



David Monrad JOHANSEN (1888-1974)

Kværn-Slått, Norsk Humoreske (pub. 1912) [3:01]

Nordlandsbilleder, Suite for piano, op. 5 (1918-19) [10:27]

To portretter fra middelalderen, Suite for piano, op. 8 (1918-19, 1922) [8:09]

Fra Gudbrandsdalen, Suite for piano, op. 9 (1922) [18:35]

Prillar-Guri, Suite for piano, op. 12 (1924) [11:09]

Nordlandske Danser, (*Danser fra Vefsn og Hattfjelldal*) op. 30 [8:03]

Rune Alver (piano)

rec. 11-14 May 2015, Sofienberg Church, Oslo

LAWO CLASSICS LWC1101 [59:39]

I have to admit never having heard of Norwegian composer David Monrad Johansen, but that made listening to this recording all the more interesting. Born into a large but fragile family, Johansen was one of only a few of the children to survive into adulthood, and his father died when he was only six years old. Being moved from his childhood home in Helgeland to Kristiana (Oslo) in 1904 resulted in feelings of longing "that became the artistic driving force throughout his life."

Johansen was a skilled pianist, and his technical prowess shines through in the pieces on this recording. This is immediately apparent in the striking *Nordlandsbilleder*, already a huge contrast with the folk-style of the very early *Norsk Humoreske* which opens the programme. If you were expecting something akin to Grieg you will need to think again. Johansen was absorbing the influence of Debussy, but *Nordlandsbilleder* is by no means a slavish imitation. Folk inflections can still be traced, but there is a chill melancholy as well which creates a strong and individual atmosphere.

The same can be said of the *To portretter fra middelalderen*, from the same period, the folk-origins of which are so well hidden in the first of the two pieces that you would be unlikely to make the association without prompting. This mysterious piece contrasts with a more rhythmic second movement on the more robust theme of trolls. The booklet notes are very helpful in outlining the narratives for these and other pieces with traditional origins. *Fra Gudbrandsdalen*, is more direct in this regard, its melodies representing "a little piece of Maihaugen in music which would, he hoped, evoke everyday life and customs of the Valley." Some of these pieces are highly evocative, with a feel of mist in the still air and a silence broken only by distant and indistinct sounds of nature. There are also lively dances, a feature shared with *Prillar-Guri*, though the animated and increasingly distilled nature of this music is darkened in its outer movements by an association with the Battle of Kringen of 1612, Prillar-Guri being a legendary woman who blew a ram's horn to signal and distract the invading Scottish soldiers.

The *Nordlandske Danser* are arrangements of traditional pieces recorded in the field by the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation in the 1950s. These are five dance melodies from Vefsn and Hattfjelldal "freely adapted for piano" as the composer described them in their printed form. The tunes and rhythms are entirely clear, though also entirely idiomatic for piano: "From Traditional Music to Art Music" as was the name of the radio programme on which they were intended for broadcast.

Superbly performed by Norwegian pianist Rune Alver and captured on an equally fine recording, this release reveals a composer who should be better known beyond his native land. There is a fertile imagination behind even the more simple pieces here, and the further reaching music casts an entirely magical spell that shouldn't be missed by piano enthusiasts and listeners who find themselves drawn towards the clear and liquid air of northern Europe.

Dominy Clements

http://musicweb-international.com/classrev/2016/Aug/Johansen_piano_LWC1101.htm