

UTOPIAS

— Radical Interpretations of Iconic Works for Percussion

Kjell Tore Innervik performs Morton Feldman's *The King of Denmark* and Iannis Xenakis's *Psappha*, exploring the intimate performing space with large format recording techniques, engaging the listener in immersive audio. The Xenakis was recorded twice: once from the perspective of an intimate listener, and a second time literally "over-head", giving a first-persona perspective. The difference not only in microphone technique but also in the performer's state of mind and how he projects his playing has a profound impact on the listening experience.

- 1 Psappha — 2nd persona
- 2 Psappha — 1st persona
- 3 The King of Denmark

Recorded in DXD 24bit/352.8kHz

5.1 DTS-HD MA 24/192kHz 5.1.4 Dolby Atmos 48kHz

2.0 LPCM 24/192kHz 5.1.4 Auro-3D 96kHz

+ mShuttle MP3 and MQA



2L^{|4|}

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pure audio



AURO 3D

DOLBY ATMOS

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UTOPIAS

Music exists only for a moment, for example while a performer plays an instrument and someone listens. What happens, simply stated, is that sound waves are emitted from the instrument through the air and engage the two eardrums of a listener; or, to be more exact, different frequency components are projected in different directions from the instrument, and some of these components reach the listener's ears as *direct sound*, while others reach them as *reflections* from the architecture surrounding the instrument. When you listen to this recording you are bringing the music into existence. You can play the recording as often as you wish, and each repetition has the potential of constituting a new listening experience. When impulses from the nerve-sensors in your inner ear reach your brain, and you sense these impulses as a sound-quality, a harmony, a melodic phrase, a rhythm, then – and only then – is the emotional music-experience born. When the performer stops, the music is silenced. So music is *ephemeral* – it exists only while it is being performed *and* while it is being listened to.

As a listener you have to trust the whole performance situation: that the composer wants you to engage in precious experiences, and that the performer is committed to enabling such experiences in a faithful way, and you have to trust both of them not to want to harm you, either when making the music very loud or when making it extremely soft. By giving the performance situation this trust, you humbly submit yourself to what the music “tells” you. Humility helps you to defeat the ever-threatening cynicism that can reduce the chance of an artistic experience. We use the word “tell” deliberately, because you might think the story told is purely subjective. Of course, what the music tells you is partly formed by *your* references, what *you* have learnt, which kind of experiences that have influenced *your* mindset. But music is also a social thing, bearing its own context through a shared history and shared aesthetic discussions over time, by sharing different social praxes in approaching music and musical works. Music is thus an *inter-subjective* experience.

The two pieces presented in these recordings represent two extremes – loud and soft – and, on embarking on our project, we saw them as a perfect choice, both in isolation and taken together. Our starting point was the truism that different media, such as a concert performance, a phonographic recording, or visual transmission through television or video-media, require and elicit distinctly different interpretations of a given musical piece.

The discipline of critical listening lay at the heart of the project right from the start. Our team aimed to create situations where the listener could listen to music in a designed situation or environment that facilitated the experience of the interpretation's qualities. Exploring the intimate performing space with large format recording techniques and engaging the listener in immersive audio, we decided to record *Psappha* twice: once from the perspective of an intimate listener facing the performer, and a second time literally “over-head”, giving a first-persona perspective. The difference not only in microphone technique but also in the performer's state of mind and how he projects his playing has a profound impact on the listening experience.

This was especially relevant for Feldman's *The King of Denmark*, which is not composed to be performed and projected in a big concert hall. Feldman indicates that the music should be played by fingers, hands and arms (without beaters as is normal) attributing a sensuous tactility not only to the performer, but even extended to the listener. We had to create a “private space” with our audience close to the performance set-up. We drew on the concept of micro-utopias – temporary and small-scale “moments” – originally proposed by Nicolas Bourriaud.

A utopia, a non-existent place, is a projection where there are no constraints of practicality, nothing to hold you back. Such is our approach to the music on this album. In each piece of music we endeavour, using — as we explain more fully below — all the resources at our disposal, to unite the composer, performer, recording artist and listener, and to

take them at least some of the way to a utopia. We envisage him or her experiencing a whole series of small-scale moments that offer a projection of the music where there are no constraints, and where the experience aspires to a kind of mini-utopia. It therefore seemed fitting to use the Greek symbol μ , often used as a prefix denoting smallness, in a typographical “subtitle” to this album: μ topias.

We soon found that our determination to create different interpretations in a meaningful way drew us into a host of other activities, such as finding all we could about the background of the piece, examining the aesthetic context of the composer and making a deep analysis of the score. Instead of creating fancy interpretations, transformations, variations, and so on, out of the blue, *we* had to find something the piece wanted to tell us. We were bold enough to see this as a radical step, and this *radicality* transformed our quest away from extravagances and outrageousness, into what is, in fact, the original meaning of “radical”: that is, an inherent quality. The etymology of “radical” is the Latin “radix” (= root). So we were *searching for roots*. We ourselves had to be humble – just as we wanted our listeners to be – and had to submit ourselves to what could be extracted from shared knowledge of both musical pieces. *We* had to expand our knowledge of themes, topics, backgrounds, stories related to the pieces. For example, for Feldman’s *The King of Denmark* this quest could embrace many things: waves on different types of beach, horse-rides in a cityscape, proximity issues, the deportation and mass murder of Jews during the Second World War, the “Stolperstein” stones set in pavements commemorating deported individuals, the ritual meal on the Sabbath, weightlessness performance (zero gravity), and so on.

Xenakis’s *Psappha* demanded another avenue of enquiry: amongst other things into Sappho’s poetry and its prosody, the formalization of musical structures, ancient Greek philosophy, modern architecture, the Rumanian instrument *Toacă* (called *Simantra* by Xenakis: a plate of wood or metal used as a bell in orthodox cloisters in Romania), popular

culture in the streets and markets of Athens and on the Greek islands. Such investigations in our project we labelled *peripatetic explorations* – explorations conducted without a pre-determined goal and with a willingness to shift from one line of enquiry to another, in this way enabling us to experience discoveries and revelations. Through such explorations we defined a huge set of *possible interpretations* – different ways we could interpret the piece of music, setting up an angle of meaning, a take, such as: *what if the piece was all about the stepping stones?* Or we could combine a number of different meanings or stories, thus in fact creating additional meaning. Most of these possible interpretations never came into existence in the sense of being performed and listened to – they just remained in the pool of what could be done. However, a few developed further into actual realizations.

All this exploration took place before the performer started the normal preparatory process of working through and rehearsing the score and internalizing the music. Our performer, Kjell Tore Innervik, went to extremes: his scrutiny of the score, his rehearsals, his selection of instruments, and his gradual arrival at a possible interpretation involved a constant re-appraisal of his decisions – he had to return to the score again and again, reconsider his playing, and review his choices regarding instrumentation and set-up. And he constantly wanted input on his decisions. Every time we entered his studio the set-up had changed and new musical statements were emerging.

The oscillation between basic performance skills and putting interpretation in focus was guided all the way by the never fully answered question: *why?* Why do we select this specific interpretation? Why would that be interesting for anybody? Trying to answer such “impossible” questions sent the rest of the team back to consider the performativity of interpretation, and Kjell Tore Innervik back to re-rehearse basic performance skills. We found we could create an endless range of new conceptual frameworks. It seems to be impossible to exhaust the potential of developing interpretations. Therefore the recordings of these pieces by Xenakis and Feldman should be thought of as “windows” – each giving a

specific interpretation. They are results of our process at a specific time, in a specific setting – ephemerality turning back upon us. To continue the process would give rise to different interpretations. So by opening two windows – that is, two different listening perspectives of *Psappha* – we share insights with you, and you can participate in our exploration.

Comparing the scores of *Psappha* and Morton Feldman's *The King of Denmark* reveals some similarities but marked differences. Both pieces are unconventionally notated on graph paper. Xenakis uses the grid as a way to notate a neutral succession of beats. He tries to avoid the traditional notion of bars. What he calls a *sieve* is basically a mathematical way of describing which beats are active, or “present”, and which are not. Thus his active beats are notated *on* the gridlines. Feldman, however, in *The King of Denmark*, notates musical events *between* gridlines. By studying some of his more conventionally notated scores, we found it significant that Feldman hardly ever lets musical action happen on a downbeat – he takes great care to place the event suspended between downbeats. This, of course, is a significant difference from Xenakis's aesthetics. Another very obvious difference is that Feldman prescribes the dynamics to be “extremely low, and as equal as possible”, whereas the dynamic range in *Psappha* goes from medium dynamics (*p* – *piano*) to extremely loud (*ffff* – *fortissimo*). So this is a significant difference. Listening to the recording of Feldman you might even want to turn the volume down (!) to recreate his “extremely low”.

Feldman is even less precise than Xenakis in his indications as to which instruments the performer should play. Selecting instruments, in Feldman's scenario, is a long and transformative process. It draws in not only the stories the performer associates with a specific instrument (for Kjell Tore Innervik an old fish-and-meatball tin recalled memories from his childhood), but also the stories which are activated in the performance context (for example, artillery shells mean something different to a Palestinian audience in a refugee camp than to, say, a traditional Norwegian audience). The positioning of the chosen

instruments in our recording was not only important for the distribution of sound in the horizontal plane, but also necessary for extension in the vertical plane. A truly trans-disciplinary process showed us that the otherwise so obvious visual design was not as important as the contextual and conceptual design.

The beauty of the Recording Arts is that there is no fixed formula and no blueprint. It all comes out of the music. Every project starts out by digging into the score and talking with the composer, if contemporary, and the musicians. It is not our task as producers and engineers to try to re-create a concert situation with all its commercial limitations. On the contrary, we should make the ideal out of the recording medium and create the strongest illusion, the sonic experience that emotionally moves the listener to a better place.

It is a classic dream – to transfer the concert hall to one's private home. To a large extent we in fact manage to do this, but we always reach a point where we have to concede that the traditional stereo perspective has intrinsic limitations. In 2004 Lindberg Lyd began to explore surround sound. First of all we thought in terms of a conservative format which recreated the spaciousness of a room. After that, we started getting a little more aggressive. It was not until we dropped our determination to reconstruct the physical conditions of a performing environment, and instead pursued the music's emotional core, that we really succeeded in recreating the original “genuine article”, independent of time and place.

First of all, this was a mental about-turn, and it didn't lead to any immediate changes on the technical side. But over time it engendered a completely new approach to every single project. We now seek the musical core with an intensity we could not match earlier, and we make use of perspectives that step out of reality and deliberately create an illusion that has the power to get to the listener in a very direct way. In practice this means, among other things, that one discards the old idea of a concert, and makes no attempt to reconstruct its physical conditions. Such factors as the distance between the performer's

podium and the audience cease to have any importance, and the musicians no longer have to think about projecting the music out into the space around them for the sake of the recording. The texture of the music, its timbre and the other values that constitute its sound are brought into focus locally and directly in intimate communication with the listener. This proximity requires not only new technical solutions, but also a methodical collaboration between the composer and the instrumentalists performing the music.

The most extreme consequence of this approach brings about a situation where the recording venue as a physical entity becomes less central. True, its size and acoustic properties are still extremely important insofar as they can impact the resulting sound by virtue of such factors as sound reflected from hard surfaces, frequency spectrum and reverb time. But even more important is the dynamic space in the room or venue where the performance is moulded in direct communication between performers and listeners. From the point of view of microphone technology and set-ups this is the space into which we tread, and we often end up in the very same place a conductor would have chosen. In our view this development has taken the listener from a passive and “distant” relationship to an active perspective where he or she chooses their own focus. This gives the listener access to details and lines in the music that were hidden earlier, or were at best only diffusely registered in traditional recording production.

Recording in spacious acoustic venues like large concert halls, churches and cathedrals is actually where we can make the most intimate recordings. The qualities we seek in large rooms are not necessarily a big reverb, but rather the openness you can get when there are no close reflecting walls. Making an ambient and beautiful recording is the path of least resistance. Searching the fine edge between direct contact and openness – that’s the real challenge! A really good recording should be able to bodily move the listener. This core quality of audio production is made by choosing the right venue for the repertoire, and, having chosen it, by balancing the image by means of careful positioning of microphones

and musicians relative to each other *in* the venue. There is no method available today that can reproduce the exact perception and listening experience of attending a live performance. This leaves us, when it comes to recording music, with the art of illusion. As recording engineers and producers we need to do exactly the same as any good musician does: interpret the music and the composer’s intentions and adapt to the surroundings where we perform. That’s where immersive audio comes in.

Immersive Audio is a completely new conception of the musical experience. Recorded music is no longer a matter of a fixed one- or two-dimensional setting. It is a three-dimensional enveloping situation. Surround sound and immersive audio are like a sculpture that you can literally move around and relate to spatially; surrounded by music you can move about in the aural space and choose angles, vantage points and positions. Rather than “reproducing” a concert situation we consider the art of recording a discipline in its own right. It gives us the chance to place the listener in an ideal position so he or she becomes an actual party to the event. We can optimize the energy of the music, reveal all the small nuances, avoid disturbing distractions and thereby maximize the emotional impact. The ideal and personalised position is, so to speak, the seat no member of an audience has been able to afford – until now!

For the first-persona perspective of *Psappha* we went as far as considering using small microphones worn on the performer – even to the extent of fixing miniature capsules on his fingers – but this approach was discarded because of all the unwanted side effects and various other shortcomings. Even when capturing sound over-head – the sound the performer himself hears – we can only try to *emulate*, but cannot fully *transfer*, the complex neurological experience. The performer, after all, has a more or less preconceived mental timeline of the music to come: his muscles prepare and execute a multitude of subtle movements, and there is a haptic feedback from the motoric work performed. All we can do with today’s understanding of our sonic perception is to follow up on the illusion.

Multi-channel spot-microphone recordings entered the world of classical music in the 1970s and 80s. An alternative is, of course, to seek inspiration in the simpler microphone techniques of the 50s and 60s, where the “Decca Tree” of spaced omnidirectional microphones left questions of internal balance and dynamics to the performers. Our three-dimensional 2L-cube is inspired by this approach. The array is scaled to the size of the ensemble, to the volume of the hall and to the defined recording space for each recording. When preparing for distribution we target the playback situation with separate mixes. For Auro-3D or Dolby Atmos each microphone in the 5.1.4 array is relayed directly to its according loudspeaker. With diminishing numbers of loudspeakers we do not sum or fold-down. We take away sources. So for 5.1 only the lower bed of microphones is active. Then it is usually only the front left and front right microphones playing in stereo. Possibly with a slight texture added from the rear microphones. Pure, clean and minimalistic. Our philosophy is simple: one microphone straight to one speaker. The important aspect is to configure the set-up so time of arrival is captured and released in natural order.

Iannis Xenakis said of himself, “You see, I thought I was misborn, centuries too late.” His date of birth is uncertain; it was in May, in either 1921 or 1922. He was born to parents of Greek heritage in the town of Braila in Romania. His mother died during his early childhood and he was sent to a boarding school on the Greek island of Spetsai. Even though he was attracted to classical music, he prepared for the entrance exams of the Athens Polytechnic University, living in Athens and studying physics and mathematics. Nevertheless, he also took piano lessons, and then studied counterpoint and music theory.

From 1940 to 1947 his life became more and more entangled with politics. He became a member of the communist party, and soon joined the resistance movement, fighting first against the Italian invaders and later the German occupation forces. At the end of the war, with Germany defeated and the occupation over, the communist partisans refused to surrender their weapons, and in the ensuing civil war Xenakis was seriously wounded, losing

the sight of one eye. He was hospitalized. In 1947 he was condemned to death as a terrorist. His father helped him to acquire a false passport, and he fled first to Italy, and later to Paris.

Xenakis soon got a job in the workshop of the famous architect Le Corbusier, a job he kept until 1959, working on several important architectural projects. He also tried to follow composition classes with Arthur Honegger and Darius Milhaud, but was discouraged by their conservative and theoretical demands. Then he approached Olivier Messiaen, who immediately recognized that the 30-year-old man in front of him should not study classical music theory, and he encouraged Xenakis instead to invest his qualifications in mathematics and architecture in his compositional work.

Xenakis composed the orchestral pieces *Metastaseis* (1953-54) and *Pithopraktha* (1955-56). *Metastaseis* was premiered at the 1955 Donaueschingen festival, with Hans Rosbaud conducting, and was given a tumultuous reception: the public divided for and against. Xenakis now worked more and more as a composer, and from 1962 he received a growing number of commissions and his works were performed with increasing frequency. During the following fifteen years he composed some of his most personal works. The unique aesthetic of his music won worldwide recognition. He died in 2001, after a few years of accelerating illness.

Morton Feldman was born in 1926 to parents of Russian-born Jewish heritage. He grew up in Queens, New York, and had piano lessons with the pianist Vera Maurina Press. Already as a child he was determined to compose music. From an early age he therefore received composition lessons, from Wallingford Riegger and Stephan Wolpe. The crucial point in his early career was his almost mythological meeting with John Cage in 1950. After a performance of Webern's Symphony by the New York Philharmonic they met quite by chance when leaving the concert. Feldman later visited Cage, and showed him a string quartet he had composed. Cage asked Feldman some questions

about how he composed the music, and when Feldman shyly answered, “I don’t know how I made it!” Cage jumped up and down, and with a kind of high monkey squeal screeched, “Isn’t that marvellous? Isn’t that wonderful? It is so beautiful, and he doesn’t know how he made it.” Cage introduced Feldman to the New York art scene and to Cedar Tavern where they met many of the leading abstract expressionist painters.

Feldman’s use of unconventional notation correlates with his interest in these New York artists in the fifties: Marc Rothko and Jackson Pollock being the best known. Like them, he wanted to avoid the dramaturgical chain of cause-effect, and instead let the music be as untouched as possible by human intentionality. The way he ‘throws’ the numbers in the grid of *The King of Denmark* is not unlike Pollock’s drip painting. And the almost silenced musical events – enhanced by his indication that they should be played only by the performer’s “fingers, hand or any part of his arm” – can be compared to the vibrant soft colours and soft-edged rectangles in the paintings of Rothko.

Until 1972, when the conductor of the Buffalo Symphony Orchestra, Lukas Foss, succeeded in finding a teaching position for him at the State University of New York, Feldman was dependent for an income on working in his father’s shop. In 1974, however, his post at the university was upgraded to a professorship – the Édgard Varèse Professorship – a post he was to hold for the rest of his life, and at last Feldman could concentrate fully on his compositional work. He founded the June in Buffalo Festival and became central in leading the Center of the Creative and Performing Arts and the ensemble Creative Associates together with the percussionist Jan Williams.

Although Feldman was enjoying success and was receiving prestigious commissions he began to ask himself – towards the end of the seventies – if the role of the composer was simply to entertain the audience: *Is music an art form?* He gave up the audience – as he formulated it – and won a “new” audience. From then on – not having to concern

himself with the traditional audience – his works grew considerably in length: his String Quartet (1979), for example, lasts for almost eighty minutes. His Second String Quartet (1983) is even longer, extending to more than six hours. Feldman’s last years saw him withdrawing more and more from his teaching position in Buffalo, dissatisfied with the financial terms of his position. He became artist in residence at the California Institute of the Arts in 1985, and subsequently at the University of California, San Diego, holding this last position until his death in 1987.

Kjell Tore Innervik, percussionist from Narvik in Arctic Norway, graduated in 2004 from the Norwegian Academy of Music in Oslo with a Diploma in Solo Percussion, and has since explored music, performance and music making in an ever deeper search for the performer within himself. During a three-year fellowship at the Norwegian Academy of Music, he commissioned music for his artistic research project *Quartertonamarimba*. He continued at the Academy with a four-year post-doctorate exploring sound, extended percussion instruments, interfaces and electronics through improvisation, and co-creating music in close collaboration with composers. Innervik has also given the world premiere of numerous works for percussion.

Innervik has said that he was drawn to an interest in the roots of musicianship and to an exploration of the field of interpretation. “I wanted to put our interpretation of modern classics in a wider perspective,” he says, “and to give my own shake-up to the tradition. This meant I had to be ready to take risks, and to work hard at my craft. One of the paths I took was into the music of Xenakis and Feldmann, and a sample of the results can be heard on this album. I say ‘a sample’ because I devoted approximately a thousand hours to each piece, with preparations, careful thought, explorations, continual testing, rehearsing, re-thinking, more rehearsing: all in all, constantly searching further and further until I felt I was free to give a voice – a sound – to my choices, and to physically perform them into audible expressions.”











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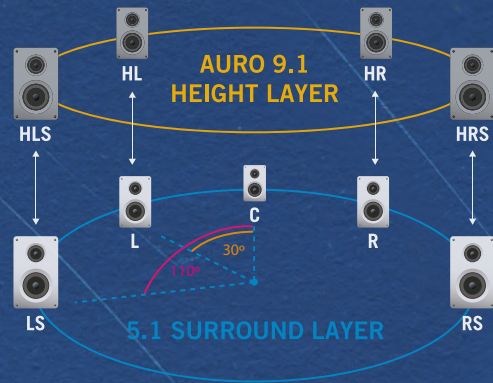
Radical Interpretations of Iconic Musical Works for Percussion was an interdisciplinary artistic research project hosted at the Norwegian Academy of Music (2013–2017) in collaboration with the Oslo Academy of the Arts, the Oslo School of Architecture and Design, Westerdals Oslo ACT and 2L through the Norwegian Artistic Research Programme.

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 5.1 DTS HD MA 24/192kHz  5.1.4 Dolby Atmos 48kHz
 2.0 LPCM 24/192kHz  5.1.4 Auro-3D 96kHz

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This recording was made by Lindberg Lyd AS with DPA and AEA microphones and HORUS converters to a PYRAMIX workstation on Ravenna AoIP. Complete system on JMF Audio PCD302 power line conditioner. Digital xTreme Definition is a professional audio format that brings analogue qualities in 24 bit at 352.8 kHz sampling rate.

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UTOPIAS — Radical Interpretations of Iconic Works for Percussion

- 1 Iannis Xenakis: Psappha — 2nd persona 18:09
- 2 Iannis Xenakis: Psappha — 1st persona 18:03
- 3 Morton Feldman: The King of Denmark — intimate 9:51
Kjell Tore Innervik, percussion