

Site review by [Geohominid](#) March 27, 2015

Performance: ★★★★★

Sonics: Stereo

★★★★★

Multi-ch

★★★★★

Our guide through this inspiring collection of contemporary male voice choral works from Norway is Wolfgang Plagge, born in Oslo (1960) of Dutch parents. In the disc's booklet, he first gives a philosophical view of the need to produce something new in artistic creativity, and then insightfully surveys the innovations of the selected composers for this programme by the Christiania Male Voice Choir (Mannskor). An internationally respected pianist and composer himself, he introduces his own 'Natten sanger' (Night Songs) which Christiania Mannskor commissioned from him and premièred in 2012.

This 'a cappella' programme is rich in creativity: poetry, music and performance meld to give a deeply satisfying and moving listening experience. A mix of secular and sacred, the texts range through the Psalms, early Christian Church devotional Latin hymns, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), Shakespeare, the King James Bible, John Northam (English translator of Ibsen) and Norwegian poets Arne Garborg (1851-1924), Ragnhild Foss (1883-1952), Rolf Jacobsen (1907-1994), (Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) and Egil Elseth (1927-2012).

Apart from Knut Nystedt (b.1959), regarded as the grand old man of C20th music in Norway, most of the composers here will be little known outside the country. Fear not, the general harmonic idiom is tonal, and even modern harmonies caress the ears rather than being aggressive. The choir was founded in 2009 by its conductor Marius Skjølaas and the mix of 24 professional and semi-professional members aims to revive the tradition of the male chorus in Norway, making it more easily accessible. It also seems to be gaining the role of a National choir, from its Government invitation to sing at a Nobel Peace Prize Dinner and other invitations by Parliament. Lawo's 'Something New' is the choir's first recording of four planned SA-CDs.

Under the intuitive direction of Skjølaas, the choir meets all the characteristics which Plagge attributes to a Norwegian choral tradition - full-sounding, modal and jubilant, demonstrated superbly by Carl-Andreas Næss' Veldig Reiser Landet Seg (Mighty this land rises), where the deep basses in the choir have a field day, as do the tenors with their burnished ardour. The choir has a greater number of soloists than most, and this adds individual characters with their definitive voices, providing extra emotional involvement in the poetic texts.

The magnificent sound of Christiania Mannskor is partly due to the friendly acoustics of Ris Church in Oslo, a favourite venue for Norwegian recording engineers. The microphones provide a reasonably close image of the singers in Stereo so that details are not lost, lightly invested with the halo of reverberance from the church, but with 5.0 Multichannel, the venue opens up breathtakingly, with the music enveloping the listener realistically.

Something new? Undoubtedly, yet the composers still base their work on many well-known historical styles, giving the listeners the accessibility for which they are seeking. Yet the profundity (or amusement) which the poets ignite in the music is still transmitted. I give Plagge the last words: "no matter what we humans think and feel about equality and evenness, every thing in us, with us, and around us is in constant flux".

An exemplary choral programme which should not be missed. I can't wait for the next volume in this series

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