

# Gunnar IDENSTAM

LOFOTEN MEDITATIONS

A SUITE OF ELEVEN INTROSPECTIVE ORGAN IMPROVISATIONS

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# LOFOTEN MEDITATIONS

by Gunnar Idenstam

The improvisations on this album were originally made for the soundtrack of the 2019 film *The Vegan Toothbrush* (*Den veganske tannbørsten* in Norwegian), by the Norwegian film-maker Trygve Luktvaslimo, commissioned by the Lofoten International Art Festival. In 2020, the soundtrack was awarded 'Best Music Score' at the Annual Copenhagen Film Festival.

Luktvaslimo's 'Director Statement' reads:

My work is humorous, sometimes melodramatic, and quite dire. This approach makes sense to my filmmaking, to combine the loosening perspectives which satire and laughter offer with things we cannot get away from, like perhaps vanity and death in earlier films, and vanity and climate facts in this one.

When I wrote *The Vegan Toothbrush*, I tried to observe the climate debate and its rhetorics, and I wondered why facts and obvious truths are often set aside to other, more subjective arguments. For example, all the new brands and products that are developed to aid over-consumption astonish me. Shouldn't we consume less rather than differently? Take the Humble Brush, a 'socially responsible, eco-friendly, vegan toothbrush' that features in the film. And isn't it twisted when a devastating drought is welcomed as a summer with extra beach days?

To me, there's absurdity and horror to the way we deal with world problems and basic climate truths, and I've wanted to reflect this in my film. The urgency is augmented by the original soundtrack of improvisations by Swedish organist, composer and phenomenon Gunnar Idenstam.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Posted at <https://filmfreeway.com/ShallowWaterBlackout>.

Luktvasslimo's website offers a summary of the plot:

As residential cruise vessel *The World* sails by Lofoten, climate revolutionary children Amelia and Steven hijack the ship as part of their scheme to rid society of what they consider its worst enemy: ignorant adults. In *The Vegan Toothbrush* the familiar arguments from the climate debate are growing hollow. CO<sub>2</sub> utopians, religious, sceptics and denialists, warriors and eco liberals – they are all in grave risk of ending up at the ocean floor as the children take over *The World*.<sup>2</sup>

For recordings I normally prefer to use pipe organs but for this one I chose my own digital Allen Quantum Q350 organ with 50 stops. The sounds of a digital organ are sampled from the sounds of different pipe organs, each voice and each note at a time. The choice was motivated by the fact that I wanted to combine different tunings from the Baroque period with samples of the Cavaillé-Coll organ (from the legendary French organ-builder of the nineteenth century). I sometimes even use the 'hardcore' mediaeval tuning of meantone in some pieces. This tuning sounds very unusual to a modern ear: the intervals are very clean and harmonically pure in C major, but they get more and more 'false' the further you get from C major. The result gives an extra, 'mystical' dimension to the music. When I made the music, I simply imagined the breathtaking natural scenery of Lofoten and the threat from the climate changes and just let go. I did not watch the film beforehand because of the simple fact that it had not yet been completed. I was also inspired by Renaissance chorales, Baroque dances and ornaments and, of course, the French improvisation tradition with its dramatic chords, fast figures on fluffy flutes and harmonies from the Impressionist period.

### **[1] Prelude**

A minimalist piece with percussive figures. At the end, the main theme appears.

### **[2] Chorale Theme: I**

A *recitativo*, chorale-like piece inspired by mediaeval sounds and chords in meantone

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.tryveluktvasslimo.com/copy-of-home>.

tuning. Here and there one can hear one of the Glockenspiel voices of the organ.

### **3 Water Vortex**

A piece of music inspired by the image of something sinking in the sea, which, as Trygve explained to me, would be a scene in the film.

### **4 Water Landscapes**

This music is heard underwater, suggesting bubbles and beautiful marine landscapes. I use soft flutes and celesta sounds and the 'Fileuse' structure of the French improvisation tradition: fast figures on flutes in both hands, like thin threads flying around (a 'fileuse' is a woman spinning thread).

### **5 Poem I**

The first of two twenty-minute improvisations inspired on the moment. Imagine waves, bubbles, blueish colours. I use Celesta, 4' Flutes, a Gregorian chant in the pedal with a 4' stop, Tremolos and Meantone tuning. A soft reed in the pedal introduces a distorted *crescendo*, leading to a climax. It is striking how different F major and A flat minor chords sounds in meantone tuning – and the further one gets from C major, the more 'untuned' it becomes. A *recitativo* in high-pitched flutes leads to some thoughtful, ornamented Messiaen-like chords. It is intriguing to note how the fluctuation of the 'air' of the digital organ changes the chords: it is a setting that makes the organ sound more alive. The piece ends with a dialogue between the Clarinet and a Diapason and mystical chords with the Celesta behind the soft organ sounds.

### **6 Chorale Theme: II**

Here the main theme and its chords are developed a little more – first with a Diapason and unstable air-supply and then with the Clarinet, and the piece ends with an ornamented melody on both the Clarinet and the Diapason in meantone.

### **7 Poem II**

This second twenty-minute improvisation begins with arpeggio chords on the Harp against a backdrop of flutes and aliquots (which sound at an interval of a third or

fifth from the original note). Aquatic movement with flutes, deep bass and thirds in meantone continues until a single 4' Flute appears, interrupted by percussive chords and muddy comments. A rhythmic section reminiscent of Debussy's *La mer* leads to a climax in Tutti, followed by a *diminuendo* to poetic solo flutes. Harsh repetitive chords in meantone follow, but a welcome *diminuendo* leads to a *recitativo* on the Oboe and tremulant. Another rhythmic and minimalist section follows, where one can clearly hear how different notes appear in different loudspeakers, just as in a pipe organ, where different notes are placed to the left or to the right. The piece continues with tremolos on shy flutes and the Celesta. A section with deep 32' bass and aquatic movements on the soft Harp, and soft hits on the Chimes. A sparkling little voice in high-pitched notes is heard, and one does not know where the music is going. *Staccato* notes on foundation stops and Chimes appear, bringing the movement to an end.

#### **8 Scandinavian Air: A Meditative Recitativo**

The combination of the sampling of the early Baroque Schnitger organ, meantone and Messiaen harmonies generate an unusual musical landscape, like a distorted echo from the Baroque era.

#### **9 Bubbles**

A piece describing bubbles rising up from the bottom of the sea; a water landscape in shadowy, dark colours.

#### **10 Chorale Theme: III**

Here is the main theme on the Sesqualtera stop and Chimes, with a bass of a soft Basson. The Chimes alone makes a spooky ending.

#### **11 Hymn**

Rhythmic chords accompany the main theme from *pianissimo* to an ending which reaches a climax on Tutti and Chamade trumpets in the left hand – the horizontal pipes one can sometimes see in the facade of pipe organs. The piece ends with traditional rock harmonies and repeated chords in triplets.

**Gunnar Idenstam**, concert organist, composer and folk musician, is known throughout the world for his virtuosic playing, stunning improvisations and untraditional and original take on organ music. He aims to expand his audiences' appreciation of the organ and to transcend the limitations of genre. He comes from a religious background in classical music, but has always had a 'distant love relationship' with the folk and symphonic rock of the 1970s. Now he has brought these influences into the context of organ music when he builds bridges between the French cathedral tradition, symphonic rock and Swedish folk-music.

He studied at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm, with Anders Bondeman, Rune Ångsö and Torvald Torén, and then studied the virtuoso French tradition in Paris, with Marie-Claire Alain and Jacques Taddei. He achieved the highest honours in both countries. In 1984 he was the first – and, to date, the only – musician from northern Europe to win the prestigious international competition in improvisation, the 'Grand Prix de Chartres'. Since 1986 he has pursued an international career as a concert organist, with recitals in (for example) the Berliner Philharmonie, the Luxembourg Philharmonie, Auditorio Nacional in Madrid, Palau de la Música in Barcelona, Suntory Hall in Tokyo, Spivey Hall in Atlanta, the Spreckels Organ series in San Diego and in many European cathedrals. Before the Russia/Ukraine war he was one of the artists most frequently appearing in the Mariinsky Concert Hall in St Petersburg and the Svetlanov and Zaryadie Concert Halls in Moscow.

In 2012 he was awarded the 'Interpreter of the Year' prize by the Royal Academy of Music in Stockholm for his renewal of the art of the organ at the highest international level. The prize was presented to him by His Majesty King Carl XVI Gustav of Sweden. In June 2013 he received the Litteris et Artibus – a royal medal for recognition of eminent skills in the arts.



Photograph: Annakert Gillblad

Gunnar Idenstam has been a member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Music since May 2013. His music and arrangements are published by Universal Scodo and by Gehrman's Musikförlag, Stockholm.

This is his fourth appearance on a Toccata recording. With the nyckelharpa player Erik Rydwall he performs folk-music from the Nordic and Baltic countries on the album *Northern Dances* (TOCN 0004), one of the first releases on the Toccata Next label; Toccata Next also released *A Saami Requiem*, in which Gunnar Idenstam is joined by the Sámi artist Ola Stinnerbom in a ritual journey to the Sámi world of death (TOCN 0017). The reviewer for MusicWeb International was persuaded: 'If this collision of musical worlds intrigues you, *A Saami Requiem* will reward your curiosity. If you are on the fence, as I was, about such a project, take the risk! Between those two, Toccata Classics TOCC 0495 presented fifteen of Gunnar Idenstam's *Metal Angel* pieces, which an Amazon customer described as 'Absolutely amazing!', going on to say: 'This is one of the best organ CDs I've ever bought. His influences of French music, symphonic music, film scores and rock music is so energizing! Love to listen to this loud in the car!'

# THE ALLEN QUANTUM Q350 DIGITAL ORGAN

by Gunnar Idenstam

This recording was made on my personalised version of the Allen Quantum Q350 digital organ, an instrument I have spent much time adjusting and voicing to enrich its palette and expand its range. The organ and its sixteen loudspeakers were placed in Eric Ericsonhallen, the former Skeppsholmen Church (on the island of Skeppsholmen, in central Stockholm), from 2011 to 2021. Thus the Eric Ericson International Choral Centre was able to borrow the organ for their choral concerts, and I had a place to practise. Now it is placed, with its sixteen speakers providing surround sound, in Mikaelsskapellet, a church that is part of the St Matteus congregation in the district of Vasastaden, also in central Stockholm – and 100 metres from where I live.

## Specification

### Pedal

1. 32' Contre Violone
2. 32' Contra Bombarde
3. 16' Violone
4. 16' Diapason
5. 16' Contre Trompette (SW)
6. 16' Bourdon
7. 16' Bourdon Doux
8. 8' Gedackt Flute
9. 8' Octave
10. 8' Trumpet
11. 4' Choral Bass
12. 4' Clarion
13. IV Mixtur

### Swell (enclosed – manual III)

14. 16' Bourdon Doux
15. 8' Rohrflute
16. 8' Viola Pomposa
17. 8' Viole Célèste
18. 4' Traverse Flute
19. 4' Octave Geigen
20. 2' Piccolo
21. 8' Trompette
22. 8' Oboe
23. 16' Contre Trompette
24. 1  $\frac{3}{5}$ ' Tierce
25. 2  $\frac{2}{3}$ ' Nazard
26. IV Fourniture
27. Celesta



## Couplers

- 8' Choir to Great
- 8' Swell to Great
- 8' Choir to Great
- 8' Swell to Choir
- 8' Great to Pedal
- 8' Swell to Pedal
- 8' Choir to Pedal Choir unenclosed
- Great/Pedal unenclosed

## Great (enclosed – manual II)

- 28. 16' Violone
- 29. 8' Diapason
- 30. 8' Viola Pomposa (SW)
- 31. 8' Viole Céleste
- 32. 8' Harmonic Flute
- 33. 8' Tromba
- 34. 4' Flute
- 35. 4' Octave
- 36. 2' Fifteenth
- 37. IV Mixture
- 38. Chimes
- 39. Celesta



## Choir (enclosed—manual I)

- 40. 16' Erzähler
- 41. 8'' Erzähler celeste II  
(modified to normal tuning)
- 42. 8' Holzgedeckt
- 43. 4' Koppelflute
- 44. 4' Prinzipal
- 45. 2' Octave
- 46. III Zimbel
- 47. 1 $\frac{1}{3}$ ' Quinte
- 48. 8' Krummhorn
- 49. 8' Festival trumpet
- 50. Celesta

Special thanks to Christine Löfgren, Rörlesretorik



Photograph courtesy of Trygve Luktvasslimo

*The Humble Brush, a 'socially responsible, eco-friendly, vegan toothbrush' that features in Trygve Luktvasslimo's film of the same name.*



Recorded on 6 January 2019 in the Eric Ericson-Hallen  
(the former Skeppsholmskyrkan), Stockholm  
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## GUNNAR IDENSTAM Lofoten Meditations

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5	Poem I	19:28
6	Chorale Theme II	5:43
7	Poem II	19:13
8	Scandinavian Air: A Meditative <i>Recitativo</i>	3:45
9	Bubbles	1:15
10	Chorale Theme III	2:10
11	Hymn	3:35

Gunnar Idenstam, Allen Quantum Q350 digital organ

TT **63:58**

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