### Gert Mortensen

### The Percussion Universe of Axel Borup-Jørgensen

1	Solo Opus 88 (Gert Mortensen) *	13.38
2	Music for percussion + viola Opus 18	
	(Tim Frederiksen, Percurama, conductor Gert Mortensen)	12.29
3	La Primavera Opus 97 (Duo Crossfire) *	20.40
4	Periphrasis Opus 156 (Gert Mortensen, Michala Petri)	11.17
5	Winter Music Opus 113.1 (Gert Mortensen,	
	Danish National Symphony Orchestra Brass Quintet) *	14.09
	Total	72.44

<sup>\*</sup> World Premiere Recording



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Axel Borup-Jørgensen was born in Denmark, Hjørring on 22 November 1924, but grew up in Sweden, which his family moved to when he was 2½ years old. After a few years of nomadic existence, the family settled in Mjölby, where Axel went to school. His father was an inventor by nature and his creativity was inherited by his son. From his early boyhood, he was able to play several instruments by ear: mouth organ, small accordion, mandoline and piano. In junior school he played together with a couple of class-mates, and they often performed at class parties. As a schoolboy, Axel developed into an impressive drawer, he was interested in astronomy and dreamt of becoming an engineer or an architect.

The shift towards classical music came in 1942. when the boy's piano teacher - after having tried in vain to arouse his interest in operetta and popular music - presented him with the slow movement from Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata. "It was as if a spiritual world opened up, almost with the effect of a religious conversion." After this, piano playing became Axel Borup-Jørgensen's overriding interest. He spent many hours every day at the piano, and as an upper secondary student in nearby Linköping he used the school's sports days to travel to Stockholm and get piano lessons. His repertoire included Grieg's Lyrical Pieces as well as some of the classical-romantic works that were at the centre of the young man's musical universe.

Alongside music, Swedish nature was a source of experiences and inspiration for Axel Borup-Jørgensen. In 1942, the family acquired the small island *Björkö* in lake *Sommen* on the border between Östergötland and Småland. Here Borup-Jørgensen used to walk, cycle and row on long trips during the summer holidays and lose himself in the special stillness that characterises the open expanses of deserted countryside – a stillness that often seems to be recognisable in Axel Borup-Jørgensen's music.

In 1946, Axel Borup-Jørgensen returned to Denmark as a student at The Royal Danish Academy of Music, with the piano as his main subject and supplementary lessons in instrumentation. Those studies – together with Niels Viggo Bentzon's introduction into the various forms of music – was of decisive importance in causing composition to take over the role of piano playing after 1948 as his key musical activity.

He retained his connection with Sweden and spent many summers on Björkö. He was also a diligent reader of Swedish literature. Up to the mid 1950s, this reading focused on such writers as Verner von Heidenstam, E.A. Karlfeldt and Gustav Fröding. Later on, more modernist lyricists such as Karl Vennberg and the Finland-Swedish avant-garde poet Gunnar Björling played an important part in his development from an early romantic-impressionist position to a more aphoristic style. According to Bo Wallner, the influence of modern poetry was more important to him than contemporary modern music.

After Passing his music teaching excamination at The Royal Danish Academy of music, Axel Borup-Jørgensen established himself as a piano teacher. He taught at institutions and had private pupils and this, combined with family obligations, tended to isolate him from the environment for new music in Copenhagen. A divorce in 1958 brought about a change in his family situation and meant that he was now able to devote more time to new music. In 1959, he travelled to the European mecca of modern music, Darmstadt, where he found confirmation for the development he was undergoing in, for example, his *Preludes for Piano* op. 31:1 (1958-59). He played some of them at one of Wolfgang Fortner's courses, and Fortner felt that Axel Borup-Jørgensen's development 'seemed to be the right one'.

Borup-Jørgensen returned to Darmstadt in 1962, but he did not return as a serialist or electro-acoustic composer. He was already in pursuit of his own corresponding form of expression, and Darmstadt did not mean a new departure for him but a confirmation, where the early orchestral works of Ligeti in particular, with their strictly divided string voices, were an inspiration for the orchestral works from the 1960s.

Borup-Jørgensen became especially known among the general public when his Nordic Summer Pastorale won first prize in the competition for a short orchestral work held by Danmarks Radio in 1964, with extensive media coverage. The first prize also included a commission for a large orchestral work for the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Danish National Symphony Orchestra. This work, Marin, Borup-Jørgensen worked on until 1970, when it was given its first performance by the Danish National Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Herbert Blomstedt. It was awarded a prize by the international Rostrum of Composers in Paris and played by Francis Travis and The Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra as the concluding work at Nordic Music Days in 1978. Marin was a milestone for Axel Borup-Jørgensen as a composer. The composition and the fair copy of the score and voices required an enormous amount of work about 6,500 hours, or more than three normal years of work - the main part of which comprised a daily work-load of 16 hours in 1969 and 1970. After Marin, Borup-Jørgensen avoided works for large orchestras with strictly divided string voices, concentrating to an increasing extent on chamber music ensembles.

Nevertheless, the tendency towards a simpler mode of expression – be it modernism's 'neo-simplicity' or a neo-classicism – which was typical of Danish music after the 1970s, is not apparent in Borup-Jørgensen's works. If simplicity is there, it is due to pedagogical considerations being taken of amateur musicians or students, either in the form of music designed specifically for teaching purposes or as the preparation of musical material in versions of varying levels of difficulty. Axel Borup-Jørgensen lived a quiet life as a composer, piano teacher and avid concert-goer. He continued to develop his personal style until his death on 15

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October 2012, and he liked to collaborate with instrumentalists who could help him realise his ideas about new ways of playing and new sound possibilities that could be obtained from traditional instruments such as the recorder and guitar. With a consistency and perseverance that characterised his music for over 60 years, he worked towards an ever-increasing clarity, concentration and fine graduation of expression.

The biography is an abbreviated, edited version of Axel Borup-Jørgensen's autobiography, as told to Jens Brincker in 2012 (see the complete text at www.komponistforeningen.dk/komponistbasen).

Awards:

Aksel Agerbys legat 1960
Lange-Müller-stipendiet 1963
Tips-stipendiet 1964
Dansk Komponistforenings Jubilæumslegat 1968
Herman Sandbys legat 1980
Hakon Børresens legat 1988
Det Anckerske legat 1988
Præmieringer fra Statens Kunstfond 1965, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1986
Carl Nielsens og Anne Marie Carl-Nielsens Hæderspris 1989
Schierbecks legat 1994

Statens Kunstfonds livsvarige ydelse 1965

# The Percussion Universe of Axel Borup-Jørgensen

Axel Borup-Jørgensen was a modern composer. One with a highly distinctive poetic vein. Modern, because he broke with musical traditions and right from his early works in the 1950s allowed his music to sound exactly as he had conceived it. He was born in Hjørring in the northern part of Denmark in 1924 and composed about 200 small and large works before his death in 2012. Without following particular trends or public whims. Although his music sometimes sounds fragmented or alien, it is always poetic. For Borup-Jørgensen refused to follow modernist norms as well. At a point in the 1960s for example, when romantic descriptions of nature were distinctly unmodern, that was precisely what he composed. But in a completely original way, with dramatic pauses and innovative sounds.

During the second half of his life, Borup-Jørgensen wrote small-scale works in chamber music contexts, where he cultivated tiny details for untraditional classical instruments such as viola, percussion and recorder. Five compositions that last 10-20 minutes, where a sound-world is minutely and sensitively examined from all sides – almost as if the musicians are forming a sound-sculpture. One can notice that the music took long time on the draft plan before, after many revisions, he released the work.

The composer's precise idea about the music can be seen from the score, if one should be in any doubt. Borup-Jørgensen was the type of composer whose music is characterised by a great many small details and explanatory remarks about performance. So the interpreter is in no doubt as to how the untraditional notes and signs are to be understood – very frequently with recurring figures featuring a slight sound variation on the previous one.

A good example of that mode of thought on the CD is "Periphrasis" for recorder and percussion. The title is a Greek word that among linguists refers to derivations of words as a kind of variation. For example, it means the same thing to say 'to give

Komponistprisen 1994

a presentation' and 'to present the music'. Though not completely, Borup-Jørgensen composes around the musical utterances as a kind of chase between recorder and percussion, which imitate each other's movements and figures. As if they were playing the same music, but each with their distinctive sounds. The music starts extremely soft with single, calm statements, and then develops in intensity and turns into increasingly violent outbreaks making the instruments get closer and closer to each other. Finally the many movements merge completely into an interweaving of sound, and then the reverse takes place: long pauses, long notes and separations until the tranquillity is total.

"Periphrasis" approaches meditation in the great breaths that arise with the pauses between the outbreaks. The point is even more evident in "Solo for percussion" from 1979. The piece is a violent example of its kind, making use of an enormous battery of percussive instruments. Drums, bells, cymbals, gongs, a number of bottles, a feather and other special effects – and also a steel drum, which makes an appearance between the series of concluded passages as a sign that something else is about to happen. The meditative aspect arises because the passages are so separate and differ so much from each other in terms of sound. In that way the music advances as an alternation between inhalation – pauses – and large exhalations of music.

The percussive piece "La Primavera" (Spring) from 1982 is an experience for two percussionists. The music begins and concludes as bell-ringing and small outbursts. Very calmly, and yet increasingly more intensely, a world of metallic sounds unfolds. Several times in the course of the approx. 20 minutes the piece lasts, the musicians stop and, after a pause, leave the sound-sculpture that have been in the process of constructing. From metal to drum skin, for example. It is as if new music enters the musical space, yet always a number of recognisable rhytmical or sound-based motifs that recur – in a mixture between completely pure, glass-clear sounds and strongly spiced clashing of cymbals that contain all possible colours in a single beat.

"Winter Music" for five brass instrumentalists and percussion was composed by Axel Borup-Jørgensen between 1981 and 1984 as an enclosed, highly dramatic description of the hard winter period. It is almost a duo. The percussion plays one role, with outbursts and rolling exclamations, while the brass instrumentalists join forces to play a completely different role. With pulsating sounds either simultaneously or slightly staggered, the calm, muted movements form a contrast. In that way, a psycho-drama arises in the area of tension between the restless percussion and the steadily advancing brass with a great number of special details of timbre. For example, when the instrumentalists slap their hand against the mouthpiece instead of blowing, only hollow sounds come out in short bursts. A poem belongs to the music, written by the Swede Erik Axel Karlfeldt, who portrays the dark side of winter, with clouds, night and death. Borup-Jørgensen himself wrote in a short note to the work that 'it is a music that is often heavy, lethargic and dark, and only towards the end are the latent forces let loose' – and this is something one understands quite precisely when one hears it.

"Music for percussion + viola" sticks out slightly from the other pieces. It is a work from his youth, written in the mid 1950s, for Knud Frederiksen, who is the father of the soloist of the present recording. The piece has a different pulsating basic feeling from the others. Where one notices how Borup-Jørgensen as a young man also had as a point of departure a reaction to neo-classical music and its simple, rhytmoriented patterns. While listening, however, one becomes well aware that it is the same composer who in the other pieces on the CD sensitively constructs soundworlds. For at one point the viola, as the only melodic instrument in the piece, takes over and in a long passage explores new paths slowly and sensitively. With pauses and time to notice the individual utterances of the music.

In all the works, percussion is centre-stage – and they therefore all share the large richness of sounds produced by the full array of percussion instruments found in 20th century music. Skin, metal and wood, everything from small bells to a gong one metre in diameter – all of them struck with small and large clubs or felt or wood, or stroken with a bow. And even fine micro-sounds brought to life by thin metal nitting needles against small metal disc. Everywhere in the music a fascinating and extremely large world of sounds opens up in a vast number of shades.



#### Gert Mortensen

Gert Mortensen was born in Denmark in 1958. He studied in the soloist class at The Royal Danish Academy of Music in Copenhagen, where he is now professor.

For 25 years he held the position of solo percussionist with The Royal Danish Orchestra. During this time he became recognised as one of the leading concert percussionists in the world. He has performed as a soloist in concerts and on TV and radio in most of Europe, USA, Japan, Australia and China.

He has played at numerous international festivals, including the Proms at the Royal Albert Hall with the BBC Philharmonic, The Barbican, ISCM World Music Days, Warsaw Autumn, the Edinburgh Festival, The Bergen International Festival in Norway, Estate Musicale Venice, Beijing Percussion Festival, The Stockhausen Festival and at the Berliner Philharmonie.

Gert Mortensen's research and projects are often a blend of the avant-garde and ethno-musicology, and at his concerts he makes use of a fascinating array of instruments from all parts of the globe where he has carried out studies: Mexico, Cuba, Zimbabwe, Burma, India, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, Cook Islands and China.

Together with the composer Per Nørgaard and the conductor Sir Simon Rattle he has studied Balinese gamelan music. Gert Mortensen brought home a complete chromatic gamelan set to be used in Western musical compositions, including the opera *Det Guddommelige Tivoli* (The Divine Circus) by Per Nørgård. Gert Mortensen is known as a particularly innovative creator of instruments, and as a result of his search for new sounds he has created a new instrument, a 'glassophone', which has a range of nine octaves and is made of hand-blown glass used in the traditional Italian wine industry.

He has created various major multi-arts events, including an open-air music drama in Italy: *Farm-o-rama* for chamber orchestra, ballet dancers, old tractors and other agricultural machines and implements, animals and fireworks!

Other examples are the modern dance performances *Pulse of the Elements* featuring African dancers and European percussionists as well as the ballet *Stone Circle*, an idea deriving from the magic stone circles in Africa and with music performed on stones as well as electronics, composed by Ejnar Kanding. In 2010 and 2013, Gert Mortensen was Artistic Director of the gigantic 'World-Music' show *GloboBEATS* at the Concert Hall of The Royal Danish Academy of Music in Copenhagen, with more than 100 musicians and colourful dancers from all over the world.

Since 2004, Gert Mortensen has intensified his concert activities in China, where he has appeared in numerous big cities from Shenyang in the north to Guanzhou in the south, including famous concert halls such as the imposing National Center of Performance Arts in Beijing and Shanghai Grand Theatre.

He has been a soloist with the Beijing Symphony Orchestra and represented Denmark during the World Exposition EXPO 2010 in Shanghai. He has given lectures and master-classes and also had TV programmes on national Chinese CCTV. As a direct result of this, he has been co-founder of the world's first Music Confucius Institute at The Royal Danish Academy of Music, established during the visit of the Chinese president to Copenhagen in 2012.

Gert Mortensen regularly holds master-classes all over the world, and has been guest teacher for the European Union Youth Orchestra under the conductor Claudio Abbado.

Among the awards that Gert Mortensen has received are the Carl Nielsen Prize, Jacob Gades Legat, Gladsaxe Music Prize and the Music Critics' Honorary Award. A number of Scandinavia's leading composers have written works for Gert Mortensen – including Per Nørgård, Svend-David Sandstrøm, Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen, Poul Ruders and Askell Masson and he has worked with such international composers as Xenakis and Stockhausen.

Gert Mortensen has recorded for BIS, DG, OUR Recordings and Dacapo Records.



#### Tim Frederiksen

Studied under Erling Bloch and Max Rostal. Advanced chamber music studies under, among others, members of the Amadeus Quartet. Appointed solo viola player in The Danish National Symphony Orchestra in 1980, and in 1983 gained the position as 1. concert master in this orchestra. From 1996 concertmaster of Collegium Musicum, Copenhagen, until this orchestra disbanded. In 1996 appointed professor of viola and chamber music at The Royal Danish Academy of Music (DKDM). Here Tim Frederiksen has taught a number of ensembles that have not only played a major role in the life of Danish chamber music but have also proved themselves internationally in competitions and concert series, including: Trio Ondine, Paizo Kvartetten, Jalina Klavertrio, The Danish String Quartet and Nightingale String Quartet.

As a soloist, Tim Frederiksen has performed with most Danish orchestras, playing such works as Bartok's *Viola Concerto*, Per Nørgård's *Remembering Child* and Poul Ruders' *Viola Concerto*. He gave the first performance of Jan Yngve Trede's *Viola Concerto*, which was also dedicated to him.

As primarius in The Danish Quartet (1986-96) he travelled all over Europe, and he is co-founder of Trio Soleil with the pianist Elisabeth Westenholz and the clarinettist Niels Thomsen.

Tim Frederiksen is also in demand as an adjudicator in international music competitions and is head of department and pro-rector at DKDM.

Recordings by Tim Frederiksen include: Schumann's *Märchenbilder* and *Märchenerzählungen*, Mozart's *Kegelstatt Trio* and Bruch's *Eight Pieces* with Trio Soleil; Jan Maegaard's solo piece *Labyrint*, Vagn Holmboe's

Chamber Concerto for Viola and Orchestra. Chamber Concerto for Violin. Viola and Orchestra, and Chamber Concerto for Oboe. Viola and Orchestra: all the string quartets by Carl Nielsen, Johannes Brahms and Paul Hindemith with The Danish Quartet, Brahms' Sonata for Viola and Piano, op. 120, with Elisabeth Westenholz and Brahms' Two Songs. op. 91, for mezzo-soprano and piano, with obligato viola, together with the mezzosoprano Susanne Resmark.





#### Percurama

The Percurama Percussion Ensemble was founded by Professor Gert Mortensen, with The Royal Danish Academy of Music as its point of departure.

The combination of students and teachers means that the ensemble features many participants from the Danish percussion scene. The number of musicians varies from 2 to 25, depending on the repertoire to be played.

Forum Percurama is a melting-pot of various artistic forms such as 'contemporary concerts', 'cross-over performance', drums and modern dance, world/ethno music, concerts for children, trash music, music theatre, percussion and choir and percussion combined with 'real-time painting' and gamelan ensemble.

One thing all Percurama activities share is the fascination with the ritual power of drums, pulse and rhythm that is created by a blend of sounds, sound-effects and the use of a large number of instruments.

For years, Percurama has had a fruitful cooperation with the French conductor Jean Thorel, one that has resulted in many performances of works composed for enormous groups of percussion, including: Edgar Varese *lonisation*, Lou Harrison *Labyrinth #3*, Gérard Grisey *Le noir de l'étoile* and Alberto Ginastera *Cantata para America Magica*.

Percurama collaborated with the Danish choir Ars Nova in presenting a unique version of John Cage's *Song Books* at the famous Viking ship museum in Roskilde, where a music circus was established for singing voices, percussion, electronics and actors.





#### **Duo Crossfire**

Representing fine national academies of Asia and Europe these two artists have created a global meeting point of crossing musical styles. Professor and soloist Gert Mortensen from The Royal Academy of Music in Denmark and Chinese percussion professor Qiao Jia Jia from Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing has performed in Europe and China. Qiao Jia Jia holds a master degree in both ethnic classical Chinese music as well as a post graduate soloist diploma in western music. This fact has influenced on the duos repertoire resulting in an unusual crossover of different styles. The music of our time is presented along with light classics and minority music e.g. from the Tujia ethnic group of Hunan. Today Qiao Jia Jia is posted from China as director of the Music Confucius Institute at The Royal Academy of Music in Copenhagen.

Since 2008 Duo Crossfire has performed more times at the National Center for the Performing Arts Beijing (NCPA). 2009: Estate Musicale, Italy and with the Zielona Gora Philharmonic Orchestra from Polen, National Chinese Television CCTV. 2010: Summer Festival Tour Shanghai, Tianjin, Nanjing and Hangzhou. 2011: Young Nordic Music Festival Copenhagen, Xinghai Music Festival Guanzhou. 2012: Official Opening Ceremony China Denmark Music Confucius Institute, World premier of Bach to the Future by Per Nørgård (chamber version) together with the DiamondEnsemble Copenhagen, Zielona Gora Philharmonic Orchestra, Estate Musicale Italy. 2013 and 2014 Pulsar Festival for new music Copenhagen.

#### Michala Petri

Michala Petri is born 1958 as daughter of pianist Hanne Petri and violinist Kanny Sambleben. She had her debut at age 5 and started her formal education at age 11 at "Staatliche Hochschule fur Musik und Theater" in Hannover, Germany with Professor Ferdinand Conrad.

Since then she has performed at major festivals and in concert halls around the world, as soloist with leading chamber and symphony orchestras. Amongst musicians she has worked with are Gidon Kremer, Joshua Bell, James Galway, Keith Jarrett, Christopher Hogwood, and Claudio Abbado. Since 1992 Michala Petri has formed a duo with Danish guitarist and lute player Lars Hannibal, with whom she also performs worldwide and in 2013 she formed a duo with harpsichordist Mahan Esfahani.

Michala Petri's repertoire spans from early baroque to contemporary music, and her vivid interest in expanding the expressive possibilities of her instrument has made her an inspiration for many of today's composers.

For 30 years she was under contract with the international recording companies Philips/Polygram and RCA/BMG, and in 2006 she formed together with Lars Hannibal their own company, OUR Recordings, in order to have full artistic freedom. Her many recordings have received international nominations and awards, amongst others 4 Grammy nominations and 3 ECHO Klassik Award. A series of 7 CD's with contemporary recorder concertos from various countries has been started with the Grammy nominated *Chinese Recorder Concertos* and *English Recorder Concertos*, and continues with *Danish* 

Recorder Concertos in 2014, German Recorder Concertos in 2015 and American Recorder Concertos in 2016.

Michala Petri has received many of her country's highest civilian honours including the prestigious Léonie Sonning Music Prize in 2000, and was awarded the 1. rank of Knight of Dannebrog in 2011.

In September 2012 Michala Petri was appointed Honorary Professor at The Royal Danish Academy of Music.

Photo: Tom Bernard





## Danish National Symphony Orchestra Brass Quintet

Trumpets: Michael Frank-Møller and Karl Husum. Both known as magnificent soloists. Michael and Karl both entered the musical world playing in the 'Tivoli Boys Guard' in Copenhagen. Michael also regularly plays solo trumpet in the London Symphony Orchestra.

French Horn: Lasse Mauritzen is already a legend as a hornist. He has been a soloist with various orchestras and is a frequently used guest solo-hornist in a number of major London orchestras.

Trombone: Jesper Juul was solo trombonist in the Danish National Symphony Orchestra from 1996 to 2013. In 2013, Jesper was appointed a professor at The Royal Danish Academy of Music. Jesper also performs as a soloist at home and abroad, and teaches a steadily increasing number of master-classes.

Tuba: Thomas Røisland is one of the leading tuba players of northern Europe. He has a permanent appointment in NRK (Norwegian Radio Orchestra), but has been granted leave for a couple of years to play in the Danish National Symphony Orchestra. Thomas is in great demand as a soloist and chamber musician.

The quintet has given various highly praised concerts, both in Denmark and at international venues.

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