

Rolf
Wallin:

Large Bird Mask

Cikada
Kenneth Karlsson — piano
Christian Eggen — conductor



Large Bird Mask

We are increasingly made aware of animal species on the brink of extinction. The populations of many common bird species have been more than halved in the matter of a few decades. This disturbing fact led composer Rolf Wallin and director Kjetil Skøien to ask: when we exterminate the birds, do we also exterminate what they symbolise deep within us? The dream of flying, the dream of singing freely and exuberantly, and indeed the very dream of freedom?

Maybe it is time to show humility? In many indigenous cultures, the shamans use masks to become one with the animal spirits, so that animal species can be harvested sustainably by hunters without disappearing. Instead of masks, Cikada's musicians use their instruments to "become birds". Some of the music they play is extracted from the song of three endangered bird species stretched in time so that our slow human ears can appreciate their fascinating melodic swirls. And with text and choreography they move into a larger scenic unity, with projected images and videos telling the story of these fantastic creatures and our vulnerable relationship with them.

The world premiere of *Large Bird Mask* took place in The Oslo Opera House as part of the Ultima Festival in 2019, and it received great critical acclaim. This album represents an aural journey through that multimedia performance, which starts off as "just another chamber music concert" and dives gradually into an eerily mythical world, where the musicians are

trying to become birds in various ways, with their instruments, with their movements, with their voices.

This album is also a tribute to the many fruitful collaborations Rolf Wallin has had with Cikada since its formation in 1989.

Wallin about the music in this album:

Seven Disobediences (2018)

The beginning of the many-faceted story of this piece started in 2001, when I wrote the piano pieces *Seven Imperatives* as part of the music for the dance performance *7 Imperatives*, commissioned by the Norwegian national ballet company Carte Blanche, choreographed by Ingun Bjørnsgaard. Also in the performance appeared Ravel's *Gaspard de la nuit*, and this gave me the idea to go into the tradition of romantic and impressionist character pieces, like Grieg's *Lyrical Pieces* or Debussy's *Preludes*: short pieces with a motto, and usually with one prevailing sentiment, like a musical short story or a miniature painting.

Pianist Kenneth Karlsson, one of Cikada's "founding fathers" takes centre stage in *Seven Disobediences* as soloist. After having performed *Seven Imperatives* several times and released them on his solo album (2012), *The view was all in lines*, Kenneth asked me to transform the piece into a chamber concerto for him and the other Cikada players. So, 17 years after

their first appearance, each of these seven commands (Seek!, Push!, Sink!, Spin! etc.) receives a response from eight musicians that are not necessarily obedient. The world premiere took place during the Donaueschinger Musiktage in 2018.

Birds Within Us (2019)

Birds Within Us was written especially for the performance *Large Bird Mask*, but it can also be performed as a freestanding piece. The score is extracted from the song of endangered bird species, stretched in time and in pitch. In the first two movements, the "tape speed" of the recordings of a starling and a nightingale are slowed down according to the alarming decline of their respective species' population from 1980 to 2014. The happy chirping slowly transforms into disturbing howls of large and sad mythical animals. And the musicians follow each of the birds down into this dark abyss. However, we might also have a hope of reversing this dismal and alarming trend. Thus, in the last movement, a skylark makes the same journey, but in the exact reverse, ending up in the population of "the good old days", and the piece ends with the victorious cascades we know and love hearing on a bright summer's day.

The Dawn Choruses

Before, between and after the three movements of *Birds Within Us*, the musicians take us out into mysterious forests to join

authentic bird choruses: The birds sing either in real time, or slower in speed and lower in pitch, and the musicians improvise with them and each other, making four different dreamlike soundspaces. Maybe, some time in the future, we humans can learn to live peacefully alongside these amazing creatures?

Rolf Wallin



Rolf Wallin

Rolf Wallin (b. 1957) is one of Scandinavia's leading contemporary composers, widely performed and commissioned internationally. His musical background spans from jazz, avant-garde rock and early music to traditional classical training, and this versatility is reflected in an exceptionally many-faceted list of compositions. Wallin's output covers a wide range of expressions and techniques: from strictly absolute music to music theatre and installations, from elaborate computer-aided compositions for the concert hall to strongly intuitive music for the stage.

Stonewave, one of his most popular and frequently performed pieces, is made purely from fractal mathematics, but far from being abstract, Wallin's music comes across as very physical and organic. And it often connects directly with the world around him, most notably in works such as *Act* (2004), a celebration of the power of cooperation, *Strange News* (2007), which tells the story of the rehabilitation of child soldiers, and *Large Bird Mask* (2019), posing important ethical and philosophical questions around the accelerating extinction of birds. His opera *Elysium* (2016) brings together topics such as human rights, revolution, salvation and transhumanism.

Kenneth Karlsson

Kenneth Karlsson was born in Åmål, Sweden. In his youth, he started playing impro and rock music with friends, and soon, an interest also in classical music was born. After a few years, he took up studies at the Norwegian Music Academy before continuing his musical education in the Netherlands. Since then, Karlsson has worked as a classical and contemporary classical pianist. In the 1980s and -90s, he was a member of groups like Ensemble K4, Oslo Sinfonietta, and Aquarius.

Throughout the years, Karlsson has played in several improvisation ensembles such as the quartet Point 4 with Jon Balke, Ingar Zach, and Bjørn Rabben, and he has had longstanding collaborations with singers Hilde Torgersen and Elisabeth Holmertz.

Since 1989, Karlsson has been the pianist and artistic director of Cikada. In addition to this, he is currently playing in an improvisation duo with percussionist Ingar Zach and in the experimental, genre-crossing group Vollen United – a group mixing baroque, classical contemporary, pop, and improvisational music.

Karlsson has done several multimedia projects and often worked with dancers and video artists. He has initiated a great number of commissions and world premieres, having worked with composers and musicians such as Klaus Lang, Clara Iannotta, James Dillon, Carola Bauckholt, Liza Lim, Bent Sørensen, Richard Barrett, Lasse Marhaug, and Rolf Wallin.

Karlsson also plays the Indian harmonium and synthesizer. Kenneth Karlsson has toured the world extensively and recorded a number of albums. In 2001, he received a Grammy for his solo album "sofferte onde serene".

Christian Eggen

Conductor, composer, and pianist Christian Eggen is one of the most influential figures on the Norwegian music scene. His projects range from contemporary music, cross-genre productions, installations, radio and television drama productions, film, and theater, to opera, classical music, and jazz. He played with Terje Rypdal for many years, and was a member of the jazz ensemble Søyr.

He made his debut at age 16 and quickly established himself amongst leading pianists. His CD release of Carl Nielsen's piano works

in 1994 set a new standard, praised Danish newspaper *Politiken*. Today, Christian Eggen is one of Europe's leading conductors of contemporary music, and he regularly performs with ensembles such as the German Musikfabrik and the French Ensemble InterContemporaine. The list of composers with whom he has worked closely contains some of the most distinguished of our time: Cage, Lutosławski, Xenakis, Lachenmann, Kurtág, Lindberg, Saariaho, and Bent Sørensen.

His work with the Oslo Sinfonietta and Cikada has secured their place as one of the top Nordic ensembles - Cikada received the Nordic Council Music Prize in 2005. Christian Eggen has also received a Norwegian Grammy Award (Spellemannprisen), the Lindeman Prize, the Oslo City Art Award, and the Norwegian Music Critics Award twice, both in 1999 and 2007. In 2007, King Harald appointed him Commander of the Royal Norwegian Order of St. Olav.

Cikada

Cikada has been a key player on the Nordic contemporary music scene since its formation in 1989. Never afraid to follow its own path, the ensemble continues to renew itself through astute, innovative programming, and the ever-present desire to let audiences experience some of the best music of our time.

The ensemble has since the outset consisted of ten permanent members: flute, clarinet, piano, percussion, string quintet and conductor. It performs at prestigious festivals such as Donaueschinger Musiktage, Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, Klangspuren Schwaz, Sacrum Profanum, Wittener Tage für Neue Kammermusik, Bergen International Festival, Warsaw Autumn, ECLAT Stuttgart and the Ultima Festival, of which it is a founding member.

Over the years, Cikada has commissioned and premiered 200+ works by some of today's leading composers both internationally and domestically. This includes collaborations with composers such as Carola Bauckholt, Richard Barrett, Laurence Crane, James Dillon and Liza Lim, as well as recent commissions from Georg Friedrich Haas, Malin Bång, Clara Iannotta, and Klaus Lang. Cikada is also a strong protagonist for the many exciting voices of new Norwegian music, with large commissions and portrait concerts by Eivind Buene, Lars Petter Hagen, Jon Øivind Ness, Asbjørn Schaathun, Maja Ratkje, Rolf Wallin, and Kristine Tjøgersen to name a few.

Cikada has released numerous albums for ECM, Lawo Classics, Aurora and 2L among others, as well as appearing on several split albums and compilations. Their oeuvre has garnered accolades such as the Norwegian Grammy «Spellemannprisen», the Edison Award and the prestigious Nordic Council's Music Prize of 2005, in addition to several nominations.

Cikada Ensemble is funded by the Norwegian Arts Council and Oslo Municipality.

Musicians:

Kenneth Karlsson, piano solo

Cikada:

Anne Karine Hauge, flute

Rolf Borch, clarinet

Kenneth Karlsson, piano

Bjørn Rabben, percussion

Sara Övinge, violin

Odd Hannisdal, violin

Bendik Foss, viola

Inga Byrkjeland, cello

Magnus Söderberg, double bass

Christian Eggen, conductor.

Rol Wallin (1957*)

Seven Disobediences
for piano and ensemble

- 1 Seek__01:35
- 2 Push__05:12
- 3 Sink__02:01
- 4 Spin__03:55
- 5 Stab__00:41
- 6 Lean__08:05
- 7 Quit__00:25
- 8 Dawn Chorus 1 (Improvisation)__02:35
- 9 Birds Within Us: I. Starling__06:01
- 10 Dawn Chorus 2 (Improvisation)__02:52
- 11 Birds Within Us: II. Nightingale__05:34
- 12 Dawn Chorus 3 (Improvisation)__02:30
- 13 Birds Within Us: III. Skylark__04:28
- 14 Dawn Chorus 4 (Improvisation)__06:29



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