

ILLUMINATIONS



Vintage recordings of music by RUTH BAKKE
performed by
Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra w/Per Hannevold
Iver Kleive, Audun Kayser and others

Illuminations Concerto for Bassoon and orchestra
(commissioned by Per Hannevold).



Per Hannevold (Photo: Kate Lemmon)

Ruth says: I love to play a lot of instruments and try out their different sounds. While a student I played in 3 different symphony orchestras (in Norway and in the U.S.A.), respectively horn and viola. By 1993 bassoon was the only instrument of the orchestra that I had never played before. So, before I composed this concerto, I got a thorough training in playing (some) - and really get to know (the many possibilities of) - the bassoon from the eminent soloist Per Hannevold.

In **Cantilena** the bassoon plays a long and calmly moving melody built on a slight variation of the main theme: Again the theme starts on Eb, but now it is not the fundamental tone, but the M7 and then M6 *over* the fundamental E. The melody is first played in a baritone range and then in an alto range before it gradually moves all the way up to a long g” followed by a calm descent. Then a little faster version of the theme returns in the orchestra, gradually building up to a **cadenza** leading into the 3rd movement, **Jeu** (game/play). It is a scherzo, with the main theme starting on F (another half step up).

Fugato & Chorale starts with a faster version of the theme (M2 mostly falling and tritone mostly rising + M7 falling). The violas play the theme at half the tempo. 8 measures after the bassoon has entered, the tubular bells announce the first notes of the chorale: C - E - G (each 8 beats long) along with the vibraphone and the glockenspiel. Then the bassoon plays an octatonic motif before the lower instruments of the orchestra play the chorale (Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty) in long (whole) notes. The bassoon plays octatonic fills between each line of the hymn, and variations of the fugato or main motif are played in the other (higher) instruments. After the mighty chorale calms everything down, the final movement **Lumina** (Light) comes with a reminiscence of the Cantilena motif, this time with the 1st violin following up, playing the tune in canon. Then a solo viola leads the tune. The music fades as the **Coda** suddenly brings back the intro of the concerto. But then the music calms down again and motifs are repeated, now also by the English horn backstage.

In Memoriam (Alta) Time has proved that the controversial construction of the Alta dam in 1987 (destroying the Alta canyon and local Sami culture after a 15 years long civil conflict) was unnecessary. 45 years later Norway still has enough electricity to manage without the Alta power plant - we are exporting much surplus power!

The main section of the composition is an expression of resistance against the destructive «development». The middle section is a more lyrical music with an impression of the beautiful nature worth conserving. Sadly, politicians are now making an even worse decision: to sacrifice the Førde Fjord: killing life at the bottom of the fjord for a filthy mining profit, which Norway really doesn't need. Remember Alta! This piano piece has just a medium level of technical difficulty, making it possible to be played by good amateurs.

Meditation on «Lamb of God, Most Holy» starts with the first 3 notes of the hymn, in long values. It repeats with a different harmony. Repeats again and develops. Slow tune, in half and whole notes. Thick chords, many whole tones, but also some half tones and some clusters. A slow, syncopated ostinato in the pedal. In the B-part the tempo in the melody picks up with a more ornamented line, mostly in C-major, but with some accidentals added. But the accompaniment is not in C-major! Mostly it contains whole tones, but sometimes there are some half tones as well. The chords mostly move slowly sideways, a half or a whole step. The last part contains some imitations, and in some parts the theme is played in quarter notes in stead of the dominating half notes.

In Meditation on «Nailed to a Cross» the music moves on 4 different levels (different sound colors and different tempos): The 1st manual presents a rhythmically free flowing flute part. The 2nd manual presents the chorale in the Crumhorn, in a very slow tempo surrounded by close and dissonant parts. In the 3rd manual the Vox Celeste presents slowly floating clusters. And then the pedal has an incessant tritone «chord» (E + A#) symbolizing the beats of the hammering of the nails...

The composer has also a version of this meditation where the flute part is played by a saxophone and there is a recitation of the lyrics of the hymn (along with the playing of the tune) and also, some percussion is added - marking the hammering etc.

Toccata on «Praise, my Soul, the King of Heaven» starts with a fanfare in a kind of D tonality. The 2 first measures of the hymn are soon repeated in different ways with a cluster-like accompaniment. Then the typical chords for the following toccata are introduced, mainly consisting of a fundamental tone with added M3, tritone and M7 - often in parallel motion, not within a key, and also played as single falling 16th-notes ending in a couple of thick cluster build-ups to the toccata - which has the tune in half notes in the pedal and the above mentioned 16th-note chords repeated in the manuals. When the hymn tune is completed, there is a short interlude and build-up to the fanfare ending

Psalm 8 is based on a Biblical Psalm of David. The music contains a version of the composer's many tonal paintings of the text (parts of the music are improvised):

O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is your name in all the earth!

You have exalted your majesty above the heavens.

Out of the mouths of children, even the unweaned,
you have ordained strength because of your enemies,
that you might silence the hostile and the vengeful.

When I behold your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars which you set in place -
WHAT IS MAN - that you are mindful of him?
or the son of man that you care for him?

You have made him little less than the angels,
and crowned him with glory and honor.

You have given him rule over the works of your hands,
putting all things under his feet:

All sheep and oxen, yes, and the beasts of the field,
The birds of the air, the fish of the sea,
and whatever swims the paths of the seas.

O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is your name in all the earth!

Ruth Bakke wrote **Into the Light** for Håkon Gudbrandsen, former concertmaster of the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra. It is a simple and powerful composition that always makes a strong impression on the listener. As the title implies, the work represents a progression from darkness to light. It is inspired by a verse from the 1st Letter of St. Peter :

Blessed be the Lord, our God, who has called us out of the darkness and into his marvellous light (1. Pet. 2:9)

The work is clearly divided into three continuous sections. The first one represents darkness, followed by a transition that leads to the final section, where light is the obvious reference.

A twice repeated five-note motif on the organ provides the introduction for the extended first part. A pensive, ever evolving violin line is supported by a slow eighth-note pulse in the bass pedals, and modal harmonies that lead into one another by way of clusters. These clusters or “sound clouds” are also a representation of the obfuscating effect of darkness, while the resulting chords seem to offer glimpses of a brightness that is yet to be fully reached.

As both instruments reach a high register, the five-note motif reappears one fifth higher than before, and again a minor third higher, now in conversation between the organ and the violin. The latter is left alone to further develop the same motif and the three-note motif – C-Bb-C – that introduced the violin into the piece. The violin dives into the deep but rises again, reaching the same high note it had attained in m. 24. It then goes up a semitone and the organ joins, now playing in the high register until the very end of the piece. The former, implacable eighth-notes in the pedals are now replaced by sustained thirds and seconds in the bright 2-foot registration. The old chords linked by clusters have now transformed into a sparkling 32nd-note hocket between the hands. On top of this scintillating background the violin soars with a very high continuous melody of unpredictable note lengths. The now prevailing ecstatic mood is briefly interrupted by a shorter violin solo (m. 64) that describes a final ascent to the realm of everlasting light. The last four measures of the work focus on this heightened state, finally reaching as high as both instruments can achieve.



Håkon Gudbrandsen (private photo/Foto-Knudsen - copyright belongs to H.G.s family)

Ruth Bakke (b. August 2nd 1947, Bergen) was educated as an organist at the Bergen Music Conservatory - now Grieg Academy. Also, she completed a 2-year music study at the University of Oslo in half a year (spring 1968). Then she studied 4 years in the USA on a Fulbright scholarship, obtaining a BA from Texas Lutheran College and a MA (double major: composition & organ) from Washington State University. In august 1972 she moved back to Bergen and became an organist and choir director at Stortveit Church, a position she held for 45 years. Also, she did some teaching at the Bergen Music Conservatory/Grieg Academy and at the Bergen Teachers' College (dept. of Music).



Ruth Bakke (Photo: Odd Roar Haug)

Bakke's production includes orchestral and chamber music as well as many works for the organ and liturgical music, both vocal and instrumental. Her abilities as an improviser have seeped into her compositions, which often display seemingly intuitive elements and a keen ear for tonal color within a clearly ordered framework. This is very obvious in the myriad registrations and nuances found in her fascinating music for the organ. In later works she has explored the possibilities of whole-tone structures from a very personal angle. Bakke's music seems to be in search of a spiritual dimension and is often contemplative in mood. However, it can also embrace humor, albeit usually of a somewhat arcane character. An apt example is her sextet "Des Kaisers neue Kleider" which is a very elaborate musical joke, but the music is purposely devoid of any externally "funny" aspects. Her work "Pano Piano - 25 Small Piano Pieces" is a collection of miniatures written for young players. They include graphic scores, motifs and tone-rows intended for development by the players as well as simple two-part pieces in a free-tonal language and a piece for prepared piano. Young pianists enjoy playing them, as they awaken their creativity.

Her orchestra work "Lone Star Memories" was a commission from the Mid-Texas Symphony Orchestra for their bi-centennial season. And the organ concerto «aSPIRations» was commissioned by the BIT20 Ensemble and premiered at the Bergen Kirkeautunnale in September 2022.

Bakke has also worked within the electronic and electro-acoustic media. She premiered her newest multi-media work "De Composition" at the Borealis Festival in 2021 in cooperation with the video artist Anne Marthe Dyvi. For more info about Bakke's music, see her website: www.ruthbakke.com

Illuminations Concerto for bassoon & orchestra

Per Hannevold - bassoon

Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, Cond.: Dmitri Kitajenko

Recorded by NRK in Grieghallen, Bergen Sept 8, 1994

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|---|---------------------------|--------|
| 1 | Intro & Exposition | [2'53] |
| 2 | Cantilena | [5'52] |
| 3 | Cadenza | [0'51] |
| 4 | Jeu | [3'55] |
| 5 | Fugato & Chorale | [5'29] |
| 6 | Lumina & Coda | [4'47] |
| 7 | In Memoriam (Alta) | [5'27] |

Audun Kayser - piano Recorded by NRK in Bergen Feb. 23, 1981

3 Organ Chorales, Iver Kleive - organ

Private recording/Jan Hovden, Nov. 1990, on the Jehmlich organ at Storetveit Church, Bergen

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| 8 | Meditation on «Lamb of God, Most Holy» | [5'13] |
| 9 | Meditation on «Nailed to a Cross» | [5'04] |
| 10 | Toccata on «Praise, my Soul, the King of Heaven» | [3'28] |
| 11 | Psalm 8 | [8'19] |

Bodil Eldhuset - soprano, Tormod Kayser - drum set, Ruth Bakke - organ

Private recording at Storetveit Church (Bergen) late 1978 (on the old pneumatic organ)

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| 12 | Into the Light (Meditation on I. Peter 2:9) | [8'56] |
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Håkon Gudbrandsen - violin, Ruth Bakke - organ

Recorded by NRK June 16, 1983 at Fana Church, Bergen

Cover photo: Per Johannes Sørfonden Mastering: Jan Øyvind Hanevik

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