



Pierre-André Valade by Michael Nyvang

“He makes us play better than we actually can.”

... is the testimony of an ATHELAS musician to the ensemble's new chief conductor, Pierre-André Valade, after a concert in Birmingham last year. The decision to appoint Valade for a 3-year period as ATHELAS' chief conductor was therefore not a difficult one for the ensemble's artistic director, Anders Beyer:

“Whether you manage a football team or a music ensemble, you need to look for the person capable of lifting the team to a higher level and into a new league. It's both my own and the ensemble's belief that Pierre-André Valade can meet that challenge.” And he is supported wholeheartedly by Valade, who says of the coming collaboration:

“ATHELAS is an ensemble who are strongly and spontaneously devoted to optimal performance. Their dedication makes the group be a sort of ideal place for music making. I was extremely pleased when Anders Beyer asked if I was willing to become their chief conductor.”

Together with composer Phillipe Hurel, Valade established Court-circuit, one of the leading ensembles in France, with new music as its speciality, where he stayed a music director for 16 years until he resigned in January 2008 to devote himself to his guest conducting career.

Valade found a crucial source of inspiration in his meeting and friendship with the French composer-conductor Pierre Boulez. As a flautist in the early days, Valade toured the USA with Ensemble Intercontemporain under Pierre Boulez's leadership, and also premiered Boulez' flute concerto “...explosante-fixe...” in the early 90's. “Boulez great insight into music, his discipline and meticulous preparation were an important benchmark and example for me” says Valade. “Pierre Boulez is my primary point of reference. He's been a very powerful source of inspiration for me.”

Valade has learned from the great orchestral leaders that only by working with, and learning from, the very best can you achieve the impressive results on which he today can pride himself as a conductor: a wide-ranging repertoire,

award-winning recordings, a long series of well-reviewed concerts with the world's leading orchestras and ensembles, and an active life as a touring top-class conductor with concerts and projects counted in the hundreds each year.

While you will also find Wagner and Berlioz in Valade's repertoire, his work with 20th and 21st century music is close to his heart. “One of the wonderful things about working with new music is that you can actually talk to the composer, share with him or her the joy of making the music heard for the very first time, then bring this enthusiasm on to the audience!” says Valade. “Also, it has happened to me so many times that members of the audience, including people with no particular music culture, come after a contemporary music concert to express what a great experience they enjoyed. I strongly believe that contemporary music is closely connected to us, simply because it takes its roots in our culture, our way of living, of thinking.”

Valade has paid particular attention to French spectral music, which arose from works with delicate, harmonic timbres created naturally. Spectral music was developed by among others Gérard Grisey, Tristan Murail, Hugues Dufourt, towards the end of the 20th century. It was to inspire many composers throughout the world.

Over the centuries symphony orchestras have become an important part of European musical culture, but do we have the strength and the will to continue with them, I asked Valade in Paris. Without hesitation he answered:

“Of course we have the strength to continue the tradition. We also have the energy and the creativity to develop it. Tradition is in no way a dead concept: what we are building today is tomorrow's tradition! Symphony orchestras will definitely survive, while the musical world has been developing from the past 30 years ways to supplement the traditional music-making institutions by creating smaller ensembles like ATHELAS Sinfonietta, London Sinfonietta, Ensemble


Intercontemporain or others. Symphony orchestras are irreplaceable, while they cannot be the only response to the variety of music being written. The imagination of the composers is tremendous, and while the orchestra remains as a major instrument to perform this music, other instruments are also needed to match the creativity and make it shine at its best for the listeners

With recent concerts in New York, Tallinn, Birmingham and Cannes, ATHELAS has made its mark internationally and is now involved in two distinctive EU projects: Integra II and Re: New Music. As a brand ATHELAS has many faces, and it must be able to participate in a broad range of concerts and collaborations with other institutions and related art-forms. International projects are an important area of the ensemble's strategy. ATHELAS is looking to the leading stages and festivals in Europe where other trend-setting ensembles are performing. Together with Valade, ATHELAS has a wide international network that it plans to exploit in the coming years.

With an equally high level of ambition and energy – and with such a capacity as Pierre-André Valade at the rostrum – ATHELAS has the potential to move into the European elite of classical ensembles. “Danish audiences have been starved of quality through a mistaken cultural policy since 2001. We have shut the windows on music from the rest of the world. That's frightening, and we're trying to do something about it. Danish audiences don't yet know the world-famous Pierre-André Valade, but they are going to!” says Anders Beyer.

Michael Nyvang is a Danish composer resident in Paris.
Photo: Claude Dufêtre

Find more information on Pierre-André Valade on www.pierreandrevallade.com. See also an Interview with the conductor on www.youtube.com/athelas-sinfonietta.



ATHELAS Sinfonietta Copenhagen is proud to present the ensemble's new chief conductor

Pierre-André Valade

The French conductor Pierre-André Valade (b. 1959) is especially well-known and admired for his performances of repertoire from the 20th and 21st centuries, and receives regular invitations from major festivals and orchestras in Europe, the USA, Canada and Australia/New Zealand. Of his many recordings, Grisey's *Les Espaces Acoustiques* has been singled out for particular praise and won both the Diapason d'or de l'année 1999 and the Grand Prix de l'Académie Charles Cros. Later recordings have also received awards.

Valade has recorded Harrison Birtwistle's *Theseus Game* for Deutsche Grammophon, a piece he premiered along with Martyn Brabbins in Duisburg and conducted at Southbank Centre, BBC Proms, Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, Lucerne International Festival and in Berlin. In 2008 he received the Grand Prix de l'Académie Charles Cros, this time under the category "conductor", where he was the only award winner. Pierre-André Valade made his BBC Proms debut in 2001, and has appeared at the Aldeburgh, Bath International and Holland festivals, Strasbourg Musica, Oslo Ultima, Monte Carlo Le Printemps des Arts, Nice Manca, Paris Ircam Agora, Radio-France Présences, and in Perth, Sydney, Wellington and Tokyo.

In 2005 he conducted the world premiere of Marc Monnet's opera *Pan* for the Opera du Rhin in Strasbourg.

In 2006, he conducted London performances of *Mixtur* by Stockhausen with the London Sinfonietta and a portrait of Helmut Lachenmann with the Royal College of Music Symphony Orchestra.

In 2008, he participated in the centenary of Messiaen's birth, conducting works in London, Wellington, Basel and Hanoi.

Valade frequently conducts Tonhalle Orchestra Zürich, BBC Symphony and BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestras, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Ulster Orchestra, Luxembourg Philharmonic, Orchestre de Paris, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, London Sinfonietta and other internationally renowned orchestras.

In January 2001 Valade was awarded the Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French Minister of Culture.

Pierre-André Valade is chief conductor of ATHELAS Sinfonietta Copenhagen for the period 2009 – 2012.