Kvalbein Astrid

***Institutionalizing contemporary music in Norway: From Pauline Hall to the Ultima festival***

“The cultural country of Norway still appears to be… a kind of musical robber state,” stated the composer, critic and founder of *Ny Musikk*, the Norwegian section of the International Society for Contemporary Music, Pauline Hall, in 1948. At the time, the capital Oslo was still awaiting its opera house (to be opened in 1959), a national music academy (established in 1973) and a proper concert hall (completed in 1977). These were all crucial institutions for a decent classical music life, she claimed. By founding *Ny Musikk* in 1938, Hall had herself made the first move to establish a contemporary music institution in Norway. The avant-garde and the twentieth century modernism were however more or less absent until around 1960. Then it rapidly gained interest, and during the 1970s and 1980s new musics were promoted and by a wide range of musicians, ensembles and composers, in different venues. Some of the venues – such as the Henie Onstad Art Centre that hosted Norway’s first studio for electronic music – were crucial for the development in the field, not least by providing space for encounters between prominent artists from abroad and Norwegian composers and performers. When the Ultima festival for contemporary music was established in 1991 it was both a follow-up of the successful ISCM World Music Days held in Oslo in 1990 (for the first time since 1953) and a rare joining of forces, including the major music institutions of the city, that should prove to be powerful. Ultima quickly became a defining force for contemporary music in Norway, and subsequently one of the largest and most prestigious contemporary music festivals in Europe. How could “the musical robber state” end up hosting such a varied and vivid contemporary music institution? This paper discusses the driving forces behind this development, focusing on the aesthetic dynamics and power structures under different leaderships in the history of the Ultima festival until today.

Astrid Kvalbein holds a PhD from the Norwegian Academy of Music (2013) on Pauline Hall (1890-1969), the composer, critic and founder of the Norwegian section of the ISCM. In 2013 to 2017 she was a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Oslo, in a project about the composer Fartein Valen (1887-1952). During the same period she participated in a project on art and power, also funded by the Research Council of Norway, where she did a case study of the Ultima festival for contemporary music. Kvalbein is currently leader of a new project on the history of music education at the Norwegian Academy of Music, funded by the Lindeman Foundation and running until the Academy’s upcoming 50 years anniversary in 2023. She has also been a music critic for many years, and is a freelance singer of contemporary music.