



LAWO
CLASSICS

Johan Kvandal
Complete String Quartets
Engegård Quartet

Johan Kvandal's music for string quartet

Johan Kvandal's string quartets nos. 1–3 have already been recorded, but here we are also introduced to his other works for this classical ensemble. The Engegård Quartet are ideal interpreters of these often challenging works spanning almost four decades of the composer's life. Thus they show the artistic development of one of the foremost Norwegian composers of the post-war generation.

Johan Kvandal was born in Kristiania, soon to be Oslo, in 1919. His father was the composer David Monrad Johansen, who, inspired by Edvard Grieg, strived to combine a national idiom with modern developments in European music. His son can be said to have followed a similar path from the outset, but his musical output is as a whole more European than Norwegian. Through his parents, Kvandal was familiar with the artistic milieu in Oslo and spent summers in peaceful Østerdalen. He studied organ, conducting and above all composition in Oslo, Vienna (with Joseph Marx) and later in Paris. Here, from 1952 until 1954, he received lasting impressions from Nadia Boulanger and her circle of students and became familiar with the music of luminaries like Bela Bartók, Igor Stravinsky and Olivier Messiaen. His modernistic style may at times sound quite dissonant, but he steered clear of dodecaphony and serialism. He continued to compose in (neo)-classical forms, feeling that they were by no means a spent force. His second and third string quartets and the two Norwegian Dances date from his post-Paris period.

Johan Kvandal, whose outward appearance was rather timid, was a surprisingly versatile composer with a rich output, who wrote for a wide variety of ensembles: solo works, songs, choral works, concertos and orchestral compositions, including a symphony. His biggest work, the opera *Mysteries* Op. 75 (1993), is based on Knut Hamsun's novel of the same title. Kvandal died in Oslo in 1999, at the age of 79.

Fugue (1946)

This surprisingly lyrical, unpretentious piece ('moderato') of neo-baroque polyphony explores standard compositional devices well known to fugue enthusiasts. The B minor scale provides the basic material, whereby a fair amount of chromaticism is to be expected. A four-bar theme is introduced by the second violin and repeated by the first, followed by the cello and the viola in turn.

A short contrasting motive easily identifiable by pizzicato scales takes over. Instead of being developed it soon leaves the ground to the fugue theme again, this time repeated in a different order, whereby the cello plays the inversion of the theme, turning it upside down. A third round of entrances is only hinted at. A pedal note (an extended bass note) on B natural, the tonic, shows that the music will soon reach its climax and as often in Bach's (and others') music the final chord of a movement in a minor key is a jubilant major chord. The technical term for this, among fugue enthusiasts, is a Tierce de Picardie.

String Quartet No. 1, Op. 11 (1946)

Here, we are introduced to a Haydnesque sound-world packed with sonata form, variations, a scherzo and a finale: neo-classicism, in other words. The overall key is F major. The first movement, 'allegro', is written in sonata form, very close to what might be found in a textbook. There are two main themes, the second being in the dominant, to be repeated in the tonic later on. The middle part, or development, is untypically notated in C major with more than a hint at the old Lydian mode. The recapitulation returns to F major. Good-humoured music-making throughout!

The second movement consists of a theme with variations, ten altogether followed by a coda. This kind of movement is also commonly found in Haydn's (and later composers') string quartets, his 'Emperor' quartet being a famous example. Johan Kvandal's sorrowful 12-bar theme ('andante', $\frac{3}{4}$) in G minor is coloured by folkloristic modal elements. The following variations are consistent with the theme in terms of form, but free themselves gradually. The fourth introduces a faster tempo, 'allegro non troppo'; rather martial rhythmic figures then appear before we reach the majestic 'molto pesante' of the seventh variation. A soulful choral follows before a last build-up. The dramatic coda features complicated passages, frequent septuplets and a cello cadenza before this momentous movement finally unwinds.

The shorter 'allegretto, un poco animato' in 3/4 and D minor again harks back to Haydn's later quartet scherzos, whereby the middle section ('meno mosso') in D major employs polyphonic devices.

The F major finale, 'allegro' in 4/4, has a strong forward drive and is a feat of craftsmanship while also markedly humorous. A fugato opening catapults us into a world of playful erudition. The composer soon adds a second fugato theme and combines



them both masterfully. A third theme marked 'grazioso' relieves the polyphonic tension only to give way to a recapitulation of the first part. Fittingly, the young Kvandal takes a bow with an elegant short phrase ending pizzicato. Altogether, this is a remarkable first string quartet!

**String Quartet No. 2,
Op. 27 (1966)**

The second string quartet is very different indeed. Even if composed in four movements, the composer writes 'attacca' at the end of the first three, clearly indicating that they should be played without releasing the tension. The mood is gloomy throughout much of the work, Kvandal uses the designation 'lugubre' both in the first and fourth movements ('Prolog' and 'Epilog'). This is further stressed by the use of ostinato pizzicati in the cello – or walking bass, if you like. One may associate this with funeral music.

This is Johan Kvandal's most uncompromising string quartet. Listening may be challenging: metrical structures are often blurred, the tonal system is strained to the utmost and in places completely abandoned. Diminished and extended octaves occur and contribute to a feeling of desolation in the continuous highly dissonant harmonies. Soon one discovers the potential for beauty in this sound-world, though. Dense writing in all registers explores a hauntingly passionate string sound. Contrasting pizzicato passages involving all instruments in the third movement create a very different effect. Hushed 'tremoli' and 'sul ponticello' - meaning close to the bridge - make the notes hardly audible in the second and fourth movements.

There are melodies here, but smaller repeated motives are often more easily discernible. The third movement introduces a fast rhythmical motive on one note, like a kind of Morse code, next to a fugato theme and the movement soon achieves a sprightly 'scherzo' character. This is music which needs and deserves repeated listening.

**Two Norwegian Dances,
Op. 44 (1976)**

These dances are based on 'Halling' and 'Springdans' from Edvard Grieg's *Peer Gynt*. Inspired by traditional folk music, Grieg included these pieces for solo violin in his music for Henrik Ibsen's 'dramatic poem' *Peer Gynt*. Johan Kvandal's version, a hundred years later, is a mildly modernised remake leaving the folkloristic character intact. He takes care to emphasize changes

in rhythm which could easily make dancers fall over. 'Halling', an often acrobatic dance in 2/4 or 6/8, is named after the valley Hallingdal whereas 'Springdans' is a 'jumping dance' in triple metre.

In fact, what Kvandal does here is quite the same as what Grieg himself attempted when he rewrote some of Mozart's piano sonatas for two pianos.

**String Quartet No. 3,
Op. 60 (1983)**

In later years Johan Kvandal tended to soften his musical language, so also in this quartet. It was originally commissioned by the Trondheim String Quartet. Similarly to Kvandal's first string quartet, we find four separate movements. The form is again more traditional, making it relatively easy to follow the work's development. His harmonic expression is less edgy, and the overall atmosphere is less tense than in the second quartet. Classical accompaniment figures like off-beats, syncopations and arpeggiated chords remind us of the neo-classicism from his first quartet. Tonally the point of departure is E minor, and the final chord is a triumphant E major, a Tierce de Picardie like in his early fugue.

The first movement, 'andante sostenuto'/'allegro', opens with a motive in falling seconds. A similar motive may also be found in the other movements, thus linking them together. A slow introduction – a classical device – leads into an energetic 'allegro' section again opening with falling seconds 'marcato'. A second theme is introduced at piano, followed by a grand gesture by the cello. A forceful climax in fortissimo exhibits the orchestral potential of a string quartet. After the repetition of the first 'allegro' part with its two main themes, the slow introduction is repeated.

The second movement, 'adagio', is a broad and deeply felt lament with dramatic outbursts. All instruments are allowed to shine as soloists. It is relatively easy to identify and follow the themes as they unfold and repeat – the composer seems to breathe naturally within older forms. Unconventionally, Kvandal indicates some improvisatory bars ('improvisando, tranquillo'), which lead up to the re-entry of the first theme. Long pedal notes provide harmonic foundation to plaintive, sighing sequences. A lovely movement that lingers in our memory!

The 'Scherzo' is as playful as the title intends it to be ('scherzo' means joke or entertainment). Ternary form, ABA, is customary for this kind of movement, so also here, whereby the middle part,

B, is relatively long and influenced by folk music. The A section includes a melody played in parallel fifths. This used to be forbidden in classical harmony, but it does not hurt the ear here.

The fast final movement is prepared by the heavy gesture of falling minor seconds that we heard at the beginning of this work. At the end, it reappears and retrospectively assumes the character of a motto. Apart from these special features, this is a typical Finale: virtuosic passages, above all in the first violin, energetic 'marcato' statements, traces of polyphony and sudden 5/8 bars within the overall rhythmic 2/4 frame, allowing us to enjoy and relax.

Morten Carlsen
The Norwegian Academy of Music
(Edited by Philip Dutton – Composer)

Engegård Quartet

On this recording:

Arvid Engegård – Violin
Dorothee Appelhans – Violin
Juliet Jopling – Viola
Jan Clemens Carlsen – Cello

Formed under the midnight sun in Lofoten in 2006, the Engegård Quartet has rapidly become one of Norway's most sought-after ensembles. Their bold, fresh interpretations of the classical repertoire combined with a deep attachment to their Scandinavian roots has attracted international acclaim and inspired some innovative partnerships and programming.

The quartet's debut CD was praised as 'breathtaking' in *The Strad*, while their second release won *Pizzicato* magazine's 'Superperson Award'. Their CD of works by Grieg, Sibelius, and Olav Anton Thommessen was praised by Tully Potter in *Music Web International* as 'what Grieg lovers have been waiting for'.

The Engegård Quartet has a busy concert schedule throughout Scandinavia and further afield. They have performed in some of Europe's finest venues including the Mozarteum in Salzburg and Prague's Rudolfinum, as well as performing in South America with concerts in Medellín, Bogotá, and São Paulo. Festival performances include the Delft Chamber Music Festival, SoNoRo Festival in Bucharest, and Heidelberg's Streichquartettfest.

Deeply committed to today's composers and to keeping the string quartet repertoire alive and developing, the Engegård Quartet has commissioned several works throughout their career. They have focused first and foremost on Norwegian composers including Maja Solveig Kjelstrup Ratkje, Olav Anton Thommessen, Therese Birkelund Ulvo and Cecilie Ore, but also on the Finnish pianist and composer Olli Mustonen. The Engegård Quartet's acclaimed collaborations with the jazz violinist Ola Kvernberg and hardanger fiddler Nils Økland and have led to commissions including the *Telemark Quintet* from Nils Anders Mortensen, and *Hypnagogia* and *Flukt* from Ola Kvernberg. Several of these commissions have been recorded by the Engegård Quartet.

On the classical front, the Engegård Quartet has had the honour to work with (among others) Sir Andrés Schiff, Leif Ove Andsnes, Christian Ihle Hadland, Paul Lewis, Dènes Várion, Nabuko Imai, Kim Kashkashian and Emma Johnson MBE.

The Engegård Quartet's concert and recording programmes reflect their passion for the core quartet repertoire and their desire to discover and share new musical worlds. They have, or are in the process of, recording the complete string quartets by Robert Schumann, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and also the Norwegian composers Catharinus Elling and Johan Kvandal.

Members of the quartet are deeply involved in bringing superb chamber music to Norway – Arvid Engegård as founder of the Lofoten International Chamber Music Festival, and Juliet Jopling as artistic director of the Oslo Quartet Series. The Engegård Quartet's own '1-2-3 Festival' focuses on one composer over a long weekend and has proved immensely popular ever since its inaugural year of 2016. Every November, in "Nynorskens hus" right in the center of Oslo, this classical minifestival provides a feast of chamber music, song, piano works, and lectures. Read more on 123festival.no.

Arvid Engegård and Juliet Jopling are founding members of the Engegård Quartet. Jan Clemens Carlsen joined in 2013 and Laura Custodio Sabas joined in 2022. Arvid Engegård plays a Jean Baptiste Vuillaume violin (1858), on loan from Dextra Musica. Laura Custodio Sabas plays a Jean Baptiste Vuillaume violin (1857). Juliet Jopling plays a Giuseppe Guaragnini viola (1770) and Jan Clemens Carlsen plays a Giacomo Zanoli cello (1737) on loan from Dextra Musica. On this recording: Dorothee Appelhans plays a Patrick Robin (2010), on loan from Dextra Musica.

The Engegård Quartet is supported
by Arts Council Norway.



Johan Kvandal (1919–1999)

01. Fugue for String Quartet (1946)___03:02

String Quartet No. 1, Op. 11

- 02. I. Allegro___04:52
- 03. II. Andante___08:13
- 04. III. Allegretto un poco animato___04:26
- 05. IV. Allegro___06:20

String Quartet No. 2, Op. 27

- 06. I. Prolog___04:26
- 07. II. Lo stesso tempo___04:53
- 08. III. Adagio – Allegro vivace___04:54
- 09. IV. Epilog___03:12

Two Norwegian Dances, Op. 44

- 10. I. Halling___03:46
- 11. II. Springdans___02:45

String Quartet No. 3, Op. 60

- 12. I. Andante sostenuto___06:47
- 13. II. Adagio___08:20
- 14. III. Scherzo___03:02
- 15. IV. Andante sostenuto – Allegro vivace___04:46

RECORDED IN GRORUD CHURCH, OSLO,
15–17 MARCH 2021

PRODUCER: **VEGARD LANDAAS**

BALANCE ENGINEER: **THOMAS WOLDEN**

EDITING: **VEGARD LANDAAS**

MASTERING: **THOMAS WOLDEN**

BOOKLET NOTES: **MORTEN CARLSEN** /
EDITED BY **PHILIP DUTTON** – COMPOSER

BOOKLET EDITOR: **HEGE WOLLENG**

COVER DESIGN:

ANNA-JULIA GRANBERG / **BLUNDERBUSS**

COVER PHOTO: **JAN OVE IVERSEN** / **OVERPARI**

SESSION PHOTO: **THOMAS WOLDEN**

KVANDAL PHOTO (BOOKLET): **LISBETH RISNES**

KVANDAL PHOTO (DIGIPACK): UNKNOWN

THIS RECORDING HAS BEEN MADE POSSIBLE
WITH SUPPORT FROM ARTS COUNCIL NORWAY

LAWO
CLASSICS

LWC1253 © 2023 LAWØ © 2023
LAWØ CLASSICS www.lawo.no