

CANTUS

*Works by
Egil Hovland*

LARS NOTTO BIRKELAND
ORGAN

EIRIK RAUDE, PERCUSSION
FORSVARETS STABSMUSIKKORPS
PETER SZILVAY, CONDUCTOR

Egil Hovland (1924-2013) is considered one of Norway's significant composers in the second half of the 20th century. His concertos, symphonic music and chamber music are central to post-war Norwegian music history, but it is in the field of church music that he has made his greatest mark.

From 1949 until his retirement, Hovland was organist at Glemmen Church in Fredrikstad. After completing his organist degree at the Oslo Conservatory of Music, he studied composition with Bjarne Brustad, Vagn Holmboe, Aaron Copland and Luigi Dallapiccola. The study trip to the international courses for new music in Darmstadt and the studies of Gregorian chant at the monastery in Solesmes demonstrate the breadth of Egil Hovland's musical interests as a church musician and composer. Between these extremes there is a conglomerate of stylistic elements that he chose to use: «In my constant struggle to create something new, I draw inspiration from all kinds of music, from all kinds of impressions that the outside world gives.»

After being at the forefront of musical development in the 1960s with experimental works such as *Lamenti* for orchestra, *Missa Vigilante* or *Elementa pro organo*, a change of style occurred in the years around 1970. Hovland wanted to «speak more simply, more amiably, preferably more romantically». «Interludium» from *Den vakre rosen* (The Most Beautiful Rose) op. 71 (1970) is a good example of Hovland's desire to reach more people with his music. This small organ piece is taken from a commissioned work for NRK - Norwegian television - called «Reflections in music, pictures and words on a fairy tale» by H.C. Andersen for narrator, four sopranos, organ and orchestra.

The same year, Hovland composed Toccata on «Nu la oss takke Gud» (Now Thank We All Our God) on the occasion of his daughter's wedding. Here, to typical features from the romantic organ tradition, are added cascades of cluster sounds as «a greeting» from the former avant-garde composer.

Hymns played a central role in Hovland's life. As an organist and as a member of committees tasked with revising and renewing the Norwegian Church's singing tradition, he created hymn melodies that have become an indispensable part of the Norwegian hymnal treasury. From the 1970s, he used hymn melodies and texts as a source of inspiration and thematic material in almost everything he composed. As a chorale in *Crux Ave* (1979) op. 102, the seventh of a total of nine organ partitas, Hovland chose «Jerusalem du hochgebaute Stadt» (Jerusalem, Thou City Fair And High). The partita was commissioned for the inauguration of the new organ in Trømborg Church, Østfold, Norway, and was premiered by Harald Herresthal. All the verses in the German text are reproduced below the chorale in each variation. Hovland said «the music is like a life that crawls upwards until it reaches a plateau, and then the last verse comes, quietly and calmly, mit jubelklang, mit Instrumenten schön» (with jubilant sounds, with beautiful instruments). The contrast between the hope and jubilation of the text, and the introverted, and gradually brutal character of the music is striking. There is something symbolic in the fact that the chorale almost disintegrates along the way. Towards the end the melody is completely fragmented and almost unrecognizable before it re-emerges as a conclusion with new colors. Behind the work lay personal experiences of sorrow and

pain, but also of hope. This is reinforced by the fact that Hovland quotes some verses from Revelations (21:3-4) at the beginning of the printed score:

«Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.»

The partita is treated contrapuntally, which has associations with Bach's canonical variations on «Vom Himmel hoch». Contrary to what Hovland had previously said, that he would use musical means that would allow him to reach his listeners, this music was created without any possible thought of pleasing the audience.

In the absence of a good title, Hovland used the title «Cantus» for the first time in 1964. He claims that the title «was just plucked out of the air». The term was, in music history, originally used for the melodic leading voice in medieval and Renaissance vocal music. Hovland's ten works with this title, with one exception, have in common that they are written for one melodic instrument with instrumental accompaniment. The vocal element that justifies the title is that they all have a chorale or a folk tune as their starting point.

Cantus VII (Il Maestro) op. 132 is composed for organ and nine brass instruments. It is a commissioned work from the St Olav's Days in Trondheim. The work was premiered in

the Nidaros Cathedral in 1985 by Per Fridtjov Bonsaksen on the occasion of Johann Sebastian Bach's 300th anniversary. The well-known B-A-C-H motif is built into the twelve-tone scale that forms the melodic base. The Bach-motif is easily recognizable when it appears in the work's three movements. In the last movement, the chorale «Allein zu Dir, Herr Jesu Christ» (In Thee Alone, O Christ, My Lord) is introduced with Bach's own harmonization. The chorale is played by the brass and allows the organ to perform interludes as was the practice in Bach's time.

Cantus IX (Te Deum) op. 133 for organ and percussion was commissioned by Uranienborg Church and was premiered by Jon Lammetun and percussionist Allan Suttie in 1986. The work is based on Egil Hovland's own melody on «O store Gud, vi lover deg» (Martin Luther's version of the Te Deum hymn: Lord God, Thy Praise We Sing). The text is a hymn of praise and deals with God's omnipotence, Judgment Day, the seraphs' praise, and the vision of the host of the saved in the feast hall of the Father's House. The basic character is still the oppressed man who, in a mixture of pain and joy, begs for mercy. This is also how the work ends with a «pain motif», a falling minor second, which Hovland often uses in music with similar content. Cantus IX is, as a whole, colorful and varied music, characterized by virtuosity and musical contrasts.

Harald Herresthal



The organ at Sofienberg church. Oslo, 2014/III/39, by Eule Orgelbau (Bautzen, Germany)
Photo: Anna-Julia Granberg



The organ at Fagerborg church. Oslo, 2007/III/54, by Orgelbau Goll (Luzern, Switzerland)
Photo: Orgelbau Goll

JERUSALEM, DU HOCHGEBAUTE STADT

T: Johann M. Meyfart 1626, M: Melchior Franck 1663

Translation: Catherine Winkworth 1858

1. Jerusalem, du hochgebaute Stadt,
wollt Gott, ich wär in dir!
Mein sehnend Herz so groß Verlangen hat
und ist nicht mehr bei mir;
weit über Berg und Tale,
weit über blaches Feld
schwingt es sich über alle
und eilt aus dieser Welt.

2. O schöner Tag und noch viel schönre Stund,
wann wirst du kommen schier,
da ich mit Lust, mit freiem Freudenmund
die Seele geb von mir
in Gottes treue Hände
zum auserwählten Pfand,
daß sie mit Heil anlände
in jenem Vaterland!

3. O Ehrenburg, nun sei begrüßet mir,
tu auf der Gnaden Pfort;
wie große Zeit hat mich verlangt nach dir,
eh ich bin kommen fort
aus jenem bösen Leben,
aus jener Nichtigkeit
und mir Gott hat gegeben
das Erb der Ewigkeit.

4. Was für ein Volk, was für ein edle Schar
kommt dort gezogen schon?
Was in der Welt von Auserwählten war,
seh ich, die beste Kron,
die Jesus mir, der Herre,
entgegen hat gesandt,
da ich noch war so ferne
in meinem Tränenland.

*1. Jerusalem, thou city fair and high,
Would God I were in thee!
My longing heart fain, fain to thee would fly,
It will not stay with me.
Far over vale and mountain,
Far over field and plain,
It hastes to seek its Fountain
And leave this world of pain.*

*2. O happy day and yet far happier hour,
When wilt thou come at last,
When fearless to my Father's love and pow'r,
Whose promise standeth fast,
My soul I gladly render?
For surely will His hand
Lead her with guidance tender
To heav'n, her fatherland.*

*3. O Zion, hail! Bright city, now unfold
The gates of grace to me.
How many a time I longed for thee of old
Ere yet I was set free
From yon dark life of sadness,
Yon world of shadowy naught,
And God had given the gladness,
The heritage, I sought.*

*4. What glorious throng and what resplendent host
Comes sweeping swiftly down?
The chosen ones on earth who wrought the most,
The Church's brightest crown,
Our Lord hath set to meet me,
As in the far-off years
Their words oft came to greet me
In yonder land of tears.*

5. Propheten groß und Patriarchen hoch,
auch Christen insgemein,
die weiland dort trugen des Kreuzes Joch
und der Tyrannen Pein,
schau ich in Ehren schweben,
in Freiheit überall,
mit Klarheit hell umgeben,
mit sonnenlichtem Strahl.

6. Wenn dann zuletzt ich angelanget bin
im schönen Paradeis,
von höchster Freud erfüllet wird der Sinn,
der Mund von Lob und Preis.
Das Halleluja reine
man spielt in Heiligkeit,
das Hosianna feine
ohn End in Ewigkeit

7. mit Jubelklang, mit Instrumenten schön,
in Chören ohne Zahl,
daß von dem Schall und von dem süßen Ton
sich regt der Freudensaal,
mit hunderttausend Zungen,
mit Stimmen noch viel mehr,
wie von Anfang gesungen
das große Himmelsheer.

*5. The patriarchs' and prophets' noble train,
With all Christ's followers true,
Who bore the cross and could the worst disdain
That tyrants dared to do,
I see them shine forever,
All-glorious as the sun,
Mid light that fadeth never,
Their perfect freedom won.*

*6. And when within that lovely Paradise
At last I safely dwell,
What songs of bliss shall from my lips arise,
What joy my tongue shall tell,
While all the saints are singing
Hosannas o'er and o'er,
Pure hallelujahs ringing
Around me evermore!*

*7. Unnumbered choirs before the shining throne
Their joyful anthems raise
Till heaven's glad halls are echoing with the tone
Of that great hymn of praise
And all its host rejoices,
And all its blessed throng
Unite their myriad voices
In one eternal song.*



LARS NOTTO BIRKELAND

organist

Lars Notto Birkeland (born 1969) is one of Norway's leading concert organists, and maintains an extensive career as a pianist, conductor, accompanist, and educator. Since 2014, he has served as an organist at Akershus Castle Church in Oslo. He was previously organist at Fagerborg Church in Oslo, has taught at the Norwegian Academy of Music and the Barratt Due Institute of Music, and has worked as répétiteur and chorus master at the Norwegian National Opera.

He studied at the Norwegian Academy of Music with Professor Harald Herresthal, continued his training with Kåre Nordstoga in Oslo and Guy Bovet in Switzerland, and participated in numerous masterclasses with artists such as Marie-Claire Alain, Luigi Ferdinando Tagliavini, and Jon Laukvik.

Birkeland made his debut in Oslo Cathedral in 1998 and is active as a concert organist both in Norway and abroad. With the Oslo Philharmonic, he has appeared as a soloist in Poulenc's Organ Concerto and Saint-Saëns' Organ Symphony, among other works, and has performed with several other orchestras and at major festivals throughout Norway and Europe.

He places strong emphasis on chamber music and interdisciplinary collaborations. In 2011, he released a critically acclaimed recording of Jehan Alain's complete organ works (Simax Classics), followed in 2018 by a recording of concertos for organ, percussion, and string orchestra by Bjørn Kruse and Kjell Habbestad, in collaboration with the Norwegian Radio Orchestra (Aurora Records).

Birkeland also works extensively with organ transcriptions of orchestral music. One of his recent projects is a transcription of Béla Bartók's opera *Bluebeard's Castle* for organ and piano, which has been performed in numerous venues since 2022.

Since 2025, he has been the recipient of Norway's 10-year Government Grant for Established Artists.



EIRIK RAUDE

percussionist

Eirik Raude (born 1973, in Horten) is a Norwegian percussionist and festival director, recognized as one of the leading performers in the Nordic region within his field. He has appeared as a soloist with major orchestras such as the Berlin Philharmonic, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the Staatskapelle Dresden, and has collaborated with conductors including Gustavo Dudamel, Andrew Litton, John Storgårds, Lawrence Renes, and Jonathan Nott.

Raude has premiered over 50 works by both Norwegian and international composers and has worked with prominent figures such as Sofia Gubaidulina. From 1999 to 2009, he was a percussionist with the Oslo Philharmonic and has since built an extensive career as a soloist and chamber musician.

In 2004, he released his debut solo album, *I Ching* (Simax Classics) which was met with high critical acclaim. Since 2017, he has served as the executive director of the Risør Chamber Music Festival.



FORSVARETS STABSMUSIKKORPS

Forsvarets stabsmusikkorps (The Staff Band of the Norwegian Armed Forces) is one of the Norwegian Armed Forces' five military bands and is Norway's largest professional wind orchestra. Based at Akershus Fortress in Oslo, it was established in 1818. The band is Oslo's oldest musical institution and serves as the Armed Forces' most important ceremonial band, with regular assignments for the Royal Family, the Parliament, the Government, and various military units.

The band has an extensive concert program in Oslo and the eastern part of Norway, and it also participates in international military music festivals and tattoos. It collaborates with music institutions, music festivals, cultural centers, and other cultural organizations. Over the course of a year, the band performs up to 150 concerts and engagements of various sizes.

PETER SZILVAY conductor

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 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.



EGIL HOVLAND: *Cantus I–X*

Cantus I
for flute and harpsichord,
op. 45 (1964)

Cantus II (*Variations on a French Noël*)
for soprano recorder and piano,
op. 83 (1975)

Cantus III (*Maria Gnadenmutter*)
for violin and piano,
op. 103 (1980)

Cantus IV
for brass quintet,
op. 97 (1979)

Cantus V
for trombone and organ,
op. 120 (1982)

Cantus VI (*Ved haandarbeidet*)
for recorders, flute, and piano,
op. 118 (1982)

Cantus VII (*Il Maestro*)
for organ, 9 brass instruments and timpani,
op. 132 (1985)

Cantus VIII
for oboe and string quartet,
op. 129 (1986)

Cantus IX (*Te Deum*)
for organ and percussion,
op. 133 (1986)

Cantus X
for trumpet and organ,
op. 168 (2002)

EGIL HOVLAND (1924–2013)

Cantus VII (*il Maestro*)
for organ, brass instruments and timpani
01. I 06:02
02. II 05:44
03. III (Choral) 03:25

Cantus IX (*Te Deum*)
for organ and percussion
04. I 07:14
05. II (Toccata) 07:17
06. III (Epilogue) 02:38

Crux Ave – Variationen über «Jerusalem,
du hochgebaute Stadt» (Orgelpartita VII)

07. I 01:23
08. II 02:29
09. III 03:30
10. IV 02:20
11. V 04:00
12. VI 04:09
13. VII 02:12

14. Interludium from
Den vakreste rosen 02:31

15. Toccata over
Nu la oss takke gud 03:22

MUSICIANS:

Lars Notto Birkeland, Organ

Eirik Raude, Percussion

Peter Szilvay, Conductor

Brass Ensemble from Forsvarets stabsmusikkorps

Sebastian Haukås, Trumpet

Tone Fossum Olsson, Trumpet

Tormod Åsgård, Trumpet

Thomas Gimse, French Horn

Simen Aleksander Olsen Hagen, French Horn

Karoline Trondsen, Trombone

Ingebjørg Bruket, Trombone

Joar Lemme, Trombone

Snorre Sivertsen, Tuba

Rune Heggli, Timpani

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ARTIST PHOTO (RAUDE): RUNE KONGSRO

ARTIST PHOTO (BAND): FREDDY HAUG

ARTIST PHOTO (SZILVAY): LARS IGESUND

PHOTO ORGAN AT FAGERBORG CHURCH: ORGELBAU GOLL

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