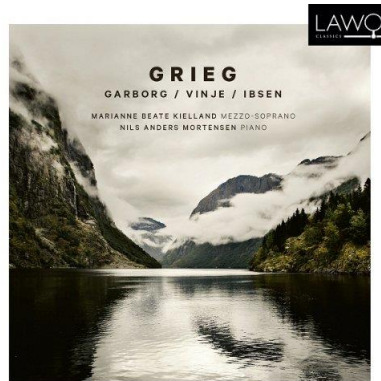


GRIEG *Haugtussa*, op. 67. *Vinjesangene*, op. 32. *Ibsensangene*, op. 25 • Marianne Beate Kielland (mez); Nils Anders Mortensen (pn) • LAWQ 1059 (74:59 📀)



Lieder on Texts By Garborg Ibsen & Vinje
AUDIO CD; HYBRID SACD - DSD

Although these are among Grieg's most popular songs, I am not aware of any prior disc that combined these three cycles, which is a logical compilation if for no other reason than their combined duration. One reason for that may be that the "Vinje Songs" (settings of poems by Aasmund Olavson Vinje) are most often sung by a male, and *Haugtussa* by a female. But there are neither textual nor musical reasons for limiting the gender of the performer.

The program notes, written by the singer, were worrisome. She emphasized how she and the pianist carefully studied the scores and tried to avoid the temptations "to go far beyond Grieg's instructions." The notes led me to anticipate a highly literal, correct set of performances that might have lacked spontaneity or freedom.

That was not the case at all. Both Kjelland and her pianist delight in this music, and bring it to life in a highly communicative and direct way. The third song of *Haugtussa*, for instance, "Blåbær-Li" (Blueberry Slopes), is strophic in structure, with five verses repeating the music. Kjelland brings remarkable variety to each verse, differentiating them with color, dynamic shading, and even inflection, as does pianist Mortensen.

Kielland's voice is not the most lush; it is focused and basically lyric in timbre. She does, however, have the ability to vary the color significantly, and the intelligence to do so wisely. She will bend pitch for expressive purposes, vary the amount of vibrato according to musical and dramatic context, and she conveys a very wide range of moods. She captures the bittersweet, reflective nature of *Våren* perfectly, and Mortensen keeps the hushed mood perfectly through the conclusion. "Langs ei å" (Beside a Stream) is hauntingly beautiful here, and Kielland and Mortensen lighten the mood appropriately for "Eit syn" (A Vision), one of the songs probably more appropriate for a male singer, but one doesn't mind her appropriation of it because of the conviction with which she sings. It is true that when Kielland pushes the voice one might wish for a bit more tonal body, but those moments are very rare, and are more than compensated for by the highly intelligent, musical, and communicative performances here. This is highly recommended. It doesn't replace the Grieg disc by Anne Sofie von Otter (DG 818102), which is singularly beautiful, but it is a wonderful supplement to it. Von Otter has the complete *Haugtussa* on her disc, but only a handful from the other two cycles heard here, instead adding a variety of other songs by Grieg.

Very natural recorded sound, fine notes, and complete texts and translations round out this very beautiful disc. **Henry Fogel**

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