



Pauline Hall, ca. 1950

Pauline Hall

Birth name: Pauline Margrethe Hall

* 2 August 1890 in Hamar, Norwegen

† 24 January 1969 in Oslo, Norwegen

Composer, pianist, conductor, stage director, music critic, journalist, foreign correspondent, translator, public speaker, organisation leader

- Og hvad lever så Nordens eneste kvinnelige symfoniker av?

Pauline Hall ler høit.

- Jo, av å oversette slagertekster, lage musikk til barnetimen i radio, av musikalske arrangementer i de pussigste former, av å skrive avisartikler og oversette, av å være repetitor og snakke i radio, av å dirigere en vokalkvintett. Kort sagt av alt annet enn nettopp det å komponere. For det kreperer man gladelig av om man ikke har hellet med sig. (intervju i "Dagbladet" 13.09.1934)

- And how does the only Nordic female composer of symphonic music make a living?

Pauline Hall laughs out loud.

- From translating lyrics for popular songs, making music for children's radio programmes, from musical arrangements of the most peculiar sorts, from writing newspaper articles and translating, from being an accompanist and speaking on the radio, from conducting a vocal quintet. In short: from anything but composing. Because unless luck is on one's side, one starves to death from it. ("Dagbladet", 13 September 1934)

Profile

The versatile and internationally-oriented Pauline Hall was a prominent figure in the musical life of Norway during the first half of the twentieth century.

First and foremost she was a composer who won great acclaim for her songs, chamber music and orchestral works, as well as for theatre and film music. Early on, she developed a French-impressionist, later a neoclassical compositional style, and she was the driving force behind the Norwegian premiere of Kurt Weill's "Threepenny Opera". Her experiences among the cultural scenes of Paris and Berlin also inspired lifelong efforts to improve the contacts and exchange between Norway and the continent, especially France and Germany.

Hall put her personal mark on the discourses on new music and modernity not only as a composer, but as a critic and commentator in "Dagbladet", as well as founder and chairman of the Norwegian section of the International Society of Contemporary Music (ISCM) from 1938 to 1961. She was also among the founders of The Norwegian Society of Composers in 1917.

Pauline Hall was the first female composer to receive an artist's grant from the Norwegian state (in 1917). Being a woman and a relatively unconventional composer – opposing the dominant (national) aesthetic ideals – does, however, seem to have been a drawback in the competition for financial support, in comparison to her male colleagues.

Cities and countries

Pauline Hall lived most of her life in Oslo, Norway, with the exception of a stay in Paris from 1912 to 1913, then Dresden for six months in 1914. From 1926 to 1932, she worked as a foreign correspondent in Berlin for the daily newspaper "Dagbladet". She later undertook several short trips in Europe as a music critic and as chairman

for the Norwegian section of the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM).

Biography

Pauline Margrethe Hall was born on 2 August 1890 in Hamar (Norway). Her parents, pharmacist Isak Muus Hall and Magdalena Hall (née Agersborg) were both eager amateur musicians. Pauline, who played the piano, was the third of four children in their musical home. Shortly after her birth, the family moved to Kabelvåg (Lofoten) in Northern Norway for ten years. Pauline Hall then returned to Hamar where she received most of her education. At Hamar Cathedral School, one of the oldest and most prestigious schools in Norway, she was a member of the theatre group and orchestra, as well as editor of the school chronicle. After her exams in 1907, she took piano lessons with Johan Backer Lunde and studied composition with Catharinus Elling in Kristiania (today Oslo), before travelling to Paris in 1912 where she stayed until the end of 1913. Even though there is no evidence of any involvement with the Parisian Conservatory or private lessons, she attended countless concerts, operas and theatre productions, and the stay left a deep artistic impression on her. The influence of Impressionism (Claude Debussy) and the Groupe Les Six can be recognized in Pauline Hall's later compositions. Moreover, she was inspired, and partly overwhelmed, by Maurice Ravel's "Daphnis et Chloé" and Modest Mussorgsky's "Boris Godunov" at the Parisian Opera, the Ballets Russes and Igor Stravinsky's "Le sacre du printemps" (Hall 1963, p. 10). After a short internship in Dresden in the summer of 1914 with Erich Kauffmann Jassoy, Pauline Hall returned to Norway, as her financial support ceased due to her father's death.

In 1910 and 1912, Pauline Hall organized concerts in Tromsø consisting exclusively of her own works. In 1913, she published her first song-album. Her official debut as a composer took place on 7 March 1917 at Brødrene Hals concert hall in the Norwegian capital. Here, she presented songs, piano pieces and a sonatina for violin and piano. Critics responded positively. In the same year, Pauline Hall was one of the driving forces behind the foundation of the Norwegian Society of Composers (Norsk komponistforening), and in 1920 she became member of the board. Her first piece for orchestra "Poème Élégiacque" was also premiered in 1920 by the Orchestra of the Philharmonic Society. Two years later the "Nocturne Parisien" followed, which in 1929 was to become the second

movement of the "Verlaine-Suite". With the latter work, Hall was essentially recognized as a skilled symphonic composer. Because the Philharmonic Society had refused to include the work in their seasonal programme, the concert premiere was organized by Pauline Hall herself, together with Ludvig Irgens-Jensen and Arne Eggen, who also premiered some of their own compositions in this manner (Vollnes 2000, S. 145ff.). The event turned out a considerable economic failure, but a huge artistic success.

From the 1920s onward, it became increasingly difficult for Pauline Hall to draw an adequate income from composing, and during the 1920s and 1930s, she developed an enormous versatility. She was an accompanist and head of a concert agency, translated opera libretti and gave lectures on the radio. She also wrote music for the radio programme "Barnetimen" (Children's Hour) at the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) and founded the "Pauline Hall-Quintett" with four female vocalists and herself as pianist. Besides composing, she arranged vocal music of different genres, such as spirituals for the vocal quintet and various choirs. In addition, Pauline Hall worked a great deal in the field of music journalism.

Between 1926 and 1932 Hall lived in Berlin as a correspondent for the Norwegian Newspaper "Dagbladet", reporting on both cultural and political events. She wrote predominantly about the contemporary, at times politically radical, works presented at the theatres and opera houses in Berlin, and like many others, she was deeply fascinated by the collaboration between Kurt Weill and Bertold Brecht. In 1930 she thus brought "The Threepenny Opera" to the Centralteatret in Oslo. The piece was premiered with Pauline Hall as stage director, translator and musical leader, and her staging was reproduced in several runs until 1955.

For Pauline Hall, the "Threepenny Opera" was the beginning of a close and productive relationship with theatre. From the middle of the 1930s, when she started composing incidental music, until the 1960s, she composed music for more than 30 plays, one ballet and four films in cooperation with avant-garde Norwegian directors such as Agnes Mowinckel and Hans Jacob Nilsen. Some compositions, she rearranged for the use in concert halls: the suite from Shakespeare's "Julius Cæsar" (1950) and the "Liten dansesuite fra As You Like It" (Little Dance Suite from "As You Like It") for three wind instruments

(1959). Her characteristic, theatrical diction is also audible in “Smeden og Bageren” (The Blacksmith And The Baker, 1932) for male choir and in “Cirkusbilleder” (Pictures from A Circus, 1933) for orchestra, in the “Suite for blåsekviintett” (Suite for Wind Quintet) from 1945 and the humorous “Fire Tosserier” (Four Insanities) for soprano and wind instruments of 1961.

From 1934 on, Pauline Hall worked on a regular basis as a music critic with the daily newspaper “Dagbladet”, holding this position until 1964, with the exception of the war years 1942-1945 when she was removed by the National Socialists. She gained standing as a highly respected, appreciated, and sharp critic. Hall probably met her future partner, the journalist and feminist Caro Olden, in the journalist milieu surrounding “Dagbladet”. From the 1940s onwards the two women lived together, becoming one of the first couples in Norway to live in an openly homosexual relationship.

In 1938 Pauline Hall founded “Ny Musikk” (new music) as a Norwegian section of the International Society of Contemporary Music (ISCM). As the society’s chair (until 1961) she would strengthen her international network by participating in numerous musical festivals, both as a Norwegian delegate and as a reporter for “Dagbladet”. In 1952/53, she became executive of the ISCM in connection with the organisation of the ISCM music festival in Oslo in 1953. The event was a huge artistic success and a personal victory for Hall, as the festival rescued the organisation from a crisis. It also presented a wide range of contemporary music not known to the critics and audiences of Norway at the time.

In 1958 Pauline Hall was honoured for her contribution to the musical life of Norway with the King’s Medal of Merit in gold (Kongens fortjenstmedalje i gull). In 1960, at the age of 70, she was awarded the Statens Kunstnerlønn (a pension awarded by the government). She is one of very few women to have received this honour (Kvalbein 2013, Kap. 4.2).

Pauline Hall passed away on the 24 January 1969 in Oslo at the age of 78.

Appreciation

At a time when the majority of Norwegian composers related their work to the musical heritage of Edvard Grieg, integrating and admiring national folk music and cultu-

re, Pauline Hall sought inspiration in other European tonal languages and aesthetic ideals. Early on she developed a French-influenced compositional style, most sonorously revealed in the impressionistic Verlaine-Suite for orchestra (1929). She later moved towards a neoclassical, partly dissonant style, as evident, for example, in her “Fire Tosserier” (four nonsense songs, 1961) for soprano and winds.

Whether as an artist, journalist or organization leader, Hall always opposed what she considered the kind of musical nationalism that led to cultural isolationism. She was often a sharp and outspoken participant in debates on such matters.

Her stays abroad, in Paris (1912-1913) and Berlin (1926-32), as well as her travels as a critic and chairman of the Norwegian section of the ISCM, “Ny Musikk”, were significant sources of inspiration for her and provided vital international networks. Through her work in the ISCM, Hall initiated Norwegian premieres of internationally acclaimed works, of which some were performed in chamber concerts arranged by Ny Musikk, others in cooperation with larger institutions, such as Arnold Schoenberg’s “A Survivor from Warsaw”, which had its Nordic Premiere with Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra in 1954 (see Calico 2014, p. 66ff).

As an eager champion of music cultures other than the dominating national (romantic) currents in Norway, Hall repeatedly argued that the musical life of her home country was provincial in character, pointing at the lack of an opera house, a proper concert hall, and a public music academy in the capital. She would only live to see the opening of the opera house in 1958.

Pauline Hall operated in and between many different positions and fields in the cultural life of Norway. After her initial success as a composer of songs, chamber music and symphonic works, she devoted herself to theatre and subsequently film music, contributing substantially to the development of the genres as of the mid 1930s. From this time on, music was gradually integrated more closely into various aspects of drama. By working on film music, Hall also demonstrated her open-mindedness towards new technologies, and she embraced the radio as a medium for public education from the start.

In her later years, Hall’s compositions became increasing-

ly light and diverting, often with humorous elements, and, strikingly, often written for wind instruments – probably inspired by her experience with theatre ensembles.

Although Pauline Hall, unlike contemporary colleagues like Fartein Valen and Arvid Kleven, did not develop an atonal musical language herself, she contributed to many processes of modernization in the musical life of Norway. Thus, she was and is considered a modern woman and artist, highly respected as a composer and critic.

Reception

Pauline Hall holds an important position in Norwegian music history, a history she has substantially contributed to by way of her articles, lectures and criticism. On the occasion of its 50th, 70th and 75th anniversaries, she has been honoured by the organization she founded, Ny Musikk (see Houm 1988, Kvalbein p. 386ff). But despite her versatility, Hall first and foremost was a composer, and numerous reviews constitute a rich material for the study of the reception of her music.

Hall was recognized early on as one of the most successful female composers after Agathe Backer Grøndahl. “One dares to claim that since Mrs. Grøndahl no female Norwegian composer has had a more fortunate first appearance”, wrote the critic Jens Arbo in the journal “Musikerbladet” (no. 18, 1917) after her debut concert on March 7th, 1917. At the beginning of the twentieth century, it was obviously considered a rare event that a composer, moreover a female composer, should propose a full concert programme exclusively with her own works.

The critics in Kristiania (now Oslo) nevertheless responded with general enthusiasm. Pauline Hall’s songs, which were mainly written in a late romantic style with lyrics in German or a Scandinavian language, were particularly highly praised at the beginning of her career. The compositions that revealed influence of French music, such as the “Chanson d’automne”, set to a poem by Paul Verlaine, and the Violin Sonatina, were, however, met with less enthusiasm.

Before her debut concerto, Hall had already published and won acclaim for her four piano pieces (op. 1.) and several songs, and was already regarded as one of the most promising female composers in Norway, among many who at the time wrote in smaller “domestic” forms. In

1920, she did, however, make the leap into symphonic formats, “with remarkable artistic certainty” (Reidar Mjøen in “Dagbladet”, 5 March 1920), when the “Poème Élégiacque” was premiered at the Oslo Philharmonic’s concert series for young composers (“De unges konsert”).

Hall presented her next orchestral work in 1922, the “Nocturne Parisien”, which was to become the second movement of the “Verlaine-suite” in 1929. In the years between these two premieres, Norwegian critics had gradually become more accustomed to impressionist languages (see Kvalbein 2013 p. 98ff). Arne van Erpekum Sem, who in 1922 characterized the “Nocturne Parisien” as interesting, but “often overloaded with seemingly far-fetched sound effects which do not relate well to the often thin and not very original thematic content” [en ophoben av ofte noget søkte klangeffekter som ikke står helt i forhold til deg litt tynde og ikke ganske originale tematiske indhold], wrote in 1929 about the whole suite, that it was “at the level of most of the new Russian and French works we have been grateful to be introduced to lately” [Den står fullt på høyde med de fleste av de nyere russiske og franske verker, som vi har vært takknemlige for å få høre i den senere tid den senere tid] (“Tidens tegn”, 20 January 1929).

The “Verlaine-Suite”, which was perceived as a quite modern work, was for the most part received with similar enthusiasm at its premiere together with Ludvig Irgens-Jensens “Passacaglia” and Arne Eggen’s “Symphony in G minor” on 29 January 1929. The concert has later been considered a watershed moment in Norwegian music history (see Huldt-Nystrøm 1969 p. 247).

Pauline Hall later won considerable acclaim as a composer of stage music. The theatre directors of Oslo regularly commissioned music from her from the mid 1930s onwards, and in the course of the next thirty years, she composed music for numerous theatrical plays, four films and a ballet. The critics noted in particular her ability to write sparingly, but to the point, effectively underpinning the action and the personalities and emotions of the characters (see Kvalbein 2013 p. 184ff). Her later orchestral works, such as “Cirkusbilleder” (Pictures From A Circus) from 1933 and a suite based on the music for “Julius Cæsar” (Shakespeare) from 1950, were also warmly acknowledged in the press.

Her Suite for Wind Quintet was premiered in the au-

tumn of 1945 at the “Norwegian music week”, a celebration of the liberation from the Nazi occupation presenting works that had been written during the war. Egil Falck Anderssen described Hall’s suite with the following words: “In this work, Hall, as usual, speaks her own language, one quite strange to the musical life of Norway. She has distanced herself from everything that is called “genuinely Norwegian” these days, and even at times allows herself to be completely informal and witty. Also in this, she is a rare figure... We hear a march, a rondo, a waltz and a polka. All is straightforward, humorous and in good spirits, a hint of irony, playful artistry and esprit.” (“Dagbladet”, 10 October 1945)

The “Verlaine-Suite” and the “Suite for Wind Quintet” have been quite often, if unregularly, performed after Hall’s death in 1969, and were both recorded together with “Suite fra Julius Cæsar”, “Liten Dansesuite fra As You Like it” and “Fire Tosserier” for a CD released in 1990.

New academic interest in Hall has emerged in the twenty-first century, and her songs and piano pieces have been rediscovered and recorded. In 2010, the singer Tove Træsdahl recorded a selection of songs for the CD “Til en kunstner” with pianist Per Arne Franzen, and Ingrid Andsnes performing Hall’s Opus 1, “Four piano pieces”. The violin sonatina from 1917 was performed by violinist Catharina Chen and pianist Sveinung Bjelland at the Bergen International Festival (Festspillene i Bergen) in 2011.

As part of her PhD project on Hall, singer and musicologist Astrid Kvalbein also recorded two CDs with samples of Hall’s music, among them the violin sonatina, some of the early songs and also a few songs in cabaret style to poetry by, among others, Bertolt Brecht and Erich Kästner.

Research

Musicologists Åse Lahn Lunder’s and Inger Lokjær Faurdal’s master level theses about Pauline Hall, the former at the University of Oslo in 1977, the latter at the University of Copenhagen in 1993, are important contributions to the study of Hall, and both are strongly influenced by feminist thought. Faurdal sees Hall’s career in light of the general professionalization and liberation of women at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century in Scandinavia, and the concept of “overgangskvinde” (woman of transition).

After these initial scholarly investigations, the interest in this – for various reasons – marginalised woman came alive again at the beginning of the new millennium (see, for example, Vollsnes 2004 and 2006). Astrid Kvalbein’s PhD dissertation *Musikalsk modernisering. Pauline Hall (1890-1969) som komponist, teatermenneske og Ny Musikk-leiar* (“Musical modernization. Pauline Hall as Composer, Theatre Woman and Leader of Ny Musikk”), completed at the Norwegian Academy of Music in 2013, discusses Hall’s versatile involvement in musical life in Norway in relation to different discourses on modernity.

As Hall has left behind relatively few personal documents (such as private letters and diaries), forthcoming research will most likely focus on the investigation of musical manuscripts, various printed sources (books, newspapers, concert programmes etc.), the archives of the national broadcasting company (NRK) as well as public correspondence and the protocols and archives of Ny Musikk.

Need for Research

Little of Hall’s music is published or at hand in print. Critical and commented editions of, for example, the “Verlaine Suite”, the “Suite for Wind Quintet”, and “Fire tosserier” would be especially welcome, perhaps as part of the current Norwegian Musical Heritage project (Norsk musikkarv).

Pauline Hall’s compositions for theatre and film also await closer study. Systematic research on this material might prove a valuable contribution to understanding the practice of composing stage music in Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Hall’s corpus of music reviews also remains to be studied in detail. Her articles in “Dagbladet” during the period from 1934 to 1964 constitute an interesting material for analysis. To what extent are Hall’s artistic and aesthetic, as well as political, viewpoints revealed in this material, and how do they relate to her cultural and practical work in the musical life of Norway?

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