

American Record Guide

independent critics reviewing classical recordings and music in concert

Leonard Bernstein Centennial Celebrations
Operas: *Fellow Travelers*, *Beatrice and Benedict*
Wild Aquanetta

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gets off the ground, and the close harmonies in Gershwin's 'Love Is Here To Stay' are, maybe, a little too close for comfort. Elsewhere, it's one delight after another; zippy African rhythms in 'Kelele,' burbling arpeggios in 'Scarborough Fair' and the Lennon-McCartney 'Follow the Sun,' a breezy 'Down With Love' by Harold Arlen, a gooey but heartfelt 'Danny Boy,' and a 'Bobby Shaftoe' that races like the wind.

"Spiritual": With motets by Byrd, Palestrina, Tallis, Lassus, Schutz, Reger, Poulenc, Alonso Lobo, and Salamone Rossi; plus spiritually-charged songs by Whitacre, Chilcott, Rheinberger, RVW, and others, this is a glorious program that's right in the King's wheelhouse. The only quibble is that too-bright vowel sounds sometimes get in the way of the music. The fellows don't sing that way in English, and their Latin is always in control. But in Hebrew (Rossi), German (Reger, especially) and French (Poulenc), you may find yourself reaching for a pair of sunglasses, so glaring are the vowels. (I have no idea why this pops up so noticeably in this set, and not in the other two.) Mind you, there's much to enjoy; but if you fancy, say, a sleek, elegantly veiled approach to Poulenc's *Prayers to St Francis*, you'll have to look elsewhere.

"Secular" puts the ensemble to work in the Renaissance fare that made them famous. Madrigals by Lassus, Byrd, Josquin, Vasquez, Senfl, Le Jeune, and a few others are the highlights of the three-volume set. The best of all of them might be 'Revey Venir du Printans' by Claude Le Jeune, its springy sentiments and swiny rhythms all but jumping out of the speakers. We also get Fauré's 'Papillon et La Fleur' emerging as Paris barbershop, Saint Saens in a pair of handsome songs I'd never heard ('Romance du soir' and 'Les Marins de Kermor'), and a gorgeous 'Die Nacht' by Schubert. I also admire the colorful wisdom spun out in the close harmonies of Toru Takemitsu ('Homemade Proverbs').

All this comes in a thick hardback volume full of texts, translations, and brief commentaries on the anniversary enterprise. Nothing is said about the music.

GREENFIELD

Norwegian Choral

Norwegian Girls Choir/ Anne Karin Sundal-Ask
2L 144 [SACD] 44 minutes

The Norwegian Girls Choir is one of the most distinguished choral organizations in Norway. This program is sung by their Studio Choir, the most selective ensemble performing under their aegis. That places the Studio Choir

among the elite choirs of their country and—given Scandinavia's penchant for choral excellence—among the best choirs of its type anywhere. They sound every bit of that in 2L's enchanting program of folk melodies, hymns, and love songs composed or arranged by Edvard Grieg, Knut Nystedt, and some lesser-known composers from the North.

Life's simple joys are leavened with occasional bouts of melancholy as neighbors greet neighbors, the Nordic spring vanquishes winter, the dying get right with God, old churches disappear, babies sleep, gifts of sugar candy are shared, the sale of religious indulgences is spoofed, and cows are herded to the wordless songs of farmers. The singing is warm, gentle, and emotionally engaged in every bar. It's a short program, but a lovely one; so if you like music for women's choir, you'll be quite pleased with it. If you don't, the charm, brevity, and ethnic oomph of the program might have you changing your mind for a spell.

GREENFIELD

The Road Home: American Choral

3 Shaker Melodies; arr HUMBLE: *In the Sweet By and By*; arr KIRCHNER: *Unclouded Day*; Angel Band; *Hallelujah*; GUILLAUME: *Dominus Vobiscum*; RUNESTAD: *Reflections*; LAURIDSEN: *Lament for Pasiphae*; *Mid-Winter Waking*; *Intercession in Late October*; PAULUS: *The Road Home*; KIRCHNER: *I'll Be On My Way*; arr MATTSON: *I'll Be Seeing You*
Jeff Lankov, p; Santa Fe Desert Chorale/ Joshua Haberman—Avie 2377—60 minutes

You start off figuring you're in for a New Mexico hymn-sing by the foothills of the Sangre de Cristo mountains. A fervent 'In the Sweet By and By' leads to a set of Shaker melodies and three spirited offerings from the Protestant hymnal. Just when you think you've got the spiritual mood pegged, though, you're whisked off to the Caribbean for 'Dominus Vobiscum,' a search for meaning amid struggle composed by Sidney Guillaume and sung in Haitian Creole. (Guillaume was born in Haiti in 1982 and immigrated to the US, where he studied music at the University of Miami. He is now based in Los Angeles.) From Hispaniola, we head north to Walden Pond for Jake Runestad's musical meditation on the words of Henry David Thoreau. Then we're off to three settings of the pensive, often uneasy poetry of Robert Graves in Morten Lauridsen's *Mid-Winter Songs*. We conclude with the late Stephen Paulus's radiant 'Road Home'; Shawn Kirchner's 'On My Way,' which is scented with Appalachian Bluegrass; and 'I'll Be Seeing