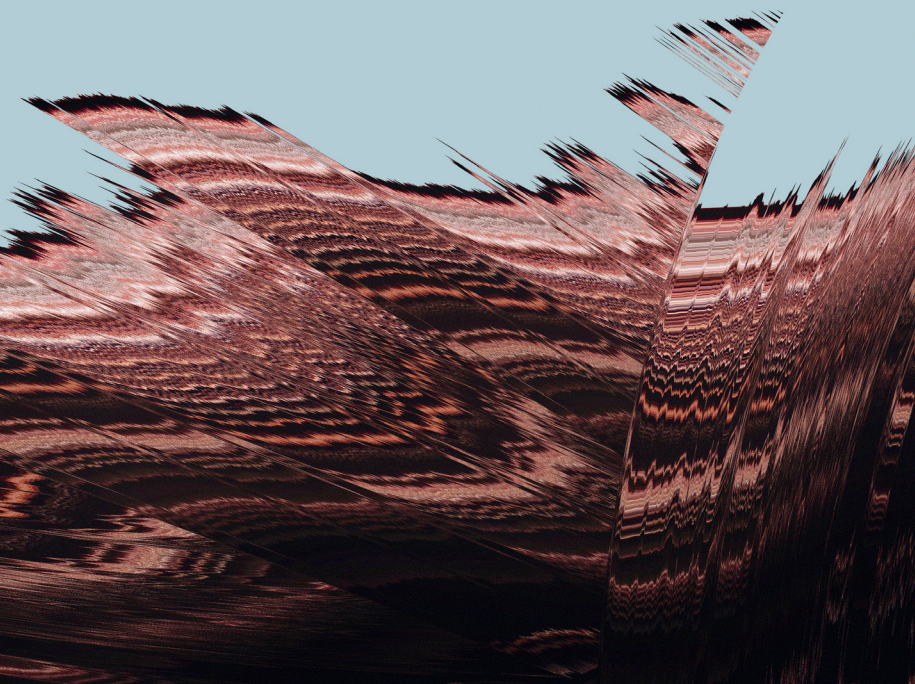


Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen
Complete String Quartets, Vol. 2

Nordic String Quartet



Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen (1932–2016)

Complete String Quartets, Vol. 2

Nordic String Quartet

Heiðrun Petersen, violin; Mads Haugsted Hansen, violin

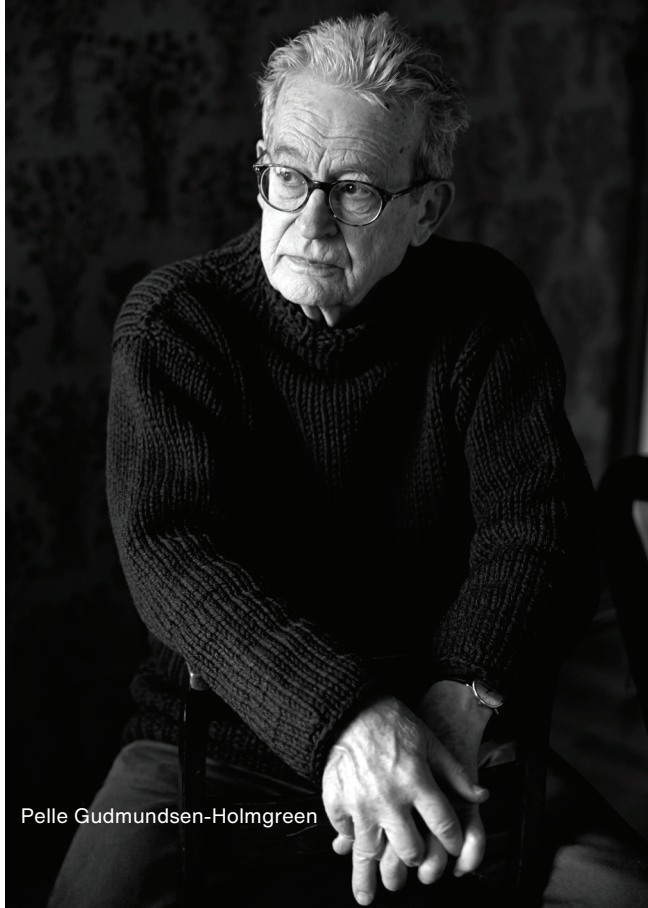
Daniel Eklund, viola; Lea Emilie Brøndal, cello

String Quartet No. 7, <i>Parted*</i> (1984)	14:50
1 I.	2:29
2 II.	2:43
3 III.	6:51
4 IV.	2:47
5 String Quartet No. 8, <i>Ground*</i> (1986)	20:14
6 String Quartet No. 9, <i>Last Ground</i> (2006) for string quartet and ocean**	10:17
7 String Quartet No. 10, <i>New Ground</i> (2011)	13:17

Total 59:39

* World premiere recordings

** Ocean material realised in cooperation with Wayne Siegel at DIEM, Aarhus



Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen

From the Ground Up

By Andrew Mellor

Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen managed to unite every faction of progressive Danish music in admiration. After studies in the 1950s with Finn Høfding, Svend Westergaard and Vagn Holmboe at the Royal Danish Academy of Music, he began to write music in a post-Bartókian and Serialist vein while working as a technical assistant at the Royal Danish Theatre. This period produced the composer's first three string quartets, included on the first volume in this series (8.226217).

In the wake of those works, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's music began to focus more on the fundamentals of time and rhythm while developing a distinct sense of the absurd, invariably handled with childlike innocence. Then came twentieth-century Dan-

ish music's Big Bang: the arrival of so-called New Simplicity, a sonic answer to Denmark's functionalist design movement which decreed that the structure of any work should be clearly audible.

Techniques pioneered by the composer Henning Christiansen, the artist Robert Rauschenberg, the writer Hans Jørgen Nielsen, the playwright Samuel Beckett and the sculptor Jørgen Gudmundsen-Holmgreen (Pelle's father) all helped shape in the composer a mature voice both wholly distinctive and disarmingly honest. The music that flowed from him from the late 1960s onwards was refreshing in the extreme, applying the communicative instincts of a street busker to the 'concrete' principle of music as sound.

Gudmundsen-Holmgreen went further than most in the New Simplicity movement, returning not just to traditional materials – using triadic harmonies as an equivalent to the woods and leathers of the furniture

makers – but to the earth itself. His music delved joyously into the nature of noise and the sonic impulses that underpin life, humour, speech and conversation.

Few Gudmundsen-Holmgreen scores take themselves seriously but plenty become poignant, emotive or serious by default. His methods of composing can appear to have been pilfered from children or animals: musical building blocks are stacked on top of one another or repeated as obsessive slogans; banalities seize hold of the discourse and are held aloft in fascination; solo instruments are forced out onto tightropes while instrumental groups are bound together in unlikely coalitions that writhe and wriggle like ferrets in a sack.

In a pertinent echo of Carl Nielsen's lifelong quest to drag song and symphony back down to earth, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's music endears itself more downwards than upwards. If his works provoke, and

some do, it is rarely for the sake of provocation or to the detriment of a meaningful emotional residue. Listen more deeply, and we hear a body of work in sympathy with whole rafts of the planet's species – music with a clear heartbeat, a living pulse and an animalistic gait whose numerous displacements and distractions speak of the imperfection, coyness, exuberance and confusion of life as a mammal.

Gudmundsen-Holmgreen wrote string quartets throughout his career, from 1959 to 2013 (three years before he died). This span of work charts not just his music's fundamental style and sound, but also its relationship to form. 'I have inherited from my father the preservation of sensuality, the retention of a childlike spirit and an innocence in dealing with people and in my work ... I have also inherited from him the quest for the perfect form,' the composer once said; 'I know that it can't be found, but I shall continue to try.'

That form is concerned less with Classical floorplans than with an intuitive sense of balance – between opposing impulses, etiquettes, timbres or agendas. As time went by, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen allowed more physical forces to wash into his works and particularly his string quartets, reflecting the living presence of those who played them, many of whom he formed strong bonds with. The world-renowned Kronos Quartet, who instigated a number of the composer's string quartets, looms large in that process.

String Quartet No. 7, *Parted* (1984) Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's later string quartets tend to bear an umbilical connection to their immediate neighbours. *Parted*, the composer's seventh quartet, came a year after *Parting*, his sixth. The latter piece presents a clear musical gesture and stretches it as if into a grand echo of itself – a tender farewell. *Parted*, the first score commissioned from

the composer by the Kronos Quartet, reflects on fresh estrangement and all that comes with it.

The music's initial disorientation can be viewed as a classic Gudmundsen-Holmgreen search for comfort and coalition. His coming-to-terms with this 'parted' status reflects the composer's Kierkegaardian interest in the concept of two opposing ideas, parties or characters and the social awkwardness such opposition can engender. The ensemble can appear to be split into the three under-chin instruments and the single between-legs one. Patterns establish themselves only to oscillate with opposites or grind to a halt.

In the second movement, the cello obsesses over a single, droll note while its companions blare out clarion chords above, an opposition inverted at the close of the work when the cello underpins luminescent chords while the first violin bows ecstatically on a single altitudinous pitch. In between, lyricism sprouts

among the composer's characteristic grinding sounds and alarmist chords; conversations run out of words; instruments cling vulnerably to single pitches and there are hints of the motoric minimalism associated with the America of the Kronos Quartet.

String Quartet No. 8, *Ground* (1986) Two years after *Parted*, the Kronos Quartet took delivery of its next commission, *Ground*. The score formed both a beginning and an ending: closing the series of quartets numbered 5-7 (ending with *Parted*), while also marking the starting point in a series of modular, related quartets stretching beyond the three included on this recording.

The Baroque practice of looping a bass line (or 'ground bass') proved useful for Gudmundsen-Holmgreen, its enforced limitations acting as a stimulant. The composer would toy with the device throughout his later decades and for this eighth string quartet, extended its rubric by using

rows of harmonic sequences in symmetrical upward and downward movements. The composer's own explanatory note explains that his ground consists of 'a continuously repeated 35 bar rhythmic foundation (constructed of polyrhythms), an equilibrium in a limited number of tones, a continuously repeated harmonic sequence (modulating between four different symmetrically arranged levels) and the overall form of a bow, consisting of many small bows.'

In that, the work was 'kind of an experiment' in the composer's own words – an attempt to prod, probe and provoke the institutional 'ground bass' with new apparatus while also testing the capabilities of the playing ensemble, whose constantly abridging, condensing and intensifying sequences (particularly during the first seven minutes of the score) are technically challenging and dynamically straining for a group of four acoustic instruments from the same string family.

For all that, this quartet still emerges as one of Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's most enchanting: a playful rhapsody on simplicity, constraint and resolution whose poetic empathy (and parting gesture) offers palpable closure on what went before.

String Quartet No. 9, *Last Ground*
(2006)

Twenty years passed between *Ground* and its successor, *Last Ground* – another collaboration with Kronos, and a score that Gudmundsen-Holmgreen fully expected would be his last in quartet form. Yes, a ground bass is at work in this piece – this time, though, the focus is more on the series of chords implied by the bass line, which alternates with inverted versions of itself. New to this piece are electronics: the sampled sounds of a roaring sea, wind and associated wildlife, perhaps an echo of time spent by the composer on the slender Danish island of Samsø in the Kattegat Sea.

'In the face of the roaring, raging sea the quartet is a puny little thing,' said the composer to the music journalist Jens Cornelius in 2007; 'It's very faint-hearted. Gradually it gets slower and weaker. What starts as a pale, puny little thing gets even paler!' In the same conversation, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen drew an analogy with his own mortality. Eventually, the sounds of the sea return to wash the quartet out completely, but not before one last musical clue: the introduction of an A flat to the constant note D, to form an ominous tritone.

String Quartet No. 10, *New Ground*
(2011)

Last Ground turned out not to be Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's last string quartet – nor even, in fact, his last 'ground'. Aware of comments made at the time of that piece, the composer, with his tongue lodged firmly in his cheek, described setting out to 'disappoint listeners as much as possible' by writing 'an outgoing, light

quartet' titled *New Ground* but based on a famous old ground: that used by Johann Pachelbel (1653–1706) in his famous *Canon and Gigue*.

Pachelbel's ground isn't spelt-out verbatim; Gudmundsen-Holmgreen gives it an extra bar and a bluesy chromatic detour on its home straight. Apart from that, the technique is effectively Baroque: above the consistently looping ground, the discourse becomes ever more complicated and exuberant – and, in this case, fractious, flailing, scared and animalistic. The idea proved even more fertile than this one quartet could justify and would lead to the composition of two partner pieces that can be superimposed onto it: the atonal *No Ground* and the vocal work *Green*. That, however, was all still to come ...

Andrew Mellor is author of The Northern Silence – Journeys in Nordic Music and Culture (Yale University Press, 2022)

Nordic String Quartet is a critically acclaimed ensemble known for their nuanced and luminous sound. Formed in 2013, the quartet consists of Heiðrun Petersen (violin, Faroe Islands), Mads Haugsted Hansen (violin, Denmark), Daniel Eklund (viola, Sweden) and Lea Emilie Brøndal (cello, Denmark). After studies at the Royal Danish Academy of Music with Professor Tim Frederiksen, they have established themselves as leading interpreters of Nordic string quartet repertoire.

Their recordings of both Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's (2019 onward) and Nancy Dalberg's complete string quartets on Dacapo Records have received international acclaim, with the first named Contemporary Album of the Year by the DR P2 Award in 2020, the latter was recognised among MusicWeb International's Recordings of the Year in 2019.

The Nordic String Quartet has excelled in both Nordic repertoire and cross-genre collaborations, winning

several awards, including the Odd Fellow Lodges Music Prize and the gold medal at the Berliner International Music Competition.

With the quartet's first album of Peter Heise's complete string quartets for Dacapo Records (2023 onward), they continue their successful rediscovery of forgotten Nordic repertoire – as the magazine *The Strad* wrote: 'A neglected Dane is compellingly revived.'



Nordic String Quartet
(Heiðrun Petersen, Daniel Eklund, Lea Emilie Brøndal and Mads Haugsted Hansen)

Fra grunden og op

Af Andrew Mellor

Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen formåede at blive højt værdsat af samtlige lejre inden for ny dansk musik. Efter i 1950'erne at have studeret på Det Kongelige Danske Musikkonservatorium hos Finn Høffding, Svend Westergaard og Vagn Holmboe begyndte han at skrive musik i en Bartók-inspireret, serialistisk stil sideløbende med et arbejde som scenetekniker på Det Kongelige Teater. Fra denne periode stammer hans tidligste tre strykekvartetter, som findes på denne series første CD (8.226217).

I kølvandet på disse værker begyndte Gudmundsen-Holmgreen i sin musik at fokusere mere og mere på tidsmæssige og rytmiske grundelementer og på samme tid udvikle en karakteristisk fornemmelse for det absurde, der uvægerligt anskues

med barnlig uskyld. Derefter fulgte The Big Bang i 1900-tallets danske musik: ankomsten af den såkaldte "ny enkelhed" som en klingende parallel til den funktionalistiske bevægelse i dansk design og med krav om, at strukturen i et værk altid skulle kunne opfattes umiddelbart.

Teknikker udviklet af komponisten Henning Christiansen, billedkunstneren Robert Rauschenberg, forfatteren Hans Jørgen Nielsen, dramatikeren Samuel Beckett og Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreens egen far, billedhuggeren Jørgen Gudmundsen-Holmgreen, var alle med til at udvikle en moden stemme hos komponisten, der på én gang var helt igennem særegen og afvæbnende oprigtig. Som følge af deres kombination af gademusikantens sans for at kommunikere med en "konkret" opfattelse af musikken som lyd kom hans mange værker fra slutningen af 1960'erne og frem til at fremstå voldsomt forfriskende.

Gudmundsen-Holmgreen gik længere end de fleste andre inden for

den ny enkelhed og vendte ikke blot tilbage til traditionelt materiale – såsom at bruge treklange som sidestykke til møbeldesignernes træ og læder – men også helt ned på jorden. Hans musik fordybede sig begejstret i støjens natur og i de klanglige impulser som udgangspunkt for tilværelsen, humor, tale og samtale.

De færreste af Gudmundsen-Holmgreens partiturer tager sig selv seriøst, men mange af dem bliver gribende følelsesladede eller regulært seriøse. Hans kompositionsmetoder kan forekomme hugget fra børn eller dyr: musikalske byggesten stables oven på hinanden eller gentages manisk som kampråb; banaliteter overtager samtalen og fremhæves fascineret; soloinstrumenter tvinges ud i linedans og instrumentalgrupper forenes i usandsynlige kombinationer, der vrider og vender sig som ildere i en søk.

Som et bevidst ekko af Carl Niensens livslange forsøg på at bringe sange og symfonier ned på

jorden igen henvender Gudmundsen-Holmgreens musik sig snarere nedad end opad. Når hans værker er provokerende, og det er nogle af dem, er det sjældent for provokationens egen skyld eller på bekostning af eventuelle tilbageværende følelser af betydning. Ved nærmere lytning hører vi værker i samklang med hele horder af klodens skabninger – musik med et tydeligt hjerteslag, en levende puls og en animalsk gangart, hvis talrige forskydninger og omveje er udtryk for det uperfekte, bly, frodige og forvirrende ved livet som pattedyr.

Gudmundsen-Holmgreen skrev strykekvartetter gennem hele sin karriere, lige fra 1959 til 2013 (tre år før hans død). Værkrækken afspejler ikke blot den grundlæggende stil og klang i hans musik, men også dens forhold til lyd. "Det, jeg har overtaget fra min far, er en bevarelse af sanseligheden og fastholdelsen af barnesindet og en troskyldighed i omgangen med mennesker og i mit arbejde ... Det, jeg også har arvet fra min far, er ønsket

om den fuldendte form,” har komponisten engang sagt; “Jeg ved godt, at det ikke kan opnås, men jeg bliver ved med at prøve.”

Formen er i dette tilfælde mindre optaget af klassiske strukturer og mere af en instinktiv fornemmelse for balance – mellem modsatrettede impulser, regler, klangfarver og dagsordener. Med tiden lod Gudmundsen-Holmgreen flere og flere fysiske kræfter trænge ind i sine værker og i særdeleshed strygekvartetterne som udtryk for det levende nærvær hos de udøvende, som han i mange tilfælde knyttede stærke bånd til. Den verdensberømte amerikanske Kronos Quartet, der uropførte en række af komponistens strygekvartetter, er et af de mest markante eksempler.

Strygekvartet nr. 7, *Parted* (1984)

Gudmundsen-Holmgreens senere strygekvartetter forekommer ofte organisk forbundet med deres umiddelbare naboer. *Parted*, komponistens syvende kvartet, kom til et år efter

den sjette, *Parting*. Sidstnævnte formulerer en tydelig musikalsk gestus, som bliver strakt ud til et storladent ekko af sig selv – et kærligt farvel.

Parted var komponistens første bestillingsopgave til Kronos Quartet og afspejler på samme tid en ny afsked og alt deraf følgende.

Den indledende retningsløshed i musikken kan betragtes som en klassisk Gudmundsen-Holmgreen-søgen efter tryghed og enighed. Hans erkendelse af denne status som *parted*, adskilt, afspejler komponistens Kierkegaard-inspirerede interesse for tanken om to modsatrettede idéer, parter, stemmer eller figurer og det socialt akavede, en sådan modsætning kan afstedkomme. Ensemblet kan forekomme opsplittet i de tre instrumenter under hagen og det ene mellem benene. Mønstre etableres, blot for at bevæge sig frem og tilbage mellem modsætninger eller gå kværende i stå.

I anden sats fordyber celloen sig i en enkelt, spøgefuld tone, mens dens

makkere larmer løs med signalakorder ovenover, og sidst i værket vendes modsætningen om ved, at celloen danner bund for lysende akkorder, mens førsteviolinen stryger ekstatisk løs på en enkelt svimlende tonehøjde. Indimellem skyder poesien op mellem komponistens typiske kværende lyde og skrækindjagende akkorder; samtaler løber tør for ord, og instrumenter klynger sig skrøbeligt til enkelte tonehøjder, ligesom der er antydninger af den motoriske minimalisme, man ofte forbinder med Kronos' USA.

Strygekvartet nr. 8, *Ground* (1986)

To år efter *Parted* modtog Kronos Quartet sin næste bestilling, *Ground*. Partituret udgjorde både en begyndelse og en afslutning: afslutningen på kvartettrækken nummer 5-7 (som slutter med *Parted*) og samtidig udgangspunkt for en række modulliggende, indbyrdes forbundne kvartetter, der endda strækker sig ud over de tre på denne udgivelse.

Barokkens teknik med at bygge musik op over en underliggende, gentaget basgang viste sig nyttig for Gudmundsen-Holmgreen, for dens påtvungne begrænsninger kom også til at fungere stimulerende. I sine senere år legede komponisten ofte med grebet og udvidede i den ottende strygekvartet dets rammer ved at bruge rækker af akkordsekvenser i symmetrisk opadgående og nedadgående bevægelser. Komponistens egen værknote forklarer, at hans basgang består af “en konstant gentaget 35 takter lang rytmisk figur (konstrueret af polyrytmer), en balancegang i form af et begrænset antal toner, en konstant gentaget akkordsekvens (der veksler mellem fire forskellige symmetrisk arrangerede niveauer) samt en overordnet bueform bestående af mange små buer.”

I så henseende var værket med komponistens egen formulering “en slags eksperiment” – et forsøg på at prikke til, udforske og provokere den etablerede “basgang” med nye

virkemidler og samtidig afprøve mulighederne i ensemblet, hvis stadig mere korte, fortættede og intensiverede sekvenser (i særdeleshed i de første syv minutter af værket) er teknisk krævende og dynamisk anstrengende for en gruppe på fire akustiske instrumenter fra samme strygerfamilie.

Ikke desto mindre fremstår kvartetten som en af Gudmundsen-Holmgreens mest fortryllende, en legesyg rapsodi over enkelhed, mådehold og beslutsomhed, hvis lyriske indfølelse (og karakter af afsked) står som en mærkbar afslutning på det foregående.

Strygekvartet nr. 9, *Last Ground* (2006)

Der skulle gå tyve år mellem *Ground* og dens efterfølger *Last Ground* – endnu et samarbejde med Kronos og et værk, som Gudmundsen-Holmgreen var fuldt og fast overbevist om ville blive hans sidste for kvartetformatet. Jo, der optræder en

basgang i stykket – men denne gang gælder opmærksomheden snarere den række akkorder, som baslinjen antyder ved at alternere med omvendinger af sig selv. Ny er også værkets inddragelse af elektronik: samlede lyde af bølgebrus, vind og forskelligt dyreliv, måske udtryk for komponistens nære forhold til Samsø.

“Over for det brølende, rasende hav er kvartetten en splejset lille sag,” sagde komponisten i 2007 til musikjournalisten Jens Cornelius. “Den er meget skræmt. Lidt efter lidt bliver den langsommere og svagere. Den begynder som en bleg og splejset lille sag og bliver endnu blegere!” I det samme interview henviste Gudmundsen-Holmgreen også til sin egen dødelighed. Til sidst vender havlydene tilbage for at skylle kvartetten fuldstændig væk, men ikke før et sidste musikalsk tegn: et As tilføjes liggetonen D og danner en ildevarslende tritonus.

Strygekvartet nr. 10, *New Ground* (2011)

Last Ground skulle alligevel ikke blive Gudmundsen-Holmgreens sidste strygekvartet – eller for den sags skyld hans sidste “ground”. Med visse datidige kommentarer til stykket i tankerne og tungen fast plantet i kinden talte komponisten om at give sig i kast med at “skuffe lytterne mest muligt” ved at skrive “en udadvendt, let kvartet” med titlen *New Ground*, men baseret på en berømt gammel basgang, nemlig den som Johan Pachelbel (1653-1706) anvendte i sin berømte *Kanon og Gigue*.

Pachelbels basgang bliver ikke fremført eksakt; Gudmundsen-Holmgreen tilføjer en ekstra takt og en bluesagtig omvej hjem. Derudover er teknikken dog i praksis barok: oven over den konstante basfigur bliver samtalen mere og mere kompliceret og overstadig – samt i dette tilfælde også fragmenteret, flagrende, skræmt og dyrisk. Idéen viste sig endnu mere frugtbar, end denne

ene kvartet kunne rumme og førte til udarbejdelsen af to søskendestykker, der kan lægges ind over den: den atonale *No Ground* og vokalværket *Green*. Det lå imidlertid endnu et stykke ud i fremtiden ...

Andrew Mellor er forfatter til The Northern Silence – Journeys in Nordic Music and Culture (Yale University Press, 2022)

Nordic String Quartet er en kritikerrost strygekvartet kendt for deres nuancerede og vitale klang. Kvartetten blev dannet i 2013 og består af Heiðrun Petersen, violin (Færøerne), Mads Haugsted Hansen, violin (Danmark), Daniel Eklund, bratsch (Sverige) og Lea Emilie Brøndal, cello (Danmark). Efter studier hos professor Tim Frederiksen i solistklassen på Det Kongelige Danske Musikkonservatorium har kvartetten etableret sig som førende fortolkere af nordisk strygekvartetrepertoire.

Indspilningerne af både Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreens (2019 og frem) og Nancy Dalbergs samlede strygekvartetter for Dacapo Records har modtaget international anerkendelse: første album vandt P2 Prisen som "Årets album, ny klassisk" i 2020; det andet nævnt blandt MusicWeb Internationals "Recordings of the Year" i 2019.

Nordic String Quartet har excelleret både i nordisk repertoire og i samarbejder på tværs af genrer og

har vundet flere priser, herunder Odd Fellow Logernes Musikpris og guldmedaljen ved Berliner International Music Competition.

Med kvartetens første album med Peter Heises samlede strygekvartetter for Dacapo Records (2023 og frem) fortsætter de deres succesfulde genopdagelse af glemte nordisk repertoire – som magasinet The Strad skrev: "En forsømt dansker genoplives overbevisende".

DDD

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Producer: Tim Frederiksen

Sound engineering, editing, mixing and mastering: Ragnheiður Jónsdóttir

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