



---

## Catharinus ELLING (1858–1942)

### *Young Elling: Songs*

Marianne Beate Kielland (mezzo), Nils Anders Mortensen (piano)

rec. Vågan Church, Norway, 2013

Sung texts with English translations enclosed

**LAWO LWC1072 SACD** [43:11]

Catharinus Elling may not be a household name, even in Norway. He took a university degree in language-teaching and worked for some time as teacher but his musical interests gradually took over. After several years of study in Germany he devoted his life to composing and, from 1898, worked as a folk music collector and published several volumes of folk songs arranged for voice and piano. He wrote symphonies, an opera, an oratorio and more than 200 songs.

My first acquaintance with his music was some five years ago when I reviewed a disc with his songs, including 12 songs from Arne Garborg's *Haugtussa* ([review](#)). Grieg set eight songs from the same collection at about the same time and his cycle quickly became a standard, at least in the Nordic 'romans' tradition. Elling's songs inevitably found their way into the shade cast by Grieg's – unfairly I thought when hearing them. The main reason for this was presumably that Grieg's music is characteristically Norwegian, while Elling's is rooted in the central European Lied tradition – read Schumann and Brahms. This is somewhat surprising considering his interest in folk music, but that interest probably didn't come until he started his avid collecting. I also believe that the general neglect of Elling's songs in his lifetime rested upon the fact that he was regarded as old-fashioned. Today we can appreciate these songs for their intrinsic value and not as historical documents out-of-phase with their time.

That is also the attitude Marianne Beate Kielland expresses in her liner notes: "Elling's songs are simpler than those of Grieg's from the same time. Yet many of them are so extremely beautiful in their simplicity and certain piano or vocal phrases inspire the urge to conduct or sing along with the music."

Simplicity is no vice in itself, and when the melodies seem sprung directly from nature or, more importantly, from the texts, they stand out as organic, in particular when you understand the language in which they are sung. Good translations are also a valuable help in distilling the essence of these songs. Jim Skurdall has done excellent work in this connection. When it comes to the three songs of the clown from *Twelfth Night* it is the other way around. It would have been interesting to know who transferred Shakespeare's immortal words into Norwegian. The songs, composed in 1884 and thus among his earliest even though the opus number indicates that they should be later, are melodious and fresh and so are the opus 41 songs, written five years later. Elling found his personal style early and stuck to it for the rest of his life. It should be pointed out that all his songs were written within a relatively short span of time. The *Haugtussa* songs, mentioned earlier, which were his last songs, were written in 1895. By that time he was 37 and still a young man; he was to live another 47 years.

There are several poets represented here who must be regarded as minor, though there are also settings of J P Jacobsen and Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson. Ivar Aasen is also a well-known name, more for having created *nynorsk*, one of the two official languages in Norway, based on the people's language, while the other one,

*bokmål*, was closer to Danish. It is interesting to note that Kr. Randers, whose name I wasn't even able to find on the internet, inspired Elling to some of his finest compositions. Both *Erotikon* and *Jeg vil ut!* from his opus 45 songs (the back cover unfortunately reverses the digits) are wonderful songs and should be much better known. So also should the eight short songs from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, most of all *Morgenlied*, a truly beautiful song. He is a great melodist and no one should be ashamed of wallowing in the beauty of his songs. Marianne Beate Kielland has recorded many marvellous discs and the present one is a further feather in her cap. This CD is even more important for bringing these songs up into the light. None of them has been recorded before. Nils Anders Mortensen, a pianist I haven't encountered before, accompanies flexibly and the recorded sound is first class.

Treat yourself to this disc and you will find new favourites you didn't know existed. I wouldn't be surprised if after the first listen you also ordered the *Haugtussa* disc as well.

**Göran Forsling**