



Früh

Songs by Berg, Schönberg & Webern

See end of review for track listing

Marianne Beate Kielland (mezzo)

Nils Anders Mortensen (piano)

rec. 2-4 June 2011, Lofotkatedralen, Kabelvåg

LAWO CLASSICS LWC 1033 [48:13]

This CD turned up as one of those waifs and strays which tend to fall in between the more easily consumed classic programmes. However, my eye was caught by the Lawo label, whose Beethoven wind octet recording (see [review](#)) is still very much a firm favourite. Having decided to give it a chance I was immediately caught by the Copland-like simplicity of the opening song, *Fraue, du süsse*. Berg's songs inhabit that humid late-romantic turn-of-the-century world, his youthful intensity of feeling making settings of the sort found here an ideal vehicle for all kinds of outpourings, though a sense of 'classical' restraint is also a remarkable feature of many of these songs.

Schoenberg's songs are also a product of his younger years, and other than *Erwartung* have little of the chromatic saturation which would lead up to those well-known 12-tone technical changes. Webern's *Acht frühe Lieder* were a product of the tradition of Schumann and Wolf, and were written at the time of his early encounter with Schoenberg. There is some of the sparseness of texture in a few of these songs which makes them stand apart from those of Berg, but you will find none of the serialism of his mature output. There is much harmonic exploration, with fascinating twists in songs such as *Bild der Liebe* and Richard Strauss moments in songs like the sublime *Sommerabend*. Pianist Nils Anders Mortensen plays all of these with the utmost sensitivity.

All of these songs are fascinating, but it is the performances which make this an outstanding disc. Marianne Beate Kielland has a beautiful mezzo voice, deep and expressive, but with a soprano lightness which is utterly responsive to the extremes of mood and linguistic expression. Her articulation is superb, and with the texts all given in the booklet it is easy to follow each song though the layout with English translations underneath rather than alongside the German originals is not ideal. There are alternatives for this repertoire on record, but few if any which bring the *Früh* or should that be *Frühe* songs of these composers together in one place in quite this way. Don't be put off by the relatively short playing time. If you like late-Romantic vocal music but have missed or avoided these names for whatever reason, this disc is a gem full of discovery.

Dominy Clements

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