



**KVERNDOKK** *Så kort ein sommar menneska har. Likevel er du her. Spor ikke om kjærlighet. Ruth Maier in Memoriam. Bare dragen er fri. Vise. Song. Shakespeare sonetter. Ave verum* • Marianne Beate Kielland (mez); Nils Anders Mortensen (pn) • LAWO 1220 (54:51 📀)



Gisle Kverndokk is a Norwegian composer (b. 1967) who begins his program notes for this disc with “Melody is something I have been passionate about throughout my career as a composer.” The songs recorded here certainly prove his point. One is struck by the melodic invention at the beginning of the first song, which gives the disc its title, *Så kort ein sommar menneska har* (So short is the summer we all have). Kverndokk creates a lilting strain that depicts both the beauty of summer and the wistfulness integral to a poem (by Liv Holtskog) that reminds us that everything, including the beauty of summer, is perishable.

Summer is a consistent theme throughout the disc. The first of the eight *Shakespeare sonetter*, all set in English, is “Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?” Throughout the entire cycle Kverndokk captures the tenderness, wit, and dark undercurrents of these sonnets. In “Full many a glorious morning have I seen,” where Shakespeare writes of the loss of love (“But out, alack, he was but one hour mine”), the music conveys the ache expressed in the words.

The major work on the program is a cycle of seven songs titled *Ruth Maier in Memoriam*. Ruth Maier was an Austrian Jewish woman born in 1920 who fled Vienna when Hitler annexed Austria, but who unfortunately chose Norway in 1939. She lived with a host family and began studying in the Arts and Crafts School in Lillestrøm, and she had a passionate love affair with the Norwegian poet Gunvor Hofmo. Tragically, Maier was arrested and deported to Auschwitz, where she was killed in 1942. Hofmo kept her dairies, and in 2007 they were translated and published. Kverndokk’s response to the dairies is deeply moving. He sets both diary entries of Maier and poems by Hofmo. The passion of Hofmo’s “Til en vennine” (To a girlfriend) is exquisite in its tender beauty, and the pain of the final song, “Nothing Exists,” is heartbreaking.

These songs of Kverndokk were a major discovery for me, a collection that I will return to many times. The performances are essential to the success of the disc. Marianne Beate Kielland’s lyrical mezzo-soprano and her ability to communicate all the emotion contained in the songs are treasurable, and pianist Nils Anders Mortensen is fully involved as well.

The recorded sound is well balanced and natural. The composer’s notes are extremely helpful. I’m glad that LAWO provided texts and translations, though I wish that they had placed the Norwegian and English together instead of putting the Norwegian first and the English second, making it hard to follow as closely as would be ideal. Nonetheless, anyone who is interested in songs of our time will find much pleasure here.

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