SONO LUMINUS
CONCURRENCE
Iceland Symphony Orchestra
Daníel Bjarnason, conductor
ISO PROJECT VOL. 2

Anna Thorvaldsdóttir

1 **Metacosmos** [13:13]

Haukur Tómasson

2 **Piano Concerto No. 2** [17:01]

Víkingur Ólafsson, Piano

María Huld Markan Sigfúsdóttir

3 **Oceans** [9:34]

Páll Ragnar Pálsson

4 **Quake** [15:33]

Sæunn Thorsteinsdóttir, Cello

Total Time [55:21]

"I am both very proud and excited to bring out the second volume of this recording project dedicated to bringing the orchestral sound world of Icelandic composers to the ears of the world. This album also represents the ongoing wonderful collaboration between the Iceland Symphony Orchestra and Sono Luminus. These recordings, with the orchestra sat in a circle and me conducting in the middle, have been an unusual adventure for us all; challenging and exciting at the same time. The whole team at Sono Luminus have been extremely dedicated and ambitious throughout, working hard to bring this music to recording in the best and most immersive way possible today."

Daníel Bjarnason,
Conductor

ICELAND SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

CONCURRENCE

Can you hear a country in its music?

I posed that question only a few years ago, while contemplating the five recent orchestral works by leading young Icelandic composers that comprised Recurrence, the previous volume of this invaluable, illuminating Sono Luminus series. Pondering those pieces with a visit to Iceland still vivid in my mind's eye, I likened aspects of the music at hand to elements of land and sky, climate and atmosphere—an approach not without merit, but surely not the sole dimension worth contemplating.

Two of the composers featured on that previous CD are also present in this second collection, Concurrence. Hearing Anna Thorvaldsdottir's Metacosmos and María Huld Markan Sigfúsdóttir's Oceans in close proximity, it's hard not to consider once more the natural features of Iceland. But before you decide to approach these disparate works as paintings in sound, listen again for aspects that distinctly evoke more human dimensions.

Thorvaldsdottir, advising performers on how to approach Metacosmos, describes her music as "an ecosystem of materials that are carried from one performer – or performers – to the next throughout the process of the work." The piece isn't meant to depict some specific vista, but rather to compel its participants – listeners included – to contemplate the myriad interrelations that bind us together, in space and through time. Oceans, with its gently gliding movements and ravishing plays of light and color, conjures visions of the natural world. But there's also something ineffably human, emotional, and personal in its cinematic swells and haunting suspensions. In both pieces, despite their markedly different aspects and approaches, the sensation of a beating heart is at some point inescapable.

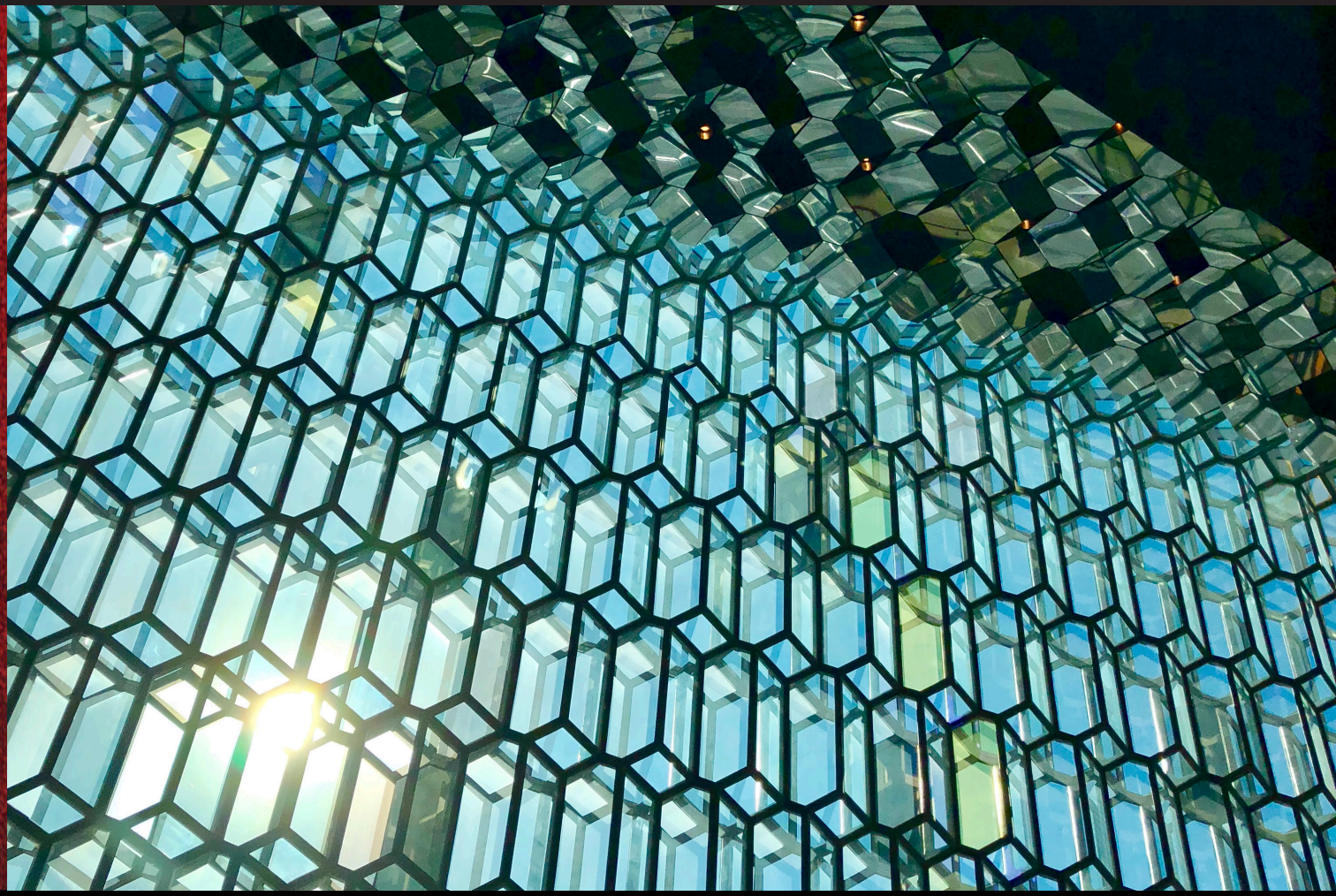
Ideas of human presence, interrelationship, and community come to the fore in works by Haukur Tómasson and Páll Ragnar Pálsson. Each is a concerto – one in name; both in function and spirit – yet in neither do we hear emphasized the "individual acting within (or railing against) society" dialectic encountered commonly in the historic genre.

In Tómasson's Piano Concerto No. 2, the soloist is first among equals, a frolicsome force in continual conversation with lively choruses of counterparts, never overshadowed but also rarely isolated. The solo cello is more prominent, perhaps, in Pálsson's Quake, but not in the sense of a single orator foregrounded against a complementary background. Rather, amid the work's deliberate, effective tectonic judders and jolts, the soloist might well be... well, us, responding with panic and adroitness to keep pace with the rumbling, mysterious tumult all around.

Concurrence, then, points out something fundamental about Icelandic music. Works like those presented here, in magnificent performances by the Iceland Symphony Orchestra, are not merely illustrative of a fascinating, singular ecosystem, but also evoke the relationships that bond this island-nation's inhabitants to the land, its sky, its weather—and to one another.

— Steve Smith

Steve Smith is director of publications for National Sawdust *in Brooklyn, New York, and wrote previously for* The New York Times, Time Out New York, *and the* Boston Globe.



ICELAND SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

The Iceland Symphony Orchestra gave its first concert in 1950 and has since expanded from a part-time ensemble of forty players to an internationally renowned orchestra of eighty-five full-time musicians. As Iceland's national orchestra, resident at Harpa Concert Hall in Reykjavík and funded in large part by the Icelandic state and the city of Reykjavík, it gives around a hundred concerts each season, its repertoire ranging from traditional classical works to contemporary and film music. It has worked with such renowned musicians as Daniel Barenboim, Anne-Sophie Mutter, Joshua Bell, Hilary Hahn, Jonas Kaufmann, Isabelle Faust, and Evelyn Glennie. Currently Conductor Laureate, Vladimir Ashkenazy has conducted the Orchestra regularly since the early 1970s. Among the orchestra's former Chief Conductors are Petri Sakari, Rumon Gamba, Ilan Volkov, and Yan Pascal Tortelier. Osmo Vänska is Honorary Conductor, having worked closely with the orchestra since his tenure as Chief Conductor in the 1990s, and the highly acclaimed Icelandic composer Anna Thorvaldsdottir is Composer-in-Residence. In September 2020, the Finnish conductor Eva Ollikainen will assume the post of Chief Conductor and Artistic Director.

The Iceland Symphony Orchestra's wide-ranging international discography includes highly praised cycles of the symphonies of Sibelius and orchestral works by Jón Leifs. The first volume in the series devoted to orchestral works by Vincent d'Indy with Rumon Gamba was nominated for a Grammy award in 2008. Its most recent release, of symphonies by Charles Gounod, was an Editor's Choice in Gramophone and CD of the week in The Sunday Times. The Iceland Symphony Orchestra has appeared widely throughout Europe, including performances at the BBC Proms and Wiener Musikverein, and in 2018 embarked on a highly successful three-week tour of Japan with Ashkenazy. It has also appeared twice in Carnegie Hall, New York. Writing in The New York Times, the critic Alex Ross described its performance under Osmo Vänskä as "sensational... one of the finest Sibelius performances I have encountered."
en.sinfonia.is

DANÍEL BJARNASON

Conductor

Daníel Bjarnason is one of Iceland's foremost musical voices today. Principal Guest Conductor with Iceland Symphony Orchestra and Composer in Residence with Musiekgebouw Eindhoven, he keeps busy conducting and composing schedules.

As a guest conductor, he has been invited by orchestras such as Los Angeles Philharmonic, Gothenburg Symphony, Toronto Symphony and Tokyo Symphony orchestras; and recent commissions include works for Los Angeles Philharmonic, Musiekgebouw Eindhoven, The Holland Festival and Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra.

His Violin Concerto, written for Pekka Kuusisto, has become one of his most popular works since its premiere in 2017 at the Hollywood Bowl. It has since been performed by Kuusisto with numerous renowned orchestras around the world and continues to be regularly scheduled in future seasons

danielbjarnason.net

ANNA THORVALDSDÓTTIR

Anna Thorvaldsdottir's "seemingly boundless textural imagination" (NY Times) and "striking" (Guardian) sound world has made her "one of the most distinctive voices in contemporary music" (NPR). "Never less than fascinating" (Gramophone), her music is composed as much by sounds and nuances as by harmonies and lyrical material. Her music is written as an ecosystem of sounds, where materials grow in and out of each other, often inspired by structural elements from nature, like proportion and flow. Anna's works have been awarded on many occasions – most notably, her "confident and distinctive handling of the orchestra" (Gramophone) has garnered her the prestigious Nordic Council Music Prize, the New York Philharmonic's Kravis Emerging Composer Award, Lincoln Center's Emerging Artist Award and Martin E. Segal Award.
annathorvalds.com

HAUKUR TÓMASSON

Haukur Tómasson (Reykjavík, 1960) was awarded the 2004 Nordic Council Music Prize, the greatest honour awarded to a Nordic composer. This award, which Tómasson received for his chamber opera Guðrún´s 4th Song, firmly established his stature as one of Scandinavia´s most outstanding composers. The music of Haukur Tómasson is vibrant and scintillating, characterized by intense rhythmic activity, bright, colorful timbres, and a keen ear for novel and effective instrumental combinations. Tómasson´s music bustles with energy and is often quite complex, although the rapidly moving surface rhythm occasionally comes to a halt, giving way to slowly moving sonorities of imposing power and austere beauty. (Árni Heimir Ingólfsson)
haukurtomasson.com

MARÍA HULD MARKAN SIGFÚSDÓTTIR

María Huld Markan Sigfúsdóttir (b. 1980) is a composer and a violinist. She graduated as a violinist from the Reykjavik College of Music in 2000 and with a Bachelor's degree in composition from the Iceland Academy of the Arts in 2007. Maria is a member of the band amiina from 1999. amiina has released and recorded several albums and performed their music around the world as well as collaborated with various artists. Maria has composed music for orchestras, various sized ensembles,

choir, choreography and films.In 2012 her piece, Sleeping Pendulum, for baroque violin and electronics received a prize at the IRC (International Rostrum of Composers). Her piece, Loom, was on the The New York Times top 25 list of the best classical music tracks of 2018 .

PÁLL RAGNAR PÁLSSON

Páll Ragnar Pálsson is an Icelandic composer born in Reykjavík, 1977. He played in the indie rock band Maus for 12 years before venturing into the field of classical contemporary composition. Páll holds a doctoral degree from Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre where he studied with Helena Tulve. His sense for sound was refined throughout countless studio hours where music was perceived rather as masses of noise than melodic-harmonic patterns and processed in a physical and instinctive way, rather than intellectual and analytical manner. Though instrumentation has changed, impulses gathered in the world of rock indirectly still have an impact on Páll's art today. He seeks inspiration from movements in nature and draws parallels to similar processes within the human psyche, compositions resulting as organic linear transformations with a spiritual undertone.

pallragnarpalsson.com

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legacyaudio.com

LEGACY

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