

Halvor Haug

(b. Trondheim, 20. february 1952)

Sonatina for Violin and Piano (1973)

First performance: Stange, 6. March 1977

Simon Walter Hauge (violin) and Darlén Bakke (piano)

Halvor Haug grew up in Bærum (near Oslo). He learned to play the piano and the trumpet, playing the latter for several years in a local wind band. His theory teacher at the conservatoire, Kolbjørn Ofstad (1917 - 1996), recognised a creative talent in young Halvor and encouraged him to write some music of his own. This resulted in three small piano pieces which Ofstad asked him to orchestrate. Two of the orchestrations were performed in the Oslo University Aula by the conservatoire orchestra, thus giving Haug the first taste of what would become the main focus of his creative life: symphonic music.

Further studies in Helsinki brought him, in 1973, in contact with Einar Englund (1916 – 1999) and Erik Bergman (1911 – 2006) who were his teachers for a year. Bergman was one of the pioneers of modernism in Finland. Englund (one of the foremost Finnish symphonists in the generation after Sibelius) taught Haug mainly orchestration. These two impulses proved to be of great importance for the development of Haug's artistic personality. In 1978 Haug received advice from the English composer Robert Simpson (1921 - 1997), another great symphonist in the second half of the Twentieth Century.

The 1976 work "Symfonisk Bilde" (Symphonic Picture) marks Haug's first truly independent composition, written without outside guidance. Further works such as "Stillhet" (Silence) for strings and the orchestral pieces "Poema Sonoro", "Poema Patetico" and "Furuenes Sang" (Song of the pines) established Haug as one of Norway's foremost symphonic voices. Five symphonies followed, the last three of which were commissioned, nos. 3 and 5 by the Trondheim Symphony Orchestra and no. 4 by the Oslo Philharmonic.

The work "Insignia" was commissioned for the Lillehammer Olympic Games in 1994. It became one of Haug's most often performed works internationally. Other commissions include the symphonic song cycle "Glem aldri henne" ('Never forget her' – Trondheim S.O. for the celebration of the 1000th anniversary of the city of Trondheim, 2000) and "Il Preludio dell' Ignoto" (Ungdomssymfonikerne).

Haug has also written a number of remarkable chamber works, amongst which the most prominent are his two string quartets (1985 and 1996) and the Piano Trio (1995). The second string quartet was premiered at the 1996 Stavanger Chamber Music Festival, where Haug was festival composer that year. Other pieces in smaller format include the early "Sonatine" for violin and piano (1973), "Duetto Bramoso" for violin and guitar (1976) a Brass Quintet from 1981 and "Essay" for alto trombone and string quartet (1987).

Christoph Schlüren, one of Halvor Haug's tireless advocates, has the following to say about his music:

Haug's dissonance treatment, his chordal collisions which flow like molten lava, and his diatonically led, chromatically regulated strong sense of melody are evidence of a composer of immense and refined sensibilities.[...]

Halvor Haug is among the minority of composers who are fully in control of the orchestra as an instrument. He knows how best to calculate orchestral effects and is aware of new instrumental combinations. A virtuoso in the use of orchestral chiaroscuro

and timbral change, he integrates competing qualities of sound in the service of absolute musical drama. [...]

The composer, however, is not party to a philosophy of avoidance or negation, preferring to see his output as one that has emerged from a Nordic symphonic tradition still in its infancy. His grammatical style obeys other rules than those of his predecessors. His syntax is extremely personal. And the content is what holds the whole thing together, having its roots in a uniquely personal soil. Again and again, we recognise that it is not the 'what' but the 'how' which determines the artistic success of any piece of music. Halvor Haug's musical language may be full of allusions, but it never runs out of ideas, just as a good film is more than the sum of the individual scenes. It is up to the listener to identify the main theme, and to align himself with the wishes of the protagonist. For the protagonist is not just an acoustic phenomenon, but a living being. But life itself is inscrutable in that the distinctness of one who lives and that which is lived remains part of the act of living.

(Christoph Schlüren: "Halvor Haug – Music's inscrutable Life" 1997)

The *Sonatina for Violin and Piano* stands as Halvor Haug's op. 1.

As the very existence of this edition proves, we consider it to be a work worthy of publication and, therefore, performance. Although the strengths that would characterize Haug's mature music are here mostly in inchoate form, the *Sonatina* has many charms to its credit. The composer has, however, an ambivalent relationship to the work. He writes:

[...] I consider it as my op. 1 - written when I was 21 years old. It is, of course, not one of my significant works, only an infant beginning. I have not retracted it, because it shows where I began as a composer.

(email to R.O. 7. september 2020)

This explains what Haug refers to as the "strange coda":

Regarding "the Norwegian coda", which actually has nothing to do in there, I believe it might be an expression of my letting go of the Griegian language - the typically Norwegian. I remember getting tired of it early on. It has no real place at the end of the work but, oh well...I let it be as it is, and the ending is, after all, quite beautiful even though it is "misplaced".

(email to R.O. 20. october 2020)

He goes on to criticize his young man's notation, saying that there are many things he would have done differently today.

The single-movement work, lasting roughly eight minutes, begins with a beautifully wistful melody and a simple accompaniment. Both melody and harmony become gradually complex; the texture gradually more contrapuntal, the rhythm gaining vitality. By the time the two instruments, after two respective solos, are back in consort (on measure 58) the idyll of the beginning seems a very distant memory. In spite of the frequent references to the opening material, the language becomes more and more abrasive, with the texture lightening somewhat between mm. 68 and 78. Reaching an apparent dead end on measure 87, the first 23 measures of the piece are reinstated, *verbatim*. It seems all the accumulated turmoil had only been a disguise for an underlying melancholy that permeates the work. After this recapitulation the music goes back to the unrest that had preceded it, before reaching the "strange coda", beginning on m. 135. The music does indeed become a great deal simpler in every respect, and more "Norwegian" than the rest of the work may have suggested. There is even a passing reference to Grieg on m. 139, where the violin

quotes (consciously or not) the opening four notes of the great G minor quartet. Thus plays out Haug's valedictory to the old simultaneously with the beginning of one of the most remarkable creative musical outputs by a late 20th century composer.

The work was premiered in 1977 and recorded in 1979 by the late Simon Walter Hauge and the pianist Darlén Bakke. Regrettably, the recording never made it to print.

Ricardo Odriozola - Bergen 26. October 2020