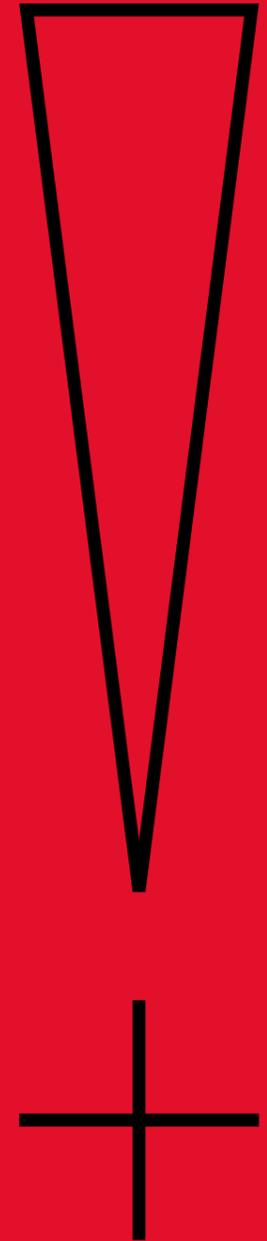


Knut Olaf Sunde

Comfort Music



MERE



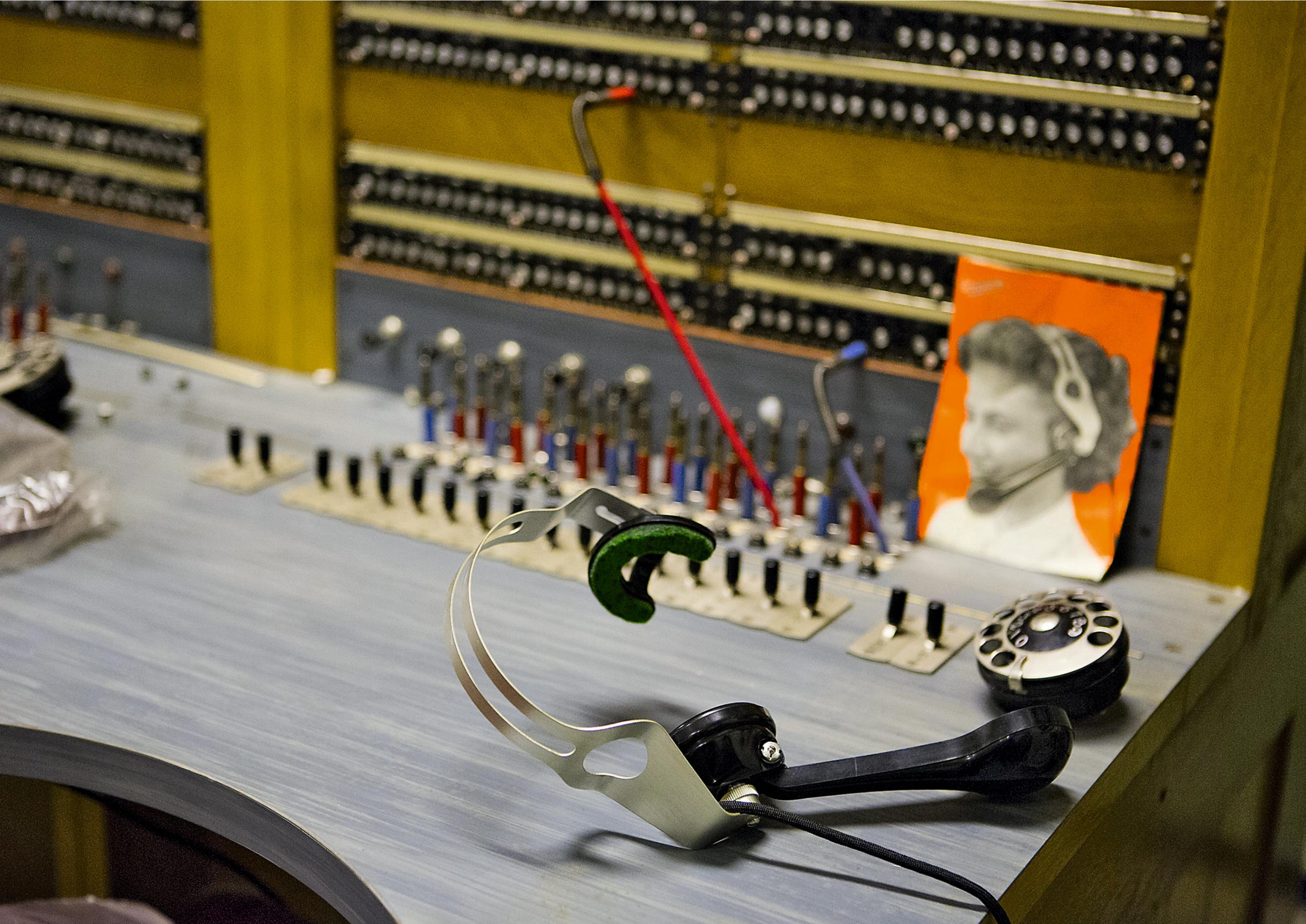




38

39

40







Bendik Hagerup

One of the nicest things about the Ultima festival, especially if you live in exile, as I do, is the opportunity it provides to encounter old friends. My happiness was therefore great when I met a close friend, one I hadn't seen for a long time, outside the Vulkan Arena before attending Knut Olaf Sunde's new work *Comfort Music*. We had a lot to catch up on, but we were met in the entrance by two friendly and well-dressed young gentlemen who politely informed us that we were going to two different places.

While my friend was sent upstairs to the concert hall, I was guided into a side room, next to Vulkan's café, currently unmanned and spiritless as only closed places can be. A handful of people were already there. Most seemed to know someone and were talking to each other in low voices, while I was sitting alone at one of the long coffee tables, slightly grumpy since I would rather have continued my conversation with my friend upstairs.

Very well, then, I thought to myself. *Comfort Music*, my ass.

For Knut Olaf Sunde this experience is part of the work. For him, a piece of music does not start with the conductor's initial moves, and doesn't end when the last note is sounded. The context the music occurs in is as important, if not more so: the physical surroundings and their acoustic qualities, the social framework of a performance, the philosophical and aesthetic connotations of a given situation and how our sensory apparatus relates to the information presented to it are just some of the key levels of the experience. An illustrative early example is *Molladalen*, a 'site specific mountain concert for four trombones and walking audience in acoustic valley' from 2007. The audience and musicians took an eight hour walk together, sharing the necessary effort, conver-

sations and expectations as well as the tactility of the specific outdoor acoustics. Sunde has a wide and inclusive view of what constitutes a musical work, reminiscent of Christopher Small's idea of musicking. In his book of the same name, Small argues that that music is not an object but an action, or rather, a network of actions. As a substitute for the word music, a noun, he coins the term musicking, a verb derived from the noun meaning 'to music', as a term for all the different actions that involved with or related to the performance of music. Musicking includes not only directly musical actions such as performance, composing, listening, but also ac-

Nina Bratland

The audience is split into two groups. One is allowed to go upstairs and stay in the concert venue where the musicians also are present, while the other obediently enters a waiting bus.

I am sitting in the bus. During the ten minute ride we are presented with short, well considered talk by the conductor, Kai Grinde Myrann, about the the place we are heading for. It is a ruin, established to protect society from potential disasters.

Control over societal structures and communication must be maintained here, and the site is now cultural heritage. We can move freely, but nothing must be touched or moved.

The bus stops at a small parking lot in a residential area on the outskirts of the city centre, built in the 1950s in We get out of

the bus and are guided towards an anonymous basement entrance. The stairs are narrow and the hall is small. We now hear some sounds whose timbre, with the green colour of the walls, the wall plaster and the smell of the basement, create a dense and layered impression.

We enter two larger rooms between high metal stands, with cables, tables, chairs in a row, a telephone handset, headsets, yellow protocols and dust. And some loudspeakers, for the occasion. The soundwall rises slowly, becoming more insistent. Its strength increases to strong, quick and immersive repetitions. It forms a heavy and sharp unity with the objects in the space, the boxes, microphones, metal chair legs and couplings. As beats, as commands and orders, it is hard, never ending work. Endurance in empty positions. Something we are kept in. For a long time. We have left an ordinary Monday and entered a state of

activities that we may not normally consider part of a musical experience, for example the piano tuner, ticket seller or even the cleaning staff. In the book's introduction, Small sketches the basis for a theory of musicking, and I allow myself to quote him at some length, since I suspect that Sunde would nod affirmatively to this:

'The act of musicking establishes in the place where it is happening a set of relationships, and it is in those relationships that the meaning of the act lies. They are to be found not only between those organized sounds which are conventionally thought of as being the stuff

of musical meaning but also between the people who are taking part, in whatever capacity, in the performance; and they model, or stand as metaphor for, ideal relationships as the participants in the performance imagine them to be: relationships between person and person, between individual and society, between humanity and the natural world and even perhaps the supernatural world. These are important matters, perhaps the most important in human life[...].'

The meaning of music, if such a thing can be defined, is thus not only situated in the

emergency. The audience doesn't move anymore. Most stand quite still.

The basement is a telephone exchange. It was built in the 1960s, when relations between the U.S. and the Soviet Union were extremely tense. The best communications technology of the time was installed as a stand by, an emergency exchange in the event of a not unlikely crisis. The exchange is connected to political events in history. It is connected to a system of fear. But it has never been used. The chairs are still covered in their delivery plastic and all the equipment is unused.

In the bus back to Vulkan Arena the sound follows us. An even pulse. We are kept alive. The last section of the work is performed for an audience which has been united, both groups sitting on the floor of the concert hall. We have been evacuated to a common ground, exchanging experiences.

sounding music, but equally in the numerous networks of connections revealed when music is made, one way or the other. It is these networks of meaning that Knut Olaf Sunde wants to activate with his music. This is his material, more than pitches and rhythm. These are what he tries to organize, in such a way that they may mean something to the listener. So it makes some sense to to claim that what Sunde creates, his medium if you like, is not really music, but musicking.

As a consequence the purely musical material may sometimes take a subordinate role. Or perhaps it would be better

to say that the music is given a different function to that we are used to. Its most important role is no longer to sound as a musical narrative, but serve as a base, and centre, for the (conceptual) situation that arises as it is performed.

While much of the composer's previous music was characterized by complex hyperactivity, in recent years he has moved in a nearly diametrically opposite direction, to a music which is dominated by massive and static sound masses. The composer's pleasure in organizing and manipulating his material is still present, but where this was expressed before through a construction of complex surfaces, it is now a more systematic and laborious boiling down of his material to its absolute zero point, so that in the end only the structural frames are left remaining. This is a natural development for the composer: in order to draw attention to the context it is important that the musical material itself does not attract too much attention. The result is some kind of anti-music, devoid of rhetoric, narrative drive and emotional effects.

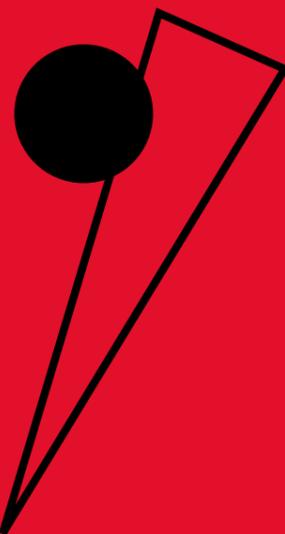
This strikes me as a key to much of Sunde's recent music: a music that, as far as possible, opens a mental space for the listener. It is a music that may not only encourage, but might actually force a listener to let their mind go.

There is only a little musical action, and what there is is radically cut down, so that no matter how benevolently you try to listen to the resounding sounds, the mind will inevitably begin to wander at one point or another.

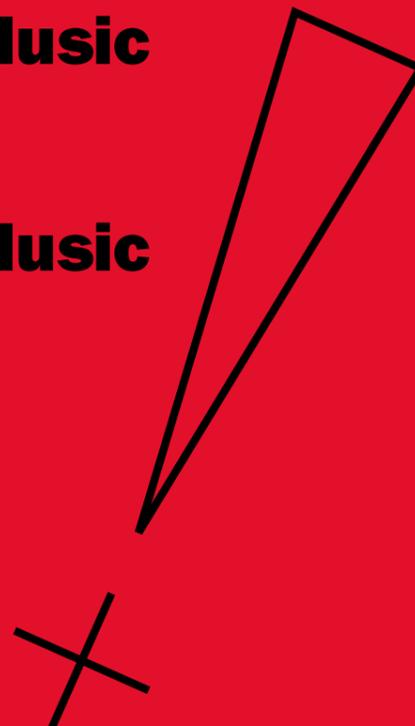
But maybe it's just there when a piece by Knut Olaf Sunde really starts.



LP 1
Side A
Comfort Music
part one
Side B
Comfort Music
part two



LP 2
Side C
Comfort Music
part three
Side D
Comfort Music
part four



17.50 18.00 18.10 18.20 18.30 18.40 18.50 19.00 19.10 19.20 19.30

①

⑤7

⑤9

⑥0

⑥1

⑥4

⑥5

30 min instrumental static	11 min instrumental low cycles
-------------------------------	--------------------------------------

13:30 min instrumental harmonics	4 min alarm	
	1	1

15-20 min cm_dnt

17 min cm_lowcycles	18 min cm_ruined_b131	7:30 cm_slow- birdalarm	cm-noise- alarm
11 min	6 min	6:30	



V
U
L
K
A
N

EMERGENCY

Performed by
Aksiom Ensemble
Kai Grinde Myrann
conductor
Fredrik Brandstorp Olsen
saxophones
Henrik Munkeby Nørstebø
trombone
Anders Kregnes Hansen
vibraphone
Petter Haukaas
vibraphone
Jonas Cambien
piano

Ole Martin Huser-Olsen
guitar
Vilde Sandve Alnæs
violin
Ivan Valentin Hollup Roald
cello
Christian Meaas Svendsen
contrabass
Recording
Cato Langnes
Thom Johansen
Editing and mixing
Cato Langnes
Knut Olaf Sunde

Mastering
Cato Langnes
Recorded live at
premiere
Vulkan Arena
Oslo
14.9.2015
Produced by
Knut Olaf Sunde
Design
NODE Berlin Oslo
Photography
Henrik Beck

Project produced by
Notam
Ultima
in cooperation with
Telenor Kulturarv
Telemuseet
Written
2015
P&©MERE Records 2018
MERE017
n©b
All rights reserved