres of borders and with colonies around the world. But nationalistic trends and political defeats in the 19th century hit the country's geography hard: the Crown said goodbye to Norway in 1814 and had to let go of the Duchies of Schleswig, Holstein and Lauenburg in 1864. In the space of a few decades, the country and its geography were reduced to what looked on the map like a nightcap on the German Empire, a shadow of its former glorious self.

The result was a very particular mixture of megalomania and inferiority complex. The Danes feel a certain respect towards the pathos shown by other nations, melodic languages and showmanship while they themselves speak with their mouth half closed.

Music in Denmark was for some decades dominated by Carl Nielsen, with his unassuming songs and more modernist instrumental works. This composer with the dual identity ended up as director of the Royal Danish Academy of Music in Copenhagen and from 1926 onwards was the mentor for Vagn Holmboe and other young composers.

Vagn Holmboe in turn became teacher to a whole generation of Danish composers and cultivated a style embracing Neo-Classical elements and Eastern European impulses in equal measure up until his death in 1996. Per Nørgård came to him in 1949, barely 17 years old, with a wish to be guided and became his pupil at the Academy. Therefore, we can draw a direct line from Nielsen to Nørgård, who remains active today.

Yet Nørgård also dramatically rebelled against this father figure around 1960 and ended up as the exponent of something new and more internationally minded in Danish music, together with colleagues such as Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen and Ib Nørholm, both now deceased. Through more than 300 works in almost every genre, Nørgård has united principles from the European avant-garde with psychological and ecological awareness and made himself synonymous with 'cosmic', ever-searching music.

The cello plays a prominent role in newer Danish music: some of the most prominent performers of contemporary music in Denmark have been cellists. The versatile nature of the instrument might also have played a role: the musician sits down, the instrument stands on a stick, it all seems very grounded and connected to something solid in the otherwise unruly universe of the avant-garde.

**Sonata for Cello Solo No. 1** was first conceived in 1951 and revised to the present version two years later. Already at this point – only 20 years old! – Nørgård engaged in a technique with pointers towards his present practices:

The theme changes imperceptibly during the first movement. The new theme then defines the second movement and is also transformed. In the third movement, the twice modified theme is used as the take-off for the finale. The transformations through the three movements also happen on an inner plane with three very different expressions as the result. This method characterises much of Per Nørgård's first period as a composer and would in time become ever more dominant and eventually an inextricable part of his mindset.

**Sonata for Cello Solo No. 2** is in fact a combination of two pieces created more than a quarter century apart. The first movement appeared in 1953 as *Solo intimo* and has ever since been one of the absolute classics of Danish music for cello. Both dynamically and melodically, the piece draws a gigantic curve from hushed tones through the hymn-like culmination back to the hushed again.

The young composer then experienced a kind of transformation. In 1956, he engaged in a correspondence with none other than Jean Sibelius and wrote of his fascination with the "universe of the Nordic mind". One of his letters mentioned *metamorphosis* in the symphonies of the Finn and was received with great gratitude by his ageing colleague.

Metamorphosis is the technical name for the changes that Nørgård used in his first Cello Sonata. The method has, as his teacher Vagn Holmboe famously said, a biological tinge: the first theme in the composition transforms slowly so as to become unrecognisable

and towards the end looks like a completely different individual, much like "the caterpillar's progress from chrysalis to fully unfurled insect".

Three years later, in 1959, Nørgård made the greatest discovery of his life, developing a culmination to his work with metamorphoses that he called the *infinity series*. Here, he allows a cell consisting of a few notes germinate ongoing reflections and projections, multiplying indefinitely.

The result resembles a Russian babushka doll: figures within figures, ever smaller, resembling serialism but in a spontaneously sensual way. With the exception of a brief period in the early 1980s, the *infinity series* has influenced practically all of Per Nørgård's works since 1968, i.e. for more than half a century.

*Solo in scena* for solo cello appeared in 1980 as one of the last pieces before the composer's break from the infinity series and is in his own words marked by a "constantly changing restlessness." It can be played as a work in its own right or as the sequel to the more clear-cut and calmer *Solo intimo* in the vein of 'opposites attract', in which case it forms the second movement of Sonata for Cello Solo No. 2.

**Sonata for Cello Solo No. 3** from 1999 is shaped almost like a traditional altar triptych: the first and last movements are based on the same melody and are dramatically contrasted to the second movement with its ever-changing rhythms and broad intervals.

The piece is subtitled with a quote from Irish-born author Samuel Beckett. "In my early television remembrance I recall a broadcast with Samuel Beckett, one of the fathers of the absurd play and drama," Per Nørgård wrote in 2010. "At one time Beckett looked the viewer (...) in the eye and said: "*What! – is the word*". I have not since been able to forget it, obviously, having borrowed this ambiguous sentence as the title for this short cello sonata."

The middle of the 20th century marked the beginning of a new golden age in Danish music. The country opened up mentally as well as politically and made space for trends completely without local role models.

Poul Ruders from Ringsted on Zealand trained as an organist and has in his capacity as composer cultivated networks in UK and the USA. This Danish internationalist is particularly known for his colourful works for orchestra with a brilliant use of the instruments and for his opera *The Handmaid's Tale* (2000), after the novel by Margaret Atwood. His preferred method from the end of the 1970s onwards has been inspired by what is known as *change ringing* in British churches – an ancient system of endless variations on a small number of bells in a church tower.

**Bravourstudien** was written for cello virtuoso Morten Zeuthen, one of the leading figures of Danish musical life. The piece appeared in 1976 as one of the last on Ruders' very long catalogue of works before he took up the concept of *change ringing*.

Many of his works from the 1970s are based on works from former times and so do not seem unaffected by the period's taste for the postmodern. The ten movements for solo cello in this work, for instance, have the folk melody *L'homme armé* from the Middle Ages running as a current through variations with titles from all of music history – Overture, Recitative, Serenade, Potpourri, Étude, Intermezzo, Fantasia and Variation classique.

"I have taken a firm grip on the old melody and run it through the wringer," the composer once said, "subjecting it to stylistically different, highly associative variations under the title of *Bravour-Studien*, a heading you may find in old editions of Franz Liszt's *Études*".

Søren Schauser

*Søren Schauser (b. 1965) is Associate Professor at the Royal Danish Academy of Music in Copenhagen and author of a wide range of books on music and philosophy.*

**Wilhelmina Smith** is an artist of intense commitment, poetic insight and dazzling versatility. She is a cellist whose artistic mission embraces a conversation through music, one that enthusiastically encompasses the music of the present placed within the context of a living past. As a soloist and recitalist as well as a collaborative musician and festival director, Mina has consistently advocated for composers with whom she has developed vital relationships, to have their music creatively positioned within an intellectually engaging context and performed with the utmost passion and technical assurance.

Ms. Smith was awarded a 2015–2016 McKnight Artist Fellowship for Performing Musicians, one of the largest and most established fellowships of its kind in the U.S. She made her solo debut with the Philadelphia Orchestra while a student at the Curtis Institute of Music and in 1997 was a prizewinner in the Leonard Rose International Cello Competition. She has been soloist with orchestras nationally and internationally including the Orquesta Millenium of Guatemala and the Ural Philharmonic Orchestra of Russia and has performed recitals across the US and Japan.

She has been a guest artist with the Philadelphia and Boston Chamber Music Societies, and the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, and has performed regularly in festivals such as the Marlboro Music Festival and Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival. In 2005, she formed the Variation String Trio with violinist Jennifer Koh and violist Hsin-Yun Huang, and is a founding member of Music from Copland House. She is founder and Artistic Director of Salt Bay Chamberfest, on the coast of Maine; a festival that has been home to performers and composers of international renown for over two decades.

Praised by *The Strad* as “A consummate communicator of the new virtuosity,” Smith’s 2019 recording of solo works by Salonen and Saariaho (Ondine) has earned high praise from reviewers including BBC and Gramophone. Ms. Smith’s recording of sonatas by Britten and Schnittke with pianist Thomas Sauer was released on the Arabesque label in 2006, and her recordings of chamber music include the complete chamber works of Aaron Copland (Arabesque), and works by Sebastian Currier (Koch), Osvaldo Golijov (Kleos), Pierre Jalbert (CHB), Jennifer Higdon (Naxos), Aaron Jay Kernis (Koch). Tamar Muskal, John Musto (Koch), Kaija Saariaho (Cedille), and Michael Torke (AMR).

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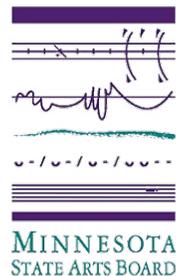
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A woman with blonde hair, wearing a teal dress and a matching cape, is sitting on a dark, rocky shore. She is holding a cello and looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The background shows a body of water and more rocks.

**PER NØRGÅRD** (b. 1932)

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**WILHELMINA SMITH**, cello