

## Dana New Music Festival XXX to feature music by Swedish composer Lars Bröndum

by Daniel Hathaway



Soon after arriving at the Dana School of Music at Youngstown State University, composers Robert and Gwyneth Rollin founded the Dana New Music Society and the New Music Festival. This week, the Festival celebrates its thirtieth anniversary with a series of performances and premieres on Wednesday, April 30 and Thursday, May 1.

The free performances begin with a Music at Noon concert on Wednesday at the Butler Institute of American Art, followed by a gala concert in Bliss Recital Hall on Wednesday evening featuring Robert Rollin and the Festival Orchestra. Guest pianist Holly Roadfeldt will play a solo recital on Thursday evening in Bliss Recital Hall (see the calendar listings for details).

Swedish composer and performer Lars Bröndum (above) and California-based composer Kathy Henkel will be the featured artists this year, each of them premiering a new work. Bröndum will be returning to the university where he first matriculated as a guitar major but soon encountered the new music scene. “When they introduced us to the curriculum as freshmen,” he said in a telephone conversation, “they warned us about taking a certain course because it was all ‘strange music’.”

The course in question was Robert Rollin’s Composers Ensemble and the idea of “strange music” acted like a magnet for Bröndum, who had composed for his band as a teenager in Sweden and switched from guitar to composition for his master’s at YSU and Ph.D. at the University of Pittsburgh. “I realized I always wanted to be a composer,” he said, “and Rollin exposed me to a variety of music through the festivals, which brought in guests from New York, LA and even Sweden and opened up my curiosity.”

Bröndum will have four of his works played on the festival, three on Wednesday evening and one on Thursday. The pieces are varied in style and instrumentation.

*Orgone Accumulator*, for bass clarinet and recorded sounds, takes its name from a 1930s hoax machine marketed to increase one's energy. "The author William Burroughs built his own, probably to detox himself," Bröndum said, adding that the title really has nothing to do with the music. "It's hard to find good names for pieces!"

The recorded track will use sounds from 1970s analog sources. "Those sounds are in again," he noted. "I have a huge modular synthesizer in Sweden. I grew up with that kind of equipment and it feels like returning home. Now that laptops are everyday devices that you do school work on and pay bills with, I like the contact you get touching knobs and dials in real time."

But laptops come in handy if you can't travel with a Theramin. "Those raise eyebrows at Customs," Bröndum said. "The antennae are intimidating." Instead, playing live and working with loops, the composer will layer sounds "like Ligeti's sound clouds." The piece has the evocative title of *Tangled Web*.

Bröndum has used deconstructionist techniques to compose his five-movement piano suite, *Laocön*, and his *Variations for String Orchestra*, which receives its premiere on Wednesday evening. "*Laocön* is inspired by an El Greco painting with very distorted, strange colors. It's a 12-tone piece that starts to follow the rules but then I begin to break down the technique into repetitive patterns. All the movements explore different moods. The one Holly Roadfeldt will play is *Elegy* — a funeral piece."

The *Variations*, which were commissioned by the festival, are based by request on a Swedish theme. "I found a fiddle tune from the turn of the 20th century and wrote intertwining themes that begin in the Dorian mode, then the themes take over in a deconstructive way and the piece metamorphosizes into something completely different before returning to the tune."

The other guest composer premiere on Wednesday evening's program will be Kathy Henkel's *Passing Doble*, a memorial for two younger Los Angeles friends who both passed away unexpectedly.

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