

**Review: CMA Concerts at Transformer Station —
Frode Haltli, Norwegian accordionist (April 27)**



by Mike Telin

On Sunday, April 27 the CMA Concerts at Transformer Station series concluded its inaugural season with a stunningly beautiful performance by Norwegian virtuoso classical accordionist Frode Haltli.

If you're wondering about the term "classical accordionist," you're not alone. The instrument has yet to be recognized in many parts of the world as one associated with classical music. However by the end of his program that featured music by Hans Abrahamsen, Magnar Åm, Arne Nordheim and Aldo Clementi, Haltli had more than made a convincing case that the term is indeed fitting.

Written in 2006 and dedicated to Haltli, Danish composer Hans Abrahamsen's *Air* is a simple atmospheric piece that worked perfectly as an opener to the program. The colors and subtle timbre changes Haltli produced were astonishing.

Norwegian composer Magnar Åm's *On the Banks of the Eternal Second* (1995) is an interesting mix of minimalism with snippets of Asian and Norwegian folk music scattered in. Using the full range of the accordion, from rumbling lows to piercing highs, the work takes interesting and unexpected melodic and thematic twists and turns. It was also quite fun to watch Haltli negotiate all of this with such ease.

Known as the “Grand Old Man of Norwegian Folk Music”, Arne Nordheim’s *Flashing* (1986) is based on the cadenza of his accordion concerto. Symphonic in scale, the work is imaginative, energetic, lyrical and full of life. Throughout the performance, Haltli was clearly in technical command of the work’s rapid-fire passages. As an aside, Frode Haltli has recorded Nordheim’s complete works for accordion, which I highly recommend.

The final work, Italian composer Aldo Clementi’s *Ein kleines ...* (1998) is described as a strictly scored piece with an open duration. The composer referred to it as a Lullaby. Haltli described it as a beautiful two-voiced lullaby that goes on and on. Melodically mesmerizing, the performance lulled listeners into a serene mood — the perfect conclusion to a musically fascinating concert. Hopefully Frode Haltli will return to Cleveland soon.

CMA Concerts at Transformer Station have been a great addition to the area’s classical music scene, filling a large void that has existed for quite some time. The venue’s acoustics are superb and the one-hour format, combined with the close proximity of artists to audience, makes these concerts highly enjoyable. And CMA’s Tom Welsh has done an incredible job of selecting artists who fit the space and format. Let’s see what he has in store for next season.

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