

## **GRIEG: Six Ibsen Songs; 12 Vinje Songs; Haugtussa – Marianne Beate Kielland, mezzo-sop./ Nils Anders Mortensen, p. – Lawo Classics (stereo)**

*An absolutely mandatory release of three of the greatest song cycles ever written—performed to perfection.*

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**GRIEG: Six Ibsen Songs, Op. 25; 12 Vinje Songs, Op. 33; Haugtussa Op. 67 – Marianne Beate Kielland, mezzo-sop./ Nils Anders Mortensen, p. – Lawo Classics stereo-only SACD LWC1059, 75:01 \*\*\*\*\*:**

This is my first exposure to Marianne Beate Kielland though she seems to have a big career already behind her. Her voice to me is “old style”, full of Gallic overtones—fast *vibrato*, lacking huge richness but replete with color and character. Grieg of course composed many songs, 181 in fact (with 34 not finished), and this makes for his single largest genre type. Though today most people don’t think of him that way, his skill with the art song and the number composed make him one of the finest lieder composers of his age, and easily worthy to be included with the romantic greats—and you know who they are.

Grieg set the greatest poets of Norway and had the added advantage of being married to his Danish wife, Nina. A professional soprano, she was assigned by Grieg to première many of his songs. As a result the works lay well for the voice (he never specified which voice they were intended for, though local traditions have grown up) even though many of them are quite difficult. *All* of them are quite beautiful, some stunningly so, some hauntingly chilling and unforgettable. Though the *Haugtussa* cycle is the most famous here, and probably the greatest, it is the *Vinje Songs* that tug the strongest at my emotions; there is something so full of pathos, longing, and deliciously ascetic about the cycle that makes it hard to resist.

The program is actually given in reverse of composition order. Last we have the *Ibsen Songs*, and as might be expected considering the composer’s attachment to this writer, some of the most memorable melodies are found in this set. Kielland doesn’t seem to have any trouble in navigating the stylistic differences among these three sets (and yes, they *do* exist), approaching each song with a concentrated and wonderfully focused vision that makes each work sound as if it is the most important on the recital.

This was recorded at the 1200 seat Vågan Church (Lofoten Cathedral) on the island of Austvågøya, just off the west coast of Norway in Nordland. It is only two stereo SACD tracks but the sound is intimate and off-white in nature, making for a perfect manner of capturing this music. Pianist Mortensen’s contribution can hardly be slighted, balanced nicely with Kielland’s warm and brandied mezzo. This is one of the finest *lieder* records I have ever heard, and surely one of the top ten discs of any type that I will encounter in 2014. Grab it.

—Steven Ritter