

## Reviews: [Aria - Vegard Landaas, Anders Eidstein Dahl](#)

Site review by [Geohominid](#) June 27, 2014

Performance: ★★★★★ Sonics: ★★★★★

Everybody likes a good tune. Here is an ingenious programme of mostly little-known melodies, performed by a soloist with accompanist. Unusually for "classical" music, the solo instrument is a saxophone and it is accompanied by another wind instrument - the Main organ of Bragernes Church, in Drammen, south of Oslo.

Saxophonist Vegard Landaas was, in 2000, the first student of this specialisation to graduate from the Norwegian Academy of Music. He now is one of the most prominent saxophonists in Europe. The classical repertoire for the sax is fairly limited, and Landaas often has to use arrangements from music intended for other instruments, but he encourages modern composers to write for him; an imposing list of whom appears in the booklet notes. His accompanist, Anders Edsten Dahl, graduated from the Academy a year later than Landaas, and is much involved in solo and concert organ music. Since 2001 he has been organist at the large Bragernes Church in Drammen, south of Oslo, which is an important venue for regional festivals.

The collection of short pieces, several with heart breaking melodies, is esoteric, as is the list of composers:

David Bratlie (b.1972)

Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)

Erik Satie (1866 - 1925)

Geirr Tveitt (1908 - 1981)

Johan Halvorsen (1864 - 1935)

Eugène Bozza (1905 - 1991)

Rolf Wallin (b1957)

Ennio Morricone (b1928)

Oskar Lindberg (1887 - 1955)

Alessandro Marcello (1669 - 1747)

Helge Horum (b1936)

Some of the pieces are well-known (but not necessarily in their original formats); Grieg and Halvorsen provide two sets of three pieces from their Norwegian folk music collections, while the poignant 'Gabriel's Oboe' theme from film music by Erico Moriconi is played almost daily by one or more of the myriad classical music FM programmes around the globe. Alessandro Marcello's Concerto in D minor for oboe, strings and continuo is well-known by Baroque followers. It has splendid, memorable tunes in the outer movements, with a lovely languid Adagio between. Landaas and Dahl play an arrangement based on JS Bach's somewhat ornamented arrangement for solo harpsichord and this is highly successful.

The one piece originally written for saxophone and organ is by Oslo's Big Band leader, Helge Horum's "Sunset", composed for the funeral of Horum's mother. A near-miss, as it were, is Rolf Rollin's 'Elegy for Trumpet and Organ', a fine melody imbued with shifting harmonies suggested by Xenakis and Ligeti and a startling few seconds in the middle when the organ lets loose with a sudden blast of anger, shaking a fist at the heavens. The composer gave permission for the transcription.

Landaas has phenomenal technique in controlled breathing, required when the many pieces with long-breathed cantabile lines are executed. He is able to vary his tone from bright and snappy in the Marcello fast movements (and a Grieg march) to golden toned, sumptuously expressive; his instrument just sings. His artistry in presenting much slow, emotional music without making listeners fall asleep makes a number of these circa 3 minute pieces sound like little jewels. Dahl is a sympathetic accompanist, using appropriate registrations to match with the saxophone tone in use, and ensuring that there are no signs of the towering Queen of Instruments covering his soloist. This is fine chamber music-making, even if the chamber is a big church!

That last comment brings us to the recording, in stereo only. Usually with organs, it is important to capture the mutual reactions of building tand organ, where a good multichannel recording is the best. For this aurally power-mismatched pair, however, a chamber set-up is required, with just enough of the ambience to let the tone, particularly of the saxophone, to develop. The Lawo engineer seems to have set up for a near perfect balance, and for once I didn't crave a multichannel track. There is a somewhat quirky design for the digipak format: the track list appears diagonally in a tiny font on a rich green background. The sleeved booklet has an excellent guide, which usefully guides you through the music.

This is an intriguing and highly enjoyable concatenation of short musical pieces with disparate origins . It shows how versatile the sax can be, in hands as skilled as Landaar's. I strongly recommend it.