



DROWNWORDS

Simon Steen-Andersen *Complete Works for Guitar*

Francesco Palmieri

Brian Archinal

VERTIGO Ensemble

Lennart Dohms

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Simon Steen-Andersen Complete Works for Guitar

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TT: 56.47

Francesco Palmieri *classical & electric guitar*

Brian Archinal *performer*

Ensemble VERTIGO der Hochschule der Künste Bern

Lennart Dohms *conductor*

° *World premiere recording*

DROWNWORDS

This recording project was born of my fortuitous encounter with Simon Steen-Andersen at the Bern University of the Arts (HKB). My first year studying in Bern coincided with Simon's first year on the faculty and I used the opportunity to work on a couple of his pieces with him. When I first met Simon, I knew little of his approach to composing for guitar. However, his eclectic personality and unique way of thinking about music spoke to me. The more I practiced and researched his music, the more I became convinced that a monographic record highlighting his complete compositions for guitar would help bring his work to a wider audience.

I found myself in a positive, supportive environment with particularly favourable circumstances; Contrastes Records offered me the opportunity to produce an album on their label, and the HKB supported the studio recording and the post-production. My fellow musicians brought great passion and talent to the project, and two years later, this album has become a reality.

Simon was enthusiastic about the idea of this project and was a willing participant in all the phases of its production. A relationship of mutual esteem was present from the very beginning and for one year we worked intensely on the preparation of the entire repertoire. It has been a long process of experimentation involving overcoming both instrument-technical and interpretative challenges. Many works have been revised and modified, over and over again, until results were obtained that embody our aesthetic ideas and adapt to my way of playing.

The piece *Drownwords* has been a particularly demanding test for everyone, the outcome of which remained uncertain until the day of the recording. When Simon told me «*[Drownwords]* is my best title ever», it became clear what the name of this record should be.

Francesco Palmieri



An instrument very much like us humans!

My mother had a western guitar hanging on the wall that I tried out from time to time until I got a small nylon stringed guitar of my own for my 10th birthday. A few years later I had saved up and was able to buy a cheap electric guitar and eventually started playing rock music in different bands. After 3-4 years, and an electric guitar upgrade, we reached a point where we were playing quite nice gigs at decent venues and small festivals. During all that time, I was making up more and more music on my acoustic guitar - music that did not fit the bands and in some cases did not really fit anything else I knew at that point. I composed many hours of music and played it all through several times a week in order to not forget it. When I finally felt that my memory was reaching its limit, I went to the library, borrowed a bunch of scores and somehow managed to decipher enough basic notation to be able to notate it all - in retrospect pretty rudimentary, of course. Besides my guitars I also spend lots of time experimenting with music and sound on my Amiga 500 equipped with an early, low quality sampler. When I was 18, I had to quit playing rock music because of ear problems, and I never really wanted nor felt that I had any significant talent to be a classical guitar player, so I finally focused fully on the part of music making that had always given me the most pleasure: making stuff up and arranging it in time, i.e. composing.

As I started taking piano lessons and exploring writing for other instruments and ensembles the guitar completely left my mind. With a sort of relief and the conviction that I would never compose for the guitar again. Five years later, a few years into my studies at the music academy in Aarhus, I started sharing an apartment with the guitar player Frederik Munk Larsen, and it did not take long before we agreed that it was finally about time that I would try to write something for the guitar, after all. I saw this as a kind of ultimate challenge, but I felt confident that I would be able to make something great with all the experience that I had acquired and all the discoveries I had made since last time I had a guitar in my hands. So, naturally I started by trying to apply on the guitar what had been working quite well for me in my work with other instruments, a highly energetic, gestural, extrovert, dense and rather loud music. And of course I absolutely failed!

It took me almost a year and quite a bit of struggle before I had finally produced what ended up being the second half of *in-side-out-side-in ...*. Through the struggle I had not just completely rediscovered the instrument, but also hugely expanded my musical notions and approach. The 'energy' that I had always been trying to condense through loud, explosive dynamics and big gestures paradoxically turned out to continue at the opposite end of the dynamic scale. On the left, i.e. the 'wrong' side of the left hand, the 'backside' of the guitar, I had discovered a magic '*pianississimo*' world full of tiny sounds, microtones, bi-products and glitches. I then picked up my initial, unsuccessful attempts at making an extrovert, loud and self-confident music for the guitar that I had literally thrown in the

trash bin and made that into what ended up being the first half of *in-side-out-side-in ...*. The form of the piece therefore became a reflection of the actual compositional process, at first trying break through the physical limits of the guitar, but only succeeding and 'transcending' when finally giving up and surrendering to the introvert, thin, fragile features, completely unique for the guitar. The form of the piece could even be said to be a reflection of a biographical transition, moving from one way of composing to another within the actual piece, because the immense amount of personal discoveries and realisations present in *in-side-out-side-in ...* changed my music and stayed with me until today!

Drownwords for guitar and voice from 2003 has very obvious echoes from the sound world of the second half of *in-side-out-side-in ...* (and pre-echoes to the piece *Difficulties Putting It into Practise* for two performers from 2008). For various reasons it was not premiered until 2009, and by then I was not quite satisfied with the piece. The voice did not seem to integrate with the guitar and despite clear attempts to avoid a theatrical feel, it did not succeed. I planned to revise it many times since then, but somehow never got around to it before now. The goal of this revision has been to preserve the original idea and feel, without changing too much or in anyway re-composing. The use of the actual voice (i.e. the vocal chords) has been reduced and replaced by other ways of activating the mouth cavity. This idea was already present in the original piece, where the performer was instructed to spray air into the mouth while forming words, but has been expanded and simplified to the projection of different sounds into the mouth from a miniature loudspeaker on a stick.

My concerto for guitar and large orchestra, *Amongst* from 2005 is even a sort of continuation of *in-side-out-side-in ...*, starting with the last 60 seconds of the piece (or optionally playing the whole piece as a seamless introduction). The guitar is limited to two dynamic states, putting the dynamic dichotomy of *in-side-out-side-in ...* even more to the point: either as loud as possible, unamplified or as soft as possible, or extremely amplified and therefore much louder than the unamplified playing. The same principle is applied to the orchestral instruments and the orchestra as a whole by letting them either play as loud as possible on hampered or heavily dampened instruments or *pianissimo* unisons in large groups. The cadenza occurring about 15 minutes into the piece has become the stand-alone piece *Within Amongst* and presents a sudden reduction of sound and density in the concerto, a sort of anti-virtuosic, hyper-intimate break with the sound suddenly coming from loudspeakers placed in the middle of the audience.

In *Beloved Brother* the 'backside'-tapping technique from *in-side-out-side-in ...* is expanded and used as a way to arrange two early movements by J. S. Bach with similar sound qualities as the clavichord, the instrument of origin, as well as to add a certain resistance, physical struggle and fragility to the reiteration of this otherwise simple and beautiful music from the past.

Lastly, all the considerations about physical interaction with the guitar in *in-side-out-side-in ...* , solving all the practical puzzles of the 'backside'-techniques, mark the beginning of my choreographic approach to musical instruments and compositional integration of movements that are very much present in the *Next To Beside Besides* series and *Amid* and finally became the main theme in *Studies for String Instruments #1-3* and pretty much all of my work after that.

Simon Steen-Andersen

in-side-out-side-in ... (2001) for guitar

Transformation to the opposite and then to the opposite's opposite, forcing the inner side to the surface – both in the poetic and the literal sense. Everything can be looked upon from different perspectives or be given ambiguity, but what happens if the different perspectives or the different aspects of the music depart in different directions at different speeds? The answer is: no single answer is possible ...

Within Amongst (2005) 'anti-kadenza' from *Amongst*, concerto for extremely amplified guitar and large orchestra

I always felt a bit sorry for guitar players – especially, when I was one myself. The instrument can radiate an almost aggressive fragility, which, in spite of all the sympathy and good will this arouses in me, gives me the feeling that everything could break down at any time. And it can get almost embarrassing when the guitar pompously or in desperation tries to break through its physical limitations, trying to be extrovert, powerful and sonorous. In other words: an instrument very much like us humans! *Amongst* for guitar and orchestra is actually for two guitars. The first guitar is the one that is normally hidden behind the shiny surface and can only be seen or heard through the large microscope of extreme amplification. The second guitar is the one that in stubborn desperation keeps fighting against its handicap to be heard – the unamplified 'cardboard box' made into a caricature in the meeting with the large hall and the orchestra.

Beloved Brother (2008) two movements from J. S. Bach's *Capriccio in Bb arranged* for 'backside' guitar

Bach's *Capriccio on the Departure of a Beloved Brother* was probably written in 1704 when Bach was only 19 years old. It therefore seems quite certain that the piece was originally composed and

performed on the clavichord. If one dampens the strings of a guitar between the sound hole and the bridge and then taps a tone (making it sound by hitting it with the finger on the fret board rather than plucking it with the other hand) one only hears the 'backside' of the string sounding. The 'backside' guitar has many similarities with the clavichord: its tones are extremely soft, thin and fragile, the technique of tapping produces a loud percussive sound and the pitches are often slightly out of tune. And both are extremely difficult to play, demanding all the skill and focus of the player. *Beloved Brother* is an arrangement of movement number one and three from Bach's *Capriccio* arranged for 'backside' guitar: *Arioso/Adagio* (with the programmatic text «In which his friends prevail upon him, to give up his proposed journey») and *Lamento/Adagissimo* (with the text «Is a general *lamento* by his friends»). Today Bach's *Capriccio* is almost never performed on the clavichord, sometimes on the harpsichord, but mostly on the grand piano, a very different instrument from the clavichord and therefore already a sort of arrangement or translation. The guitar is obviously an entirely different instrument, taking these arrangements even further away from the original, but at the same time completing a circle, ending up not far away from the clavichord in sound, physicality and intimacy.

Drownwords (2003, rev. 2019) for guitar and performer

Words tend to disappear before our very ears in favour of their meaning. The word 'word' has a special position in the language, because it also points back to itself, forms a kind of closed circle or feedback loop and therefore manages to be both concrete and absolute. The text in *Drownwords* consists of the word 'word' in Icelandic, German, Romanian, Arabic dialect and Koran Arabic: *orð*, *wort*, *vorba*, *kilma*, *kilmeh*. These are repeated again and again as a mantra or a substream exposed to different degrees of distortion and infiltrated by sounds and phonemes without meaning. The piece is among other things the struggle of these five words to mount to the surface, to become meaning for a brief moment, before slowly submerging again.

Drownwords was originally an unpublished piece written for soprano and guitar. It was revised and adapted in collaboration with the performers especially for this CD.

Study for String Instrument #2 (2009) for e-guitar and whammy pedal

Study for String Instrument #1-3 is a trilogy exploring, among other things, choreographic aspects of string playing. All three pieces are notated as movement and #1 and #2 can be played on any string instrument or in any combination of string instruments. The development in the series is going from 'the movement of the sound' to 'the sound of the movement', increasing the role of the movements themselves, ending in *Study #3* composed with the motto: at least as interesting for a deaf as for a blind person. *Study #2* is for string instrument(s) and a so-called whammy pedal. The instrument is mainly making glissandi over two octaves, back and forth. The pedal can do the same thing; it can







gradually transpose the sound of the instrument up two octaves. The first part of the piece is simply exploring the combinations of the glissandi and the transposing (enabling four octaves glissandi when the instruments and the pedal are going in the same direction or 'neutralizing' the glissandi when the instruments and the pedal are going against each other, making the note stay more or less in the same place), but later the whammy pedal is fed with more noisy sounds, resulting in more possibilities and surprising results. When fed with pure noise, the whammy pedal is forced to choose a random note to transpose. In the end of the piece, in a section marked *molto cantabile*, the pedal is 'tricked' into constantly choosing new notes from the noise source, as if the pedal was inventing and singing a melody.

Next to Beside Besides #8+13 (2003/06/08) for two e-guitars

An abstractly conceived piece of music will still be the same piece even though played on instruments with essentially different types of movements. But what if the abstract composition was also concerned with the movements? What if the composition was thought of as a choreography for musician and instrument with sound as a consequence? Then the 'same piece' would sound completely different on instruments with different relations between movement and sound. But would it then be the same piece at all? Next to *Beside Besides* is a series of 13 'choreographic translations' (translations of the movements or actions, rather than an instrumentation of the resulting sounds) of the piece *Beside Besides* (for solo cello), a piece already in itself a spin-off from the ensemble piece *Besides*.

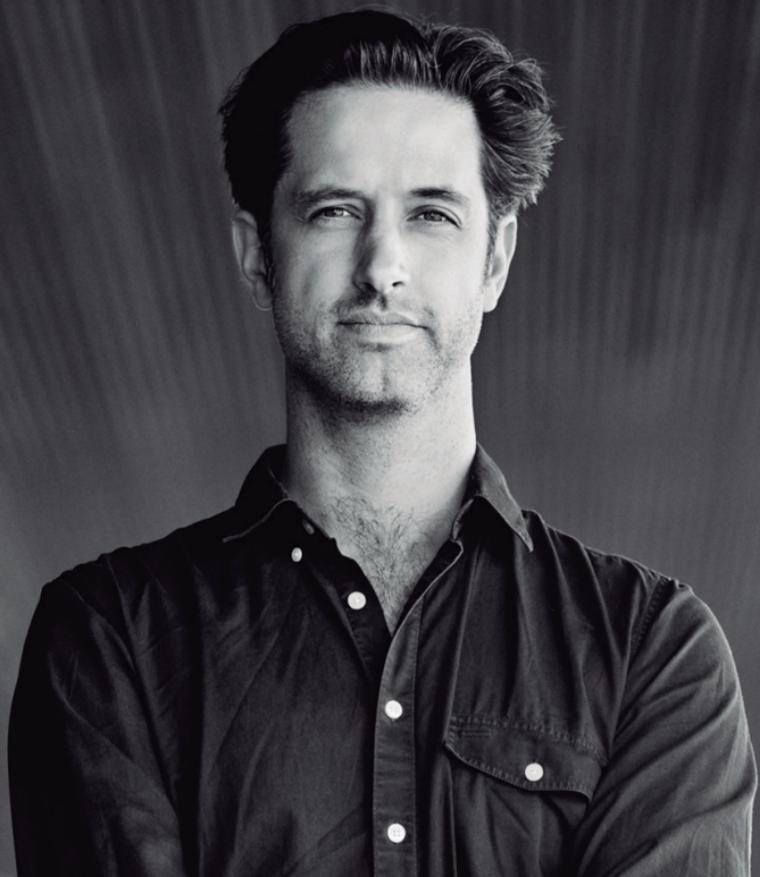
In this version, two different translations for e-guitar are played simultaneously in a virtual duo.

Amid (2004) for flute, clarinet, piano, guitar, percussion, violin and cello

- Movement of the sound or sound of the movement?
- Condition for the essential or essence of the condition?
- Object as space?
- A music of the up-bow and the inhalation

Simon Steen-Andersen
(source: Edition•S)





Simon Steen-Andersen (*1976, DK) is a Berlin-based composer, performer and director working with a multidisciplinary approach to musical performance and the concert situation, resulting in works situated between the categories of music, performance, installation, theatre, choreography and film.

Simon Steen-Andersen studied composition with Karl Aage Rasmussen, Mathias Spahlinger, Gabriel Valverde, Bent Sorensen and Hans Abrahamsen in Aarhus, Freiburg, Buenos Aires and Copenhagen 1998-2006. Since 2018 he is professor of composition at Bern University of the Arts and associate professor of composition at the Royal Academy of Music in Aarhus.

Simon Steen-Andersen's work has been awarded the SWR Orchestra Prize 2019, Mauricio Kagel Music Prize 2017, the Siemens Composer's' Prize 2017, the Nordic Council Music Prize 2014, the SWR Orchestra Prize 2014, the Carl Nielsen Prize 2013, the Kunstpreis Musik from Akademie der Künste in Berlin 2013, the International Rostrum of Composers 2010, the Kranichsteiner Music Award 2008 and the Holmboe Prize 2000. Member of the German Academy of the Arts since 2016, member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Music since 2018.

Simon Steen-Andersen has had works commissioned by ensembles, orchestras and festivals such as Ensemble Modern, ensemble recherche, the Danish National Orchestra, the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, the Southwestern German Radio Orchestra, Ensemble Ascolta, JACK Quartet, Oslo Sinfonietta, Athelas Sinfonietta Copenhagen, Aarhus Sinfonietta, NADAR Ensemble, Neue Vocalsolisten Stuttgart, asamisima, Donaueschinger Musiktage, Munich Biennale, Salzburger Biennale, Ultraschall, Wittener Days of New Chamber Music, ECLAT, Ultima Festival and NOW!

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Francesco Palmieri (*1996, IT) is an Italian classical and electric guitarist. His artistic practice focuses on contemporary music, ranging from free improvisation to music theatre, performing concerts on classical and electric guitar, mandolin and banjo, with fixed media, live electronics and video.

At 17 he debuted as a soloist with orchestra at the Teatro dell'Aquila in Fermo and as a result was awarded the scholarship Lina Cinque. Since then, he has performed as a soloist, with orchestra, in ensembles and in various chamber music groups in numerous festivals and concert halls in Italy, Switzerland, France and Spain. He received grants and scholarships from important institutes and foundations: Haiku Stiftung (2019), Giovanni-Iviglia Stiftung (2019), Christine-Fromer Stiftung (2019), Fondazione Giorgio Cini of Venice for the workshop Research-Led Performance: The Guitar in the Work of Mauricio Kagel, Giacomo Manzoni and Fausto Romitelli (2016). In 2019 he became the first guitarist to receive the 1st prize at the prestigious Valentino Bucchi International Competition for Interpretation of Contemporary Music in Rome.

He graduated in 2017 with honors and honorable mention at the Conservatoire G. B. Pergolesi of Fermo under the guidance of Claudio Marcotulli. Then he attended the III Master en Interpretación de Guitarra Clásica at the Pablo de Olavide University of Seville, held by Francisco Bernier, Zoran Dukic, Antonio Duro, Pablo Marquez, Lorenzo Micheli, Paolo Pegoraro and Judicael Perroy. In 2020, he was awarded a Master's degree in Music Performance with distinction from the Bern University of the Arts, where he studied with Elena Casoli. He is currently studying at the FHNW Academy of Music in Basel, attending the Specialised Master in Contemporary Music.



Brian Archinal (*1986, US), American percussionist living and working in Switzerland, has been collecting awards and praise for his musical activities as a percussionist, educator and artistic director. Together with ensembles like Ensemble Nikel (Tel Aviv, Israel), ET | ET (Basel, Switzerland) and Collegium Novum (Zurich, Switzerland), he pursues the forefront of musical exploration and collaboration.

As Professor of Percussion at the Bern University of the Arts (Hochschule der Künste Bern), his pedagogy is built around an experimental approach to musical interpretation and performance, as well the role of multimedia in performance.

Upon receiving a U.S. Fulbright Grant with a supporting Fellowship from the prestigious Swiss Government's Federal ESKAS program he moved to Switzerland to study with Professor Christian Dierstein. He holds a Masters degree from the University of California San Diego where he studied with Professor Steven Schick, and a Bachelors degree from the University of Kentucky with Professor James Campbell. Brian has performed internationally at some of the most prestigious festivals for contemporary music including: Gaudeamus (Utrecht, NE), Donaueschinger Musiktage (Donaueschingen, DE), Wien Modern (Vienna, AU), ArsMusica (Brussels, BE), Biennale di Venezia (Venice, IT), Manifeste (Paris, FR), Warsaw Autumn (Warsaw, PO), Ultima (Oslo, NO), as well as Time Spans (New York City, US), and has recorded for various music labels such as Kairos, GOD Recordings, MODE Records, WERGO, Edition zeitgenössische Musik Klarthe, Tzadik, NEOS, Galaxa and Silentes.





Lennart Dohms (*1976, DE), conductor, after studying theology and theatre in Cologne, he completed his musical education in Salzburg, Paris and Dresden. His broad range of activities includes transdisciplinary projects, collaboration with composers, performance artists and scientists, and a teaching position as university lecturer. As a member of the ensemble El Perro Andaluz (DE) he was awarded the Dresden Culture Prize and, for his work as conductor, the Arras-Prize. Guest performances of opera and contemporary music have taken him all over Europe. In 2013 he was appointed to teach at the Bern University of the Arts as head of the Master of Arts degree course in Performance.

Music of our time needs strong advocates and highly trained ensembles bringing together passionate musicians and innovative artists – since 2007 the **Ensemble VERTIGO** at the Bern University of the Arts presents a variety of programs ranging from milestone works of modernisms, as well as countless first creations to experimental and transdisciplinary performative projects. Curated by the Lennart Dohms and Patrick Jüdt the ensemble works on a regular basis with the most important conductors and composers of our time and performs at festivals and venues all over Europe. The guest list includes amidst others Helmut Lachenmann, Tristan Murail, Enno Poppe, Sarah Nemtsov, Simon Steen-Andersen Peter Rundel and Francois Xavier Roth. For the renowned new music label NEOS the ensemble has recorded music by Brian Ferneyhough, James Wood, John Cage and Helmut Oehring.





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Simon Steen-Andersen Complete Works for Guitar

Francesco Palmieri classical & electric guitar

Brian Archinal performer

Ensemble VERTIGO der Hochschule der Künste Bern

Lennart Dohms conductor

Saki Shirokoji violin

Yann Naïm Alhadeff cello

Oda Lou Johansen flute

Christian Spitzenstätter clarinet

Matthieu Alain Félix Brechet piano

Gian Marco Medda percussion & whammy pedal

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