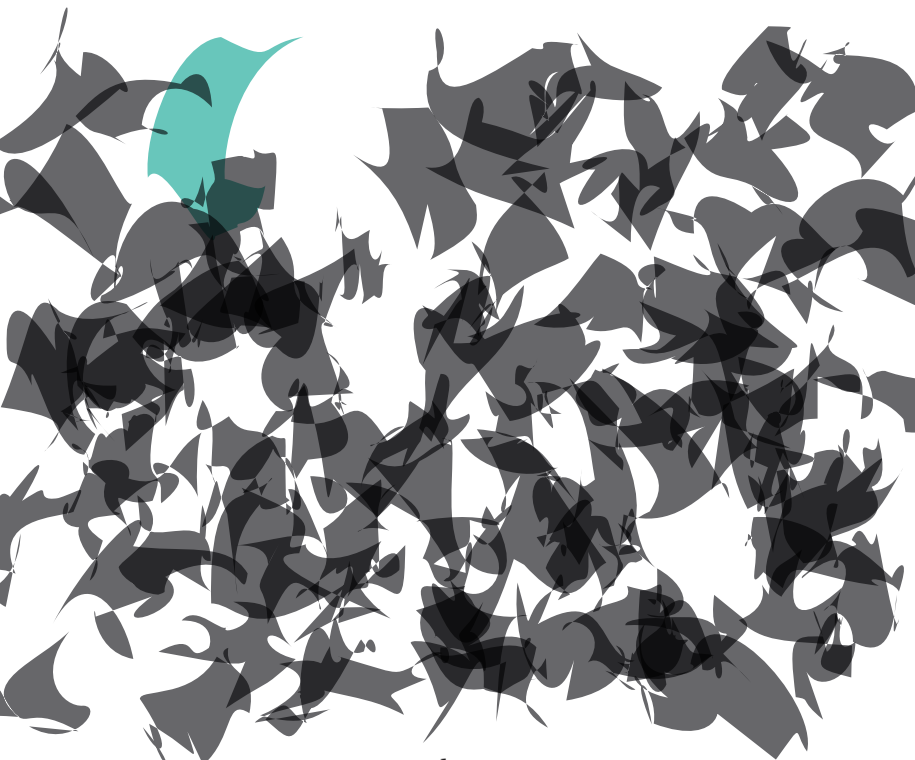


POUL RUDERS

Viola Concerto · Handel Variations



Lars Anders Tomter

Aarhus Symphony Orchestra – Marc Soustrot, Andreas Delfs

POUL RUDERS *Viola Concerto · Handel Variations*

Lars Anders Tomter, *viola* · Aarhus Symphony Orchestra
conducted by Marc Soustrot* and Andreas Delfs**

	Concerto for Viola and Orchestra (1993-94; rev. 2013)*	25:41
1	Risoluto Appassionato –	9:17
2	Largo Sonore – Distinto – <i>Cadenza Prima</i> – Vivo –	6:46
3	Tempo Primo: Risoluto Appassionato – <i>Cadenza Seconda</i> – Risoluto Appassionato (come prima) – Intimo quasi penoso	9:38

	Handel Variations (2009)**	39:20
	<i>Ninety symphonic reflections on eight bars by Georg Friedrich Handel</i>	
4	Theme – Variations 1-10 –	2:48
5	Variations 11-35 –	8:21
6	Variations 36-65 –	13:14
7	Variations 66-76 –	4:18
8	Variations 77-90	10:39

Total: 65:03

World premiere recordings

'I have a mantra', says the Danish composer Poul Ruders: 'To entertain, to enrich and to disturb'. It's always important to listen out for the note of irony in what Ruders says. Mischievousness, darkly-inflected playfulness, the Mephistophelean twinkle in the eye – they are as much characteristics of the man as they are of his remarkable music. Mantras, mission statements, personal affirmations, are all features of modern discourse Ruders views quizzically at best. All the same, this is a composer who does take a lively interest in how his music affects people: 'More composers do than are prepared to admit it', he adds knowingly. And there could be no finer example of how his music can entertain, enrich and, ultimately, disturb, than the *Handel Variations*, composed in 2009 for the 75th anniversary of the Aarhus Symphony Orchestra the following year. The theme Ruders chose for his variations is the engagingly brief 'Bourrée' from Handel's *Water Music* – or, to be more precise, it's the first eight bars of the Bourrée that Ruders presents at the beginning of *Handel Variations* and then, as he puts it, 'hauls through the wringer'.

One of the reasons Ruders decided to focus on this tiny, simple idea was that it had been hovering at the back of his mind for some years, quietly but insistently demanding some kind of creative engagement. But it was the realisation that this persistent 'ear-worm' could be the perfect basis for a set of variations that really set Ruders's mind working. Strong, distinctive melodies aren't always good variation material: they tend to hold their identity stubbornly and refuse to submit to transformation. But Handel's Bourrée is both very simple (it's really no more than a rapid sequence of tiny cadential figures) and highly, almost maddeningly memorable, like the 'Ho-ho-ho' witches' chorus theme from Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* Ruders plays with so memorably in his variation-form orchestral work *Concerto in Pieces*. The consequence is that Ruders is able to put Handel's tiny theme through no less than 90 variations, transforming it into ever richer and stranger forms, without the listener feeling that Handel's basic pattern has ever been entirely lost. Why 90 variations? Originally, Ruders wanted to compose 74, one for each year of Handel's life, but the impetus just kept carrying him forward until, as he puts it, 'the tube was squeezed absolutely flat.'

While it is clearly Handel's theme that carries the music through to its conclusion, there is at the same time a kind of process of 'erosion' – of deconstruction and reconstruction – at work



Poul Ruders

in *Handel Variations*. 'Imagine a vast gallery of Handel portraits,' says Ruders, 'in which Georg Friedrich appears, at first fully recognizable, but then the "disfiguration" sets in, and approximately halfway into the piece, all recognizability is gone – and now Handel-variations become Ruders-variations, because I carry on transforming the middle variations, which are now more Ruders than Handel...' And behind, or perhaps it's better to say within, this seemingly abstract process, an emotional drama is also being played out, part-concealed at first behind characteristic Mephistophelean masks, but increasingly forefront in the later stages of the work. On one

level *Handel Variations* is strictly organised, with each variation having a 'twin' at some point in the structure. On another we sense a gradual ascent from the wickedly witty opening variations towards a visionary pinnacle, complete with chiming bells, yielding eventually to a descent into melancholy. The emotional arc of *Handel Variations* reminds this writer of the Australian poet Les Murray's brilliant evocation of the glory and pathos of creativity, *Performance*. 'I starred that night, I shone', Murray begins, 'I was footwork and firework in one'. Dazzling image succeeds dazzling image, but at last, inevitably, comes the painful return to earth: 'As usual after any triumph, I was, of course, inconsolable.'

This is the world – the aching, desolate sadness that underlies Mephistopheles's wicked teasing and mockery – which the Viola Concerto (1993-4) makes its home. Yet paradoxically there is also a strange kind of peace present, or at least suggested, in this music. It is, Ruders wrote at the time, 'a musical tribute to serenity and patience, rare qualities in a day and age, where the mind is never allowed to rest, being constantly bombarded by short-lived, flashy "zaps"; it is a piece devoted to the right and ability of music to stay aloof, maintaining its emotional integrity, detached from the tyranny of fashion and trend.' In these words one can also sense something of Ruders's admiration for Sibelius, the great Nordic musical exemplar of 'integrity' and detachment from the 'tyranny of fashion and trend', whose development of highly original structures from tiny seed-like motifs has struck many listeners as profoundly organic in its thinking.

We can hear something similar, but at the same time highly personal, at work in the Viola Concerto and its two companion works, the Cello Concerto *Anima* and the Piano Concerto No. 1. Each makes use of a technique Ruders developed to which he gave the title 'minimorphosis'. Everything derives, he tells us, from the viola's melodic line that opens the work, from which are evolved 'independent, simultaneous layers employing the ancient virtues of augmentation and diminution (broadening or shortening of the rhythmic patterns)'. The listener can hear – or at the very least *feel* – this process at work right at the start. The viola's long singing phrase is intermittently, quietly doubled, now by half the orchestral violas, now by the flutes. But the rhythms of the orchestra instruments are not quite the same as those of the viola, so that these accompanying lines seem slightly 'out of phase' with the soloist. More instruments join in – clarinets, a horn, violins, and so on – and as their rhythms become less and less like those of the solo viola, so these lines begin to take on a life of their own. Gradually the voices proliferate

until, at the high point of this first section, the viola ceases, and the orchestra revels in the rich polyphonic texture Ruders has evolved. But then the viola returns, the mood relaxes, and the character of the music begins to change – strings increasingly still, woodwind livelier, more soloistic, but still deriving from the original viola line.

After the first performance at the BBC Proms Ruders decided that, for all its sustained logic, the Viola Concerto was simply too long. The *Largo sonore* section at the heart of the work, for viola and hushed high string harmonics, was reduced in length, and the second solo cadenza was also cut, but listening to this recording it would be hard to guess where the surgeon's scalpel had been utilised. The Concerto's large-scale lyrical progress still feels inevitable – in fact the ending seems even more logical in this revised version. Listeners may sense in the piquantly dissonant harmonies a yearning for some kind of resolution, and as the work progresses this yearning seems to grow stronger. The final section builds to another big polyphonic climax, but now it subsides onto something very like an E major/minor chord. Then the coda, marked *Intimo, quasi penoso* ('Intimate, almost pained') at last achieves a kind of stability on a long-sustained string chord which is even more clearly G minor. But at the very end, even the stability of the strings' chord is called into question: the bass shifts from a solid G to a B flat, as the viola swoops upwards to the same note, fortissimo, six octaves higher. Has the Viola Concerto achieved serenity, or has it only glimpsed its possibility? Either way, it points to something far removed from, and much needed amid the nervous, compulsive frenzy of our times.

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Lars Anders Tomter

The Norwegian **Lars Anders Tomter** is considered one of today's leading violists. In the course of a long career he has appeared at the Vienna Musikverein, Carnegie Hall in New York, Wigmore Hall in London and Konzerthaus Berlin. Tomter has performed with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields, the Budapest Festival Orchestra and the major Scandinavian orchestras. With a repertoire embracing all major works for viola, Tomter has also premiered concertos by Rolf Wallin and Erkki-Sven Tüür. Among numerous recordings is the world premiere recording of Vagn Holmboe's viola concerto for Dacapo. Tomter is a professor at the Norwegian Academy of Music in Oslo and at the Royal Danish Academy of Music.

Aarhus Symphony Orchestra was founded in 1935 and resides today at Musikhuset Aarhus in the awarded Symphonic Hall. The Orchestra's 65 permanent musicians have been under the baton of its French chief conductor Marc Soustrot since 2015. Annually the Orchestra gives 35 subscription concerts as well as family concerts, chamber concerts and collaborative concerts with festivals and venues such as Musikhuset, Smukfest, Spot Festival and Aarhus Festival. Aarhus Symphony Orchestra has a permanent cooperation with the Danish National Opera (Den Jyske Opera) and has recorded a substantial amount of both Danish contemporary works and a more Classical repertoire on CD. The Orchestra gives more than 100 school concerts each year, and in 2018 it launches "Musikkens Børn" (Musical Childhood) – a new ambitious family project for pre-school children and their parents.

Marc Soustrot is considered a specialist of French orchestral literature. Formerly the principal conductor and artistic director of the Orchestre Philharmonique des Pays de la Loire, the Beethoven Orchester Bonn, and Het Brabants Orkest, Eindhoven, he is Chief Conductor of Malmö Symphony Orchestra and Aarhus Symphony Orchestra. As a guest conductor Soustrot has worked with numerous orchestras such as Staatskapelle Dresden, Munich Philharmonic, Bamberg Symphony and the Danish National Symphony Orchestra. He has worked at the Opéra de Monte-Carlo, the Semperoper Dresden, the Teatro Real Madrid, the Grand Théâtre de Genève, La Monnaie de Munt Brussels, The Royal Danish Opera and the Norwegian National Opera. Marc Soustrot was honoured with the title Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur in 2008.

The German conductor **Andreas Delfs** has held chief artistic posts with orchestras in North America and Europe. As Music Director from 1996-2009 and Conductor Laureate from 2009-2015 of the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, Delfs was instrumental in the orchestra's rise to national prominence. He has also led the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra as music director from 2001-04 and as artistic advisor from 2004-06. In Denmark, engagements have included appearances with the Danish National Symphony, Copenhagen Phil, Aarhus Symphony and South Jutland Symphony Orchestras. He also served as General Music Director of Staatstheater Hannover from 1995-2000. Prior to this, Delfs was music director of the Bern Opera and resident conductor of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra.

"Jeg har et mantra," siger komponisten Poul Ruders: "At underholde, at berige og at forstyrre." Man skal altid lytte efter antydningen af ironi, når Ruders udtaler sig. Drillesygen, den mørkt modulerede kâdhed, den djævelske splint i øjet – disse træk er karakteristiske for hans person, ligesom de er karakteristiske for hans bemærkelsesværdige musik. Mantraer, hensigtserklæringer og fremhævelser af sin egen person kendetegner nutidens udtryksform, som Ruders i bedste fald står undrende overfor. Alligevel er det en komponist, som interesserer sig levende for, hvordan hans musik påvirker folk: "Op til flere komponister gør det såmænd – uden at ville indrømme det," tilføjer han sigende. Og man finder næppe et bedre eksempel på, hvordan hans musik kan underholde, berige og i sidste ende forstyrre end *Händel Variationerne*, komponeret i 2009 til Aarhus Symfoniorkestres 75-årsjubilæum det følgende år. Temaet, som Ruders vælger til sine variationer, er den charmerende korte bourrée fra Händels *Water Music* – eller for at være mere præcis: det er de første otte takter af bourréeen, som Ruders præsenterer i begyndelsen af *Händel Variationerne* og derefter kører gennem vridemaskinen, som han udtrykker det.

En af grundene til, at Ruders bestemte sig for at fokusere på denne lillebitte, enkle ide, var, at den havde kørt i baghovedet i nogle år, stille og roligt, og den havde uophørligt insistet på en eller anden form for kreativ behandling. Men det var erkendelsen af, at den påtrængende 'øremorm' kunne blive det perfekte udgangspunkt for et sæt variationer, som for alvor satte Ruders' hjerne på arbejde. Stærke, karakteristiske melodier egner sig ikke altid til variationer, de har det med stædigt at fastholde deres identitet og nægte at underkaste sig forandring. Men Händels bourrée er både meget enkel (den er faktisk blot en hurtig sekvens af små kadencefigurer) og yderst, ja for så vidt vanvittig irriterende iørefaldende, ligesom heksekorets Ho-ho-ho-tema fra Purcells *Dido og Æneas*, som Ruders leger så uforglemmeligt med i sine orkestervariationer, *Concerto in Pieces*. Derfor formår Ruders at lade Händels lille tema gennemføre ikke mindre end 90 variationer, hvor han forandrer det til bestandigt rigere og ejendommeligere former, uden at lytteren føler, at Händels grundidé på noget tidspunkt er forsvundet. Hvorfor 90 variationer? Ruders ville først komponere 74, en for hvert år i Händels liv, men han kom i den grad i stødet indtil, som han siger, "at tuben var klemt fuldstændig flad."

Det er klart Händels tema, som bærer musikken frem til dens afslutning, men der foregår samtidig en slags 'erosionsproces' – med dekonstruktion og rekonstruktion – i *Händel Variationerne*. "Forestil dig et enormt galleri af Händel-portrætter," siger Ruders, "hvor Georg Friedrich viser sig, først fuldkommen genkendelig, men derefter sætter 'vansiringen' ind, og omtrent halvvejs inde i stykket er al genkendelighed væk – og nu bliver Händel-variationerne til Ruders-variationerne, fordi jeg bliver ved med at transformere i midtervariationerne, som nu er mere Ruders end Händel." Og bagved, eller det er måske bedre at sige: inden i denne tilsyneladende abstrakte proces udspringer der sig tilmed et følelsesmæssigt drama, først halvt skjult bag karakteristiske Mefistofeles-masker, men efterhånden mere og mere i forgrunden i værkets senere faser. På et niveau er *Händel Variationerne* strengt organiseret, hvor hver variation har en slags 'tvilling' i opbygningen. På et andet mærker vi en gradvis opstigning fra de frækt vittige første variationer hen imod et visionært højdepunkt med tilhørende klokkeklang, som til sidst afløses af en nedsynken ind i melankolien. Den følelsesbetonede bue i *Händel Variationerne* minder denne skribent om den australske digter Les Murrays fortræffelige fremmanen af kreativitetens pragt og patos i *Performance*. "Jeg var en stjerne den nat, jeg strålede," begynder Murray, "jeg var slid og slæb og festfyrværkeri på én gang." Det ene svimlende billede følger efter det andet, men til sidst kommer uundgåeligt den smertelige tilbagevenden til jorden: "Som sædvanlig efter hver en triumf var jeg naturligvis utrøstelig."

Det er denne verden, som *Bratschkoncerten* (1993-94) gør til sin egen – den smertefulde, trøstesløse sørgmodighed, som ligger bag Mefistofeles' ondsindede spot og drilleri. Man oplever paradoksalt nok også en slags forunderlig fred i denne musik, i hvert fald er den antydnet. Ruders skrev dengang, at det er "en musikalsk hyldest til ophøjet ro og tålmodighed, sjældne egenskaber i en tidsalder hvor sinde aldrig får lov at få fred, konstant bombarderet af den kortvarige, lynhurtige zappen. Det er et stykke, som er helligt musikkens ret og evne til at stå for sig selv og fastholde sin emotionelle integritet, frigjort fra modens og trendens tyranni." I disse ord kan man også mærke Ruders' beundring for Sibelius, det store nordiske musikalske forbillede med hensyn til "integritet" og frigørelse fra "modens og trendens tyranni", hvis udvikling af virkelig enestående former ud fra bittesmå kernemotiver har slået mange lyttere som dybt organisk i sit tankesæt.

Vi kan høre noget lignende og samtidig højt personligt i bratschkoncerten og dens to søsterværker, cellokoncerten *Anima* og klaverkoncert nr. 1. I hver af dem anvendte Ruders en teknik, som han kaldte 'minimorfose'. Han fortæller, at alt er afledt af bratschens melodiske linje,

som kommer først i værket, og herfra udvikles "uafhængige, samtidige lag, som anvender gamle dyder som augmentation og diminution (forlængelse eller forkortelse af de rytmiske mønstre)". Lytteren kan høre eller i det mindste *føle*, at denne proces er i gang lige fra begyndelsen. Bratschens lange syngende fraser bliver med mellemrum svagt fordoblet, snart af halvdelen af orkestrets bratschgruppe, snart af fløjterne. Men orkestrets rytmer er ikke helt de samme som solobratschens, med det resultat at disse akkompagnerende passager forekommer at være en smule 'ude af takt' med solisten. Flere instrumenter slutter sig til – klarinetter, et horn, violiner osv. – og når deres rytmer fjerner sig mere og mere fra solobratschens, begynder disse passager at føre deres eget liv. Gradvist vokser stemmerne ganske vildt indtil højdepunktet i det første afsnit, hvor bratschen holder inde, og orkestret bolttrer sig i den righoldige, polyfone sats, som Ruders nu har udviklet. Men bratschen vender tilbage, stemningen bliver afspændt, og musikens karakter begynder at ændre sig – strygerne efterhånden rolige, træblæserne mere livlige, mere solistiske, men stadig trækker de på den oprindelige bratsch-linje.

Efter uropførelsen ved en BBC promenadekoncert i 1995 blev Ruders enig med sig selv om, at bratschkoncerten ganske simpelt var for lang trods hele dens gennemgående logik. *Largo sonore*-afsnittet i værkets centrum med bratsch og tyste strygerflageoletter blev stærkt reduceret, og den anden solokadence blev også beskåret, men når man lytter til den nærværende indspilning er det svært at gætte, hvor kirurgens skalpel har været i arbejde. Koncertens overordnede lyriske forløb føles stadigvæk sammenhængende – slutningen forekommer faktisk at være endnu mere logisk i denne reviderede version. Lytteren kan mærke en længsel efter en slags opløsning i de pirrende dissonans-harmonier, og mens værket skrider frem, synes denne længsel at blive stærkere. Det sidste afsnit lægger op til endnu et stort polyfont klimaks, men nu falder det til ro i noget, der ligner en E-dur/mol akkord. Codaen, betegnet *Intimo, quasi penoso* (Inderligt, næsten forpint), når til sidst frem til en form for stabilitet på en længe udholdt strygerakkord, som er endnu tydeligere g-mol. Men til allersidst bliver der sat spørgsmål ved strygerakkordens stabilitet: bassen skifter fra et massivt G til et B, mens bratschen suser opad til den samme tone, fortissimo, seks oktaver højere. Er bratschkoncerten kommet frem til den ophøjede ro, eller har den kun fået et flygtigt glimt af muligheden. Uanset hvad, så peger den på noget fraværende og også særdeles tiltrængt i vor tids nervøse, tvangsmæssige vanvid.

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Norske **Lars Anders Tomter** er en af tidens førende bratschister. Gennem en lang karriere har han optrådt verden over, bl.a. i Wiens Musikverein, New Yorks Carnegie Hall, Londons Wigmore Hall og Konzerthaus Berlin. Han har optrådt med BBC Symphony, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Academy of St. Martin in the Fields, Budapest Festival Orchestra og med de store skandinaviske orkestre. Tomters repertoire omfatter alle store værker for bratsch, og han har uropført koncerter af Rolf Wallin og Erkki-Sven Tüür. Tomters mange cd-indspilninger tæller bl.a. førsteindspilningen af Vagn Holmboes bratschkoncert for Dacapo. Lars Anders Tomter er professor ved Norges Musikkhøgskole i Oslo og Det Kongelige Danske Musikkonservatorium.

Aarhus Symfoniorkester blev grundlagt i 1935 og har til huse i Musikhuset Aarhus, hvor det råder over sit helt eget koncertsted; den prisbelønnede Symfonisk Sal. Orkestret består af 65 fastansatte musikere med chefdirigent Marc Soustrot i spidsen siden 2015. Orkestret afholder mere end 35 abonnementskoncerter om året, og derudover kommer familiekoncerter, lørdagskoncerter, kammerkoncerter, og samarbejdskoncerter med festivaler og spillesteder, bl.a. Musikhuset, Smukfest, Spot Festival og Aarhus Festuge. Aarhus Symfoniorkester er fast medspiller ved Den Jyske Operas årlige produktioner i den østjyske landsdel og har endvidere en betragtelig indspilningsvirksomhed af både danske, nykomponerede værker og det mere klassiske repertoire. Orkestret varetager mere end 100 skolekoncerter om året og lancerer i 2018 et nyt ambitiøst familieprojekt "Musikkens Børn", der henvender sig til før-skolebørn og deres forældre.

Marc Soustrot betragtes som specialist, hvad angår fransk orkestermusik. Han var tidligere chefdirigent og kunstnerisk leder for Orchestre Philharmonique des Pays de la Loire, Beethoven-orkesteret i Bonn, og Het Brabants Orkest i Eindhoven og står i dag i spidsen for Malmö Symfoniorkester og Aarhus Symfoniorkester. Som gæstedirigent har Soustrot arbejdet med adskillige orkestre som Staatskapelle Dresden, München Filharmonikerne, Bamberg Symfonikerne og DR SymfoniOrkestret. Soustrot har haft engagementer ved Opéra de Monte-Carlo, Semperoper Dresden, Teatro Real Madrid, Grand Théâtre de Genève, La Monnaie de Munt Brussels, Den Kgl. Opera i København samt Den Norske Opera i Oslo. Marc Soustrot blev i 2008 hædret med titlen Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur.

Den tyske dirigent **Andreas Delfs** har været engageret af orkestre i Nordamerika og Europa. Hos Milwaukee Symfoniorkester var han musikchef fra 1996-2009 og æresdirigent fra 2009-2015, og han var således centralt medvirkende til orkestrets løft i USA. Han stod også i spidsen for Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, først som musikchef fra 2001-04 og siden som kunstnerisk rådgiver fra 2004-06. I Danmark har Delfs optrådt med DR SymfoniOrkestret, Copenhagen Phil, Aarhus Symfoniorkester og Sønderjyllands Symfoniorkester. Han var chef for Staatstheater Hannover fra 1995-2000. Forinden var Delfs var musikchef ved operaen i Bern og dirigent for Pittsburgh Symfoniorkester.

DDD

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