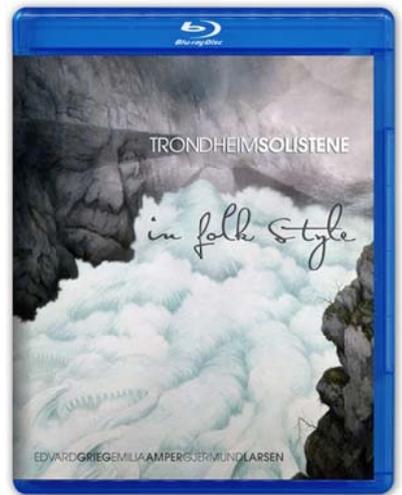


**GRIEG Holberg Suite. 2 Nordic Melodies, op. 63. AMPER Abrégé1. G. LARSEN Diplom2 • Trondheim Soloists; Amilia Amper (nyckelharpa); Gjermund Larsen (fiddle) • 2L 68 (Blu-ray and SACD: 57:34)**

Simply put, this release offers the most stunning engineering I've ever experienced. It's hard to describe it without falling back on over-familiar tropes, but if I ever wanted to demonstrate the value of high-resolution, multichannel sound, this is the recording I'd choose, the one that best creates the illusion that the musicians are actually there in the room with you. Granted, there are a dizzying number of possible formats: 2L offers an audio-only Blu-ray (with 7.1 DTS HA MA 24/96kHz and both 5.1 DTS HD MA and 2.0 LPCM in 24/192kHz), as well as an SACD with the usual three options, and (in case that's not enough) online access to MP3 and FLAC versions. I haven't listened to the downloads, but I've sampled the rest, and to my ears, the 7.1 version offers the most engaging acoustical environment. In immediate comparison, the two-channel versions are distinctly less involving—and I suspect that would be true even if the surround tracks didn't put you at the center of the ensemble (with violins behind you, soloists and other strings in front—it makes a particularly wonderful effect at the beginning of the second half of Grieg's op. 63/2). Heard on their own, though, the stereo versions certainly offer first-class sound, too.



The music and performances are a consistent delight. The Trondheim Soloists take a buoyant and textually transparent approach to the Holberg Suite, playing down its potential neoclassical severity and playing up its charm. Thus, for instance, the accents on the Gavotte are clear, but never biting; the Air achieves its poignance without a trace of pain; rhythms throughout are infectious, but never aggressive. The same qualities mark the performance of the Nordic Melodies. Not the only way to deliver this music, of course, but entirely engrossing.

The disc is filled out with two folk-inspired suites by contemporary musicians. The notes, unfortunately, are not as lucid as the performances, but the five-movement Abrégé seems to be a compilation of pieces by the Norwegian folk group Väsen (one based on a traditional tune, the others apparently not), arranged by Johannes Leonard Rusten of the Trondheim Soloists. Although Amilia Amper is listed as “composer,” it's not clear what her compositional role is. She does, however, contribute virtuoso solo work on the nyckelharpa (described in the notes as “a type of fiddle with a chromatic keyboard, ... played with a bow and ... [including] resonating strings”), its slightly acrid sound adding considerably to the effect. Diplom, by fiddler Gjermund Larsen, is described as “a new composition ... composed using traditional styles.” Both works are for the most part simple in outline and texture (no Bartók or even Grainger here), with catchy tunes and rhythms. I could single out, for special mention, the hypnotic rhythms in the last movement of Abrégé or the supple lamentation of the solo fiddle in the middle movement of the Larsen; but in fact, from beginning to end, these pieces will keep you spellbound. I only wish that 2L had translated the titles of the movements: knowing, for instance, that “Kaptan Kapsyl” means “Captain Bottlecap” or that “Till Farmor” means “To Grandmother” (information I picked up from the Väsen Web site) adds to our appreciation.

All in all, though, exuberantly recommended, especially for people with the equipment necessary to take full advantage.