



## Hanne Tofte Jespersen: *Urolige Tilder* (Times of Unrest)

The CD is performed by members of the Nordic String Quartet. Danacord (2022)

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This compact disc, featuring three string quartets, is a project of the Chamber Music Society BRAGE in Randers, Denmark, which commissioned Hanne Tofte Jespersen's *Urolige Tilder*. Their aim was to create a new work that was related to two earlier quartets, both composed in times of war: Haydn's Op. 76, no. 2 (French Revolutionary War) and Benjamin Britten's Op. 25, no. 1 (World War II). Jespersen's quartet, composed during the time of the war in Ukraine, portrays the angst and uncertainty of our current period.

The first movement conveys an eerie sense of foreboding. Beginning pianissimo, the violins, in their high registers, slowly descend in fourths, while the viola moans an ascending quarter tone. Glissandos add a lamenting sigh, and the glassy surface is punctuated with soft pizzicatos. The pace quickens into a march-like Allegro, grimly sarcastic in tone, only to be interrupted by a brief return of the opening material. The march resumes but dissolves into a cello line, giving lyrical expression to the lament. The descending fourths of the opening material return in augmentation in the second violin and viola, with the first violin and cello playing the march theme in canon. The result is unsettling and aptly

conveys a sense of unrest. Building to a climax, the march abruptly stops, and a creeping, sinister ascending chromatic line gradually grows from the lowest to the highest register, overwhelming fragments of the march theme. The glissandos of the opening return, now transformed into shrieks of distress. The movement ends calmly with a return of the glassy texture of the opening.

The second movement, Andante, is a theme and variations and is intended as a homage to Haydn. It begins with a mournful theme in the viola surrounded by icy harmonics in the violins and cello. A ghostly-sounding theme, played by the first violin and derived from the viola's theme in diminution, is transformed into a wistful whistle, accompanied by wisps of harmonics in the other strings. The viola theme returns with the first violin continuing and the second violin and cello layering pizzicatos under this duet. A fascinating texture occurs when the viola and the violin play the same melody with the violin shadowing the viola's notes in harmonics. The result is startling and haunting. The viola continues its mournful melody while the violin interjects delicate fragments and the cello plays a contrapuntal line pizzicato until all three join in a unison figure in A major.

In the following section, the first violin (mm. 41-48) quotes a passage from the second part of the opening theme from the second movement (Andante) of the Haydn quartet, like a distant memory of grace. The second violin takes up the viola's opening theme in a duet with the cello playing pizzicato and the viola keeping the pulse with quarter notes. A gently rollicking dance-like rhythm characterizes the next section bringing cheerful light into the darkness. Only a bit of this cheerfulness remains in the final section, which ends with a forceful forte.

The third movement is titled "Burlesque" and is marked "Comodo, quasi pesante." It begins with all the quartet members vocalizing the syllable "sch!" twice very loudly and stamping their feet once. According to the composer, "sch" is used to create awareness, and it also

serves as a contrasting effect. The use of "sch" and the foot stamping are part of Jespersen's interpretation of the burlesque/grotesque genre, and they are related to the theme of unrest. These gestures lead into a heavy, peasant-like dance; the minuet movement of the Haydn quartet has been characterized as a type of peasant dance by reviewers. The "sch" and stamping return, and the section that follows features the violins' alternating trills, recalling the eerie tone of the first movement. Under these high trills, the cello begins a pizzicato bass line that repeats while the viola plays a line taken from the first violin's solo at the beginning of the movement. This is taken up by the second violin and finally the first violin and cello, so that all four are playing the line and accelerating with a fast crescendo until the forward movement comes to a screeching halt with the return of "sch" and foot stamping.

The final movement, Largo, is a homage to Britten and is subtitled "Deep Peace." It begins with the cello playing a mournful melody in the low register. Tremolos and repeated notes softly shiver above it in the upper strings, and the high register is similar to the opening of the Britten quartet. The cello repeats the phrase, but this time in harmonics. Elements of the previous movements float in and out, with the cello's melody acting as a fixed idea that binds everything together. There is a brief coda incorporating the descending fourth of the opening, but calmly resolving to a hopeful E major chord.

This music is very expressive, lyrical, and imaginative. Ms. Jespersen has a strong sense of form and contrast and writes idiomatically for the strings. The playing throughout is superb.

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Victoria Bond is both a composer and a conductor. Her commissions include The American Ballet Theater, Houston and Shanghai Symphony Orchestras, Cleveland, and Indianapolis Chamber Orchestras, and Cassatt String Quartet. Her compositions have been performed by the Dallas Symphony, New York City Opera, Anchorage Opera, Shanghai Symphony, and members of the New York Philharmonic. Bond's opera *Clara* was premiered at the Berlin Philharmonic Easter Festival. Bond has been profiled in the *Wall Street Journal*, *Today Show*, *People Magazine*, and *The New York Times*.

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