



Bach Composing

— *Ulf Improvising*

Ulf Nilsen, Piano & Organ

— Helt fra jeg var liten og begynte å spille, har skapergleden vært der. Trangen til å leke med all musikk jeg ble presentert for. Behovet for å gjøre noe intuitivt og umiddelbart innenfor hvert stiluttrykk jeg ble fortrolig med. Slik ble grunnlaget lagt for den improviserende musikeren jeg er. Samtidig er jeg, paradoksalt nok, veldig glad i noter; jeg har alltid likt å innstudere musikk som foreligger i skriftlig form, for så å framføre min tolkning av den. Min identitet som musiker forankres altså i at fantasi og kreativitet alltid går hånd i hånd med gleden over og respekten for «den store musikken». Og albumet *Bach composing - Ulf improvising* springer naturlig ut av denne identiteten.

— Så hvorfor akkurat Bach? For det første liker jeg Bach! For det andre er han gammel nok – det har liksom lagt seg 300 års musikkhistorie oppå ham – noe som gir Mange genre

og stilepoker å boltre seg i for en improvisator anno 2021. Og for det tredje er Bach anvendelig; musikken hans er alltid bygd opp av tydelige rytmiske og melodiske motiver. Dette gjelder i høyeste grad de verkene jeg har valgt ut til dette albumet, i tillegg til et annet og vel så viktig kriterium: motivene må trigge fantasien; jeg må kunne forestille meg dem satt inn i helt nye konstellasjoner og sammenhenger. Dermed er Bachs komposisjoner og mine improvisasjoner knyttet sammen gjennom de motivene jeg har benyttet, mens selve de improviserte stykkene er blitt noe helt annet enn Bach. Som titlene antyder, har jeg latt meg inspirere av så vel tysk og fransk romantikk, som russisk, brasiliansk og norsk 1900-tallsmusikk. Og kirkemusikeren i meg fornekter seg ikke – improvisasjon VII er ikke alene om å inneholde salmesitater. Kjærligheten til salmer har vi felles, Bach og jeg.

ULF NILSEN er født i 1964. Han har studert orgel, klaver og cembalo ved Norges musikkhøgskole og Sweelinck conservatorium i Amsterdam. Han ble snart kjent som en svært allsidig utøver og improvisator med stor sjangerbredde. En kveld står Beethovens sene sonater på programmet – neste uke tolker han Piazzolla og Ellington fra orgelgalleriet. Bachs fuger for orgel, Griegs slåtter for klaver – det er stor spennvidde i repertoaret på Ulfs konserter, der han også gjerne improviserer over temaer fra publikum. Han har vært ansatt som organist i Lovisenberg kirke i Oslo siden 1996, og driver ellers utstrakt konsertvirksomhet på både orgel og klaver.

Som improvisator kaller Ulf seg en ubetinget autodidakt. Som Bach-tolker er det imidlertid tre musikkpersonligheter han trekker fram som særlig viktige premissleverandører: sin aller første orgellærer ved blindeskolen i Oslo, Kari Andersen; dernest sin cembalolærer ved Norges Musikkhøgskole, professor emeritus Ketil Haugsand; og sist, men ikke minst, sin klaverlærer i senere år, professor emeritus Einar Steen-Nøkleberg.

— Ever since I was young and began to play music, the joy of creation has been part of my life. The urge to take a playful approach to all the music I encountered. The need to do something intuitive and spontaneous within every style I became familiar with. This was how the foundation was laid for the improvisational musician that I am. Paradoxically, at the same time I like notated music very much; I have always enjoyed learning music that is in written form, and then presenting my own interpretation of it. My identity as a musician is, then, based on the idea that imagination and creativity always go hand in hand with pleasure in and respect for “the great music”. And the album *Bach composing – Ulf improvising* emerged as a natural part of this identity.

— But why Bach in particular? First, I like Bach! Second, he is old enough – with 300 years of music history following him – which

gives an improvising musician of 2021 a wide variety of genres and styles to choose from. Third, Bach is adaptable; his music is always built up around well-defined rhythmic and melodic motifs. This definitely applies to the works I have selected for this album, in addition to another, and equally important, criterion: the motifs have to spark my imagination. I must be able to envisage them in totally different constellations and contexts. So Bach’s compositions and my improvisations are connected through the motifs I have used, while the improvised pieces themselves have become something entirely different from Bach. As the titles indicate, I have drawn inspiration from German and French romanticism as well as Russian, Brazilian and Norwegian music of the 20th century. And the church musician in me cannot be denied – improvisation VII is not the only one to include quotations from hymns. The love of hymns is something that we have in common, Bach and I.

ULF NILSEN was born in 1964. He studied organ, piano and cembalo at the Norwegian Academy of Music and the Sweelinck Academy at the Amsterdam University of the Arts. It was not long before he had earned a reputation as an extremely versatile performer and improviser who could play in a wide range of genres. One evening Beethoven’s late sonatas are on the programme, and the next he is interpreting Piazzolla and Ellington from the organ gallery. Bach’s fugues for organ, Grieg’s Norwegian peasant dances for piano – Ulf’s concerts offer a broad repertoire, and he often improvises on themes suggested by the audiences. He has been engaged as organist at Lovisenberg Church in Oslo since 1996, and also presents a large number of organ and piano concerts.

As an improviser, Ulf describes himself as being totally self-taught. As an interpreter of Bach, however, he describes three people from the music world as having had a particularly strong influence on him: his very first organ teacher at the school for the blind in Oslo, Kari Andersen; then his cembalo teacher at the Norwegian Academy of Music, Professor Emeritus Ketil Haugsand; and last, but not least, his piano teacher in more recent years, Professor Emeritus Einar Steen-Nøkleberg.

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)*

1. *Prelude in C Major, BWV 545	2:25
2. <i>Brahms greets the Master</i>	4:07
3. *Nun komm', der Heiden Heiland (a due bassi e canto fermo), BWV 660	2:39
4. <i>Russian Roulette</i>	5:10
5. *Rondeau from Partita in c minor, BWV 826	1:29
6. <i>Rendez-vous in Paris</i>	5:28
7. *Andante from Trio Sonata no. 4 in e minor, BWV 528	5:01
8. <i>Bossa noBach</i>	5:01
9. *Fugue in b minor, BWV 544	5:59
10. *Gigue from French Suite no. 5 in G major, BWV 816	3:30
11. <i>Toccata Norvegienne</i>	3:39
12. *Sarabande from Partita in a minor, BWV 827	4:56
13. <i>Funeral meditation</i>	6:05
14. *Fugue in E-flat Major, BWV 552; part 1 (alla breve)	2:44
15. <i>Heavenly interlude on a Norwegian hymn</i>	
*Fugue, part 2 (6/4) & *Fugue part 3 (12/8)	7:48

Ulf Nilsen, *Piano & Organ*

Organ: Ryde & Berg orgelbyggeri (Organbuilders) Opus 33, 1995

19 Stops. Mechanical action and stop action.

Great: Bordun 16' Principal 8' Rørfløyte 8' Oktav 4' Kvint 2 $\frac{2}{3}$ ' Oktav 2' Mixtur IV Trompet 8'

Swell: Gedackt 8' Gamba 8' Principal 4' Fløyte 4' Waldfløyte 2' Scharf III Obo 8'

Pedal: Subbass 16' Principal 8' Oktav 4' Fagott 16'

Grand piano by C. Bechstein,
provided by Hellstrøm Flygel & Piano

Organ by Ryde & Berg Organbuilders,
1995

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