

LAWQ
CLASSICS

MARTIN ROMBERG
ARTS AND SIGNS

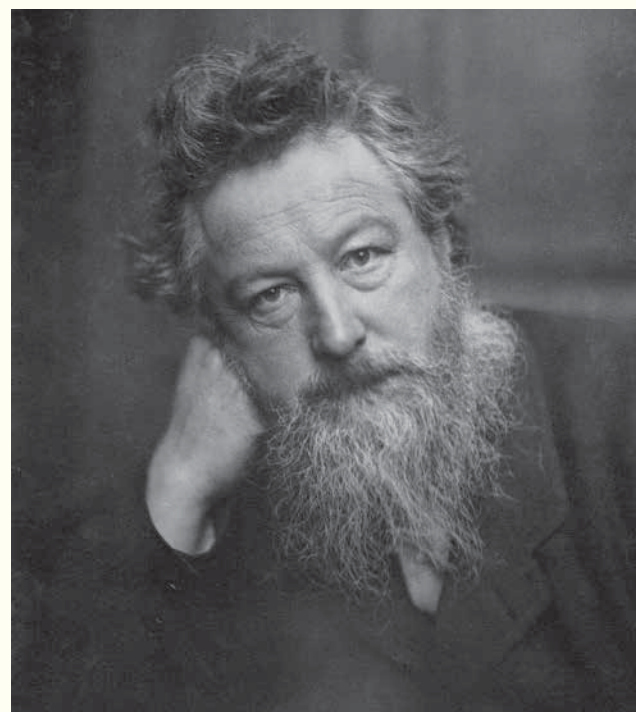
ALEXANDRA SILOCEA
PIANO





*"... I do not want art for a few; any more than education for a few;
or freedom for a few..."*

— William Morris



ARTS ^{AND} SIGNS

The Arts and Crafts movement, initiated by the British philosopher, designer, and artist William Morris, among others, between 1870 and 1910, was a humanistic attempt to introduce the refined aspects of art—or, in other words, the beautiful—to the masses. Hand-designed tapestries, woven textiles, and intricate floral patterns became purposeful in making beauty accessible to the growing educated and financially liberated upper-middle class in Europe. It was a crucial period for early socialism, when aesthetics were still an integral part of the heritage of the *Bildungsbürgertum*, a class connected to Greek philosophy, which considered beauty as a universal parameter for all citizens—a political force in its own right.

Although “the beautiful” would lose its meaning as a social marker when it was democratized and rendered non-exclusive (after all, what is paradise but a reward for the hard-working?), it was nonetheless a result of an attempt to preserve European metaphysics through the creation of decorative, ornamented, pastoral, calming, and conscientiously crafted objects that could serve as meditative focal points.

The Arts and Crafts movement was correct in many respects: it advocated a return to the crooked and organically made, to the faux-faulty, and

emphasized the relationship between art and social health. The dignity of “the honest human hand,” to quote Ruskin, was needed to counter the cynicism of mass production and the war-mongering dystopia that characterized European culture at the turn of the last century (not entirely unlike our present times).

Dismissed as “nostalgic decoration”, the movement was absorbed by the modernist progressives of the interwar period, like many other movements with ties to the past. However, if one keeps the question in mind—whether culture for all would still allow for the beautiful—one might ask if the Arts and Crafts movement deserves to be revisited, perhaps upgraded with the emotional and narrative potential of music. We tentatively name this intention *Arts and Signs*.

In the semiotic sense, the musical “sign” is an echo of something vaguely known. Because it is, to some extent, already familiar, it carries its own meaning. The sign, impossible to execute without the craft it represents, thus replaces the craft itself as a concept. This form of musical sub-creation, to paraphrase Tolkien, does not only refer to itself (as all “Tristan-chords” refer to “Tristan-chords”) but also to what the chord has come to signify culturally: unfulfilled love and tragedy, and how humans have navigated these emotions through the centuries, “in the spirit of the *Zeitgeist*,” or not. Tolkien’s semiotic solution to the authenticity question was to lift these signs into the realm of dreams and alternative universes, making it possible to treat the human condition literarily, from a perspective of uplift. Artists of this temperament find fulfillment in planting their feet firmly in the heavens, while their minds float on the ground.

VALAQUENTA II

The Ladies

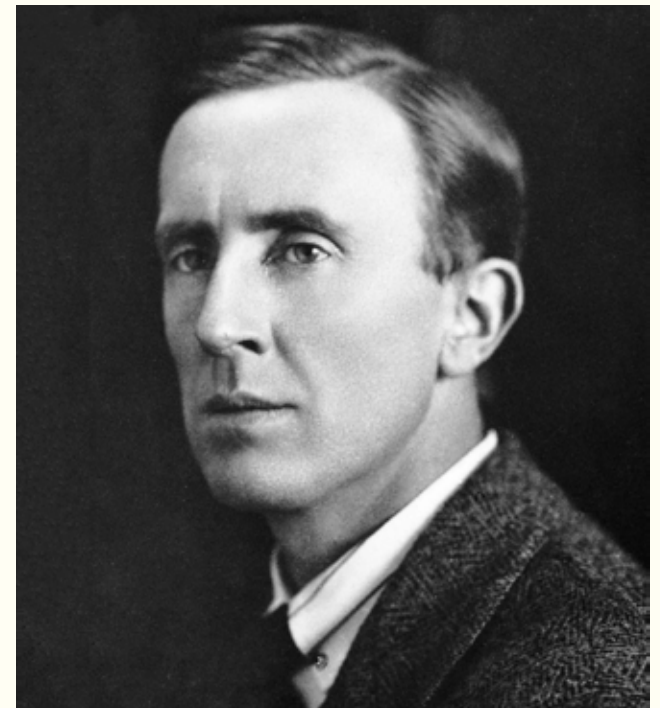
Seven pieces for Piano
Based on the Tale by J.R.R. Tolkien

2010 | 2020

The *Valaquesta*, or the story of the primordial gods as told in J.R.R. Tolkien's *Silmarillion* (1977), has haunted me since my formative youth. In 2008, probably due to a certain timidity toward the feminine, I decided to release a collection of piano pieces, *Valaquesta I*, focused solely on the male characters from the myth. Many asked, understandably, about the female characters, and I could only respond that they didn't sing to me at the time. Several sketches were made in 2010, but none of the pieces could find the concentrated calm needed for their seeds to grow into real saplings.

In reality, the Ladies of the lore demanded shorter, simpler, more transparent, and less warlike and ambitious pieces than the first collection. And as every musician burdened with maturity knows, simplicity is often more difficult than complexity. Tolkien's female divine characters, part of a reminiscence of the Hellenistic-Norse pantheon of gods, are also intimately connected with song—whether in conjuring, celebrating, or lamenting the tragedy of existence.

Concerning the latter, *Valaquesta II* was written during the Mordorian darkness of the 2020 pandemic, commissioned by none other than the Valar themselves to soothe the world and restore balance.



TABLEAUX KITSCH

*Four Piano Pieces
Inspired by paintings by Odd Nerdrum*

2014

This collection of four pieces emerged from an unexpected encounter with the extraordinary Norwegian painter Odd Nerdrum, who resided in Paris between 2007 and 2012. The pieces were written successively for his private vernissage at his manor in Maisons-Laffitte in 2012 and an exhibition at the European Museum of Modern Art in Barcelona in 2015, with the piece “Melancholia” added some years later. Nerdrum’s paintings are an extraordinary attempt to integrate classical figurative oil painting with a personal hero’s journey into an inner world and fantastical landscapes of universal quality. His operatic works investigate drama, movement, gravitational forces, and surprising visual perspectives. From the hopeful “To the Lighthouse” and the Leonardian masterpiece “Stranded,” to the dazzling “Melancholia” and the metaphysical “Drifting,” these piano pieces are attempts to derive a fundamental atmosphere or dramatic narrative from the paintings.

Odd Nerdrum,
Melancholia,
(Portrait of Bork), 2015



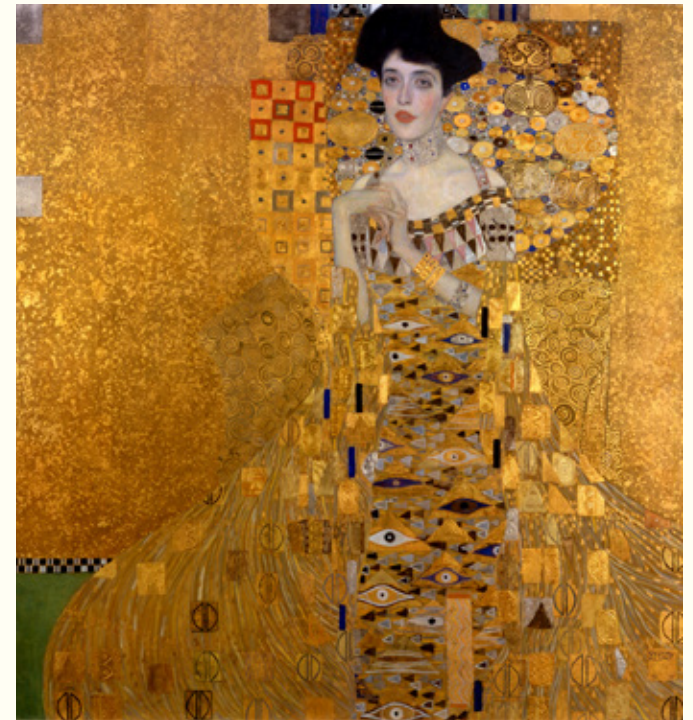
TABLEAUX d'OR

*Two piano pieces
Inspired by paintings by Gustav Klimt*

2022

These two pieces, inspired by Gustav Klimt's *Adele Bloch-Bauer I* and *Der Lebensbaum*, were commissioned by French-Romanian pianist Alexandra Siloceca in 2022 as part of her artistic collaborations with museums and the visual arts world. The latter painting also served as part of Austrian piano manufacturer Bösendorfer's spectacular Klimt series. Klimt's works, which combine a strange but masterful mix of orthodox iconography and decadent figuration, represent one of the last truly "decorative" movements in European art, and one of the most domestically beloved. The 1907 portrait of the wealthy Jewish woman Adele Bloch-Bauer fuses gold-leaf iconography with the commissioner's sparkling jewels, uniting secular and religious forces. Paired with the decadence of the times, this creates a dizzying effect reminiscent of the "fin-de-siècle" period. In times of crisis, when the world seems to be ending, excess, intoxication, and beauty remain the only means by which the human tragedy can be made bearable.

Gustav Klimt,
Adele Bloch-Bauer I, 1907



KARI'S STEV

*Reflections on a Folkloric Theme
From Jæren*

2022

This brief piece is the result of a personal and precious encounter with Kari Sand, a now 90-year-old woman from Jæren. Sand is the hearty matriarch of the Norwegian Sand family (to whom the composer is also related) and a living memory of the lost Scandinavian medieval ballad tradition, a culture in which words were remembered, not written. A *Stev* is a form of Norwegian folk song consisting of four-line lyric stanzas. This particular type of *Gammelstev* (Old Stev) is the oldest form of end-rhyme poetry in Scandinavia. This piece also seems related to the older ballad tradition, especially because of the *omkved*—a repetitive phrase after each stanza.

The mystical and symbolic text speaks of a forest of “noble” trees where the hind, squirrel, and dove reside, growing “south and west of the fjord,” in other words, a place that exists only in dreams. This place is called the *Aúromheimen* (Otherworld), a term also found in the famous medieval ballad *Draumkvedet*. How can a young man find the virgin in such a place? As is often the case, music and words pose questions that humans are not meant to answer.

*Eg veit meg ein ædelig skoge
súnnan og vestan i fjord.
Der vekser så mange dei ædelig tre
dei venast på jordi som gror.
“Horre sko sveinen finne jomfrúa?”*

*Der vekser så mange dei ædelig tre
bjørkji og så lindi.
Der spelar så mange dei ædelig dyr
Hjorten og så hindi.
“Horre sko sveinen finne jomfrúa?”*

*Der spelar så mange dei ædelig dyr
Ikonnet og så Dúva
Ho er ætta or Aúromheimen
den rike, stolte jomfrúa.
“Horre sko sveinen finne jomfrúa?”*

This musical reflection was written for Sand's 86th birthday and was for that occasion performed by Norwegian pianist Christian Ihle Hadland.

All texts written by Martin Romberg.



MARTIN ROMBERG

Composer

Martin Romberg (born in Oslo, Norway, in 1978) is one of the most active orchestral composers of his generation in Scandinavia. His music, which draws inspiration from images and literary works rooted in Pagan and Celtic-Christian culture as well as fantasy literature by authors such as J.R.R. Tolkien, H.P. Lovecraft, and Robert E. Howard, has been described as post-Wagnerian and neo-romantic, blending elements of mythopoeia, legends, folklore, and mysticism.

Romberg's works have been published by Éditions Billaudot in Paris and performed by numerous orchestras worldwide, including the Astana Symphony Orchestra, Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, Deutsche Film-orchester Babelsberg, Orchestre National de Montpellier, Akademische Orchestervereinigung Göttingen, Shanghai Youth Symphony Orchestra, Mittelsächsische Philharmonie, Orchestre de Basse-Normandie, Orchestre Régional d'Avignon, Orchestre de Pau Pays de Béarn, Telemark Chamber Orchestra, Nizhni Novgorod Philharmonic Orchestra, Arkhangelsk

State Chamber Orchestra, Orchestre National de Lille, Orchestre Philharmonique de Nice, Severnaya Sinfonia, Russian Camerata, Mariinsky Orchestra, Scarborough Symphony Orchestra, Nizhni Novgorod Soloists, Misbourne Symphony Orchestra, Moldovan National Youth Orchestra, Kostroma Philharmonic Orchestra, Grimethorpe Colliery Band, and Württembergische Philharmonie Reutlingen, under conductors such as Alan Buribayev, Kirill Karabits, Damian Iorio, Samuel Jean, Jean Deroyer, Ariane Matiakh, Fabio Mastrangelo, György Ráth, and Elim Chan.

Romberg studied contemporary classical composition at the University of Music in Vienna with Michael Jarrell, film music with Klaus Peter Sattler, and orchestration with Ertuğrul Sevsay. He has released three solo albums, respectively on LAWO Classics and KLARTHE Paris, and two symphonic production music albums for Audio Network, which he conducted with the London Session Orchestra at Abbey Road Studios in London in 2016 and 2018.

Romberg is quadrilingual and, outside of music, also writes literary works and philosophical essays.





2. Der Lebensbaum

Träumend ♩ = 90 ca. 5

p Martin Romberg
(1978)

molto cant.

ALEXANDRA SILOCEA

Piano

Alexandra Siloceca is a French-Romanian concert pianist, podcaster, and curator, internationally recognized for her emotionally powerful performances and innovative approach to classical music.

As a concert pianist, she performs with leading orchestras, including the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Bamberg Symphony, the Gävle Symphony Orchestra, Kymi Sinfonietta, the Oulu Symphony Orchestra, and the Meininger Hofkapelle, under the baton of conductors such as Vladimir Jurowski, Jakub Hrůša, Leo McFall, Delyana Lazarova, Roderrick Cox, or Alexandre Bloch.

Performing under the Patronage of the Duchess of Rutland, Alexandra frequently collaborates with contemporary composers: the Piano Concerto No. 1, "The Kookaburra" by Luis Saglie composed specifically for Alexandra Siloceca and conductor Alejandra Urrutia, will have its premiere at the Teatro Municipal de Santiago in Chile June 2025. A reinvented artist for the fourth

consecutive edition at the Enescu Festival 2025. In 2023 She preformed Fazil Say's Piano Concerto "WATER" with the "G. Enescu" Philharmonic Orchestra at the Festival.

In 2024, Alexandra performed at the National Gallery in London for the 85th Anniversary Concert of Myra Hess's wartime performances, a celebration of music's resilience and cultural significance. Her collaborations with the Heidi Horten Collection include creating experiences where music and visual art harmonize to captivate audiences.

Educated in Bucharest, Vienna and Paris, Alexandra was mentored by Elisabeth Leonskaja, Maria João Pires, and the late Radu Lupu. A Bösendorfer artist for over 20 years, and newly appointed LOBMEYR Ambassador, Alexandra created "Klimt meets Bösendorfer—The Tree of Life," a new format blending solo piano music, Gustav Klimt's favorite songs, poetry, and a unique limited-edition Bösendorfer grand piano.

On her Piano Fortissimo Podcast, Alexandra engages in conversations with esteemed invited guests about music, art, and culture, fostering deep connections to global audiences.

www.alexandra-siloceca.com

BÖSENDORFER

*Collector's Item Grand Piano:
Klimt Tree of Life*

With the *Tree of Life* Grand Piano from the Bösendorfer Collector's Item Artist Series, the piano manufacturer honors Gustav Klimt, one of Austria's most important painters. Renowned for his interdisciplinary works and the influence of ancient oriental, early Christian, and East Asian themes, Klimt was a world-famous artist during his lifetime.

Klimt's *Tree of Life* frieze, created for the dining hall of the Palais Stoclet in Brussels, is a seminal work from his "Golden Period." For this monumental work, he produced impressive full-scale preliminary drawings, which were revised several times and accompanied by handwritten notes and instructions for the production of the actual frieze in the Wiener Werkstätten manufactory.

For their Collector's Item Series *Klimt*, Bösendorfer used the original template of the painting and transferred it to the interior of the piano lid using an intricate reprography technique. The details were then highlighted and embellished with fine gold leaf, creating a harmonious blend of Austrian culture—artistic, musical, and artisanal.

As a collector's item, the *Tree of Life* Grand Piano is limited to just 25 instruments worldwide, each with an individually numbered brass plaque. It is available in two models: Grand Piano 214VC and Concert Grand 230VC Vienna Concert.



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Bösendorfer



MARTIN ROMBERG

VALAQUENTA II

1. ELBERETH, LADY OF THE STARS—02:56
2. YAVANNA, LADY OF THE SOIL—03:04
3. NIENNA, THE MOURNER—01:21
4. ESTĚ, THE HEALER OF WOUNDS—02:48
5. VARIĚ, THE WEAVER OF DESTINY—02:20
6. VÁNA, THE ETERNAL YOUNG—02:50
7. NESSA, THE LADY OF DANCE AND HUNT—02:04

TABLEAUX KITSCH

8. TO THE LIGHTHOUSE—05:34
9. MELANCHOLIA—02:28
10. DRIFTING—04:02
11. STRANDED—05:36

TABLEAUX D'OR

12. LA FEMME EN OR—03:44
13. DER LEBENSBAUM—03:13
14. KARI'S STEV—04:16