

Magne Thormodsæter

L'arte della persuasione



Full-Force Concoction

To many, the worlds of jazz and classical music may be parallel lines, but they don't ever converge. Magne Thormodsæter's aptly titled *L'arte della persuasione* is quite literally an attempt to convince you otherwise. A 35-minute story told in five acts; it pits a high-caliber classical ensemble against a jazz group to observe the outcome. The result is captivatingly unclassifiable. As much a compositional tour de force as an experiment with uncertain outcome, ECM-alumni, bassist, and in-demand session musician Thormodsæter has created a magical fusion defying the laws of theoretical gravity.

It was a kind of magic which came with a distinct danger of derailing. "I put musicians from these two worlds together in one room and made them play the score for the first time right there," Thormodsæter recounts from his studio at Bergen university, where he now teaches as a professor, "We instructed the strings with classical terms, and then trusted the ears of the jazz musicians to work things out in the moment. I honestly didn't know what would happen." He pauses for a moment. "It did make me quite nervous."

Although Thormodsæter fully composed *L'arte della persuasione*, its approach spans a bridge between compositional and improvisational aspects. On the one hand, it takes in the harmonic and melodic language of the written Western tradition. At the same time, at different points, the score provides the musicians with cues – or permissions - to act spontaneously, in close conjunction with the leader of that particular section. The work thus has a modular component to it and will never sound the exact same way twice.

Favouring invention and discovery, the base of the music is simple: people meet, things happen. This, too, is what happened during the sessions. Gradually, the musicians began moving towards each other, overcoming their initial reservations. It forced the classical performers to leave the score behind at times and the jazz musicians to stick to it closer than ever before. As the process intensified, they turned into creators themselves, sculpting the shape of the piece in the moment. They were truly making it "their own."

"When we started out as students at university, we would constantly have these discussions between classical and jazz students about who held the claim to the highest art," Thormodsæter remembers, "It was really silly if I think back on it." To him, the current trend towards unity and border-crossing is as exciting as it is a logical continuation of the deconstructions by Stravinsky and Miles Davis's later work – which his own music acknowledges as much as it references Bach.

An explorative work, *L'arte della persuasione* nonetheless feels entirely organic. Maybe that's because the forces of gravity have been bending the parallel lines of classical and jazz for over a century. Here, they are finally converging with the full force of a beautiful blow.