



**Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky** (1840–1893)

SOUVENIR de Florence (op. 70)

I. Allegro con spirito 11:12

side C II. Adagio cantabile e con moto 10:11

side D III. Allegretto moderato 6:27

IV. Allegro vivace 7:31

**Carl Nielsen** (1865–1931)

Ved en Ung Kunstners Baare (fs. 58)

*At the Bier of a Young Artist*

— Andante lamentoso 4:42

**TRONDHEIMSOLISTENE**

Øyvind Gimse / Geir Inge Lotsberg



Recorded at Selbu Church, Norway, October 2011 by Lindberg Lyd AS

recording producer and balance engineer MORTEN LINDBERG recording technician BEATRICE JOHANNESSEN musical director ØYVIND GIMSE executive producers STEINAR LARSEN and MORTEN LINDBERG editing, mix and mastering MORTEN LINDBERG vinyl pre-mastering and DMM disc cutting HENDRIK PAULER pressed by PALLAS GERMANY artwork HÅKON GULLVÅG graphic design MORTEN LINDBERG Financially supported by NTNU - Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim Municipality, Fond for lyd og bilde and Fond for Utøvende Kunstnere. 2L-090C-LP made in Norway 2012 Lindberg Lyd AS

TRONDHEIMSOLISTENE **Souvenir** part II



# Auditory bliss

by Erik Føsnes Hansen

How do we listen to music? Indeed, how do we listen to anything? Our use of our hearing consists primarily of a conscious shutting out of our minds the things we don't want to hear.

Because the ear is always open; we can't shut it the way we can our eyes – only at night is our hearing turned down

somewhat, but it is never turned completely off. Even with our eyes closed, even in sleep, our hearing is our sensual lifeline back to the reality that surrounds us. It is our last line of defence. It nudges us and fetches us back from sleep whether to the whimpering of a hungry infant, the alarm clock going off or (presumably once in a distant past) to the hungry growl of a bear heading into the family cave. From the moment of our birth to the moment of our death, as long as our hearing works, we are surrounded by sound from all sides. We are afloat in an ocean of sound. We have no choice.

That is why sound can feel so insistent, so almost rude. From the downstairs neighbour's incessant fixing-upping to the oaf across the street from whose windows music always pours on beautiful summer evenings. It isn't the music that is the problem – the oaf may have an excellent taste in music; what offends is how the insistent the act is. He gives us no choice. Or rather, there is the choice between going over, ringing his doorbell and then killing him, or shutting our own windows. Those are the choices we can live with.

And yet, most of the time living in this lifelong cacophony is fine. Most of the things we shut out, we relegate to the subliminal parts of our consciousness: the noise of traffic, swarms of people, footfall on the pavement, the computer fan, the sound of the breeze, raindrops, the voices of children on the playground down the street, the clatter of cutlery in the café – it all becomes one big hum, a backdrop which makes for a sort of silence of the mind. We even experience a feeling of security as we are carried by the stream of the big and small sounds of our everyday lives. Occasionally, young children from an urban environment may feel scared the first time they come to the wide open spaces at winter and hear: nothing. The silence in the mountains can seem terrifying. “The great, white silence,” Nansen termed it. It is related to eternity, to soundless space, to the absence of life, to death.

But the mountains are not altogether quiet. The hearing readjusts, recalibrates to new levels. The whooshing of wind over a snow dune. The squeaking of footsteps in snow. The creaking of a cabin wall. Dogs barking in the distance. When you then return to town, the constant whoosh of sounds suddenly feels like nothing so much as noise – until after a couple of days we no longer hear it: we have got used to it once more.

Some sounds speak to us directly; they carry a meaning, are more than just a sound amid sounds. The human voice is one such sound, always wanting to impart something; it engages our minds and hearts, whether it speaks to us directly or is merely a snippet we pick up in passing down a street: “... and then I said to Gunnar, Gunnar I said, don't you realize what she's getting up to on the side?” And we walk on, pondering whatever that could be. Even when we are spoken to in a language we don't understand, our inner analyst is launched into intense, urgent action: is the conductor trying to tell us that our ticket isn't valid? Have we got on the wrong train? Have we gone too far? Should we have gone yesterday? Doesn't he like us? What is it he wants from us?

Some sounds want to engage us, and engage us directly. Music is one such sound. Like the human voice it carries meaning, a manmade content in the form of harmonies and melodic lines, rhythm, tempo, and volume, all of which becomes the medium for a much deeper content, one of feeling. Sadness, joy, triumph, solemnity, melancholy, hope, despair, mirth, drama: music brings us all of this in its web of time, timbre, and pitch. But, depending on how it is produced, it brings us something else besides: the musician's personality, the character of the time and place.

Maybe that is why so many experience a vast, qualitative, difference between music that has been recorded and music that is being performed now. The recorded music is unchanging. It doesn't yield and flex. It doesn't change according to the situation but constitutes a fixed matrix, which is always the same. It is also usually characterized by being perfect; any of

the little hitches and glitches that will normally accompany the live performance have been rubbed out. Music performed live on the other hand adapts to the situation, physically – in the form of the acoustics and other characteristics of the venue – but also in a sort of

meeting of minds as it encounters the audience. These can be many or they can be few, they can be young or old, interested or indifferent. The musicians invariably adapt to the atmosphere in that moment, the genius loci – the spirit of the place – as the ancient Romans would have said. And their expression is unique, it is created then and there; the situation cannot be reproduced. A different form of dynamic arises between the performers and the audience when the performance is live.

You can feel the difference when a famous Oslo-café no longer allows musicians in the galleries to entertain the guests, but have replaced them with a CD which whirrs and becomes part of the backdrop. Even if the volume is lower than when the café's band is playing, the sound is more insistent because it is mechanical. It becomes irksome, wearying. It doesn't yield and flex, but perseveres; it doesn't address us directly as individuals but speaks to a sort of abstract general public. The warmth, the immediacy and the intimacy is missing: because there's no one there.

Add to that the difference in sound quality between an instrument and a loudspeaker – I am thinking particularly of acoustic instruments here. Supposing you don't have

loudspeakers worth a minor fortune, positioned at the perfect distance from where you are sitting, and supposing you also don't possess a hifi as expensive as a Mercedes Benz, there will invariably be a marked – or at best, a subtle – difference between the music from an instrument and the music from a box. To me that difference has always seemed most comparable to the difference between the heat from a fireplace and that from an electric heater. It's possible that I am imagining this, but personally I very much feel life emanating from live music. The vibrations of the cello string, the silvery breath of a flute, the sharp division of air coming from the reed – these are extensions of the organism; the musician is living his music; his personality, indeed his very physicality, down to his gestures and breathing, emanate through them. That is what makes them so human; they become almost voice-like. They fill the room and the people in it.

These qualities are difficult, perhaps even impossible, to capture in a recording. The recording is done – provided what is recorded isn't a live performance – under controlled, often slightly sterile conditions. The musicians haven't dressed up for the occasion; it's often early in the day, and there's no audience to give that buzz, to provide those little coughs, those craned necks and that breathing. And of course there is also no applause. Instead there is a man in a loudspeaker who says 'cut' and 'whenever you're ready'. He isn't even in the same room as them. Every so often the conductor leaves his ensemble and runs out to him to listen to the latest attempt. If there is a window in the recording booth (but there isn't always), you can see them talking, gesticulating. I remember an old philharmonic musician referring to this silent situation as “the fish tank” – incidentally he never said which side of the pane he felt he was on.

Recording music does, in other words, present challenges greater than the purely technical – that is to say, challenges beyond the mere mechanical reproduction which undoubtedly

has become very good in later years. The recording scenario is in itself frequently different from when you play live to an audience. The listening situation is similarly different. Often it is reduced from a shared experience to a highly individual affair; perhaps you are just two or three people listening, but often only: I. I alone. The music carried by the recording is intended for me. As audience I get a completely different angle on the matrix constituted by the recording. It requires more from my powers of re-creation and more mindfulness on my part than does the concert hall experience.

In a way this is not unlike the novel; the novel and the situation in which its reader finds him or herself. Like the recording, the novel is always an unchanging matrix which the reader relates to. In reading, art appreciation is a highly individual, hermetic condition, and the reader must endow each word with a tone, infuse each character with life and give light to the vistas. The writer must make a very detailed inventory of his artistic effects in order that his text may work on this micro level, and have the right dimensions, depth and personality. Intimacy. A voice.

The record producer is faced with the same challenge. The key to all good recordings is to be found, I think, in realizing the profound difference between a live performance and a recording, and not trying to bridge that gap. It's about discovering what only the recording can do. To do so the producer must become an active participant in the musical process itself, on a par with the musicians and the conductor. The producer has to discover the timbre and acoustic pattern, which will bring out the more abstract qualities of the music – bringing us closer to the innermost intensions of the composer, to the perfect resonance with the composer's perfect score. Music – detached from its immediacy in the now, in the room, with all its little hitches and glitches – defined as something finite, something repeatable.

TrondheimSolistene are not only a leading and living chamber orchestra, but are also always looking for new ways to communicate music through those recordings to which they devote so much time and prestige. In order to avoid those frequently static acoustic patterns which so often characterize classical recordings (first violinists on the left, and so forth and so tutti on) and attempt a rapprochement to the music so that it doesn't merely copy the musicians' places on the dais, producer Morten Lindberg has taken some interesting measures on this recording – measures that became real challenges for the musicians and which tested the ways in which they usually perform. Indeed one might even say that it tested their very unity of execution. During the recording of Tchaikovsky's *Serenade for Strings*, the musi-

cians were separated from their usual seating partners and placed in a circle, in the middle of Selbu Church, all of them at an equal distance from the microphones which were in the middle of the room (along with the painter Håkon Gullvåg). Such a method tests the musicians' abilities both as soloists and as an ensemble, and it must have felt quite daunting to start with. But as the truly excellent orchestra they are, TrondheimSolistene soon arrived at a new artistic freedom in this situation and started to make music.

To the listening ear this makes for a startlingly different experience. The melodic lines come at you from every side, detached from any fixed sense of direction. And aided by the acoustics provided by the medieval walls of Selbu Church, the work becomes something which seems to soar about you, or in which you yourself seem to soar. Perhaps, you think, this is how Tchaikovsky himself heard it as he wrote it down, detached from the starboard

and port of the dais. But it can also be seen as a new way of recording where the production itself takes on a more active role in the music. Adding qualities to the recording which only a recording can possess. It is an excellent solution to the dilemmas which confront recorded music. Just as the parallel release of a LP-version opens to the unique auditory depth which the vinyl adds to the listening experience.

There is, interestingly, an early recording of Tchaikovsky's voice, done by the company Edison in Moscow in 1890. Several of his musician friends participate on the recording which lasts just under a minute, and they cheer and sing and make snide remarks, like kids with a tape recorder; towards the end Tchaikovsky even whistles. What about the sound quality? Let's just say that it has come a long way since then. It sounds as if they are talking into a tin and have sore throats. They even sing off key. They obviously don't take this seriously, but make cuckoo-sounds for the fun of it. These few, jarring seconds of recorded, preserved sound paradoxically become a memento of a time when recordings were still not really in existence, a time when music was always a deliberate act. A time of greater silence and a different sort of sound. Presumably there was also a different relationship between the expectations of the artist's technical virtuosity and the expectations of his personality – allowing his personality to make up for more than it could today. The dizzying progress of the recording technique in the past hundred years has without a doubt raised our expectations of technical proficiency on the part of the musician: a bum note, or a note just slightly off, is forever captured on a recording as if set in stone.

An ear graces the covers of this recording. It is an amalgamation of Tchaikovsky's and Carl Nielsen's ears, based on pictures from their youths, painted by Håkon Gullvåg – presumably after he had stood for so long and listened to TrondheimSolistene in the church that he felt like one great, big ear himself. The ear is very much an illustration of the rapprochement on this production. For the last ten years artistic director Øyvind Gimse has put his distinctive mark on TrondheimSolistene, and you sense his musical ideals in both their live performances and recordings such as this. Along with Geir Inge Lotsberg and producer Morten Lindberg, Gimse and the orchestra have chartered new auditory landscapes with this recording. In a sense the recording can be said to come across as disembodied and distilled down to a pure listening experience, a pure ear experience.

As Gullvåg's illustration suggests, what we as listeners encounter here is sheer auditory bliss. TrondheimSolistene take a new step towards bridging the gap between themselves and their audience. It is not the gap between the live performance and the recording which they attempt to close. It is the gap between the recording and the living, ever open human ear.

translated from Norwegian by Mette Petersen

## TRONDHEIMSOLISTENE

### violin

Geir Inge Lotsberg

Daniel Turcina

Anja Aubert Bang

Stina Elisabet Andersson

Anders Larsen

Anna Adolffsson Vestad

Cathrine Egeris Søndberg

Hilde Kolstad Huse (part I)

Åse Våg Aaknes (part I)

Tora Stølan Ness (part I)

Karl Jonatan Lilja (part I)

Ingrid Wisur (part I)

Fride Bakken Johansen (part II)

Sigmund Tvette Vik (part II)

Erling Skaufel (part II)

### cello

Øyvind Gimse

Tabita Berglund

Katrine Pedersen (part I)

Cecilie Koch (part II)

Jaroslav Havel (part II)

### bass

Erik Løwendahl (part I)

Rolf Hoff Baltzersen (part II)

