

# **Let the Harp Sound!**

Updating the understanding of the sound and artistic role  
of the harp in Norwegian contemporary music

by

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Artistic Research Project

The Norwegian Artistic Research Fellowship Programme

First supervisor: Ivar Frounberg

Second supervisor (2009–2010): Godelieve Schrama

## Contents

Foreword		5
About the artistic research project		9
1. Introduction		
a. Goals and contributions of “Let the Harp Sound!”		9
b. An artistic research project		9
2. Artistic result		11
3. Research questions		11
4. Critical reflection		12
a. Choosing the format of the critical reflection		12
b. Disposition of the critical reflection		14
Section I	Updating the understanding of the harp	15
	I.1. About	
	a. Background	15
	b. Strategy	17
	I.2. How to write for harp	19
	I.3. Workshops	19
	I.4. Repertoire	21
	I.5. Conclusion of section I	26
Section II	Initiating artistic explorations	27
	II.1. About	
	a. Background	27
	b. Strategy	27
	II.2. A collaboration with Mark Adderley	29
	II.3. A collaboration with Øyvind Torvund	33
	II.4. A collaboration with Simon Steen-Andersen	37
	II.5. A collaboration with Henrik Hellstenius	43
	II.6. Conclusion of section II	47
Section III	Gaining experience	49
	III.1. About	
	a. Background	49
	b. Strategy	50
	III.2. The harpist conversations	51
	III.3. Learning “Grains”	53
	III.4. Learning new skills	59
	III.5. A visual and interdisciplinary approach	61
	III.6. Conclusion of section III	63

Section IV	End result	65
	IV.1. Presentation of artistic result	65
	IV.2. Conclusion	69
	a. Personal artistic position	69
	b. How the project contributes to professional development of the subject area	70
	c. Critical reflection on the process	73
	d. Turning points	75
	e. Critical reflection on the results	76
Gratitude		79
References		
	1. Sources in this text	81
	2. Scores and recordings referred to in the composer collaborations	83
	3. Performances in “Let the Harp Sound!”	85
	4. Interdisciplinary projects in “Let the Harp Sound!”	87
	5. Performed repertoire in “Let the Harp Sound!”	87
	6. List of sources in “Let the Harp Sound!”	89
	6.1. Complete list of researched repertoire	89
	6.2. Complete list of researched recordings	93
	6.3. Complete list of sources in literature	96
	6.4. Complete list of sources in websites	97
Appendix		99
	All plans last only until the first shot – bar by bar	101
	A conversation with Willy Postma	124
	A conversation with Judy Loman	130
	A conversation with Godelieve Schrama	136
	A conversation with Elisabeth Sønstevold	144

## Foreword

Among many Norwegians, the harp is associated with angels. As a harpist I have been told numerous times how feminine and elegant, both visually and musically, harp playing is perceived to be. The harp itself is often used to create a visual impact, with an impressive shape and with its decorations in gold. It is sometimes viewed as a luxurious instrument, mysterious for being unknown to most audiences and extravagant on display. Many harpists have earned their living performing in a white dress and even with angel wings on their back. Using the harp in such a way builds a myth around the harp. However, the same myths that provide the harpists such a unique position, can artistically become an obstacle. If audience learn that harp performances are angelic and soft, it becomes difficult to present music that does not answer to their expectations: Music that needs to be listened to for its autonomy, without the myth of the harp surrounding it. Perhaps the same myths also make it difficult for composers to use the harp.

And the pieces I liked . . . they broke with the tradition. And . . . and . . . I tried to get more people to like this kind of music for the harp. But everyone wanted the expectations of the harp to be met. Even not bringing a gold harp was wrong.

— from “Heritage” 2011<sup>1</sup>

As a harpist, I do not see harp playing as angelic at all. Just pulling the strings, with all their tension, requires strength. Playing the strings while changing the seven pedals, one’s whole body must work at once, which often demands hard work. The role of the harpist in the ensemble is often both unique and musically exposed, giving rise to professionals who are independent decision-makers, creatively flexible as well as strong-minded. I often find harpists to be similar to percussionists—frequently performing music in different styles, using multiple playing techniques, devising a pragmatic problem-solving approach to their performances and fulfilling a host of musical functions.

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1. S.R., in Henrik Hellstenius’s “Heritage” (2011), for harp, harpist, and video.

The harp itself contains a wide tonal range, and it can produce a wealth of sounds. Dynamically, its range continues to increase, thanks to the ongoing development of its construction, and playing techniques.

The complex evolution of harp playing, which for the past twenty-five years offers a wealth and variety of musical color and effect larger than any other instrument, pipe organ excepted. It seems in order here to recollect that what differentiates the harp from any other musical instrument is the fact that it is orchestral in its tonal range.

—Carlos Salzedo, 1944<sup>2</sup>

The hope is that the harp will gain a wider recognition in Norway, not only being known for its stereotypical “romantic” sides. The instrument should be recognized for its flexibility and broad usability—as a folk instrument, an instrument in dance music, as an orchestra instrument, a solo instrument, a chamber instrument, a baroque instrument, an electric instrument, an instrument used in pop, rock, new age, indie, jazz or classical music, as a primitive instrument and as an extravagant instrument.

A sound machine of limitless capacity.

—Zeena Parkins<sup>3</sup>

Among its unique instrumental qualities, what particularly distinguishes the harp is the way in which the sound is produced by the direct physical touch of the string. There are no hammers between the harpist and the instrument. The sound of the harp therefore not only depends on the harp itself but on the body and technique of the harpist—the angle of the fingertips, the way the hand closes, the amount of force used. The musical outcome is intimately connected to the physical execution of the notes in the score.

To understand how to use this physicality and to compose for the harp should be an exciting process. The hope is that composers use the harp boldly, and not approach it as a restricted instrument. To compose for the harp is often unnecessarily problematized, even in literature on orchestration. However, by approaching the harp as a unique instrument, and not, for example, in

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2. Carlos Salzedo: “The Harp: Musical Medium of Our Age,” *Musical America* (January 10, 1944).

3. From the harpist Zeena Parkins’s website, accessed 14 June 2014, <http://www.zeenaparkins.com/about.html>.

comparison with a piano, the challenge of understanding the harp will become easier. All composers base their ideas on previous experiences. “Let the Harp Sound!” points out that there exist many more possibilities on the harp than what is often portrayed, which hopefully will encourage composers to explore the harp more thoroughly, on the harp’s own terms. An important premise is nevertheless that composers listen to harp music.

To make the instrument sound well and make the most of its resources . . . The secrets of the harp are far simpler than certain people imagine, and its possibilities are never-ending for those who have faith.

—Marcel Tournier, 1959<sup>4</sup>

The harp is, first and foremost, an instrument like all the rest: a source of sound, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the value of which is determined by the people who work with it. This definition, of course, allows for numerous possibilities, but legacy, tradition, and stereotypes tend to create limits. I learned to play the harp in a certain way, based upon knowledge inherited from the harpists before me, who inherited knowledge from the harpists before them, and so on. I emerge from within a long tradition of harp playing. But as I face new challenges with my harp, I find myself continuously questioning this traditional knowledge. “Let the Harp Sound!” thus chronicles a classically trained musician’s journey from a traditional, idiomatic approach to her instrument, to music of contemporary aesthetic directions, such as hyper-idiomatic instrumentalism, open form, new complexity or radically idiomatic instrumentalism. While my main focus is on the harp’s possibilities and broadening the use of harp, the project indirectly reflects upon the musician’s position in perspective of the development of new music. It displays how the musician’s knowledge, curiosity and openness, or the musician’s willingness to let go of tradition, affects the development of music.

So, I want the harp in a new context. Someone accused me of wanting the harp to be something else than it is.

But that’s not the case. I just don’t want the harp to be locked down in what a harp could be.

—from “Heritage”, 2011<sup>5</sup>

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4. Marcel Tournier: “The Harp, a History of the Harp throughout the World, Harp Notation” (H. Lemoine, 1959), p. 93.

5. S.R., in Henrik Hellstenius’s *Heritage* (2011), for harp, harpist, and video.

*What are your  
ideas for the harp,  
and where do your  
ideas come from?*



Keynote picture from my lecture for the composer students at the Norwegian Academy of Music, spring 2011.



## About the artistic research project

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.a. Goals and contributions of “Let the Harp Sound!”

The artistic research project “Let the Harp Sound!” was begun in October 2008 and completed in June 2012. As stated in the “Revised Project Description” of 24 November 2011, its focus was to update the understanding of the sound and artistic role of the harp in Norwegian contemporary music. More specifically, I sought to (a) promote a broader use of the harp in Norwegian contemporary music, (b) initiate artistic explorations of the harp among composers in order to contribute to the further development of the artistic range of the instrument, and (c) help myself in my effort to increase my experience within the contemporary music scene.

“Let the Harp Sound!” contributes to new artistic development through a series of new compositions for the harp, placing it within fields of composition in Norway where the harp has never been included before. “Let the Harp Sound!” also presents, through performances and gathered reference material, central repertoire from 1960 until today, much of which has never before been performed in Norway. Additionally, the project sheds light on some selected harpists’ viewpoints through conversations with them.

#### 1.b. An artistic research project

“Let the Harp Sound!” is a project within the Norwegian Artistic Research Programme, where the research is based almost entirely on the creative processes and the performances themselves. Other Ph.D. harp projects, which have come into light, such as by Gunnhildur Einarsdóttir and Lucia Bova, seem to have focused on the playing techniques for the harp, the historic development of harp repertoire or the written analysis of harp scores. Divergent to this, my project concerns itself with the *artistic explorations*, as does the entire artistic research program. Such a context for the project has enabled “Let the Harp Sound!” to emphasize the *artistic expressions* and the performances themselves, the entire project taking place in an artistic context.

The model for my research was for the project to be an imaginary journey through the vast field of contemporary music, with the aim always on the harp role as stated in my goals. Along the way diversions were allowed in certain directions. Start of the journey was on the traditional idiomatic compositions. The project then went on to research various contemporary directions such as music in the modernistic tradition, avant-garde, new complexity, hyper-idiomatic instrumentalism, musique concrète, electronic music, the use of multimedia, music theatre, musique concrète instrumentale, indeterminacy, free improvisation, open form compositions and cross-genre compositions. My personal interaction and communication with composers, representing varying compositional styles and working methods, was of particular interest for the project. The different formats and angles of approach to the harp given by each of these collaborations were among the interesting finds in the project, resulting in a display of what the harp's role may be in the 21st century.

The explorer in a strange territory may cross and re-cross the same point many times, but will come towards it from a different direction each time as he traverses the terrain, and, if he is lucky, will each time obtain a new point of view.

—Christopher Small, 1977<sup>6</sup>

“Let the Harp Sound!” has been a project within the contemporary field of classical music, by a classically educated harpist, with a focus mainly on traditionally notated music. The project is distinguished by the specific focus on challenging the “idea of the harp” among composers, harpists, and musicians in general. The work is related to the work of other classical harpists who perform contemporary music, such as Gunnhildur Einarsdóttir, Miriam Overlach, Brigitte Sylvestre, Frédérique Cambrelling, Ann Yeung, Godelieve Schrama, Sofia Asuncion Claro, Ellen Bødtker, and Claudia Antonelli. It was also inspired by the improvisational work, compositions, and conceptual ideas of harpists such as Rhodri Davies, Victoria Jordanova, Anne LeBaron, Zeena Parkins, and Hélène Breschand. In the Norwegian scene in particular, “Let the Harp Sound!” was inspired by fellow independent musicians; such as Victoria Johnson, Rolf Erik Nystrøm, Maja Ratkje, Håkon Thelin, Tanja Orning, Rolf Borch, Else Olsen Storesund, Ellen Ugelvik, Frode Haltli, Håkon Stene, and Anders Førisdal.

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6. Christopher Small: *Music, Society, Education* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, in association with Wesleyan University Press, 1980).

## 2. Artistic result

The artistic result of the project was a series of concerts held by me throughout the project period. The main artistic result was presented at a final concert and through two recordings. The final concert took place at Kulturkirken Jakob on 8 June 2012, with the following program:

- Ø. Torvund: *Night and Jungle* (2011–12), for electroharp, amplifiers, and tape
- R. Murray Schafer: *The Crown of Ariadne* (1979), for solo harp with percussion
- G. Scelsi: *Okanagon pour harpe, tam-tam et contrabassi* (1968)
- H. Hellstenius: *Heritage* (2011), for harp, harpist, and tape
- S. Steen-Andersen: *History of My Instrument* (2011), for harp, pick-up, and video

The two audio recordings included the following:

1. Mark Adderley: *All plans last only until the first shot* (2010), Concerto for harp and sinfonietta. Recording of the live performance on 13 September 2010 at the Ultima Festival. Performed by Sunniva Rødland (harp) and Ensemble Ernst, conducted by Thomas Rimul. Recorded by Cato Langnes (NOTAM).
2. Ruben Sverre Gjertsen: *Grains* (2003), for viola, harp, and percussion. Performed by Peter Kates (percussion), Sunniva Rødland (harp), and Ricardo Odriozola (viola). Conducted by Trond Madsen. Studio recording by Aurora Records for Bit20 Ensemble.

## 3. Research questions

As presented in the “Revised Project Description” (24 November 2011), there were three central research questions in “Let the Harp Sound!”:

1. *How can I expand the harp’s role within contemporary aesthetics?* Through this project I set out to explore the expressive range of the instrument, in terms of its potential in the field of new music. I also looked at ways of making the harp more available to composers through

workshops, lessons, updated resources, and one-on-one time between harpist and composer. Lastly, I tried to showcase repertoire where the harp is used in less conventional ways.

*2. How can I help to redefine the boundaries of the harp as an instrument?* Through exploring the harp in collaboration with others and in my own practice, I was able to look at the harp from new angles. Artistic explorations of the harp involved different aesthetic approaches, interdisciplinary work, placing the harp in new contexts, improvisation, investigating new playing techniques, and challenging my approach to the harp as an instrumentalist. The composer collaborations particularly focused on exploring the communication between harpist and composers working with different compositional methods.

*3. How can I meet the new challenges of contemporary aesthetics?* This question deals with what is required of a classically trained musician working within contemporary music. To be able to perform works within a variety of aesthetic directions I had to learn new skills as a performer, and gain more knowledge that would further enable my interpretation. To explore this question, I deliberately sought to challenge the traditional role of the harpist, from a variety of perspectives.

## **4. The critical reflection**

### **4.a. Choosing the format for critical reflection**

In the Norwegian Artistic Research Programme, research candidates must submit a critical reflection that accompanies the artistic result.

The results of the critical reflection shall be available to the public and of a permanent nature. The candidate shall choose the appropriate medium and form.

—Norwegian Artistic Research Programme, 2010<sup>7</sup>

I have chosen a written form with a subjective point of view to relate my personal journey and artistic development—that is, a personal account. I am writing it partly to make the discussions, reflections, and efforts that led up to the artistic result more available, in the interests of shedding

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7. §5.2., “Regulations for the Research Fellowship Programme, endorsed by the steering committee on 08.09.2008 and adjusted according to decision on 02.09.10,” accessed 16 June 2014, [www.artistic-research.no](http://www.artistic-research.no).

more light on the process of composing for the harp and the development of new roles for the harp and harpist. In addition, a written critical reflection represents an additional opportunity to reach an audience that was not able to follow my project directly. Lastly, a written critical reflection allows me the opportunity to expand upon the larger topics of the project, positioning “Let the Harp Sound!” within the general conversations surrounding new performance practice, alternative concert formats, the integration of visuals in music, interdisciplinary collaborations, the use of electronics, music education, and the role of the co-creating musician.

Artistic research is therefore not just embedded in artistic and academic contexts, and it focuses not just on what is enacted in creative processes and embodied in art products, but it also engages with what we are and where we stand.

—Henk Borgdorff, 2010<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, the critical reflection will help to clear up misunderstandings about the project itself. When I presented “Let the Harp Sound!” throughout my research period, I met with many different expectations regarding what it entails. Some musicians, for example, thought it was great that I was “putting things right” with composers, implying that my project was about telling composers what to do. Other people thought that I was only interested in making the harp sound harsh or aggressive, or that I was seeking a comprehensive list of “dos and don’ts” for the harp. This project was never confined to any of those particular directions, and this written text will explain better the choices I made, and why I made them.

That being said, the actual *results* of my research are consistently embedded in the artistic outcome of the project and not in this text as such. My performances showcase my reflections on the research questions, whereas this document is a *supplement* to that process, not a scholarly argument in and of itself. In fact, I believe the true strength of any artistic research project is that it both derives from and points to the *experience* of art, rather than the *consideration* of it:

Clearly research in and through artistic practices is partly concerned with our perception, our understanding, our relationship to the world and to other people. Art thereby invites reflection, yet it eludes any defining thought regarding its content. Artistic research is the acceptance of that paradoxical invitation. It furthermore enhances

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8. Henk Borgdorff, “The Production of Knowledge in Artistic Research,” in *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts*, ed. Michael Biggs and Henrik Karlsson (London: Taylor and Francis, 2010), p. 51.

our awareness of the pre-reflective nearness of things as well as our epistemological distance from them. This makes artistic research an open undertaking, seeking the deliberate articulation of unfinished thinking in and through art.

—Henk Borgdorff, 2010<sup>9</sup>

#### **4.b. Disposition of the critical reflection**

The following text is divided into four sections. The first three sections reflect upon the research questions presented in the introduction from the perspective of the “Revised Project Description” (24 November 2011). The last section reflects upon the presentation of the final artistic result.



Final recital performance of G. Scelsi's *Okanagon*. Photo: M. A. Evanger.

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9. Ibid., p. 45.

## Section I: Updating the understanding of the harp

### I.1. About

#### I.1.a. Background

In 2007, when I initiated this project, the harp was still very much on the sidelines of Norwegian contemporary music. Many composers viewed it as a complicated instrument; to write for it, they thought, they needed to consult a harpist, which was not always an easy thing to do. In general, at this time, it was difficult to obtain information about or directly experience new harp music. There were few recordings available of the contemporary harp repertoire, either nationally or internationally. Unsurprisingly, there was generally limited knowledge among Norwegian composers and musicians alike about recent developments of the harp.

Over the course of this project, thankfully, the availability of contemporary music for the harp has increased. There also seem to be more harpists focusing on contemporary music, more recordings being made, and more websites dedicated to how to write for the harp.

There is a standing paradox about the harp: the less people know about that instrument, the more they talk about it and the more they express senseless opinions. The traditional brainstorm generally uttered by newspaper reviewers and music critics is that “the harp is the most ancient of musical instruments.” Historically speaking, it is true, but musically considered, it is a fallacy; indeed, the harp of the Jews, Egyptians, Greeks, and Irish, bears as much relation to the 20th-century harp as an ox—historically the oldest means of transportation—to an airplane, scientifically the most modern instrument of transportation. Another traditional brainstorm is that “the harp is a very limited musical instrument.” This observation may be true, but only in the minds of people with limited understanding—musicians not excluded.

—Carlos Salzedo, 1944<sup>10</sup>

The construction of the harp has changed dramatically in the last 150 years and continues to change today amid continuous experimentation with different types of wood and mechanics. The harp has gained a greater dynamic range, spurring harpists to simultaneously develop their techniques in order to produce a wider range of sounds. Following upon these changes, and in

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10. Salzedo, “The Harp: Musical Medium of Our Age.”

the context of new directions in composition as well, the harp repertoire has increased in its quantity, quality, and range of expression.

For references on how to compose for harp, many composers today turn to harp repertoire that was created in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century or at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, by composers such as Gabriel Fauré, Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel. But some composers find that these references are not relevant to their style of composing. On the international scene there are a number of composers who have used the harp in less conventional ways. However, this development seems to remain largely unknown in Norway. Many playing techniques that would be regarded as “extended techniques” in Norway are actually quite common in the standardized harp repertoire. As a result there exists an interesting potential for Norwegian composers to actively seek and explore the *full range* of the instrument.

In orchestras, the harp can come across as a “soft” instrument, and often one watches the harpist play without hearing the harp through the sounds of the other instruments.<sup>11</sup> Many assume that this follows from the nature of the instrument itself, instead of wondering whether, in fact, composers simply tend to use the harp in “soft” ways, or composers fail to orchestrate it properly, or the conductor has asked the harpist to play softly.<sup>12</sup> When one has little other knowledge about the modern development of the harp, such repeated experiences with the harp can limit one’s expectations of it. Ultimately, in turn, these presuppositions work to limit the harp’s utility in contemporary music altogether, and there arises a feedback loop that offers no opportunity for more, better harp playing.

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11. Lucille Lawrence addresses the art of balancing the harp’s sound with the orchestra in her book *The ABCs of Harp Playing, for Harpists, Orchestrators and Arrangers* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1962): “Notes for the Conductor and the Harpist . . . To have a well balanced performance, the dynamics of the harp should be a degree louder than those of the instruments with which it plays. For example, against an *mf* the harp should play *f*. Near the harp its sound may seem too loud, but at a distance of ten or more feet, it will be found that a good firm tone is needed to adequately balance the sustained tone of a bowed wind or brass instrument” (p. 41).

12. Beatrice Schroeder Rose addresses conductors’ preferences for quiet harpists in her book *The Harp in the Orchestra*, (Piasco: Salvi Harps, 2002): “The sound of the harp at close range is quite different from the sound (or more correctly, the lack of it) that reaches the audience. From the podium, some conductors tend to be unaware of the deceptive tonal projection of the harp” (p. xiv).



### **I.1.b. Strategy**

To promote a broader and better-informed use of the harp, the approach has been divided into three paths: (1) to encourage composers to use the harp more effectively, (2) to make updated musical references more widely available, to showcase the many possibilities of the harp, and (3) to explore and then demonstrate these new possibilities myself, as a professional harpist in Norway today.

Through workshops and one-on-one time with the composers, I have encouraged their ideas for harp writing. While orchestration literature provide a presentation of playing techniques in their separate forms, it seems to be a challenge to learn how one can combine the techniques. To encourage composers to use the harp more efficiently has for example involved discussions on how they can make the harp-sound project in a concert hall or how they can make the harp sound loud. To study the possibilities of combining playing techniques I have referred them to relevant harp scores<sup>13</sup>.

By focusing on the *unique characteristics* of the harp the intention was to avoid basing the approach to it on a comparison with other instruments. Composers or harpists often appear to compare the harp with the piano or guitar. Many harpists are also pianists and tend to approach the harp from this perspective.<sup>14</sup> However, to allow the harp to achieve its full potential it must be distinguished from other instruments and its unique characteristics recognized. In fact, in most ways the instruments (i.e. piano, harp and guitar) are not similar at all. Basing analysis on comparisons only lead to relative conclusions that tend to complicate the understanding of what a harp really is, particularly when dealing with sound qualities and the pragmatic issues involving the instrument. The aim was therefore to present all references to the harp as starting points for analysis; to refer only to original harp works, to give emphasis to high quality harp instrumentation books and to consistently acknowledge the harp as an asset in artistic explorations.

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13. References to works included in collaborations are listed in "References".

14. It is not long since many harpists were originally pianists who also played the harp. This is also touched upon in the harpist conversations presented in the appendix.

I spent a lot of time, in fact, researching repertoire, recordings, and orchestration literature (my findings are listed in the appendix). Some of this repertoire highlights a decidedly unconventional use of the instrument's sounds (see, for example, the works by Ray Murray Schafer, Giacinto Scelsi, Wolfgang Rihm, and Willem Jeths). I performed some of it in concerts, to present music that would broaden the perspective regarding what the harp's sound could be. These performances did not favor one specific aesthetic style in particular, but aimed to challenge a *fixed set of expectations* placed on the harp. I framed the harp within various artistic contexts, including interdisciplinary ones, examining the harp from different angles and exploring its ability to contribute to a variety of contemporary artistic formats.

One constant factor throughout "Let the Harp Sound!", has been its focus on *the expressive range* of the harp. The development of new playing techniques has *not* been a goal in itself, nor have I tried to develop a systematic method of using the harp. On the contrary, the target has been the diversion. The term sound in the title is also deliberately chosen, as it is a wide term, open to many possible interpretations.

I have explored the range of sound on this instrument at different levels. At the micro-level I developed my playing technique, edited harp parts, and experimented with new fingering in order to make the music sound different. I have discussed hand positions with composers and worked on their sketches. My main means of pursuing a pragmatic approach to the exploration of sound has been through practicing and improvising.

At another level of exploring the range of sound, several different harps were used in this project: a Horngacher concert harp (Empire style), a Lyon and Healy electroacoustic concert harp (style 2000), and a Camac electric harp (Electroharp, an electric lever harp with thirty-six strings). The electric harp is in fact a relatively young instrument (created in the 1980s) that is frequently used in genres such as pop and jazz, but not so much in contemporary classical music, though it allows for numerous artistic possibilities, some of which I have been exploring.

The application of analogue modification (effect pedals, guitar and bass amplifiers) and digital electronics (Ableton Live or Max) has contributed to a wider level of exploring the range of

sound, by framing the harp as a modern sound source rather than a classical instrument of tradition. Despite all of the electronics, though, I always tried to remain close to the acoustic sounding harp.

## I.2. How to write for harp

As I reviewed the literature on how to write for the harp, including books on orchestration that are often used to educate composers, I found that *Writing for the Pedal Harp: A Standardized Manual for Harpists and Composers* by Ruth Inglefield and Lou Ann Neill was the most relevant resource for this project.<sup>15</sup> It presents updated references to harp repertoire and an extensive introduction to both conventional and unconventional playing techniques, with a very helpful focus on the practical execution of those techniques. Recently, the harpist Gunnhildur Einarsdóttir added her Ph.D. dissertation on how to write for the harp to a website hosted by the Sibelius Academy;<sup>16</sup> it also relies upon *Writing for the Pedal Harp* as a starting point. Other helpful books include John Marson's *The Complete Guide to Harp Glissandi*<sup>17</sup> and Beatrice Schroeder Rose's *The Harp in the Orchestra*.<sup>18</sup> I highly recommend that any composer writing for the harp consult a specialized and thorough source (book or website) on how to do so. In my research I have read orchestration literature by, among others, Elaine Gould,<sup>19</sup> Samuel Adler,<sup>20</sup> and Kurt Stone,<sup>21</sup> but their sections on the harp are very limited—to successfully present the harp in only a few pages is simply not possible.

## I.3. Workshops

My interactions with composers involved workshops with the composition students at the Norwegian Academy of Music, as well as individual lessons on the harp for various composers. I held two workshops on harp instrumentation, one in the spring of 2009, another in the spring of 2011. The most extensive workshop (in spring 2011) involved twelve hours of classroom lectures and a one-hour individual harp lesson. In addition I met many other composers one-on-

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15. Ruth K. Inglefield and Lou Ann Neill, *Writing for the Pedal Harp: A Standardized Manual for Composers and Harpists*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington, Ind.: Vanderbilt Music Company, 2006).

16. See [www.harponotation.com](http://www.harponotation.com), accessed 14 June 2014.

17. John Marson, *The Complete Guide to Harp Glissandi* (New York: Lyra Music, 1966).

18. Rose, *The Harp in the Orchestra* (Houston: B. Schroeder Rose, 2002).

19. Elaine Gould, *Behind Bars: The Definitive Guide to Music Notation* (London: Faber Music, 2011).

20. Samuel Adler, *The Study of Orchestration*, 3rd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982/1989), pp. 94–102.

21. Kurt Stone, *Music Notation in the Twentieth Century: A Practical Guidebook* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1980), pp. 226–56.

one in my studio to teach them harp playing and discuss compositional methods for the harp. When advising composers on how to write for harp, some points were particularly focused upon: I encouraged composers to *listen* to as much harp music as possible. This would help them to delve more deeply into the characteristics of the harp's sound. Attention was brought to the physicality of playing the harp, how sound is physically produced and how harpists use their hands and feet. Very rarely did I point out anything to be impossible. For instance, while advising composers to keep track of the pedals throughout their compositions, I also told them to *not worry* too much about the pedal changes. Pedals often seem to be a point of worry for composers, but they equally risk being too careful as being too ambitious. To have complete understanding of how to use the pedals they need to understand the physicality of changing them and to practice composing where pedals are used. I also encouraged composers to study harp scores independent of their aesthetic style. For instance, by studying scores there is much to learn about how complex a harp score can be, how the hands are used, how a strong dynamic is successfully produced, how a chord is built up or how one can combine playing techniques. There could be as much to learn from Benjamin Britten's use of the harp, for example, as there is from Luciano Berio's, even though composers might relate more to the aesthetic ideas of the latter.

## **I.4. Repertoire**

Presented in section V of this text, are the lists of repertoire and recordings that were relevant to “Let the Harp Sound!” There were several qualities I searched for when I chose the repertoire:

- an unconventional approach to the harp,
- the demonstration of a wide range of expressions and dynamics,
- the demonstration of pragmatic use of relevant playing techniques, such as chromaticism,
- a particularly functional harp part within the respective forms of aesthetics,
- the use of other media, such as electronics, theater, or choreography, to expand the traditional role of the instrument/performer.

In general, I privileged chamber music, including standard ensembles but also works for harp and electronics. I studied scores, listened to recordings (including harp improvisations), and performed some of the works in concerts. The repertoire was chosen to highlight the conceptual potential of the harp.

When working with composers, I varied the works I presented as references according to need and the character of the collaboration. As mentioned above, the comprehensive list of works and recordings used in the collaborations and workshops can be found further on in this text. However, most of the composers only heard me refer to some of these works. The list is not intended as a reference list on “how to write for harp”. On the contrary, many of these works are on the unconventional side, and do not represent a standard. These are works that display a use of the harp that perhaps is not so well known to composers and therefore has the quality of broadening their view on how to use the harp.

Early in this project I tended to emphasize the Norwegian harp repertoire written between 1970 and 2000. I spent a lot of time acquiring original and printed scores, combing through radio archives, and listening to the performances of Norwegian colleagues. However, it soon became evident that a comprehensive documentation of this particular repertoire would be too time consuming, and instead the focus shifted to our present time, new Norwegian works and a more

experimental approach to the harp. That said, I did representative performances of harp pieces by the Norwegian composers Arne Nordheim, Bjørn Fongaard, Wolfgang Plagge, Ruben Sverre Gjertsen, and David Bratlie. I also spent a lot of time editing and rewriting *Variations* with its composer, Kjell Mørk-Karlsen.<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately, the performance of this work had to be postponed, and it was not able to be part of the project.

Among all of the performances in “Let the Harp Sound!” I would like to highlight a few as follows:

**Ray Murray Schafer: *The Crown of Ariadne* (1979), for solo harp with percussion**



Image of the dressed rehearsal of *The Crown of Ariadne*, 8 June 2012 (photo: Marit Anna Evanger).

*The Crown of Ariadne* has been a great inspiration to me, particularly for its wide range of dynamics, sounds, and musical expressions. Schafer draws upon many playing techniques on the harp and further explores the instrument’s possibilities relative to percussive instruments. In the work, the harp has many roles; in the “Bull’s Dance” (the third movement), for example, the sound is forceful and solid, whereas in “Dance of the Night Insects” (the fourth movement), it is delicate and fragile. Schafer displays a unique ability to build sound in the harp, making it

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22. Kjell Mørk Karlsen: *Variations for Harp* (1973/86), op. 29, MIC Norway.

orchestral and rich in its timbre. In addition, his extensive collaboration with harpist Judy Loman, involving all his compositions for harp, was worth studying further to find out more about a collaboration that apparently was so successful. I did so by visiting Loman in Toronto in February 2009. The conversation that I had with her can be found in the appendix. In 2012, *The Crown of Ariadne* was included in the semifinal program of the International Harp Contest in Israel, and it is well on its way to becoming a standard part of the harp repertoire.

**Marius Constant: *Harpalycé pour solo harpe* (1980)**

Marius Constant's "*Harpalycé*" is an unusual piece for harp, in the sense that it is exploring aggressive musical expressions on the harp. The expressions range from fragile tuning key glissandi to noisy thunder effects. Also, Marius Constant's choice of the troubling Greek tragedy of "*Harpalycé*" as his basis for this harp solo, could be described as an unconventional use of harp. The tragedy contains a troublesome storyline, with its depictions of abuse, deep sorrow, and murder. Marius Constant is successful in using the harp to portray this strong emotional content. To do this, he explores playing techniques and effects such as thunder glissandi and pedal buzzes and creates strong dynamics by doubling the melodic line in two, three, or four octaves. The piece is a very successful demonstration of expressive possibilities of the solo harp.

**Jakob Ter Veldhuis: *Cities Change the Songs of Birds* (2008), for harp and boombox**

In 2008, I attended the world premiere of *Cities Change the Songs of Birds*, as performed wonderfully by Lavinia Meijer. The liner notes touch upon its controversial content: "The piece depicts two American women struggling to survive in the world of drugs and crime. The harp comments, plays a dialogue or just accompanies the recorded voices of the women."<sup>23</sup> While I found Meijer's performance immensely inspiring, others in the audience walked out in protest during the concert, and the piece went on to provoke an extensive debate on the Internet that reveals some of the prejudices of the harpists involved in the conversation:

It is unfortunate that new harp music by this world premiere has stooped to this degree and brought the harp to the gutter.

—Kathy Elarte<sup>24</sup>

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23. Quote from [www.jakobtv.net](http://www.jakobtv.net), accessed 2 September 2014.

24. Quote from [www.harpcolumn.com/forum](http://www.harpcolumn.com/forum), accessed 9 February 2010.

Some absurdly suggest censorship; then the debate moves on to discuss just what is an appropriate use of the harp. Some contributors are more outspoken than others:

There is a very thin line between avant-garde music and (pardon) chromatic masturbation about “this sick sad world.” The last one has nothing to music. And a harp, meaning it is a healing and peaceful instrument because of its acoustic species, is not a brain-crushing instrument. Stereotypes? Probably—but you can never imagine a bloody drugged ugly punk ripping the harp strings. Only in a nightmare—but you need to have a sick sad inner world for this. Some stereotypes must stay untouched. There is too much shit in a world and there’s NO reason to express it with the only instrument that is incarnated tenderness even in physics and lyrics both.

—Katerina Antonenko<sup>25</sup>

While it goes without saying that many harpists do not agree with these attitudes, they are nevertheless interesting to observe. It almost seems as though these harpists feel personally insulted because their instrument had not been presented in a way that accords with their idea of it. It is also interesting to note that such attitudes remain part of the cultural and artistic orientation of our international community of harpists.

I really liked the piece and immediately decided to perform it. It offers a rare glimpse into the desperate life of a drug addict, a glimpse that engages me on an emotional level and that provides powerful insight into the complex problems of drug abuse. *Cities Change the Songs of Birds* is a very moving piece that I perform with great care and respect.

With regard to its use of harp, I am in fact grateful to be able to perform a piece on the harp with such strong political content. The harp part itself is not particularly avant-garde, however, but instead rooted in jazz.

### **Carlos Salzedo: *Concerto for Harp and Seven Winds* (1926)**

Carlos Salzedo is a significant contributor to the twentieth century’s approach to the harp, dating back to his well-known writings on harp notation from the 1920s.<sup>26</sup> Many harpists refer to Carlos Salzedo when advising composers on writing for the harp, although his notation and composition techniques are not always up to date or representing a standard. My choice to perform this

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25. See [www.harpcolumn.com/forum](http://www.harpcolumn.com/forum), accessed 9 February 2010 (some words and spellings are edited by the author).

26. Carlos Salzedo: *Modern Study of the Harp* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1921).



particular work by Carlos Salzedo was based on several reasons: It is rarely performed (never before in Norway), so it is not very known. Carlos Salzedo himself said that the Concerto turned out to be too difficult.<sup>27</sup> Technically and musically, the Concerto has a wide range of musical expressions and unfamiliar ways of using the harp (at least to some). Also, it demonstrates how the harp can be used chromatically, which has been a point of misunderstanding among some of the Norwegian composers.

Carlos Salzedo wrote the following notes about his concerto:

Like other works of mine in which the harp plays a leading part (*The Enchanted Isle, Symphonic Poem for Harp and Orchestra; Prélambule et Jeux, for harp and chamber orchestra; Sonata for Harp and Piano*), sonorously, this Concerto is based upon the new orchestral balance that can be obtained by taking advantage of all the resources of the harp, which today can produce thirty-seven tone colors and effects, as described in my *Modern Study of the Harp*. I have chosen the concerto form for this work because the contemporary literature of the harp did not possess a concerto.<sup>28</sup>

### **Lars Horntveth: *Kaleidoscopic* (2008), for jazz band and string orchestra**

My collaboration with jazz musician Lars Horntveth started in 2008, when I was asked to play *Kaleidoscopic* by the Norwegian Radio Orchestra (KORK) at Øyafestivalen. Based upon the score that had been used to record the piece,<sup>29</sup> I extensively edited the harp part to adapt it to a live performance setting. Horntveth then asked me to join his band for tours in Norway, Spain, Belgium, Holland, and the United Kingdom between 2008 and 2012. The collaboration also involved performing pieces from Horntveth's album titled *Pooka*,<sup>30</sup> as well as recording harp parts for his radio theater composition *Kongshavn*<sup>31</sup> and his arrangements for albums by fellow artists Martin Hagfors<sup>32</sup> and Susanne Sundfør.<sup>33</sup>

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27. Carlos Salzedo's article in Musical America's Educational Department: «The Harp - Musical Medium of Our Age», 1944: «My only adverse criticism to this composition of mine is its terrific performing difficulty».

28. Lyra Music: [www.lyramusic.com/Salzedo-Remembered-1885-1961-Lyra\\_p\\_10.html](http://www.lyramusic.com/Salzedo-Remembered-1885-1961-Lyra_p_10.html), accessed 3 June 2014.

29. Lars Horntveth: *Kaleidoscopic*, label: Smalltown Supersound ©© 2008, CD STS097.

30. Lars Horntveth: *Pooka*, label: Smalltown Supersound, ©© 2003, CD STS079.

31. Radio theater production by NRK in 2010: <http://blogg.nrk.no/kongshavn/>.

32. Martin Hagfors: *I Like U*, label: Strømmland Records © 2011, CD SR005.

33. Susanne Sundfør: *Silicone Veil*, label: EMI Norway/Warner Music Norway AS © 2012, CD5099955909426.



Performing “*Kaleidoscopic*” in Barbican Hall, London, June 2012.

Horntveth’s compositional approach to the harp is interesting, particularly for those composers who write popular music, film music, or arrangements for orchestras. In *Kaleidoscopic*, he uses the sound of the harp both melodically and as an addition to the color of sound in the band. The harp part also has a significant rhythmical role. Horntveth finds inspiration for composing for the harp through listening to albums featuring the harp. Working with him extended my experience with alternative settings and musical approaches outside the classical tradition. This in turn inspired my ongoing research for “Let the Harp Sound!”

### **I.3. Conclusion of section I**

During “Let the Harp Sound!” I researched over 170 works for harp and listened to approximately 90 recordings of harp music. I also undertook forty performances, five of which I produced myself, showcasing various approaches to the harp. Taken together, the lists of repertoire, the performances, and the instrumentation literature presented here comprise an up-to-date resource regarding the contemporary use of harp.

## Section II: Initiating artistic explorations

### II.1. About

#### II.1.a. Background

In recent decades, practice in the notation and performance of new music has continued to innovate and experiment. The nature of notation, its functions and uses, as well as performers' approaches to realization and interpretation seem as open-ended as ever. In the digital age the dialogue between composer, notation and performer remains vital, and the collaborative process continues to take many forms.

—InTime Symposium 2012<sup>34</sup>

“Let the Harp Sound!” set out to contribute to the further development of the artistic range of the instrument by collaborating with carefully chosen composers in a variety of styles, taking part in creating a new work as a co-creating musician, and reflecting upon these collaborative processes. There were four comprehensive collaborations on new musical works associated with this project, featuring the composers Mark Adderley, Henrik Hellstenius, Simon Steen-Andersen, and Øyvind Torvund. In addition, there were other collaborations throughout the project that also initiated artistic explorations, with Ivar Frounberg, Ola Gjeilo, Lars Horntveth, and Thomas Myrmel.

#### II.1.b. Strategy

The designated collaborating composers work within a variety of contemporary aesthetic directions. Choosing these composers in particular the intention was to approach the harp from different angles, as well as to promote the harp in forms of aesthetics in which the instrument has previously only played a minor role. The harp was investigated through various contexts. The collaborations enabled me to observe and take part in the artistic choices made for the harp from the very beginning. The working process was thoroughly planned out and based on a close interaction. Early on, we reflected together on what was successful and what could be improved. The new works were performed several times in order to experiment with different artistic and musical solutions, and revisions were both comprehensive and ongoing. The priority was to ensure that the composer was fully enabled to exploit the harp's potential in their music.

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34. Quote from the website of the InTime Symposium 2012: [www.coventry.ac.uk/music/intime-symposium-2012](http://www.coventry.ac.uk/music/intime-symposium-2012), accessed 9 April 2013.

At each meeting with the composer, I tried to establish a positive environment for the creative process. Contributing factors included time spent together, trust, confidence in one another, willingness to contribute to the process, frequent communication, openness to new experiences, predictability (knowing what to expect from one another, knowing when new material would arrive, sticking to deadlines), a cool head, patience, persistence, self-awareness about one's aesthetic preferences, a broad perspective on playing techniques, clear communication about previous experiences, and a generally considered view of the field. I also explored different methods of communication, such as giving harp lessons, lending a harp to composers, improvising with the composers, researching novel applications, reviewing sketches that revealed specific artistic intentions, or experimenting with playing techniques along with the composers. In all, we spent much more time together than is typical for a conventional collaboration, which allowed us to delve more deeply into the working process.



Working in studio with S. Steen-Andersen.

## II.2. A collaboration with Mark Adderley

The harp has traditionally had a tendency to be portrayed in a rather delicate, tender and fragile light; this is not the case in "All Plans Only Last Until the First Shot". Here, the instrument displays a quite different character, at times aggressive, extravert and defiant. It is given a confrontational role in its relationship to the surrounding ensemble that also does not back off! Here, in this robust environment, no excuses are accepted. I wanted to explore, amongst other things, the aesthetics of violence, and to create, to some extent, an explosive and belligerent work for an instrument that is often regarded as something rather delicate; I wanted to get the instrument to bare its teeth and to flare up. The harp can really bite if provoked, and I approach it as an instrument with no weaknesses and no limitations. It is only in this way that one can open up the palette and paint unrestrainedly with a broad brush as I wanted to!

—Mark Adderley, 2010<sup>35</sup>

*All plans last only until the first shot* is the title of Mark Adderley's concerto for harp and sinfonietta, commissioned for "Let the Harp Sound!" in collaboration with Ensemble Ernst. It was premiered at the Ultima Oslo Contemporary Music Festival on 13 September 2010 and financed by the Norwegian Society of Composers. This very thorough collaboration involved seventeen meetings between Mark Adderley and me over seventeen months (2009–10), each for two hours or more. Mark Adderley attended six of my solo concerts throughout this period as well.

The main intention of the collaboration was to produce a piece that would hopefully enrich the Norwegian harp repertoire. I commissioned a concerto because there are very few Norwegian concertos for the harp, and I favored a sinfonietta over a full orchestra because the sinfonietta is a cutting-edge ensemble that often sets the agenda for contemporary classical music and its development. It was important to include this particular arena in my project, to help updating the harp as a contemporary instrument in Norway

Mark Adderley's music is inspiring to me personally, and this was a key motivator throughout our collaboration. His music is complex, full of energy and reveals a great sense of humor, all qualities that I want the harp repertoire to have more of. At the same time, Adderley's complex

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35. Program notes by Mark Adderley, 2010.

way of writing could produce very technically challenging material that in turn would give us lots to talk about.

Mark Adderley loves the idea of rules. He did not find the literature on orchestration very clear, because he perceived it as a neutral presentation of playing techniques and their notations. He wanted to know *how* to use them! He wanted to know do's and don'ts! "How many pedals can you change per second?" Frustratingly enough I did not provide him with such rules. "It all depends, I can do a lot."

What it depends on, of course, is how each element is combined in the music, which is what Mark Adderley and I went on to explore. With the focus on how physical movements and the body itself can influence the musical outcome, we looked at, among other things, when the hands should alternate, which fingering or hand positions would benefit the sound quality that is produced, whether "turning" (change of direction, up and down) in the same hand should be avoided, what the benefits are of alternating hands in a consistent pattern, how internalizing a physical movement in one hand might help to create complex rhythmic layers, and how tempo affects the quality of the harp's sound, the phrasing, the available playing techniques, and so on.

Mark Adderley and I also discussed the notation and how this could be done most efficiently. Efficient notation from the harpist's point of view is when it takes little time to read the music before understanding what needs to be done physically.<sup>36</sup> This is known as action-notation or prescriptive notation, where the notation focus on which actions to make, rather than what it should sound like, which is descriptive notation<sup>37</sup>.

In our discussions, it was important to differentiate between the musical idea and the use of playing technique. If I wanted the pedal changes to be planned out more efficiently it had nothing to do with trying to change the harmonies. This could be a point of misunderstanding between a musician and a composer. For a composer to change the score it could feel like he has

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36. [www.harponotation.com](http://www.harponotation.com): "The harpist needs to know and see immediately on which string the note or effect should be produced.", accessed 28.03.14.

37. Charles Seeger: Prescriptive and Descriptive Music-Writing, *The Music Quarterly*, 44-2, p.184-195, (Oxford University Press, 1958).

to compromise the idea. However, many changes can be made without actually changing the idea.

To create a phrase on the harp, one organizes the individual sounding fingers in a musical line that builds and then releases physical energy. The performer must be able to control the fingers, so they sound equal, slightly emphasized or more emphasized, depending upon their placement in the line of the phrase. To achieve this level of control of the fingers it is important to thoroughly work out a fingering that enhances the phrase in a useful way. If the composer wants a line to be legato, it is important for the fingering to be connected, so that the line is not disrupted by a single second finger attack, for example, or by a “lift off.”<sup>38</sup> If the phrase has jumps in it, the musician must be able to achieve confidence with the hands and to be able to reposition them without hesitation. Adderley managed this in his concerto by planning similar hand positions that were not physically awkward, even when the harmonies were varied. Turnings are an issue as well, with regard to phrases that move in one direction, then reverse course. In these cases, it helps the flow of the phrase if the composer carefully considers which fingers go where. The quality of the sound is influenced by the same variables. If the composer wants a warm, relaxed sound, the performer’s hand should not be in a strained position—if the hand feels natural, the sound will too. If the composer wants a strong harp sound, the performer must have both the time and the opportunity to apply full force—to build tension and release it so as to maximize the sound that is generated. Adderley and I studied scores by composers who had managed powerful sounding harp parts (such as Alberto Ginastera or Benjamin Britten) and found that they often doubled the chords or melodic line, usually at the octave. When playing such parts, the harpist must use a wide hand position for the octaves, which also increases the force she can use to pull the strings. It is not only the doubling that makes the harp sound stronger, that is, but also the way one uses the hands.

Mark Adderley was involved in many such reflections about facilitating harp playing, but it remains an open question as to whose responsibility it should be to consider these aspects of the practical execution of a composition. Many harpists view the planning of the score (the pedals,

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<sup>38</sup> “Lift off” is used here to describe the fingers being lifted off the strings entirely and consequent replacement of the fingers on the strings; connected fingering avoids this potential disruption by keeping the fingers on the strings throughout the given phrase.

hand positions, and fingerings) as part of their job, but music that has been conceived or constructed impractically can make this very difficult. Other times the harpist can be too quick to impose their practical solutions on to the score and end up producing a musical result other than what the composer intended.

Since the many different practical solutions will impact the musical outcome in different ways, harpists bring their questions about the physical execution of a score not only to the initial ideas of the composer but also to the *finished* realization of those ideas. Composers do not always foresee how the practical execution influences their musical ideas. Performers, on the other hand, might need some time or conversation in order to find the best solution. During my collaboration with Adderley, I surprised myself sometimes by managing to do things I had previously thought unlikely or awkward, often because after some consideration I found a good solution. It is therefore best if both parties trust one another to make a conscientious effort and to be open-minded when confronted with new challenges.

Performing *All plans last only until the first shot* with Ensemble Ernst (conducted by Thomas Rimul) was a joy. Although the piece is technically demanding, I could play it comfortably and securely. Because of this, I could communicate the piece to the audience with confidence. Also, having worked so closely with Adderley, I had a great sense of ownership of the piece, which was very motivating to me while presenting our work.

The discussions that took place throughout my collaboration with Mark Adderley often dealt with more general observations that could give a helpful insight on writing for harp. A detailed presentation of the discussions and our work on the score is presented in the appendix.



### II.3. A collaboration with Øyvind Torvund

My chief concern is keeping an open approach as to what may function as the constitutive parts of a work of music, and trying to combine several kinds of elements . . . Contrasts, juxtapositions, and completely opposite perspectives interest me because I believe that there is a lot happening around and beneath the ordinary musical framework, and [there are] a lot of unconscious forces to be explored.

—Øyvind Torvund<sup>39</sup>

Øyvind Torvund's working methods differ markedly from the other composers involved with the project. His composition *Night and Jungle*, for electro-harp, amplifiers, and tape, was based on trial and error around exploring ideas about sound on the harp itself. Early on we worked out a few sketches with some initial ideas, but we soon abandoned them in favor of a more improvisational approach. In this collaborative atmosphere, we both took an active part in developing the piece. Torvund also spent quite a lot of time with the harp on his own.

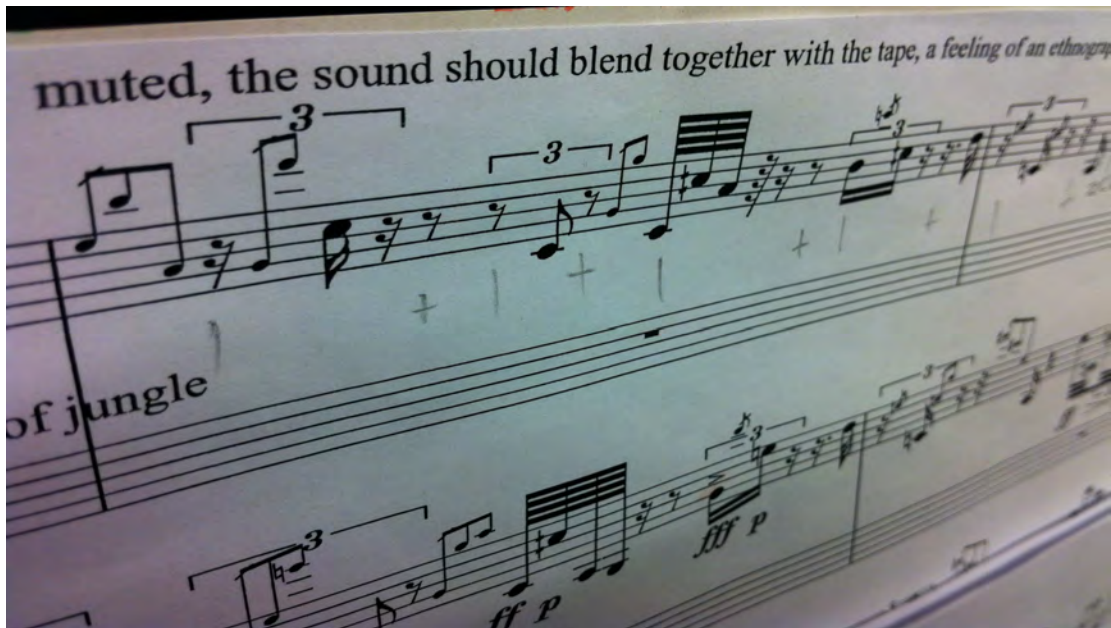
Though I have now publicly performed *Night and Jungle* four times, we still regard it as unfinished. Our collaboration functioned as a learning experience for us both. So far, Torvund has not accepted any compensation for making this piece, by his own choice. He wanted to enjoy complete freedom in experimenting with the various harps, and he felt that working within the boundaries of an official commission would focus him instead on some fixed final result.

Our collaboration consisted of twelve sessions working with the harp, as well as telephone calls and emails, from 2008 to 2012. We finished the first version of the piece in June 2011 and I premiered it at the World Harp Congress in July of the same year. Following the premiere, Torvund and I continued to develop the piece further. After additional sessions together in the fall of 2011, I performed new versions of *Night and Jungle* in November 2011 and March 2012. Then, at the final project recital on 8 June 2012, I presented it in a surround version, with seven amplifiers placed around the audience. In addition, a recording of my performance of the piece was included in an exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Copenhagen, by the artist Yorgos Sapountzis, titled *Deus ex machine*.<sup>40</sup>

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39. Quote from [www.oyvindtorvund.com](http://www.oyvindtorvund.com), accessed 17 February 2014

40. See <http://assets3.artslant.com/ew/events/show/230505-deus-ex-machina>, accessed 13 April 2013



First page of the score for *Night and Jungle* as performed at the World Harp Congress, Vancouver, 2011.

Øyvind Torvund has a background as a guitarist and has played in rock and improvisational groups. His approach to the electric harp was influenced by his knowledge of the electric guitar and electronic appliances. He was also inspired by the work of harpists such as Zeena Parkins. For the harp itself, Torvund only uses analogue electronic devices in *Night and Jungle*, including guitar and bass amplifiers, a distortion box, and a volume pedal. In addition, he uses a triangle stick and the wooden part of a tuning key to create various slides and tremolos on the harp strings.

[Øyvind Torvund's] music assembles disparate materials, inconsistent attitude: sounds from rock or everyday life (or nature), simplicity in a complex context, improvisation coexisting with exact notation, seriousness in counterpoint with humor. The melodic schemes may come from street noise, electronic distortion or folk music.<sup>41</sup>

As a composer, Torvund approaches music in a conceptual manner, not only thinking of *what* is being played but also of *what context* the music contributes to. *Night and Jungle* stages different settings: a busy Internet café in Japan, waves hitting the seashore, jungle sounds, and urban street

41. Quote from [www.oyvindtorvund.com](http://www.oyvindtorvund.com), accessed 17 February 2014.

noise, and machinery and alarms coming and going. The harp part has a different role in each setting.

Torvund's background as a rock and improvisational musician was also apparent in his approach to how *Night and Jungle* should be performed. He tried not to impose any particular demands for virtuosity on the music and insisted that mistakes were not necessarily out of place. "Wrong sounds" were even regarded as helpful to the overall expressiveness of *Night and Jungle*. For example, in the parts of the piece where you hear the Japanese Internet café, the harpist should appear *not* to know the part, in this way depicting a casual feel toward the playing. Along these lines, the electronic equipment used in the performance did not need to be high end. Even when the sound engineer grew annoyed at the buzz in some of the amplifiers, Torvund did not seem to mind. He preferred to make use of a low-fi aesthetic, where technical flaws such as distortion, hum, background noise, and limited frequency response are part of the audio presentation for artistic reasons.<sup>42</sup>

In the sessions with Øyvind Torvund, improvisation and aural transmission were key elements. Our collaboration taught me much about improvisation and exploring my general attitudes towards performance. Øyvind Torvund's composing methods initiated a personal involvement, placing very different demands on me than from those of a more conventional, score-based interaction with a (typically removed) composer. I had to strike an elusive balance between a casual performance approach and knowing the part well enough to play it. Such an approach recalled my experience with other musical settings, such as in the jazz band of Lars Horntveth, I felt that I could benefit from this experience when working on Øyvind Torvund's piece.

It was especially difficult to keep a cool head and allow for still further explorations as the deadline of the first performance approached. Yet the whole nature of the piece demanded the ongoing cultivation of a creative space where explorations could take place, and we needed to be tuned in and open to new ideas every time we met. Of course, it was not ideal that the piece was finished only a month before its world premiere, and within the same time period as the pieces by Henrik Hellstenius and Simon Steen-Andersen drew to a close. Since the character of the

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42. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lo-fi\\_music](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lo-fi_music), accessed 21 August 2014.

collaborations with these three composers was so different, it was a challenge for me to get into the “right state of mind” with each composer. On numerous occasions my working method had to switch back and forth between an improvisatory approach and a very technically strict approach, and from analogue electronics to digital electronics, and from a laid-back attitude to a classical virtuosic attitude.



Guitar amplifier settings during a performance of *Night and Jungle*.

*Night and Jungle* is the kind of conceptual work that may benefit from an unconventional performance setting—Torvund’s music arises from a crossover and contextual musical approach that is not necessarily best communicated in a classical concert hall, where a laid-back approach to performance might not be what the audience expect of the performer. Likewise, it was a challenge to communicate the character of *Night and Jungle* when it was programmed alongside other, more traditional pieces, where I had to switch from a casual approach to a virtuoso, classical one. It would have been interesting to perform *Night and Jungle* in a casual setting, such as at a jazz concert, where this might not have been an issue.

*Night and Jungle* is simply not a work that puts the harp or the harpist at the center of the activity. Both exist among the different atmospheres created by the piece, guiding the listener on a journey using relatively simple melodies, bird imitations, or noisy effects.

## II.4. A collaboration with Simon Steen-Andersen

In his compositions, Simon Steen-Andersen combines physical movement, visual art, sound art and music. In our collaboration, his ideas were always very precise and demanded exact execution. He had an unparalleled practical understanding of how his ideas might be executed on the harp, and very rarely did he suggest anything that appeared to be impossible. His ideas were often surprising. Our sessions in the studio, trying out different ideas and finding practical solutions together, was characterized by a fun and playful atmosphere.

*History of My Instrument* was commissioned by me and funded by the Arts Council Norway and my artistic research project budget. Steen-Andersen and I also received assistance from NOTAM by working together with sound designer Cato Langnes and my collaboration with engineer Tom Johansen on the modification of two toy harps. We began to develop the piece during the spring of 2009. We met five times before the piece was premiered at the World Harp Congress in Vancouver in July 2011. We met twice more before my final recital in Kulturkirken Jakob in June 2012. As part of “Let the Harp Sound!” there were six performances in total of *History of My Instrument*.

The result of our collaboration is a multimedia performance piece, in which music, movements, and images are intertwined components of the overall content. Using the computer software Ableton Live, video and audio files are controlled through two MIDI boards behind the harp, operated by the harpist. Video is projected onto the harp by a standard video projector. The harp is prepared with paper interwoven through all of the strings and gaffer tape in a specific pattern on the bass strings. Contact microphones are mounted inside the harp (for amplifying pedal slides), as well as on a credit card that I use on the strings. Behind the harp is a table on which are placed the MIDI keyboard, the credit card, a fly swatter (for hitting the harp), as well as an amplified Disney toy harp. A small lamp is mounted on the tuning pegs and a second MIDI controller is placed on the floor. In addition, I sit on a very high stool that I move around in the piece. In front of the harp there is a “cheesy-looking”<sup>43</sup> vocal microphone and my computer, responsible for running the whole piece, is placed on the floor.

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43. Instructions given to me by Simon Steen-Andersen, in our work session the 10 July 2011.

In the beginning of our collaboration, we spent time discussing different ideas, harp history and various literature about harp techniques. Workshops were planned, in which we experimented with real-time video. We tried out contact microphones at different places on the harp and worked out what equipment created the sound world we sought. Our last workshop comprised a number of intense days of experimentation, during which we finished the piece. Together we would try out various ideas; while Simon established the choreography and honed the Ableton file, I wrote down the instructions, which comprises the harp score so I would know what to do. I learned *History of My Instrument* through our workshops together.

In developing this piece uppermost in our minds were the stereotypes associated with both the harpist and the harp. Instead of avoiding them, however, Steen-Andersen investigates, scrutinizes and challenges them in his composition. Making the harpist wear a white dress, turning the harp into angel's wings that are "attached" to the harpist's back, and using musical material from pieces like Albert Zabel's *La Source*, opus 23, and Alphonse Hasselmans's *Firefly*, are a myriad of techniques in which he takes a fresh look at what a harpist can be, by *confronting* the clichés.

*History of My Instrument* responds to some of the central questions in "Let the Harp Sound!" By confronting the harp using these various strategies, the harp is placed in a historical context. Images of harpists of all shapes and sizes, including stereotypical pictures of angels and the nobility playing the harp, are projected onto the harp and the performer. Portraits of former harpists are used as part of the live performance. This coincides well with the project's ethos of how tradition always influences us, how we mirror those who came before, but also that we live in changing times. In *History of My Instrument* Steen-Andersen comments on historically significant literature by such harpists as Carlos Salzedo, Henriette Renié and Yolanda Kondonassis. Steen-Andersen's approach to their musical oeuvre is probably not as these harpists intended. In this way, Steen-Andersen not only places the harp within his aesthetic construct, but also the harpist and the history of the harp. A good example of this is when in the piece he turns off the sound almost entirely while I mimic the movements of the famous harpist and pedagogue Mildred Dilling.<sup>44</sup> A video of Mildred Dilling performing is projected on the harp and on me. Our hands move simultaneously, and it is sometimes difficult to determine who is

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44. See [www.youtube.com/watch?v=PNFtRU\\_c2Ec](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PNFtRU_c2Ec): *Mildred Dilling Performs in 1940*, accessed 22 June 2014.

who. Steen-Andersen does this in response to the quote preceding this section of the piece (which is ironically projected as text onto the harp):

Perhaps Carlos Salzedo said it best in this excerpt from an article published in the January 1952 issue of *Etude Magazine*: “Music is meant to be heard, but also to be looked at, otherwise radio would have long ago supplanted the concert stage, which, fortunately it has not.”<sup>45</sup>

The live performer of *History of My Instrument* does in effect perform the same movements as the “great masters” before. Slow motion movements concentrate the audience’s attention on the physicality of the performance, the body language and the energy in harp playing. In the video that is shown of Mildred Dilling, she says “To let the harp speak for itself”. This phrase is in various ways played many times during *History of My Instrument*. As a result, Steen-Andersen presents the sound of the harp from a completely different perspective than Mildred Dilling intended.

Performing *History of My Instrument* was an unusual experience. It was interesting that much of what I was doing within the piece was hidden behind the harp or took place in the dark. Many in the audience did not seem to understand the relationship between my performance and the video being shown on the harp. The technically demanding parts of the piece involved triggering multiple MIDI triggering, precisely mimicking the arm and hand movements in the video, making the pedal noise introduce the harmonies of the song “Those Days Are Over,” heard toward the end, as well as sliding the credit card over the gaffer-tape at an exact angle and speed so that it would sound like what was being said simultaneous to the sound file: “To let the harp speak for itself.” The piece has been very popular with audiences due to its many layers, both serious and funny. It is not often that harpists get to play a harp piece with a degree of absurdity embedded within it, and it was wonderful to do so.

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45. Simon Steen-Andersen quoting from “On Playing the Harp” by Yolanda Kondonassis, published by Carl Fischer, 2006.



From the dressed rehearsal of *History of My Instrument*, 8 June 2012 (photo: Marit Anna Evanger)

There is music in each of the movements I am involved in. All the actions performed by the harpist during the piece are strictly choreographed. The opening of the piece comprises the harpist casually saying, “Before playing I’d like to give you a short outline of the history of my instrument” (quoting Mildred Dilling). As the spotlight fades, I turn on the small lamp so my hand on the far side of the paper becomes visible, and then I trigger the start of the piece, count six sounds, and play Albert Zabel’s *La Source* on a muted harp in synchrony with the tape. The small light is turned off, I carefully pick up the credit card with my right hand and make “breathing noises” on the back side of the harp, stand up, lift the stool to create more space, shift the credit card to my left hand, loosen the cable so I have enough range, pull the table with the keyboard closer, placing my right hand on the keyboard, and so on. There are no movements that are not planned. For example, when I come from behind the harp to sit down with the toy harp I do so in one long step, crouching as I go. Likewise, the timing of hitting the harp and the



movements leading up to that moment have been thoroughly worked out. Much of what I do is behind the harp, as mentioned before. During the credit card section, when I slide the credit card on the left side of the harp, I am constantly triggering the MIDI keyboard without looking at it: C-D-C-E-C-F-C2-G-C2-A-C2-Bb(long)-Bb(short)-Bb (short+)-Bb(moving on). This means that I have to hold my hand still so I know where the different keys are, and it restricts my movement in front of the instrument.



Staging *History of My Instrument*, 8 June 2012 (photo: Marit Anna Evanger)

One of the challenges of performing *History of My Instrument* was working with the lighting on stage, the light in the concert hall in general, and the quality of blackness in the overhead projector. Simon Steen-Andersen's idea was that it should be so dark that no one could see me. This meant that the hall and stage needed to be 99% dark. Often, it is the concert producers who decide whether or not the hall is dark enough, and we therefore had to communicate to them the immense importance of this aspect of the piece. In addition, many halls that can accommodate this degree of darkness are not designed for good live acoustics (for example, black box theaters or movie theaters). Up to now, the lighting was only truly successful in one performance, in the Planetarium Room of the Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology during "Researchers Night 2011." Performing in complete darkness for the first time, I immediately faced new

challenges, because I had grown accustomed to using my eyes to some extent. Thankfully, the performance went well<sup>46</sup>.

What then is the consequence of performing the piece when lighting is not optimal? Steen-Andersen was adaptable to the possibility, pointing out that the piece could still be appreciated for other qualities. The effect of less ideal lighting continued to be explored when performing the piece at various other concert venues. Interestingly when I performed *History of My Instrument* in Levinsalen at the Norwegian Academy of Music, the darkness was nowhere near ideal, and a composer in the audience told me afterward that he actually preferred the three-dimensionality of that performance to the absolutely dark performance of “Researcher’s Night 2011”, which he had also attended, because he liked the fact that the different layers always were visible and that the performer did not disappear from view.

I have rarely met a person who is more pragmatically oriented than Simon Steen-Andersen, and who demonstrates a focus in solving performance-related practical issues. This quality in him made it possible for me to trust him and his ideas, believing them to be manageable, even though at times his demands seemed excessive and that he worked in a creative arena that was previously unfamiliar to me.

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46. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zr1Yh5wpqVo>, accessed 14 February 2015.

## II.5. A collaboration with Henrik Hellstenius

In 2008 a “portrait work” was commissioned from Henrik Hellstenius for “Let the Harp Sound!”; it was funded by the Norwegian Arts Council. The result, titled *Heritage*, consists of three movements that include a live harp performance, text fragments spoken by the musician both live and on tape, recordings of the musician’s father, and a video projecting both text and personal photos of the musician’s family. *Heritage* contains reflections about identity, tradition, and finding one’s place in life that also underpin “Let the Harp Sound!”

I asked Hellstenius to compose this piece, inspired by his other portrait works, *Personality and Essence*<sup>47</sup> for Kjell Tore Innervik and *Victoria Teller*<sup>48</sup> for Victoria Johnson. In these works, and in *Heritage*, Hellstenius explores the relationships between the composer, the musicians, and the audience. These biographical statements combine the musician’s actual performance with field recordings and texts from his or her personal life. Like a literary biography or a portrait in visual art, the composer presents the performer through the composer’s eyes. These portrait works explore communication on many levels. First of all, the relationship between the composer and the performer is inverted, so that the performer is the most important figure in the work. Second, the relationship between the performer and the audience is unusual, in that it is based upon relatively personal revelations from the classical musician. Third, the relationship between the composer and the audience is changed, in that the composer is no longer autonomous or independent of the musician. Where does the composer end and the performer begin here?

Henrik Hellstenius and I met six times between 2008 and 2011, and the world premiere of the work took place on 26 July 2011. After the premiere, we continued to develop the work and met seven more times before the final recital at Kulturkirken Jakob on 8 June 2012. During the period between the world premiere and the final concert, I gave three different performances of *Heritage*. Before each performance we altered and developed the work. Hellstenius took an active part throughout our collaboration and participated before and during my performances, including taking part in the workshop with the choreographer Gunnhild Bjørnsgaard.

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47. Henrik Hellstenius: *Personality and Essence* (2007), for quartetone marimba and electronics, Oslo: MIC Norway.

48. Henrik Hellstenius: *Victoria Teller* (2007), for electric violin and electronics, Oslo: MIC Norway.

Instead of making field recordings from my everyday life, Hellstenius asked me to record my various thoughts and reflections, speaking into a device with a wireless microphone. There were no limitations upon what I could talk about, other than my own choice to speak about heritage. I also traveled to Trondheim and recorded a lecture my father gave to his students at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) in March 2011. Listening carefully, you can also hear my dog and the birds singing in my garden as part of the recording of my reflections, which was used for the first three performances of the work. The quality of these first recordings was not good, however, and the background noise eventually became more of a distraction than an asset. In early 2012, I made new recordings of the same text using a Roland MP3 recorder,<sup>49</sup> and Hellstenius chose to combine both recordings in his last version of *Heritage*.

Performing *Heritage* for the first time was an experience I will never forget. The Tom Lee Music Hall in Vancouver, Canada, was filled with harp colleagues attending the World Harp Congress 2011. I had no idea how they would respond to what I was saying in the tape, or to the piece itself. I prepared myself for the worst, even wondering whether the audience would start to leave the hall while I was still playing. Yet it was soon clear that there would be a positive response from the audience. I could hear people reacting to what I was saying on the tape, culminating in the last movement, where I talk about being a harpist. Audiences were commenting out loudly, responding to my statements. I could hear them laughing and agreeing with many of the statements. This was unlike anything else I had performed. It was personal. After the concert and in the days that followed, many people came up to me to let me know what they thought about it. One of the things that made a lasting impression on me was a woman from the audience who could not stop crying. She wanted to tell me how grateful she was, but she had a hard time speaking. I was staggered by how powerful *Heritage* was. Audience members had very different experiences of it as well. Some people enjoyed its focus on nature, trees, and the preservation of our family history. Others were more interested in the issues involved with being a harpist, and recognized themselves in what I was describing. Several people said they would mention my performance as one of the best experiences of the festival on the evaluation form.

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49. Ediro R-09.

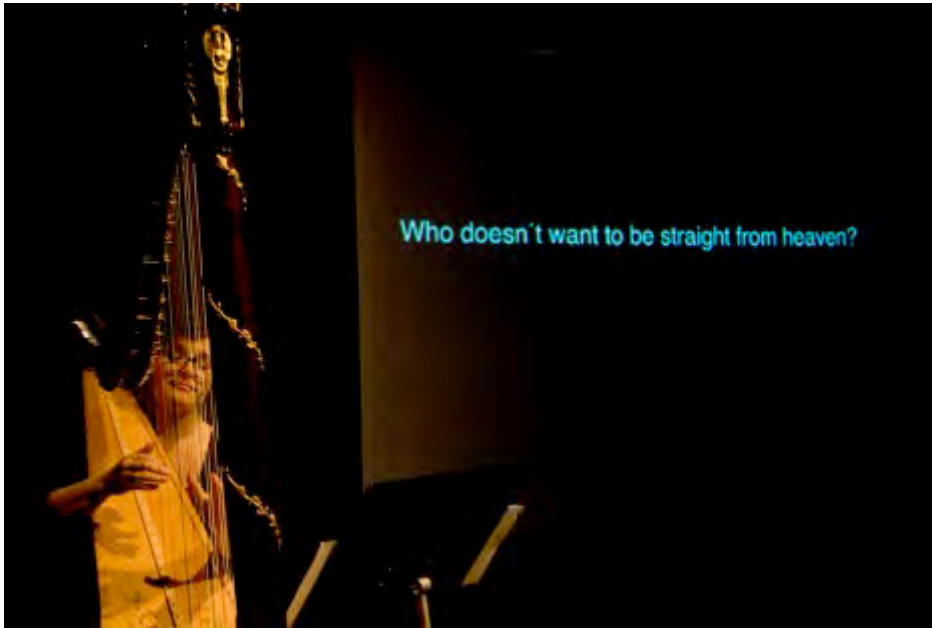


Picture of the final recital performance of H. Hellstenius's *Heritage*. Photo: M. A. Evanger.

*Heritage* always seemed to invite a dialogue with audience members, and one of the recurring questions at the performances in Norway was why I spoke English during the piece. There were several reasons. First of all, the piece was to be world premiered at the World Harp Congress 2011 for an international audience, and English would be the most readily understood language there. Second, I wanted to reach an audience outside of Norway in general. Third, I am familiar with English and have many family members who are not Norwegian, so that English is a language I often use, both privately and professionally. Though speaking in Norwegian might have enhanced the intimate and personal character of the piece, being my first language after all, I decided to privilege the accessibility of English instead.

The collaboration between Henrik Hellstenius and I was interesting for “Let the Harp Sound!” in the perspective of how a composer and a musician works together. The co-creating part of the musician is in many ways more evident in this type of collaboration. This is also a type of collaboration that challenges the ownership in a composition. We both had to be very sensitive towards each other, since *Heritage* was personal to us both. It was also important that I was comfortable on stage with what I presented, and Hellstenius had to pay careful attention to the limits of my comfort zone. Especially, when preparing the last version, it took some time for me

to incorporate the new elements—performing with the video for the first time and speaking more of the text while playing.



Picture of the final recital performance of H. Hellstenius's *Heritage*. Photo: M. A. Evanger.

In hindsight, it is interesting to observe that we did not experiment so much with the actual use of harp in *Heritage*, although we did make some changes to the harp part. In the first movement for example, there were originally three lines moving independently of each other, which we reduced to two. Also, we added a few bass notes, after I deliberately challenged Hellstenius on the issue of using more bass and bigger chords to gain more resonance in the harp. However, I quickly realized that Hellstenius' choice of not using the harp in this way was a deliberate one, which led to our discussions on traditional views of good and bad sound on the harp. Composers who want the instruments to sound differently than the romantic sound ideal sometime struggle to communicate their aesthetic point of views to the performer. An example of this was when I thought the tremolos in the last movement sounded very thin and brittle, and I changed it without asking Hellstenius. This was typically what I would do to “help” the composer in other situations too. When playing this for Hellstenius, he immediately heard that something was off, and asked me what I was doing. It turned out that he was not interested in the “good and warm”-sounding tremolo that I was creating, but wanted the tremolos exactly as brittle as they were written.

Henrik Hellstenius' working method was always structured and he was very clear in his communication with me. We followed the time schedule that we had agreed upon in the beginning of our collaboration and Hellstenius delivered a finished score in time. As a result, I did not stress over this piece, and I felt that I was included in every stage of the composing process. I loved to take part in creating *Heritage*, and performing this piece contributed significantly to developing my musicianship, a topic I discuss further in chapter three.

## **II.6. Conclusion of section II**

My composer collaborations produced four works for harp, three of which are completed. Through engagements with the composers in discussions about the roles of the harp and the harpist, the collaborations initiated explorations of new artistic possibilities. The collaborations were both dynamic and various in character. Sometimes composers had specific ideas and demanded a specific execution, other times they have been open to suggestions and curious about alternatives. Sometimes our roles would switch back and forth within the same collaboration. Each person joined in and contributed to the "space" that would lay the groundwork for the creativity. The result of the collaboration depended on the character of these meetings. Putting restraints or directions on top of the meetings could therefore have limited the process, in the sense of taking away from a genuine openness when meeting each other. The experience of such collaborations has reinforced my belief in a flexible and open-ended creative process. Sometimes direction is unavoidable and sometimes the effectiveness of restraints is needed, but if it is possible, the genuine open meeting between creative people could result in wonderful art. Music exists in the meeting between people.

What has become evident in "Let the Harp Sound!" is that even the most introverted composer must be able to communicate his or her ideas. Having created music in theory, the composer must then collaborate with the musician on the practical aspects of its execution. The impact of all of these small practical choices on the musical outcome has been clear throughout "Let the Harp Sound!", and particularly in the collaboration with Mark Adderley.

I believe that it is possible to rethink the use of the harp's sound within most contemporary forms of musical aesthetics. Even within traditional compositional styles, one can explore the expressive use of the harp and revisit the assumptions that inform its character. Composers base their approaches to instruments on their knowledge, previous experiences, and various points of reference that they have accumulated over the course of their careers. Revisiting those expectations allows them to gain a broader view of the possibilities that exist.



Rehearsal of S. Steen-Andersen's *History of My Instrument*, spring 2011.



## **Section III: Gaining experience**

### **III.1. About**

#### **a. Background**

As a full-time freelance harpist, I have performed in a wide range of settings, playing mostly classical but also within other genres, such as pop or jazz. Through my work I have met many composers and music arrangers whom I have advised on how to write for the harp, and I have edited many harp parts. To be able to give composers sufficient advice, I have always wanted to learn more about the contemporary music field.

At the same time I have worked with many event managers and concert arrangers who are responsible for deciding the repertoire to be performed in their programs. It has often been a challenge to advocate for the modern or contemporary repertoire for harp. Over the course of “Let the Harp Sound!” however, I have been able to build my repertoire, to discover new performance opportunities and to present unconventional harp repertoire to a wider audience.

From early on in the research project it was important to define my own role. This was a project that I had initiated, and to achieve its goals I had to take an active role in all aspects of the project. When building more knowledge and experience in contemporary music, my own idea of the harp and its possibilities would expand, and simultaneously I would gain more ability to advice composers or refer them to relevant resources. To further understand the contemporary field as a whole, particularly the various aesthetic directions, was equally important. This was pursued in order to help my understanding of the composers I worked with, being able to study scores in the appropriate aesthetic context, as well as increasing my communication skills within the field.

As mentioned, the working methodology of composers varies greatly. In addition, in Norway the functional division of labor between the composer and the musician is becoming increasingly blurred. In some cases, the composition of a new piece involves contributions from everyone involved in the process. The role of the autonomous composer no longer seems to be viable for

these compositional styles, in fact, composers and musicians no longer seem to have any clearly defined roles, a developmental trend that is clearly reflected in my project.

To promote and expand the use of the harp in contemporary music, it is imperative to involve the harp with progressive people and experimental projects. This in turn demands a harpist with some facility in aspects of theater, visual art, and electronics. The goal was therefore to gain experience in these areas as parts of my own musicianship.

Another goal was to become so familiar with novel expressions, that they would become a natural ingredient of my musicianship. It was not a question of being able to apply new techniques in a mechanical/technical way, as much as it was a question of integrating a natural way of approaching contemporary expressions from within. This meant that the challenge was not first and foremost about practicing and managing, but more about confronting the deeper attitudes towards what being a musician entails and what one wants the instrument to be for oneself. Such attitudes inform one's process of working on contemporary music—for example, if I have been performing many works with a horizontal progression, I should be careful not to apply a progression to a work that is vertically oriented. Or, if I am used to telling the audience a story as part of the performance, I should be careful not to do the same when there is no storyline in the music. Or, if I want to entertain the audience, I should remove myself from this when working within aesthetics where entertaining the audience is not done in a traditional sense.

By exploring my own role in the contemporary art scene I had to become more personal than what is normally expected of a classical musician. Being personal also means that my own aesthetic preferences become more influential. My own training and my own idea of what a harp/harpist can do, influence the collaborations I am involved in. One focal point of the project was therefore in emphasizing an awareness of what constitutes my comfort zone or personal preferences as a musician.

### **b. Strategy**

“Let the Harp Sound!” sought to build my experience within contemporary music. I set about learning and performing more contemporary repertoire, researching various compositional styles within contemporary music, reflecting on my role in the project as a whole, and exploring new

possibilities for myself as a musician. Central to this were my ongoing reflections upon my personal musicianship, the relevance of my previous training, and challenging my notions of what was possible.

I ventured into previously unfamiliar territory, studying electronics, theater music, and improvisation. I also challenged myself to learn and perform pieces that were particularly technically demanding in order to further develop my technical range. Lastly, it was important to gain more knowledge about compositions that were central to the development of contemporary harp repertoire, building a wider repertoire, to create a bigger performance platform for myself as a harpist.

### **III.2. The harpist conversations**

I really think that the harpist needs to meet the composer, to play for him and together find solutions. That is the only thing that has really worked. I have also given harp lessons to composers, emphasizing the things I have mentioned here; four fingers, big, wide chords, clear bass, to not change pedals when the tone is still ringing and to not do any quick key changes. Furthermore it is important to be able to change between enharmonic tones, not to insist that it must be an F# and not a Gb. I also want it to sound good, and not be too nitty-gritty. Another thing to think about is to have a variation in the dynamics, using both fortissimo and pianissimo.

—Willy Postma

Before embarking on the composer collaborations for “Let the Harp Sound!” I sat down for a series of conversations with harpists who had been involved in the creation of harp repertoire that were of interest to my project. I wanted to know how the harpists had worked together with the composers and how they themselves related to the harp. I highly recommend reading the entire conversations, which include many interesting ideas regarding what is important when one is composing for harp, or when the harpist is working with composers. The interviews with the Norwegian harpists Elisabeth Sønstevoid and Willy Postma also focus on the Norwegian harp repertoire, particularly that of the 1970s, which offers an interesting perspective on the Norwegian music scene of that period.

One of the observations made through these conversations was the relationship between the degree of involvement from the harpists and the musical outcome. For instance, works that had been edited by a harpist seemed in turn more frequently performed by other harpists, which indicate that the work was made more available to other harpists by the editing. It was also interesting that the dynamics of the collaboration influenced the performances—when the composer and harpist had communicated well, harpists seemed to feel more comfortable when performing the work.

Composers write in so many different styles nowadays. I think it is important to be open to what makes the harp respond in a satisfying way—that you work with the instrument and not against it. This is generalized, but I think if you are working with the instrument and the musicians feel you are [doing so], the musicians feel they can do it [too]. This is very dependent on harpists not being locked down in the tonal aspect, which is very easy for harpists to do. The harpists (and other musicians) need to be open to any thinkable harmonies.

—Elisabeth Sønstevoid

I also asked the harpists about what resources they had supplied to composers. Some mentioned the orchestration literature of Hector Berlioz,<sup>50</sup> which was interesting, since Berlioz wrote (in 1843) about an entirely different harp than the one we play today. More relevant recent literature on general orchestration might instead be Elaine Gould's *Behind Bars*<sup>51</sup>, as mentioned in section I.

Also, the comparison to the piano was a re-occurring theme, and two of the harpists had been pianists themselves. In fact, it used to be quite common that the harpists were former pianists who were recruited to play the harp. This was a reminder of how much the harpist's educations have developed in recent time.

Because “Let the Harp Sound!” wanted to challenge the prevailing use of the harp, the conversations touched upon various experiences with limited expectations for the instrument:

I try to avoid stigmas. What maybe annoys me, though, is that if you go into chamber music clubs, or societies that organize a series of concerts a year, there are lots that don't want to program harp. Not as a recital and not

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50. Hector Berlioz: *Berlioz's Orchestration Treatise*, ed. Hugh MacDonald (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

51. Elaine Gould, *Behind Bars: The Definitive Guide to Music Notation* (London: Faber Music, 2011).

as chamber music. Because the repertoire is too difficult, they say. It is too new; harpists have no Beethoven, no Mozart, and no Haydn. They don't want to take the risk because it might be too difficult for the audience. It doesn't have to do with stigmas, although it does have to do with my instrument. Obviously this is the repertoire we have. However, it mostly says something about how old-fashioned a lot of classical music lovers are, or people who think they love classical music. They are very scared of anything that is new. At the moment you get on stage, it is no longer an issue: the audience loves repertoire that is different and they like it. That is, if you make a good program, of course, not if you make a shit one. I do have the privilege of being able to play in very nice places. But even there, [and] even my agent who is making a tour like that possible, [one] encounters places where they say, "No, Debussy is really too modern for our series."

—Godelieve Schrama

Meeting these harpists was very inspiring to me personally, and everything we talked about was in the back of my mind throughout my project. The recognition that both their abilities as harpists and their unique personalities influenced the projects in which they were involved, inspired my approach toward the relationship between the composer and the musician.

The repertoire developed the harp as a solo instrument. We still need more pieces for the harp to take its place as a solo instrument. However sometimes I fear that we never really will. Why, I don't know. We make more noise than a guitar. And yet the guitar has wonderful repertoire. But now, we are developing our own wonderful repertoire.

—Judy Loman

### III.3. Learning *Grains*

I approach the harp as an outsider, viewing it as a collection of strings that one can play around with, the same way as when you play inside a piano, scraping or letting objects bounce around. I have no overstated respect for traditions, but of course there is a musical representation behind [them].

—Ruben Sverre Gjertsen<sup>52</sup>

To explore the communication between composer and musician further, I chose to do a recording of Ruben Sverre Gjertsen's *Grains*, for viola, harp, and percussion, with the Bit20 Ensemble (Aurora Records). The aim was to gain experience with working on a very complex score, and

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52. Ruben Sverre Gjertsen in an email to the author, 10 January 2011 (translated by S.R.). Original: Nå kommer jeg til harpen som en utenforstående, ser den som en samling strenger man kan leke med, på samme måte som man spiller inni et piano, skrapet eller lar gjenstander sprette rundt. Jeg har ikke noen overdreven respekt for alle tradisjoner, men det ligger selvsagt en musikalsk forestilling bak.

*Grains* certainly looked like a daunting task. But was the score really as inaccessible as it seemed, and if so, why? Bit20 Ensemble asked me to join them on this recording in the fall of 2010, and I studied *Grains* for nearly three months before recording it in Bergen's Grieghallen on 31 January 2011. The composer and I corresponded some by email and met once before the recording day.

Gjertsen's approach to the harp is exciting, particularly in terms of his interest in rough sounds—long scraping sounds and the extensive use of slow pedal glissandi, for example. Abrupt and sparkling sounds are also something that the harp excels in doing, perhaps more so than other instruments. In *Grains* the harp part is independent and fairly aggressive, propelling the music forward. Gjertsen sets up a relationship between the viola, harp, and various percussion instruments in an unusual way. The harp is an important part of the textures of this piece, and Gjertsen embraces the instrument wholeheartedly.

Throughout the arduous process of learning *Grains*, I was impressed and inspired by how meaningful this music was, though it appeared so random on the surface.

In order to interpret scores by contemporary composers, one must be able to understand the aesthetic context. Gjertsen's score is extremely detailed and includes his personal experiments with creating his own notational language. Some of his notation is prescriptive (action-based notation), and some is descriptive (indicating how the music should sound), and he even uses both at the same time. The minutely detailed notation gives the impression that Ruben Sverre Gjertsen wants an exact execution. His apparent demand for exactness is also confirmed when he at specific places in the score writes out "written rhythm or ad.lib.", which implies that the places he has not written "or ad.lib." should be as written. The complexity and apparent strictness led me to interpret this score within the aesthetics of the so-called "New Complexity."<sup>53</sup> In addition, the work's level of technical difficulty points to the "struggle idiom," where the performer must work at the very edge of what is possible, so that the struggle itself is

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51. According to Christopher Fox in Grove Music Online, "New Complexity" is "A term that became current during the 1980s as a means of categorizing the music of Brian Ferneyhough, Michael Finnissy and a number of younger composers, the majority of them British, all of whose music was held to share certain aesthetic and formal characteristics. In particular they sought to achieve in their work a complex, multi-layered interplay of evolutionary processes occurring simultaneously within every dimension of the musical material."

part of the aesthetics. However, in an email to me, he noted that certain aspects of the score constituted “something to aim for.”<sup>54</sup> This is crucial information for anyone interpreting *Grains*, and it is not obvious from the score. This could mean that the score should be interpreted with more liberty than how I first approached it, and less strict than what is communicated in the score.

The image shows a page of musical notation for bars 110-111 of the piece *Grains*. It includes three staves: Percussion (Perc.), Viola (Vla.), and Piano (P). The Percussion staff has markings for *ppp*, *sub.*, *crini SP*, *coll legno batt*, *v v v v v v*, *cold*, and *oscil. lentissimo*. The Viola staff has markings for *sf*, *pp*, and *pesante*. The Piano staff has markings for *delicato*, *pp*, *mf*, *sf*, *ppp*, *pedal gliss./vibrato lentissimo*, and *let stick vibrate against string*. There are also handwritten annotations in blue ink, including "What does this mean?" and "3 4 5 6".

Bars 110–11 of *Grains*.

Learning *Grains* thus became an experience with an aesthetic direction that puts the performer in a conflicted situation. *Grains* challenges my training as a classical musician and my traditional approach to learning a score. As a classically trained musician I approach the score with the intent of doing what it says, the way it says. However, when applying this attitude in a work, which is on the verge, or perhaps beyond what I am capable of, it creates a lot of frustration. In addition, some of the things Ruben Sverre Gjertsen asks for, are seemingly non-existing, for example the gradual slide of the pedal moving harmonically from one half note to the next.<sup>55</sup> The notation that Ruben Sverre Gjertsen introduces also complicates the interpretation further. Some of his “new” notation seems to only be a change of name on the playing technique, or a new way of notating it. The sounding result seems to be the same as with the standardized notation. This complicates the learning process, and leaves me feeling that I am continuously

54. Email from Gjertsen to the author, 11 January 2011.

55. When the pedal moves between positions you only hear mechanical noise or the metal of the pins buzzing against the strings. There is no pitch in-between the pedal positions.

asked to go the “long way around” to understand what actions to make, instead of approaching them efficiently and directly, like I normally do. As a result, the validity of what the composer asks for comes into question. The trust in the composer’s intentions is weakened, which makes it difficult to loyally commit to the score as a performer. Therefore, my first challenge when learning *Grains* was to overcome my initial negative reaction to the score, enough so, that I would be motivated to make an effort of understanding what the composer wanted.

The struggle becomes a battle between performance ethics and the work’s aesthetic. The built-in verge of collapse is fought with all means available. The performer cannot lose the battle, or she loses face! The psychological effect is strong: this music requires all the performer’s resources in the battle, but the outcome is still uncertain.

—Tanja Orning, 2014<sup>56</sup>

In addition to overcoming psychological demands of learning *Grains*, I had to cultivate a strict discipline of practicing three sessions each day, setting myself small goals, and allowing for very gradual progress. I made use of every learning strategy I knew, including the following:

- Practicing the most difficult spots every day
- Dividing the notes into sections: left hand, right hand, cross rhythms separately
- Practicing in groups
- Practicing jumps in groups
- Practicing in different rhythms so the emphasized finger varies
- Creating technical etudes from difficult gestures
- Practicing complex movements by placing the first note in each hand
- Practicing transitions by placing the last note of one element next to the first note of the next element, gradually increasing the notes in each element
- Practicing complex cross-rhythms slowly, learning by ear
- Automating complex cross-movements
- Practicing slowly with a metronome, and gradually increasing the tempo

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56. Tanja Orning, “The Polyphonic Performer: A Study of Performance Practice in Music for Solo Cello by Morton Feldman, Helmut Lachenmann, Klaus K. Hübler, and Simon Steen-Andersen,” Ph.D. diss. (Norwegian Academy of Music, 2014), p. 243.



After recording *Grains*, I wrote about my experience in my project diary:

Before starting to practice *Grains* I had spent quite a few hours planning my pedal changes. At the same time I had made the initial planning of fingering. Now I needed to adapt my fingering so they would work musically. From looking at the score it seemed like it was important to outline all the details, such as having a clear subdivision of rhythm, doing all the dynamic markings and accentuating the individual notes the way the score said. The fingering would have to be somewhat adapted to the various rhythms and tempi, so figuring out the cross-rhythms and getting an idea about the final tempo was something I prioritized at the beginning.

After the planning of fingerings was done and I had a clearer picture of what kind of cross-rhythms *Grains* consisted of, I started practicing the speed of the movements. Dividing the score into smaller sections was my starting point. The size of the sections was decided by the realistic amount to practice each day. I set myself small goals—for instance, learning all the right notes in the right order in a particular figure could be achievable in one day. I did not try to do it at tempo. Actually my tempo in the beginning was probably 1/8 of what it should be. I also spent some time identifying the most difficult spots in the piece, so I could start every day with the difficult places. These places would take the longest to achieve, so it was important that I kept practicing them every day. I would vary the intensity by jumping between sections of varying difficulty. Another variation was practicing very small sections versus practicing longer lines (which was possible after a while of practicing).

Learning *Grains* progressed very slowly. My frustration with the score was consistent, if not increasing. Many times I was convinced that I would not make it before the deadline. I wanted to work on the music, to shape it, to interpret it, but I was still stuck at learning the notes. I had to practice bodily movements again and again so my body would respond fast enough when upping the tempo.

Only in the last week before the date of the recording was I able to play it flowingly enough to start to work on my musical interpretation of it. Of course I had thought about the music all along while practicing the execution of the notes, but I had not been able to do it before then. When you start playing out your musical ideas, they often need some adaptation along the way, according to what your listening tells you works and not. Also when a higher flexibility in tempo is achieved new musical possibilities evolve from it. It was a great feeling to finally experience some excess of energy in *Grains*. However, it did not happen every time and I did not feel I had the piece securely under my skin before going to Bergen to record it. I did not feel like I could control the many details of the score yet.

A general observation from this entry is that, whether the score is impossible or not, one has to *try* to make it possible. The question then becomes, where does one draw the line? How much

effort is enough? When can one say that one knows the work well enough to perform or record it? When does one finally know whether some aspect of it is going to be possible or impossible? With all of this in mind, it has been interesting to read Tanja Orning's recently published dissertation, where she discusses the value of resistance in the work—that is, the battle between the performance ethics and the work's aesthetic—then introduces the possibility of embracing the ambiguity therein:

The perceptual ambiguity of the piece works against the habitual patterns ingrained in the musician, questions every move and method, and forces the performer to find new methods and approaches. For the performer of this music, it is a tremendous challenge to interrogate and examine one's own practice—to confront one's limits, work on the margins, and accept the nonlinearity of complexity that removes perfection out of the vocabulary. In doing so, the performer allows these scores to become an area of investigation into corporeal, analytical, perceptual and psychological aspects of performance, engaging the broad range of human capacities for expression.

—Tanja Orning, 2014<sup>57</sup>

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57. Ibid., pp. 231–32.

### III.4. Learning new skills

As touched upon, “Let the Harp Sound!” involved learning new skills as a performer. Many of the works that I studied and performed presented me with unfamiliar playing techniques, such as the extensive rhythmical pedal sliding in Carlos Salzedo’s *Concerto* and the use of plectrums in Ruben Sverre Gjertsen’s *Grains*. I also studied “open form” composition and indeterminacy through works by Else Olsen Storesund, John Cage, and an open form seminar. During the project, I spent many hours experimenting with tools and appliances on the harp, either improvising or exploring new approaches independently of any of the ongoing projects. However, in some of the works that I performed, I used the harp with preparations that were the direct result of my experimentation.

Performing works that involved music theater (particularly those by the composers Jakob Ter Veldhuis, Else Olsen Storesund, Matthew Shlomovitz, Thomas Myrmel, and Henrik Hellstenius), I had to learn new skills as a stage performer and work hard on my body language, use of my voice, performance energy, and choreography. In J. Ter Veldhuis’s *Cities Change the Songs of Birds*, for example, the composer asks the harpist to speak (or yell) some of the text along with the tape that is playing. In Henrik Hellstenius’s *Heritage*, the text was gradually dispersed between prerecorded tapes and live speech during the performance. Lastly, in Thomas Myrmel’s *Dasein in Fieri/Hendelser ved vann*, the slow, quiet walk by the harpist to the harp (fully twenty minutes were dedicated to walking around the swimming pool and up the diving-board stairways as part of the performance) involved working choreographically on body language, pace, and energy level.

New skills within electronics were also necessary. The initial approach to using electronics in “Let the Harp Sound!” involved pieces for harp and tape or pieces where electronics were employed and controlled by the composers (Lyle Mays, Ray Murray Schafer, Jakob Ter Veldhuis, Karsten Brustad). Through performing these pieces I studied and explored the basic use of PA-systems, different quality of different speakers (JBL, Genelec, Mackie, Yamaha) and the placement of speakers. In June 2009 I bought an electro-acoustic harp (Lyon&Healy style 2000). This was in many ways a turning point and the first step towards becoming more focused

on electronics in music. To become able to operate and work creatively with software programs I had private lessons with Assistant Professor Alex Gunia, learning Ableton Live.

Using Ableton Live and an electric harp (a thirty-six-string Camac Electroharp), I created a soundtrack for Else Olsen S.'s *Martin and Sunniva Play Lotto*. In 2010 I world-premiered Bjørn Fongaard's<sup>58</sup> piece *Concerto for Harp and Tape*,<sup>59</sup> which he had written in 1976. This project involved collaborating with NOTAM to restore and digitize the original tape of Fongaard improvising on an electro-acoustic guitar. Exploring this soundscape, I concluded that an electro-acoustic harp would blend better with his sound, even if he had not written for one (such a harp had not been developed yet at the time he wrote the piece). I also had to learn how to operate a video projector, MIDI equipment, and microphones to perform some of the pieces. For Simon Steen-Andersen's *History of My Instrument*, I operated an Ableton Live file through a MIDI keyboard, controlling both the audio and the video elements of the work. In Ivar Frounberg's *Material Investigations: "Shepard Tones," a Laboratory for the Harp*, we used a MAX patch (software program). I explored analogue electronic equipment through improvisation as well as in the collaboration with Øyvind Torvund, such as Line 6 DL4 and ProCo Rat, as well as a volume pedal from Ernie Ball and a Boss loop pedal (RC2). For Torvund's piece we also experimented with guitar and bass amplifiers, comparing the differences in sound between brands such as Vox and Marshall.

I gained experience in concert production by producing five of them during my project, culminating in the final recital, which involved twenty-five people. My work as a producer involved everything from booking the hall to writing extensive "riders", scheduling rehearsals, negotiating compensation, organizing the delivery of equipment, and serving as an artistic director.

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58. Norwegian composer and pioneer of electronic music.

59. Bjørn Fongaard: *41 Konserter for diverse instrumenter og lydbånd: Concerto for Harp and Tape*, op. 131, no. 28 (1976), Oslo: MIC Norway.

### III.5. A visual and interdisciplinary approach

“Let the Harp Sound!” included several interdisciplinary projects, either located in other artistic disciplines or involved with additional media or technology, such as theater, electronics, or video. While I initially sought to focus on the practical use of the harp, I soon found that it was imperative to engage with outside viewpoints by re-contextualizing the instrument. Among other things, I found that the introduction of *visual elements* into the concert format has proven to be central to my explorations, both of individual works and of the given concert as a whole. The interdisciplinary projects were also an extended exploration of the artistic role of the harp and the role of the harpist. The idea was to continue “looking” at the harp from different angles. The interdisciplinary focus eventually became an important factor in the development of my musicianship, and thus became a significant part of the project. So much so that the end recital reflected a thorough work on the visual aspect of the performance.

The visual appearance of the harp is a strong co-factor in a harp performance. The harp is in many ways an entity unto itself on stage. Classical musicians often have similar playing positions and similar rituals on stage. Traditionally this does not play a decisive role in the harpist’s overall perception of his or her impact. However, the visual employment of the harp sometimes plays the role of enforcing stereotypical ideas, such as the “luxurious” gold harp, or the angelic instrument, placing the harp above other instruments or alone or by other means. Interestingly, the visual aspects of a contemporary music performance have increasingly become an integral part of the staging, inspired by such composers as Mauricio Kagel and Helmut Lachenmann. The results of this development can be seen in many of the aesthetic directions being pursued today. To meet this development as a performer, “Let the Harp Sound!” aimed to attain a higher awareness of the visual context of the performances, engaging in the visual context of harp in contemporary music.

Some of the performances used the harp within a sculptural aspect. This was evident in *Dasein in Fieri/Hendelser ved vann* by Thomas Myrmel, where he placed the harp on the 5-meter diving

board in a swimming hall inside a cave in Harstad,<sup>60</sup> near the ceiling, projecting shadows of the harp (and harpist) onto the ceiling.

My collaboration with the pantomime artist Martin Hasselgren (February–March 2010) involved a very experimental approach to staging and performance, including both improvisation and a careful strategizing of the relationship between the visual and the aural. A variety of harps in different styles were employed, and I moved from harp to harp, sometimes within the same piece. The harps were put in different positions, one of them lying on the floor, and the harps were used as props by the pantomime artist. The aim was to make the visual impact of the harp performance a physically dynamic-, rather than a static one, enhancing performer flexibility on stage.

I pursued further visual and theatrical explorations with the choreographer Gunhild Bjørnsgaard and the light designer Jahn Slaattum (November 2011). By this time, all of the commissioned pieces had already been performed, and my artistic focus had shifted from making each piece work individually to making them work together, with a particular emphasis on the staging, the coordination of many harps, the scenography, and the theatrical possibilities of the harpist. For the concert on 6 November 2011, an additional piece was world premiered: Ivar Frounberg's *Material Investigations: Shepard Tones*, for harp and electronics. Processed through the software Max, each segment of the harp part was looped and moved from one speaker to the next (there were eight speakers) in a surround-sound setup. The sound segments became increasingly distorted as the pedals were blocked in half position by rubber tuning keys. Also, the strings were retuned randomly, so the tuning itself became increasingly distorted. Choreographer Gunhild Bjørnsgaard was fascinated by this piece and wanted to enhance the movement of the sound by having the harpist actually move around in a circle, while playing in the middle of the room. Also, the lighting by Jahn Slaattum created an intimate circle around the harp and harpist.

For the concert as a whole, we had the audience sit in a triangle, with one harp positioned at each corner of the audience grouping, as well as one in the middle. This created, in effect, four stages,

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60. Grottebadet AS, Harstad.

and when the harpist moved between stages, there was a tunnel of light to walk through. We worked very hard on the practical execution of this concert, trying to solve the puzzle of which harp could be moved where, how the speakers should be placed, and how the audience could best see things. The experiences from this performance were incorporated in the staging solutions of the final recital on 8 June 2012.

### **III.6. Conclusion section III**

The Norwegian Artistic Research Programme, which I have been a part of, demands that you take an artistic position— not being afraid to actively make personal artistic choices has been a strong factor in the entire research project. In my case, I had to be aware of what it is to be a harpist, why I do what I do, and why it should matter. This active awareness has altered my approach to being a musician, and it has influenced my collaborations with others.

Classical musicians could be described as somewhat “chameleon” artists. We comfortably vary between styles and expressions. Working with composers, we mostly do not control the artistic outcome. This means that we only indirectly provide a personal approval of the quality of music or concert. Within this project however, it has been important to only communicate music that would be relevant to the research questions. Thus, my body of art has taken shape through many little choices or statements, both in collaborations with others, as well as in my own research and choice of repertoire.

I have explored what it means to be a harpist in various situations—by doing different things on stage, taking on various collaborative roles, articulating my aesthetic point of view when advising composers, building a body of art for the project, gaining more experience in unfamiliar fields, and testing my personal approach toward contemporary music. Maintaining an open approach to my musicianship has been an ongoing exercise. With each project, personal boundaries of what I thought possible have been moved. Building on my experience, knowing that such boundaries are dynamic alters the premises of my musicianship. As a result, the approach to both music and being a musician contains a wider variety of possible approaches than before.

The composers involved in the project were encouraged to redefine their notion of what a harp can do. The resulting collaborations posed new challenges to me as a harpist as well. In interdisciplinary, conceptual, or trans-medial work, it is no longer enough to interpret music in the traditional way. In "Let the Harp Sound!" the role of a harpist developed into a broader definition than what it previously held in my training as an instrumentalist. Developing more flexibility as an artist enabled me to discover new artistic contexts. Interestingly, one may observe that in many of the works performed in "Let the Harp Sound!", the classically trained musician becomes an amateur, often doing things they have not done before. In such works I have had to re-define the meaning of professionalism.

Along with redefining my professionalism, the "idea of the harp" was also re-contextualized. The *ability* to be open to new ideas influenced the artistic results, but this meant that I also had to be able to let go of my own ideas of what the harp is. I gradually went from being concerned about the traditional idiomatic use of harp to a view of the harp as a modern sound source. In some of my work it is the sound itself that is important, and not the actual use of the harp. As a result, I have tried to distance myself, to some extent, from the instrumentalist's habit of thinking about the *use* of the instrument first, then the sound.

When one strives to keep an open mind, having to put aside previous perceptions of ones instrument, questioning the premises for good art and music, re-defining ones professionalism and doing things that are outside of ones training-, the "comfort zone" is continuously challenged. Taking part in the development of new works, it is difficult to plan ahead, because so many of the challenges are unforeseen. Likewise, new works will be scheduled for performance on a specific date, which means that there is limited time to address potential problems. Feeling uncomfortable is therefore a natural part of the process of creating something you do not know the outcome of. This has resulted in a need to re-define what my "comfort zone" should entail.

That being said, having taken quite a few risks in the projects presented here, I have also been cautious. Being the owner of harps bears a huge responsibility, both economically and emotionally. This means that I have at times been compelled to find a compromise or tweak



initial ideas, to obtain a liable level of risk. Risk-taking is based on a judgment of the surrounding situation as a whole, depending on practicalities and the people involved.

## Section IV: End result

### IV.1. Presentation of artistic result

The project's final recital was held at Kulturkirken Jakob on 8 June 2012 and made possible through funding from the Norwegian Programme of Artistic Research, the Norwegian Academy of Music, and the free disposal of the hall. Kulturkirken Jakob was chosen after careful consideration, with a particular focus on acoustic qualities combined with staging possibilities, equipment available in the hall and lighting possibilities. The production involved twenty-five people. In this concert my role included being the performer, the producer and the artistic director. Thankfully I had good help from the clever people involved. This was the program:

Øyvind Torvund: *Night and Jungle* (2011), for electroharp, amplifiers, and tape

Ray Murray Schafer: *The Crown of Ariadne* (1979), for solo harpist with percussion

—Interval—

Giacinto Scelsi: *Okanagon* (1968), for amplified bass, harp, and tam-tam

Henrik Hellstenius: *Heritage* (2011), for harp and video

Simon Steen-Andersen: *History of My Instrument* (2011), for prepared harp, pick-up, and video

On video outside of the hall:

Thomas Myrmel: *Dasein in Fieri/Hendelser ved vann* (2009), for soprano, harp, and electronics in Grottebadet Swimming Hall in Harstad

As I developed the program, it became evident that the works I wanted to present all had a visual or conceptual aspect to them; in addition, the concert had to reflect the work that had been done during the project. I chose to build on my experiences with previous performances in “Let the Harp Sound!”, and especially the recital of 6 November 2011, in which the choreographer Gunhild Bjørnsgaard and I had experimented with theatrical performance technique, staging and

lighting. As I did in this concert, I would use multiple harps for the final recital, placed in different positions in the hall. It was carefully planned which piece would go where. For *Night and Jungle* (Torvund), for example, I positioned the harp in the middle of the audience, using a surround speaker set-up. I wanted *Okanagon* (Scelsi) to take place behind screens, with the shadows of the players projected onto the walls of the church. *Heritage* (Hellstenius) had to be performed near the audience, best projecting an intimate setting but also providing a clear view of the video screen. *History of My Instrument* (Steen-Andersen) required complete darkness and a projector that had to be positioned 4.5 meters directly in front of the harp. There were obviously many things to take into consideration, concerning both sound and appearances.

I used four harps in the concert. My Horngacher harp was for the acoustic pieces by Henrik Hellstenius and R. Murray Schafer, as I was most comfortable with it and it had the best sound. I used the Camac electroharp for Øyvind Torvund's piece, the Lyon and Healy electro-acoustic harp for Giacinto Scelsi's piece (since the instruments were to be amplified), and the Lyon and Healy style 21 for Simon Steen-Andersen's piece. All of the pieces required individual tuning of the harp in question, because four of these composers had used quartertones or semitones. The speaker systems used in the final concert included multiple guitar and bass amplifiers, two speakers on stands placed close to the harp (for the pieces by Schafer, Steen-Andersen, and Hellstenius), and the equipment already installed in the hall for the piece by Scelsi. To project video and play the background tape in the pieces by Torvund, Hellstenius, Schafer, and Steen-Andersen, I employed several laptops and sound cards. In addition, there were numerous microphones—DPAs<sup>61</sup>, contact microphones, and vocal microphones. I placed a screen in front of the musicians in the piece by Scelsi and a separate screen for the video in Hellstenius's piece. I placed a screen behind the set-up for the Steen-Andersen piece to stop the projection from spreading out too far behind the harp, and to hide the altar in the church.

With all of these various contrivances, it was tricky to determine the ultimate performance order of the individual pieces. To avoid having to move equipment or instruments around or retune the harps in front of the audience (thereby disrupting the progression of the concert), we had to devise a careful plan. First of all, the two pieces using the Horngacher harp (Hellstenius and

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59. DPA Microphones (originally Danish Professional Audio).

Schafer) would have to be on either side of the interval. The piece with the electroharp in the middle of the audience could not be juxtaposed with any of the pieces with visuals, because the harp might obstruct the view for some people. The setups for Schafer and Steen-Andersen took a long time, which meant that they needed to be in place before the concert started, so Schafer would have to be played before Hellstenius—that is, Schafer before the interval and Hellstenius after the interval. This then meant that the pieces by Hellstenius and Steen-Andersen had to be in the same half of the recital as the piece by Torvund. Steen-Andersen's piece was to be performed at the very end of the concert, which meant that the Torvund piece would be in the first half. Through this process of elimination, then, we finally devised a program order that did not entail any moving of instruments, speakers, or projectors.



Image from the final recital rehearsals at Kulturkirken Jakob. Photo: M. A. Evanger.

Musical considerations were also part of the ordering process. Musically, it seemed natural to have the chamber music piece by Scelsi and Steen-Andersen's piece toward the end, gradually increasing the musical complexity of the performances. It was also important that the audience did not see the musicians before they went behind the screens (this was meant to be a surprise element). Performing Scelsi's and Steen-Andersen's pieces after the interval meant that we would be starting and ending the second half of the concert in darkness. A practical concern that prompted me to open the concert with *Night and Jungle* was the fact that there was static coming

from the amplifiers used in this piece, so they would need to be turned off during the performance of Schafer. It was important to avoid having to turn them on in front of the audience and thus give away the surprise element of the surround sound. Musically, however, *Night and Jungle* was not a virtuoso piece—that is, one in which the performer would immediately command the audience’s attention. On the contrary, it would instead be a quiet start to the recital, easygoing and informal. I thought it would be an interesting approach to come unnoticed on stage and start playing so physically close to the audience. I liked the idea of letting the performance of *Night and Jungle* indicate to the audience that this concert would be different—that it would not be about technical virtuosity as such. Instead, it would be an invite to listen to a different kind of story about my instrument

Two small stages outside of the main stage were built to raise the harps and improve both acoustics and visibility. Each of the four harps was individually lit throughout the concert, and the screens we used had a visual role even when they were not in use in the pieces. When it came to transitions between the pieces, we wanted the audience to applaud, for a couple of reasons. First, for the only time during my whole project, all of the composers were actually present, and it was a nice occasion for them to be officially recognized and receive this response from the audience. Second, even though we had planned the order so carefully, there were many things going on between the pieces—turning all the amplifiers off, turning projectors on, moving screens, stopping and starting new sound files, and so on. We needed to prolong the time between the pieces and have the audience make some noise to facilitate this activity.

## IV.2. Conclusion

According to the Norwegian Artistic Research Programme, the following subjects should be addressed in the critical reflection:

- Personal artistic position/work in relation to subject area, nationally and internationally.
- How the project contributes to professional development of the subject area.
- Critical reflection on the process (artistic choices and turning points, theory applied, dialogue with various networks and the professional environment, etc.)
- Critical reflection on results (self-evaluation in perspective of the revised project description)<sup>62</sup>

Having covered many of these points in the preceding text, I will conclude my critical reflection by briefly addressing them, one by one. On a general note however, the goal to present a broad perspective into the use of the harp, as well as encouraging a diversion in how one approaches this instrument, inevitably leads to an open-ended conclusion; I have shown that in each project there are many variables, such as the use of the harp, the role of the harpist, the relevant resources and the working methods.

### a. Personal artistic position

“Let the Harp Sound!” was an artistic research project with a focus on artistic processes and artistic expressions. It was put together by a classically trained harpist and had traditional notated music as its starting point. Aesthetically, it moved from the traditional idiomatic instrumentalism to contemporary aesthetic directions, such as experimental music (including indeterminacy and open-form compositions), music theater, hyper-idiomatic instrumentalism, “musique concrete instrumentale” and New Complexity. In the end, that is, I sought to explore possibilities and ultimately position the harp within a broader field of aesthetic possibilities, along the way making it more relevant to contemporary composers. Likewise, by taking an active part in the creation of new music, I was able to explore the harp as a co-creating musician. In this sense, the

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62. §5.2. “Regulations for the Research Fellowship Programme, endorsed by the steering committee on 08.09.2008 and adjusted according to decision on 02.09.10”, accessed 16 June 2014, available at [www.artistic-research.no](http://www.artistic-research.no).

project found itself in the company of recent work by Norwegian musicians within contemporary classical music.

In a process where a work is created, it is the meeting between individuals, as people with their stories, their preferences and their skills, that is more important than the meeting between people who are representatives of defined professions, such as “musician,” “composer,” “director,” “choreographer” . . . It is when one thinks outside of these categories—that is, refrains from representing them—that possibilities reveals themselves and unexpected results take place.

—Maja Ratkje, 2008<sup>63</sup>

By re-contextualizing the harp, “Let the Harp Sound!” has moved from an instrumental focus, to (placing the harp in) a wider artistic context, exploring the harp with an interdisciplinary approach and applying electronic elements to the harp performances/repertoire. Harpists such as Victoria Jordanova, Zeena Parkins, Rhodhri Davies and H  l  ne Breschand have inspired this work. In addition the project has moved from a traditional, classical view of the harp, towards a more flexible, improvisational approach, regarding the harp as more of a neutral sound source.

### **b. How the project contributes to professional development of the subject area**

“Let the Harp Sound!” contributes to the development of new harp repertoire through the compositions that were created under its auspices by the composers Mark Adderley, Simon Steen-Andersen,   yvind Torvund, Henrik Hellstenius, Ivar Frounberg, Ola Gjeilo, and Thomas Myrmel. There are video and audio recordings of the performances in “Let the Harp Sound!” available through the library at the Norwegian Academy of Music. Some recordings have been subsequently posted on the Internet as well.<sup>64</sup> In addition, two professional recordings were generated as part of the artistic result of the project:

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63. Quote from Maja Ratkje’s “Innlegg i debatten ‘Den medskapende musiker’ ved NMH 2008” [Contribution to the debate “The Co-Creative Musician” at the Norwegian Academy of Music 2008], [www.ratkje.no](http://www.ratkje.no), accessed 3 June 2014. Translated by S. R  dland, with permission of the author. Original: “I en prosess hvor et verk blir til, s   er m  tet mellom enkeltmenneskene som personer med sine historier, sine preferanser og sine ferdigheter viktigere enn m  tet mellom personer som representanter for definerte yrkesgrupper, f.eks. ‘musiker,’ ‘komponist,’ ‘regiss  r,’ ‘koreograf’ . . . Det er n  r man tenker bortenfor disse kategoriene—det vil si: lar v  re    representere dem—at mulighetene   pner seg og at uventede resultater inntreffer.”

64. See [www.sunnivawettre.com](http://www.sunnivawettre.com), accessed 16 June 2014.

1. Mark Adderley: *All plans last only until the first shot* (2010), concerto for harp and sinfonietta. Recording of the live performance on 13 September 2010 at the Ultima Festival. Performed by Sunniva Rødland (harp) and Ensemble Ernst, conducted by Thomas Rimul. Recorded by Cato Langnes (NOTAM).
2. Ruben Sverre Gjertsen: *Grains* (2003), for viola, harp, and percussion. Performed by Peter Kates, percussion, Sunniva Rødland, harp, and Ricardo Odriozola, viola. Conducted by Trond Madsen. Studio recording by Aurora Records for Bit20 Ensemble.

“Let the Harp Sound” has contributed to increasing awareness of the harp’s potential impact within contemporary music, and it did so through composer collaborations, workshops for composers, and concerts that were open for all. Through the project’s mere existence, the harp has been put on the agenda to a much greater degree, and those who have followed the project have called into question many of their stereotypes and assumptions about this instrument.

“Let the Harp Sound!” is a contribution to the discussion among harpists and composers about what the harp’s role could be in music today, and in future aesthetics (as addressed in the harpist conversations presented in the appendix). Many possibilities for the harp were explored in the concerts that were part of the project. Its contributions to the *international* discussion about the use of harp in today’s music were particularly apparent from the performance at the World Harp Congress in Vancouver in 2011.

In addition, the performances, compositions and visual approach in “Let the Harp Sound!” have inspired artists, both in Norway and internationally. Some of the works that were performed in “Let the Harp Sound!”, have already been performed by harpists in other countries. Several new compositions, for other instruments than harp, seem to further develop ideas from compositions created in “Let the Harp Sound!”. Furthermore, the visual work in “Let the Harp Sound!” coincides with the general development towards a stronger visual awareness in music performances, and an increase in interdisciplinary performances.

Outside of its contributions to harp-specific topics, “Let the Harp Sound!” indirectly touched upon other ongoing discussions on more general topics. Although it is outside the scope of this critical reflection to discuss them extensively, I will mention them briefly:

*The co-creative musician:*

- The need for musicians to take on a broader role in contemporary music, one that goes beyond concern with playing their instrument alone.
- The need for a higher awareness of the importance of the musician's role in collaborations with composers, for example with regards to aesthetic point of views, questioning traditional training and how the musicians approach their instrument.
- The question of ownership in commissions where the musician is highly involved in the creative process.
- The need for more financial funding for the musician’s involvement in collaborative commissions—available funding sources tend to subscribe to the traditional view of the composing composer and the performing performer.

Music education:

- The need for more focus on the classical musician’s skills in the context of the use of electronics or improvisation in compositions or performances.
- The need for more thorough orchestration literature on each individual instrument in composition studies.
- The relationship between the educational emphasis on a traditional idiomatic style and romantic sound ideals and the obvious demand for new performance practices in contemporary music.



- The need for the musician’s understanding of contemporary music development—for example, through music philosophy and a broad approach to recent music history.
- The need for an interdisciplinary working environment, as well as knowledge about contemporary art and aesthetic movements.

#### Performance:

- The development of a future role for classical instruments.
- The ability to think outside the box with regard to performance; the development of the concert format.
- The possibilities of integrating images in music, balancing and integrating these different formats.

The whole upbringing of a modern musician, whether he is a composer, a performer or a listener, is based on playing, hearing, reading and analyzing old music . . . The modern musician’s approach to the music of his own time is obstructed by the past, and his approach to old music is through the gateway of the present.

—Thurston Dart<sup>65</sup>

#### **c. Critical reflection on the process**

In the beginning of “Let the Harp Sound!” I focused on the stigmas of the harp, and the need to confront these stigmas. Another aspect to limitations of what a harp can do, was the expectations to the instrument, expectations to what a “good” way of using the harp should be. This was expressively pointed out to me in the aftermath of the harpist Lavinia Meijer’s performance at the World Harp Congress in Amsterdam 2008, as described in section I.2.c.

It became clear that harpists themselves wished to maintain a traditional use of harp, an attitude which could be influential to the development of the repertoire, considering that these harpists

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65. Thurston Dart: *The Interpretation of Music*, 4th ed. (London: Hutchinson, 1967), p. 160.

would bring the same attitudes into their choice of repertoire, collaborations with composers, teaching or programming of harp music. It stood as an example of how important the harpist's preferences are in respect to the position of the harp in music. Perhaps this was what Carlos Salzedo wished to confront in 1944 when he wrote the following:

Imagine the paradox and ordeal of harp students' musical evolution, flanked by Bach and Godefroy!

Fortunately times have changed; we have now an excellent repertoire of good harp music. There is no excuse any longer for harpists to perpetuate harp music of low birth. It was that degrading music which kept the harp too long in disgrace with the leading musicians and the serious-minded public.

As the project progressed, it seemed less important to continue to focus on stigmas, because the project itself, and its many performances, came to represent such a different approach to the harp. Through these performances the statement of broadening the idea of the harp was sufficiently evident. However, stigmas surrounding the harp remain an issue in the contemporary scene. Also in other projects composers deal with stereotypes, such as composer Graham Fitkin reports:

The ability of this new instrument to play recorded samples or trigger MIDI effects and parameters means that the archetypal Western perspective on the harp and its associated heavenly docility can be turned on its head . . . I wanted to inject a certain brutality and rawness into the music . . . in contrast to that dreamy harp sound we're accustomed to.<sup>66</sup>

In retrospect, the observation is that by challenging the role of the harp in contemporary music, I simultaneously challenge the stereotypical idea of the harp. Many of the composers involved in "Let the Harp Sound!" have responded to my project by confronting the stereotypical harp in some way, shape or form. Although I would like the harp to not be associated with angels and angelic music, it seems difficult to disregard the existence of such associative thinking. Perhaps it is by exploiting the stereotypes to our advantage, by utilizing them within a contemporary frame, that one can convince the audience to re-evaluate the harp. Instead of trying to ignore a dominating tradition, one can bring the harp forward by embracing or confronting it, although on our own premises. However, it remains important for composers, conductors and musicians to

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66. Quote from [www.harpblog.info](http://www.harpblog.info), accessed 23 March 2014, in relation to Fitkin's *No Doubt*, a concerto for MIDI harp and orchestra that was commissioned by harpist Sioned Williams and world-premiered by the BBC Symphony Orchestra in 2011.

remember that stereotypes do not correspond with what the possibilities of the harp really are. Personally, I find the need to forget what other people expect of the harp, in order to approach it the way I want to.

With regards to new possibilities, it is interesting that the more I delved into the field of contemporary music the more open-minded towards the use of harp I seemed to become. For instance, my idea of what was an idiomatic use of harp became a fluid idea, constantly developing and crossing previous boundaries. After having familiarized myself with, and performed works, which previously seemed non-idiomatic, the works eventually added to my performance repertoire, expanding my perception of what was a comfortable, natural or idiomatic use of harp. This conclusion coincides with what Tanja Orning writes in her dissertation:

The last skill I consider vital in this performance practice is the willingness to explore the limits of idiomaticism. This approach requires explorative skills, a co-creative attitude, and an ability to avoid getting locked into a notion of what is idiomatic for one's instrument. It requires skilled instrumentalists who have fully mastered their instrument, but who are also willing to "kill their darlings." It requires viewing one's attachment to this instrument as something that can be challenged, accepting that the instrumental practice also must oppose to tradition. The performer must leave the craftsmanship domain and take a step into the creative one, where instrumental skills are essential, but not sufficient alone. Each performer's idiomatic position is closely connected to their instrumental identity, a role highly governed by the implicit relationship to the idiomaticism.

—Tanja Orning, 2014<sup>67</sup>

#### **d. Turning points**

From 2008 to 2012 I gave forty performances that were part of or relevant to "Let the Harp Sound!" Some represented "turning points" in the project. As I touched upon in chapter III.4, the performances at the Ilios Festival in 2009 and the Vinterlyd Festival in 2010 started me down the path to music theater, improvisation, and the integration of electronics into the performance. At Vinterlyd I particularly challenged my comfort zone by doing things on stage that I was not trained for, which resulted in valuable experience. In terms of experiments with electronics, I also performed with the EA harp at various concerts, including a world premiere of Bjørn

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67. Orning, "The Polyphonic Performer," p.308.

Fongaard's *Concerto for Harp and Tape*.<sup>68</sup> With regards to my playing technique, certain repertoire particularly extended my technique further; such as when performing Carlos Salzedo's *Concerto* at NMH in January 2010, Mark Adderley's *All plans last only until the first shot* at the Ultima Festival in September 2010, and when learning *Grains* by Ruben Sverre Gjertsen in January 2011.

Perhaps the most significant turning point was the performance at the World Harp Congress in Vancouver in 2011. The concert included the world premieres of three works, all of them a result of extensive collaborations. This repertoire used the harp within new contexts, changing my role as a musician. Also, the newly gained knowledge within electronics and video culminated with this performance. In addition, the opportunity was to present results of "Let the Harp Sound!" to an audience consisting mainly of harpists, and to receive their response. This experience indicated a positioning of the project in the international harp community.

In order to decide how the artistic result of "Let the Harp Sound!" should be presented, the explorations in the concert at the Academy of Music the 6<sup>th</sup> of November 2011 was particularly important. This concert was a "trial run" for the End Recital. A thorough description of the work can be found in chapter III.4.

#### **e. Critical reflection on results**

"Let the Harp Sound!" has been a personal journey for me, with some different turns than what I expected when starting my research. At the beginning of the project, I was cautioned about the amount of time I would be able to commit to it. Within an overall time frame of three years, the Norwegian Artistic Research Programme anticipates that their fellows will spend six months rewriting the project description and planning their research, which takes place over the next twenty-two months, before they begin the process of presenting the end result. Over the course of those twenty-two months, fellows dive deep into their research topics.

I do wish I could have done more. While I managed to touch upon many aspects of the role of the harp in contemporary music, there were things yet to do. I would have liked to perform

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68. Fongaard: *41 Konserter for diverse instrumenter og lydbånd*.

Luciano Berio's *Sequenza II* and George Aperghis's *Fidelité*. I would have liked to delve more thoroughly into the possibilities of electronics, interdisciplinary collaborations, and improvisation. There is significant potential in the integration of visuals into music performances as well. I hope I get the chance to further develop these ideas, and to devote more time to performing and documenting the Norwegian repertoire of the 1970s and 1980s. On the other hand, I do not expect to run out of future projects.

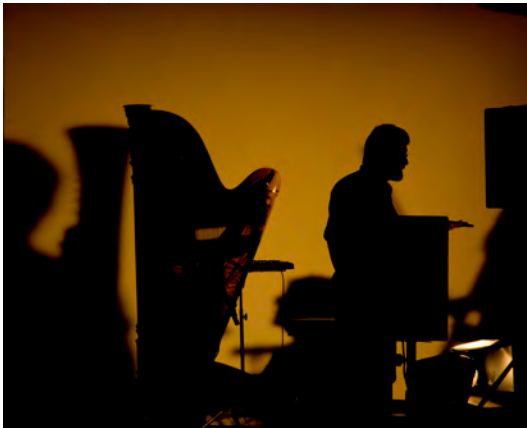


From the performance of Thomas Myrnel's *Dasein* in Fieri at Illos 2009.

“Let the Harp Sound!” succeeded in putting the harp on the agenda among composers who have not written (much) for the instrument, and it created a bigger platform for me as an artist. The knowledge I gained is already impacting my future projects. The vast world of contemporary art and music, combined with playing an instrument that continues to fascinate me, offers numerous artistic opportunities. Playing the harp is more exciting than ever.



## Gratitude



Rehearsal in Kulturkirken Jakob, June 2012 (photo: Marit Anna Evanger)

There are so many people and collaborators who made this project possible and to whom I am grateful. I have had the pleasure to work alongside fabulous people who are all very clever at what they do.

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Ginastera, Alberto: *Harp Concerto* (1956), op. 25, London: Boosey and Hawkes.

Gubaidulina, Sofia: *Five Etudes* (1965), for harp, double bass, and percussion, Hamburg: Musikverlag Hans Sikorski.

Hindemith, Paul: *Harp Sonata* (1939), Mainz: Schott Music.

Jeths, Willem: *Fas/Nefas* (1997), for harp and orchestra, Amsterdam: Donemus.

Kagel, Mauricio: *Zwei Akte* (1988/1989), Grand Duo für Saxophon und Harfe, Vienna: Universal Editions.

Kikta, Valeri: *Sonata for Violin and Harp* (1998), Piasco: Salvi Publications.

Kvandal, Johan: *Sonate: Ballade om Hemingen unge* (1984), op. 63, Oslo: Norsk Musikkforlag AS.

Krenek, Ernst: *Sonata for Harp*, op. 150 (1955), Kassel: Bärenreiter.

Mathias, William: *Santa Fe Suite* (1988), for harp, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mays, Lyle: *Twelve Days in the Shadow of a Miracle* (1994), Los Angeles: Fatrock Ink.

Nordheim, Arne: *Tractatus* for leading flute, low woodwind, harp, celesta, piano, percussion, and strings (1987), Copenhagen: Editions Wilhelm Hansen.

Nørgård, Per: *Hedda Gabler* (1993), suite for viola, harp, and piano, Copenhagen: Editions Wilhelm Hansen.

Nørgård, Per: *Gennem Torne* (2003), for harp and ensemble, Copenhagen: Editions Wilhelm Hansen.

Plagge, Wolfgang: *Nocturno Sonata*, op. 79 (1994/95), for solo harp, Oslo: MIC Norway.

Rautavaara, Einojuhani: *Ballade* (1973/1981), for harp and strings, London: Boosey and Hawkes.

Rautavaara, Einojuhani: *Concerto* (2000), for harp and orchestra, London: Fazer Music Inc. / Boosey and Hawkes.

Renie, Henriette: *Ballade Fantastique after "The Tell-Tale Heart" of Edgar Allan Poe* (1912), for harp, Boca Raton, Fla.: Masters Music Publications.

Rihm, Wolfgang: *Die Stücke des Sängers* (2000–2001/2008), for harp and ensemble, Vienna: Universal Editions.

Saariaho, Kaija: *Il Pleut* (1986), for soprano and piano or harp, London: Chester Music Ltd.

Saariaho, Kaija: *Fall* (1991), for solo harp and electronics, London: Chester Music Ltd.

Saariaho, Kaija: *New Gates* (1996), for flute, viola, and harp, London: Chester Music Ltd.

Salzedo, Carlos: *Ballade* (1910), pour harpe, Paris: Editions Alphonse Leduc.

Salzedo, Carlos: *Chanson dans la nuit* (1927), for solo harp, New York: Lyra Music Company.

Salzedo, Carlos: *Concerto for Harp and Seven Winds* (1926), New York: Lyra Music Company.

Scelsi, Giacinto: *Okanagon* (1968), for amplified harp, bass, and tam-tam, Paris: Salabert Editions.

Schafer, R. Murray: *The Crown of Ariadne* (1979), for solo harp with percussion, Ontario: Arcana Editions.

Schafer, R. Murray: *Theseus* (1983), for harp and string quartet, Ontario: Arcana Editions.

Schafer, R. Murray: *Harp Concerto* (1987), for harp and orchestra, Ontario: Arcana Editions.

Schafer, R. Murray: *Wildbird* (1997), for violin and harp, Ontario: Arcana Editions.

Schafer, R. Murray: *Tanzlied* (2003), for mezzosoprano and harp, Ontario: Arcana Editions.

Schevikhoven, Henk Van: *Three Pieces for Harp* (1976), Oslo: MIC Norway.

Stockhausen, Karlheinz: *Klang II, Freude für 2 Harfen* (2005), Kürten: Stockhausen-Verlag.

Takemitsu, Toru: *Stanza II* (1971), for harp and tape, Paris: Editions Salabert.

Taylor, Stephen Andrew: *Nebulae*, for harp, video, and electronics (2005), unpublished.

Varèse, Edgar: *Amériques* (1921), for large orchestra, New York: Boosey and Hawkes.

#### **Recordings:**

Hélène Brechand: *Le Goût Du Sel*, label D'autres Cordes © 2006, d'ac081.

Rhodhri Davies: *Trem*, label: Confront © 2002, CD confront 11.

Rhodhri Davies/Gregory Büttner: *3 Harp Treatments*, label: Anthropometrics © 2009, CD anthro03.

Adrian Leaper and Orquesta Filarmónica de Gran Canaria: *Ginastera / Villa-Lobos / Copland: Harp / Harmonica / Clarinet Concerto*, label: Arte Nova Musikproduktions, © 1996/7, CD 156356.

Anne LeBaron: *1,2,4,3*, label: Innova Recordings ©2010, Mp3 236.

Victoria Jordanova: *Dance to Sleep*, label: Composers Recordings, Inc. (CRI), ©© 1997, CD 755.

Victoria Jordanova: *Postcard from Heaven*, label: ArpaViva © 2007, CD 118524.

Zeena Parkins: *Between the Whiles*, label: Table of the Elements © 2009, TOE CD 110.

Zeena Parkins: *No Way Back*, label: Atavistic © 1998, ALP64CD.

Giovanna Reitano: *Sylvano Busotti: Fragmentations, Labirinti*, label: Stradivarius © 2006, CD 33742.

Schönberg Ensemble: *Reinbert De Leeuw; Schönberg Ensemble*, Schönberg Ensemble Edition no. 24, label: Etcetera © 2007, 23 CDs, SACD, and 3 DVDs, catalogue no. 9000.

### 3. Performances in “Let the Harp Sound!”

Ilios (contemporary music festival in Harstad), Harstad 2009 (four concerts):

Two performances of Thomas Myrmel’s *Dasein Fieri (Hendelser ved vann)*, for soprano, harp, and electronics. World premiere, commissioned by Ilios. With Anat Spiegel and Thomas Myrmel.

Solo concert in the Hall of Justice: R. Murray Schafer: *The Crown of Ariadne*.

Pub concert at “Rosen”: W. Mathias: *Santa Fe Suite*; A. Nordheim: *Den første sommerfugl*; R. Murray Schafer: *The Crown of Ariadne*. With Marianne Beate Kielland.

Vinterriss (contemporary music festival in Østfold), Halden 2009:

World premiere of Karsten Brustad’s *Fabelhave*, for soprano, harp, wind orchestra, and electronics. With Åshild Skiri Refsdal and the Norwegian Wind Orchestra, conducted by Peter Szilway.

Chamber performance: S. Gubaidulina: *Five Etudes*, for bass, harp and percussion. With André Fjørtoft and Roger Morland.

NMH, 27 April 2009:

Chamber performance (colleague concert): L. Mays: *Twelve Days in the Shadow of a Miracle*, for viola, flute, harp and tape. With Anders Rensvik and Anne Heistø Aavatsmark.

Sonar Festival, Barcelona, Spain, 19 June 2009:

L. Horntveth: *Kaleidoscopic*, for band and string orchestra. As part of the Kaleidoscopic Band: L. Horntveth, A. Mjøs, S. Rødland, G. Nilsen, Ø. Moen, and Barcelona 816.

NMH, 21 August 2009:

Concert/presentation for advanced students: M.Constant: *Harpalycé*

NMH, 28 August 2009:

Concert: M.Constant: *Harpalycé*; R. Murray Schafer: *The Crown of Ariadne*

Tour, Norway, 2–6 September 2009:

L. Horntveth: *Kaleidoscopic*, for band and string orchestra. As part of the Kaleidoscopic Band: L. Horntveth, A. Mjøs, S. Rødland, G. Nilsen, Ø. Moen, and the Trondheim Soloists. Concerts in Trondheim, Oslo, Grimstad, Stavanger, and Bergen.

NMH, 15 January 2010:

Concert: C. Salzedo: *Concerto*, for harp and seven winds. With NMH Sinfonietta, conducted by Jan-Erik Hybertsen.

STUK Festival, Stuk Art Centre, Leuven, Belgium, 12 February 2010:

L. Horntveth: *Kaleidoscopic*, for band and string orchestra. As part of the Kaleidoscopic Band: L. Horntveth, A. Mjøs, S. Rødland, G. Nilsen, Ø. Moen, and Emanon (Belgique string orchestra).

Vinterlyd (contemporary music festival at NMH), 2 March 2010:

Concert/performance with pantomime artist Martin Hasselgren: M. Shlomovitz: *Letter Pieces*; J. Ter Veldhuis: *Cities Change the Songs of Birds*; M. Constant: *Harpalycé*; E. Olsen S. / S. Rødland / M. Hasselgren: *Martin and Sunniva play Lotto*.

New Music Oslo, 27 April 2010:

Concert: Y. Sletthom: *10 Bagatelles*, for solo harp; R. Murray Schafer: *The Crown of Ariadne*

Jakob Culture Church, Oslo, 20 May 2010:

L. Horntveth: *Kaleidoscopic*, for band and string orchestra. As part of the Kaleidoscopic Band: L. Horntveth, A. Mjøs, S. Rødland, G. Nilsen, Ø. Moen, and mixed string orchestra.

Urban Explorers Festival, Dordrecht, Holland, 22 May 2010:

L. Horntveth: *Kaleidoscopic*, for band and string orchestra. As part of the Kaleidoscopic Band: L. Horntveth, A. Mjøs, S. Rødland, G. Nilsen, Ø. Moen, and mixed Dutch string orchestra.

Asker Church, 20 June 2010:

Chamber concert: L. Mays: *Twelve Days in the Shadow of a Miracle*, for flute, viola, harp, and tape. With Anders Rensvik and Trond Magne Brekka.

Ultima (international contemporary music festival), 13 September 2010:

World premiere of Mark Adderley’s *All plans last only until the first shot*, concerto for harp and sinfonietta. Commissioned by S. Rødland and Ensemble Ernst. Financed by the Norwegian Society of Composers. With Ensemble Ernst, conducted by Thomas Rimul.

NMH, 8 November 2010:

Concert: K. Saariaho: *New Gates*, for flute, viola, and harp; world premiere of B. Fongaard: *Concerto*, for harp and tape. With Anders Rensvik and Anne Heistø Aavatsmark. Knut Vik (sound).

NMH, 12 November 2010:

Sinfonietta concert: A. Nordheim: *Tractatus*. With NMH sinfonietta, conducted by Sigmund Torp.

Nidaros Cathedral, Trondheim, 28 December 2010:

World premiere of Ola Gjeilo's *Christmas*, for equal choir, harp, and ad lib. string quartet. With Nidaros Cathedral Girl Choir, conducted by Anita Brevik, and Nidaros String Quartet.

Open Form Seminar, Oslo, 1 March 2011:

Improvisation concert after seminar with Else Olsen S., Mia Gran, and Jon Halvor Bjørseth. By Ny Musikk Oslo.

Church concerts, Oslo, 2–3 March 2011:

R. Murray Schafer: *The Crown of Ariadne*.

Danish Radio, Copenhagen, Denmark, 6 May 2011:

Chamber concert/live radio concert: K. Saariaho: *New Gates*, for flute, viola, and harp. With Bendik Foss and Elin Torkildsen. K. Saariaho: *AMERS*, for sinfonietta; P. Nørgård: *Momentum*, for sinfonietta. With Ensemble Ernst, conducted by Thomas Rimul.

World Harp Congress, Vancouver, Canada, 27 July 2011:

Solo performance: world premiere of S. Steen-Andersen: *History of My Instrument*; H. Hellstenius: *Heritage*; Øyvind Torvund: *Night and Jungle*. With Cato Langnes and Carl Schmidt (sound).

Researchers Night, Oslo, 21 September 2011:

Solo performance: H. Hellstenius: *Heritage*; S. Steen-Andersen: *History of My Instrument*. With Knut Vik and Henrik Hellstenius (sound).

Artistic Research Autumn Forum, NMH, 18 October 2011:

Concert/interview: Simon Steen-Andersen: *History of My Instrument*, for prepared harp, pick-up, and video; Henrik Hellstenius: *Heritage*, for harp, harpist, and tape; interviewed by Tanja Orning.

Antony and the Johnsons, 8/11 October 2011:

Performed with the EA harp in a grand scale: "Oslo Spectrum" in Oslo and "Dødens Dal" in Trondheim. As part of the KORK orchestra. With Antony & the Johnsons.

NMH, 6 November 2011:

Concert/performance: world premiere of Ivar Frounberg's *Material Investigations: "Shepard Tones," a Laboratory for the Harp*; G. Scelsi: *Okanagon*, for harp, bass, and tamtam; H. Hellstenius: *Heritage*, for harp and tape; S. Steen-Andersen: *History of My Instrument*, for prepared harp, pick-up, and video; Øyvind Torvund: *Night and Jungle*, for electroharp, amplifiers, and tape. With Eirik Raude, Inga Margrethe Aas, Cato Langnes (sound), Jahn Slåttum (lights), and Gunhild Bjørnsgaard (choreography).

Høstriss (contemporary music festival in Østfold), Sarpsborg, 20 November 2011:

Concert: Sofia Gubaidulina: *Five Etudes*, for harp, bass, and percussion. With André Fjortoft and Roger Morland.

Vinterlyd Festival (contemporary music festival at NMH), 3 March 2012:

Concert-lecture: R. Murray Schafer: *The Crown of Ariadne*, for harp with percussion; Simon Steen-Andersen: *History of My Instrument*, for prepared harp, pick-up, and video; Øyvind Torvund: *Night and Jungle*, for electroharp, amplifiers, and tape. With Eirik Raude (percussion), Inga Margrethe Aas (double-bass), Cato Langnes, Fredrik Ellingsen, Øyvind Torvund, Henrik Hellstenius, Simon Steen-Andersen (sound), Julie Skoglund (lights), Gunhild Bjørnsgaard (choreography), Ivar Frounberg (supervisor).

Oslo Screen Festival, Ny Musikk, 9 March 2012:

Performance: Simon Steen-Andersen: *History of My Instrument*, for prepared harp, pick-up, and video.

Supperåd, NMH, 10 May 2012:

Short lecture: R. Murray Schafer: *The Crown of Ariadne*, for harp with percussion.

End Recital, Kulturkirken Jakob, 8 June 2012:

Concert/performance: R. Murray Schafer: *The Crown of Ariadne*, for harp with percussion; G. Scelsi: *Okanagon*, for harp, bass, and tamtam; H. Hellstenius: *Heritage*, for harp and tape; S. Steen-Andersen: *History of My Instrument*, for prepared harp, pick-up, and video. Øyvind Torvund: *Night and Jungle*, for electroharp, amplifiers, and tape. With Eirik Raude (percussion), Inga Margrethe Aas (double-bass), Cato Langnes, Fredrik Ellingsen, Øyvind Torvund, Henrik Hellstenius, Simon Steen-Andersen (sound), Julie Skoglund (lights), Gunhild Bjørnsgaard (choreography), Ivar Frounberg (supervisor).

## 4. Interdisciplinary projects in “Let the Harp Sound!”

The following projects entailed the explorations of interdisciplinary aspects:

- Thomas Myrnel’s *Dasein in Fieri (Hendelser ved vann)*, which soprano Anat Spiegel and I world-premiered together with the composer at the Ilios Festival in Harstad in 2009.
- Creating the tape for the performance of Else Olsen S.’s *Martin and Sunniva Play Lotto* at the Vinterlyd Festival in 2010.
- The collaboration with the pantomime artist Martin Hasselgren for the Vinterlyd Festival in 2010, which involved, among other things, the performances of Else Olsen S.’s *Martin and Sunniva Play Lotto*, Jakob Ter Veldhuis’s *Cities Change the Songs of Birds*, and Matthew Shlomovitz’s *Letter Pieces*.
- The collaboration with Simon Steen-Andersen to compose the piece *History of My Instrument* in 2010–12.
- The collaboration with Øyvind Torvund to compose the piece *Night and Jungle* in 2010–12.
- Performances of various pieces with tape by composers such as L. Mays, B. Fongaard, J. Ter Veldhuis, and H. Hellstenius.
- The collaboration with Henrik Hellstenius to compose the piece *Heritage* in 2011–12.
- The collaboration with the choreographer Gunhild Bjørnsgaard and the light designer Jahn Slaattum for a project recital on 6 November 2011 that involved the world premiere of Ivar Frounberg’s *Material Investigations: Shepard Tones*.
- The production of the final recital of “Let the Harp Sound!” on 8 June 2012—specifically, the scenography, the staging, the sound design, and the light design.

## 5. Performed repertoire in “Let the Harp Sound!”

WP= World Premiere, NP = Norwegian Premiere

Adderley, Mark: *All plans last only until the first shot* (2010), concerto for harp and sinfonietta, Oslo: MIC Norway. WP

Andrès, Bernard: *Duke* (1985), for harp, Paris: Éditions Musicales Hortensia. NP.

Bratlie, David: *Credo Reloading* (2007), for solo harp, Oslo: MIC Norway. WP.

Brustad, Karsten: *Fabelhave* (2009), for soprano, harp, symphonic wind ensemble, and electronics, Oslo: MIC Norway. WP.

Constant, Marius: *Harpalycé pour harpe et quintette à cordes ou orchestre à cordes*, (1980), Paris: Ricordi. NP.

Fongaard, Bjørn: *41 Konserter for diverse instrumenter og lydbånd: Concerto for Harp and Tape*, op. 131, no. 28 (1976), Oslo: MIC Norway. WP.

Frounberg, Ivar: *Material Investigations: “Shepard Tones,” a Laboratory for the Harp* (2011), for harp and electronics, unpublished. WP.

Gjeilo, Ola (lyrics: George Herbert): *Christmas* (2010), for SSAA, harp and ad lib. strings, Norsk Musikkforlag. WP.

Gubaidulina, Sofia: *Five Etudes* (1965), for harp, double-bass, and percussion, Hamburg: Musikverlag Hans Sikorski. NP.

Gjertsen, Ruben Sverre: *Grains* (2003), for viola, harp, and percussion, Oslo: MIC Norway.

Grisey, Gérard: *Quatre Chants Pour Franchir Le Seuil* (1997/98), pour voix de soprano et quinze musiciens, Paris: Ricordi.

Hagfors, Martin (Horntveth): *Floating from a Dream* (2010), on the recording *I Like U*, unpublished.

Hellstenius, Henrik: *Heritage* (2011), for harp, harpist, and video, unpublished. WP.

Horntveth, Lars: *Kaleidoscopic* (2008), for jazz band and string orchestra, unpublished.

Horntveth, Lars: *Kongshavn* (2009), for miscellaneous instruments, radio theater music, unpublished.

Horntveth, Martin: *Violent Sorrow* (2009), for mixed ensemble, unpublished.

Mathias, William: *Santa Fe Suite* (1988) for harp, Oxford: Oxford University Press. NP.

Mays, Lyle: *Twelve Days in the Shadow of a Miracle* (1994), Los Angeles: Fatrock Ink. NP.

- Mjø, Andreas: *Norma Jeane* (2008), for solo harp, music for the theater play *Norma Jeane*, unpublished. WP.
- Myrmel, Thomas: *Dasein in Fieri/Hendelser ved Vann* (2009), for harp, voice, and electronics, unpublished. WP.
- Nordheim, Arne: *Tractatus* for leading flute, low woodwind, harp, celesta, piano, percussion, and strings (1987), Copenhagen: Editions Wilhelm Hansen.
- Nordheim, Arne: *Den Første Sommerfugl* (1982), for voice and harp, Oslo: MIC Norway.
- Nørgård, Per: *Momentum*, cello concerto no. 2 (2009), Copenhagen: Editions Wilhelm Hansen.
- Saariaho, Kaija: *Amers* (1992), for soloist and large ensemble, London: Chester Music Ltd.
- Saariaho, Kaija: *New Gates* (1996), for flute, viola, and harp, London: Chester Music Ltd. NP.
- Salzedo, Carlos: *Concerto for Harp and Seven Winds* (1926), New York: Lyra Music Company. NP.
- Salzedo, Carlos: *Chanson dans la nuit* (1927), for solo harp, New York: Lyra Music Company.
- Scelsi, Giacinto: *Okanagon* (1968), for amplified harp, bass, and tam-tam, Paris: Salabert Editions. NP.
- Schafer, R. Murray: *The Crown of Ariadne* (1979), for solo harp with percussion, Ontario: Arcana Editions. NP.
- Shlomovitz, Matthew: *Letter Pieces* (2007+), open-score pieces for performer (for example, dancer, live artist, actor) and musician (vocal or any instrument).
- Slettholm, Yngve: *10 Bagateller for Harpe/Ten Miniatures for Harp* (1998/2000), Adliswil: Pizzicato Verlag Helvetia. WP.
- Steen-Andersen, Simon: *History of My Instrument* (2011), for harp solo and video playback, Copenhagen: Edition S. WP.
- Storesund, Else Olsen: *Martin and Sunniva Play Lotto* (2010), open improvisation for pantomime artist, harpist and lotto cards, unpublished.
- Torvund, Øyvind: *Night and Jungle* (2011/2012), for electroharp and tape, unpublished. WP.
- Veldhuis, Jakob Ter: *Cities Change the Songs of Birds* (2008), three urban songs for harp and soundtrack, Amsterdam: Boombox Holland. NP.



## 6. List of sources in “Let the Harp Sound!”

### 6.1. Complete list of researched repertoire

- Adderley, Mark: *Postures* (2000), for solo harp, Adliswil: Pizzicato Verlag Helvetia/MIC Norway.
- Adderley, Mark: *All plans last only until the first shot* (2010), concerto for harp and sinfonietta, Oslo: MIC Norway.
- Adderley, Mark: *Broken Intention* (2011), trio for flute, viola, and harp, Oslo: MIC Norway.
- Andrès, Bernard: *Duke* (1985), pour harpe, Paris: Éditions Musicales Hortensia.
- Aperghis, George: *Fidélité, Tryptique No. 3* (1982), pour harpiste seule regardée pour un homme, Paris: Editions Salabert.
- Aperghis, George: *Compagnie, Tryptique No. 2* (1982), pour harpe et 1 percussionniste, unpublished.
- Badings, Henk: *Trio no. X* (1977), for alto flute, viola, and harp, Amsterdam: Donemus.
- Badings, Henk: *Quintet no. VI* (1986), for clarinet (Bb), violin, violoncello, guitar, and harp, Amsterdam: Donemus.
- Berio, Luciano: *Chamber Music* (1954), per voce femminile, clarinetto in Sib, violoncello ed arpa, Milano: Edizioni Suvini Zerboni.
- Berio, Luciano: *Sequenza II* (1963), pour harpe, Vienna: Universal Editions.
- Berio, Luciano: *Autrefois (berceuse canonique pour Igor Stravinsky)* (1971), for flute, clarinet, and harp, Vienna: Universal Editions.
- Birtwistle, Harrison: *Crowd* (2005), for solo harp, England: Boosey and Hawkes.
- Boulez, Pierre: *Sur Incises* (1996/1998/2006), for three harps, three pianos and three percussionists, Vienna: Universal Editions.
- Bratlie, David: *Credo Reloading* (2007), for solo harp, Oslo: MIC Norway.
- Britten, Benjamin: *Suite for Harp Solo*, op. 83 (1969), London: Faber Music.
- Britten, Benjamin: *A Ceremony of Carols*, op. 28 (1942), for SATB and harp, London: Boosey and Hawkes.
- Britten, Benjamin (lyrics: T. S. Eliot): *Canticle V: The Death of St. Narcissus*, op. 89 (1974), for tenor and harp, London: Faber Music.
- Britten, Benjamin (lyrics: Robert Burns): *A Birthday Hansel*, op. 29 (1975), for high voice and harp, London: Faber Music.
- Britten, Benjamin: *8 Folk Song Arrangements* (1976), for high voice and harp, London: Faber Music.
- Brustad, Karsten: *Fabelhave* (2009), for soprano, harp, symphonic wind ensemble, and electronics, Oslo: MIC Norway.
- Buhr, Glenn: *Tanzmusik* (1986), for harp solo, Toronto: Counterpoint Music Library Services.
- Bussotti, Sylvano: *Fragmetations pour un jouer de harpes* (1963), Ancona: Bèrben Edizioni Musicali.
- Byrnes, Garrett: *Vision of Twilight* (2003), for solo harp, Providence, R.I.: Musica Cosmopolita.
- Cage, John: *In a Landscape* (1948), for piano or harp, New York: Edition Peters.
- Cage, John: *Postcards from Heaven* (1982), for 1–20 harps, New York: Edition Peters.
- Caplet, André: *Conte Fantastique* (1908), for harp and string quartet, Paris: Durand.
- Carligeanu-Birtu, Nicky: *Rondo* (2005), for flute, viola, and harp, Los Angeles: Fatrock Ink.
- Carter, Eliot: *Trilogy; Bariolage* (1992), for solo harp, London: Boosey and Hawkes.
- Crumb, George: *Ancient Voices of Children* (1970), for soprano, boy soprano, oboe, mandolin, harp, electric piano and percussion (three players), London: Boosey and Hawkes.
- Crumb, George: *Frederico's Little Songs for Children* (1987), for soprano, flutes, and harp, New York: Edition Peters.
- Constant, Marius: *Harपालycé* (1980), pour harpe et quintette à cordes ou orchestre à cordes, Paris: Ricordi.
- Delden, Lex Van: *Notturmo* (1954) for solo harp, Amsterdam: Donemus.
- Donatoni, Franco: *Marches* (1979), due pezzi per arpa, Milano: Ricordi.
- Donatoni, Franco: *Secondo Estratto* (1970), per arfa, pianoforte e clavicembalo, Milano: Edizioni Suvini Zerboni.
- Donatoni, Franco: *Small* (1981), per ottavino, clarinetto e arpa, Milano: Ricordi.
- Egge, Klaus: *Sonata for Harp*, op. 33 (1974), Oslo: MIC Norway.
- Ellis, David Graham: *Celestial Vibes* (1975), for vibraphone and harp, London: United Music Publishers LTD.
- Eötvös, Peter: *Psy* (1995–2000), for flute, cello, and cimbalom/harp/piano/marimba, Milano: Ricordi.

- Ferneyhough, Brian: *Funérailles* (1969–80), for strings and harp, London: Editions Peters.
- Flothuis, Marius: *Pour le Tombeau D'Orphee, Danse Élégiacque pour Harpe Seule*, op. 37 (1950), Amsterdam: Donemus.
- Fongaard, Bjørn: *120 Preludien für Harfe Allein*, op. 112 (1971), Oslo: MIC Norway.
- Fongaard, Bjørn: *Sonata for Harp*, op. 108 (1971), Oslo: MIC Norway.
- Fongaard, Bjørn: *Trio for flauto, viola og harpe* (1971), Oslo: MIC Norway.
- Fongaard, Bjørn: *Suite for Harp*, op. 110, no. 9 (1975), Oslo: MIC Norway.
- Fongaard, Bjørn: *41 Konserter for diverse instrumenter og lydbånd: Concerto for Harp and Tape*, op. 131, no. 28 (1976), Oslo: MIC Norway.
- Fongaard, Bjørn: *Concerto for Harp and Orchestra*, op. 143, no.1 (1978), Oslo: MIC Norway.
- Frounberg, Ivar: *Material Investigations: "Shepard Tones," a Laboratory for the Harp* (2011), for harp and electronics, unpublished.
- Ginastera, Alberto: *Sonatina I* (1938), unpublished.
- Ginastera, Alberto: *Harp Concerto*, op. 25 (1956), London: Boosey and Hawkes.
- Gjeilo, Ola (lyrics: George Herbert): *Christmas* (2010), for SSAA, harp, and ad lib. strings, Oslo: Norsk Musikkforlag.
- Gjeilo, Ola: *River* (2006), for cello and harp, Oslo: Musikk-Husets Forlag AS.
- Grisey, Gérard: *Quatre Chants Pour Franchir Le Seuil* (1997/98), pour voix de soprano et quinze musiciens, Paris: Ricordi.
- Gjertsen, Ruben Sverre: *Grains* (2003), for viola, harp, and percussion, Oslo: MIC Norway.
- Gubaidulina, Sofia: *Five Etudes* (1965), for harp, double bass, and percussion, Hamburg: Musikverlag Hans Sikorski.
- Gubaidulina, Sofia: *Garden of Joy and Sorrow* (1981), for harp, flute, viola, and reciter (ad lib.), Hamburg: Edition Sikorski 845.
- Hagfors, Martin (Hornrveth): *Floating from a Dream* (2010), on the recording "I Like U," unpublished.
- Haug, Halvor: *Dialogue for Two Harps* (1987), Oslo: Warner/Chappel Music Norway AS.
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**Appendix**

All plans last only until the first shot – bar by bar	101
A conversation with Willy Postma	123
A conversation with Judy Loman	129
A conversation with Godelieve Schrama	135
A conversation with Elisabeth Sønstevoid	143





Note that there are two different versions of the score that are referred to throughout this text. The first version is the handwritten score that I received from Mark Adderley in February 2010. The second version is the harp-part of the published score of 2010 (Music Information Centre Norway).

### **Pedal changes and enharmonic possibilities:**

The possibility of using enharmonic tones is a unique characteristic of the harp. It is not more or less difficult to play for instance an F# than a Gb. Using enharmonic tones can sometimes help to prevent problems. For example, repeating tones on the same string, that shortens the resonance of the previous tone as well as making it more awkward to play, can be produced on two strings instead of one. Difficult passages with many pedal changes can also be simplified by employing enharmonic tones that will involve less pedal changes. Sometimes enharmonic tones can be used to facilitate hand positions that make the tone quality better when executed, or to facilitate comfortable hand positions that can be played with more ease. As a consequence, using enharmonic tones can enhance the sound quality and help to create a more flowing musical phrase. When studying the enharmonic possibilities, please note that fully understanding this concept is at an advanced level of composing for the harp, and many composers collaborate with the harpists involved to find the best solutions. Even when a composition is finished, harpists often continue to develop individual solutions using enharmonic tones. How they solve these issues seems to be highly individual, since there can be many solutions to the same issue. Finding the best solution is often based on the individual physical and technical qualities of the player involved.

In *All Plans Last Only Until the First Shot* Adderley wanted to think as freely as possible about pedal changes and harmonic variation, trying deliberately not to limit himself in this regard. We both agreed that the best starting point would be to compose in a bold way, possibly employing harmonic changes that would involve too many pedal changes. Instead of limiting the harmonic variation in order to achieve fewer pedal changes, we would address potential problem areas when they occurred.

Adderley inserted pedal diagrams before every new staff in the harp part. This technique seemed to be a very practical solution for this composition. The diagrams helped to continuously confirm the pedal positions for each section, as an addition to the pedal notation within the staff. The diagrams helped to make the pedal changes more clear and prevented misunderstandings. Following are some examples from the score where we worked on issues concerning the pedal changes, including my comments:

Bar 15, third beat (Fig.2):

Note that there is an editorial mistake in the second (published) version of the score; there is no treble clef in the left hand (see fig.1).

I changed F# to Gb. This makes it possible for the previously played Fb to resonate longer and avoid damping. This also changes F# in bar 16, first beat.

In the same chord (bar 15, third beat) I also changed A# to Bb, because I already had Bb, and it was superfluous to change A neutral to A#.



The image shows a musical score for harp, consisting of two systems of staves. The first system covers bars 14 to 15, and the second system covers bars 16 to 20. The music is written in 4/4 time and features complex rhythmic patterns with triplets and sextuplets. Pedal markings are indicated by numbers 2, 3, and 6 above the notes. The score includes dynamic markings such as *f* and *mf*. The second system includes a section labeled '17-18' with a double bar line and a '2' marking, indicating a specific pedal or articulation change.

Fig.2: Bar 14-20, second version.

Bar 49, first beat (Fig.3):

I changed G# to Ab for several reasons. Firstly, it takes a longer time to go from the Gb (where the pedal is positioned at this point in the piece) to G#. Secondly, the Ab rings more because the string is looser. Thirdly, the space between the Fb and Ab is larger, making it easier to avoid buzzing sounds when placing the fingers. Lastly, the Ab-C is already used in bar 47, and the similarity between bar 47 and bar 49 makes it easier to learn this particular passage.



Fig.3: Bar 49, second version.

Bar 59, first beat (Fig.4 and 5):

In bar 59, first beat, I removed the F# in the right hand, making it possible to play the F neutral in the left hand. This could also have been solved in a different way, either by making the first chord shorter, or by removing the G neutral in bar 58, third beat, which would enable the F# to become a Gb instead. Adderley was presented with all the options, and he chose the first based on the sound quality.

The image shows musical notation for Bar 58-59, second version. It consists of two staves in 4/4 time. Bar 58 starts with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 4/4 time signature. The first beat of bar 58 has a complex chord with notes F#, G, A, B, C, D, E, F. The second beat of bar 58 has a trill between Gb and Ab. Bar 59 continues with complex chords in both hands. The bottom staff has a bass clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat).

Fig.4: Bar 58-59, second version.



Fig.5: Bar 58-60, first version.

Bar 94, fourth beat (Fig.6 and 7):

I changed Ab to G# to avoid the buzz when changing the ringing Ab/G# half a beat later, to A (see fig.7). Note that there is an editorial mistake in bar 95, first beat. The A# is supposed to be an A neutral. This also means that the Ab in bar 95, third beat is played as a G#. This solution makes it possible to avoid changing the A-pedal several times, since the G# is already in the position needed.

Fig.6: Bar 94, second version.

Fig.7: Bar 95, second version.

Bar 137, first beat (Fig.8):

I changed Cb to B (H) to avoid the pedal changes in bar 136-37 (C#-Cb-C#), which also changes the C in the second beat (to B#/H#). This solution also helps to create more space for other pedal changes.

Musical score for bars 135-137, second version. The score is written for piano in treble and bass clefs. Bar 135 starts with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 3/4 time signature. It contains a triplet of eighth notes in the treble and a triplet of eighth notes in the bass. Bar 136 changes to a 3/4 time signature and contains a triplet of eighth notes in the bass. Bar 137 changes to a 4/4 time signature and contains a triplet of eighth notes in the bass. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and accidentals.

Fig.8: Bars 135-137, second version.

Bar 159 (Fig.9):

Note that the pedal changes that need to be made before bar 160 depend on a relatively long fermata in order to gain enough time to damp the strings and quietly change the pedals.

Musical score for bar 159, second version. The score is written for piano in treble and bass clefs. It shows a 2/4 time signature. The treble clef part has a half note with a flat and a fermata, followed by a quarter note with a flat. The bass clef part has a half note with a flat and a fermata, followed by a quarter note with a flat. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and accidentals.

Fig.9: Bar 159, second version.

Bar 228, second beat (Fig.10):

I changed the E neutral in the right hand to Fb throughout this bar, because this makes it possible to play the Eb in the left hand. The E neutral in the left hand, fourth beat, is also changed to Fb.

Musical score for Bar 228, second version. The score is in 4/4 time and consists of two staves. The right-hand staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 4/4 time signature. It features a triplet of eighth notes in the first beat, followed by a quarter rest, and then a series of chords in the second, third, and fourth beats, each marked with a triplet bracket. The left-hand staff begins with a bass clef and a 4/4 time signature. It features a sextuplet of eighth notes in the first beat, followed by a quarter rest, and then a series of chords in the second, third, and fourth beats, each marked with a triplet bracket. The fourth beat in the left hand shows a change in the bass line.

Fig.10: Bar 228, second version.

Bar 276, fourth beat (Fig.11):

I removed the D in the left hand (only on fourth beat) to avoid the buzz when changing the pedal to Db. This solution also enables me to play the E with a flat left hand that can damp the lower D before the pedal change. All together this creates a more clear and articulated sound.

Musical score for Bar 276, second version. The score is in 4/4 time and consists of two staves. The right-hand staff begins with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. It features a series of chords in the first, second, and third beats, each marked with a triplet bracket. The fourth beat shows a change in the bass line. The left-hand staff begins with a bass clef and a 4/4 time signature. It features a series of chords in the first, second, and third beats, each marked with a triplet bracket. The fourth beat shows a change in the bass line. The dynamic marking *ff* is present in the left hand.

Fig.11: bar 276, second version.

**Damping:**

As well as discussing how to use damping as an effect in itself, Adderley and I discussed damping in relation to harmonization. On the harp it is possible to “clean up” the chord, either by damping the strings one by one, damp specific chords, the bass register or by damping all the strings at the same time. To avoid the buzzing sounds when changing the pedals, some or all strings need to be damped. Adderley however, often wanted the chords to keep ringing and he didn’t mind that pedal-changes sometimes could be heard because of this. To let the strings ring while changing the pedals felt risky to me as a harpist, since it was not always possible to anticipate *how much sound* the pedal changes would result in. It is an artistic choice to let the pedal changes be heard. I do think however that the amount of buzzing sounds should ideally be controlled through notations in the score, since the buzzing sounds can become a musical element. The notations could either involve guidelines for pedal changes at the beginning of the score or by marking the specific places and tones that should be damped. In my case, the composer heard me play the part and would comment on it if the amount of buzzing sounds became too dominating. Following are a few examples of places in the score that involved damping:

Bar 23, fourth beat (Fig.12):

I damp the last chord at the end of the fourth beat, to be able to change the pedals and to prepare for the next bar.



Fig.12: Bar 23, second version.

Bar 28, 1rst beat (Fig.13):

I damp the lower Gb before changing the pedal to G#.



The image shows a musical score for two staves, likely piano. The first staff is in treble clef and the second in bass clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and one flat (Bb). The time signature is 2/4. The first staff begins with a measure containing a half note G4 with a sharp sign (#) and a half note F#4 with a sharp sign (#). A dashed line with the number 8 in parentheses above it spans the first two notes. The second staff begins with a half note G3 with a flat sign (b) and a half note F#3 with a sharp sign (#). The music continues with various notes and rests in both staves.

Fig.13: Bar 28, second version.

Bar 159 (Fig.14):

I damp in the fermata to change a number of pedals.



The image shows a musical score for two staves, likely piano. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and one flat (Bb). The time signature is 2/4. The first staff begins with a half note G4 with a flat sign (b) and a half note F#4 with a sharp sign (#). A fermata is placed over the first two notes. The second staff begins with a half note G3 with a flat sign (b) and a half note F#3 with a sharp sign (#). A fermata is placed over the first two notes. The music continues with various notes and rests in both staves.

Fig.14: Bar 159, second version.

**Enhancing the music:**

The issue of musical phrasing and sound quality when playing the harp is complex. The player's body is a direct influence on the sound that is produced on a harp. The harp distinguishes itself from other instruments in this aspect. The tension of the hand and arm, the size of the hand and arm, the force projected through the fingers, the angle of the fingertips, the release of the hand, the quality of the skin on the fingertips and more, - all play a part in deciding what type of sound that will come out of the harp. The musical phrasing is influenced by how the fingers and hands are placed. If the harpist aims to produce a legato phrase, it will for example be helpful to connect the fingering, so the hand always remains on the strings. Oppositely, if the aim is to create a break (') between the musical elements, it will be helpful to lift the hand off the strings and then replace it to play the next element.

In *All Plans Last Only Until the First Shot* there were several places where Adderley and I discussed how the physical execution of the score could enhance the musical ideas; for example how hand positions could be slightly changed to enhance the sound quality, how the hands could overlap each other to avoid turning in one hand (enhancing the flow of the phrase) or how we could prolong the reverberation of strings by avoiding the replacement of fingers. Following are some specific examples:

Bar 14, second beat (Fig.15):

Instead of having to turn the direction in the right hand, from Fb to Db(/B/G), I put the Fb in left hand and added the lower B to the right hand chord. This solution provided several benefits:

- the rhythm becomes steadier because the execution is easier (a more comfortable hand-position),
- the fingers create less buzzing sounds (especially vulnerable is going from Fb to G),
- the preparation of each hand position is given more time, enabling me to pull the strings with more energy, resulting in a more convincing sound.
- it becomes easier for me psychologically to separate the sixteen-note triplet value from the eighth-note triplet value

- The chord is given slightly more emphasis because of the increased hand position on the triplet eighth-note, enhancing the rhythmical idea of stressed and un-stressed beats.



Fig.15: Bar 14, second version.

A solution like this helps to create the musical phrase that the composer intended. The same changes are made on the third beat, by putting the D in my left hand and moving the lower C up in the right hand chord. This creates a repeating pattern, making it easier to learn. Moving on, still within the third beat, the A up is moved up in the right hand, becoming a seventh. This solution stabilizes the right hand more and it creates a repeating pattern of fourths in the left hand when moving on to the fourth beat. In bar 15 (see fig.1) I avoid the turning of the right hand by putting the lower Db in the left hand. In this way I avoid lifting the hand off the strings after playing the octave, which enables me to connect the fingering from the high Db to the C and G, thus creating a more legato phrase.

Bar 27, first and second beat (Fig.16):

I removed the two D#'s in the middle, playing only the top and lower one. In the second beat I similarly removed the two B's in the middle, playing only the top and lower one.

This solution made it possible for me to connect the fingers between the first and the second sixteenth-note in each rhythmic figure. The hand position is comfortable, enabling me to use more force.



Fig.16. Bar 27, second version.

Bar 148, third beat (Fig.17):

By putting the Db and F in the left hand, I am able to connect the fingers when playing the rhythmic figure in the right hand. This solution results in a bigger chord in the left hand, that sounds heavier, which again enhances the rhythmic pattern.



Fig.17: Bar 148, second version.



Bar 149, first beat (Fig.18):

The distance between G and Eb in the right hand chord is too wide, which is easily solved by placing the G in the left hand.



Fig.18: Bar 149, second version.

### Hand positions:

I worked on finding the best hand positions throughout the score. Two examples are presented below, from bar 15 and bar 25 (Fig.19 and 20). Personally, I want to avoid playing octaves that are followed by chords immediately afterwards (played by the fingers 1-4 and 2-3) as in bar 15, 1st beat. Interestingly however, I *do* play a seventh with a chord afterwards (with the same fingers as above) in bar 25, 1st beat. The difference here is the distance between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> finger, not being as wide. In bar 15 I am avoiding an uncomfortable stretch that could damage my hand. This is an individual choice of course, since harpist's hands come in all sizes.



Fig.19: Bar 15, second version.



Fig.20: Bar 25, second version.

**Repetitions on the same string:**

A seemingly re-occurring issue when composing for harp is the repetition of the same tone, using the same string. It is certainly possible to replace the finger on the same string after playing it, and it is also possible to repetitively play the same string relatively quickly. However, there are a number of reasons why, in many instances, this should be avoided. Replacing the finger on a string that has just been played, shortens the resonance of that string. Sometimes this will make the musical phrase sound illogical, since seemingly random tones will sound shorter than the others. Also, since the repetitive use of the same string requires that the player remove the fingers from the string, it will sometimes create a break in the intended phrase. Please note however, that this also depends on other variables, such as tempo and what happens before or after the “lift off”. The repetitive playing on the same string, can also be employed as a rhythmical element, where the damping of the string is heard as part of the rhythm. Below is an example from the score where I addressed the repetition of the same tone:

Bar 172, first beat (Fig.21):

I initially suggested that we should leave out the C in the chord, which would make the first C resonate longer and make the passage "cleaner" (free of buzzing sounds). However, this became less of a problem after I learned it.



Fig.21: Bar 127, second version.

### Jumping:

“Jumping” is when hands move up and down, between different registers on the harp. The fingerings are not possible to connect, and the hands “jump” from one position to another. Since the harpist does not have visual control of all strings at all times, jumping can sometimes be a challenge. In order to hit the right tones it is often necessary to have time to check that the hand is in the correct position by looking at it before playing. Sometimes, as Adderley and I also encountered when working on this piece, the need for such a visual control can limit the tempo and expressional conviction of the player.

In *All Plans Last Only Until the First Shot* there is a passage (Fig.22) where Adderley wants the harp to play strong sounding chords in all registers. Based on our discussions about jumping, I started to improvise with Adderley present in the room, using strong sounding chords in different registers. Inspired by this, Adderley suggested that I should play randomly chosen clusters in different registers, which would sound virtuosic, but would not inhibit the musical expression of absolute conviction.



Fig.22: Bars 200-205, second version.

**Arpeggio:**

Arpeggios or broken chords are common in harp compositions, and it is not my intention to explain this playing technique any further here. However, I would like to shortly address Adderley's use of arpeggios, since they are notated in a relatively untraditional way:

Bars 19-24 (Fig.23):

The arpeggios in these bars are written as grace notes, which is not a common way of notating arpeggios. You will find that the notation is done in this way because the tones within each arpeggio are not necessarily played in the same direction. In addition, the arpeggios should be played as “brisés”, short and at the same time. Personally, I thought that these arpeggios sounded too "thin" due to the layout of the chord. However, this is the intended sound.



The image shows a musical score for piano, consisting of two systems of staves. The first system covers bars 16 to 18, and the second system covers bars 19 to 24. The notation is in treble and bass clefs. In the first system, bar 16 has a sixteenth-note arpeggio in the treble clef, followed by a quarter rest in the bass clef. Bar 17 has a quarter rest in the treble clef and a quarter note in the bass clef. Bar 18 has a quarter note in the treble clef and a quarter note in the bass clef. The second system covers bars 19 to 24. Bar 19 has a quarter note in the treble clef and a quarter note in the bass clef. Bar 20 has a quarter note in the treble clef and a quarter note in the bass clef. Bar 21 has a quarter note in the treble clef and a quarter note in the bass clef. Bar 22 has a quarter note in the treble clef and a quarter note in the bass clef. Bar 23 has a quarter note in the treble clef and a quarter note in the bass clef. Bar 24 has a quarter note in the treble clef and a quarter note in the bass clef. The notation includes various accidentals and dynamics.

Fig.23: Bars 16-24, second version.

**Dynamics and balancing aspects:**

The issue of how to create loud dynamics on the harp is important, since all composers should be able to use the full dynamic range of the harp when needed. I have unfortunately encountered composers who believe that the harp sounds weak no matter how it is used. This is not true. Composers such as Wolfgang Rihm, Alberto Ginastera, R.Murray Schafer or Benjamin Britten, as well as Mark Adderley, show that, relatively speaking, it is *the way* you use the harp that decides the dynamic impact. The modern harp is a much stronger sounding instrument than a hundred years ago, when Debussy and Ravel were composing for harp. Also, harpists today often use a playing technique that makes it possible to play louder. The harp sound will project according to how effectively the composer builds the sound in the harp, as well as how the harp part is orchestrated in ensemble settings. Adderley wanted to challenge the aspect of strong dynamics on the harp and his orchestration of the *sinfonietta* includes a frequent use of loud and forceful musical expressions. How to create a strong sounding harp was therefor a frequent topic in our discussions.

There are, in my opinion, many ways to make the harp sound loud. It can be achieved by for example using many registers on the harp simultaneously: through big chords, through doubling the tones in octaves or through glissandos. The harp can also sound strong by using hand positions that enable the harpists to use their *full force* when playing. Also, on many harps it is possible to play with more force in keys with many flats due to the condition of the mechanism. High registers and certain extended techniques on the harp can also be used for a more penetrating sound.

It could be helpful to consider hand positions in relation to the force needed to achieve the dynamic and character of the sound. I believe that a decisive element in how strong it is possible to make the harp sound is the *distance* the fingers travel before hitting the palm of the hand. A wide hand position, such as an octave, can sound stronger than a small hand position, such as a third. Using a small range of tones in the bass will for instance often sounds soft, since the fingers are close to the palm, making it difficult to apply the same force as if the fingers were more spread (see fig.25). Below are a few examples of places in *All Plans Last Only Until the First Shot* where Adderley and I focused on dynamic aspects:

Bars 4-8 (Fig.24):

In this section Adderley has doubled the melodic line by using octaves, making it possible for the harp to sound strong and forceful. This section should be performed at the very brink of what the harp and harpist are capable of in regards to dynamics.

Fig.24: Bars 1-8, second version.

Bars 59-60 (Fig.25):

The intended dynamic in these bars is fortissimo. It is however difficult to achieve a strong sound with the relatively small hand positions in the left hand.

Fig.25: Bars 59-60, second version.

### The psychology of notation:

Prescriptive musical notation (action-based notation) tells the musician what body movements they need to make. This is the most efficient way of notation for the harp. Musicians often have many things going on at the same time, for example knowing which hand or foot goes where, knowing if the fingers or hands are moving up or down, understanding where each finger should be placed or knowing exactly when the pedals should be changed. To facilitate this complexity of coordinated actions, the musicians sometimes find it helpful to find patterns in the score or to categorize actions into different groups - such as thinking about hand positions rather than about each individual finger, or thinking about pedal changes in pairs or groups rather than one by one. Regardless of musical expressions or tonal language, musicians might therefore find it easier to learn scores where there are somewhat repetitive physical actions. It is for example easier to learn the pedal changes G-Gb-G-Gb than G-F#-no change-Gb. Below are some examples:

Bar 29 (Fig.26):

In the first version of the score, Adderley notated a pedal glissando with a bow and the word "Ped.gliss" above the bow. This is not a standard method for notating a pedal glissando and the editor also misunderstood this notation. In the second version there are therefore several places where there should be pedal glissandos, but where the notation is quite unclear. Bar 29 is an example of this.



Fig.26: Bar 29, second version.

Bar 67, 1rst and 4rth beat (Fig.27):

The lower line should be notated in the lower system to avoid the ledger staffs and because the lower line is played by the left hand here.



Fig.27: Bar 67, second version.

Bar 77, 1rst and 4rth beat (Fig.28):

In the first version the chords were notated together. In the second version they are separated, suggesting where the hands should be placed, which makes the notation easier to read.



Fig.28: Bar 77, second version



## Bar 102 (Fig.29):

Normally a bar line means that the accidentals are neutralized. In bar 102 that would imply that the G within the second beat is neutral, even though the pedal is positioned for the G# within the first beat. However, there is a neutral sign on the G in the fourth beat, which is confusing. I ended up playing a G# in the second beat also.



Fig.29: Bar 102, second version.

## Bar 114 (Fig.30):

Adderley could write “normal” in bar 114, which would make it even clearer that there is and end to “8va”.

Fig.30: Bars 111-115, second version.

## Bar 145 (Fig.31):

This is another example of the confusing notation of pedal glissandos. The editor misunderstood Adderley's notations to mean that the bow between the F# and the F neutral was a phrasing bow, which he then preceded to remove. The F#-F should be played as a pedal glissando, and the hand does not need to play the F string again.



Fig.31: Bar 145, second version.

## Bar 158, first beat (Fig.32):

The low Db used here means that the harpist needs to pre-tune this string to Db before playing the piece, since there usually is no pedal mechanism on this string. This should be notated at the beginning of the harp part.



Fig.32: Bar 158, second version.

**Editorial misunderstandings:**

Unfortunately, there are quite a few errors in the published harp part. This is a reminder that it is not only the composer who needs an updated understanding of harp notation, but also the editor. However, when the score already has been published it seems difficult to get the score revised.

Bar 63, 65 and 68 (Fig.33):

What looks to be a confusing notated cluster played as an arpeggio, is really intended by the composer to be a thunder glissando. In the first version Adderley notates this playing technique according to the guidelines of Inglefield and Neill in their book *Writing for the pedal harp*. However, when Adderley's handwritten score is adapted into a digital version, the editor misunderstands Adderley's notation.



Fig.33: Bar 63, second version.

Other editorial mistakes:

Bar 15, second beat: The treble clef is not correct - it continues to be a bass clef.

Bar 63,65 and 68: the clusters in the left hand are supposed to be thunder glissandos.

Bar 78: The lower G# should be notated as an octave as in the first version and in bar 75.

Bar 84: The D# is an Eb in the first version.

Bar 95, first beat: A# is an A neutral.

Bar 143, second beat: Pedal glissando from F# to F neutral.

Bar 163, first beat: Pedal glissandi from F to F#.

Bar 241, first beat: The Gb is a Bb.

Bar 267, second beat: the Bb is a B (H).

## A Conversation with Willy Postma

December 2008

*Willy Postma worked at the Norwegian Academy of Music, as the harp teacher between 1991 and 2011. She was a guest-professor at the Sibelius Academy in Finland between 1992 and 2000. Besides being the solo harpist in the Trondheim Symphony Orchestra for 46 years, Willy has performed at numerous concerts, as a soloist, chamber- and orchestra-musician. She has given master classes around the world, and been a member of the Board of Directors of the World Harp Congress. In 2007 she received the Royal Norwegian Order of St.Olav, Knight of first class, for her contributions to the harp society in Norway. Willy Postma has world premiered many new works for harp, and she has commissioned works from composers such as Per Hjort Albertsen, Bjørn Alterhaug, Fred Johnny Berg, Terje Bjørklund, Eberhardt Bøttcher, Klaus Egge, Halvor Haug, Kjell Mørk-Karlsen, Johan Kvandal, Bertil Palmar Johansen, Henk van Schevikhoven, Henning Sommerro and Magnar Åm.*

*I started our conversation by asking Willy how she started playing the harp and how she came to live and work in Norway:*

Willy: Before I even knew what a harp was, I played the piano. At some point somebody asked me very nicely if I could learn how to play the harp, given that I was such a quick learner! Soon after that I found myself playing the harp in the philharmonic orchestra in Rotterdam. My teacher had become ill and I had to jump in as an extra. I didn't really plan to become a harpist, and for many years I still thought of myself as a pianist. But look what happened! I was a solo-harpist in the Trondheim Symphony Orchestra for 44 years, and before that I was in the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra.

When somebody told me that there was a vacancy in Norway for a harp- and piano-position I thought it was a good idea to apply for it. I had previously been on holidays in Norway and thought it seemed like a nice country to live in, compared to the Netherlands. I especially thought that Rotterdam was an awful city where I never felt safe. I hoped I would be able to practice the piano in Trondheim, which I had not found the time to do while working in Rotterdam. This was in 1963 and in 1964 I went to Norway. I played the harp parts on the piano, because there was no harp to play on. Trondheim Symphony Orchestra did not get a harp until 1965. I had only had a few lessons on the harp and I wasn't really interested in the instrument. That changed however after I had my first daughter in 1966. Then I started practicing very hard and I matured into it.

*Sunniva: So with this in mind you must have started quite quickly with the commissioning of new music?*

W: Yes, I did, actually already in the 60's I started asking everyone if they could write

something for me. I was participating in a competition; I travelled to Israel, where I won a prize. I pretended this was my harp exam, since I didn't graduate anywhere before that. At that time I felt the need for more new works. I asked a Dutch composer who lived in Trondheim; Henk van Schevikhoven, and he composed three preludes for me. After that, there were quite a few composers who made something; Bjørn Alterhaug, Eberhardt Bøttcher, Kjell Mørk Karlsen and Klaus Egge. Many of the pieces were composed for me to perform at the World Harp Congresses.

I also had a few conversations with Geirr Tveitt about his harp concertos. We talked about his second concerto and how the harp was not balanced with the heavy instrumentation of the orchestra. Geirr was not happy with the concerto and forbade me to perform it until he had changed it for a smaller ensemble. He passed away before he had the chance to do so. I later performed the second movement from the concerto arranged for a smaller ensemble. Bit20Ensemble and I performed it in Paris. Geirr also told me that the famous harpist Nicanor Zabaleta had performed his first concerto before it was lost. I meant to ask Nicanor about this, but he passed away before I had the chance.

*S: How was the collaboration between you and Kjell Mørk Karlsen?*

W: Well, I wrote to the Norwegian Composers Society and said that I would like to have a work for harp by a Norwegian composer. Then, I had to call around to ask who would be available. I knew Kjell Mørk Karlsen from having talked to him at a few concerts, and I was looking forward to working with him. I commissioned him to write a solo piece for the first world meeting for harpists, which later became the World Harp Congress.

I was not too thrilled about the collaboration with Kjell. He didn't ask me anything and suddenly I received a finished score in the mail. Later on I asked him why he didn't contact me and he told me he had been in contact with another harpist who worked in Oslo where he was. There were a lot of choices that they had made that I disagreed with, for instance, the tritone that starts the whole piece. I thought it was too passive. You could maybe make it work on a piano, but such a thin chord on the harp does not resonate. If he at least had used a bass tone at the same time it would have worked better.

After hearing the piece a few times he agreed with me and he composed a completely new version of the piece. At that time I had performed the first version quite a few times, including a radio recording for the Norwegian Radio. The new version however was nothing similar and would have been a lot of extra work to learn. I had spent all my energy and interest on it by then, so I never learned the second version. The version that I did was never published and the published version has never been performed.

*S: The Sonata by Klaus Egge was composed around the same time, in 1976, how was your collaboration with him different?*

W: Well, I world premiered the Sonata in “Aulaen” in Oslo, which I had rented to give a full evening recital. I played the piece by Kjell Mørk Karlsen at the same concert, after having world premiered it in Maastricht earlier that year. In general I thought the whole process of commissioning music was very unfair. Maybe it is better now. The composer asked me to commission him to write a piece. I applied for financial support and he got the money. Then I had to rent the concert hall to be able to perform his piece within the time limit. If I didn’t perform it I would have to pay the composer from my own pocket. This put a great pressure on me as an artist. I spent around 1200 hours learning his piece, which I had not been given a chance to influence. I performed eleven works for harp in “Aulaen” but I was financially broke because of it.

The Sonata by Egge is very hard. If you look at the music you see that there are sevenths and triads up and down, forwards and backwards for 20-25 minutes. I wrote to him and asked nicely if he could make the second movement slower, as a contrast to these big chords going up and down. He agreed with me and sometime later he sent me a new second movement. I really liked what he had written and was very happy. But suddenly he changed his mind and he told me to play the first version anyway.

There were two pages in the Sonata that were particularly difficult. I was not able to learn it before the deadline, so I decided to skip the two pages. Klaus Egge was in the hall listening to it, but he didn’t notice. I asked him about it afterwards and he became quite angry and told me never to do that again. Later on I learned those two pages as well.

What sticks out to me from this collaboration is after all that hard work, Klaus Egge comes up to me after the concert and says: “ Oh, if I had known how to use the harp I would have done it so differently!” My chin almost dropped to my knees when he said that. He had never asked me for advice. I found it very frustrating and it could be quite hurtful to experience those kinds of things.

*S: Looking at all your collaborations, which one were you most satisfied with?*

W: That is of course my collaboration with Johan Kvandal. He came to live at my house for a few days while working on the composition. This was in the 80’s. I had changed my tactics by then, being careful who I asked to work with. Initially I asked Kvandal for a ballade, but he insisted on wanting to write a sonata. The compromise ended up being that he called the first movement a ballade. I was very excited about the old poem that I had found, which would be the basis for the piece. Kvandal came up with a lot of suggestions. I understood what he was after and we worked and worked and worked. I was allowed to make a lot of suggestions. Where he wanted it to be mysterious I suggested that he should use enharmonic tones and double the line by using both hands. This was instead of using repetitive tones, I suggested C#-Db and so on. He was so intrigued about the possibilities that he wanted to use enharmonic tones everywhere.

That made the whole piece sound much better. Another thing we talked about was to always use four fingers and not five as on the piano. That is a common mistake. He filled in the chords as I was playing them for him. He also didn't know how much he liked the bass until I showed him.

If you look at the score you can see that he very consciously used groupings of four wherever he could. He had really taken in what I had told him. He was the first composer who I worked with who listened and truly collaborated. I didn't say much about the harmonization of the main theme, but a little bit into it he had written a lot of complicated groupings that didn't work.

We also worked a lot on finding effects that would illustrate the story of the Poem. Kvandal wanted to hear Heming the young ski over the mountains and eventually disappearing, so I suggested we should use the glissandi for that. After finishing the first movement Kvandal looked at me and asked: "Who is the composer here, you or me?" So he wanted to do the second movement on his own. I only made a few corrections after that. The piece is a lot of work to learn, but almost everything works well, except for page 11, where he uses five fingers when turning in the top.

*S: When a composer wants to build a big chord like this, maybe with the same big and generous sound, what advice would you give him?*

W: Only to think about everything working out in groups of four and not five like I have mentioned. We worked a lot with making the harp sound optimal. To not go against the harp qualities. Also, if a composer wants to use effects, it is not enough to only "throw in" a few romantic ones, like glissandi and harmonics, he or she has to use them in a specific way.

To make the harp sound strong it is best to play in the lower keys with a lot of flats. The Sonata by Kvandal uses seven flats in the first movement (Cb Major) and six in the second (Gb Major). By doing this it is possible to maximize the use of synonyms. This makes the harp strings resonate more freely. If a composer writes in E major it is awful, then you ask him to change it at once! I can't stand it! The strings are so taught that the sound is awful, and you have no possibilities of using enharmonic tones. That is why Kvandal has done it so you can make a D# and an F and an F# and so on. Because of this he creates an enormous sound that is not being muffled because you have to replace your fingers.

My advice of using low keys was also helpful when I collaborated with Henning Sommerro. I asked him to write in the low keys so we could use all the effects on the harp. I wrote down the harp effects I wanted to use; "bisbigliando", harmonics, glissandos, as well as various key changes. Sommerro was using his tune "Vårsøg" to make a new harp piece. He decided to use all the effects that I had suggested, and

make it into a variation piece, with one effect for each variation. The harp piece works really well, it is phenomenal.

Another thing to think about when you want the harp to sound good is the spacing of the tones. It is not a good idea to use triads in the bass, "no thirds in the bass" I tell them. It is better to think big, open chords on the harp, using wide triads. Also, it is good to use the whole range of the harp, not only the middle section as many composers do.

*S: What about the pedals?*

Well, of course you have to keep your mind on what pedal changes you have to make when you compose for the harp. But you know, we change two pedals at the time and an experienced harpist can change the pedals very quickly. I rarely think about pedals as a problem. What I *do* say often is that there has to be time to muffle the strings. If you have just played an E in the bass and you change the pedal to Eb without muffling you will hear a pedal glissando. You can't change pedals when the strings are still vibrating. I have corrected that many times.

*S: So to sum up, what kind of collaborations have been the more successful in your mind?*

W: I really think that the harpist needs to meet the composer, to play for him and together find solutions. That is the only thing that has really worked. I have also given harp lessons to composers, emphasizing the things I have mentioned here; four fingers, big, wide chords, clear bass, to not change pedals when the tone is still ringing and to not do any quick key changes. Furthermore it is important to be able to change between enharmonic tones, not to insist that it must be an F# and not a Gb. I also want it to sound good, and not be too nitty-gritty. Another thing to think about is to have a variation in the dynamics, using both fortissimo and pianissimo.

*S: What musical roles do you think the harp should have in the future, for example in the orchestras?*

W: I don't think the harp should be used as a percussion instrument, I think that goes against the harp's characteristics. I am also not so interested in an extreme use of the harp. The most important thing is that it resonates well. I really like the way Bartók uses the harp, as an interfering sound in the marketplace (Concerto for Orchestra, first movement, second harp). I also think it is important to build a good repertoire. We lack a lot of the solid standard pieces, like the piano has, especially in the Norwegian repertoire. We could have more pieces for certain occasions, such as Christmas, or more sonatas and sarabands.

*S: Which Norwegian composers who have written for harp would you refer the younger composers to?*



W: Well that would have to be Magnar Åm, Ragnar Söderlind and Halvor Haug. Haug was after all the easiest to work with of them all. My favorite living composer is Einijohanna Rautaraara. He has written "Ballade" for harp and string orchestra, which I love.

S: *Thank you Willy for sharing your experiences and giving us a little insight into the processes of the works dedicated to you.*

Cited works:

Bartók, Béla: Concerto for Orchestra (1943)

Edge, Klaus: *Sonata for Harp*, op. 33 (1974), Oslo: MIC Norway.

Haug, Halvor: *Dialogue for Two Harps* (1987), Oslo: Warner/Chappel Music Norway AS.

Karlsen, Kjell Mørk: *Variations for Harp*, op. 29 (1973/86), Oslo: MIC Norway.

Kvandal, Johan: *Sonate: Ballade om Hemingen unge*, op. 63 (1984), Oslo: Norsk Musikkforlag AS.

Rautavaara, Einijuhani: *Ballade* (1973/1981), for harp and strings, London: Boosey and Hawkes.

Schevikhoven, Henk Van: *Three Pieces for Harp* (1976), Oslo: MIC Norway.

Sommerro, Henning: *Vårsøg, fantasi for harpe og strykere* (1993), Oslo: Norsk Musikkforlag

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## **A conversation with Judy Loman**

February 2009

*Judy Loman graduated from the Curtis Institute of Music, where she studied with the celebrated harpist Carlos Salzedo. She was the principal harpist in the Toronto Symphony from 1960 until 2002. Loman is a prolific recording artist. In addition to performing classical harp repertoire she has commissioned many new pieces from Canada's foremost composers. She has introduced these compositions worldwide through her recordings and recitals in North America, Europe, Israel and Japan. A dedicated teacher, Judy Loman is harp instructor at the Curtis Institute of Music, Professor of harp at the University of Toronto, and instructor of harp at the Toronto Royal Conservatory of Music. She gives master classes worldwide and has adjudicated at both the International Harp Contest as well as composers competitions and young artist competition given by the American Harp Society and the Fukui Festival. (Source: The Banff Centre)*

*Sunniva: Dear Judy Loman, I would like to begin by asking how you started playing contemporary music?*

Judy: Well, I studied off course with Salzedo, and that was sort of something that he drummed into all of his students; to bring the harp into the 20th Century and have new music written! He thought the harp repertoire was very small and limited, and not the best of music. I guess that having music written just stuck with me, and when I came to Canada that was one of the things that I wanted to do. Fortunately there was a big encouragement for Canadian composers at the time that when I came to Canada. The CBC symphony orchestra in Toronto featured Canadian composers every week as well as contemporary composers other than Canadian. Most of the work I did as the soloharpist in this orchestra was contemporary work. We did a concert practically every week of new contemporary pieces. And amongst all those pieces were many very fine Canadian composers, such as Murray Schafer and John Weinzweig. This way I got to know these composers and talked to them about composing for the harp. John Weinzweig was my first effort. He wrote a concerto for harp. That was one of the very first things. Later, I also asked John to write another piece for harp.

*S: Did you have a meeting with him before he started composing for you?*

J: Yes, to have a "good feeling" for how to write for the harp he took some harp lessons from me. I wanted to let him have a feel for how to play the harp and started him as a beginner. I showed him a few playing techniques as well as how short I am on the right side. My arms are short and I am not that big either, so it is hard to get down in the bass with my right arm. I think the lessons helped him along in his compositions. I don't know how much it helped him, but I think he did go to the harp later to try out some things.

There was nothing in those *15 pieces* that were impossible to play or was at a point where it wouldn't work. Although there is one piece where I actually have to put the harp down and go over to the other side in order to play. We figured it would work that way giving lots of time. We worked a little bit harder to make everything work on the *Concerto* however.

John Weinzwieg was a very clean cut kind of a composer. He wrote a lot. The first things I heard by him sounded a bit like Aron Copland, and then he went very twelve tonal. His concerto was in the twelve-tone style, which was much less interesting to ordinary people. Its an interesting concerto, but I have hardly played it, nobody ever wants to listen to it. It is rather dry. But then he went back in his *15 pieces for harp*- they are very accessible, but they are different. Some of them I have performed quite a bit. I love for instance "Fine time" and I think "Quarks" is a very exciting piece! The pieces were not what I expected to get when I asked him to write a solo piece though. We were both really busy at the time and had a hard time getting together. So he just kept writing and one day he called me up and said he had 13 or 14 new pieces and probably a couple more on their way! "Maybe you ought to listen to it?" he said. So he brought it over and it was just amazing.

*S: What qualities were you looking for in the composer? What made you choose to work with Weinzwieg and Schafer?*

J: I just like the way they write music! With most of them there is something about the way they write for orchestra, because most of them I heard in the orchestra first. There is something about the way they write for orchestra that reminds me of the harp.

For example the CBC did a piece by Schafer called *Mostroul*, in which the whole orchestra was dispensed around this huge hall and playing back and forth to each other. The sonorities that he was making in this piece made me think: "oh my god, this piece would sound gorgeous on the harp!" And so I asked him!

Previous to that I had done quite a bit of Takemitsu's works, and knew him fairly well. He was always in Toronto at that time and we did a lot of his works. I always had a good opportunity to talk to Takemitsu. At one point he told me that he wanted to write a piece for harp with bells, and that the harpist was going to put the bells on her arms. So when I was talking to Schafer I said: "you know maybe it could even do with some bells or something?"

And I told him that Takemitsu had that idea but that he hadn't done it yet. So that is how the bells came into the piece. But on the ancles rather than on the arms, because when we experimented we realized that the bells got into the harp all the time which didn't work.

*S: What would your advice be to a composer who has never before composed for the harp?*

J: Well I would first give them as much harp recordings as they can possibly listen to. And then I would give them all of Salzedo's books on writing for the harp. I would also give them Salzedo's music with the etudes and that sort of thing. This is what I did when I worked with Kelly Marie Murphy, who wrote *Illuminations* for me for 2000. I did the opening concert for the American Harp Society that year. I wanted to do a 20th Century concert with a 21st century piece, and so I commissioned her to do that. I told Kelly Marie to just write what she wanted and if it was not going to work I would tell her. Together we would figure out a way to try to make what it was she wanted sounding. Most times it would be enough to change a few notes or so. And it has always worked really well. I think this method works well with every composer.

For instance when Ray Ludecke wrote a piece for harp and string quartet; *The Moon and the Labyrinth*. That is so hard! Anyway, there were some spots where he wanted me to play high up on the harp and then come down and play octaves in the bass. We looked at it and I told him I would not make any kind of sound doing that. He was fine with that and changed it.

*S: So the composers have an initial idea of the feeling and the effect they want and then you give them some examples of what they can do?*

J: Right. Now with Kelly we were a little bit too far away from each other for us to meet on a regular basis. What she would do was to send me music by fax. Then I would play it, figure out what would be better to do and then fax it back to her. She was perfectly happy with that.

*S: Your collaboration with Schafer is very interesting and has involved many pieces; "The Crown of Ariadne", "Theseus", "Wildbird", "Tanzlied" and the "Concerto". Schafer seems to be very open to what the instrument can do and uses it in a way that seems very free of stigma surrounding the harp. He uses for instance the percussiveness of the harp and a very full and strong sound with a wide dynamic range. How did you collaborate with him?*

J: Yes you're right. He *does* know the harp well. He knows that you don't write a lot of stuff in the bass if you want it to be really clear. Very often he will put something in there that needs to be changed, like a pedal. For instance in *Ariadnes Dream* (movement 4b in *The Crown of Ariadne*) you have to be very careful with those bass notes. I always have to edit, you know. A lot of things change from the first versions. Schafer always apologizes. He is not one of those people who says "No it has to be this way" you know. We do edit a lot and even now I don't know if you have *The Crown of Ariadne* with the new piece in it? *Ariadne's Dream*. There is one part in that which is so difficult I haven't even bothered telling him about it.

Although, if you take out one note it is a lot easier. Take out one note and just add another one, you see he has got an F here, -if you do a D you don't need to change that up here and the pedals are different then. I think I do G and D, and I think I do the G sharp now. On the first harp I did this piece, it didn't have a very good G sharp so I decided to change that A there. But now I do the G sharp anyway. But at any rate, this is a lot easier, believe me. Just not to have to change that pedal. I do the D over here now and I muffle that here, see. And then that leaves... just taking out that one pedal makes a big big difference.

I encourage Schafer not to worry about the accidentals and not to worry about lots of pedals. Just put in the harmonies that he wants and we will work it out later. Like I showed you in *Ariadne's Dream*.

I really enjoy playing these pieces by Schafer. *The Crown of Ariadne* is the only piece that I don't get a back ache on too. There is so much use of the body and while you are doing it you're just relaxing somehow.

*S: I would like to talk about the dynamic range and the percussiveness in the harp because for many Norwegian composers this is quite unfamiliar. They often don't think about the harp in a forceful or percussive way. When I do repertoire which presents the harp in this way they often get very surprised to see that it is possible! This possibility is one of the things I really want to communicate to them!*

J: Yes, they should know this way of using the harp. Especially the Weinzwieg pieces are very percussive, Schafer's are so romantic, that sometimes people don't understand how much goes into it.

*S: Towards the end of our conversation I would like to talk about the harp in contemporary music in general. Which modern pieces do you believe have been the most significant ones for the development of the harp?*

J: Oh gosh... There have been many contemporary pieces written that are quite beautiful. But for the harp's development, that is a different question. I think all the good ones have developed the harp *repertoire*. But I don't think there is anything new that has been done, that hasn't already been shown to some composer by some harpist. You know, all the playing techniques that Murray uses have been used before, except for the tube. I mean people have blown into the back of the harp before, but the tube was Murray's invention which gave a great sound. The repertoire developed the harp as a solo instrument. We still need more pieces for the harp to take its place as a solo instrument. However sometimes I fear that we never really will. Why I don't know. We make more noise than a guitar. And yet the guitar has wonderful repertoire. But now we are developing our own wonderful repertoire.

I mean the thing that really develops the harp is the harpist being able to play so much better than they used to be able to. I remember when I was off to school fifty years ago, there were very few people who could really play the harp. They would start very late and try, they'd do the best they could you know with muscles that should have been developed from the time they were little, and with demands that should have been made on them that weren't made. Now the demands are in place and they are coming through. The harpists today are fantastic! You know, the ones that aren't the best are better than anything I knew when I was growing up. So as the harpists get better they are going to demand more repertoire and as composers demand more, the harpists are going to get better. But no composers demand as much as Parish Alvars. So you see, there is a lot to go on there.

*S: So in other words pieces like Berio's Sequenza would be very hard for any harpists in that day also, because it is written in the sixties?*

J: It is still hard! If you look at that piece; only the dynamics themselves, every inch of that piece, no, every eighth of an inch of that piece needs to be figured out and worked on section by section. By the way, I have never played that piece. I took one look at it and thought I don't have the time. I would want to be able to do things exactly the way they are written and to do that exactly the way it is written would take years.

However I don't know if it is one of those pieces that developed the harp. It is music for the harp that developed. For anyone who is passionate about that kind of music to put that effort into it is a really wonderful thing. But I have just gone in another direction and I have worked with composers whose music I love and I am not particularly fond of Berio's music. Also as I said, when I started here in Toronto which was fifty years ago, there was such a wealth of composers to work with and the money was there to get these pieces commissioned. Why would I go outside of Canada when we have so many good composers to work with?

*S: But I think for the harp to develop it needs to be shown that it is possible. That is what your work with Schafer and Weinzwieg, as well as with Buhr shows! For instance in the piece "Tanzlied" by Schafer, you hear the harp as a full-on concert instrument, like a solid musical instrument. Like the piano, but not the piano.*

J: Yes, because it is not. Unfortunately it can never do what the piano can do. I also played the piano, and at one point decided that I loved the harp more. I loved practicing the harp more and I loved playing it more than the piano. But when you think of the piano repertoire and the things that the piano can do...!

But the piano can never do what the harp can do either! In many places. I get that all the time from pianists that have to take harp parts in things like the Britten. Especially pianists who have to do harp and choir stuff. They try to do on the piano what is written for the harp but it doesn't work. Still it is a little bit discouraging sometimes.

*S: The harp is different from the piano for sure, but I still think it is possible to make a “whole” musical piece and not feel limited. It should be important for the music not to be too easy, or flowing. Or avoid being focused on what is harpistic or “harp-like”.*

J: Well that is what Schafer does

*S: On that note I thank you for this conversation and all your wonderful work Judy Loman!*

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## **A conversation with Godelieve Schrama**

### **March 2009**

*Godelieve Schrama is a Dutch harpist, educated in both Holland and France and now a harp professor in Germany (at the Hochschule für Musik in Detmold). Her discography counts six solo albums, among others the remarkable “Harp Concertos from the Netherlands”, in which she performs four new harp concertos by Dutch composers. As a soloist she collaborates with renowned conductors and orchestras. She is also a core member of the ASKO|Schoenberg ensemble for contemporary music. Her commitment to keeping the harp tradition alive takes various forms. She has commissioned works by many composers, collaborating closely with them, some of which are interdisciplinary projects bringing art forms together. In 1996, she was awarded the Dutch Music Prize for her work, the highest distinction conferred on classical musicians in the Netherlands.*

*Sunniva: I would like to start our conversation by asking you about your studies-, where and with whom did you study?*

Godelieve: I stayed in Holland actually, while studying with Germaine Lorenzini in France. I started to work and freelance a little bit, so I decided not to live in Lyon because I wanted to stay in a musical circle I knew and have experience in working. I travelled to Lyon for my lessons. The studying with Lorenzini was a very important and also very good experience.

*S: When did you start to develop an interest for contemporary music?*

G: I have always been interested in contemporary music but I didn't know so much. My grandfather was a composer, so the fact that people write music today was something that was normal for me. We would go and listen to his music whenever he had finished something. Later on I think it was always part of my “menu”, so with all my teachers it was normal that I was always working on something from the 20th century. When I was still at Den Haag Conservatory I was already meeting with people who were composing or organizing things in contemporary music and doing small jobs within the field. At that time I founded a quintet in the normal instrumentation; for string trio, flute and harp. Among other things we commissioned pieces. The violinist of this quintet, was just starting as a principal violinist of the Schoenberg Ensemble, which is a contemporary music group. I think it was through her that I got my first invitation to go and play there. This is how I was just very gradually rolled into the scene really. Also, I have never done only contemporary music I have always done everything really.

*S: You seem to play more contemporary music than other music. Do you also play more contemporary music than most harpists?*



G: Yes I think so. When you go into an orchestra you get an other diet than if you play in a contemporary music group. For ten years I have done more or less steady playing with the Schoenberg Ensemble. I have always continued to commission people to write new pieces. I started by commissioning solo pieces and then I commissioned several Concertos.

In the last years however, I have decided that it might be more useful to put the harp in a broader context. There are several reasons for doing so; If you commission a Concerto it is very nice. You can get a nice concert with a good orchestra and a radio recording and some attention; someone writing about you in the newspaper. Unfortunately it is usually only once that this piece will be played. This does not do the composer much service because I believe that music must be played more often than once. Therefore I think it is much more important that I let my instrument grow or develop with the music. Therefore I am looking for setups with other instruments or for occasions where we can have pieces that can be played more often. So I try to put harp in a wider context. If you ask for a solo piece it is very nice to play and to work on it, but it is very very difficult to programme. If you already have the opportunity to play a recital you can maybe put in a modern piece, but only one, because people don't want to hear modern music all the time. Except for when you go to a modern music series which is sometimes possible of course. I have a lot of good quality work but it doesn't mean I can do a contemporary recital or a different programme every year, there is no way. So I think chamber music, more in the direction of musical theatre, or projects that also have other elements like contemporary art will have a better chance of being played.

*S: Do you know how many solo and chamber music pieces you have been world premiering?*

G: Well, I think there might be around twenty? Might be a little bit more. And also with the Schoenberg Ensemble I premiered a lot of pieces but I didn't commission them. Personally there have been about five Concertos, 10 or 12 solo pieces and then some chamber music.

*S: Could you tell us about the projects and collaborations you have been in, and maybe say something about why you chose to work with those composers in particular?*

G: I chose them partly because I knew them from the Conservatory, or I played a piece or heard a piece and thought "oh, this is a nice composer to ask".

*S: Did you become interested in asking them because of their music in general or because of their way of treating the harp?*

G: No, usually because of their music in general. I used to think they would need to have an affinity with the instrument in order for them to compose for it, but I am more interested now in concept than I was before. So I was much more interested in the harp and now I am interested in what the composer wants to say. I worked with a lot of dutch

composers myself. I started with quite conventional ones like Theo Verbey and Roel Van Oosten. They are on one of my CDs. Then I came to Willem Jeths which is also on the CD, but his is not a conventional piece.

*S: I think Willem Jeths' piece is a remarkable piece.*

G: Yes, it is a fantastic piece, but the first time I had to play it I was completely confused, because it demands something of you that has in fact not much to do with playing harp. Because I am standing up and beating the strings with a stick for twenty-five minutes (except for one part where I am sitting down to play). I find it very hard to find a way to do that.

*S: Did he say something about that, how you should do things?*

G: Well, I have to admit that we fought a lot. He also did a solo piece for me and we saw each other a little bit too much, so we just got angry about everything. I thought it was very hard, it is a very aggressive piece to play, but I was very fortunate that I had the chance to do it again two years ago in Switzerland. It is a very good piece, very strong. Even if everything it says about the instrument is not about the instrument. Fas/Nefas means what is allowed and what is not allowed, to be exactly on the borderline. That is what this piece is about; Is it allowed to beat on the harp with the stick or should you only play it with your fingers for example? However I think the first time I did it I didn't understand it yet. It doesn't mean I didn't play it well, but I really didn't understand it yet. I think I understand it better now.

*S: What drew you to him as a composer?*

G: Well somebody told me that he was very good, so I just called him! Very simple really.

*S: Did you know that you could expect something unconventional from him?*

G: Yes, I went to listen to some pieces so I knew he was unconventional, but you still don't know what to expect if somebody is going to write for your instrument for the first time. I tend to give composers a kind of "Carte Blanche", and then they can do what they want sort of.

*S: When you initiate a project with a composer who has little experience with the harp, what information do you give them? Do you refer them to any material, like orchestration books?*

G: I don't give them much information really. They usually know what they need to know. The Berlioz (Berlioz's Orchestration Treatise) they all have. If they want I show them some repertoire. Usually I show them how the way of writing can be very varied. I

show them Caplet's Espagnole from 1924, which is quite contemporary really. And I show them Berio's Sequenza for harp. I often find however, that composers who have something to say not really are interested in what someone else has been saying before them. They want to invent their own language. Though sometimes you get really stupid questions like; How far can you spread your fingers, is it a decime or is it more or less? If you answer that it is in fact a decime you know they might write sixteenth notes in a very fast tempo in decimes, which of course is not possible! That is why I don't tell them anything. Usually I get sketches and we discuss then what they wrote. I try to prepare the sketches as well as I can. I am not very good at sightreading contemporary music so I have to practice the samples before I get a feel for them. When working with the composers it sometimes helps me when they explain what they really tried to do. Then the notes that I previously didn't understand make much more sense. Writing down music is maybe fifty percent you know, the other fifty percent you have to find by asking yourself questions all the time; What does the composer really mean?

*S: So when you get the first sketches from the composers, do you find that there are any re-occurring elements that are general challenges when composers write for harp?*

G: Yes, I still get the seventh B (Sub Contra B) all the time, the note B which is not on the harp. A lot of composers don't know that it is not there and "big" composers such as Rihm, Boulez or Carter are no different. They don't think about it and then they just write it.

*S: You mentioned earlier what you do when you receive a part for a new piece. I would like to ask you how you view the issue of being non-idiomatic versus being idiomatic? How do you approach new ways of using the harp and where do you draw the line of what is possible and not? For instance; we know to draw the line if the hand is too big, because it will hurt us, but are there other limitations that you won't do if someone asked it of you?*

G: Well, I won't do anything that really damages the instrument, that's for sure.

*S: That is interesting because this view of what damages the harp has changed as well, hasn't it?*

G: Yes I agree, because I *do* beat it up! I must say, and I can show you on my harp, that the varnish has actually cracked because of Berio with his Bartók-pizzicatos. So I do damage the harp in a way. I think I forget those things in the process, I forget the problems, maybe we change how we think about it in the process. But what I do is that when I play the Concerto by Jeths for instance, which is with percussion sticks on the string, I have to change all the basses afterwards because I completely beat them out of tune. So for sure, I damage the strings and I spend 300Euro on replacing the strings. It is an expensive concerto! (Laughs)

*S: So in general, if something would negatively affect your health or affect your instrument- that would be off-limit for you?*

G: Yes, although your health is always affected! Every time I get a new piece I say to my husband: "Never again I give a commission!" I say this because it is a hard process! I have so much regard for someone who wants to be a composer, but I always shout at them, although privately and not in person. Composing is also a very difficult process. It is something that is really out of human range almost. So you have to be a little bit insane to be able to compose. I have a lot of respect for people who are able to do that. So I try to understand, that is the basic thing, I try to understand what someone is trying to tell.

*S: You mentioned that you work with sketches of the new pieces; How well do you need to know something or try out something before you view it as too difficult or impossible?*

G: Well, if you want to learn a big piece out of the standard repertoire, always you reserve a certain amount of time, say four months or six months? So why not accept that this time is also needed for the new music? But we are impatient, me too, we want to know what the music is about. I want to hear what it should sound like, but maybe it just takes more time? Playing techniques have also developed, so I am sure you can also bring the technique further by trying or keep on trying. But it is difficult when you don't understand why you are having to do that. Like the example you showed me (R.S.Gjertsen: *Grains*); with a pattern that is irregular and incomprehensible, making life very difficult. So the only way you can do it is by automatizing it, but that will take you a lot of time since it is irregular. And yet, Carter writes very difficult for the harp but he is a very good composer. So good compositions makes it worth it I guess.

*S: When starting to work with the composers, what kind of expectations did you have to your collaboration?*

G: It always varies I think. It depends on the commission. Usually, what is coming out is not what I expected. Which is good in a way, it is fine, you just have to make a step back and accept that this is something else. Maybe he did something to the harp that was not expected or maybe he didn't do what I hoped for, but there is something there, there is always something that is worth exploring. I have had discussions with other musicians who thinks I should set my commissions stricter, that I should say that I only want this or that-, but I can not do it! I think that someone who has to create something new should have the freedom to choose which way he wants to go, even if that affects my pleasure.

*S: When you initiate a project how do you view your ownership in it? What is your role in the collaboration? To explain what I mean by this question; I think that you on the one hand have the ownership in the project because you are the one initiating it. Then, there*

*is the issue of how far this ownership should go; for instance which artistic choices you make for the commission. On the other hand, you have an ownership in the process; you comment on sketches, you revise scores and you influence the process throughout more or less, depending on the individual project. This goes against the idea perhaps of the autonomous composer, where the musician's role is only to be a servant, not influencing the creative process at all. How do you view your role with these perspectives in mind?*

G: Well I know that if I don't initiate a project it won't happen, so it is true that I am the motor really, but I consider the composition as owned by the composer entirely. Because I am sure that if I do a premiere, if it is a good piece and someone else is going to play it, it is probably going to be played better then, because it already has a history. The first performance is usually not the best performance. Which is fine. If the piece is good enough it is nice that it is carried on by other people. However the ownership is not always obvious, I'll grant you that. I do know that since I started to make real concepts I do feel that it is necessary that my part in it is described, and not only the fact that I play the harp in it, but also that I have sort of made thoughts about the idea. In financial terms it would be nice if you get compensation for that part of the work. But in the end you know it is such fun to do anyway.

*S: As a harpist, how you feel about the stigmas concerning the harp, white dresses and such, have you experienced any of that?*

G: Well I don't have a white dress! (Laughs) I try to avoid stigmas. What maybe annoys me though, is that if you go into chamber music clubs, or societies who organise a series of concerts a year, there are lots who don't want to programme harp. Not as a recital and not as chamber music. Because the repertoire is too difficult they say. It is too new, harpists have no Beethoven, no Mozart and no Haydn. They don't want to take the risk because it might be too difficult for the audience. It doesn't have to do with stigmas, although it *does* have to do with my instrument. Obviously this is the repertoire we have. However it mostly says something about how old fashioned a lot of classical music lovers are, or people who think they love classical music. They are very scared of anything that is new. Only by the moment you get on stage it is no longer an issue; the audience love repertoire being different and they like it. That is if you make a good programme of course, not if you make a shit one. I do have the privilege of being able to play in very nice places. But even there, even my agent who is making a tour like that possible, encounters places where they say "no, Debussy is really too modern for our series..."

*S: Have you experienced composers having set expectations, and that those expectations or prejudices limit their use of harp?*

G: Prejudices for sure. Sometimes they are very disappointed if things don't work as they thought. Someone who does not seem to be limited is Wolfgang Rihm who is a

very very interesting composer. I did several pieces by him. There are no solo pieces or Concerto or anything, but a lot of ensemble pieces. And there is one piece which is called “*Des stücke des Sängers*”, for harp solo and then only brass and percussion. Very loud; four trombones and two tubas and you know- some really crazy combination. And what he does is always using very small clusters, extremely loud or very soft. So I always get blisters when I practice it and it is not harpistic at all really. It is all “DANG DANG DANG”. That is his language, but it is very strong music, it is very good. But there is not one glissando or arpeggio or anything in there.

*S: Towards the end I would like to ask you how you view your possibilities for expressing yourself on the harp? Some harpists I have met seem to think that the harp is somewhat limited in its possibility of expression compared to other instruments. How do you feel about this aspect of playing the harp?*

G: Well, I think this goes up and down. The fact that I chose the harp can not have been at random. There is always a reason why a child at the age of five chooses an instrument, so there must be an infinity with the sound or something that I cannot describe. I have often been a little disappointed with the repertoire of the harp. There is a lot of repertoire for other instruments, especially with the piano repertoire, that I would love to be able to explore. And I think we are very disadvantaged not being able to go through the whole Beethoven Sonatas for example or Bach or Schubert if you wish. It would be helpful in order to develop our musical taste and our musical facilities. However I am sure that something in the sound and probably in the actual movement of playing the harp, the actual touch you make when you move the strings is exactly the right thing for me. This is what I had to be, I couldn't be a pianist because this is the instrument I should play. I don't know why, but I am sure. I think in expressing myself I don't feel restricted. I think that if I should feel restricted it is because I am in a phase in my life where I have not accessed all the expression that I would have liked to have access to. And I think even if a piece only awakens one part or one element of my expression facilities, it can be fulfilling anyway. I am a performer for sure, you know, I like to be on stage, I am scared, but I love it and I love to make the sound, so the possibility is always there to express myself. You know I am just thinking about the poem at the end of the Gubaidulina trio, where she says “tomorrow we will play another tune”. That is what is so great about music that you can fill the time with the piece and then do it again and again. And it will always be something different. So if today this expression is part of my personality tomorrow it can be another part. If I don't understand you today I might understand you tomorrow. Or maybe in ten years I say that now I want to do it completely different. Regardless if it is contemporary or non contemporary.

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## **A conversation with Elisabeth Sønstevoid**

October 2010

*Elisabeth Sønstevoid was the principal harpist in the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra for 40 years. She studied the harp with Oscar Harlem, before moving on to the Akademie für Musik und darstellende Kunst in Vienna. After six years in Vienna she went on to study with Marisa Robles in London. Elisabeth held her solo debut concert together with her brother Knut Sønstevoid, in 1968. She went on to lead various chamber music ensembles, releasing a record together with the flautist Per Øien. Elisabeth's parents were well-known Norwegian composers; Maj and Gunnar Sønstevoid. Elisabeth world premiered her fathers Concerto for oboe and harp with the oboist Erik Njord Larsen and the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra. With the same orchestra she performed Einojuhani Rautavaara's Harp Concerto, conducted by Jukka-Pekka Saraste.*

### **About Elisabeth and her background**

*Sunniva: Elisabeth, could you tell me about your relationship to contemporary music?*

Elisabeth: Yes, my parents, Maj and Gunnar Sønstevoid were both composers. The very first professional gigs that I had, still being a student, involved performing music that they had composed. My parents worked individually and they covered many different areas. They wrote classical concert pieces, but they also did a lot of work within film music and the Norwegian Broadcasting Company (NRK), composing for radio theatre. Their compositions for radio and TV range from serious programs to programs for children. They were both very versatile musicians and I learned a great deal by playing their music in the beginning of my carrier, taking part in recordings and other things. You could say that the music was 'tailor made' for me.

Later on in my career I have very often experienced that composers are afraid of the harp. They don't know what they can and can't do. Often they have many questions about pedals and other things. The way I experienced it, their worries led to two different results; Either they did not care at all if it would be possible or not to play. If I would tell them that "listen, maybe you shouldn't do this..." about pretty basic things, they would respond by saying "no, i don't care about this, just work it out yourself". Well then, I will work it out myself! Otherwise, the composers would be so intimidated that they almost wouldn't dare do anything. This is just as bad as the other, although in a different way. But my mother and father always came and showed me things and asked about things and that, which meant that by recording time, the part were always nice and playable.

*S: What kind of connection did your parents have to the harp and why did you start playing it?*



E: Why I started? Well, this might sound quite prosaic. I have often been asked that question, and I don't know if people misunderstand what I am saying now. They were very pragmatic musicians my parents, and they knew the scene very well, they knew all the musicians in Oslo. They saw that very few people played the harp. I have a brother who plays the bassoon and this choice did not involve the same analysis. There was a need for harp. There was only one harpist, or almost the only one, there might have been someone in Bergen or Trondheim too. I started playing the harp when I was eleven years old and I studied of course with this one man! His name was Oscar Harlem and he was employed in the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra. I had been playing for a while before I started playing contemporary music. I knew how to play before I did I would say. But when I started doing my first professional gigs, it was by playing my parents music. At that time I was still a student. It was around the time when I moved to Vienna. I was six years in Vienna.

*S: Who did you study with?*

E: I had two teachers. I studied with professor Hubert Jelinek for two years. He was a teacher at the music academy. After that I studied for four years with a woman called Louise Dreyer Zeidler. At the same time I attended composition as my main subject at the academy. Dreyer Zeidler was not a teacher at the music academy, but I really wanted to study with her. When I had my exams I had one external exam. Through my studies in composition I could also study the subjects that the harp study entailed. So I had one full study, and then I took another full study on the side. I had my harpist-exams as an extern at the academy. After this I moved for one year to London, where I studied with Marisa Robles.

### ***Views on the harp parts***

*S: Coming back to Norway you became the solo harpist in the Oslo Philharmonic orchestra and stayed in this position for 40 years. As an orchestra harpist you have been in contact with a lot of contemporary music. Could you say a little about what it is like to meet a composer, or a new harp part and how you meet any challenges along the way?*

E: Yes, to begin with you have a great deal of humility towards what is written and what the composer wants to communicate. Some times you have to go behind the score. This is because you get the sense that by strictly following the score you won't somehow achieve the essence of what the composer seems to want to communicate. At that point you have to sit down and think: Why is this not working, what is it that really is happening and what holds it back?, Does the composer know enough about the instrument, has he had the chance to sit down with a harpist to learn what works and not works? There are very few people who have seen a harp up close at all. So if this is the case you have to try to find out what the composer is trying to communicate; What is important? And if you get the chance to talk to the composer—very often they are open

to suggestions. Then I might tell them that by doing so and so it might correspond better to what it is they want. I suggest several solutions. A very simplistic thing for example; you are playing a long note and it is supposed to last the whole bar, but after one or two eighth-notes you have to change a pedal because you need a different tone. That means the first tone can't keep ringing. The tone is still in the harp, even though the string itself is not ringing anymore. This is a very small example, but sometimes it is these kind of things they don't understand about how the instrument works. A lot of fast notes in the bass on wire strings does not sound very clear in general. It ends up being some sort of fuzzy element that might not have been what he wanted, or many other things like this. Most of the composers are very open-minded and interested in learning new things. Some say 'just do what you want', but others might want to learn more about it.

*S: Is it mainly in connection to the orchestra and during rehearsals that you meet the composer?*

E: That all depends, sometimes people come by to show me things.

*S: Some time before the project, when they are still in the process of composing?*

E: Yes, but I think it happens more often when the compositions are solo pieces or chamber music. In the orchestra situation they very often deliver the full score and parts all together, which means that you don't have the same amount of time to work on it in this way. When this happens the changes need to happen during the first rehearsals.

*S: You have talked a little bit about understanding the musical functionality of the harp and for the composer to sit down with a harp or harpist, -do you have other useful advices to the composers? Are there any problems, in addition to pedal changes and overlapping harmonization, which you often meet?*

E: Well, often people don't know that you are only using eight fingers, but this is maybe more often within the classical tradition where the figures are typically...-chords with ten tones and that kind of thing. Often there are pedal issues. It depends of course on how far into modernity we are moving, if there is a classical composing technique or if it is a modern piece with other techniques and that sort of thing. In my experience it depends on what kind of setting you are working in. If you are in a symphony orchestra performing in a big concert hall and you want a pedal noise, then it is a relatively little and intimate thing to be able to project it in an orchestra. And maybe it is supposed to last for half a bar and there is not enough sound left. But you know, you have to consider this in its context.

*S: So the problems vary all the time?*

E: Yes, many different things can occur. When you receive a contemporary harp-part in the orchestra you also don't have the same opportunity as with other things to choose not to do it or to say that this will not work.

*S: Did you say that you primarily have focused on conventional playing techniques or have you played something with other techniques too?*

E: I have, but nothing very very modern.

*S: Well, when Carlos Salzedo published his book on modern playing techniques in the twenties, he introduced notation for 28 new techniques, which ranges from everything like pedal glissandi to knocking effects. Of course you will know this book.*

E: Yes, but I was not thinking about those kinds of playing techniques, here we are talking about more advanced and modern things, like the stuff that you are doing.

*S: I find that very interesting, because in my experience, people very often have completely different views or knowledge of what modern playing techniques on a harp would be. Many composers would think that for instance pedal glissandi are something new, and that hitting the strings is very avant-garde. Harpists on the other hand are so used to these techniques that they might not even think about it. It is a paradox. It seems to be that with the regards to playing techniques, the harpists are in front of the composers! I find that peculiar!*

E: Yes, they might be thinking about p.d.l.t. (près de la table/close to the soundboard) and maybe some knocking, maybe some paper between the strings to produce a different sound - Real modern! (LAUGHTER)

*S: Have you otherwise reflected on how the harp is being used? I am especially thinking about the artistic role. For example, in Brahms' "Requiem" the harp ends the whole requiem by a dissolving chord, which releases the tension and points towards the divine. This is a very clear role, artistically. I call it an artistic role, but you could also call it a musical role. When you have worked in the orchestra you have had many different roles within the orchestra. Have you any thoughts about the role the harp has been given in comparison to other instruments or any personal wishes concerning this?*

E: Yes, I feel that on many occasions the harp deals with some kind of widening of the soundscape (?). To me this is what I feel is the most interesting function in an orchestra. There is a funny story that I was told when I studied in Vienna; Someone had met Bruckner in the street, who was staring in the ground and being in a bad mood. They said hello and asked him how he was. 'Is something wrong? What is bothering you so much?' And then he said 'I am composing the 8th symphony and then I couldn't do it without the harp!' The story was that Bruckner didn't like the harp and that he had tried

and tried, but couldn't do without it. You have played Bruckner's 8th, so you know how it goes. That part you might compare a little to Brahms' *Requiem* in a way. I think that if you go from there and into Mahler and onwards to the Impressionism.(..)

You could say that if you look at Berlioz' *Symphony Fantastique*, which actually is very technical even though the sound when the harp comes in is more celestial. However looking at most of Mahler's harp parts, every tone is important. Even when there is only one tone it has a very specific function, it just has to be there and you can't imagine it not being there. Of course I think that this way of using the harp is very intriguing and nice. And then I do think that the impressionists are the ones I feel have gone furthest into what I feel is the soul or the character of the harp. They produce amazing colors of sound on the instrument. Not to forget Stravinsky of course, who said that everything should be damped and no tones should ring. For instance the place in *The Fairy's Kiss*, which is quite special, because you stay completely low, p.d.l.t., the harp is almost alone and then you play very strong and damp immediately. It is quite a big effort to do. In *The Fairy's Kiss* the harp functions in a more percussive fashion. In the *Firebird*, also by Stravinsky, the function of the harp is somewhat different.

*S: Is there something you think the harp should not take part in? You mentioned that there are places in the repertoire where you have a lot to play but that it is impossible to be heard. Is this a typical problem?*

*E: Yes I did sometimes get parts in which I thought the piano could have done a much better job, without the same problems; loud and nice and those typical piano movements that just doesn't work on the harp. You can't make it sound and you can't bring the accents out enough. What do the composers want from using the harp in these places? Do they have a clear idea about it when they sit down to write?*

*S: Well, if they wanted to bring out the accents and full force of the harp they don't seem to know how to do it!*

### **Communicating with the composers**

*S: I would like to return to the composers that you have performed pieces by and who you knew well. Could you tell us how things were with your parents and perhaps Fongaard? How did they wish to use the harp, did they have clear ideas about that? Did you have any opportunity to influence them in what they wanted to use the harp for, or was it first and foremost their idea with you showing them some solutions?*

*E: Fongaard presented to me different issues that he wanted some help with. I think he had prepared well as to how he would do it. What was so special about Fongaard's pieces was that it was a challenge to find the form. There were no bar-lines, only a long line of various compositional ideas that he thought of. To make music out of it that people would find interesting to listen to was not an obvious task. Not that it was bad on*

his part, that is not what I mean, but the first time you look at the score there is no obvious pattern or way to shape it. How do I make it come alive for the audience to become engaged in it?

*S: Did he say something about that himself?*

E: Not so much I think. I had to sit down and be completely open to what it could be. You play and then you listen to what is really happening. And while you slowly get it under your skin you try to imagine and to create your own form. Where are the highlights? In this Sonata I have written a lot of comments pointing out the main theme, exposition, introduction, peaceful side theme, where it should be “rubato” or where it should be bright and powerful. There are no guidelines from the composer as to how you should shape it. I don't think you can just sit there and play the notes back and forth, that would be just nonsense. In this way I thought it was quite different to work with Fongaard, I found him very inspiring.

*S: What about your parents?*

E: Mother and father have written an amazing amount of music, you won't believe it!!! I shouldn't say this, but there is a whole house full of music, from top to bottom. Of course they wrote very nice things, because they had heard me play since I was a child, and I could always tell them if there was anything I didn't like. My father composed the music for all the films of Arne Skouen, from the first til the last. And in the film *Om Tilla*, where Synne Skouen plays the main character named Tilla, he only used the harp. All the music was only harp. In that sense there were big tasks they gave me. Other times there were small ensembles that meant that the harp part was very important in the context. The music itself was not always so complicated. We spent six years in Vienna for the main reason that my father wanted to study twelve-tone technique with professor Hans Jelinek. Jelinek was the former student of Schoenberg and my dad wanted to study the twelve tone composition style. But when he started composing in the twelve-tone style it became more difficult, because with that comes a lot of problematic use of pedals. Father had made a small block of wood, with wholes in it that he put matchsticks into. CDEFGAH, and when he composed he moved the matchsticks. And if he felt there were too much moving of the matchsticks he had to re-think it.... He was so sweet!

*S: THAT should be an advice to everyone: Matchsticks!*

E: Of course you *can* change quite a lot of pedals. But if there are too many changes there is a limit to what you can wrap your head around in a way. But it went well. He composed a lot of good pieces in twelve tone style, for example his concertos.

Father used the harp both as a leading and as an accompanying instrument. I remember that in a lot of the film music he wrote, you would sit in a big orchestra, this recording in the University Aula- they must have spent a lot of money for their time; they would have a full symphony orchestra and we would record. But as it was in *De dødes tjern* - which I haven't played, it was before I got so far, there was only a trio which had a much more varied use. *De dødes tjern* was performed by Oernulf Gulbrandsen, Oscar Harlem and Arne Novang.

### **Confronting challenges**

*S: How much do you work on a part before you decide it is impossible? Do you find that it is hard to determine what is possible and not?*

E: I think that all depends on the situation. I'll tell you a story; When I first started working, there was a harpist who came from Sweden to be an extra in the Oslo-phil. Her name was Mrs. Fagerstrøm. She was an elderly lady who had been working in the Opera in Stockholm for nearly fifty years. A headstrong woman, and one day she said to me: You must never tell any conductor that your part can't be played. Conductors travel all over the world and maybe he has just been in another city where the harpist could play this part exactly!

If the concerts are important, with notable, sometimes iconic conductors, I work as hard as I possibly can to be able to play the part, if it is Mahler, Strauss, Debussy, Ravel or that kind of thing. If there are directors, composers or arrangers who I feel don't know what they are doing, if I feel it is clumsily written, I focus on what they want to achieve instead, what function they intended for the harp. Then I modify the part to try to optimize the sound or to achieve the nicest function. In these situations I don't practice until it hurts to be able to play something that I think is clumsily written by a bad composer. So it all depends on circumstance. You want to do your best, but it is not always doing your best to practice over and over something that can't be played. Then it would be better to rearrange the part to make it sound nice and to be heard! It sometimes happens also that the part is so big that even if you *can* play it you won't be able to project it through the orchestra.

*S: Here we touch upon what boundaries there are. We all have our boundaries in some way or the other. My boundaries are that I won't do anything that will hurt the harp or myself. However my definition of what will hurt is maybe wider than other harpists. Do you have specific things that you know you won't do? Some harpists don't want to play quartertones for instance.*

E: No, quartertones are not a problem what so ever, as long as I am able to do them! Those things are not a problem at all. I don't have any restrictions as to confronting new challenges. But of course there are times when you encounter technical problems, or at

least I feel that I do, where I simply don't have the technique to be able to play it. For example octaves in "forte" played fast or other technical issues. There's a difference also of when you choose yourself what to play as opposed to when you sit in an orchestra where you have to play what is being put in front of you. I can't tell anyone that if I would play this I would hurt myself, you know? I *have* to play it, which means I have to find other solutions. Of course, when you have worked for many years you get a little tear and wear. I have weak spots everywhere; thumbs, shoulders.... and then you meet your boundaries a little quicker perhaps. I don't want to *choose* to rehearse pieces that I feel I compromise my health doing. I would never do that. Having retired from the orchestra I don't need to anymore.

*S: This is interesting, because it shows what a great responsibility the composer has when composing for the orchestra. A composer who sends out parts to orchestra musicians has a direct influence on the physicality and health of the musicians they involve. This is something I believe musicians could communicate better, the fact that they don't have the opportunity to say no and what this implements.*

E: Yes, there is no turning back, everything has to be played.

### ***The limitations of the future***

*S: What do you think about the future of the harp? What role does the harp play today, how do younger composers use the harp? Are composers so afraid of writing for that harp that you feel it has stagnated a bit? Do you have any thoughts on what you believe the harp should contribute to or how it should be used, where it should play a bigger role perhaps?*

E: That is a very broad question because that is where the classical music stops and where orchestra repertoire and regular.... I would think that there are several instruments that have limitations when it comes to new and very avant-garde music. And then you have all the electronics that come into the picture...

*S: What kind of limitations are you thinking of?*

E: Well, I think about those who work with electronics, in many ways they have a much larger spectrum of sound that they can work with. I think about how they experience going back to the classical instruments again. The problem of the harp has to do with the fact that you only have seven different tones—well it is not necessarily a problem... Composers write in so many different styles nowadays. I think it is important to be open to what makes the harp respond in a satisfying way, that you work with the instrument and not against it. This is generalized, but I think if you are working with the instrument and that the musicians feel you are, the musicians feel they can do it. This is very dependent on harpists not being locked down in the tonal aspect, which is very easy for

harpists to do. The harpists (and other musicians) need to be open to any thinkable harmonies. But if the future of the instrument and all new pieces only involve creating all kinds of new sound effects, I believe it is too limited. It might seem interesting at the time, but then it is done and you can't keep doing that again and again. There has to be something else. But do you feel you stagnate in the harp's limitations? You know much more about this than me?

*S: Well this is a question I ask myself in this project. I am wondering if there is a relationship between the preferences of the harpist and the music that is being created for them. But this is of course when the harpist commissions a work, where they choose the composer and the aesthetic, you know? That way the harpists choose the approach to the harp. What the harpist think will sound good on a harp becomes important. This also relates to the micro-level, when you give feedback to the composer on a specific bar or when you show them examples of different solutions. Then these examples are also based on your own preferences and what you think works and not works on a harp. This is where my learning curve has been great. I knew it of course before also, but it is interesting to experience what happens when you challenge your own aesthetic or technical or even expressional preferences (especially in interdisciplinary projects). If you for example start doing theater music or you just challenge the way you do things, then you automatically increase tolerance to what is ok to do on the instrument. This in turn influences the music I am involved in creating, because I suddenly suggest ideas that I wouldn't have two years ago. This is a great experience. This is also where education has a role. I believe one should be far more conscious of ones own preferences and ones own identity, especially when cooperating with others. However you seem to me to be a very conscious person, perhaps because you grew up with parents who where a part of the scene and you know what it means to write music. I have seen other harpists being more intolerant, for example delivering a long list of 'wrong' things in the piece they have received. They are not communicating or trying to find a way together with the composer.*

E: Yes, In my experience a new piece often feels very awkward, but after a while it gets better. There are several things happening side-by-side when you rehearse a new piece. When you learn what the score says, you also get to know the tonal language. If you have a trained ear you will know if it is good or bad, if it will work in the end. But sometimes this takes time and it all happens at the same time. Sometimes you need to work on it a long time, and perform it several times, so much that it starts to take form within you. Then its function changes and when you play a wrong note you hear that it is wrong. When you played it the first time you couldn't tell the difference because you didn't know it. This is not always easy to do.

And it is not fun to agonize on things that don't work, where you can't do it and when you feel your technique is horrible because of it. Then in a way it is not well written.

*S: Why should composers continue to use the harp?*



E: I think they have to be motivated by the special sound quality in the harp. It is not a percussive department or a piano, it is something different.

***Arne Nordheim and his butterfly***

*S: We are getting close to the end of the interview, but before we do could we talk a little bit about Arne Nordheim? How did you experience him?*

E: Well, I have performed his songs and the butterfly and I knew Arne very well. He came and went in our home throughout my childhood. He was a very fine character, intellectually extremely alert and sharp—a very interesting person.

On the harp specifically Arne always used very big jumps. When you sit in the orchestra you have to look at the harp all the time, because the jumps are so big you would miss them if you didn't. Then you need to look at the conductor at the same time. You practically have to learn his parts from memory to be able to follow everything that is going on. Often the sections are divided in numbers, bulk 1, bulk 2, and so on. And when you sit there and look at your instrument you can't see when the conductor moves on. Other than that he has of course some very nice melodic things, nothing that goes against the instrument at all I think.

*S: But his approach to the harp is unusually conventional when you compare to his other compositions. It is of course based on sound qualities, but he himself said it was his little sweet butterfly?*

E: Yes, I remember when he had just moved into 'Grotten' (a villa at the royal grounds for chosen artists to live). He held a concert then and the neighbor (King Olav V) came strolling by with two adjutants. Maybe 10-15 people were there. Then I performed for him and it was Gulle Egge who sang. This was the world premier of *Den første sommerfugl*. Afterwards I was allowed to speak to the "neighbor". It was said with a smile always that 'the neighbor came strolling by.'

*S: Nordheim often gave musical gifts to others. He is also one of these composers who never said much about the way he wanted things to be performed.*

E. No he didn't. I can't remember that there were any difficulties either. The butterfly is very straightforward musically.

*S: Yes, it is very beautiful. We will end our conversation here for now. Thank you so much, Elisabeth!*

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