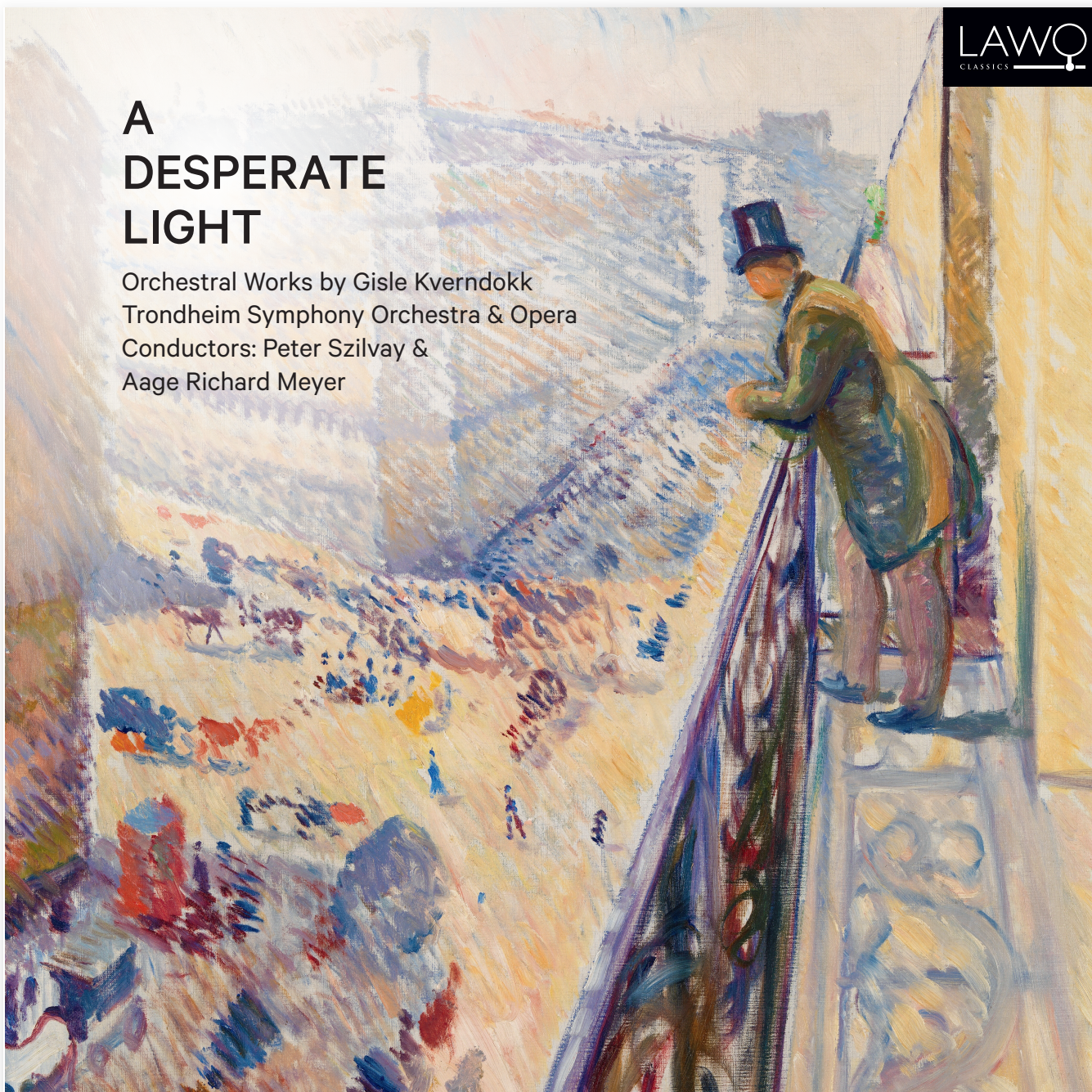


A DESPERATE LIGHT

Orchestral Works by Gisle Kverndokk
Trondheim Symphony Orchestra & Opera
Conductors: Peter Szilvay &
Aage Richard Meyer



Symphonic Suite from *Around the World in 80 Days*

The musical dramatic work “Around the World in 80 Days” has been on a long journey. It began as a commissioned work for the opening of the Norwegian National Opera at Bjørvika in 2008, after which it was rewritten as a musical commissioned by the Linz State Theatre in Austria and premiered in 2016. The musical is one of Europe’s most award-winning musical theatre works.

The journey continues now via yet another artistic form: a symphonic suite based on the themes of the opera version. The composition can be characterized as “musical drama without words”, for it is the music alone that describes both the inward and outward journey on which the story’s protagonist, the pedantic and somewhat callous Phileas Fogg, embarks in the hope of becoming a more well-rounded human being.

Symphonic Suite from “Around the World in 80 Days” opens with a theme of seven notes, which are the notes of Fogg’s creed: “All things are numbers and numbers are everything!” — a postulate that has gained new relevance in today’s world through artificial intelligence.

It is this assertion that propels him out into this opulent adventure. To prove his point, he accepts a wager that he can travel around the world in precisely 80 days.

Gisle Kverndokk sprinkles themes from the opera throughout the various movements and allows new musical constellations to emerge, not always in chronological order.

The subtitle of the musical is: “How many operas fit into a musical?”

Fogg’s journey around the world is in fact a journey through the world of opera, and it is in his encounters with a variety of famous opera characters that Fogg is put to the test, compelled to reflect on his own life and decide what kind of person he shall be.

The observant listener can make a sport of revealing how many operas fit into Kverndokk’s seven-movement suite. It isn’t an easy task, as the old and the new are woven together here with utmost care and discretion. The seven movements, chapters or scenes are a musical horn of plenty, a richly coloured flight through themes from a musical dramatic work encompassing melody lines of earlier operas in such a way that a new and independent organism emerges. It is not possible to establish where Kverndokk begins and Puccini ends, since Kverndokk wisely slips his feet into the shoes of earlier masters with respect, creativity and affection. And I dare say, the shoes fit to perfection!

The format gives the composer the opportunity to fully exploit the breadth of his versatile mastery — or should one rather say circumference? For this is about a world-encompassing journey with music as its propelling force. The work can seem natural, playful and spontaneous, but from my almost thirty-year-long collaboration with Kverndokk, I know that no note, rhythmic figure, or chord in his music is there by accident, but rather fits into the logic of the work as a whole. Yet the suite is brimming with humor in its characterization of persons, and in its grand drama and generous lack of restraint. The composer manages to play with the themes, liberated as he is from the original structure of a

musical theatre work. Here melody lines are thrown about and merged with new sounds and rhythms.

Fogg’s inward journey in particular grows within this musical language. His conflicted inner self is played out in a symphonic format, which in turn expands the boundaries of what musical theatre is able to communicate — perhaps because what is unspoken now has a voice that resounds in a full register through Trondheim Symphony Orchestra.

Symphonic Suite from “Around the World in 80 Days” is also the story of a man in search of himself: Seven words, seven notes and seven movements, in which Fogg is transformed through his encounters with seven different women and seven different aspects of love: Violetta, Tosca, Salome, Aouda, Turandot, Minnie and Fionula.

The first woman, the famous courtesan Violetta, lives from love, rather than for it. The passionate Tosca is willing to die for love, whereas the figure of Salome exposes love as betrayal through “The Dance of the Seven Veils”. Aouda’s form of love is a consequence of Fogg’s having saved her life, while Turandot, on the other hand, executes suitors who offer her love. Minnie represents love that never manages to choose, and private detective Fionula Fix falls in love with Fogg against her will and decides in the end to sacrifice her own happiness that Fogg might win his wager. Seven movements, seven notes, seven words, seven aspects of love and seven women. Does Fogg end up in seventh heaven after having sailed the seven seas? The answer lies concealed in the Kverndokk soundscape.

A desperate light

How does an idea originate? In Kverndokk’s universe two lines from a poem can give rise to an entire work:

*Today is that day, the day that carried
A desperate light that since has died ...*

Pablo Neruda

The piece opens as a cry for help. It is the struggle and despair of being locked up, wings clipped, denied access to life, without knowing when it will all be over. Relations, isolation, the longing to meet others again — everything we experienced together during the COVID lockdown.

This is a work tailor-made for a choreographer, and once again I am struck by how visually Kverndokk composes, and with what agility.

The source of inspiration here is stated by the composer himself: it is a tribute to Leonard Bernstein, inspired by maestro Bernstein’s symphony “The Age of Anxiety”.

But what is impressive and fascinating is this: despite the nod to his hero in his themes that touch upon scenes in “West Side Story, such as “Mambo” and “The Rumble”, it is Kverndokk through and through, and not Bernstein.

When all is said and done, I would like to quote Stephen Sondheim, who also wrote the lyrics to “West Side Story”, and the protagonist of his musical, “Sunday in the Park with George”: *Finishing the hat, mapping out the sky!* That is always what it’s about.

The work was written during the pandemic, but it would be inappropriate to associate it with this period, for the dramatic scope of the work is larger than what the lockdown of the country gave us.

The contemplative theme, which is introduced after barely four minutes and which also contains an echo of “Maria” and “Tonight”, is a melodic passage you can spend all day with, play over and over, drink wine to, letting your thoughts wander. Linger there, for soon desperation will really cut loose, before fading away and ending with an open question: will the world ever be the same again?

Three pictures

This work was originally a trio for trumpet, violin and piano, commissioned by Tine Thing Helseth for her chamber music festival at the Munch Museum in 2013. Kverndokk thought for a long time that the piece would be exceedingly well suited for orchestra, so as one of his pandemic projects this suite was orchestrated in 2021.

In this work Kverndokk finds inspiration in three Munch paintings: “Rue Lafayette”, “Night in Saint-Cloud”, and “At the Roulette Table in Monte Carlo”. It is not the first time his music depicts the works of a painter.

In 2001 we had the premiere of a musical based on the life of the painter Vincent van Gogh, at the Schlossfestspiele Ettlingen, and a clear line of association runs between the hero of that musical, Vincent van Gogh, and the tonal depiction of Munch’s paintings.

Rue Lafayette

An impressionist work painted by an expressionist artist. This paradox certainly has had a stimulating effect on a crossover composer like Kverndokk. A catchword here: recognition. The composer has strong ties to Paris himself, and a good many works have been composed in or inspired by the city. To start with, the music is overpowering, as a big city can be on a first visit — the multitudes, traffic, noise, immensity and chaos. The musical expression then becomes impressionist — observing, contemplative — with an expressive longing, as fragments of human destinies from the myriad of people below float up to us there where we share the perspective of the man leaning over the balcony railing.

Night in Saint-Cloud

The painting can be linked to the memory of the artist’s father, who died one year earlier.

In the same way that the enigmatic figure of the man across the room by the window catches our eye, Kverndokk’s tonal language draws our mind into the darkest corners of the same room. There is a tenderness in the music, like when the party is over and everyone has been sent home, and it is time to tidy up.

At the Roulette Table in Monte Carlo

A hint of Degas, Gauguin and van Gogh. Once again, Kverndokk’s tonal language captures the



At the Roulette Table in Monte Carlo,
Edvard Munch, 1892.

anticipation, the nervousness, the suspense, the almost tactile uneasiness, the distinct colours in the painting, and the moral disintegration around the roulette table, an emotional chaos of losses and winnings. Legend has it that as soon as Munch had won a round at the gambling table, he made straight for Café de Paris to celebrate with champagne until he had drunk up his winnings, then returned to roulette. If we take the music literally in part three, it ends as a fiasco for the gambler in the final spurt.

An inside tip for listeners of this work: find the paintings online and study them as Trondheim

Symphony Orchestra plays. The paintings expand on the music and the music illuminates the paintings.

Øystein Wiik



Gisle Kverndokk (b. 1967) is a Norwegian composer with an extensive list of works.

Kverndokk has a large output of symphonic works. His “Concerto for Harp and Orchestra” was premiered by the Symphony Orchestra of Maribor, Slovenia in 2024. “The Crystal Cabinet”, a double concerto for violin and piano, had its premier with Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra in 2003. Kverndokk has also written a number of solo concertos for oboe, flute and violin, among others. “Symphonic Dances”, premiered in 2014 by Stavanger Symphony Orchestra, was released by SSO Recordings in 2018 and nominated for a Grammy.

Kverndokk has collaborated with all the major Norwegian orchestras. He served as composer in residence with Trondheim Symphony Orchestra in 2000. In 1992 he won the Juilliard Composers’ Competition for his orchestral work “Selene”, and in 1993 First Prize in the category “Composers Under 30” at the International Rostrum of Composers in Paris for his work “Initiation” for violin and orchestra.

With librettist Øystein Wiik he has penned a number of musicals and operas produced in Norway, Germany, Austria and the USA. Their musical “Martin L.” (2008) was nominated for the Nordic Council Music Prize. The opera “Around the World in 80 Days” was commissioned as the opening production of the new opera house in Oslo, and it had its premiere there in 2010. A revised version was premiered at the Linz State Theatre in Austria in 2016 and won 6 prizes at the Deutscher Musical Theater Preis awards, including best musical. “The Name of the Rose” was a huge success at the Domstufen Festspiele in Erfurt in 2019. Their most recent musicals are “Trolle unter uns”, performed at the Luisenburg Festspiele in 2021, and “Fanny and Alexander” performed at the Linz State Theatre in 2022. Opera Nordfjord celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2023 with highly lauded performances of “Soga om Sol”.

Kverndokk collaborated with librettist Ivar Tindberg on the radio opera “Bokken Lasson — sensibel suksess” which won the Prix Italia in 2000. Their opera “The Fourth Watch of the Night” was premiered at the Norwegian National Opera in 2005 and won the Edvard Prize. It was revived in 2012 and was also presented the

same year at the Savonlinna Opera Festival in Finland. Their newest opera, “Ingrid fra Barrøy”, was premiered at the Nordland Music Festival Week in August 2024.

Kverndokk’s opera “Easter”, written with librettist Aksel-Otto Bull, had its premiere at Opera Sør, Kristiansand in 2014, and in 2017 their church opera “Upon This Handful of Earth” was premiered at the Church of St. Ignatius Loyola in New York City. Their musical “Letters from Ruth” was first performed at Musical Frühling in Gmunden, Austria, in 2023. This production won a number of prizes at the Deutscher Musical Theater Preis awards, including best music and best musical. Concert presentations of this musical have also been produced in New York City and Washington, D.C.

The children’s opera “Purriot og den forsvunne bronsehesten”, with libretto by Bjørn Rørvik, had its premiere at the Norwegian National Opera and Ballet in May 2018 and won the Norwegian Music Critics Award the same year.

Kverndokk has also written church music, chamber music, music for wind band, and music for film, dance and theatre. His collaboration with the vocal ensemble Nordic Voices has resulted in a number of works, and in 2015 the ensemble released the album “Fuge der Zeit” with Kverndokk’s compositions.

Kverndokk’s songs are featured on the album “Så kort ein sommar menneska har” (2021) with Marianne Beate Kielland and Nils Anders Mortensen.

Kverndokk was festival composer for the Nordic Song Festival in Trollhättan, Sweden in 2020 and 2021. He was named Composer of the year — Classical/Contemporary Music at the Norwegian Music Publishers Awards in 2019.

Gisle Kverndokk studied composition at the Norwegian Academy of Music and The Juilliard School in New York City. His teachers include Ragnar Söderlind, Olav Anton Thommessen, Lasse Thoresen, John Corigliano and David Diamond.



The Trondheim Symphony Orchestra & Opera

The Trondheim Symphony Orchestra & Opera (TSO) provides musical experiences and is a powerhouse of the central Norwegian cultural landscape, providing a broad range of music of the highest artistic quality. In this way, the TSO contributes to the promotion and development of general interest in music locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

Trondheim Symphony Orchestra & Opera (TSO) is one of Norway's largest cultural institutions with a history stretching back to 1909. After the establishment of the Trondheim Chamber Orchestra in 1947, the professional orchestra began to take shape. TSO was taken over by the state and NRK in 1962, and gradually became one of the country's leading orchestras.

The Trondheim Symphony Orchestra & Opera currently consists of 86 permanent musicians. In addition to classical symphony concerts, it holds a wide range of performances and services, including opera, contemporary music, premieres, early music, chamber music, popular concerts, educational activities and talent development, as well as projects for children and youths.

TSO is proudly based in the superb Olavshallen Concert Hall in Trondheim, where most of its concerts are held throughout the season. In addition,

concert tours in and around central Norway are frequent, as well as nationwide and international tours and assignments. Collaboration with the Trondheim Soloists means that the orchestra model has access to 90 musicians. TSO also collaborates with the Trondheim Vocal Ensemble, primarily with opera and choral works, as well as the Trondheim Symphony Opera Choir (TSO-koret), which is naturally an integral part of its opera productions.

Aage Richard Meyer is one of the young promising conducting talents coming from "Dirigentløftet". Aage Richard was the Assistant conductor for the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra and their chief conductor Edward Gardner from 2020 to 2023. Since then, he has worked with several of Norway's professional ensembles such as the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra, Stavanger Symphony Orchestra, Trondheim Symphony Orchestra and several of the Norwegian professional military bands.

In 2023 Aage Richard had his Opera Debut at The Norwegian Opera and Ballet in Oslo performing 3 shows of Giuseppe Verdi's "Un Ballo in Maschera". He has also assisted in several opera productions, most notably Alban Berg's "Wozzeck" at the Palau De La Reina Sofia in Valencia with their chief conductor James Gaffigan.



Conductor Aage Richard Meyer

Peter Szilvay began his career as a violist. He spent three years with the Oslo Philharmonic, where he met Mariss Jansons, for whom he served as an assistant conductor for three years. Years as a musician were quickly supplanted by constant demands to conduct. This was followed by a position as assistant conductor in the Stavanger Symphony Orchestra until Szilvay took over as conductor on his own.

Szilvay has conducted orchestras and opera in Norway and abroad. In his home country, he has led the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra, the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, The Norwegian Chamber Orchestra, the Stavanger Symphony Orchestra, the Trondheim Symphony Orchestra, the Kristiansand Symphony Orchestra, the Arctic Philharmonic Orchestra, The Norwegian Opera, The Norwegian Radio Orchestra (KORK) and all the military wind-bands.

He has also worked with the sinfoniettas of Oslo, Trondheim, BIT20 Bergen, as well as the Arctic Sinfonietta and the Bodø Sinfonietta. Szilvay has conducted productions at the Norwegian Opera Ballet and Opera South.

Internationally, he has conducted the St. Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra in Russia, the Gothenburg, Helsingborg, Umeå, and Malmö



Conductor Peter Szilvay

symphony orchestras in Sweden, the radio orchestra in Paris, the Royal Danish Orchestra, and at the opera in Würzburg, Germany.

Early in his career, he made an impressive contribution to contemporary music and performed more than 150 original works with the best ensembles at home and abroad. However, his interest in classical and romantic music has grown steadily. Szilvay is passionate about working with singers and puts the art of opera high on his priority list.

Szilvay is a distinguished communicator, and his pretalks at performances set the mood for the crowd. Contact with the public, in Szilvay's opinion, is one of the most crucial things we can give priority to. It is impossible to stress the importance of attracting audiences and sharing our amazing cultural legacy.

Gisle Kverndokk (1967)

Three Pictures (2013/2021)

- 01 Rue Lafayette__03:01
- 02 Night in St. Cloud__07:58
- 03 At the roulette table in Monte Carlo__03:08

Symphonic Suite from “Around the World in 80 Days” (2010)

- 04 London: “Phileas Fogg starts his journey around the world”__06:18
 - 05 Paris: “Violetta’s seduction”__07:16
 - 06 Rome: “Tosca’s death”__05:40
 - 07 Suez: “Salome’s dance”__09:23
 - 08 Beijing: “Phileas Fogg heroically escapes the claws of Turandot”__09:13
Harp solo: Ruth Potter
 - 09 Romance in The Pacific Ocean__07:17
 - 10 Finale: “Phileas Fogg’s victorious return to London”__05:13
-
- 11 A Desperate Light (2021)__12:29

CONDUCTORS:

THREE PICTURES: AAGE RICHARD MEYER

AROUND THE WORLD &
A DESPERATE LIGHT: PETER SZILVAY

CONCERT MASTER:

CAM KJØLL

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