Geirr Tveitt - Baldurs Draumar, Telemarkin (2003)



1. Baldurs draumar (Baldur's Dreams)
I. Prologue to Act I
II. Act I
III. Prologue to Act II
IV. Act II
V. Prologue to Act III
VI. Act III

Solveig Kringelborn (Soprano), Ulf Oien (Tenor), Magne Fremmerlid (Bass),
Jon Elkemo (Spoken Vocals)
Stavanger Symphony Orchestra
Ole Kristian Ruud - conductor

2. Telemarkin

Trine Oien (Mezzo Soprano), Magne Fremmerlid (Bass), Ulf Oien (Tenor),
Solveig Kringelborn (Soprano), Jon Elkemo (Spoken Vocals), Arve Moen Bergset (Hardanger Fiddle)
Stavanger Symphony Orchestra
Ole Kristian Ruud - conductor

The rediscovery of the music of Geirr Tveitt remains one of the more exciting things happening in the world of classical music recordings, and this new release may be the most fascinating find of all. Baldur's Dream is "A symbolic play for dance and orchestra in three acts", some 90 minutes of music with parts for singers who vocalise or apparently sing in the composer's own concept of ancient Norwegian (in other words, the text doesn't mean anything we need to worry about and largely adds color). Long before the catastrophic fire that destroyed much of Tveitt's life's work, this score was believed lost--in the London blitz during World War II. The piece was performed in Oslo in 1938, however, and a recording of that event exists, which permitted

Russian composer Alexei Rybnikov to attempt a reconstruction.

However, while at work on the reconstruction of another work--Tveitt's Sun-God Symphony, which bases its thematic material on Baldur's Dream--Norwegian composer Kaare Dyvik Husby discovered the remains not only of that work but of the full score and orchestral parts of the original full-length dance drama. These permitted him to supplement Rybnikov's reconstruction and come as close as makes no difference to what Tveitt's original must have been, including the extensive and imaginative use of a virtuoso percussion section featuring nine tuned drums and "everything but the kitchen sink" besides. The spoken prologues to each act (which you can skip over if you like as they are tracked separately) exist from the surviving programs of the original performances, so this masterpiece of Tveitt's youthful maturity (he was about 30 when he wrote it) now has been restored in all of its glory.

And how glorious it is! The story of Baldur is well known from Jon Leifs' similarly epic dance drama, though of course the two composers are worlds apart stylistically. Leifs based his musical idiom on Icelandic folk music and quoted the ancient Edda texts directly. Tveitt, on the other hand, uses an invented style largely based on pentatonic modes, so that much of the music has an exotic, Eastern flavor or even brings to mind Miklos Rosza in his "biblical epic" mode (e.g. Ben Hur). In other words, this is really big, splashy, colorful Romantic music with as much incident packed into it as possible. The tunes are extremely beautiful, the instrumental textures glitter like diamonds, and the quiet ending (after a hugely powerful climax as Baldur is killed by a mistletoe-tipped arrow) is poetry incarnate. It will blow you away.

Telemarkin is a cantata for speaker, mezzo-soprano, Hardanger fiddle, and orchestra based on a rather silly text celebrating the natural beauties of the Telemark region of Norway. Never mind the words (unless of course you happen to live there and think that it's the greatest place on earth). The music is very lovely and not in the least bit as bombastic and self-satisfied as the poem. Both this and Baldur's Dream receive well nigh perfect performances from the Stavanger Symphony Orchestra under Ole Kristian Ruud. Having already presented Baldur's Dream live, it's obvious that they were up for the challenge of recording this mammoth piece, and every section of the orchestra responds with total commitment. The solo winds do a particularly fine job (and they have a lot to do), while the busy percussionists play with both power and subtlety. Fine solo singing (have pity on bass Magne Fremmerlid for Tveitt's looney low notes) and demonstration-quality sound complete an irresistible package that will provide countless hours of pleasurable listening. It doesn't get better than this. ---David Hurwitz, ClassicsToday.com

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