

Hafliði Hallgrímsson: **Offerto**

works for solo violin



Peter Sheppard Skærved

Offerto

works for solo violin

Haflíði Hallgrímsson (b. 1941)

Klee Sketches, Op. 32 (2005-2019): Book One

1	I. Klee practising an accompaniment for a popular song	2:54
2	II. And now for the art of string-crossing	2:58
3	III. Klee experimenting with a new scale	1:27
4	IV. Klee takes a legato-line for a walk (version B)	2:07
5	V. Do not neglect your pizzicato Herr Klee	1:49
6	VI. Frau Klee is sleeping (version B)	3:17
7	VII. Klee entertaining Kandinsky	2:24

Offerto, Op. 13 (1991)(in memoriam Karl Kvaran)

8	I. Written in sand	5:40
9	II. Lines without words	3:49
10	III. The flight of time	4:35
11	IV. Almost a hymn	6:57

Klee Sketches, Op. 32 (2005-2019): Book Two

12	I. Klee the artist plays his violin	1:34
13	II. Klee 'sounds out' an etching he is contemplating	3:35
14	III. Frau Klee is sleeping (version A)	3:08
15	IV. Klee sketching a tree	1:55
16	V. Klee performing at the grave of his father	2:52
17	VI. Klee observing a large butterfly	2:48
18	VII. Klee takes a legato-line for a walk (Version A)	1:26
19	VIII. Klee notates birdsong in the aviary	4:07

Total duration

59:29

The music – Notes by the composer

Klee Sketches, Op.32 for violin solo

Dedicated to Peter Sheppard Skærved

In the year 2005, the highly esteemed British violinist, Peter Sheppard Skærved, contacted me and asked if I would be interested in providing him with a few short sketches for violin solo, which he intended to perform in a concert at an exhibition in an Art Gallery in Mexico City. Soon after our conversation I sent him a few short pieces for solo violin, which he performed in Mexico City and at other venues.

Many years later I came across these sketches, when I was looking for a particular composition. I have always loved the violin and enjoyed composing music for it. I decided to take a closer look at them, and I soon found myself revising this material and adding new pieces. I decided to keep the original title “Klee Sketches” for this collection of, even though they have with time developed into quite substantial compositions. There are now 15 pieces which I have divided into two books, in case a violinist would like to include few but not all of them in a programme.

Paul Klee was a highly educated and cultured man who also happened to be a very good violinist. He gave nearly all his paintings and drawings titles that were not only very apt, but also very clever. The titles created an additional dimension to the artwork itself. Some of these titles are playful and quirky. I decided since my music was an Homage to Klee, to give my pieces unusual titles as well, that not only reflected the musical content, up to a point, but also forced me into unfamiliar territory as a composer.

In order to get closer to Klee the violinist, I read his diaries, where he discusses in many instances his activities as a violinist. He also expresses with confidence his opinions on the music he is performing, as well as opinions on fellow musicians, conductors, soloists and composers. I soon began to feel I was composing these pieces for Klee, to perform at his house for a selection of friends, and that I could travel back in time and accept his invitation to attend the first performance.

The pieces range in technical terms from simplicity such as in “Klee takes a line for a walk”, to a relatively complex structures as in “Klee notates birdsong in an aviary”. I don’t see the need to discuss every single piece, as the titles give a good indication of what to expect when listening to the cycle.

Offerto, Op.13 for violin solo (1991) In Memoriam Karl Kvaran

Offerto was composed in memory of the Icelandic abstract painter Karl Kvaran, who died in 1989. The work is dedicated to Guðný Guðmundsdóttir, a prominent Icelandic violinist, who gave the first performance at my fiftieth birthday concert in the National Art Gallery in Reykjavík Iceland.

I valued Karl Kvaran greatly, both as an artist and as a friend. I visited him regularly over the years at his small flat on the top floor of the old Post and Telecommunication building in the centre of Reykjavík. Karl is in my opinion one of few real abstract painters that were active in Iceland in the latter half of the 20th century. In spite of working in isolation nearly all his life and without receiving recognition except from a few friends, he never wavered from his artistic goals. He has only very recently been recognised as one of the finest abstract painters in Iceland.

Offerto is in four movements:

1) Written in sand 2) Lines without words 3) The flight of time 4) Almost a hymn.

The first movement starts hesitantly, like a trembling hand writing an obituary in a dry sand. Saltandos, double- stops, and long phrases empty of emotional content rise and fall. These are notable features of the first movement. Now and then the soloist seeks assurances and consolation by “visiting” the fixed sonorities of the open strings of the violin.

In the second movement, we can imagine the artist at work alone in his studio. There are double trills, fast runs, glissando passages, delicate staccatos, and sudden dramatic outbursts. These musical gestures can well be imagined as a transformation into music of the abstract sounds made by the artist’s brush, as it touches the canvas during the creation of a painting.

The third movement is fast and furious like a flight of a meteorite. An opening rhythmic idea is elaborated and developed in an obsessive manner into gradually longer phrases. A great tension is created, and it increases as the soloist moves higher and higher up the fingerboard, until finally reaching the extreme highest register on the violin. There is suddenly a short pause, and the violinist repeats a rather insignificant *saltando* motive in an almost offhand manner, as if exhausted after a frantic flight. Then follows a brief reference to the opening theme that leads to a quiet ending.

In the last movement, bell-like pizzicatos and gentle lyrical melodies lead gradually to long hymn-like phrases that are often played in double stops and in octaves. A harsh left hand pizzicatos on the open E string, interrupts the music several times, before it reaches a high but lyrical climax, only to fall gradually to the lower register and finally ending on an open G string - the lowest note of the instrument.

Hafliði Hallgrímsson



Peter Sheppard Skærved and Hafliði Hallgrímsson at work in London, 2018

Hafliði Hallgrímsson – A lifetime inspiration

I began my collaboration with the great Icelandic composer Hafliði Hallgrímsson in 1995. From the moment we met, I realised that this was one of the most original and demanding artists I would ever encounter. His unique voice, emotional clarity, and uncompromising approach to sound and colour became fundamental to what I hoped to achieve at the violin.

Hafliði Hallgrímsson began his life as a virtuoso cellist. His deep understanding of the potential of string instruments underpins everything that he writes. The music is not only always beautiful, but the scores themselves are exquisite, a joy to read and work with. They offer further insight into the refined lyrical palate of this composer. My first encounter with his music was in a copyist's scrawl in a set of parts: encountering Hafliði's own handwriting for the first time came as, and continues to be, a revelation.

For me, there was also another point of contact – a spark to the flame – which was that Hafliði, like me, is an artist. Three of his works hang in my apartment, one dating back to his mid-twenties: there is a subtle, even mysterious, relationship between the storytelling and timbres of his music and his painting. In rehearsal, this relationship is set in counterpoint with his physicality at the cello. Even though I have only ever once seen him hold the instrument, the clarity of his demonstrations, illustrating a question of musical rhetoric through the movement of the bow in the air, synthesized all three areas of his imagination and creativity.

It has been my great joy to be involved in the various stages of *Klee Sketches*. My friend, art historian Simon Shaw-Miller, has suggested what we find so alluring in Paul Klee's works, a quality that drawings and paintings share with music, is that they are 'provisional'.¹ This is not, to say, that they are in anyway unfinished, but rather, that when we 'use them', 'stuff happens'. The 'stuff' that happens when we use a score, or look at a Klee painting, say in the Lenbachhaus in Munich, is music, is art.

Here are some disorderly reflections, sketches themselves if you like, reflections on my work with this wondrous collection of pieces:

‘Klee the artist plays his violin’: The activity all arts share, is daily work, practice. As Hafliði depicts Klee with the violin, I remember that I have learnt so much from the way that artists use the word ‘practice’ – to describe the form, the framework which is the nature of their quotidian work. The first time I heard this, I pricked up my ears: we musicians have a tendency to use the word, however much we love it (I do) in reference to a daily duty, *Dienst*. I realised that hiding within our sometimes-resentful relationship to the word is exactly the idealising notion of the artists’ practice. This is what pianist Daniel-Ben Pienaar describes (talking about his piano playing) as ‘daily bread’.ⁱⁱ

‘Klee entertaining Kandinsky’: Of all of Paul Klee’s colleagues and collaborators in *Der Blaue Reiter*, none was more sensitive to the dialogue with music than Wassily Kandinsky. His correspondence with Arnold Schoenberg remains a touchstone of the meeting of the art forms in the 20th century. But I am not entirely clear what form this ‘entertainment’ takes – is it conversation, violin playing, a drawing game? Perhaps Klee is giving a show with some of the bizarre and alarming puppets he made, not so far from the bent wire circus animals with which the sculptor Alexander Calder would later entertain his friends and their children. Artists, like musicians, are essentially, playful.

‘Frau Klee is sleeping’: There are two versions, or realisations of this image in *Klee Sketches*. In fact the composer has recomposed this piece three times over the years. Each time it has become at once more beautiful. This reminds me that so much of what we do not only happens in, but is about ‘home’. The music serves as a portrait, and a depiction of the act of looking, and, maybe, the observation of time passing. It uses some simple devices. The mute ‘describes’ quiet/or a veil over the scene of dormition. Delicate pizzicatos note time passing: ‘passing bells’ or a pendulum?

Playing these movements evokes memories of Pierre Bonnard's paintings of his wife Marthe in her bath, and Giorgio Morandi's renderings, year after year, of a limited group of ceramics in the palest colours. And then Virginia Woolf is with me, the astonishing 'Time Passes' fulcrum of *'To the Lighthouse*, a description of an empty, locked room:

"For now, had come that moment, that hesitation when dawn trembles and night pauses, when if a feather alight in the scale it will be weighed down."ⁱⁱⁱ

'Klee sketching a tree': This is movement represented, with movement. I remember something that Hafliði said in a rehearsal:

"I want you to imagine that your bow is a brush laden with paint: keep using it until all of the paint has been used up, till the bristles are dry – and keep going."^{iv}

All the *tremolo*, shaking, represents the hand of the artist drawing the leaves in motion and represents the leaves themselves. When performance is seen the right hand of the player is both of these. The strangest thing about all of this overlay is that it is not confusing for us. We are complex entities. But there's more. This 'movement representing movement', 'hollows out' imaginary and real airspaces. The space is inhabited, then vacated, evoking Rachel Whiteread's castings of our living spaces, rooms, houses, the spaces inside cupboards.

'Klee notates birdsong in the aviary': The two books of sketches end with the birds. The composer describes an act of notation. Klee stands IN the aviary. He is not writing music, or is he? I will be coming back to the composer's hand. It's impossible to not have Messiaen in mind, standing in the woods with his sketchbook, wife Yvonne Loriod with the tape recorder.

There's a fascinating connection between Hafliði Hallgrímsson's glorious hand-written scores and his laconic, wonderful drawings. Our understanding of any piece of music as performers is influenced on a number of levels by the look and layout of the music on the page. We respond visually to the material both as writing, as image, as schematic, and as structure.

'Klee observing a large butterfly': It is a truism, that so much art comes from our daily astonishment at the daily wonders nature throws our way, and throws away. Iridescence of a butterfly's wings is represented in the glister of the opening, then the tremulous quiver of the insect at rest by the flying bow hand, its bobbing flight by the couplets that follow. We listen/watch the composer imagine the artist watching these things. But Klee is not drawing but memorising. Memory is a vital tool in all our enterprise.

'Klee takes a legato – line for a walk': At the heart of so many of our responses to Paul Klee are his amazing series of 1923 Bauhaus lectures – the *Pedagogical sketches*. I bought a copy of these from my school bookshop when I was 14. It cost £1.40. I had no idea what it was, but was immediately entranced (I have kept the copy close by ever since – I am not alone in this). Let's go to the source, read the first two pages without comment and remind ourselves what we owe:

Fig. 1 – An active line on a walk, moving freely, without goal. A walk for a walk's sake. The mobility agent is a point, shifting its position forward

Fig. 2 & 3 – the same line accompanied by complementary forms

Fig. 4 – The same line, circumscribing itself

Fig. 5 – Two secondary lines, moving around an imaginary main line^v

Klee's revelatory exposition of 'what happens' inspires two sketches in this series. I will leave it to you, the listener, to decide which of the possibilities the composer might have in mind for each of them.

Peter Sheppard Skærved

ⁱ Conversation with Simon Shaw-Miller, St Ives, August, 2005

ⁱⁱ Conversation with Daniel-Ben Pienaar, London, 2020

ⁱⁱⁱ Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York City, 1927. P 208

^{iv} Rehearsal notes, Loughton, 1999

^v Paul Klee, *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, translated by Sibyl Moholy Nagy, Faber and Faber, London, 1953, Pp 16-17



Hafliði Hallgrímsson and Peter Sheppard Skærved in London, 2018

Composer and performer

The cellist and composer **Hafliði Hallgrímsson** was born in Akureyri Iceland in 1941. After graduating from the Music School in Reykjavík in 1962, he continued his studies with Enrico Mainardi in Rome and subsequently at the Royal Academy of Music in London, where he was awarded a Recital Medal and the Madame Suggia Prize. On leaving the Academy he studied composition privately with Sir Peter Maxwell Davies.

As a cellist he was active as a member of many chamber groups and orchestras including the English Chamber Orchestra, the Haydn String Trio, and the Mondrian Piano Trio and the New Music Group of Scotland. He made his debut as a cellist at the Wigmore Hall in 1971 to a great critical acclaim.

He was appointed a principal cellist of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra in 1977, but left the orchestra in 1983 to devote himself to composition full time. He has composed more than 100 works that range in content from pieces for children, to an opera based on 14 mini-stories by the Russian absurdist writer Daniil Kharms.

He has composed concertos for many internationally acclaimed soloists such as Truls Mørk, Jaime Laredo, and the soprano Helena Juntunen, to mention only a few. His compositions have been performed widely and won several prizes, including the first prize in the International Viotti competition for VERSE I, and the Wieniawski Prize for POEMI for violin and strings. POEMI was also awarded the prestigious Nordic Council Prize in 1986.

He has had a particularly successful relationship with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, which has commissioned several compositions from him, as well as the Norwegian Chamber Orchestra and the Iceland Symphony Orchestra, whose composer in residence he has been on two occasions. He is the recipient of the Order of the Falcon, awarded by the Icelandic Government for services to Icelandic music.

<https://www.hallgrimsson.org.uk>

Peter Sheppard Skærvæd is known for his pioneering approach to the music of the past of our own time and the past. Over 400 works have been written for him, by composers Laurie Bamon, Judith Bingham, Nigel Clarke, Robert Saxton, Edward Cowie, Jeremy Dale Roberts, Peter Dickinson, Michael Finnissy, Elena Firsova, David Gorton, Naji Hakim, Sadie Harrison, Hans Werner Henze, Sıdıka Özgül, Rosalind Page, George Rochberg, Michael Alec Rose, Poul Ruders, Volodymyr Runchak, Evis Sammutis, Elliott Schwartz, Peter Sculthorpe, Howard Skempton, Dmitri Smirnov, Jeremy Thurlow, Mihailo Trandafilovski, Judith Weir, Jörg Widmann, Ian Wilson, John Woolrich and Douglas Young.

Peter's pioneering work on music for violin alone has resulted in research, performances and recordings of cycles by Bach, de Bériot, Tartini, Telemann, and, most recently, his project, 'Preludes and Vollerteries', which brings together 200 unknown works from the seventeenth century, from composers including Colombi, Lonati, Marini and Matteis, with the Wren and Hawksmoor churches in London's Square Mile.

His work with museums has resulted in long-term projects at institutions including the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, the Metropolitan Museum, New York City, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the British Museum, Galeria Rufino Tamayo in Mexico City, and the exhibition 'Only Connect', which he curated at the National Portrait Gallery, London. Most recently his 'Tegner' commissioned by the Bergen International Festival, is a close collaboration with the major Norwegian abstract artist, Jan Groth, resulting in a set of solo Caprices, premiering at Kunsthallen, Bergen, and travelling to galleries in Denmark, the UK and even Svalbard/Spitzbergen. Peter is the only living violinist to have performed on the violins of Ole Bull, Joachim, Paganini and Viotti. As a writer, Peter has published a monograph on the Victorian artist/musician John Orlando Parry, many articles in journals worldwide, and most recently, *Practice: Walk*, for Routledge.

Peter is the founder and leader of the Kreutzer Quartet and the artistic director of the ensemble Longbow. Viotti Lecturer at the Royal Academy of Music, he was elected Fellow there in 2013. He is married to the Danish writer Malene Skærvæd and they live in Wapping.

www.peter-sheppard-skaerved.com



The composer in Reykjavík, 2019

Recorded at St. Michael's Church, Highgate, London on May 15 and July 3, 2019

Recording engineer/mastering: Jonathan Haskell (Astounding Sounds)

Producer: Peter Sheppard Skærved

Offerto is published by Music Sales: *Klee Sketches* unpublished (copyright control)

©© 2021 Divine Art Limited (Diversions LLC in USA/Canada)

Cover image by Hafliði Hallgrímsson, photographed by Andi Hafliðson

Photographs of composer and performer in London: Malene Skærved

Photograph of Hafliði Hallgrímsson in Reykjavik: Peter Sheppard Skærved

Solo violin recordings from Peter Sheppard Skærved

The Great Violins Series



volume 1: Andrea Amati, 1570

Telemann:

12 Fantasies for flute | 12 Fantasies for violin

Athene ATH 23203 (2CDs)

"Absolutely terrific." – *The Classical Reviewer*

"A warm recommendation" – *Fanfare*

volume 2: Niccolò Amati, 1647

An Ole Bull salon concert:

music by Mozart, Bull, Gounod, Grieg,

Braga, Heyerdahl, & Augundsson

Athene ATH 23205

"Irresistible. Strongly recommended" – *Fanfare*

"Fascinating and absorbing" – *MusicWeb International*



volume 3: Antonio Stradivari, 1685

The Klagenfurt Manuscript

Athene ATH 23206 (2CDs)

"A wonderful addition to our stock of German Baroque solo violin music." – *The Strad*

"Some of the most important and best music written for solo violin." – *American Record Guide*

"Quite remarkable journey of discovery." – *The Whole Note*

volume 4: Girolamo Amati, 1629

Vilsmajr: 6 Partias

Athene ATH 23210

(new release)





**George Rochberg:
Caprice Variations**

Violin Sonata (with Aaron Shorr)

"An outstanding recording that provides wonderful listening experiences." – ConcertoNet

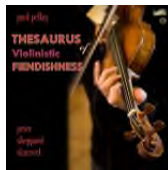
Métier MSV 28521 (2CDs)

Paul Pellay:

Thesaurus of Violinistic Fiendishness

"The music cannot fail to enchant an audience and hold their attention... superlatively skilful playing" – MusicWeb

Métier MSV 28527 (2CDs)



'Etude Philharmonique'

Major works by Hans Werner Henze, Naji Hakim,

David Matthews and Dmitri Smirnov

"...this is a fascinating collection, the spaciousness of the recording serving to underline Sheppard Skærved's luminous clarity of tone." – BBC Music Magazine

Métier MSVCD 92028

DIVINE ART RECORDINGS GROUP



Over 600 titles, with full track details, reviews, artist profiles and audio samples, can be browsed on our website. Available at any good dealer or direct from our online store in CD, 24-bit HD, FLAC and MP3 digital download formats.

UK: Divine Art Ltd. email: uksales@divineartrecords.com | USA: Divisions LLC email: sales@divineartrecords.com

www.divineartrecords.com

find us on facebook, instagram, youtube and twitter

WARNING: Copyright subsists in all recordings issued under this label. Any unauthorised broadcasting, public performance, copying or re-recording thereof in any manner whatsoever will constitute an infringement of such copyright. In the United Kingdom, licences for the use of recordings for public performance may be obtained from Phonographic Performance Ltd, 1, Upper James Street, London W1R 3HG.



métier

msv 28616

0809730861628



**Hafliði
Hallgrímsson**

