

Birgitte Alsted Agnete's Laughter



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Birgitte Alsted, electronics & vocals

Rasmus Schjærff Kjøller, accordion

	AGNETES LATTER (Agnete's Laughter) (2007-2011)	30:27
	<i>Collage of recorded and computer processed sounds and vocals</i>	
[1]	Havmanden kalder (Call of the Merman)	3:34
[2]	I dybet – Længsel (In the Depths – Longing)	2:39
[3]	Sønner 7 (Seven Sons).	7:23
[4]	Vugges (Rocked)	2:53
[5]	Landet kalder (Call of the Land)	10:23
[6]	Agnetes latter (Agnete's Laughter)	3:35
[7]	MELENCOLIA (2001)	12:01
	<i>for accordion solo</i>	
[8]	SORGSANG V (Lament V) (1996-97)	9:14
	<i>Collage of recorded and computer processed vocals</i>	
[9]	BELLETER (2004)	4:41
	<i>Collage of computer processed recordings of church bells</i>	

Total: 56:32

BIRGITTE ALSTED was born in Odense in 1942 and studied violin at the Royal Danish Academy of Music in Copenhagen. She took her master's degree in the composition of electronic music at the Royal Academy of Music in Århus in 2006, an example of her constant searching and urge to experiment.

Her parents were the engineer Christian Alsted and the pianist and music teacher Inger Ramskou. So in her background Birgitte Alsted had both music and scientific rigour.

She studied in Warsaw for two years before her violin debut in Copenhagen in 1971. In 1970 the Group for Alternative Music was formed; it was highly experimental, and the members of this Danish group were pioneers of musical performance in several ways; for example, they were first on the scene with "outreach concerts" and had their music performed in unconventional places in Copenhagen like Nørreport Station and the Zoo.

Birgitte Alsted's first written composition, *Klumpe*, for baritone and chamber ensemble, was performed as part of the group's programme in 1971. Although she gradually concentrated more and more on composition, she never shelved the violin, and she still performs as a violinist in her own works. However, the composer in her increasingly took hold, and in the 1970s and 1980s a succession of works saw the light of day.

Many of these compositions were inspired by and associated with other arts than music. *The Forges of Granada*, *Antigone*, *Dejeuner sur l'herbe* and *Dream Play* are examples of works that play on the visual and theatrical. The two last-mentioned were written in collaboration with Brigitte Kolerus at the Teatret ved Sorte Hest in Copenhagen.

The work with theatre prompted Birgitte Alsted to start experimenting with electro-acoustic music. In the infancy of this music there was a distinction between concrete and electronic music, each of which had its own base in Europe – in Paris and Cologne respectively. Concrete music consisted of sounds recorded out in pulsating real life, and later electronically manipulated. Electronic music was both generated and manipulated electronically.

Today this distinction has disappeared, and it is characteristic that Birgitte Alsted uses sampled as well as electronically created sounds in her music. Her many electronic

works include *Zu Versuchen die Fragen* from 2002, again an epoch-making composition. It combines words by the poet Rilke and noises like 'vrooom' (from a door slamming in a stairwell) and 'sssshhh' (an irritating swishing sound beneath the door) with a variety of other sounds from the Aarhus Concert Hall and the creaking door into the DIEM studio (also in Aarhus), where this work was created.

Later too Birgitte Alsted has used a text by Rilke, from the second of the *Duino Elegies*. It was composed for and given its first performance in 2012 by the Swedish violin duo, Duo Gelland. The two musicians recited while they played! On the whole Duo Gelland has often performed and recorded music by Birgitte Alsted.

Other literary sources of inspiration included the Bible. In accordance with Birgitte Alsted's speculative and at the same time sensual thinking, it was at first the Book of Job that formed the basis for one of her major works, *Lament II* (1995), which was released by Dacapo. But the Book of Jonah has also provided inspiration, for among other works *Jonah's CLIMacteric*, which was written in connection with the climate summit in Copenhagen in 2009. A climacteric means a critical turning-point, and Birgitte Alsted's work involves a narrative which, in ingenious folk-tale style, has two parallel plots: the story of the doomed, sinful Nineveh, and our present polluted world where the planet itself has to protest. The narrative involves recitation, electronic music, solo violin and vocals. The composer's works are in fact never static, but – like this composition – may for example be furnished with visual images.

The narrative element is very strong in most of Birgitte Alsted's music, and is often her starting point. Her working process is intuitively determined, and often the form materializes along the way during the process of creation.

One medium that can mould profound thoughts into concentrated form is poetry. The electro-acoustic composition *Lament V* is an example. Birgitte Alsted has also used other people's poems; she loves the haiku, which we meet in several of her compositions, for example *Haiku Wärme* from 1995.

Profundity, reflection and the desire for concentration do not prevent humour shining through. In *WHaltz* for saxophone quartet, the musicians are allowed to let down their hair. Among others things the work has been played several times by the internationally known Danish Saxophone Quartet.

Birgitte Alsted has received many grants and prizes. In October 2011 *Agnete's Laughter* was awarded the Major Prize for a Woman Composer of the Danish Arts Foundation. In addition she has won the Hakon Børresen Prize, the Anniversary Prize of the Danish Composers' Society, Det Anckerske Legat, the 3-year grant from the Classical Music Committee of the Danish Arts Foundation in 1980 and 2006, and in 2012 the life annuity of the Danish Arts Foundation. An extract from the argument for the grant in 2006 says: "From works like *Lament II*, through *Zu versuchen die Fragen* ... until today, Birgitte Alsted has in a succession of electro-acoustic works developed a personal and sophisticated sound-universe that is both interesting and captivating."

SOURCES

Mette Koustrup Petersen: *Birgitte Alsted, a biography*. Thesis, Copenhagen University 2004.

Kvinder i Musik Yearbook 2002 with the theme "Birgitte Alsted". The yearbook features poems by Birgitte Alsted and Eva Maria Jensen, articles by Mette Koustrup Petersen and Per Nørgård, and tribute compositions by Carl Bergstrøm-Nielsen, Mogens Christensen and Per Nørgård.

Ewa Dabrowska: Interview from 1985 – can be read at *Kvinder i Musik's* website: www.kvinderimusik.dk/kalliopes-hjørne-7.html

Birgitta Tollan: Interview on Sweden's Radio 2

Websites: www.alsted-music.dk and www.komponistforeningen.dk

ABOUT THE WORKS – Profundity, reflection and humor in music

Agnete's Laughter is an audio work with recordings of vocal exclamations, calls and songs, harp and waves as the basic material. This material was recorded, manipulated, edited and finalized to some extent in the DIEM studio (Danish Institute for Electronic Music) in Aarhus, but first and foremost in Birgitte Alsted's own studio.

The work has six movements: 1) Call of the Merman; 2) In the Depths – Longing; 3) Seven Sons; 4) Rocking; 5) Call of the Land; and 6) Agnete's Laughter.

The title *Agnete's Laughter* evokes Hans Christian Andersen's dramatic poem "Agnete and the Merman", which ends with the description of the despair and eternal torment that Agnete must suffer because she wants to follow her beloved, the unattainable prince, and thus has to abandon her children.

Birgitte Alsted's sound-work, like Hans Christian Andersen's poem, is based on the folk ballad "Agnete and the Merman", but the two artists' interpretations of the ballad are different. While Hans Christian Andersen, in keeping with the view of women current in his time, laments Agnete's decision, while feeling sympathy with her, it is clear that Birgitte Alsted lives in a time with a different view of women, and Birgitte Alsted's Agnete perhaps in reality comes closer to the Agnete of the ballad than Hans Christian Andersen's.

In the ballad the Merman and Agnete have a dialogue where he tries to coax Agnete back to him and their children:

M: "And your little children they long for you"

A: "Oh let them long and let them yearn,
Never to them shall I return"

...

A: "Never do I think of them, large or small,
Of the babe in the cradle never at all."

The ballad is full of symbols that are easy enough to grasp, even without Freud in the back of your mind: Agnete and the Mermaid both have yearnings and erotic feelings, and Agnete's lust for freedom is clear. Birgitte Alsted was first and foremost inspired by the actual ballad, but she has also adopted impulses from Peter Meisling's monograph about it. Peter Meisling's thesis is that it is a comic ballad, and that – even its own time – it turned everything upside down. That it can also be interpreted in a context of liberation gives it an extra dimension.

A present-day Danish artist, Suste Bonnén, known especially as a photographer, has created an underwater sculpture showing the Mermaid and his seven sons. The sculpture has been set up at the bottom of Frederiksholm Canal at the square Højbro Plads in Copenhagen, and is a great tourist attraction.

Birgitte Alsted's audio work enters into a dialogue with Suste Bonnén's sculpture while at the same time relating to the dynamics of the traffic and other sounds from the city. It was given its first performance at Højbro Plads at the end of August 2007 during the ICMC conference (International Computer Music Conference) in Copenhagen.

Extracts from the arguments for the award of the Prize of the Danish Arts Foundation 2011, formulated by the Chairman of the Jury, the composer Bent Sørensen:

"Agnete's Laughter is a unique sound-work ... a quite independent musical artwork which contains so many musical images that even without the visual it is able to evoke unforgettable images and stories in the listener ... Birgitte Alsted succeeds in creating a living inner universe where voices and words penetrate through the electro-acoustic medium ... the ancient tale emerges fused with music and creates an entirely contemporary, relevant universe of grief and laughter that forms a magical musical narrative.

It is the hope of the jury that the award of the prize to Birgitte Alsted will mean that *Agnete's Laughter* will reach more listeners and will both be restaged in connection with Bonnén's sculpture group and at the same time can be heard in quite different contexts."

Birgitte Alsted's *Melencolia* was written in 2001 and supported by the Danish Arts Foundation. The work was commissioned and given its first performance by Marie Wårme. It

is for accordion solo and is played here by the young Rasmus Schærff Kjøller, who even before his official debut in 2013 is becoming an internationally known name.

Like other works by Birgitte Alsted, it takes its inspiration from another of the arts than music – visual art, since in *Melencolia* the composer reflects over the content of Albrecht Dürer's print from 1514, *Melencolia I*. Birgitte Alsted describes Dürer's picture in these words:

"Here we see an angel of indeterminate gender seated, brooding, with a compass in its right hand and lap – probably in the process of constructing something (art? something scientific?). The tools are scattered in disorderly fashion around the angel, and there are many mysterious symbols – the strangest perhaps being the magic square..."

This magic square is divided up into 4 x 4 small squares, each with a number. The magic element is that the addition of the figures in each row of squares – horizontal, vertical, diagonal or in combinations of these – gives the result 34. Birgitte Alsted is not the first person to take an interest in this magic square. Thomas Mann, for example, used it in his great novel *Doctor Faustus*.

As a composer Birgitte Alsted has experimented in *Melencolia* with transferring the rows of numbers to scales within her work. At the same time this complicated mental activity is for her an image of the way the composer can realize her inherent sound images in a work.

Lament V was written in 1996-97 and supported by the Danish Arts Foundation. The work was created in the DIEM studio in Aarhus on the basis of material consisting of Birgitte Alsted's performance of a poem she dedicated to her mother, Inger Alsted, who died in 1997. Inger Alsted was a pianist and music teacher, and among other things performed her daughter's music in concerts.

As certain as death
pain moves
(even if) called hatred and repression

Quite inevitably
– sooner or later –
tenderness of specific touch
is struck
by love

Universal grief and pain come to expression in the way Birgitte Alsted communicates her poem. Sometimes she speaks, sometimes she whispers or shouts. The following is her own interpretation of the poem:

“I wrote the poem under the influence of a particular experience in 1996. Like so many other people, throughout my life hitherto I had not been sure of my mother’s love – you got the strong impression of being in the way of her other wishes for her life.”

Further on in her interpretation Birgitte Alsted writes about among other things the insight that struck her like an arrow:

“BUT! Suddenly one day, while clearing up, I found a lost item of clothing that she had knitted. And then I was struck – by insight into her love (previously rather invisible to me)! Shortly afterwards Michael Madsen commissioned a work for sounds coming up from the gratings under the Copenhagen City Hall Square – in fact he built an underground sound studio that sent sounds up to unsuspecting pedestrians – Fuzzy [Jens Vilhelm Pedersen] too was given a work there – so the first version of *Lament V* was premiered there in 1996 under the title “So certain” – I told my mother about the project – she thought it was a fun idea – and called it “sewer music” – and I also played the work for her through her terrible speakers, and I doubt that she liked the actual work – but she was 90, although still with her wits about her. I am very grateful that I was able to acknowledge her love for me before it was too late!”

Belletter (from 2004) was supported by the Danish Arts Foundation, and like *Lament V* was computer-processed at the DIEM studio in Aarhus. ‘Belletter’ is to be understood as ‘bell letter’ and the material for the work is a sampling of one stroke from each of the three large bells of the Elias Church in Copenhagen.

The processing of the recording of the church bells has rendered the bell sound more or less unrecognizable. Birgitte Alsted wanted to give the listeners an experience of a dance in space, and talks here about her starting point for the composition:

“The reason I recorded the bells of the Elias Church was a commission from the church for an “angel mass” – so I did that with choir, organ, harps – and the congregation’s chorales in between – accompanied otherwise by electro-acoustics generated from the three bells. *Belletter* was to form the ending of this and mix with the real bell sound during the departure of the congregation from the church. *Belletter* (like the rest of the “bell work”) was originally mixed in Surround Sound, and the idea/inspiration was to produce a feeling that the bell angels were dancing through the whole church interior. The angel mass has never been performed, but later I did the work *Dance with Bells* (where *Belletter* is the last movement) – electro-acoustically – which can be heard in its own right. *DwB* has also been played in concert a few times with me on accompanying violin, for example in *Kvinder i Musik*’s concert with the title *Elektricerne* (“The Electresses”) in the hall Dronningesalen and for my master’s exam in 2006.”

Birgitte Alsted’s own description of her composition is of course important to a possible ‘understanding’ of it; on the other hand, any listener is ‘entitled’ to read into the work what he or she directly experiences in listening, and it may be tempting for a present-day Danish listener to associate the title of this work with a well known children’s programme on TV where the teddy bear ‘Bamse’ gracefully dances ‘ballets’ (Danish *balletter*). With this kind of association the listener can hardly avoid smiling!

Inge Bruland, former associate professor at the Department of Musicology, University of Copenhagen. Member of the board of Kvinder i Musik (Women in Music).

RASMUS SCHJÆRFF KJØLLER (accordion) concludes his soloist course at the Royal Danish Academy of Music in Copenhagen in September 2013. There he has been taught by Professor Geir Draugsvoll and James Crabb. His repertoire ranges from the Baroque to newly composed music and he works across the music genres: from classical to tango to pop and rock. Rasmus Schjærff Kjøller is one half of the classical accordion duo MYTHOS, who won DR P2's Chamber Music Competition in 2011 and the International Chamber Music Competition Almere in 2012. He has played with The Esbjerg Ensemble, The Jutland Ensemble and the Swedish contemporary music ensemble Ars Nova. In 2012 Rasmus Schjærff Kjøller received the Léonie Sonning Music Grant.

BIRGITTE ALSTED – LIV OG VÆRK af Inge Bruland

BIRGITTE ALSTED blev født i Odense i 1942 og uddannet som violinist på Det Kgl. Danske Musikkonservatorium (DKDM) i København. Hendes mastergrad i komposition af elektronisk musik opnåede hun fra Det Jyske Musikkonservatorium i 2006, og den er et eksempel på hendes stadige søgen og eksperimenterelyst.

Hendes forældre var civilingeniør Christian Alsted og pianist/musikpædagog Inger Ramskou. Med sig i bagagen havde Birgitte Alsted således både det musikalske og det stringente.

Hun studerede i Warszawa i to år før sin violindebut i København i 1971. I 1970 blev Gruppen for Alternativ Musik dannet; den var meget eksperimenterende, og gruppens medlemmer var pionerer i musiklivet på flere måder, bl.a. var de først på banen med "opsøgende koncerter" og fik deres musik opført på utraditionelle steder som f.eks. på Nørreport Station og i Zoologisk Have.

Birgitte Alsteds første nedskrevne komposition, *Klumpe*, for baryton og kammerensemble, blev opført i gruppens regi i 1971. Selv om hun gradvis sporede sig mere og mere ind på komposition, lagde hun aldrig violinen på hylden, og hun optræder stadig som violinist i sine egne værker. Komponisten i hende fik imidlertid mere og mere fodfæste, og i 1970'erne og 1980'erne så en lang række værker dagens lys.

En stor del af disse kompositioner var inspireret af og knyttet til andre kunstarter end musik. *Smedierne i Granada*, *Antigone*, *Frokost i det grønne* og *Drømmespil* er eksempler på værker, der spiller på det visuelle og teatermæssige. De to sidstnævnte stykker blev til i samarbejde med Brigitte Kolerus på Teatret ved Sorte Hest.

Arbejdet med det sceniske gav Birgitte Alsted anledning til at begynde med at eksperimentere med elektroakustisk musik. I denne musiks barndom skelnede man mellem konkret og elektronisk musik, der i Europa havde hver sit hjemsted, i henholdsvis Paris og Köln. Den konkrete musik bestod af lyde, der blev optaget ude i det pulserende liv og siden elektronisk bearbejdet. Den elektroniske musik var både elektronisk genereret og bearbejdet.

I nutiden er denne skelnen forsvundet, og det er også karakteristisk, at Birgitte Alsted i sin musik bruger samplede såvel som elektronisk skabte lyde. Blandt sine mange elektroniske værker er *Zu versuchen die Fragen* fra 2002 atter en skelsættende komposition. Den kombinerer ord fra et brev af digteren Rilke med lyde som wruummm (fra et dørmæk i en trappeskakt) og sssscchhh (irriterende susen under døren), samt flere andre lyde fra Musikhuset Aarhus og dørkirk ind til det derliggende DIEM-studie, hvor dette værk blev skabt.

Også senere har Birgitte Alsted brugt en tekst af Rilke, nemlig *Die zweite Elegie* fra *Duineser-elegierne*. Den blev komponeret til og uropført i 2012 af den svenske violinduo, duo Gelland. De to musikere reciterede, samtidig med at de spillede! Duo Gelland har i det hele taget ofte opført og indspillet musik af Birgitte Alsted.

Af litterære inspirationskilder kan også nævnes Biblen. Med Birgitte Alsteds spekulative og samtidig sansende sind har i første omgang Jobs Bog været grundlag for et af hendes hovedværker, *Sorgsang II* (1995), der blev udgivet på Dacapo. Men også f. eks. Jonas' Bog har givet inspiration, bl.a. til værket *Jonas i KLIMAKterium*, som blev skrevet i forbindelse med klimatopmødet i København i 2009. Klimakterium betyder vendepunkt, og Birgitte Alsteds værk rummer en fortælling, som i finurlig eventyrstil lader to handlingsforløb følges ad parallelt: Det undergangstruede, syndige Ninive og vores nutidige forurenede verden, hvor jordkloden må gøre oprør. Fortællingen rummer recitation, elektronisk musik, soloviolin og vokal. For øvrigt er komponistens værker aldrig statiske, men kan f.eks. – som denne komposition – udstyres med en billedside.

Det fortællende element er meget stærkt i det meste af Birgitte Alsteds musik, og ofte udgangspunktet for sig. Hendes arbejdsproces er intuitivt bestemt, og mange gange materialiserer formen sig undervejs i skabelsesprocessen.

Et medie, der kan rumme dybe tanker i koncentreret form, er digtet. Den elektroakustiske komposition *Sorgsang V* er et eksempel herpå. Birgitte Alsted har også brugt andres digte; hun ynder haiku, som vi møder i flere af hendes kompositioner, f.eks. *Haiku Wärme* fra 1995.

Dybsind, eftertanke og ønske om koncentration forhindrer ikke, at humor kan trænge igennem. I *HVals* for saxofonkvartet får musikerne lov til at slå sig løs. Værket er bl.a. blevet spillet flere gange af den internationalt kendte Dansk Saxofonkvartet.

Birgitte Alsted har modtaget mange legater og priser. I oktober 2011 blev *Agnetes latter* tildelt Kunstfondens store pris til en kvindelig komponist. Desuden har hun fået Hakon Børresen Prisen, Dansk Komponistforenings Jubilæumspris, Det Anckerske Legat, det 3-årige stipendium fra Statens Kunstfonds Klassiske Tonekunstvalg i 1980 og 2006 samt i 2012 den livsvarige ydelse fra Statens Kunstfond. I uddrag af begrundelsen for bevillingen i 2006 lyder det: "Fra værker som *Sorgsang II*, over *Zu versuchen die Fragen* ... og frem til i dag har Birgitte Alsted gennem en række elektroakustiske værker udviklet et personligt og raffineret lydunivers, som både interesserer og betager."

KILDER

Mette Koustrup Petersen: Birgitte Alsted, en biografi. Specialeafhandling, Københavns Universitet 2004.

Kvinder i Musiks årsskrift 2002 med temaet: Birgitte Alsted. Årsskriftet rummer digte af Birgitte Alsted og Eva Maria Jensen, artikler af Mette Koustrup Petersen og Per Nørgård, hyldestkompositioner af Carl Bergstrøm-Nielsen, Mogens Christensen og Per Nørgård.

Ewa Dabrowska: interview fra 1985 – kan læses på Kvinder i Musiks hjemmeside: www.kvinderimusik.dk/kalliopes-hjørne-7.html.

Birgitta Tollan: Interview i Sveriges Radio 2.

Hjemmesider: www.alsted-music.dk og www.komponistforeningen.dk

Agnetes latter er et lydværk, der har optagelser fra vokale udbrud, kalden og sang, harpe og bølger som grundmateriale. Dette materiale blev optaget, bearbejdet, redigeret og færdigbearbejdet, til en vis grad i DIEM-studiet (Dansk Institut for Elektronisk Musik) i Aarhus, men først og fremmest i Birgitte Alsteds eget studie.

Værket har 6 satser: 1) Havmanden kalder, 2) I Dybet – Længsel, 3) Sønner syv, 4) Vugges, 5) Landet kalder og 6) Agnetes latter.

Titlen *Agnetes Latter* skaber associationer til H.C. Andersens eventyr om “Agnete og Havmanden”. Eventyret munder ud i beskrivelsen af den fortvivlelse og evige smerte, Agnete må lide, fordi hun ville følge sin kærlighed, den uopnåelige prins, og dermed måtte forlade sine børn.

Birgitte Alsteds lydværk er som H.C. Andersens eventyr baseret på folkevisen “Agnete og Havmanden”, men de to kunstneres fortolkning af visen divergerer. Mens H.C. Andersen i overensstemmelse med sin tids kvindesyn beklager Agnetes beslutning, samtidig med at han har medfølelse med hende, er det tydeligt, at Birgitte Alsted lever i en tid med et andet kvindesyn, og Birgitte Alsteds Agnete kommer måske i virkeligheden folkevisens Agnete nærmere end H.C. Andersens.

Havmanden og Agnete har en dialog i visen, hvor han forsøger at lokke Agnete tilbage til sig og deres børn:

H: “Og dine små børn, de længes efter dig”

A: “Og lad dem længes, mens de længes vil,
slet aldrig så kommer jeg tilbage dertil”

...

A: ”Ret aldrig tænker jeg på de store eller små,
langt mindre på det lille som i vuggen lå.”

Folkevisen er fuld af symboler, som det er let at få øje på, også uden at have Freud i baghovedet: Såvel Agnete som Havmanden har længselsfulde og erotiske følelser, og Agnetes frigørelseslyst er tydelig. Birgitte Alsted er først og fremmest inspireret af selve folkevisen, men har også modtaget impulser fra Peter Meislings monografi om den. Peter Meislings tese går ud på, at visen er en skæmtevis, og at den – også i sin egen tid – vendte/vender alting på hovedet. At den også kan tolkes i frigørende sammenhæng, giver den endnu en dimension.

En nutidig kunstner, Suste Bonnén, der ikke mindst er kendt som fotograf, har skabt en undervandsskulptur, der forestiller Havmanden og hans 7 sønner. Skulpturen er opstillet på bunden af Frederiksholms Kanal ved Højbro Plads, og den er en stor turistattraktion.

Birgitte Alsteds lydværk er i dialog med Suste Bonnén's skulptur, samtidig med at det forholder sig til dynamikken i trafik- og andre lyde fra byen. Det fik sin uropførelse ved Højbro Plads ultimo august 2007 under ICMC-konferencen (International Computer Music Conference) i København.

Uddrag fra motiveringen af tildelingen af Kunstfondens pris i 2011, formuleret af juryens formand, komponisten Bent Sørensen:

”Agnetes latter er et enestående lydværk ... et helt selvstændigt musikalsk kunstværk, der indeholder så mange musikalske billeder, at det selv uden det visuelle er i stand til at skabe uafrystelige billeder og historier i lytteren ... Birgitte Alsted formår at skabe et levende indre univers, hvor stemmer og ord trænger igennem det elektroakustiske medie ... den ældgamle fortælling træder frem, indsmeltet i musik, og skaber et helt nutidigt og vedkommende univers af sorg og latter, der danner en magisk musikalsk fortælling.

Det er juryens håb, at tildelingen af prisen til Birgitte Alsted vil kunne medføre, at Agnetes latter vil nå ud til flere lyttere og både vil blive genopsat i forbindelse med Bonnén's skulpturgruppe og samtidig vil kunne lyttes til i helt andre sammenhænge.”

Birgitte Alsteds *Melencolia* blev skrevet i 2001 og støttet af Statens Kunstfond. Værket blev bestilt og uropført af Marie Wärme. Det er for accordeon solo og spilles her af den

unge Rasmus Schærff Kjøller, som allerede før sin debut i 2013 er ved at blive et internationalt kendt navn.

Værket får – som andre af Birgitte Alsteds værker – inspiration fra en anden kunstart end musik, nemlig billedkunst, idet komponisten i *Melencolia* funderer over indholdet i Albrecht Dürers kobberstik fra 1514, “Melencolia I”. Birgitte Alsted beskriver Dürers billede med bl.a. disse ord:

”Her ser vi en engel af ubestemt køn sidde grublende med sin passer i højre hånd i skødet – sandsynligvis i gang med et forsøg på at konstruere noget (kunst? videnskabeligt?). Redskaberne er smidt uordentligt rundt om englen, og der er mange gådefulde symboler – det underligste måske det magiske kvadrat ...”

Det omtalte magiske kvadrat er delt op i 4 x 4 små kvadrater med hvert sit tal. Det magiske består i, at additionen af kvadratrækkernes tal, det være sig horisontale, vertikale, diagonale eller kombinationer heraf, alle giver tværsommen 34. Birgitte Alsted er ikke den første, der har interesseret sig for dette magiske kvadrat. Thomas Mann, for eksempel, har brugt det i sin store roman, “Doktor Faustus”.

Som komponist har Birgitte Alsted i *Melencolia* eksperimenteret med at overføre talrækkerne til skalaer inde i sit værk. Denne komplicerede tankevirksomhed står samtidig for hende som et billede på, hvordan komponisten kan få sine iboende lydbilleder realiseret i et værk.

Sorgsang V er skrevet i 1996-97 og støttet af Statens Kunstfond. Værket blev skabt i DIEM-studiet i Aarhus ud fra et materiale, bestående af Birgitte Alsteds formidling af det digt, hun tilegnede sin mor, Inger Alsted, der døde i 1997. Inger Alsted var pianist og musikpædagog og har ved koncerter bl.a. opført sin datters musik.

Så sikkert som døden
bevæger smerten,
kaldes det (end) had og fortrængning

Helt uundgåeligt
– før eller siden –
rammer
konkret berørings ømhed
af kærlighed

Almen sorg og smerte kommer til udtryk i måden, Birgitte Alsted formidler sit digt på. Snart taler, snart hvisker eller råber hun. Her følger hendes egen fortolkning af digtet:

”Digtet skrev jeg under påvirkning af en bestemt oplevelse i 1996. Som så mange andre havde jeg gennem mit hidtidige liv ikke været sikker på min mors kærlighed, da man jo fik stærkt indtryk af at være i vejen for hendes andre ønsker til sit liv.”

Videre i sin fortolkning skriver Birgitte Alsted bl.a. om den indsigt, der ramte hende som en pil:

”MEN! Pludselig en dag under oprydning fandt jeg et glemt klædningsstykke hun havde strikket. Og så blev jeg ramt – af indsigten af hendes (hidtil for mig ret usynlige) kærlighed! Kort efter bestilte Michael Madsen et værk til lyd op fra ristene under Rådhuspladsen – han lavede faktisk et underjordisk lydstudie som sendte lyd op til intetanende fodgængere – Fuzzy fik også et værk med her – så altså her blev første version af *Sorgsang V* uropført i 1996 under titlen ”Så Sikkert” – Jeg fortalte min mor om projektet – hun syntes det var en sjov idé – og kaldte det ”kloakmusik” – og jeg spillede også værket for hende via hendes elendige højttalere, og jeg tvivler på hun kunne lide selve værket – men hun var også 90 men ellers frisk nok. Jeg er meget taknemmelig for at jeg nåede at anerkende hendes kærlighed til mig inden det var for sent!”

Belletter (2004) er støttet af Statens Kunstfond og er som *Sorgsang V* computerbehandlet i DIEM-studiet i Aarhus. Belletter betyder klokkebrev, og materialet til værket er en sampling af ét slag fra hver af den københavnske Eliaskirkes tre store klokker.

Behandlingen af optagelsen af kirkeklokkerne har gjort klokkelysten mere eller mindre uigenkendelig. Birgitte Alsted har ønsket at give lytterne en oplevelse af dans i rummet, og hun fortæller her om sit udgangspunkt for kompositionen:

”Grunden til at jeg optog Eliaskirkens klokker, var en bestilling herfra til en ”englemesse” – den lavede jeg så med kor, orgel, harpe – og menighedskorale indimellem – og så ellers ledsaget af elektroakustik lavet ud fra de 3 klokker. Belletter skulle så her danne afslutning, og blande sig med den virkelige klokkeklang under publikums udgang fra kirken. Belletter (som resten af ”klokkeværket”) er oprindeligt mixet i surround sound, og det var meningen/inspirationen at give en oplevelse af at klokke-englene danser i hele kirkerummet. Englemessen er aldrig blevet opført, men jeg lavede senere værket ”Dance with Bells” (hvor Belletter er sidste sats) – elektroakustisk – som kan høres i sin egen ret. DwB er også er blevet koncertopført nogle gange med mig på ledsagende violin, bl.a. i Kvinder i Musiks koncert med titlen ”Elektricerne” i Dronningesalen og til min master-eksamen i 2006.”

Birgitte Alsteds egen beskrivelse af sin komposition er selvsagt vigtig for en mulig ’forståelse’ af den, men enhver lytter har på den anden side ’ret’ til at lægge det i værket, han eller hun umiddelbart oplever ved lytningen, og det kan være fristende for en nutidig lytter at associere titlen på dette værk til et kendt børneprogram i TV, hvor Bamse yndefuldt ”balletter”. Med en sådan association kan lytteren næsten ikke undgå at komme til at trække på smilebåndet!

Inge Bruland, fhv. lektor ved Musikvidenskabeligt Institut, Københavns Universitet. Medlem af Kvinder i Musiks bestyrelse.

RASMUS SCHJÆRFF KJØLLER (accordeon) afslutter sin solistuddannelse i september 2013 fra Det Kongelige Danske Musikkonservatorium, hvor han har modtaget undervisning af professor Geir Draugsvoll og James Crabb. Hans repertoire spænder fra barokken til den ny skrevne musik og han arbejder på tværs af musikgenrerne: fra klassisk til tango til pop og rock. Rasmus Schjærff Kjølner er den ene halvdel af den klassiske accordeon duo MYTHOS, der vandt DR P2s Kammermusikkonkurrence i 2011 og International Chamber Music Competition Almere i 2012. Han har spillet med Esbjerg Ensemblet, Det Jyske Ensemble og det svenske ny-musik-ensemble, Ars Nova. Rasmus Schjærff Kjølner modtog i 2012 Léonie Sonnings Musikstipendiat.

Sorgsang V
Birgitte Alsted

[8] Så sikkert som døden
bevæger smerten,
kaldes det (end) had og fortrængning

Helt uundgåeligt
– før eller siden –
rammer
konkret berørings ømhed
af kærlighed

Lament V
Birgitte Alsted

As certain as death
pain moves
(even if) called hatred and repression

Quite inevitably
– sooner or later –
tenderness of specific touch
is struck
by love

DDD

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Sound engineers: Marc Casanovas (*Melencolia*) and Birgitte Alsted at DIEM with Morten Elkjær (*Agnete's Laughter*), Claus Pedersen (*Lament V*) and Anders Bak (*Belletter*)

Mastering: Marc Casanovas

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MUSIKANTOLOGI

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