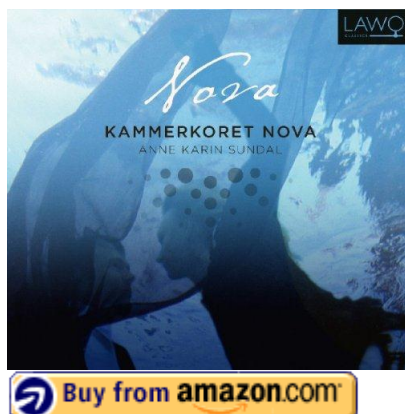


WHITACRE Water Night. Sleep. REGER Nachtlied. RACHMANINOFF Bogoroditse Devo. GJEILO Tota Pulchra Es. KVERNO Ave Maris Stella. GUERRERO Ave Virgo Sanctissima. DOMINGUEZ Deus, Qui Illuminas. NYSTEDT O Crux. JANSEN Sonnet No. 76. MELLNÄS Bossa Buffa. MÖLLER Trilo



The Nova Chamber Choir sounds very much like a fine string orchestra that has been given the gift of speech. Phrases seem to be deftly bowed; the spectrum of tone rich and varied; the blend, intonation, diction and sense of style, impeccable. These elements are a means to a very satisfying end: the expression of many aspects of the human heart represented in many styles over a span of centuries.

Most ideal are the religious works by Rachmaninoff, Reger, and the 16th-century Francisco Guerrero. The sound of Reger's chorale-like Nachtleid is especially sweet, and the slimness of tone used in Rachmaninoff's Hymn to the Virgin lends a sumptuous clarity to the work. The vibrantly sung compositions of more recent times are inspiring as well. Although their musical vocabulary is similar, each contemporary composer has his own voice, as demonstrated by Trond Kverno's repeated rhythmic patterns, or Ola Gjeilo's broad and beautiful melodic lines. Knut Nystedt's solemn O Crux gives a sense of organic connection between the 19th- and 20th-century masters. His tone clusters are used to greater effect than those of Whitacre's Water Night, where their redundancy ultimately weakens the work's dramatic power. One encounters a small flaw in Shakespeare's Sonnet No. 76, in that the soloist's words are difficult to understand, although his characterization of the verse, when one follows the written word, is quite evocative. It is no easy task for a chorus to carry off a joke, but the comic Bossa Buffa proves to be charming and witty without any coyness or artificiality on the part of either the composer or the choir. The recording closes with a haunting arrangement of the folk song Trilo, a greeting by fishermen's wives to their husbands upon their safe return from the sea. It is sung in a raw manner closely resembling the Volga Choir of the Soviet era, but with a slightly sweeter sound. Trilo's creator, an anonymous common laborer from the distant past, is paid due tribute by the arranger, the conductor, and the members of the Nova Choir, who have achieved something marvelous in preserving the simplicity and soul-deep feeling of her song.

Somewhere in her diary Virginia Woolf asked herself, "What is a great work of art?" She decided it was a work that gave one the sense of having been added to. Perhaps this is a great recording. Raymond Beegle

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