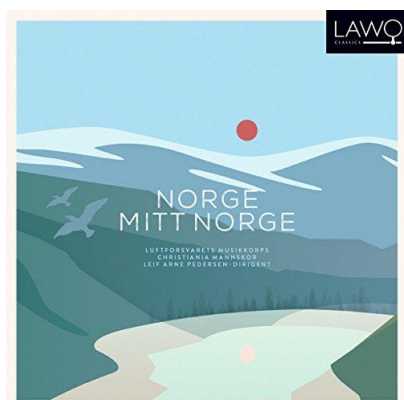


**a** **NORGE, MITT NORGE** • Leif Arne Pedersen, Marius Skjølaas<sup>1</sup>, cond;  
Christiania Men's Ch; Royal Norwegian Air Force Band • LAWQ 1121 (71:47)

**SELMER** *Greeting to Nidaros.* **GRIEG** *Funeral March in Memory of Richard Nordraak.* <sup>1</sup>*Landfall. Cantata at the Unveiling of Christie's Monument.* **SVENDSEN** *Coronation March. Cantata at the Unveiling of Henrik Wergeland's Statue. Singer's Morning Greeting.* **EVENSEN** *Arne's Song.* **GOMNÆS** *Cantata for the Centenary Celebration of the Oslo Military Society*



Music for Male Choir & Military Band

I am no chauvinist, expecting every recording to be documented in English, but this will be hard to market in the U.S. Despite the rather striking graphics of the cover, it would be an easy release to pass over with its unfamiliar work titles and credits in tiny print. Most online listings make no attempt at translation, and one usually dependable vendor's catalog doesn't even identify composers. This is too bad, as this release, *Norway, my Norway*, far from being of local interest only, is a striking collection of seldom heard works for wind ensemble and men's choir. Edvard Grieg and Johan Svendsen, not usually associated with wind ensemble repertoire, are the familiar names, and it is they who wrote the majority of these ceremonial works.

Ideally suited for outdoor ceremonies, military wind bands were, at the time these works were written (1867–1934), central to the musical life of the country. Being full-time professional ensembles, they imposed few limitations on the imagination of the composers. Grieg's *Funeral March* (*Sørgemarsj*) takes particularly full advantage of those capabilities. Most often performed in its later orchestral guise, and sometimes in the original piano or the brass ensemble versions, it achieves added bleak grandeur here. *Landfall* (*Landkjenning*) is hardly less fine. It too was eventually orchestrated, but here appears in its first form, accompanied by organ—harmonium in this case—trombone trio, and tuba. The *Cantata at the Unveiling of Christie's Monument* (*Kantate Ved Afsløringen Af Christies Monument*) is unknown Grieg, receiving a first recording in this release. A stirring, exultant work in two parts—before and after the unveiling—it revels in flourishes for the trumpets and hints at early Wagner.

Outside of Norway, Svendsen has been eclipsed by his more famous contemporary, and one might find in the generally less adventurous style of these works the reason why. Still, he was skilled in larger forms—Grieg was said to have withdrawn his symphony after hearing Svendsen's first—and these occasion pieces are well wrought and use resources expertly. His *Coronation March* (*Kroningsmarsj*) strikes a good balance between nobility and

bravado, as does *Cantata at the Unveiling of Henrik Wergeland's Statue* (*Kantate Ved Afsløringen Af Henrik Wergelands Statue*), where Wagner's pre-*Tristan* influence can again be heard. *Singer's Morning Greeting* (*Sangernes Morgenhilsen*) for the choir and brass ensemble is a bit foursquare, but perhaps given the very large forces used at the ceremony—including 700 singers—it was thought wise to keep it uncomplicated.

The remaining works are also lesser, but not really less interesting for that. Johan Selmer's *Greeting to Nidaros* (*Hilsen Til Nidaros*), written to aid a fundraising effort to restore Trondheim Cathedral, shows Norway's 19th-century bad-boy composer's interest in Wagner, Berlioz, and castanets. The last two, Alfred Evensen's *Arne's Song* and Fredrik Wilhelm Gonnæs's *Cantata for the Centenary Celebration of the Oslo Military Society* (*Kantate Ved Militære Samfunds 100 Års Jubilæum*), are nicely turned-out works by two highly regarded Norwegian bandmasters from the early 20th century.

The Royal Norwegian Air Force Band, which in 2018 will be celebrating its bicentennial—in its several historic manifestations—is one of the outstanding wind ensembles in Norway. It is hard to imagine more technically adept performances of these works or, under the direction of Leif Arne Pedersen, more expressive ones. The size of the ensemble varies from piece to piece, but it seems larger than the 21 members included in the whimsical booklet photo. Though all sections are outstanding, the brass are particularly impressive. Several works in this program were composed for it, or the Band of the Trondheim Brigade, as it was known then.

The 18-voice Christiana Men's Choir, directed by Marius Skjølaas, performs in all but the two marches. Based in Oslo (formerly Christiania), this professional choir was formed in 2009 to advance the art of men's choral singing. It is undoubtedly a superb exemplar, with its flawless balance, precision, flexibility, and generous tone. It may not field the hundreds that reportedly performed some of these pieces at the time, but what it (mercifully) lacks in numbers, it makes up for in commitment and vibrant personality. Skjølaas leads a particularly fine reading of *Landkjenning*. The soloist for the *Wergeland Cantata* is occasionally in deep water, though he doesn't do serious damage. The other solos are better taken, especially by tenor Ludvik Kjærnes in the Selmer and baritone Dagfinn Anderson in *Landkjenning*. There are informative notes in English translation, but texts appear only in Norwegian. As many are by some of Norway's most honored poets, it would be nice to know what was being sung.

But back to the positive: Lawo's recording team, Vegard Landaas and Thomas Wolden, could give lessons to the rest of the world on recording wind ensembles and choirs. The sound is detailed, transparent, vivid, and perfectly balanced, and this on the CD. The sessions were recorded in ultra-high resolution DXD. Downloads can be purchased in several resolutions and formats. The 192kHz/24-bit FLAC is simply stupendous. So is the release as a whole. There are so many reasons for liking this production, it is hard to think of anyone who shouldn't seek it out. So, please do. **Ronald E. Grames**

**This article originally appeared in Issue 41:3 (Jan/Feb 2018) of *Fanfare Magazine*.**