

Music History and Cosmopolitanism / abstract & bio
Kvalbein, Astrid (University of Oslo, NO)
Session 5b / Thursday, June 2, 4–6:30 pm

Escaping “the black cauldron”: Fartein Valen and Pauline Hall in the ISCM

At the moment, I consider it best to withdraw a little, if not, I might be put into the black [cannibals'] cauldron again... If I should be presented at an international music festival for the third time, some of the representatives of the extreme nationalist school would probably fly off the handle with rage.
(Valen in a letter to Hall 12.10.1948)

In the summer of 1938, after once again having been fiercely attacked by nationalist composers in Oslo, Fartein Valen (1887–1952) withdrew to seclusion in his home village, Valevåg. From this geographically peripheral position, he continued to develop what might be characterized as his poetic universalism, in an atonal musical language.

The very same summer the composer and high-profile critic Pauline Hall (1890–1969) brought some of Valen’s scores with her to the festival of the International Society of contemporary Music in London. Soon after returning, Hall established a Norwegian section of the ISCM. This was the starting point of an alliance between the two that would eventually lead to what is considered Valen’s international breakthrough at the ISCM festivals in 1947, 1948 and 1951.

The aim of the paper is to explore and discuss the cosmopolitan ideas that united these seemingly different personalities: the introvert aesthete Valen on one hand, and Hall on the other, who fiercely debated the “nationalist trolls” in public and was an outspoken organizer and delegate of the ISCM from 1938 to 1959. Although their artistic and verbal means of expression were different, I will argue that they both strived to belong to a global community in which music was “the language of all mankind” (Valen 1950) and “a uniting international force, not a vehicle for nationalist isolation” (Hall 1963).

Astrid Kvalbein is a postdoctoral research fellow in the department of musicology at the University of Oslo, specializing in Norwegian music history of the twentieth and twenty-first century. Her PhD-project (2013) was a study of the composer Pauline Hall (1890–1969), whose manifold work in the musical life of Norway related to different concepts of modernity. Her postdoctoral research is part of a project on the modernist composer Fartein Valen (1887–1952), focusing on cultural-historical aspects of his life and work. Kvalbein is also a freelance music critic for the daily newspaper *Aftenposten*, and a singer with a particular interest in contemporary music.