

ATHANASIA KOTRONIA

11. juni 2026
kl. 17.00

Glyptotekets Festival

KOMPONIST

DEBUTKONCERT



Foto: Siri Anna Flensburg



DET KONGELIGE DANSKE
MUSIKKONSERVATORIUM

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ABOUT THE CONCERT

My first encounter with Sappho's poetry was a couple of years ago, when I first read her work in a Danish translation. Since then, her poetry has stayed with me and has inspired a number of my works.

Sappho was a poet and musician from ancient Greece who lived around 630 B.C. Her lyric poetry was intended to be sung to the lyre. She is depicted in ancient pottery playing and singing. Musical inventions such as the plectrum and a specific type of lyre have been attributed to her. Much of her work is lost to us today, though she was called "the tenth muse" by Hellenistic poets and has continued to inspire poets, musicians, and composers ever since.

The concert's structure is reflected through Sappho's fragment 51:
jeg ved ikke hvad jeg skal gøre. Jeg har to sind. I don't know what to do
two states of mind in me

In the concert, this is expressed through the two opposing directions of antiquity: Dionysus as a symbol of ecstasy and transformation and Apollo as a symbol of knowledge and light. The concert is divided into two parts – a section for wind instruments and a section for string instruments – with elements of voice and harp.

All Danish translations of Sappho's poetry are from the collection *Jeg er grønnere end græs*, translated by Signe Andersen, Lene Carlskov, and Mille Søndergaard. The English translations in the program are by Anne Carson from *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho* as well as part of the text about Sappho.

ATHANASIA KOTRONIA

I cannot remember a time when I was not writing music. On my way to and from school, walking home with my brother, I would come up with melodies; it was always the best part of the day. My family comes from Greece, and we moved to Sweden when I was five. I began playing the clarinet, painting, and doing theatre, but it was not until I started studying composition that I found something I could disappear into. Today's concert is a part of my graduation from The Royal Danish Academy of Music's Soloist degree, partly concluding my seven years of compositional studies.

Today, much of what I have been obsessed with over the past year will be performed. For a long time, I did not see much in ancient Greece or in the cultural heritage that in some way has always been there. Now I think that after many years it has returned strongly to me, and that there is something else in it for me: multiple narratives unfolding alongside my own. Monuments that no longer exist, faces falling apart, civilizations overtaken by others and the idea of love becoming stronger than love itself.



Photo: Siri Anna Flensburg

PROGRAM

DEL 1: DIONYSOS

Hydraulis (world premiere of the Quarter-tone version)

Quarter-tone accordion: Bjarke Mogensen

Fragmenter (world premiere)

I. Men mig har du glemt

Mezzo Soprano: Hanne Marie Le Fevre

Fragmenter

II. Jeg er grønnere end græs

Soprano: Barbro Cítron, Harp: Vianne Cathérine Sali

Grönare än

I. ängen

II. gräs

V Coloris (Stefan Diaconu, flute, Jonas Frølund, clarinet, Felicia-Gabriela Greciuc, oboe, Niklas Kallsoy Mouritsen, horn, Constantin Barcov, bassoon)

DEL 2: APOLLON

Delfiske hymner (world premiere)

Violin: Adam Koch Christensen

til Afrodite

I. den udødelige

Novo Quartet (Kaya Kato Møller & Nikolai Nedergaard, violin, Daniel Śledziński, viola, Signe Ebstrup Bitsch, cello)

Fragmenter (world premiere)

III. Nattens midte

Mezzo Soprano: Kirsten Voss, Double bass: Piotr Dubajko, Harp: Vianne Cathérine Sali

Syrinx (world premiere)

Percussion: Katerina Anagnostidou

PROGRAM NOTES

Hydraulis is based on the hydraulic organ from ancient Greece (created around 246 BC). The hydraulic organ is the predecessor of all keyboard instruments and the earliest ancestor of the accordion. The music is based on a recording made on a reconstruction of a hydraulic organ, as well as an overtone analysis of that recording. The main theme comes from the recording in which the Epitaph of Seikilos is performed on the reconstruction—one of the earliest surviving pieces of music. In Hydraulis, the melody is deconstructed. The work mourns within its major keys, which in ancient Greece did not necessarily signify joy, but could instead express sorrow. It is performed on a quarter-tone accordion, which means that tones are played in intervals smaller than semitones, which can be perceived as “out of tune” in relation to the traditional tonal system.

men mig har du glemt

129a		
men mig har du glemt		but me you have forgotten.
129b		
eller du elsker en mand højere end mig		or you love some man more than me.

The two fragments are often read side by side. In the song, only the line but me you have forgotten is used, and the fragments are interpreted together. Inspired by the dithyrambic metrical, fluid structure used in choral hymns sung in honour of the god of wine Dionysus in antiquity by male or boy choirs in a call-and-response manner.

Jeg er grønnere end græs

31		
Jeg synes han ligner en gud den mand, der sidder foran dig og hører dig tale sødt nærved		He seems to me equal to gods that man whoever he is who opposite you sits and listens close to your sweet speaking
og le længselsvækkende, det får mit hjerte til at hamre i brystet for når jeg kort ser på dig kan jeg ikke få et ord frem		and lovely laughing—oh it puts the heart in my chest on wings for when I look at you, even a moment, no speaking is left in me
men min tunge knækker, en tynd ild raser straks under huden med øjnene ser jeg intet ørerne brøler		no: tongue breaks thin fire is racing under skin and in eyes no sight and drumming fills ears

kold sved løber af mig, en rysten
griber mig fuldstændigt, jeg er grønnere
end græs det er som om
jeg er lige ved at dø

and cold sweat holds me and shaking
grips me all, greener than grass
I am and dead—or almost
I seem to me.

Men alt skal voves, for

But all is to be dared, because even a person
of poverty

Grönare än is also based on one of Sappho’s most famous fragments number 31, that can be seen above. Of the love I wish for, of the things I desire, stretching within me like: I. the meadow moving through my eyes like strands of II. grass, making me unable to see anything but my own perception of what never existed.

Delfiske hymner are based on the two Delphic hymns. Both hymns share a similar character and were likely composed for performance at the Pythian Games in Delphi, a major festival in honour of god Apollo. In this version they are both merging.

The first hymn has three parts: a call for the Muses to descend from Mount Helicon; the second part mentions the oracle Pythia, as well as the offerings and smoke she would inhale to deliver her prophecies. The third part is a direct invocation of Apollo and describes how he slew the great serpent Python.

The second hymn begins in a similar way, echoing the first. Toward the end, however, it also praises the Roman Empire and wishes continued glory for it, which at the time was the dominant political power.

til Afrodite is based on Sappho’s poem, fragment 1, which is the only poem by her that has survived completely intact. In the poem she asks Aphrodite, the immortal, to be her sworn companion and relieve her suffering. In the string quartet, the theme reflects the classical Sapphic rhythmic metre, named after Sappho. Sappho’s poetry was often sung to the lyre; here, the lyre is replaced by one of its modern siblings in the string quartet.

Nattens midte

168B
Månen er gået ned
og Pleiaderne: nattens
midte, timerne går
jeg ligger alene

Moon has set
and Pleiades: middle
night, the hour goes by,
alone I lie.

The origin of this fragment has been debated since antiquity, as scholars attributed it to Sappho, although parts of it were not found written in the Aeolic dialect she spoke. The Midnight poem, though in tetrameter, is close to Sappho's own meter and pulse; this is reflected in the music by moving between Sapphic meter and tetrameter and back again.

To see the Pleiades in the night sky, one follows Orion's belt in a line to find a small "wagon"-like cluster of stars.

Syrinx tells the story of a nymph whom the god Pan (half human half goat) became obsessed with. He pursued her lustfully, and in her desperation she threw herself into a river, where she was transformed into reeds. In his grief, Pan cut the reeds and created the pan flute, also called the syrinx. On it he played longingly for her.

I saw a mosaic in which Pan carries the syrinx, and in front of him a maenad (a "mad woman" follower of the god Dionysus) dances with crotala, a form of hand cymbals.

I read a quotation about the smith god Hephaestus, who asks two lovers: if I could forge you two lovers into one at this moment, would you wish it?

The story of Syrinx originates in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a classic of ancient Roman literature. The music draws on the hexameter rhythm of the original text.

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