

Axel Borup-Jørgensen (1924-2012)

Unicorns

For guitar ensemble

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|------|
| 1 | Enhjørninger I (Unicorns I) (1992) | 7:05 |
| 2 | Entrée (1997) | 4:08 |
| 3 | Enhjørninger II (Unicorns II) (1992) | 8:07 |

Total 14:21

World premiere recording

Performed by CRAS (Peter Oldrup^{1,2}, Henrik Bay Hansen, Mikkel Egelund Nielsen, Jacob Nørrelund, Søren Eriksen and Uffe Carl Hansen)



Axel Borup-Jørgensen

The Path to Immediacy

By Niels Rosing-Schow

The Danish composer Axel Borup-Jørgensen (1924-2012) had a special affinity with the guitar. After 1970, when he immersed himself in chamber and solo works, he gave a prominent place to music for guitar, including works for solo and duo as well as the larger guitar ensembles included here.

There are various reasons for the composer's intense occupation with the instrument, artistic as well as more practical. Whatever the guitar might lack in volume, it can call on a sound world with undreamt of possibilities for nuance, from which sensual and poetic expression can be created. The instrument belongs to the artistic realm which Axel Borup-Jørgensen sought to refine in his compositions in this period, to which most of his works for guitar belong.

Many elements come together here, joined in impact and inspiration, which the composer has integrated into his creative universe at this relatively late stage in his life. Natural lyricism, as in much of Borup-Jørgensen's music, plays a subtle yet powerful role here. It stems from his upbringing in Sweden (1927-46) where his family bought the island of Björkö in Lake Sommen in southern Sweden in 1942. On walks in the surrounding area, he was absorbed by the unique stillness of this vast landscape. These experiences continued to live on in his music.

He was admitted to the music conservatory in Copenhagen in 1946, and in 1950 passed the music-pedagogic

exam on the piano. Apart from brief studies in instrumentation with Poul Schierbeck and Jørgen Jersild, Borup-Jørgensen was self-taught as a composer. Of a traditional character at first, his early compositions soon found a personal style in which relatively reduced material has an atonal, pointillist style which would become the norm in his musical creations.

When Danish musical life opened up to Central Europe around 1960, Borup-Jørgensen was amongst the first to seek out the summer courses in Darmstadt, avant-garde music's Mecca at the time. His visits in 1959 and 1962 did not significantly alter Borup-Jørgensen's mode of expression. He never embraced the serial or structuralist compositional principles of the avant-garde, as his music remained fundamentally intuitive in conception.

Instead, inspiration came from others, not least György Ligeti, who was important in providing further nuancing and refinement of his work. This influence unfolded in the substantially increased expressive palette used for the orchestral work *Marin*, a major piece he worked on between 1963 and 1970. This 25-minute symphonic work runs interwoven harmonic clusters, aleatoric principles and unconventional ways of playing in music that is strongly differentiated, sound-wise, and which describes the sea in suggestive pictures. Its realisation after many years of hard work was carried over to a creative period that was exclusively devoted to the field of chamber music and solo works. Here Borup-Jørgensen explored refined and instrumentally specific expressive possibilities, especially in the more than 20 solo, ensemble and chamber works he wrote involving the guitar.

Through the long period in which he carried out his detailed work, researching the special sound and technical playing characteristics and possibilities of the instruments he was writing for, Borup-Jørgensen worked out his own notation practice, which is remarkable for its beautiful graphic form and calligraphy. The scores are, at the same time, formidably precise and detailed (seen by contemporaries as bordering on the manic) in their instructions for the musicians. This was not because Borup-Jørgensen wanted to wreck the traditional expressive qualities: he sought a synthesis of tradition and innovation, but in a way in which the traditional parameters were to be handled with extreme sensibility.

Borup-Jørgensen's deep exploration of the guitar's expressive universe could not have happened without a close collaboration with a number of skilled performers on the instrument. The period during which he composed most of his guitar works was characterised by a shared desire for experiment on the part of composers and musicians who had an interest in new music. This was especially true of the generation of guitarists who, since the 1970s, had contributed to a golden era for Danish guitar music. For the composer, it was decisive that he had a close, trusting relationship with the musicians who presented his music, to be sure that they did so with the necessary dedication to grasp his special expressive universe. In return, they were often rewarded with works dedicated to them.

This was the case with *Entrée*, featured on this release. The work was written for a guitar festival in 1997, as the opening piece in a portrait-concert of guitar works by Borup-Jørgensen. It is a quintet composed for the

concert's five participating guitarists whose names, a bouquet of guitarists the composer, amongst others, had worked with closely, are inscribed in the score: Karl Petersen, Per Dybro, Leif Hesselberg, Lars H. Jensen and Maria Camitz.

Precisely because the work was composed as an introductory piece for a portrait-concert, the composer chose to integrate quotations from those of his earlier works for guitar which the public would be experiencing later in the concert. This did not make the work a collage: the small citations are handled with great discretion. The character of the music is aphoristic, and the peculiar sound effects and recognisable figures create a clear formal structure through variation and recurrence.

There is a certain material commonality between the two works featured on this release (for example the repeated short figures comprising three or four notes). *Enhjørninger* (1992) has an even earlier relationship with another work, a guitar duo entitled *poésies pour la dame à la licorne* [poems for a lady with a unicorn], composed in 1986-88. *La dame à la licorne* is the title of six well-known Renaissance tapestries depicting a woman surrounded by various animals, amongst which a unicorn clearly has a significant role. The theme of the six illustrative tapestries is the five senses, with a further image that illustrates the motto, *À mon seul désir* [To my only desire].

The unicorn, which has given the work its title, is a mysterious and elusive creature in the form of a horse, most frequently white, with a twisted horn growing from its forehead. This fabled animal resists capture and has

been associated with purity and innocence. Its horn was believed to ward off illness and poisoning by merely touching it. The way Borup-Jørgensen structures the work encourages a comparison with the tapestries, in which one can allow the gaze to wander from one figure to another, or to jump freely between them. The work consists of 11 relatively short sections from which the performers can select, setting them together in a free order. This is why this release includes two versions of the piece: one performance doesn't do it justice, as it has a clear identity, yet is never quite the same. It was composed for the congress of the European Guitar Teachers Association in 1992 for any number of guitarists. The versions here are for six guitars, but according to the composer's instructions it can be performed by anything from six to 24 players.

'We must accept complexity', said Pierre Boulez, and for Axel Borup-Jørgensen, complexity served as a clear artistic purpose. It is the path towards a compound, fleeting world of unprecedented poetry and refinement – at times on the verge of silence – which can be brought to life under the surface of things, a world which, in its own way, makes space for a spontaneous sensuality: complexity is the path to immediacy.

The intimacy of the guitar, its close connection to the performer's body, hands and movements, radiates into the music like a gestural presence. For a composer who understands how to 'play' on this artistically, the music suddenly engages multiple senses. Besides the heard, one senses the tactile feeling of the fingers (and nails) on the strings, plucking and striking, while the other hand moves over the fretboard. And the visual remains present

through the musician's dynamic and sounding gestures, which are embodied in the coordinated movements of the arms and the body: the sense of hearing awakens and enlivens the sense of touch and sight – even if one is 'just' listening. This holistic experience is precisely what Axel Borup-Jørgensen explores and conveys in his works for guitar.

Bringing this aspect of the music to life as well as possible, this recording was made in an entirely wood-panelled room – a continuation of the guitars' soundboxes – using analogue recording techniques.



CRAS during the recording session of *Unicorns*

CRAS is an ensemble of six classically trained guitarists who, since their formation in 2017, have posed a thought-provoking question: How can the music of tomorrow engage with the world of today?

Since its inception, the group has embarked on a series of projects that explore the intersection of contemporary music with various aspects of modern life, including societal issues, global events and political and historical themes.

Collaboration is central to CRAS's mission. The ensemble works diligently with composers from around the world to expand the repertoire for six guitars. Its diverse projects have provided opportunities to collaborate with experts across a wide range of fields, including fine dining, nuclear policy, digital bullying, puppetry, film and literature, among others. Above all, CRAS values its connection with audiences, striving to keep music alive and relevant.

The name CRAS, derived from the Latin word for 'tomorrow,' embodies the spirit of this modern ensemble, dedicated to performing the music of tomorrow, today. CRAS consists of guitarists Peter Oldrup, Henrik Bay Hansen, Mikkel Egelund Nielsen, Jacob Nørrelund, Søren Eriksen and Uffe Carl Hansen.

Vejen til det umiddelbare

Af Niels Rosing-Schow

Den danske komponist Axel Borup-Jørgensen (1924-2012) havde et særligt forhold til guitaren. I hans produktion efter 1970, hvor han fordybede sig i kammer- og soloværker, indtager musik for guitar en fremtrædende plads. Det gælder både værker for guitar solo og guitarduo. Men også – som på denne udgivelse – for større guitarensembler.

Der er flere grunde til komponistens intense beskæftigelse med netop dette instrument, kunstneriske såvel som mere praktiske. Hvad guitaren måtte savne i volumen, har den til gengæld i form af en klangverden med uanede differentieringsmuligheder, som kan skabe et sanseligt og poetisk udtryk. Instrumentet matcher på den måde den udtryksverden, som Axel Borup-Jørgensen kredsede om og forfinede i sine kompositioner i perioden, hvor de fleste af hans guitarværker er blevet til.

Mange elementer mødes her, samlet af indtryk og inspirationer, komponisten har integreret i sit kunstneriske univers i denne relativt sene fase af sit liv. Naturlyrikken, som præger meget af Borup-Jørgensens musik, er til stede som en stærk undertone. Den udspringer af hans opvækst i Sverige (1927-46), hvor familien i 1942 købte øen Björkö i søen Sommen i det sydlige Sverige. På turene i omegnen fordybede han sig i den særlige stilhed, der bliver nærværende i dette vidtstrakte landskab. Oplevelserne lever videre i hans musik.

I 1946 blev han optaget på musikkonservatoriet i København og aflagde i 1950 musikpædagogisk eksamen i klaver. Bortset fra kortvarige instrumentationsstudier hos Poul Schierbeck og Jørgen Jersild er han selv lært som komponist. Efter traditionelt farvede, tidlige kompositioner finder han snart en personlig stil, præget af et relativt reduceret materiale i en atonal, pointillistisk stil, som skulle blive gennemgående i hans musikalske skaben.

Da dansk musikliv omkring 1960 åbnede sig mod Centraleuropa var Borup-Jørgensen blandt de første, der besøgte sommerkurserne i Darmstadt, avantgarde-musikkens mekka i denne periode. Besøgene i 1959 og 1962 ændrede dog ikke grundlæggende ved Axel Borup-Jørgensens udtryksmåde. Han kom ikke til at inkorporere avantgardens serielle eller strukturalistiske kompositionsprincipper, hans musik forblev grundlæggende intuitivt konciperet.

Til gengæld blev inspiration fra ikke mindst György Ligeti vigtig for en yderligere nuancering og forfinelse af hans udtryk. Dette kom til udfoldelse på den helt store udtrykspalet med orkesterværket *Marin*, et hovedværk, som blev til i årene 1963-70. Dette 25 minutters symfoniske forløb sammensmelter harmoniske clusters, aleatoriske principper og utraditionelle spillemåder i en klanglig yderst differentieret musik, der skildrer havet i suggestive billeder. Dets realisering efter de mange års hårdt arbejde blev overgangen til en skaberperiode, der udelukkende stod i kammermusikkens og soloværkernes tegn. Her udforsker Borup-Jørgensen raffinerede og instrumentspecifikke udtryksmuligheder, ikke mindst i de mere end 20 solo-, ensemble- og kammerværker for eller med guitar.

I forlængelse af sit minutiøse arbejde med udforskningen af instrumenternes særlige klanglige og spilletekniske muligheder udarbejdede han sin egen notationspraksis, som udmærker sig ved den smukke grafiske udformning i komponistens kalligrafi. Partiturerne er samtidig uhørt præcise og minutiøse (til tider grænsende til det maniske) i deres anvisninger til musikerne. Det er ikke, fordi Axel Borup-Jørgensen kaster vrang på traditionelle udtrykskvaliteter: Han søger en netop en syntese af tradition og fornyelse, men på en måde, hvor de traditionelle udtryksparametre behandles med ekstrem sensibilitet.

Borup-Jørgensens dybe udforskning af guitarens udtryksunivers var ikke sket uden et tæt samarbejde med en række udøvende musikere på instrumentet. Perioden, hvor han har komponeret hovedparten af guitarværkerne, var præget af en gensidig eksperimenterelyst blandt komponister og musikere med interesse for ny musik. Det gjaldt ikke mindst den generation af gitarister, som siden 1970'erne har bidraget til en gylden æra for dansk guitarmusik. For komponisten var det afgørende at have et tillidsforhold til de musikere, som fremførte hans musik for at være sikker på den nødvendige dedikation i forhold til at tilegne sig hans særlige udtryksunivers. Og de blev belønnet med værker, som ofte er dem tilegnet.

Det gælder også værket *Entrée* på nærværende udgivelse. Værket blev skrevet til en guitarfestival i 1997 som åbning af en portrætconcert med guitarværker af Axel Borup-Jørgensen. Det er således en kvintet, komponeret til koncertens fem medvirkende gitarister. Partituret bærer navnene på de musikere, det er skrevet til, en buket af gitarister, som Axel Borup-Jørgensen, blandt andre, har arbejdet tæt sammen med: Karl Petersen, Per Dybro, Leif Hesselberg, Lars H. Jensen og Maria Camitz.

I og med at værket er komponeret netop som *entrée* [indgang] til en portrætconcert, har komponisten valgt at integrere citater fra egne guitarværker, som publikum så kunne opleve senere i koncerten. Ikke at værket dermed er blevet en collage: De små citater er behandlet med stor diskretion. Karakteren er aforistisk, men særlig klangvirkninger og genkendelige figurer danner samtidig gennem afveksling og tilbagevenden et klart formmønster.

Der er også et vist materialefællesskab mellem denne udgivelses to værker (eksempelvis de gentagne, korte figurer på tre eller fire toner). Men værket *Enhjørninger* (1992) har dog et endnu tydeligere slægtskab med et andet værk, en guitarduo med titlen *poésies pour la dame à la licorne* [digte om damen med enhjørningen], komponeret i 1986-88. *La dame à la licorne* er titlen på seks berømte renæssance-gobeliner med en kvinde, omgivet af forskellige dyr, hvor enhjørningen tydeligvis har en særlig rolle. Temaet for de seks billedtæpper er de fem sanser og et billede, der rummer mottoet *À mon seul désir* [Til min eneste attrå].

Enhjørningen, som har givet værket sin titel, er en gådefuld og sky skabning i skikkelse af en, oftest hvid, hest med et snoet horn i panden. Dette fabeldyr lader sig ikke indfange, og det har været forbundet med renhed og uskyld. Enhjørningens horn skulle virke mod sygdom og forgiftning, blot man berørte det. Som Borup-Jørgensens værk er disponeret, er det svært ikke at tænke på en ophængning af billedtæpper, hvor man kan lade blikket vandre fra det ene til det andet eller springe frit imellem dem. For værket er disponeret i en række af 11 relativt korte sekvenser, som de udøvende kan vælge ud fra og

sætte sammen i fri rækkefølge. Derfor rummer denne EP to versioner af stykket, for en enkelt gennemspilning af værket yder det ikke retfærdighed: det har en klar identitet, men er dog aldrig det samme. Det blev komponeret til European Guitar Teachers Association kongres i 1992 for et valgfrit antal guitarister. Versionerne her er for 6 guitarer, men kan efter komponistens anvisning opføres af alt fra 6-24 spillere.

”Vi må acceptere kompleksiteten”, sagde Pierre Boulez, og for Axel Borup-Jørgensen tjener kompleksiteten et klart kunstnerisk formål. Den er vejen til en sammensat, flygtig verden af uhørt poesi og raffinement – undertiden på grænsen til stilheden – som kaldes til live under tingenes overflade. En verden, som på sin egen måde rummer en spontan sanselighed: kompleksitet som vejen til det umiddelbare.

Guitarens intimitet og tætte forbundethed med udøverens krop, hænder og bevægelser stråler ud i musikken som et gestisk nærvær. For den komponist, der kunstnerisk forstår at ‘spille på’ dette, bliver musikken pludselig for mange sanser. Foruden det hørte fornemmer man det taktile ved fingrenes (og neglenes) berøring af strengene med knips og anslag, mens den anden hånd vandrer over gribetrættet. Og det visuelle bliver nærværende gennem musikkens dynamiske og klanglige gestus, der frembringes af armene og kroppens koordinerede bevægelser: Ørets sansning vækker og levendegør følesans og synssans. Også selv om man ‘kun’ lytter. Det er i høj grad denne holistiske oplevelsesmåde, Axel Borup-Jørgensen udforsker og formidler i sine værker for guitar.

For at levendegøre dette aspekt af musikken bedst muligt er denne optagelse lavet i et udelukkende træbeklædt rum – en forlængelse af guitarernes klangkasse – og med brug analog optageteknik.



CRAS er et ensemble bestående af seks klassisk uddannede guitarister, som siden deres dannelse i 2017 har stillet et tankevækkende spørgsmål: Hvordan kan morgendagens musik engagere sig i nutidens verden?

Siden sin begyndelse har gruppen påbegyndt en række projekter, der udforsker samspillet mellem nutidig musik og forskellige aspekter af det moderne liv, herunder samfundsspørgsmål, globale begivenheder samt politiske og historiske temaer.

Samarbejde er centralt for CRAS' mission. Ensemblet arbejder flittigt sammen med komponister fra hele verden for at udvide repertoiret for seks guitarer. Dets mangfoldige projekter har givet muligheder for at samarbejde med eksperter inden for en bred vifte af områder, herunder gourmetmadlavning, atomkraftpolitik, digital mobning, dukketeater, film og litteratur, blandt andet. Frem for alt værdsætter CRAS sin forbindelse med publikum og stræber efter at holde musikken levende og relevant.

Navnet CRAS, afledt af det latinske ord for "i morgen", indkapsler ånden i dette moderne ensemble, dedikeret til at fremføre morgendagens musik, i dag. CRAS består af guitaristerne Peter Oldrup, Henrik Bay Hansen, Mikkel Egelund Nielsen, Jacob Nørrelund, Søren Eriksen og Uffe Carl Hansen.

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