

So what we have are two attractive orchestral suites which use folk material from the Hardanger region of Western Norway where Tveitt lived, or which were composed in a folk style. It is impossible to tell which are which and it doesn't matter. The style of the music is consistent throughout.

Geirr Tveitt was amazingly prolific. He studied in Vienna and Paris with such composers as Honegger and Wellesz. He retained his strong emotional connection with an area of his native Norway where he spent many a childhood holiday and where he had seen at first hand the local instruments played and heard the local music. In 1942 he settled permanently on his family farmstead in Vikey in the Hardangerfjord. The CD booklet has a lovely photograph of the composer and his wife in local costume dated about 1954.

Sadly a great deal of his music was lost in a tragic fire at this farmstead in 1970. Naxos has recently released the two Piano Concertos and there are discs, if you look carefully, of his piano music. Nevertheless we shall never know the extent of his considerable output.

These melodies are peculiar to the area. Due to the difficult terrain intercommunication between villages and towns was only possible in summer. Some tunes were known only within the family itself. Tveitt uses a few here, for example in Suite 1 No 10 'Echo from the summer hillfarm'. There are, in fact, several very personal touches. I particularly liked this movement with its gunshot cracks as the family fired "to awake the echoes from Husalait crag".

The Suite No 4 here receives its world premiere recording. Note, slightly confusingly, that the fourth suite tracks 16-30 are labelled as 46-60 in the booklet. Remember that this is suite 4 and the movements of each suite the composer numbered from 1 up to presumably 100. This suite is delightful and great fun. It tells a story of a wedding. The couple falls in love; the man has to propose three times, each time more vociferously, until he is accepted. The families set off to the wedding. The bride arrives by boat. There is a toast. The male wedding guests create havoc, and an old flame of the bride appears and mixes her drinks. She becomes quite inebriated and gives off a great fart. Then everyone drinks the local home brew Hardanger Ale. There are also some lovely touches musically.

The boat trip (track 23 'The bridal voyage') is orchestrated magically, with rustling harp, various percussion, glissandi on the piano and some other fascinating sounds I cannot recognise in

Geirr Tveitt - A Hundred Hardanger Tunes (Suites 1 and 4) [2000]

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Wtorek, 31 Grudzień 2013 17:09 -

detail. This is a man with an ear from the orchestra. In 'The bride's drink' (track 28) bassoon trills belch out the laxatives effect in her stomach, a drunkard slips under the table pulling off the cloth and glasses with him, and sleeps, snoring, Tveitt seals this testimonial to atonal music by marking the tuba's final note "Fis"- Norwegian for F# or Fart.

Naxos are continuing their excellent policy here of using a conductor and/or an orchestra from the country from which the composer comes. This has happened whether the music is from Spain (Balada), America (Antheil), England (Bax) and I think that this is a very good idea. Of course music is an international language and you are just as likely to come across a superb performance of Elgar by an American or Dutch Orchestra as you are by British forces. However there is also a feeling that with music, which is basically nationalist, it is wise to find a conductor at least who is 'in sympathy' with the repertoire especially when it is as rare as this. Bjarte Engeset cares for and loves this music. The Scottish Orchestra have a natural rapport with the music of the north and between them they coax this gorgeous material into shape without effort or artificiality. Highly recommended. ---Gary Higginson, www.musicweb-international.com

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