


INTERNATIONAL RECORD REVIEW

Åm New SACD/Blu-ray Audio

Vere Meininga^a. Det var mjukt^b. Dette blanke no^c.

Ellen Sejersted Bødtker (electric/acoustic harps); ^b**Berit Norbakken Solset** (soprano); ^a**Hildegunn Riise** (speaker); ^c**Grex Vocalis/Carl Høgset**; ^a**Oslo Kammersolister/Jon Gjesme** (violin).

2L 51SABD (full price, one SACD and one Blu-ray, 58 minutes, 58 minutes). Website www.2l.no  Producer Morten Lindberg. Engineer Hans Peter L'Orange. Dates January and August 2007.



Harp enthusiasts may recall Norwegian harpist Ellen Sejersted Bødtker's fine debut disc of French music for harp and strings for Naxos (8.555328). Her latest recording of music by Trondheim-born composer Magnar Åm (b.1952) is a very different kind of experience, one that takes full advantage of the spatial potential of SACD and Blu-ray. Included in this release is a sound-only SACD, providing exemplary audio quality, and a Blu-ray disc which features three audio streams: two-channel LPCM, five-channel LPCM surround and (most luxuriously) five-channel DTS.

Åm has written, 'Time and space structured as music is a formidable tool for one who seeks to make conscious his deepest essence and meaning, whether one creates, performs, or listens.' There is indeed a time-suspending quality to his music, yet it does not merely float ethereally by but possesses a compelling forward thrust, articulated by explosions of sound of hyperactive intensity.

Vere Meininga ('Be the purpose') is a half-hour concerto for harp and string sextet based on a text by the composer (recited intermittently by Hildegunn Riise) which is anything but a display piece, more a meditation on the harp's unique sonic properties in which the instrument is first among equals. *Det var mjukt* ('I awoke') for soprano (Berit Norbakken Solset) and harp has a more folk-orientated feel, while *Dette blanke no* ('This our virgin now'), described as 'a concerto for harp and angels', sets Bødtker's hypnotic playing of acoustic and electric harps in the context of floated sounds which variously emerge and recede from all around the listener.

On SACD I was so captivated by the hypnotic quality of Åm's music and Bødtker's artistry that I wondered whether viewing it might actually dispel some of the magic. In the event I needn't have worried as the Blu-ray disc (apart from an optional still picture for each of the three pieces) turns out to be audio-only, although the magnificent DTS track is well worth hearing for its added depth and warmth. Whatever sound format you choose to listen to, these highly atmospheric scores make an indelible impact, especially in 5.0 format which surrounds the listener in multi-channel sound of intoxicating allure.

Julian Haylock