

Hjalmar Borgstrøm

(1864-1925)

Libretto: Hjalmar Borgstrøm

THORA

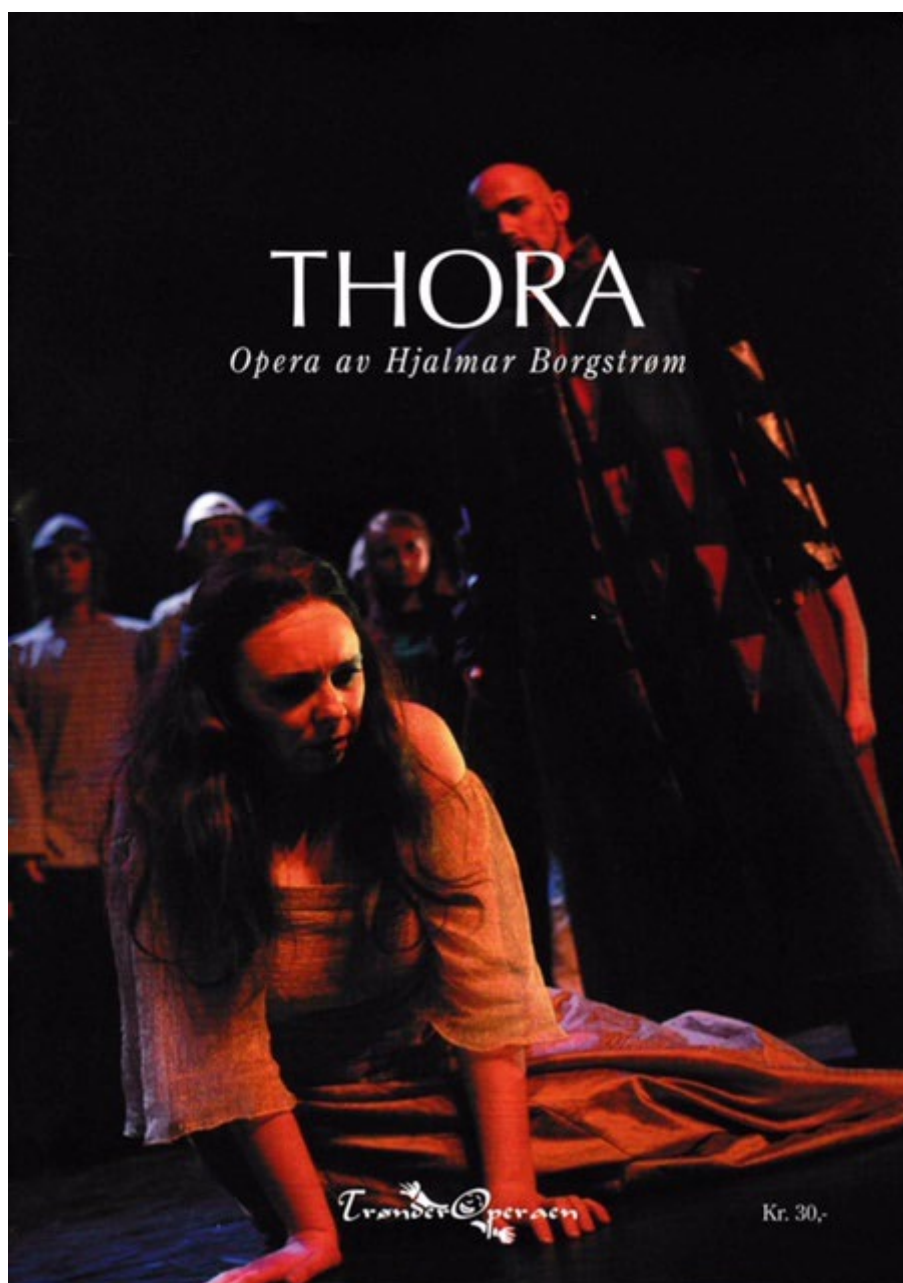


Photo: © Rune W Aasvestad

Hjalmar Borgstrøm is one of the most important Norwegian composers of all time.
(Arne Nordheim, composer)

A beautiful and authoritative Thora:

Thora has finally made it to the opera stage. And let there be no doubt: She deserves her place. Yesterday's event at Melhushallen renders it quite incomprehensible that the composer Hjalmar Borgstrøm has all but fallen into obscurity in our tiny nation. His "Thora" is nothing short of a substantial opera within the European tradition.

(Astrid Kvalbein, Aftenposten)

PRODUCTION

Music: Hjalmar Borgstrøm

Libretto: Hjalmar Borgstrøm

Director : Marianne Berglöf

Orchestra: Trondheim Symphonic Orchestra

Musical director: Terje Boye Hansen

Costume designer: Svanhild Bergsdal

Choir instructor: Hilde Gjærmundsen Ræstad

Choir: TrønderOperaens kor

Project director: Arild Hoksnes

Scenography: Andrey von Schlippe

Chorography: Liv Guldbrandsen/ Marit Laupstad Solberg

Light design: Steinar Lohne

Technical director/ sound: Rune Skogstad, Trondheim Lyd AS

PERFORMANCE HISTORY.

Thora was written in 1894 by norwegian composer Hjalmar Borgstrøm (1864 – 1925), in a period which is considered the golden age in norwegian music history. The composer also wrote the libretto himself, basing it on

the story of Håkon Jarl's murder on the farm Rimol in 995, as described in Snorre Sturlason's saga. The opera has therefore also been named „Thora on Rimol“.

As *Thora* has never been performed in his time, it has never been revised, as composers like to do in collaboration with performing artists in the course of rehearsals and performances. Thus, nobody has heard or seen the opera before it has been premièred on location, at Rimol in Melhus, outside of Trondheim, in October 2002.

ABOUT

Musical and scenic dramaturgy

As source material for the music drama THORA, Hjalmar Borgstrøm used a subject from the old Norse Edda. It deals with the king's saga about Olav Tryggvason by Snorre Sturlason. The story,

serving as narrative framework, describes the disempowerment of Håkon Jarl by Olav Tryggvason. Haunted by Olav and his men, Håkon and his slave Kark find refuge with Håkon's former beloved Thora at her farm Rimol. Olav sets a prize on the head of the fugitive. Driven by greed, Kark slains his master Håkon by night and claims his reward from Olav. Instead, he is executed as a traitor. Thora takes her own life when she discovers the beloved's body.

Even though the outward plot describes Olav Tryggvason's seizure of power in Norway, it is an uncompromising and passionate woman who is in the focus of the drama. Thora loves Håkon, but wants to take revenge on him for having betrayed her.

Divergent from the at the time predominant taste in Norway, Borgström was little interested in a typical "Norwegian" tone in his music. He was influenced by European, international tendencies. He was a fervent stalwart of Richard Wagner's idea of music drama as "Gesamtkunstwerk" (complete artwork) in which text, music and scene merge to a higher unity. Though the plot is set in the time of the Vikings, it is a psychological drama with close resemblance to Wagner's works. The inner, psychological conflicts of the main characters are at the heart of the drama. The focus is not on the outward, historic event, but on the inner struggle of the protagonist between love and hate. We can see clear parallels to both Brünnhilde and Isolde there. Characteristic as well the theme of sacrifice: Thora sacrifices her own life after the death of the beloved man – another distinct vicinity to Wagner's female characters. Another example of Wagner's influence is evident in Borgström's use of leitmotifs. Characters, ideas and actions are characterized by individual motifs in the orchestra, and, similar to Wagner, the orchestra has a narrative and psychologising function. That means that the leitmotifs are developed and modified and, in accordance with the action on the stage, reflect the outward and inward course of action. The composer draws strong and poignant characters, both in his musical and textual dramaturgy. Besides the protagonist Thora, Håkon is another complex character; features like intrepidity and heroism are contrasted with infidelity and haughtiness. The role of the slave Kark illustrates how hate and treason can grow out of mistreatment and oppression. A contrast to Håkon can be found in the future king Olav – his entrances are always marked by a heroic pathos both in text and music. Devoid of any self-reflection, Olav sees himself as redeemer and new leader of the people. A central aspect of the music-dramatic structure is the outstanding role of the choir (The people of Rimol, Olav's men). When Thora in the beginning of the piece decides to raise the oppressed people against the tyrant Håkon, a collective momentum emerges that later gets out of control. Enthusiastically and unconditionally, they follow the new leader Olav Tryggvason. The music drama THORA is not tied to the location of Rimol or the region Trøndelag, not even to Norway. The conflict of the piece is universal: Love and betrayal, power and impuissance. The outward struggle for power is reflected in the inward struggle of the protagonist. Even though the narrative framework of the drama describes one of the most radical changes in the history of the country – the Christianisation of Norway – it contains dimensions that are not tied to a specific time or place. Turmoil, upheaval, abuse of power and war in the name of religion run like a common thread through the history of mankind. It is therefore in the music-dramatic structure that the actuality of the piece can be found.

Marianne Berglöf - stage director

Synopsis

The action is set, according to Snorre Sturlason's saga, on the farm Rimol at Melhus, a little before the year 1000

AD. Haakon Jarl ruled the country. He was popular at first, but became increasingly avid for power and greedy for others' goods, gold and women as time went by. When eventually Olav Tryggvason laid claim to the throne of

Norway, the people revolted against Haakon Jarl and he had to escape. His journey ended at Thora's.

Act 1

On the farmstead Rimol Thora sings out her bitterness towards Earl Håkon: his misrule, his desertion and his betrayal of her love. Olav Tryggvason has claimed the throne of the country, and the people are in favour of Thora's support of Olav, the heir of Harald Fairhair.

Two strangers in disguise appear at Rimol and ask for food and lodging. Thora rejects their request, and Earl Håkon throws off his disguise and reveals himself as her returning lover. Thora accuses him of being a hypocrite. Olav Tryggvason's men approach in the distance, searching for the Earl. The slave Kark is quaking with fear, and Håkon asks Thora to protect him. Håkon, on his part, is anticipating his heroic death and his meeting with the gods in Valhalla.

The music expresses Thora's inner struggle. She changes her mind and decides to protect the Earl, regardless of the cost. Together they sing the praises of their renewed love, while Kark is looking forward to food and mead under the care of the woman of the house. She hides them in the hayloft.

Act II

Olav Tryggvason arrives at Rimol with his men, and the people swear allegiance to him. Thora welcomes him. Olav asks about Earl Håkon, and is suspicious of her evasive answer. He offers a reward for the head of the Earl. His men search Rimol, but cannot find him.

In the hiding place in the hayloft a new betrayal is about to take place. Kark is staring at his master with hatred. Earl Håkon has promised to give him his freedom as soon as they are saved, but the slave does not believe him. Håkon has a terrifying vision of death, and gives Kark his sword to slash healing runes on his chest, but instead the slave stabs him in the heart. Thora, in horror, sings her song of mourning. Kark reports the death of Håkon to Olav Tryggvason. They find the corpse, with a grieving Thora by its side. The people voice loud criticism of Thora's betrayal, but the King forgives her. Kark demands his reward, but is instead led to the gallows for having betrayed his master. Olav Tryggvason demands to be given Håkon's sword, but it cannot be found. Thora has taken it, and sings a song of praise to the blood-spattered blade of the sword before thrusting it into her own heart.

MUSIC

By Terje Boye Hansen

Secret Norwegian Music

In recent years I have developed an interest for Norwegian music history and those composers who lived and worked during the period from c. 1870 to c. 1920 known as the "Golden Age". My interest began with being surprised at the silence surrounding Norwegian classical music, and its history in particular.

My surprise was no less after having performed music from this period and discovering qualities that I had no idea existed. Despite having been a musician for over 30 years I have not had an acceptable level of knowledge about our own history.

Upon reflection I have come to realise that I am probably not alone in this. When asking my colleagues who Catarinus Elling or Hjalmar Borgstrøm were, I would typically receive answers such as "I've heard the name...", "Borgstrøm? Wasn't he Swedish?" or simply "Never heard of them."

So why has this music remained such a secret? Is it generally too uneven or perhaps just not good enough? The majority of Norwegian composers at the time studied in Germany, often in Leipzig, so the basis for their individual development should have been similar.

The sad fact of the matter is, however, that this music has been forgotten and remained secret. Knowledge of our own history has become – and perhaps has always been – neglected. Most of the important Norwegian works from this period are therefore inaccessible to historians, musicians and the public in general, simply because they have never been recorded on vinyl or CD.

In the preface to the third instalment of the five-volume work *Norsk Musikkhistorie* we read “The four decades from c. 1870 – 1910 were a period often referred to as the “Golden Age” of Norwegian music, during which Edvard Grieg and Johan Svendsen were the first Norwegian composers to achieve an international breakthrough.” The volume concludes with a discussion of the two foremost composers in the generation that followed, Christian Sinding and Johan Halvorsen.

In other words: A half-century of our country’s music history has earned the epithet the “Golden Age” on the basis of four composers from two generations. Surely there must be more? And this is where our man enters the scene: Hjalmar Borgstrøm. Born in Kristiania [Oslo] in March 1864 and died in 1925.

The summer 1925 edition of the periodical “MUSIKK”, devoted entirely to the life and work of Hjalmar Borgstrøm, reveals that he was a much-respected composer in his day. Following a thorough analysis of his oeuvre (symphonic poems, chamber music and songs), we read: “Borgstrøm has in addition composed two operas.” And so these two operas had in a way already become secret. In recent years I have performed works by Gerhard Schjelderup, Sigurd Lie, Ole Olsen, Johannes Haarklou and Johan Selmer with considerable enjoyment. The highlight was nonetheless the CD recording of Hjalmar Borgstrøm’s opera “Thora paa Rimol”, a work which the public now has the opportunity to experience in a full, staged version.

The opera is a gem, and in my opinion has what it takes to enter into the standard repertory: Wonderful arias and choral sections with a strong, distinctive melodic character; excellently crafted instrumentation in combination with a lively and sometimes daring imagination.

I hope that the performance of this “forgotten opera” will provide an incentive where musical archaeology can lead to awareness, research and performance, and that it might prove that the Norwegian “Golden Age” deserves attention in the context of international music history.

CAST

Thora - Mezzo soprano

Håkon Jarl - Barytone

Kark - Bass

Olav Tryggvason - Tenor

Choir SATB - The people of Rimol

Choir TTBB - Olav Tryggvason’s soldiers

Original Cast 2002:

Thora – Ingebjørg Kosmo/ Maria Stattin

Håkon Jarl – Trond Halstein Moe/ Fredrik Zätterström

Kark – Knut Stiklestad/ Roar Wik

Olav Tryggvason – Harald Bjørkøy/ Thor Inge Falch

Choir SATB – Trønderoperaens kor

Choir TTBB – Trønderoperaens kor

SCORING

3 Flöten (3 auch kleine Flöte)

3 Oboen (3 auch Englischhorn)

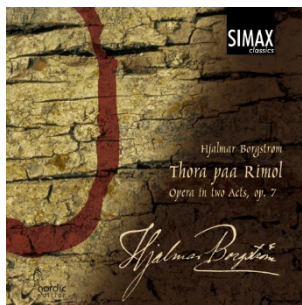
2 Klarinetten in B
Bassklarinette
2 Fagotte
4 Hörner in F
3 Trompete in C
3 Posaune (3 auch Bass Posaune)
1 Bass Tuba
2 Slagzeug
Harp
Streicher

SCORE

The score, as presented here, is a practical edition. It is the result of the involved artists' work with *Thora* as a work of music drama, starting with the recording in 2001, over the publication of the CD, the staged première and repeated staged performances up to the year of 2015.

[Score for browsing](#)

LIBRETTO:



PSC 1230- Booklet original.pdf

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About by Harald Bjørkøy

“The primary historical source for Borgstrøm’s libretto is undoubtedly Olav Trygvason’s saga from “Heimskringla” by Snorre Sturlason, which depicts the building of the nation and the dramatic period of transition between Norse religion and Christianity.

Taking this as his point of departure, and using a certain amount of poetic license, Borgstrøm wrote a libretto that is a classic love story with universal and recognizable characters:

Thora, a powerful and beautiful woman, faithful unto death;
Håkon Jarl, a classic “Don Juan” figure forced into a corner;
Treller Kark, a “Leporello”, faithful servant but at the same time a “Judas” who is his own downfall;
Olav Trygvasson, a hero representing a new age and a new religion, a nation builder and ruler over life and death.

Thora incorporates both a mixed chorus (the people at Rimol) and a male chorus (Olav Trygvason's guardsmen). Borgstrøm gives both choirs major roles in his work. At the entry of the king in the second act the two choirs meet in a wonderful double choir scene. Olav Trygvason's men are reminiscent of the sailors in Wagner's *Flying Dutchman*."

VIDEOS: X

SPOTIFY

[Thora on Spotify](#)

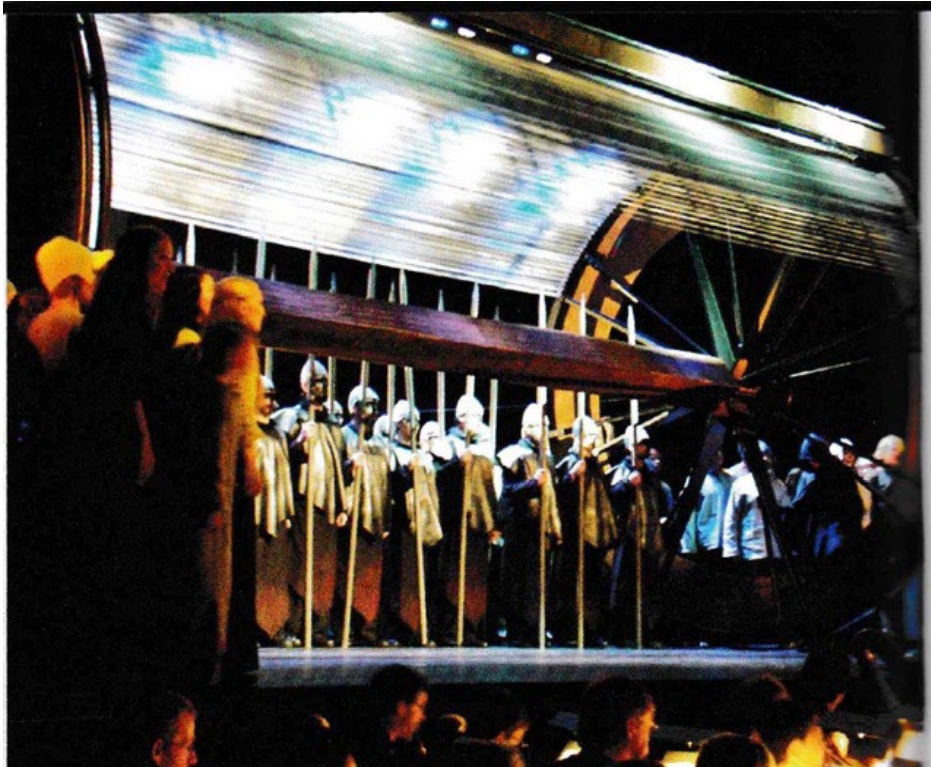
BIOGRAPHIES:

[Hjalmar Borgstrøm](#)

PHOTOS

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