



**Håkon Magnar Skogstad** (b. 1989) is a Norwegian award-winning pianist and composer. He holds degrees in classical performance from the Norwegian Academy of Music in Oslo and the Manhattan School of Music in New York, as well as a PhD in Artistic Research from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim.

He has performed both as a soloist and in ensembles throughout Norway, and has given concerts in the United States, Argentina, Germany, Austria, Spain, and Sweden. In addition to his performing career, he has composed several large-scale commissioned works that have been performed by leading orchestras in Norway.

Between 2008 and 2024, Skogstad released six recordings inspired by Argentine tango, both as a soloist and in collaboration with various ensembles, including his “tango trilogy,” in which the aim was to establish a distinctive performance style and musical language - rooted in Argentine tango, yet expanded and fused with other musical traditions - in the spirit of Astor Piazzolla’s *nuevo tango*. These albums have received widespread international critical acclaim, as well as numerous awards and distinctions. The second album of the trilogy, *Visions of Tango*, featuring violinist Atle Sponberg and the Trondheim Soloists, includes Håkon Skogstad’s *Concerto for Piano and String Orchestra* and was awarded the Norwegian Grammy Award for Best Classical Album in 2021.



## From the composer's point of view

*24 Variations for Piano* is, to a large extent, a reflection of who I am as a pianist and composer - shaped by the influences that have shaped me.

On the one hand, it draws on my many years of classical training in Norway and the United States, culminating in a doctoral degree in artistic research, where I immersed myself in Romantic and Impressionist performance practice. As part of this work, I engaged in an intensive process of copying and recreating historical recordings by pianists such as Ricardo Viñes, Ignacy Friedman, and Sergei Rachmaninov. This process has deeply influenced and further developed my classical pianistic style.

On the other hand, my music is also shaped by my eclectic background. In my early youth, I played rock music in bands and later immersed myself in jazz on the Hammond organ. In 2005, I was introduced to Argentine tango through my role as pianist in the *tango típica* octet *Tangueros del Norte*. This music - which I felt embodied "the emotions of classical music, the timing of jazz, and the attitude of rock" - was a revelation to me. I went on to study the style intensively for over a decade, including several study trips to Buenos Aires and lessons with musicians such as Pablo Ziegler, who performed in Astor Piazzolla's quintet.

*24 Variations for Piano* opens with an introductory main theme that may be described as a kind of "minimalist arietta." The theme consists of 14 bars divided into the main theme's A section and B section, gravitating between C major and A minor - the latter only being firmly established in *Variation No. 1*, which begins in bar 15. The theme is both tonally and stylistically flexible, inviting a wide range of musical genres. Out of this sense of unresolved openness, the listener is led on a journey through 24 highly contrasting musical expressions in 24 different keys. Each movement is a variation on one or more of the small motifs that make up the main theme - sometimes clearly recognizable on the surface, at other times concealed more deeply within the texture, rhythmically or harmonically transformed.

Stylistically, the work draws inspiration from a wide range of musical idioms and composers, including Chopin, Rachmaninov, J.S. Bach, Prokofiev, Debussy, Ravel, Grieg, and Piazzolla, as well as more recent figures such as Horacio Salgán and Juan José Mosalini. As a cyclical composition, it also relates to works such as the *Goldberg Variations* by Bach, Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, and Chopin's *Preludes*.

The ordering of the 24 movements follows neither the circle of fifths nor a chromatic system, but is instead shaped by the dramaturgy of the music, in which each "musical image" contrasts with the previous one. Each movement may thus stand independently as a miniature, or be experienced as part of a larger cyclical whole - a musical journey in which the final movement returns to the main theme of the opening, and A minor is transformed into A major.

**Variation No. 1 in A minor** is an improvisation on the main theme in my "bandoneón-inspired" rubato style, concluding with a reharmonization of the main theme's A section.

**Variation No. 2 in C-sharp minor** ends with a reharmonization of a condensed version of the main theme. It opens with a quasi-chromatic fantasy on these harmonies - a variation within the variation.

**Variation No. 3 in B major** presents an *espressivo*, somewhat oriental and increasingly polyphonic version of the main theme's B section in 3/4 time, set against a sixteenth-note accompaniment in the left hand.

**Variation No. 4 in E minor** is a contrapuntal, rhythmically, and harmonically varied version of the main theme's B section, performed with articulation inspired by Argentine tango.

**Variation No. 5 in D-flat major** opens with a chorale-like reharmonization based on the main theme's A section, forming the basis for a virtuosic and romantic improvisatory outburst that leads into an expressive melodic recitative.

**Variation No. 6 in G-sharp minor** is also based on the main theme's A section, but unfolds more as a lament - one of the most melancholic movements in the set, though not without contrasting rays of light in its central section.

**Variation No. 7 in B-flat major** offers a rhythmically driven, *scherzo*-like character in 6/8 time, based on the main theme's A section.

**Variation No. 8 in G minor** functions as an echo of the main theme, also 14 bars in length. The first eight bars form a chorale-like texture, in which the upper melodic tones of the accompaniment to the original main theme's A section are reharmonized. This is followed by the main theme's B section in its original, though reharmonized, form.

**Variation No. 9 in B-flat minor** is one of the most virtuosic and technically demanding movements in the set, presenting multiple variations on the full main theme across a wide dynamic range - from lyrical sonorities to fiery intensity.

**Variation No. 10 in E-flat major** features an expressive melodic and contrapuntal treatment of the main theme's B section. In the middle section, elements of the main theme's A section are interwoven as signal tones within the texture.

**Variation No. 11 in C major** is a rhythmically transformed version of the main theme's B section, characterized by the distinctive and highly articulated 3+3+2 rhythm known from *nuevo tango*.

**Variation No. 12 in E major** is a playful, neoclassical-inspired movement in which a transformed version of the main theme's B section dances between alternating 6/8 and 9/8 meters.

**Variation No. 13 in F minor** begins with a three-bar mini-chorale - a reharmonization of a variation on the main theme's A section. From this emerges an extended crescendo built on broken chords, melody, and pedal point. After a climactic moment in which the main theme's A section is once again reharmonized, the music dissolves into a postlude of broken chords.

**Variation No. 14 in E-flat minor** blends motifs from both the main theme's A section and B section into a new melody, set against a slow *milonga* rhythm and additional accompanying figures.

**Variation No. 15 in D minor** employs all the motifs of the main theme, both melodically - as a rhythmic variation - and harmonically, where the chords themselves are reharmonizations derived from the melodic tones of the main theme. The articulated playing style and timing are inspired by *nuevo tango*.

**Variation No. 16 in F-sharp minor** uses a fragmented and altered version of the opening of the main theme's B section. The movement evolves from dark, tolling "doomsday bells" to a triumphant climax, before receding back to its origin. A coda-like passage presents a reharmonization of the accompaniment, followed by the variation's main idea in the piano's upper register.

**Variation No. 17 in A-flat major** is a virtuosic outburst in which the main theme's A section appears as accented signal tones within rapid sixteenth-note figures.

**Variation No. 18 in C minor** is a lyrical yet melancholic and introspective variation of the main theme's B section. The main theme's A section appears as deep octaves toward the end of the central section.

**Variation No. 19 in G-flat major** presents variations of the main theme's B section within an impressionistic soundscape in 5/4 time.

**Variation No. 20 in F major** treats all the motifs of the main theme within a kind of oriental-inspired march in alternating 6/4, 5/4, and 4/4 meters.

**Variation No. 21 in G major** is a Norwegian folk music-inspired improvisatory movement based on the main theme's B section.

**Variation No. 22 in B minor** unfolds like a piano cadenza, presenting the motifs of the main theme through virtuosic passages over reharmonized harmonies. Together with the following variation, it forms the climax of *24 Variations for Piano*.


**Variation No. 23 in D major** begins *attacca*, continuing in B minor from the previous variation with a fragmented version of the main theme's B section. In a triumphant *appassionato* outburst, it modulates to the relative major, where a reharmonized version of the main theme's B section emerges.

**Variation No. 24 in A major** serves as a calm and reflective coda, with fragmented variations of all the motifs of the main theme. This leads into a harp-like contrapuntal passage before returning to the main theme's A section in its original form - this time in A major. A final postlude follows, before the music fades into eternity.

**Recorded at Øra Studio on a Steinway & Sons Model D**

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**Recording Engineer: Jo Ranheim**  
**Mixed by Jo Ranheim**  
**Mastered by Karl Klaseie**  
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**Photos by Marit Solemsli**  
**Cover Design by Håkon Skogstad**

Made possible with support from *Arts and Culture Norway, The Fund for Performing Artists, Trondheim Municipality and The Jac. og Mathilde Maliniaks Memorial Fund.*

 Kulturdirektoratet

