



KLAS TORSTENSSON

A PORTRAIT



Music Center
The Netherlands

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BIOGRAPHY



The composer Klas Torstensson (January 16, 1951, Sweden) studied composition at the Ingesund Musikhögskola, musicology at the University of Gothenburg and electronic music at the Institute of Sonology, Utrecht, the Netherlands.

Torstensson's compositions have been performed by orchestras, ensembles and soloists worldwide and presented on most major European new music festivals: Huddersfield, Ultima (Oslo), Steirischer Herbst (Graz), Wien Modern, Stockholm New Music, Nordic Music Days (Reykjavik/Malmö/Berlin), Gaudeamus (Amsterdam), Warsaw, Gaida (Vilnius), Festival van Vlaanderen (Belgium), Holland Festival (Amsterdam), GAS (Gothenburg), NYJD (Tallinn), Darmstadt, to name only a few.

He was also featured composer at festivals such as Stockholm New Music 1999 (together with Mauricio Kagel and György Kurtág), Time of Music 2001, (Viitasaari, Finland), and Montréal-Nouvelles-Musiques 2003.

In 1991 Torstensson received the Matthijs Vermeulen Prize - the most prestigious composition prize in The Netherlands, in 1999 followed by the Stora Christ Johnson Priset, the major Swedish composition prize awarded by the Swedish Royal Music Academy. Torstensson's opera *The Expedition* was a nominee for the Nordic Council Music Prize 2006, whereas the *Intermezzo* from the same opera received a recommendation by the jury of the International Rostrum of Composers in 1999.

Urban Songs for soprano Charlotte Riedijk, Ensemble Intercontemporain and computers - commissioned by Ircam, Paris -, was premiered in 1992, and was to be programmed for another two seasons by the same ensemble, as well as by many other European ensembles, such as Ensemble Modern (Frankfurt), Askó Ensemble (Amsterdam) and Kammar-ensembleN (Stockholm).

In 1994 Torstensson composed *The Last Diary* for reciting voice and large ensemble, based on the diaries of S.A. Andrées, leader of the tragic Arctic balloon expedition of 1897. *The Last Diary* has in the past decade also been translated into German - for performances in Vienna and Graz with H.K. Gruber in the role of Andrée - and Icelandic.

The same material served as a basis for his opera *The Expedition* (1994-1999) for soloists, orchestra and electronics, to a libretto written by the composer. The opera was premiered in concert form during the 1999 Holland Festival in the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, in a performance conducted by Peter Eötvös. Performances followed in Germany, Sweden and Norway.

From 1999 to 2002 Torstensson wrote a full-length cycle entitled *Lantern Lectures*. The cycle was a joint commission by Le Nouvel Ensemble Modern (Montréal), Asko Ensemble (Amsterdam), KammarensembleN (Stockholm) and Klangforum Wien. Over the past years *Lantern Lectures* has been performed some thirty times, by seven ensembles in thirteen countries.

In October 2004 the song cycle *In großer Sehnsucht* (on texts by five 'tragic' women: Camille Claudel, Frida Kahlo, Cristina di Svezia, Rosa Luxemburg and Louise Michel) received its first performance in the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, with Charlotte Riedijk and the Osiris Piano Trio. In the concert season 2006/2007 the cycle went on tour through Sweden and was presented in a staged version by Onafhankelijk Toneel during the Rotterdam Opera Days. The concerto for percussion and large ensemble *Selfportrait with percussion* (*Lantern Lectures*, Volume V), commissioned by Peppie Wiersma and the Asko Ensemble, was premiered during the Wittener Tage für neue Kammermusik in May 2006.

Torstensson is currently working on a set of orchestral pieces, A cycle of the North. The first piece, *Fastlandet* (The Mainland), commissioned by the ZaterdagMatinee, was first performed on October 6, 2007 as the opening work of the series 'Sibelius and the New Music' in the Concertgebouw, Am-

sterdam, by the Radio Filharmonisch Orkest conducted by Jaap van Zweden. The second work, Polarhavet (The Polar Sea), - a co-commission by Sveriges Radios Symfoniorkester and the Stavanger Symfoniorkester (Norway), was premiered during the Baltic Sea Festival in Stockholm, August 2008. The Norwegian premiere followed in December (Stavanger Cultural Capital of Europe 2008). The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra of Stockholm has - together with the Dutch Brabants Orkest - commissioned the third work of the cycle, to be performed in 2010/2011.

Most of Torstensson's music is available on CD.

(Dec. 2008)

BETWEEN REASON AND INTUITION

"original, brilliant and voluptuous music with rhythmical drive"

"grand and gripping, with hallucinating power"

There is more to composing than skilfully and intelligently arranging notes above, below and next to one another on a sheet of music paper. Whether the composer likes it or not, it also involves surrendering to dreams and memories. The composer is naked: the sounds are inalienably his - they reveal a part of his innermost being. Each composition is a self-portrait.

For Klas Torstensson those dreams and memories are, without a doubt, inseparably bound to his native country Sweden - a land of rugged beauty with its silent, empty and mercilessly desolate icescapes and with the enigmatic and bewitching poetry of the northern lights. Indeed many of his pieces seem to evoke that ancient Swedish landscape, most notably *Barstend IJs* (1986), *The Last Diary* (1994), the stunningly moving opera *The Expedition* (1999) and the - metaphorically and literally - dazzling *Lantern Lectures Volume III - Aurora Borealis* (2001).

However, when the young Klas Torstensson came to the Netherlands in 1973, he would have rejected the term "evocations of nature" for being too romantic. At the time, composing was for him, first and foremost, a cerebral activity (finding formal solutions to theoretical problems in music) even though he did let practical considerations (such as the possibilities and technical prowess of a specific musician or group of musicians) colour those abstract, formalistic principles.

Because theoretical problems in music often point to multiple solutions, Torstensson has created "families" (his term) of compositions such as *Licks & Brains* (four movements) and *Lantern Lectures* (five movements). But cross-links can also be found between say: *Solo* (1988) for bass saxophone and the orchestral work *Stick on Stick* (1990); *Stick on Stick* and *Urban Songs*



(1992); *Stick on Stick and Bowed vowels*, the seventh movement of *Lantern Lectures V – Self-portrait with percussion* (2006); and between *The Expedition* and *Lantern Lectures*. This list could be expanded quite effortlessly, given that Torstensson produces work whose essence is unchanging (just like his revered Varèse and Xenakis, their predecessors Wagner and Bruckner, and the visual artists Mark Rothko and Francis Bacon); and this essence has bound Torstensson's entire output into a unified whole.

It is typified by his formidably developed feel for dramatic timbres and textures, and his love of extreme contrasts. This gives rise to music which fluctuates between intense motion (nervously repeated rhythmic figures, often sounding like a signal, or wild, glowing, volcanic eruptions of sound) and total stasis, in which the sounds appear to freeze. But there is also a more lyrical side to Torstensson. This manifests itself in his vocal works, first in *Urban Solo* (1991), composed for the soprano Charlotte Riedijk, and later on (at an as yet unprecedented level) in his opera *The Expedition*.

Torstensson worked on *The Expedition* from 1994 to 1999. It is a magnificent synthesis of all the technical and expressive possibilities explored earlier in his career. Despite its chilling subject - S.A. Andrée and his crew's ill-fated effort to reach the North Pole in a hydrogen balloon - this opera is a warm-blooded drama about life and death. Torstensson wrote the libretto himself and based it on Andrée's Diary, which he read at the age of 10: "The story has haunted me ever since."

The expansive quality of opera in general invited Torstensson to include stylistic references in his own opera which he had, until then, deliberately avoided. Without spoiling his wonderfully unruly style, he wrote a perfectly

accessible score, which, partly because of the masterful use of electronics (the rustle of the northern lights is an experience in itself) soars above most contemporary opera scores. The final aria of the opera (a lamentation for soprano with orchestral accompaniment) is remarkable, too, for its Pucciniesque (tonal!) vocal melody and the intermittent strings in parallel movement, which dominate the vocal line during eight successive suspensions. Since the completion of *The Expedition*, Torstensson has become more inclined to let his own musical intuition guide him and to express the “sensitive” side of his nature in his music. His beautiful song cycle *In großer Sehnsucht* (2004) for soprano and piano trio (sketches of “tragic women” like Frida Kahlo and Rosa Luxemburg) already bears witness to this as does his *Self-portrait with percussion*, whose fifth movement *Almglocken* (a dark, solemn chorale for wind instruments) rings with the echoes of Mahler’s cowbells - paying homage to Anton Webern. One wonders what else the future has in store.

Erik Voermans

Translation: **Imogen Cohen/Muse Translations**

photos: **Mikael Grönberg**

COMPOSITIONS

CHAMBER MUSIC

Two showpieces for percussion

(2008)

Duration: 8'
percussion

Four Brass Links (2003)

Duration: 15'
tp, hn, trb

Urban Extra (1994)

Duration: 1'25"
music box

Hamra (1991)

Duration: 15-20'
sax-sop

Koorde (1990)

Duration: 20-25'
2pf

Solo (1988)

Duration: 10'
sax-bass

Licks & Brains I (1987)

Duration: 19'
saxophone quartet

Spans/spännvidder (1981)

Duration: 8'
bcl, cbcl, 2 perc

Spans (1981)

Duration: 8'
bcl

Pedaal (1979)

Duration: 9'
vln (amplification)

Redskap (1976)

Duration: 16'
6 perc

ORCHESTRA/LARGE ENSEMBLE

Polarhavet (2008)

[from A cycle of the North]

Duration: 21'
3333 4331 synth 3 perc timp
str(16.16.14.12.8)

Urban Intro (2007)

Duration: 5'
str(6.6.4.2)

Fastlandet (2007)

[from A cycle of the North]

Duration: 21'
3333 4331 synth 3perc timp str(16.16.14.12.8)

Self-portrait with percussion

(2006)

(Lantern Lectures, Volume V)

Duration: 40'
perc solo fl(picc/alto), ob(C.I.), cl(Eb/Bb),
bcl(cbcl), fg(cfg), tp, hn, sax(alto/bari), trb, tb,
pf, synth, perc, 2 vl, vla, vlc, cb

Lantern Lectures, Volume II

(2002)

Duration: 17'

fl, ob, cl, bcl, fg, tp, hn, trb, pf, perc, 2 vl, vla, vlc, cb

Lantern Lectures, Volume IV

(2002)

Duration: 18'

fl, ob, cl, bcl, fg, tp, hn, trb, pf, perc, 2 vl, vla, vlc, cb

Lantern Lectures, Volume III

(2001)

Duration: 17'

fl, C.I., cl, bcl, fg, tp, hn, trb, pf, perc, 2 vl, vla, vlc, cb

Lantern Lectures, Volume I

(2000)

Duration: 23'

fl, ob, cl, bcl, fg, tp, hn, trb, pf, perc, 2 vl, vla, vlc, cb

Intermezzo (1998)

[from the opera The Expedition]

Duration: 12'

3343 2sax 4332 hp pf synth bgit 5perc timp
str(16.16.12.10.8)

Kargt (1994)

[from The Last Diary]

Duration: 20'

bcl, cbcl, cfg, sax-ten, sax-bar, hn, trb, tu, pf, bgit, 2 perc, cb

Stick on Stick (1990)

Duration: 21'

4444 2sax 4442 pf hp bguit 5perc
str(16.16.12.10.8)

Licks & Brains II (1988)

Duration: 30'

sax-s, sax-a, sax-t, sax-bari

2 picc/fl, ob, C.I., cl(Eb), bcl, cbcl, fg, cfg, 2 hn, 2 tp, 3 trb,

4 perc, el.piano, bguit, 2 vl, vla, vlc, cb (amplification)

Spåra (1984)

Duration: 13'

3 sax(pan-flutes), 3 bguit, 4 perc, 2 el.piano (amplification)

Flåka (1983)

Duration: 14'

cl(Bb)/cbcl, sax-s/t, bcl/cbcl, hn, tp, trb-b, perc, pf/perc,

2 vl, vla, vlc, cb (amplification)

Järn (1982)

Duration: 9'

fl/picc, 3 sax, hn, 2 tp, 3 trb, pf, cb

Intros (1980)

Duration: 13'

bcl, fg, 2 trb-b, pf, perc, vlc, cb (amplification)

VOCAL MUSIC

In grosser Sehnsucht (2004)

Lyrics: Camille Claudel, Frida Kahlo, Cristina di Svezia,

Rosa Luxemburg and Louise Michel

Text editing by the composer

Duration: 45'

sop vln vlc pf

Intermezzo & Epilogue (1998)

[diptych from the opera *The Expedition*]

Lyrics: Nils Strindberg, Anna Charlier and Anna Kallstenius

Text editing by the composer

Duration: 22'

sop 3343 2sax 4332 hp pf synth bgit 5perc
timp str(16.16.12.10.8)

The Last Diary (1994)

for reciting male voice and large ensemble

I. Kargt

II. *The Last Diary*

Lyrics: S.A. Andrée

Text editing by the composer

Duration: 21'

male voice bcl cbcl cfg sax-ten sax-bar hn trb
tb pf bgit 2 perc cb,
str(4 vl, 2 vla, 2 vlc, 2 cb)

Urban Songs (1992)

for soprano, large ensemble and computers

Text/text editing by the composer

Duration: 30'

soprano(synth) 2 fl ob C.I. bcl cbcl fg(cfg) 2 tp
2 sax hn trb tb 2 perc pf bgit synth 2 vln vla
vlc cb live electronics

Urban Solo (1991)

Text/text editing by the composer

Duration: 20'

soprano solo (perc)

Isogloss (1985)

Text/text editing by the composer

Duration: 18'

24 solo voices

OPERA/MUSIC THEATRE

The Expedition (1999)

libretto by the composer

Duration: 140'

for soprano, tenor, baritone, bass-baritone,
orchestra and live electronics 3343 2sax 4332
acc hp pf synth bguit 5perc timp
str(16.16.12.10.8)
live electronics

Cracking Ice (1986)

Duration: 60'

for 24 singers, 6 percussionists, laser beams,
video, slides and sound tracks

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Möte med Klas Torstensson / K. Aronsson

In: *Berwaldhallen (Sveriges Radio, Sweden), Jan. 2009*

Ragnarök med lyrisk fräschör / L. Hedblad

In: *Svenska Dagbladet (Sweden), 29 Aug. 2008*

Vårens tonsättare 2009 Klas Torstensson / J. Norberg

In: *Musikmagi 1 (Berwaldhallen, Sweden), April 2008*

Virtuoos, glimmend en vindingrijk / A. Fiumara

In: *Trouw, 9 Feb. 2008*

De Zweedse natuur is mijn leven / M. Broeder

In: *VPRO-gids, Oct. 2007*

Het bouwvakkersimago van Klas Torstensson / S. Törnqvist

In: *Het Parool, 9 May 2006*

Grote stilten en brekend ijs / B. van Putten

In: *De Groene Amsterdammer, May 2006; p. 28-29*

Klas Torstensson in Conversation / J. Goldman

In: *Circuit. Musique Contemporaines (Canada) – Volume 14, nr 2 (2004); p. 49-52*

Klas Torstensson / B. Filanovsky

In: *Dutch Music, Pro Arte (Russia) (2003); p. 268-281*

Klas Torstensson

In: *Time of Music 2001; p. 23-25*

Time of Music – Time for Art – Art in Time / A. Vartola
In: *ptah (architecture design art, Finland)*, nr 2 (2001); p. 3-5

Klas Torstensson Lantern Lectures: an opera 'revisited' /
C. Schima
In: *Trackings. –Vol. 3 nr. 1 (Spring 2001)*; p. 4

Isen och människan – om Klas Torstensson och Expeditionen /
G. Bergendal
In: *Konserthuset 75 år (Sweden) (2001)*; p. 22-29

Klas Torstensson / G. Bergendal
In: *33 nya svenska komponister Stockholm 2001 (Sweden)*; p. 320-330

Klas Torstensson / F. van der Waa
In: *The Essential Guide to Dutch Music, 2000*; p. 350-354

Expeditionens spår / T. Lundman
In: *Nutida Musik (Sweden) - Jrg, 42 nr. 1 (1999)*; p. 32-41

Klas Torstensson; music as a grim journey / E. Voermans
In: *Key Notes. - No. 29 (1995)*; p. 10-15

1996 IJskomponist Klas Torstensson; het ambivalente geluk van een exil-
Zweed / J. Dame
In: *Armada, Sept. 1996*; p. 22-30

Klas Torstensson / P. Gervasoni
In: *Le Magazine (Centre Pompidou, Paris) - Feb. 1993*

Oslo's Ultima Contemporary Music Festival / O. Roca
In: *The World & I (The Washington Times), Jan. 1993*

As vague as the goal may be ... / A. Schaathun ; transl. P. Pierroux
In: *Ballade (Norway); periodical for ny Musikk.* - nr. 3, 1992; p. 15-17

Jag ger hellre riktning än substans åt lyssnadet / F. van der Waa
In: *Nutida Musik (Sweden) nr 2, 1991; p. 14-18*

Een barst - binnen één seconde samengesteld uit twaalf overlappende geluiden /
F. van der Waa
In: *De Groene Amsterdammer, 4 June 1986; p. 17*

Kan mij dat tjs, kan mij die laser schelen! Ik ben uitgegaan van een totaal idee /
W. Heijens
In: *VPRO-gids, June 1986*

DISCOGRAPHY



Self-portrait with percussion **Diptych Intermezzo & Epilogue**

Asko Ensemble, cond. *Hans Leenders*; *Peppie Wiersma*, percussion;
Charlotte Riedijk, soprano; *The Royal Stockholm Philharmonic*
Orchestra, cond. *Alan Gilbert*;
*KTC 1352



In grosser Sehnsucht **a cycle of songs**

Charlotte Riedijk, soprano; *Ellen Corver*, piano; *Peter Brunt*, violin;
Larissa Groeneveld, cello
*Cobra 0018



The Expedition **Opera in two acts with a Prologue, an Intermezzo and** **an Epilogue**

Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, cond. *Peter Eötvös*;
Charlotte Riedijk, soprano; *Göran Eliasson*, tenor; *Olle Persson*,
baritone; *Mats Persson*, bass-baritone
* Composers' Voice CV 100



Stick on Stick **Urban Solo** **Urban Songs**

Netherlands Radio Symphony Orchestra, cond. *Zoltán Peskó*;
Charlotte Riedijk, soprano/synthesizer; *Asko Ensemble*, cond.
Stefan Asbury;
*Composers' Voice CV 32



Licks & Brains

Triptych for saxophones

Leo van Oostrom, bass saxophone; *Netherlands Saxophone Quartet*;
ASKO Ensemble, cond. *David Porcelijn*

*Composers' Voice CV 13



The last diary

Palle Fuhr Jørgensen, reciter; *Asko Ensemble & Schönberg Ensemble*,
cond. *Reinbert de Leeuw*

*Composers' Voice CV 57



Koorde

Gerard Bouwhuis, *Cees van Zeeland*, piano

*NM Classics 92074



Järn

Orkest de Volharding

*NM 92021

SELECTED EXAMPLES

The image displays a page of a musical score for 'A portrait' by Klas Torstensson. The page is divided into two main sections, labeled '53' and '54' in red boxes. Section 53 (measures 330-348) features a complex orchestration with woodwinds (Piccolo, Flute 1 & 2, Oboe 1 & 2, English Horn, Clarinet 1 & 2, Bassoon 1 & 2, Contrabassoon), brass (Trumpets 1 & 2, Trombones 1, 2, & 3, Tuba), strings (Violins 1 & 2, Violas, Cellos), and percussion (Synthesizer, Snare Drum, Bass Drum, Cymbals, Triangle, Tom-toms, Gong, and Chimes). Section 54 (measures 349-367) focuses on the string section, including Violins I & II, Violas, Cellos, and Contrabass. The score is written in a standard musical notation with various dynamics, articulations, and performance instructions. The page number '51' is located at the bottom right.

Two showpieces for percussion

based on *Self-portrait with percussion* (2006), parts III & IX

for Tattana Koleva

Klas Torstensson

I

Musical score for Percussion I, measures 116-120. The score is written on a single staff with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. It features a complex rhythmic pattern with various note values and rests. The dynamics range from *mf* to *ff*. There are four numbered measures (1-4) and a box labeled '116-120'. A vertical bar on the left indicates the 'WOOD' or 'HARD' section. A 'sim.' (sustained) marking is present at the end of the piece.

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II

Musical score for Percussion II, measures 1-20. The score is written on a single staff with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. It features a complex rhythmic pattern with various note values and rests. The dynamics range from *mf* to *f*. There are three numbered measures (1-3) and a box labeled '116'. A vertical bar on the left indicates the 'WOOD' or 'HARD' section. A 'sim.' (sustained) marking is present at the end of the piece. A note at measure 1 says 'repeat several times (at 116)'. A note at measure 2 says 'check (fold, or for rest...) the kit -.....'.

Klas Torstensson/Two showpieces for percussion

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