



Ålesund Symphonic Orchestra aims to offer quality and a wide range of music.

Attraction of the Month, Norway

A musical powerhouse in the Ålesund region

In the coastal town of Ålesund in the west of Norway, Ålesund Symphonic Orchestra aims to be a centre for musicians and music fans. As a semi-professional orchestra with a mix of professional and amateur musicians, they carry the legacy of classical and modern music on to new generations every day.

By Alyssa Nilsen | Photos: Johanna Veiberg, Smiilfoto

Founded in 1945, the nearly 75-year-old orchestra is a constant and strong force in the local community in Ålesund, and its approximately 65 musicians play a big part in the musical and cultural aspect of the town. Each year, they play somewhere between seven and ten concerts, from old classical works to film music and premieres of brand-new works, and even pop music by artists like Helene Bøksle and Bjørn Eidsvåg. The orchestra

has also worked with some of the biggest names in classical music, such as Håvard Gimse, Charlie Siem, Truls Mørk, Ann Helen Moen and Henning Kraggerud. Lars-Thomas Holm has been the artistic leader since 2015 and is a generator for the artistic and musical development of the orchestra.

“Ålesund is the biggest town between Bergen and Trondheim,” manager Astrid

Josefine Eide says, “so we’re an attractive region in that sense, and we’re very grateful for the collaborations we get to do. They help us increase our audience and visibility. The Ålesund region is growing in size and numbers, and we want to attract new audiences, both young and old, through quality and a wide range of music.”

But the orchestra is also looking to expand the number of musicians, both professional and amateurs, and encourages musicians in the Ålesund area, as well as those who might be looking into moving to or studying there, to get in touch. In addition, they collaborate with Ålesund ballet school and Ålesund arts school,

hold conductor seminars and do open auditions for new members.

Nurturing new and young talent is important for the orchestra, and in March they are arranging a concert conducted by Bjarte Engeset and featuring Birgitta Elisa Oftestad, a young cellist who won *Virtuos 2018* and represented Norway at *Eurovision Young Musicians 2018* in Edinburgh.

Several nationally and internationally recognised musicians started out in Ålesund Symphonic Orchestra, and they are proud to be a stepping stone for local up-and-coming talent. "The orchestra is run by volunteers, which is somewhat unique for an orchestra with such big productions," says Eide – evidence that its aim to be a force in the local community has been a success.

A multitude of productions

With six or seven different productions each year, some with several performances, the orchestra is keeping busy. Their 75th anniversary is coming up in 2020, and preparations for the anniversary season have already begun.

There will be the premiere of a commissioned piece by composer Morten Christophersen, an oratory about the local historical figure Rollon (Gangerolv), whom people might recognise from the TV series *Vikings*. The concert is planned and performed along with local choirs and local soloists.

The town of Ålesund is recognised nationally and internationally as a town architecturally influenced by Art Nouveau, and the orchestra plans on celebrating this through concerts with music in the very same style. This is a collaboration with *Jugendstilsenteret*, an Art Nouveau centre located in central Ålesund.

In addition to this, the orchestra is working on the third and fourth installations of the *Ulfrstad* project, a concert series called *Klangen av Sunnmøre*. The project was started in 2015 to shine a light on the musical and biographical heritage of local composer Marius Moaritz Ulfrstad (1890-1968), an important Norwegian composer in the post-war period. The concerts in this series take place every October. In addition to the musical aspect of the tribute, the orchestra has commissioned a bust

of the composer to be placed in the town park, as well as a biography.

In January, the orchestra is putting on two concerts focusing on the golden age of Hollywood, which will see them perform film music from the early 1900s, and for Norway's constitution day on 17 May they are playing Edward Grieg's concert version of the classic *Peer Gynt*, a big event featuring local musicians, actors and dancers.

Upcoming events:

24-25 November 2018: Christmas concerts with Hovedøen Social Club

19-20 January 2019: New Year's concert: Golden Age of Hollywood

24 March 2019: Symphonic Concert: Dvorak's *Symphony No. 8* and Elgar's *Cello Concerto in E-minor*

17-18 May 2019: National day celebration concert: *Peer Gynt*, concert version by Edward Grieg.

Web: www.aaso.no

Facebook: [alesundsymfoniorkester](https://www.facebook.com/alesundsymfoniorkester)

Instagram: [@alesund_symfoniorkester](https://www.instagram.com/alesund_symfoniorkester)

Email: post@aaso.no

