

makes his living as an organist). The composer so evidently annoyed by all the twaddle about spiritual things in music is the self-same Ruders who is a lover and connoisseur of middle-age music, a music so spiritual that its kingdom is not of this world. Contradictions? Yes, because to abolish contradictions means shutting one's eyes and ears to something real, and that is surely not Ruders' style. His kingdom is of this world, the world of reality, where arithmetic alone won't do the trick and where contradiction is a condition of life for most of us.

Credibility is to believe what you say as you say it; to say things straightforwardly, be they banal or complicated, without tongue-in-cheek, without ironic display, without reservation. Credibility is impulsive and messy, but it is alive. And what is more, credibility is presence. – 'Truth' is a statue in a German park. In the keyword **Corpus cum Figuris** (1984) a glaring, abstract simplicity is forged iron-tight with rancid rhythms and sounds into a kind of apocalyptic vision of horror, while at the same time interacting with the opposites, aristocratic lightness and the gaiety of art itself, in a way which is beyond explanation – it is still music and not holocaust.

As Thomas Mann put it: "art is a game, but you must take it seriously". There has to be distance, that is what artistic technique is all about. But art itself must be all presence.

# HANS ABRAHAMSEN

## Between Two Worlds

One of Rudolph Escher's most famous etchings is called *Three worlds*. It shows naked trees around a pond, fallen leaves on the surface of the water and a fish in the water. The trees are reflected by the water, and through the reflection in the water we see the fish. The two worlds, air and water, meet in a third world: the reflection, the picture as it hangs on the wall.

This picture has for many years hung on Hans Abrahamsen's wall, maybe to remind him constantly of something essential in his music: a music of images emerging from a double mirror, emerging from encounters between separate worlds, a music which considers art a 'third world' – not a dreamland into which you can escape, but an exact expression of the meeting between the inner and the outer world. The music of Abrahamsen is unusually multi-dimensional. You can travel incessantly in the perspectives of this music, from foreground to background and back again, things are never moving unambiguously in one given direction, even though the music is in a state of continuous movement. Things slot into each other like cog-wheels in a multi-dimensional room: – when one thing stops, something else has already started on another level.

This is not only true of the movement in Abrahamsen's septet **Winternacht** (1976-78), which is a deliberate attempt to reflect Escher's water mirror musically, it is true about everything in Abrahamsen. Few, if any, in Danish music deal with the act of creation as coldbloodedly and controlledly as he.. Part of his musical world is always

made up of rigid and millimetre-precise constructions, – grids and fences, regular networks and logically built structures of notes and durations. But this is just one world, for another world is that of the mind, of intuition. When the mind winds and loses itself in the labyrinths of construction, images emerge, unpredictably, magically, like discoveries. Abrahamsen's music comes to life as he searches for meaning, for memories, associations and expressions of warmth in the cold nooks and crannies of construction, and this he does with untiring care and patience. Because the strange thing about notes is that suddenly, and unexpectedly, like a gift from an unknown muse, they create meaning and develop images in our mind. Typically Abrahamsen's images belong to a "third" world like that of Escher. They are neither psychology nor realism, nor are they visions, they are simply images, illustrations of music. Images of music you might once have heard, music from other times and other places, real or dreamt, but never illustrating concrete things from any known world. It is only in this "third" world that you can create images of things which do not exist. Like Magritte's famous painting of a pipe, which bears the inscription: "this is not a pipe!"

We are dealing with a peculiar romanticism here, more like Mahler than Wagner: images of sound emerge like forgotten memories, but where they come from and where they vanish to, what they represent and of what they speak, remains unknown. Abrahamsen's romanticism is adventurous, of the E.T.A. Hoffmann type: he evokes the distant, the promising and the threatening in our images of nature and existence – machines running amok, wonders springing up at an instant and vanishing again at the slightest touch. It is an intangible and foreign romanticism, a vague suspicion, something awakening for a moment, maybe never to reappear. This kind of romanticism is a timeless human discovery, not just part of a historical epoch. There is an underlying solidarity with tradition in Abrahamsen, but he is somebody who remembers, not somebody who sleeps, and the memories of bygone times are filtered through displaced recollections. When the past does surface in this music it is always as an uncertain echo. Expression often arises from reference to the most die-



*Hans Abrahamsen on the old  
fortifications Christianshavns Volde*



hard traditional idioms, but without evoking all the old warhorses usually associated with them. Past and present merge, and the conscious experience of time is repressed.

No title could be more telling than that of Abrahamsen's chamber-orchestra piece **Märchenbilder** (meaning 'images of tales') from 1984. These tales are not recounted as in Schumann, but shown as images. They are 'stories' condensed into instants, and literally suspended in a space outside time. They are superimposed and merged with other 'stories' as if they were photographic slides from a timeless dreamworld. The time-scale of music is not the same as that of the storyteller. The time-scale of music does not go from beginning to end, but is intermittent.

Abrahamsen likes to use the sound of the instrument itself as a means of developing those yellowing pictures in the web of the past that we all carry around. For each instrument is in itself an echo of its past, echoing all the music which has filtered through it in the passage of time. In the **Horn Trio** (1985) the *leitmotif* is the horn itself, and Abrahamsen verges on that which former generations called 'album leaves'. The tiny movements all have titles like the photographs in an album – *Serenade*, *Arabesque*, *Blues*, *Marcia Funebre*, *Scherzo* and '*For the Children*'. Titles which are in Italian, French and English, thus driving our thoughts further along certain tracks, recalling music we have heard or other forgotten experiences. But the music only mirrors these memories, and beneath the surface the movements lead a life of their own, deepening and often contradicting their outward form: the six pictures blend, unveil similarities, become ambiguous, become, in a word, 'modern', because they exist on modern terms: they were composed. Serenades appear and disappear before arousing anybody; sudden outbursts rip into the cobweb of the *Arabesque*; the *Blues* and the *Marcia Funebre* are slow and melancholy as if heard at a long distance; the whispering *Scherzo* develops into a hammering machine; and in the end only a few notes are left, '*For the Children*'.



Abrahamsen's starting point, however, is far from romantic. A student of what was to become known as the "New Simplicity" in Danish music, the heritage descends to him from Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen via Ole Buck; – primarily it was a revolt against that which was felt to be confused and over-ornate in the serial avant-garde of Darmstadt. In his early works he is deliberately trying to rid music of that which Schönberg called "the animal warmth of emotion". Thus he shapes clearly detached and comprehensible episodes which are playfully combined and repeated like a series of slides. For a time, he was the ring-leader in the young generation's revolt against authority and establishment, searching for musical identity in the ever delicate balance between utopia and reality. The orchestral work **Anti Common Market Movement** (1972) achieves purification with utmost and provoking simplicity, protesting against political alienation and advocating an obviously useful logic: a note is simply a note ! The work, in fact, consists of only a few notes, a C-major melody in unison and in equal note-values, repeated over and over again, and only very gradually expanding. The title was later changed to **Symphony in C**, because, as Abrahamsen explained, "music is incapable of being anti-something".

During the mid-seventies, the ambiguous and the compound, the gap between order and unpredictability, became ever more apparent in his music. The string quartet **10 Preludes** is a key work. On the surface, it is yet another easily accessible construction where ten small movements focus almost photographically on a limited selection of materials – a particular idiom or a stylistic landscape. But deeper down, single movements reflect each other in a multiple whole, merging and combining into a microcosmos. This is once again a demonstration of his enviable ability to be both measured and imaginative, meticulous and easy-going at the same time. With precision and method he organises his 'new-simplity' materials (scales, tonal odds-and-ends, tiny well-known idioms etc.), but so lovingly that the material never loses its original vitality and spontaneity. **Stratifications** for orchestra is organised in thoughtful, compound developments of layers and contrasts, and rarely indeed has a shape of such originality been cut from such simple and hackneyed materials.

Scarcity and economy are typical not only of Abrahamsen's music, but also of his output. The explanation for this lies in his method: to lose himself entirely in strategies and rules, totally committing himself to their commands, but likewise always insisting on finding the *music*, on crystallising so much beauty and so much sense into every single musical instant as he possibly can. His temperament has no room for either garrulousness or aesthetic mishaps, but he is no doctrinaire, just an artist whose innate critical sense is bound to make it difficult for him to become a happy creator. His conciseness, however, is not laconic, and his technical work is never fussy; he manages with apparent ease to maintain the mood of a work and to sum up an expression in one single gesture, thus giving depth even to the transitory.

During the eighties a swarm of inner life has been added to the static slide-series of his youth. Small figures and signs recur again and again, together with common myths from the subconscious: flickering activity which suddenly or gradually disintegrates and solidifies into immobility, nightmarishly frozen or overrun by itself; a rising crescendo which disappears without notice into thin air; movements seemingly encountering invisible and impenetrable obstacles. And, more than anything else, falling – continuous, unending, bottomless falling – of notes, of speeds and energies, into a space as endless as the rabbit-hole which led Alice to Wonderland. This falling, brought to the fore in his most recent work, the cello concerto **Lied in Fall**, might explain the melancholy atmosphere which – in spite of all the Mendelssohn-like elf-music and scherzo-ish fluffiness so characteristic of Abrahamsen – remains an undertone in the mind of his listener. Because in all music time perishes, it falls, decays irreversibly never to return. Abrahamsen's music reminds us of this, while also reminding us that the falling never ends, that we are in fact not hurtling down, but floating. In Abrahamsen's music time is not just slipping by, it leaves memories behind, memories creating new falls and new music. Thus his music challenges the very transition which it so movingly portrays.

# KARL AAGE RASMUSSEN

## The Lost Innocence *by Hans Gefors*

Dreams and music are closely related, but music is nevertheless tightly bound to its materials. For Karl Aage Rasmussen, music is just as much about reality as about imagination. Every single element of music has its own history, technique, aesthetics and expressive power. The inquisitive artist is forever searching for a pattern in the multitude of different elements.

Few are better equipped to find their bearings in the reality of music than Rasmussen. Encountering the manifold materials of music keeps arousing his imagination. You can hear it in his music and you can feel it in his urge to share his insights with others. This binds him inextricably to the physical, practical reality, which he has never tried to escape. Always a mediator between artists and audiences in new Danish music, he is active as a teacher and a commentator on many levels, and experienced as an organiser, initiator, performing musician and administrator.

His background is anything but musical and artistic, however, and he himself claims to have reached his teens before realising the existence of living composers. Classical and romantic music was the only musical reality of his childhood. He started both composing and performing very early, his first – totally innocent – large scale work, composed when he was 15, being a choral setting of **The Golden Horns**, the cornerstone of Danish golden-age poetry.

Modernism was to become the problem. Modernism was an attack on music's status as reality. For Karl Aage Rasmussen, modernism signifies nothing less than the Fall, and the urge to question modern music as we know it has remained one of his basic motivations. The impossible dream is nothing less than re-establishing the innocence of childhood.

This link with tradition should not be mistaken for nostalgia, however. Few in Danish music have struggled as consistently with the questions of *modern* music as he. His total activity revolves around this: to live through complexity for the sake of

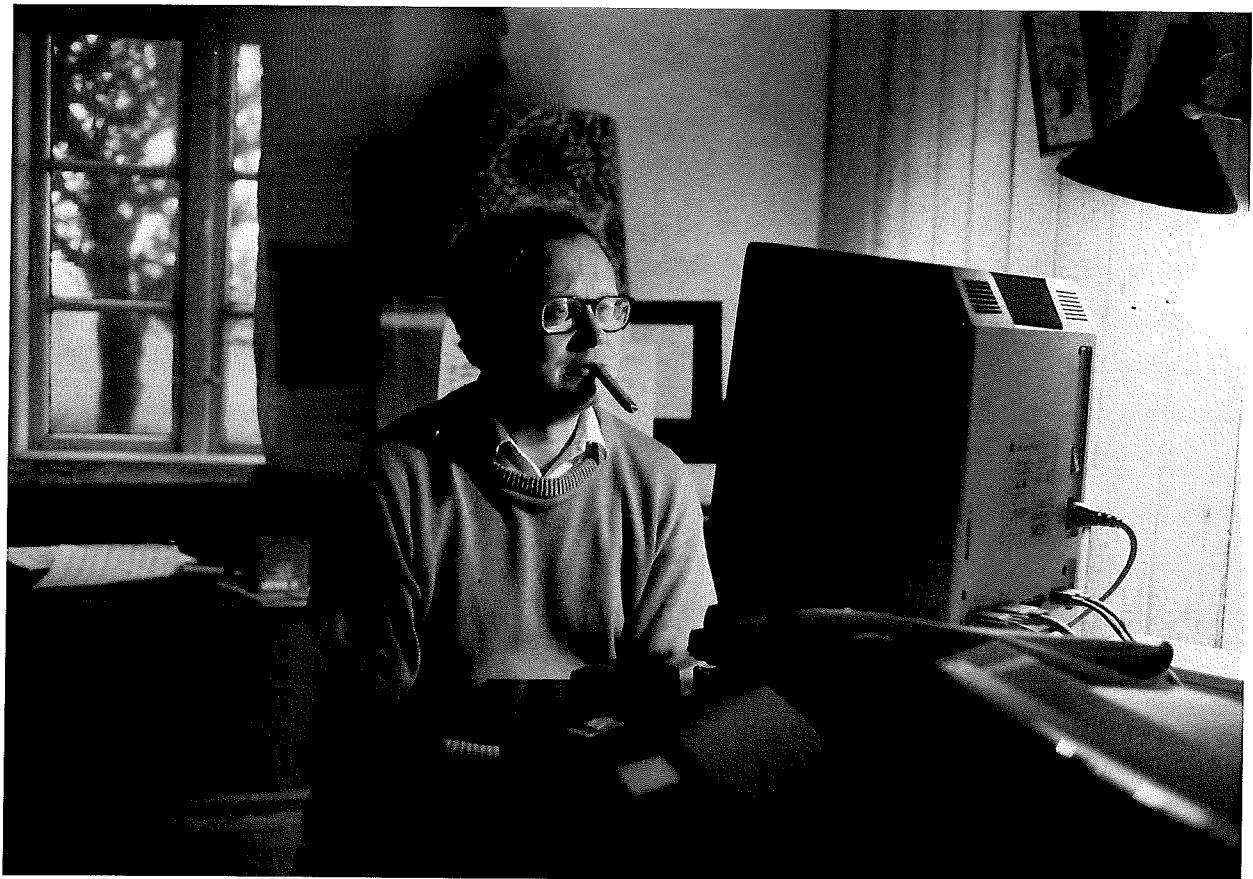


preserving naivety. In the mid-sixties when Rasmussen matured as a composer, modernism was the dominant theme and the big trauma as well. Its ideology was eloquently expressed by the philosopher Adorno, who coined its ‘categorical imperative’ in an article characteristically titled “The Difficulty of Composing”: “every triad, every traditional idiom becomes a convulsively affirmative lie about the redeemed world.”

But the way that modernism reasoned about ‘historical necessity’ was all too restrictive an abstraction for somebody as independent as Rasmussen. Far from accepting any such ‘necessity’ he energetically advocated the case for unfairly forgotten, non-adjusted outsiders in the history of music, above all for Charles Ives. By word and deed he stood up for such composers as Langgaard, Satie, Nancarrow, Sorabji, Russian futurists etc., and similarly, he advocated highly unorthodox presentations of well-known pieces by well-known composers; always in search of the unknown, even within the familiar, attempting to make visible an alternative history of music. One result of this is a book on twentieth century music, the first in Danish for many years.

The protagonist in the alternative history of music, Igor Stravinsky, is far from forgotten, though. It was by contrasting Stravinsky to Schönberg that Adorno interpreted ‘historical necessity’ to Schönberg’s advantage. But Rasmussen is definitely on Stravinsky’s side. Throughout the seventies Rasmussen disarmed Adorno’s philosophy – seemingly defiant – by composing several works exclusively in traditional idioms, without letting anybody feel that the world was redeemed in any way. This music is habitually referred to as ‘quotation music’, but the concept of ‘quotation’ is misleading. Rasmussen constructs his music methodically from tiny fragments of old music; well-known, but altogether anonymous bits and pieces, clichés, cadences and standard idioms.

This relation between originality and cliché, between new and old, is outspoken even in his early works such as **Genklang** (Danish for ‘echo’ or ‘resonance’), where the alienated tradition is clearly present in the instruments themselves, three pianos and a celesta: One piano is out of tune, like the one grandmother keeps in her



drawing-room. Another piano is 'prepared' in the way invented by John Cage, transforming it into a surrealistic mirror-image of the traditional piano. And the third piano is played four-handed, the way people played in the last century to familiarise themselves with Beethoven. In **Genklang** there is only one direct quote, the **Adagietto** from Mahler's 5th Symphony, which runs like an undercurrent through the whole work, played on the out-of-tune piano. This apart, the musical materials of the work form a gigantic fresco of scraps and pieces from the history of the tonal cadence, none of them lasting any longer than a few seconds. Old clichés which we have heard over and over again. But when a keyboard instrument is used to play Mahler's famous string-melody it is alienated, made different, and the strong emotional effect of **Genklang** comes from hearing this beautiful music fitted like a diamond into all the tonal waste from which, after all, it originated itself.

The composing process begins only after materials have been carefully selected, that is to say a level above the usual. Consequently, even though every single cliché is well-known, the sum total is entirely strange. The logic of tonal cadence is abolished, and the listener is left without any clear sense of musical gravity or direction. Everything exists for an instant, only Mahler's melody mournfully reminding us of the lost past and of time slipping by. In terms of form, the work is related to Stockhausen's 'moment-form' and the chance-operations of John Cage. Renewal is evoked through new, unexpected connections. But in Rasmussen's music the sense of this is changed entirely, because the material he uses is old and worn out. The new is hidden amongst the old. This tragi-comic marriage between tradition and renewal is, in my view, the thread of life in Rasmussen's music, and can be felt in practically all of his works.

In Rasmussen's music from the eighties, the concealed pathos of **Genklang** has disappeared, and another side of the problem concerning past and present comes to the fore: the way we experience time. Is time a line, with all events nicely ordered according to the rules of cause and effect? Or is time rather a presence: now we eat, now we talk, now we listen to Stravinsky's **Symphonies of Wind Instruments**? Or is it both at the same time? How are we to conceive time if, during a meal, we hear

Stravinsky's work from 1917 from a loudspeaker, and simultaneously have a heated debate on the thoughts of Augustine? And where is time to be found? On the display of the digital clock or else in identifying oneself with ancient thoughts which allow us to forget time and space? Modern life is an ongoing exercise in experiencing time as space: multiple time – past, present and future simultaneously. Karl Aage Rasmussen wants to expose this reality in his music. In *The Divine Comedy*, Dante describes the point at which all times meet and become one. To-day this is hardly a divine vision, just an everyday experience: we are always at a point where at least a few different times meet.

But how do you compose music like that? Rasmussen's two 'symphonies' from the eighties use the classical four-movement form. The idea is to make the listener feel at home, and in the midst of this contentment, questions emerge. In **A Symphony in Time** (1982) the musical material exceeds the boundaries of the single movements and seems unchanged throughout the work, thus displacing and merging in the different levels of time. When the *adagio* for instance becomes almost identical to the *scherzo*, time and space are disclosed as chimeras. Our habitual experience of time is disturbed and alienated. Even music which deals with time can paradoxically show change to be an illusion. Because in art, illusion can manifest itself as a form of reality, an artist can create worlds according to his own rules. In the chamber symphony **Movements on a Moving Line** (1987) the musical line forms circles within circles of movements in different tempos; the musical materials seem confined to a musical space (a circle), but at the same time they extend throughout the duration of the piece. Even the history of music may appear in the shape of a circle – development and simultaneity at the same time – for example when Rasmussen 'de-composed' the 'Hammerklavier-fugue' by Beethoven, as he did in his **Fugue** of 1983. Rasmussen poses questions repeatedly, and paradox proves the only way to answer them.

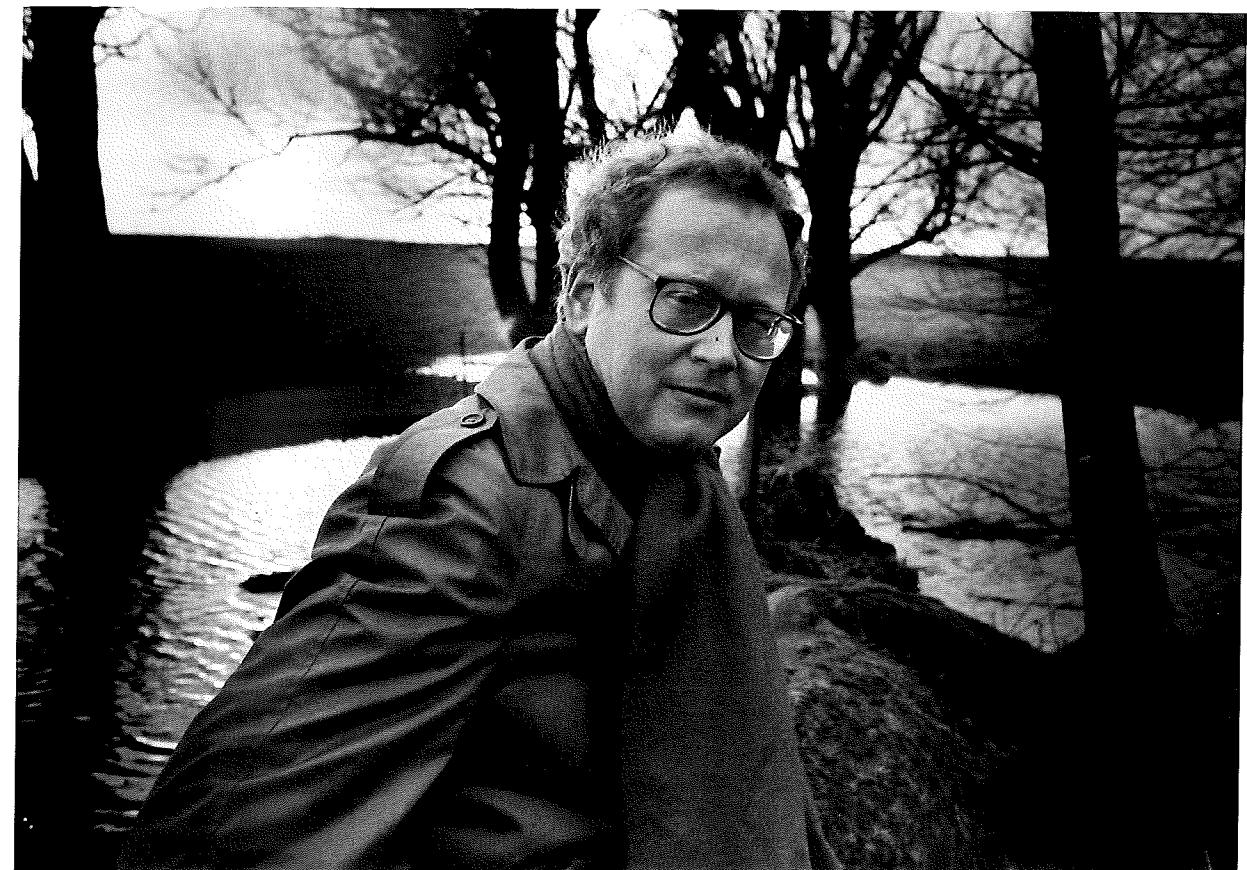
The philosophical aspect of his music is not all, however. The co-existence between tragedy and comedy is still there, notably in his vast production of music for the theatre. This is probably why none of his five musico-dramatic works to date

have been written for the traditional opera, though operatic tradition somehow features in all of them. It forms the basic condition for these tragical farces. 'Farce' because Rasmussen playfully de-composes operatic conventions, 'tragic' because he uses the stage to formulate his cultural criticism. Conventions dominate our dealings with art, and threaten to empty it of meaning, making it merely an exchange of lifeless symbols. **Majakovskij** (1978) has a cast of life-size mechanical puppets, activated by means of foot-pedals by the musicians while they are playing. **Our Hoffmann** (1985) was made to measure for Rasmussen's own alternative opera 'institution' with the lovingly ironical name: *The Danish Piano Theatre*.

A parallel to this cultural criticism is found in the series of solo-works called **Encores**. Is the 'encore', the endless repetition, the very mark of our musical culture? Or is new music destined to be a harmless encore to the musical establishment?

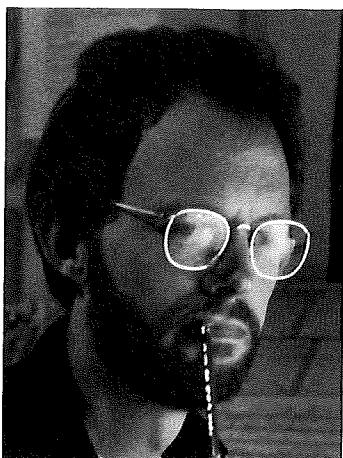
One can distinguish two stages in Rasmussen's extensive output. In the early works, we listen to the music with the remnants of history as a backdrop. The surface covers the sorrow that the new music is only possible on a hopeless tight-rope, walking between escapism and bittersweet abandon. Rasmussen's later works have an increasing trust in construction as a tool for tackling our experience of time: is it just here-and-now, or is it going somewhere? At the core of his music you will always find the paradoxical co-existence of nearness and distance, pathos and composure, large and small, past and present. In the early works, contrasts collide ironically, painfully, while in the later works they are confronted philosophically, critically, even idealistically. Schopenhauer described this duality of foreground and depth strikingly when he wrote: "In the long view and seen from outside, every man's life is, in its dominant features, a tragedy, but in detail, it is a comedy being enacted".

Karl Aage Rasmussen's project is worthy of the arts: attempting to recreate a lost naivety using the most sophisticated means of contemporary music; and defending a vulnerable innocence with the weapons of experience. When listening to Rasmussen, one must always keep this paradox in mind.





*Karl Aage Rasmussen directing a rehearsal in Copenhagen*



### A selection of works

Tycho, opera  
Himmelhoch jauchzend – zum Tode betrübt, symphony for large orchestra  
Manhattan Abstraction, for orchestra  
Thus saw St. John, for orchestra  
Corpus cum Figuris, for chamber orchestra  
Four Dances in one Movement, for chamber orchestra  
Four Compositions, for chamber ensemble  
The Dramatriology:  
I. Dramaphonia, for piano and chamber orchestra  
II. Monodrama, for percussion and orchestra  
III. Polydrama, for cello and orchestra

### Poul Ruders

Born 1949 in Ringsted. A member of the renowned Copenhagen Boys' Choir. He later studied the organ at the academy in Odense, and graduated from The Royal Danish Academy of Music. Studied composition with Ib Nørholm. For a period teacher at the academy in Aarhus. He now holds a position of organist in The National Church. Several stays abroad, in England and USA.

### A selection of recordings

Jargon.....EMI MOAK 30017/SUDM S 001  
Motets.....KONTRAPUNKT 32016  
Rondeau .....CAP 1152  
Piano Sonata no. 2.....PAULA 28  
Manhattan Abstraction, Thus saw St. John,  
Corpus cum Figuris .....POINT PCD-5084  
String Quartet no. 2 & 3.....RCA RL 70464  
Tattoo for Three.....PAULA PACD 57  
Dante Sonata .....EMI ODEON MOAK 30009  
Seven Recitatives .....DANICA DLP 8087



### A selection of works

Stratifications, for orchestra  
Nacht und Trompeten, for orchestra  
Winternacht, for chamber ensemble  
Märchenbilder, for chamber orchestra  
Lied in Fall, for cello and 13 instruments  
String Quartet no. 1, Ten Preludes  
String Quartet no. 2  
Walden, for wind quintet  
Six Pieces, for horn, violin and piano  
Studies, for piano

### Hans Abrahamsen

Born 1952 in Lyngby, Copenhagen. Studied horn, theory and music history at The Royal Danish Academy of Music. Studied composition with Per Nørgård and Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen. In 1970 co-founder of the "Group for Alternative Music". He has taught at the academies in Odense, Aarhus and Copenhagen. Artistic Director, with Steen Pade, of the NUMUS Festival 1985-88. Temporary assignment as Artistic Adviser to the Aarhus Symphony Orchestra. From 1988 Artistic Director of the Esbjerg Ensemble.

### A selection of recordings

Round and in Between,  
for brass quintet.....EMI SUDM 065 39331  
String Quartet no. 1 & 2.....RCA RL 70464  
Winternacht, Walden .....PAULA 37  
October, for piano.....DANICA DLP 8087  
Flowersongs .....EMI ODEON MOAK 30016