
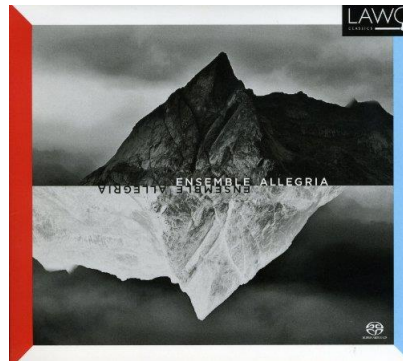


FANFARE MAGAZINE

 **ENSEMBLE ALLEGRIA** • Ens Allegria • LAWO 1044 (59:13)

**GRIEG** *Holberg Suite*. **KVANDAL** Sonata for Strings. **GRÜNER-HEGGE** *Elegiac Melody* for Strings. **NYSTEDT** *Concerto arctandriae* for Strings



Ensemble Allegria  
Audio CD  
LAWO Classics

Here is a real winner. It begins with still another recording of that ubiquitous *Holberg Suite*, but it commands attention in its superb performance by the Ensemble Allegria, an 18-piece Norwegian string orchestra. Razor-sharp attacks, a huge dynamic range, tremendous energy, and a somewhat steely but totally unified sound gives Allegria a decided edge in the crowded market for *Holberg Suites*. I suspect this work was included to give some consumer recognition in what is otherwise a program of obscure (at least to non-Norwegians) 20th-century works. Most *Fanfare* readers probably don't need another *Holberg Suite*, but I can enthusiastically recommend everything on the program.

Once past the Grieg work, the opening of Johan Kvandal's Sonata for Strings will knock your socks off, both for its astringent violence and for the powerful thrust with which the Allegria puts it over. Thereafter we encounter granitic blocks of sound—dark, gray, grim sonorities that capture all the depressing loneliness of a wintry Scandinavian landscape. Odd Gruner-Hegge's *Elegiac Melody* comes right out of the sorrowful yet restrained musical soil that produced Sibelius's *Swan of Tuonela* and "The Death of Åse" in Grieg's *Peer Gynt*. Last and certainly not least is the *Concerto arctandrie* of Knut Nystedt (born in 1915 and, as of this writing, still alive and heading for his 99th birthday in September). The four movements are highly contrasted, the most memorable of them written in a ferocious *sempre pizzicato*.

My only complaint about this production is the lack of program notes. Plenty of space was found for self-congratulatory blather, but not a word about these wonderful compositions. Pity. **Robert Markow**