


The Ondine logo, featuring the word "ONDINE" in a stylized, white, sans-serif font. The letters are slightly shadowed, giving them a three-dimensional appearance as if they are floating or standing on a surface.

ONDINE

TÕNU KÕRVITS
HYMNS TO THE
NORDIC LIGHTS

A photograph of a coastal fort at night, with a vibrant green aurora borealis (Northern Lights) visible in the sky. The fort is a stone structure with a wooden observation tower on top. A white fence runs across the foreground, and tall grass is visible in the lower left. The sea is visible in the background under the starry night sky.

ESTONIAN NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
RISTO JOOST

Tõnu Kõrvits



TÕNU KÕRVITS (1969)

1	Azure (2016/2017) <i>for strings</i>	2:46
	Hymns to the Nordic Lights (2011)	13:11
2	I	2:28
3	II	2:48
4	III	1:35
5	IV	1:00
6	V	5:20
	Silent Songs (2015) <i>for bass clarinet and orchestra</i>	14:58
7	I <i>Flower</i>	5:14
8	II <i>Sacred River</i>	3:45
9	III <i>Farewell Farewell</i>	5:59
	MEELIS VIND, bass clarinet (7–9)	
10	Leaving Capri (2018) <i>for strings</i>	4:35
11	Tears Fantasy (2011)	7:37
	Elegies of Thule (2007) <i>for strings</i>	13:56
12	I <i>The Night is Darkening</i>	4:49
13	II <i>Kellä' (Bells)</i>	3:44
14	III <i>I Look Up to the Hill</i>	5:23

ESTONIAN NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
RISTO JOOST, conductor

Tõnu Kõrvits' Songs for the Orchestra

When musing about the orchestral music of Tõnu Kõrvits (b. 1969), the first thing that springs to mind is its songlike nature – the orchestra is primarily a melodic instrument for the composer. This may explain why his preferred medium is the string orchestra (*Azure, Leaving Capri, Elegies of Thule*). But also in his compositions for the symphony orchestra, it is the melody – whether hymn-like, passionately declamatory or ornamental – which is the soul of the piece.

Kõrvits is a marvellous expert on the orchestra and a master of instrumentation, able to tune into the character of each instrument and to translate this particularity into music. We can hear this in the many instrument solos in his works. His sound fantasies bring into being worlds with an extra special atmosphere, which may include references to Romanticism from Schubert to Mahler, impressionist reflections à la Debussy, Ravel and Scriabin, not to mention the rational vigour of Stravinsky. These combine organically into Kõrvits' own unique orchestral style. The composer has said that, in addition to the string orchestra, he finds the orchestral matrix from Beethoven's era to offer the most flexibility for him.

Songs and the melodiousness of his orchestral music hint at the environment in which Kõrvits grew up – amongst pop- and rock music and the newest records acquired by his musician father Tõnis Kõrvits. Perhaps this is the reason why the composer likes compositions of the length of a rock song, whether as a separate piece or in a cyclical formation. Even the frequent appearance of the hymn genre in his works can be linked to rock music – namely, rock anthems. His tendency to use flageolet sounds calls to mind the typical vocal falsetto style of rock music. Blues is also among his favourite genres. Its melodic strategies, sequences of harmony and its yearning character have deeply impacted the composer's works.

Yet it is not only blues and Beethoven, rock music and Ravel which have captivated Kõrvits – he has been equally interested in Estonian folk tunes, for example the religious folk songs of Estonian Swedes from the western part of the country and the Seto tunes from the southeastern part of the country, near the Russian border. Those areas are part of Estonia as the mystical Thule, if one were to expand the hypothesis of the Saaremaa island as Thule to encompass all of Estonia. Kõrvits has created several compositions on the Thule theme and one of them – *Elegies of Thule* – can be heard on this album.

Throughout the years, Kõrvits has created arrangements for many musical works by other composers and himself. He likes to pick up an older composition and to reimagine it for a fresh grouping. This practice, dating back to the Renaissance and the Baroque era – which is also typical in pop music – is dear to Kõrvits. In this way he has created *Azure*, *The Night is Darkening* and *Tears Fantasy*, which was inspired by the music of John Dowland.

This album includes a selection of orchestral pieces by Kõrvits from the time period between 2007 and 2018. The journey through his orchestral music begins with **Azure** (2016/2017). This piece was originally created for male voices as a vocalise which completed the men's choir cycle *Songs from Dolores' Songbook*. The arrangement for string instruments gives the composition a special softness and translucency, which transforms into a painfully bright soundscape at the piece's culmination. There is secrecy in this poetic work – perhaps the secrecy of sadness.

Hymns to the Nordic Lights (2011) was a commissioned composition for the new music festival NYDD. The premiere was given by the Britten Sinfonia and conducted by James MacMillan. The beginning of the cycle is somewhat unique for Kõrvits – it seems to kick off with the culmination, the entire orchestra playing an intensive hymn

theme. The second part also begins with a dramatic gesture – signals by French horns and trumpets. The patterns of Nordic lights are reflected in the solo figurations of the piccolo flute and the clarinet in the third part as well as in the coldly emanating flageolet chains throughout the composition. The handling of the timpani is extremely delicate and diverse, ranging from a threatening tremolo in the distance to ecstatic cries. After the scherzo-like fourth part, the shimmering of the Northern Lights once again materialises in the last part as flageolets from flutes and string instruments, wind chimes and violin trills. The magnificent culmination lets the trumpets and French horns shine, backed by the entire orchestra, like the summit of a Scriabin-like ecstasy, conquering it all. In the end you are left with the memory of Nordic lights – and the chill.

Silent Songs (2015) for bass clarinet and the orchestra was written for the outstanding Estonian clarinetist Meelis Vind. The title brings forth associations with the famous Miles Davis' record *In a Silent Way* (1969), and we can find in the composition by Kõrvits parallels due to its lyrical and meditative, improvisation-like part for the soloist. In the second part of the work, *Sacred River*, the composer uses an Estonian Swedish religious folk tune, but places it in an exotic environment – perhaps an Oriental milieu or the music of towns by Mississippi – which Kõrvits is really drawn to.

Leaving Capri (2018) is a barcarolle with an elegiac melody, a "homage to Konrad Mägi" as the composer has noted in the score. Konrad Mägi (1878–1925) was one of the most important Estonian painters of the early 20th century. From 1921–1922, he lived in Capri, calling it "a divine island". Mägi, who yearned for southern sunny climes, died as a 47-year-old in Estonia without having the chance to return to Capri. The seeming simplicity of the composition hides a delicate instrumentation and a sense of lingering melancholy.

Tears Fantasy (2011) is dedicated to conductor Risto Joost, with whom Kõrvits has a frequent and trusting collaboration. One of Kõrvits' favourite composers, John Dowland, rewrote his pavane *Lachrimae* (1596) as a Lute song *Flow My Tears* and later also a version for the consort. In turn Kõrvits, inspired by Dowland, has composed an orchestral piece on its blueprint. It is worth mentioning that the lute is an instrument close to his heart – Kõrvits himself likes to play the guitar and the mandolin. Illuminated by Dowland, the orchestral piece by Kõrvits brings together the dancing character and the variation principle of the pavane and the mellow sound recalling the English Renaissance consort with the imitation of lute sounds. The composition is full of rhetorical sighing motifs and declining phrases reminiscent of falling teardrops.

This journey through the orchestral music of Tõnu Kõrvits concludes with the earliest work of this selection – **Elegies of Thule**, created in 2007. The musical material of the first part, *The Night is Darkening*, returns later in the third part of the mixed choir cycle *Moorland Elegies*. A Seto folk tune is used in the second part of the elegies, called *Kellä*. This is a double evocation: the orchestra imitates the playing of an Estonian plucked string instrument called the *kannel*, which in turn imitates the sound of Orthodox Church bells. The cycle is completed by the religious folk tune *I Look Up to the Hill*, which originates from the island of Saaremaa – the hypothetical "real" land of Thule.

The orchestral music of Kõrvits differs from the rest of his compositions mainly because of the opportunities which a string orchestra and a symphony orchestra offer. His lyrical and poetic strategies take hold of the listener just as in the other genres used by the composer. Kõrvits seeks to address the listener directly, their emotions and experiences, hopes and ideals. At the centre of Kõrvits' work is the human figure with all his suffering and joy, in his relationship with nature, other people and the universe. Each one of such "songs" for the orchestra is carried by a romantic breath. The composer has said

that for him romanticism is something beautiful and elevated: "Perhaps this sense of being elevated, putting romantic feelings on a pedestal and those feelings in themselves are very close to me. It reflects the secrets and sometimes the suffering of the human soul. And at the same time there is something very Nordic about it." Yet always there is something which remains tantalisingly veiled and just out of reach, the untouched internal space – and that is also quintessentially Nordic.

Kristel Pappel

Translation: Ingrid Hübscher

Tõnu Kõrvits (1969) is a shining star of Estonian contemporary music. Beside Veljo Tormis's shamanistic spells, Erkki-Sven Tüür's energetic explosions and Arvo Pärt's religious contemplations, Kõrvits's sound world stands out as highly poetic, full of visionary fantasies. His music carries the listener along on hypnotic journeys through the landscapes of nature and folk tradition, human soul and subconscious. His oeuvre includes all traditional genres from orchestral and instrumental music to choral music and operas. Currently, the list of his compositions contains 230 opuses. Figurative titles of his works often reflect romantic or mythological allegories. Breathing, song-like expression is the core of his personal idiom, reflecting delicate breeze from jazz and popular music. By its nature, Kõrvits's idiom can be called as "magic impressionism".

Tõnu Kõrvits started composing in 1990s in neo-romantic style. In 2000nds, orchestral works with more elaborated sound canvas were composed, searching for synthesis of archaic and exotic melodies, such as *The Sign of Love* (2002), *Eldorado* (2002), *Safra* (2005) for piano and string orchestra, *Tsirgutii* (*Milky Way*, 2005) for flute and string orchestra, and others. In 2000nds, Kõrvits has also composed a series of works reflecting the

imagery of the mythical Northern land Thule, an archaic prototype of Estonia – such as *Sung into the Wind* (2006) for symphony orchestra and *Elegies of Thule* (2007) for string orchestra. Kõrvits's poetic idiom has achieved extreme power of expression in chamber operas *My Swans*, *My Thoughts* (2005) and *Firegarden* (2006). In 2013, also the two-act opera *Butterfly* was composed after Andrus Kivirähk's novel. Kõrvits's excellent melodic gift is evident in his numerous works for solo instruments. He is also known as an accomplished arranger of popular music and author of soundtracks for documentaries and animation films.

In last decade, Kõrvits has composed remarkable works being still inspired by Estonian and Northern traditional culture, religious and pantheistic subtexts – *Kreek's Notebook* (2007) for mixed choir and string orchestra, based on Estonian sacred folk tunes (collected by Estonian composer Cyrillus Kreek), *Hymns from the Western Coast* (2009) for mixed choir and saxophone quartet, *Seven Dreams of Seven Birds* (2009/2012) for cello, mixed choir and string orchestra (text by Maarja Kangro and Tõnu Kõrvits), *Canticle of the Sun* (2014, text by Saint Francis of Assisi) and *Stabat Mater* (2014) for mixed choir.

Music of Tõnu Kõrvits has been performed at several festivals in European countries, USA, Australia, Canada and Russia. His works belong to the repertoire of the most important Estonian orchestras, choirs and artists, and has been performed by noted foreign collectives, like BBC Symphony Orchestra, Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra, Britten Sinfonia, Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, Swedish Radio Choir, The Sixteen Choir, and many others.

As a talented and prolific creator, Tõnu Kõrvits has gained recognition from the Estonian state and cultural institutions a number of times, among them the Annual Prize of the Endowment for Music of the Cultural Endowment of Estonia in 2004 and 2014, the

Annual Music Prize of the Estonian Music Council in 2007, and the Cultural Prize of the Republic of Estonia in 2011 and 2016. Estonian Public Broadcasting chose Kõrvits as the Musician of the Year 2015. Since 2015, Tõnu Kõrvits is an honorary citizen of Clarksdale Mississippi for his music through which he has brought honor to Clarksdale, The Delta and to the preservation of the Blues.

Evi Arujärv



Clarinetist, jazz musician and composer **Meelis Vind** began his music studies in clarinet with Harli Maanus and trumpet with Jaan Linde at Kiviõli Music School. In 1983, Vind graduated from Tallinn Music High School in Hans Suurväli clarinet class and in 1983–1987 continued his studies at Leningrad Conservatory under the supervision of Pavel Suhkanov. In 1992, Vind graduated from Estonian Academy of Music in clarinet with Hannes Altrov. In 1987, Meelis Vind was awarded the second prize at the Estonian National Competition for Woodwind Players.

Since 1987 Vind has worked as orchestral musician in Estonian National Symphony Orchestra and since 2008 taught clarinet and saxophone in Georg Ots Music School. He has also been teaching in Nõmme Music School (2004–2010).

Meelis Vind is an active chamber musician, focusing on contemporary music performance. He has participated in several projects of new music, including contemporary music ensembles NYDD and Ensemble U:. Meelis Vind has premiered new Estonian clarinet music, including Pille Kangur's *Searching for a Song* for bass clarinet, Mirjam Tally's *The Rowan Sea* for bass clarinet, and Helena Tulve's *Passage Secret* for two clarinets (with Tarmo

Pajusaar) and participated in several premiere performances of Estonian new chamber music written by René Eespere, Lepo Sumera and Helena Tulve.

Meelis Vind as jazz musician is self-taught, although he considers his friend and long-term artistic partner guitarist Ants Laigi his teacher. Since 1996 Vind has been a member of Raivo Tafenau Quintet and Duo Tafenau-Vind and he has played in Estonian Dream Big Band since its founding in 1998. He has also performed in different groups with almost all outstanding Estonian jazz musicians, such as percussionist Tanel Ruben, instrumentalists Riho Sibul, Raul Sööt, Raul Vaigla, Virgo Sillamaa and vocalist Kadri Voorand, and cooperated with singer Tõnis Mägi, ensemble Lippajad and American hip-hop and beatboxer Napoleon Maddox.

Meelis Vind has also himself founded several ensembles and composed music for them – Vind Project (album *Twilight Patterns*, 2006), VindPower (album *WindPower*, 2012), Vind Project 2, and Vind Project 3 (album *Liivamandala*, 2013). He has appeared at jazz festivals both in Estonia and abroad and collaborated with international names in jazz, like Markus Ketola and Kálmán Oláh. Vind has also practised free improvisation. In 2014, Meelis Vind was awarded the Danske Jazz Award for intensive and creative activity as jazz musician.

The Estonian National Symphony Orchestra (ENSO; known in Estonian as Eesti Riiklik Sümfooniaorkester or ERSO) is the longest continually operating professional orchestra of its kind in the country. The orchestra's history dates back to 1926 and, like that of many other world orchestras, is connected to the birth of national broadcasting. Since 2010, it has been led by principal conductor and artistic director Neeme Järvi, while Paavo Järvi has been its artistic advisor since 2002, and Olari Elts its principal

guest conductor since 2007. The orchestra's previous principal conductors include Olav Roots (1939–44), Paul Karp (1944–50), Roman Matsov (1950–63), Neeme Järvi (1963–79), Peeter Lilje (1980–90), Leo Krämer (1991–93), Arvo Volmer (1993–2001) and Nikolai Alexeev (2001–10).

The orchestra performs with renowned conductors and soloists from around the world, including Estonian musicians of the highest calibre. Its recordings demonstrate a quality recognized by many prestigious music magazines, having won several prizes, including a Grammy Award. In addition to broadcast performances on Estonian Public Broadcasting, ENSO has also been aired on the Mezzo television channel. The orchestra's home venue is the Estonia Concert Hall in Tallinn, but it has also undertaken more than fifty concert tours, most notably tours of Italy in 2003, the USA in 2009, 2013, and 2018, and China in 2016. In addition, ENSO has regularly given concerts in European and Scandinavian countries, appearing at many prestigious festivals including Köln, New York, Verona, Genoa, Munich, and Stockholm. With a repertoire ranging from the Baroque period to the present, the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra has also given premiere performances of symphonic works by several Estonian composers, including Arvo Pärt, Erkki-Sven Tüür, Eduard Tubin, Eino Tamberg, Jaan Rääts, Lepo Sumera, Tõnu Kõrvits and Helena Tulve.

Celebrating the centenary of the Republic of Estonia led the premier orchestra of Estonia on a tour to Hong Kong, Germany and Georgia in addition to the United States. In February 2018, shortly before the centenary of the Republic of Estonia, maestro Neeme Järvi was invited to the Konzerthaus Berlin to conduct Estonia's first oratorio – Jonah's Mission by Rudolf Tobias – together with the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra.

www.erso.ee

The young Estonian conductor **Risto Joost** excels by his specialized versatility and has gained widespread recognition for his work both in the opera pit and on concert stage. The trained singer and Conductor-in-Residence of the Estonian National Opera has already held major artistic positions, such as Chief Conductor of the Tallinn Chamber Orchestra and Artistic Director of the MDR Leipzig Radio Choir from 2015 to 2019.

He has succeeded at important competitions and conducted some of the world's most distinguished orchestras. Risto Joost is in demand as a guest conductor with orchestras such as Helsinki Philharmonic, Mariinsky Orchestra, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, SWR Symphony Stuttgart, Danish National Symphony Orchestra, Netherlands Philharmonic, Bergen Philharmonic, Norwegian Opera Orchestra, Tampere Philharmonic, Strasbourg Philharmonic, Noord Nederlands Orkest, Prague Radio Symphony, Janacek Philharmonic, Orchestre de Chambre de Lausanne, Netherlands Chamber Orchestra, Orchestra dell Teatro La Fenice, Tapiola Sinfonietta, Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra, Heilbronn Chamber Orchestra, Latvian National Symphony, Estonian National Symphony, Latvian National Symphony, among others. In addition, he has collaborated with the RIAS Kammerchor, SWR Vokalensemble, Ars Nova Copenhagen, Swedish Radio Choir, Rundfunkchor Berlin, and Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir, among others. At the Estonian National Opera Risto Joost has led more than 20 premieres.

His repertoire ranges from Baroque to the most challenging works of contemporary composers. At the Birgitta Festival Tallinn he led La Bohème in 2018. Upcoming highlights are his debuts with Copenhagen Philharmonic, NDR Radiophilharmonie Hannover, South Netherlands Philharmonic, Trondheim Symphony, Brno Philharmonic, and return visits with Helsinki Philharmonic, Bergen Philharmonic, Norwegian Opera Orchestra, Noord Nederlands Orkest, WKO Heilbronn, and various projects with

Janáček Philharmonic. With the MDR Leipzig Radio Symphony and Choir Risto Joost directs several programmes with works by Beethoven, Mendelssohn and Tõnu Kõrvits. His discography includes Tõnu Kõrvits' *Moorland Elegies* (Ondine) and works by Haydn with the Tallinn Chamber Orchestra, Peeter Vähi with the Latvian National Symphony, Arvo Pärt with the Netherlands Chamber Orchestra and Chamber Choir, and various recordings of Estonian music with the Estonian National Symphony and Tallinn Chamber Orchestra.

For his artistic activities in Estonia and abroad, Risto Joost received the music award of the Cultural Foundation in Estonia in 2016 and was awarded the Young Cultural Figure Award of the Estonian Republic in 2011. He was Prizewinner of the Malko Conducting Competition 2015 and Jorma Panula Conducting Competition 2012. Risto Joost has studied at the Estonian Academy of Music and received further training at the University for Music and Performing Arts in Vienna. In 2008, Risto Joost graduated from the Royal College of Music in Stockholm with a master's degree, majoring in orchestral conducting with Jorma Panula. He founded the chamber choir Voces Musicales in Estonia in 1999 and has been Artistic Director of the Birgitta Festival Tallinn.

www.ristojoost.com

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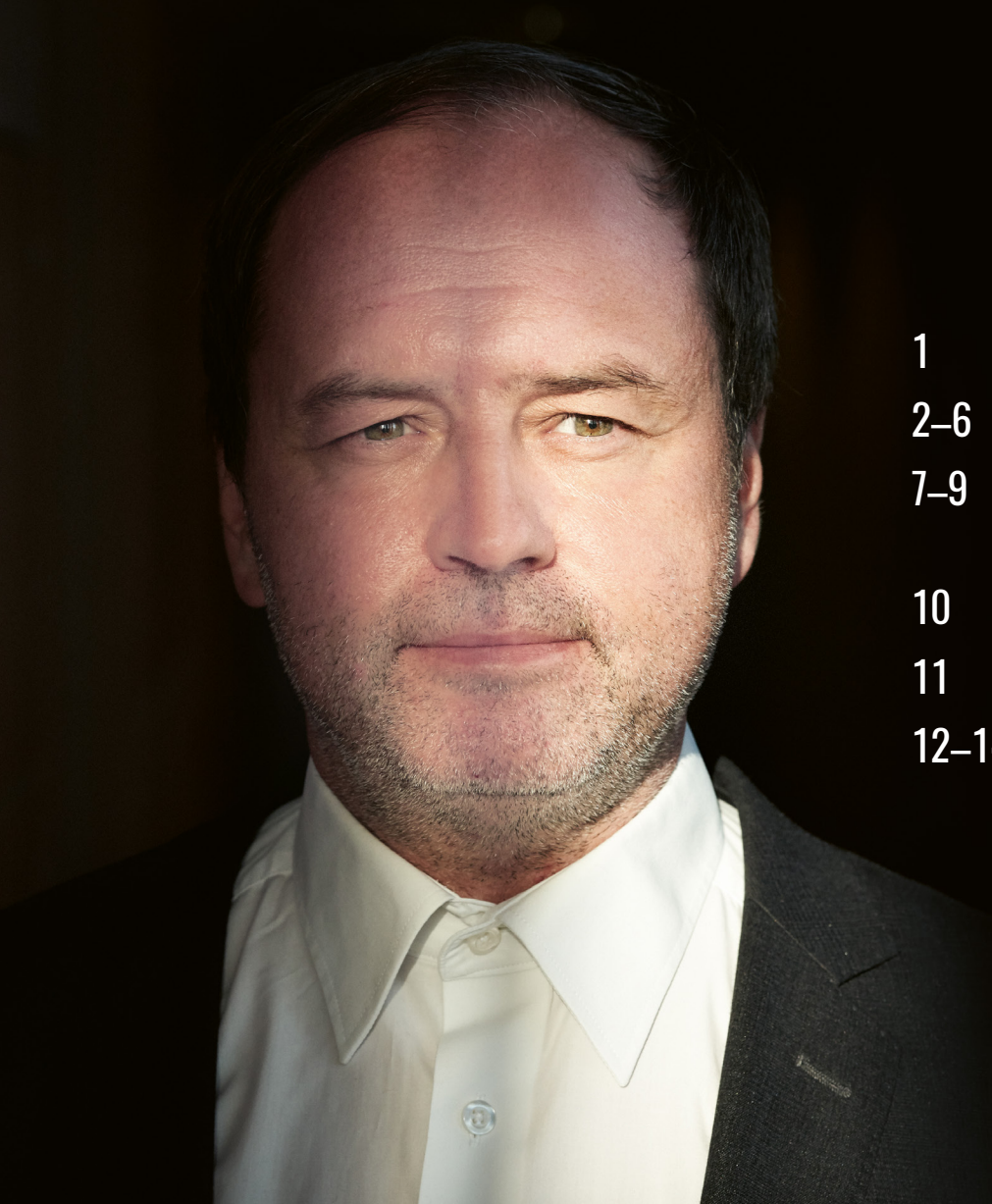
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Risto Joost



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