



Vagn Holmboe

Chamber Music (II)

Ensemble MidtVest

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Matthew Jones, violin

Sanna Ripatti, viola

Jonathan Slaatto, cello

Martin Qvist Hansen, piano

Charlotte Norholt, flute

Peter Kirstein, oboe

Tommaso Lonquich, clarinet

Neil Page, horn

Stefan Kasper, bassoon

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by the Danish Arts Council, Committee for Music



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Herning, Holstebro, Ikast-Brande, and Struer



ECO, OP. 186 (1991) *Trio for clarinet, cello and piano* 13:19

[1] I Allegro liberamente 5:13

[2] II Andante con moto 3:51

[3] III Andante 4:15

ASPECTS, OP. 72 (1957) *for wind quintet* 16:38

[4] I Andante tranquillo 5:43

[5] II Andante con moto 3:52

[6] III Andante inquieto 2:25

[7] IV Lento 1:43

[8] V Allegro giocoso 2:55

SONATA FOR VIOLONCELLO SOLO, OP. 101 (1968-69) 14:03

[9] I Præludio: Tempo giusto 4:28

[10] II Fugare: Allegro risoluto 3:56

[11] III Introduzione: Adagio – Finale: Allegro giocoso 5:39

QUARTETTO MEDICO, OP. 70 (1956) *for flute, oboe, clarinet and piano* 11:01

[12] I Andante medicamento 3:08

[13] II Allegro quasi febrile 1:35

[14] III Intermedico I: Andante senza pianisticitis 2:41

[15] IV Intermedico II (sans marais): Poco largamente 1:49

[16] V Allegro con frangula 1:49

SEXTET, OP. 114 (1973) *for flute, clarinet, bassoon, violin, viola and cello* 15:27

[17] I Andante 5:17

[18] II Andante cantabile 5:09

[19] III Allegro molto 5:01

Total: 70:28

A LIFELONG LOVE OF CHAMBER MUSIC by Jens Cornelius

Few composers of the twentieth century were as consistent as VAGN HOLMBOE (1909–1996). Throughout his long life he wrote music with a Zen-like balance between intellect and nature. His tonal idiom is an unmistakable concentrate that translucently combines modernism and the classical legacy with a great love of traditional folk music.

Holmboe's music never becomes academic. It buds, grows, blossoms and contracts in an organic process that he called metamorphosis. "The metamorphosis technique is quite natural to me, and it is interrelated with many things that slowly seep in through a life lived with nature," explained Holmboe, who was a true lover of nature. He lived for most of his life in the countryside, and planted 3000 trees with his own hands on his property by the lake Arresø in northern Zealand.

His musical production is almost as extensive. When you try to get an overview of it, his love of chamber music is as plain as a pikestaff. For Holmboe, chamber music was an ideal world where nothing gets in the way and where all the participants have an equal say in the matter. His 21 string quartets are most conspicuous in this respect, but several of his other chamber works are of the same high standard. As shown by this volume 2 in the series of his free-standing chamber works, Holmboe could express himself in a multiplicity of ensembles, forms and formats.

Vagn Holmboe composed music continuously from his teenage years until his death at the age of 86. The clarinet trio *Eco*, op. 186 from 1991 is one of his last works. It was written for the classic configuration of clarinet, cello and piano that Beethoven and Brahms also used, and the three-movement form too is thoroughly classical.

The title means 'echo' in Italian and refers to the way the instruments mirror one another and the way small motifs are used in the music. But the echo is perhaps also the memories of an old man? The trio was written at the same time as Holmboe's ten remarkable Preludes for chamber orchestra, where his concern about the frailty of nature in a violent world is clear. 'Eco' in the ecological sense is hardly an unreasonable third meaning to assign to the music.

In 1922 Carl Nielsen initiated a Danish tradition for wind quintets. The expressive, witty neoclassical style in Nielsen's Wind Quintet was to set a pattern for the future, and it can also be heard in Holmboe.

There are several direct links between Nielsen and Holmboe: at Holmboe's entrance exam for the Royal Danish Academy of Music in Copenhagen in 1925, it was Carl Nielsen who heard his violin playing and reviewed his compositions. In 1933 Holmboe's First Wind Quintet was given its first performance by four of the five musicians who had inspired Nielsen to write his. And in 1957, when Holmboe wrote his quintet *Aspects*, op. 72 it was for an ensemble that included the flautist Holger Gilbert-Jespersen, for whom Carl Nielsen had written his Flute Concerto.

Holmboe's work is neoclassical in form and full of learned polyphony, but the neoclassical never becomes stylistic imitation. As usual, Holmboe maintains his great integrity and his total rejection of what he called "tricks".

"I can't abide tricks," he stated. "The moment you use various tricks – just for the sake of the trickery, that is – then it's a lie. Then you lie in the music." Instead the music in *Aspects* is based on the characteristic metamorphosis technique of which Holmboe had achieved supreme mastery by the end of the 1950s.

The title was chosen with care. The five movements are contrasting views of a small motif that the horn plays in the very first bar. The first movement in itself constitutes a rounded metamorphosis that develops the motif through a slow introduction and a fugato main section until the horn brings it to an end.

Several neoclassical forms appear in the subsequent movements, not least in the 12/8 time of the final movement, which spins along like a gigue. The horn ensures a soft landing with its recollection of the melancholy motto, but the work ends in-tempo and with good humour.

It was the Hungarian composer Zoltán Kodály who, with his great *Sonata for Cello* (1915) resuscitated a genre that had lain idle since the days of Bach. Vagn Holmboe was certainly familiar with the modernist advances that Kodály and his colleague Bartók had made against the background of the folk music of the Balkans. Holmboe's interest in

this grew all the stronger in 1931 when he met the Romanian-born pianist Meta Graf in Berlin. In 1933-34 they travelled around together to study the folk music of the Balkans and even got married wearing Transylvanian folk costumes!

Holmboe's *Sonata for Violoncello Solo*, op. 101 is from 1968-69 and thus more than half a century later than Kodály's. If the leap in time seems surprising, it is simply an expression of Holmboe's lifelong artistic ideals. To the end he acknowledged his indebtedness to both Bach and the Balkans. From Bach he took the movement types of the Baroque, from Balkan music he took the grand gestures and a sense of drama.

The sonata begins with a grand Prelude that fantasizes over the introductory theme, and as with Bach grows into much more than a prelude. In the finest Holmboe style the music grows naturally, almost as if improvised, while at the same time it has a profoundly satisfying form.

The Baroque genre does not alter the fact that Holmboe would never have dreamt of writing a pastiche. His fugue in the second movement quickly goes its own way, and the final rondo of the sonata is a highly physical dance, full of lopsided, irregular Balkan phrases.

Not without reason, Holmboe's concentrated and sometimes ascetic music has given him a reputation as a serious man. Cheap points were alien to his nature, but that does not mean that he had no sense of humour. Holmboe's music spans all the temperaments, and in some works humour is a bearing idea. And so it is for example with the charming joke *Quartetto Medico*, op. 70 from 1956, written for piano, flute, oboe and clarinet.

Holmboe wrote the piece for four amateur musicians who were all medical doctors. This explains why the work is not all that difficult to play, and why the movement names merge with the musical expression in musical/medical diagnoses.

The first and second movements represent the contrast between healthy and feverish – balance against fitful restlessness. Then come two short interludes (called “Intermedico” instead of “Intermedio”): the first is a close-order fugue for the winds alone (“senza pianisticitis”), the second on the other hand is for piano solo (“sans ma-

rais”, that is “without marsh” – one of the players was a Dr. Mose (Danish *mose* means ‘marsh’), so he was not the pianist!).

In the last movement comes a loosening-up with an “Allegro con frangula”: frangula is a laxative, and the music really does flow easily along ...

Holmboe's *Sextet*, op. 114 for the atypical configuration of three strings (violin, viola, cello) and three winds (flute, clarinet and bassoon) was written in 1973 and given its first performance by musicians from the Odense Symphony Orchestra. The mix of instruments offers many possible types of sonority, and Holmboe, who admired Haydn greatly for getting a lot out of a little, uses the six voices like a whole small orchestra.

The first movement has a slow introduction before a fast, teeming main section begins. The little first subject and a brief rhythmic figure run through the music as a recurrent strand, but constantly transformed into new, individual variants. As a contrast, the second movement is a beautiful, ethereal interval in which the parts function as echoes of one another and are mirrored in the most delicate expressions.

Quite classically, the work ends with a lively, rhythmically intricate last movement which, typically for Holmboe, is still completely relaxed and camouflages its many ingenuities. The sextet is a lush, imaginative work, written by a composer at the peak of his mastery.

Founded in 2002, ENSEMBLE MIDTVEST consists of a string quartet, a wind quintet, and a pianist. Based in Herning, Denmark, Ensemble MidtVest resides at HEART – Herning Museum of Contemporary Art, an extraordinary venue designed by the American architect Steven Holl. Ensemble MidtVest plays approx. 80 concerts per year both in Denmark and abroad, including tours to Sweden, Norway, Germany, Poland, Italy, the UK, and the US, appearing at Festspiele Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Ravenna Festival, ULTIMA – Oslo Contemporary Music Festival, PROBALICA Festival (Toruń, Poland), and Sounds New Contemporary Music Festival (Canterbury, UK). In February 2012, Ensemble MidtVest made its debut at Carnegie Hall in New York City. The same year, Ensemble MidtVest appeared as Ensemble in Residence at the Vale of Glamorgan Music Festival in Wales. Each summer, Ensemble MidtVest concludes its concert season at the Concert Hall at Tivoli in Copenhagen, participating in the Tivoli Festival of classical music. In 2006, Ensemble MidtVest's recording of piano quartets by Mozart and Brahms was awarded a prize as the best chamber music CD of the year by the listeners of The Danish Broadcasting Corporation. In addition to classical chamber music, Ensemble MidtVest frequently works with improvisation, creating its own sound and musical language, breaking down barriers between musical styles and genres and expanding the performers' musical intuition and individuality. Assisting in this process, world-renowned Danish jazz pianist Carsten Dahl was appointed the ensemble's first Artistic Advisor in 2007. In November 2011, the CD production "Synesthesia & Metropolis", featuring fully or partly improvised music, was nominated for a Danish Music Award. Henrik Goldschmidt, principal oboist of the Royal Opera in Copenhagen, a leading expert on the music of the Middle East, became another Artistic Advisor to the ensemble in 2008. Ensemble MidtVest has performed with such renowned musicians as Martin Fröst, Sergio Azzolini, Thorleif Thedéen, Alexander Lonquich, Bjarte Eike, Per Arne Glorvigen, and Tina Kiberg as well as Swedish jazz musician Lars Jansson's trio. "Worship of Self", a CD featuring music by Lars Jansson, played by his trio together with Ensemble MidtVest, was published in 2008. Ensemble MidtVest is supported financially by the music committee of the Danish Art Council and by the Municipalities of Herning, Holstebro, Ikast-Brande, and Struer. Additionally, the ensemble collaborates closely with several sponsors.

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EN LIVSLANG KÆRLIGHED TIL KAMMERMUSIK af Jens Cornelius

Få komponister i det 20. århundrede var så konsistente som VAGN HOLMBOE (1909-1996). Gennem hele sit lange liv skrev han musik med en zen-agtig balance mellem intellekt og natur. Hans tonesprog er et umiskendeligt koncentrat, som gennemsigtigt forener modernisme og den klassiske arv med en stor kærlighed til folkemusikken.

Holmboes musik bliver aldrig akademisk. Den spirer, gror, blomstrer og trækker sig sammen i en organisk proces, som han selv kaldte metamorfose. "Metamorfosetechniken er helt naturlig for mig, og det hænger sammen med mange ting, som langsomt siver ind gennem samlivet med naturen," forklarede Holmboe, der var et udpræget naturmenneske. Han boede det meste af sit liv på landet og plantede med sine egne hænder 3.000 træer på sin grund ved Arresø i Nordsjælland.

Næsten lige så omfattende er hans musikalske produktion. Når man prøver at overskue den, falder hans kærlighed til kammermusikken i øjnene. Kammermusikken var for Holmboe en ideel verden, hvor intet står i vejen, og hvor deltagerne har lige meget at skulle have sagt. Mest fylder hans 21 strygekvartetter, men adskillige af hans andre kammercerverker er på samme høje niveau. Som denne vol. 2 i serien med hans enkeltsstående kammercerverker viser, kunne Holmboe udtrykke sig i en mangfoldighed af besætninger, former og størrelser.

Vagn Holmboe komponerede musik lige fra teenageårene og til sin død som 86-årig. Klarinettrioen *Eco*, op. 186 fra 1991 er et af hans sidste værker. Den er skrevet for den klassiske besætning af klarinet, cello og klaver, som også Beethoven og Brahms brugte, og den tresatsede form er ligeledes helt igennem klassisk.

Titlen betyder "genklang" på italiensk og hentyder til instrumenternes spejling i hinanden og musikkens anvendelse af de små motiver. Men genklangen er måske også en gammel mands minder?

Trioen blev skrevet samtidig med Holmboes ti bemærkelsesværdige Præludier for kammerorkester, hvor bekymringen over naturens skrøbelighed i en voldsom verden er tydelig. "Eco" i forståelsen "Øko" er ikke nogen urimelig tredje betydning at tillægge musikken.

I 1922 startede Carl Nielsen en dansk tradition for blæserkvintetter. Den udtryksfulde og vittige neoklassiske stil i Nielsens Blæserkvintet kom til at danne skole, og det høres også hos Holmboe.

Der er på flere måder direkte forbindelse mellem Nielsen og Holmboe: Ved Holmboes optagelsesprøve til Det Kongelige Danske Musikkonservatorium i 1925 var det Carl Nielsen, der overhørte hans violinspil og gennemså hans kompositioner. Holmboes første Blæserkvintet blev i 1933 uropført af fire af de fem musikere, der havde inspireret Nielsen til at skrive sin. Og da Holmboe i 1957 skrev sin kvintet *Aspektet*, op. 72 var det til et ensemble, der inkluderede fløjtenisten Holger Gilbert-Jespersen, som Carl Nielsen havde skrevet sin Fløjtekonzert til.

Holmboes værk er neoklassisk i sin form og fuld af lerd polyfoni, men det neoklassiske bliver aldrig til stilefterligning. Som sædvanligt bevarer Holmboe sin store integritet og en total afstandtagen til det, han kaldte "fif".

"Jeg kan ikke fordrage fif", udtalte han. "I det øjeblik, man bruger de forskellige fif, altså bare for fiffets skyld, så er det løgn. Så lyver man i musikken." I stedet bygger musikken i *Aspektet* på den karakteristiske metamorfoseteknik, som Holmboe i slutningen af 1950'erne havde opnået suveræn beherskelse af.

Titlen er valgt med omhu. De fem satser er kontrasterende syn på et lille motiv, som hornet spiller i allerførste takt. Første sats udgør i sig selv en afrundet metamorfose, der udvikler motivet gennem en langsom indledning og en fugeret hoveddel, inden hornet sætter punktum.

Flere neoklassiske former viser sig i de følgende satser, ikke mindst i finalens 12/8-takt, der snurrer afsted som en gigue. Hornet sørger for en rolig landing med sin erindring om det melankolske motto, men værket ender dog i tempo og med godt humør.

Det var den ungarske komponist Zoltán Kodály, som med sin store *Sonate for cello* (1915) genfødte en genre, der havde ligget stille siden Bachs tid. Vagn Holmboe var bestemt bekendt med de modernistiske landvindinger, Kodály og hans kollega Bartók havde gjort på baggrund af Balkanlandenes folkemusik. Interessen blev kun stærkere, da Holmboe i 1931 mødte den rumænskfødte pianistinde Meta Graf i Berlin. I 1933-34

rejste de sammen rundt for at studere folkemusikken på Balkan og blev endda gift iført transsylvanske folkedragter!

Holmboes *Sonate for violoncello*, op. 101 er fra 1968-69 og altså mere end et halvt århundrede senere end Kodálys. Undrer man sig over tidsspringet, er det simpelthen udtryk for Holmboes livslange kunstneriske idealer. Til det sidste vedkendte han sig arven fra både Bach og Balkan. Fra Bach tog han barokkens satstyper, fra Balkanmusikken de store gestusser og en sans for drama.

Sonaten begynder med et storstået Præludium, der fantaserer over det indledende motiv og ligesom hos Bach vokser til meget mere end et forspil. I smukkeste Holmboestil gror musikken naturligt, næsten improviseret, samtidig med at den har en dybt tilfredsstillende form.

Barokgenren ændrer ikke ved, at Holmboe ikke kunne drømme om at skrive en pastiche. Hans fuga i 2. sats går hurtigt sine egne veje, og sonatens afsluttende rondo er en kropslig dans, fuld af skæve og uregelmæssige Balkan-fraseringer.

Ikke uden grund har Holmboes koncentrerede og til tider asketiske musik givet ham et renommé som alvorsmand. Billige point lå ham fjernt, men det betyder ikke, at han ikke havde humor. Holmboes musik rummer alle temperamenter, og i nogle værker er humor en bærende idé. Det gælder fx den charmerende spøg *Quartetto Medico*, op. 70 fra 1956, skrevet for klaver, fløjte, obo og klarinet.

Holmboe lavede stykket til fire amatørmusikere, der alle var læger. Det forklarer, at værket ikke er alt for vanskeligt at spille, og at satsbetegnelserne går sammen med det klingende udtryk i en musikalsk/medicinsk diagnose.

1. og 2. sats står for modsætningerne rask og febrilsk – balance overfor spjættende uro. Så følger to korte mellemfspil (kaldet "Intermedico" i stedet for "Intermedio"): Det første er en tætført fuga for blæserne alene ("senza pianisticitis"), det andet derimod for klaver solo ("sans marais", dvs. "uden mose" – en af lægerne hed Dr. Mose, og det var altså ikke ham, der var pianisten!).

I sidste sats løsnes der op med en "Allegro con frangula": Frangula er et afføringsmidel, og sandt nok flyder musikken let afsted ...

Holmboes *Sekstet*, op. 114 for den atypiske besætning af tre strygere (violin, bratsch, cello) og tre blæsere (fløjte, klarinet og fagot) blev skrevet i 1973 og uropført af musikere fra Odense Symfoniorkester. Instrumentblandingen giver mange klanglige muligheder, og Holmboe, der beundrede Haydn højt for at kunne få meget ud ud af lidt, bruger de seks stemmer som et helt lille orkester.

1. sats har en langsom indledning, inden en myldrende og hurtig hoveddel går i gang. Det lille hovedmotiv og en kort rytmisk figur går gennem musikken som en rød tråd, men konstant forvandlet til nye individuelle varianter. Som kontrast er 2. sats en smuk og æterisk stund, hvor stemmerne fungerer som ekko for hinanden og spejler sig i de sarteste udtryk.

Helt klassisk slutter værket med en livlig og rytmisk intrikat sidstesats, der typisk for Holmboe alligevel er fuldstændig afspændt og camouflerer sine mange kunstfærdigheder. Sekstetten er et frodigt og fantasifuldt værk, skrevet af en komponist på toppen af sit mesterskab.

ENSEMBLE MIDTVEST blev etableret i 2002 og består af en strygekvartet, en blæserkvintet og en pianist. Siden sommeren 2009 har ensemblet boet på HEART – Herning Museum of Contemporary Art med egen koncertsal, tegnet af den berømte amerikanske arkitekt Steven Holl. Ensemble MidtVest spiller ca. 80 koncerter om året i ind- og udland. Ensemblet har således optrådt i Sverige, Norge, Tyskland, Polen, Italien, Storbritannien og USA, herunder på Festspiele Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Ravenna Festivalen, ULTIMA – Oslo Contemporary Music Festival, PROBALTICA Festival (Toruń, Polen) og Sounds New Contemporary Music Festival (Canterbury, England). I 2012 debuterede Ensemble MidtVest i Carnegie Hall i New York og var desuden "Ensemble in Residence" på Vale of Glamorgan Festival of Music i Wales. Hvert år afslutter Ensemble MidtVest koncertsæsonen med en koncert på Tivoli Festival i København. I 2006 vandt Ensemble MidtVest DRs P2-pris for årets bedste danske cd-udgivelse i kategorien kammermusik for indspilningen af klaverkvartetter af Mozart og Brahms. Udeover den traditionelle kammermusik arbejder ensemblet med improvisation med henblik på at udvikle et fælles og unikt musikalsk sprog, hvor grænser mellem musikalske stilarter og genrer ikke eksisterer, men hvor intuition, samspil og kreativitet styrkes. I den forbindelse har jazzmusikeren Carsten Dahl været tilknyttet som kunstnerisk konsulent for ensemblet siden 2007. I 2011 blev cd'en "Synesthesia & Metropolis" nomineret til en Danish Music Award i kategorien "årets bedste cross over-jazzudgivelse". Ensemble MidtVest har samarbejdet med en lang række musikere, heriblandt den klassiske oboist Henrik Goldschmidt, der i kraft af sine erfaringer med traditionel folkemusik fra Mellemøsten har været ensemblets kunstneriske konsulent i perioden 2008 til 2010. Desuden har Ensemble MidtVest optrådt sammen med klarinettisten Martin Fröst, fagottisten Sergio Azzolini, cellisten Torleif Thedéen, pianisten Alexander Lonquich, barokviolinisten Bjarte Eike, bandoneonisten Per Arne Glorvigen, sopranen Tina Kiberg og det svenske jazzensemble Lars Jansson Trio. Sidstnævnte samarbejde resulterede i 2008 i cd'en "Worship of Self". Ensemble MidtVest er et af Danmarks fem klassiske basisensembler. Ensemblet støttes af Statens Kunstråds Musikudvalg samt af de fire kommuner Herning, Holstebro, Ikast-Brande og Struer. Herudover samarbejder ensemblet med adskillige sponsorer.

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Ensemble MidtVest

DDD

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