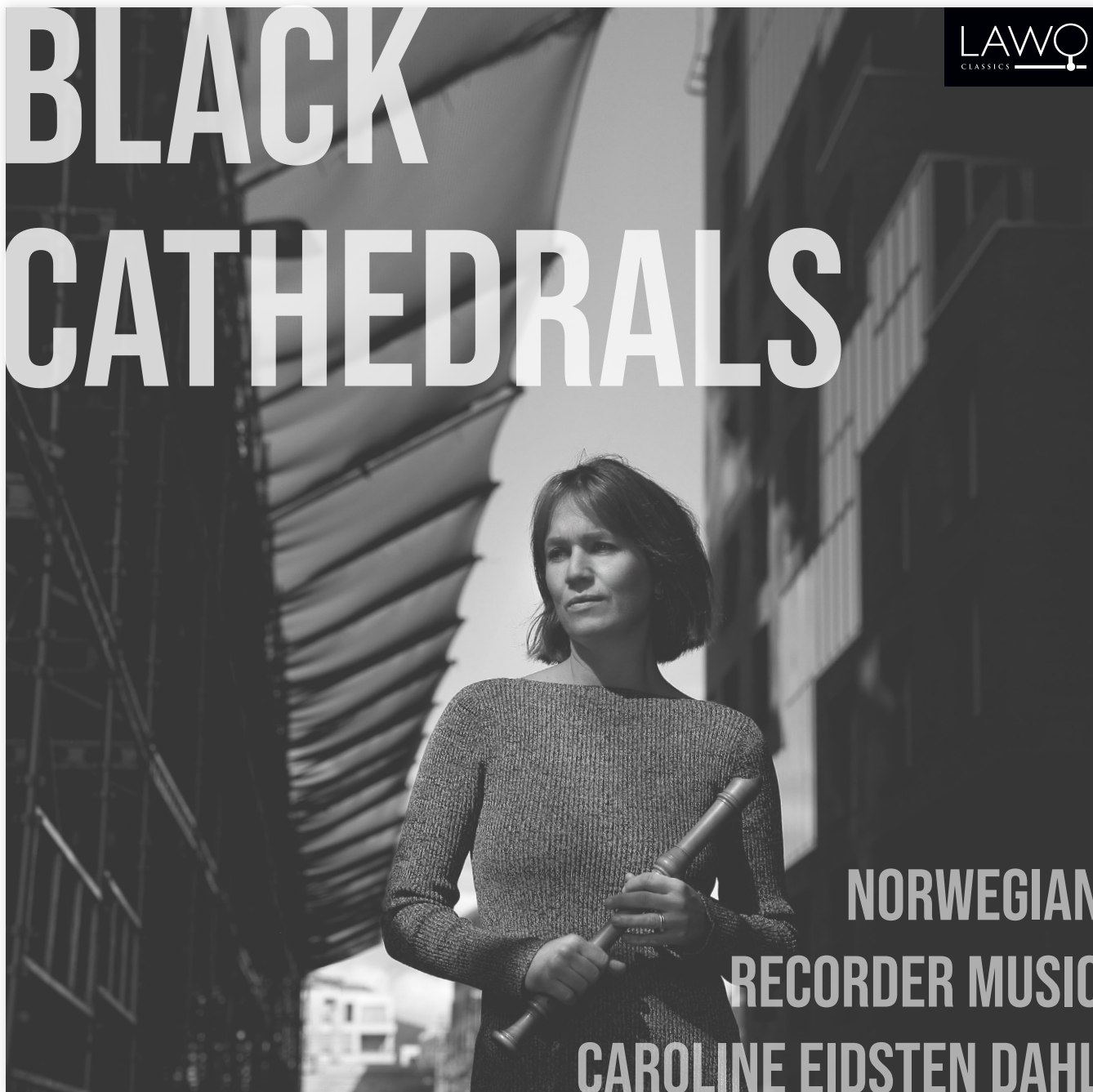


BLACK CATHEDRALS

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NORWEGIAN
RECORDER MUSIC
CAROLINE EIDSTEN DAHL



WHERE'S THE BASS?

Listening to a collection of recordings played by one single instrument comes with a set of expectations. Mind you, the recorder is not *one*, but several instruments. It can be seen - as its very distant and dissimilar cousin the saxophone - as one meta-instrument in many bodies of different sizes.

A sobering fact: the lowest note we get to hear in these recordings is middle C. The recorder family is here represented by its tenor, alto, soprano and sopranino variants, as well as the voice flute (intermediate in size between the tenor and alto). There is, in other words, plenty of treble register in the music, and no bass whatsoever. One soon realizes this is a blessing of sorts: the absence of bass frequencies carries with it another absence: perceivable overtones. Free from the unavoidable tonal connotations that deep tones create, the listener is free to interpret the unfolding of the music in any way he or she pleases. A sense of weightlessness becomes available. The music is not, in any way, earthbound. We are in the realm of the air.

The recorder is a peculiar instrument where repertoire is concerned. It only has ancient music or music from the Twentieth Century or later written for it. Between the Baroque period and the mid 20th Century there is a huge gap in the recorder repertoire. This may have had to do with the in-

creasing volume of the instruments used in Classical and Romantic music and with the ever larger concert venues, which an instrument as gentle as a recorder would have no chance of filling.

Back to those expectations: Several instruments have been claimed as being the closest to the sound of the human voice - generally by those who happen to play those instruments: the violin, the cello, the bassoon... No such claim has been made on behalf of the recorder. It, however, reigns supreme in its ability to emulate birdsong. It can also produce a number of unique sounds. These include very particular tongue tremolos, eerie glissandi, sharp "spitted" accents, percussive sounds, singing into the instrument, a variety of vibratos and more. Granted, these techniques are also common in other wind instruments, but they sound strikingly different on the recorder and create a very special atmosphere.

Many modern composers have, naturally, been seduced by the wealth of odd sounds a recorder can deliver and have exploited them extensively. Other composers, however, have been content to simply use the natural properties of the instrument, enchanted by its tender, captivating sound. In these recordings we are given a balanced presentation of both tendencies.

Lene Grenager's "**Kullsorte Katedraler**" (coal-black cathedrals) from 2022, takes its inspiration from "The Birds", a short story by the Jewish Polish writer Bruno Schulz, who was murdered by a Gestapo officer in 1942. The highly evocative titles of the work's three short movements are taken from that short story.

In the first movement, which shares the title of the entire piece, sound seems to be searching for a concise shape. Out of indeterminate clicks and burbles, sounds erupt like globules of molten lava, eventually allowing individual pitches to emerge like brief explosions of light.

In the second movement, "Vinterstormenes mørke lunger" (the dark lungs of winter gales) sound seems to be finding its place. The almost disembodied harmonics create an ghostly atmosphere further reinforced by continuous glissandi and tongue tremolos. The music feels like a distant incantation.

In the final "Djevelorgels Sorte Piper" (the black pipes of a devilish organ) sound appears to have asserted itself and become confident. The alternation between short staccato notes and surprising, accented long sounds creates the impression of an etching on air. Points and lines succeed each other with an arcane logic, eventually allowing a melody to materialize before abruptly stopping in mid flight.

The exceptionally prolific Bjørn Fongaard produced a vast amount of small sonata works for solo melodic instruments. Among these there are several for solo recorder, of which we can hear two, for the first time, in the present recording.

In these works pure melody is allowed to flourish unencumbered by either metre or tonal weight. Fongaard gives the performer a rough guideline as to the durations of the sounds, which are notated as stemless note heads. Directions of phrasing and dynamics also appear on the page. The player is allowed a fair deal of rhythmical freedom. The connection, however distant, to Gregorian Chant is hard to ignore.

Where it regards the tonal language, no sooner has a certain tonality insinuated itself, the music moves in a direction that playfully thwarts expectations. It seems the music is gently asking us to follow it wherever it may take us.

Sonata op 125 no. 29 (!) is written for the soprano recorder. Its first movement ambles along contentedly, never becoming unduly assertive. After briefly rising and growing in presence, it returns to its initial calm. The second movement continues with the predominantly legato articulation of its predecessor, but in a more animated manner, even allowing for short staccato spurts. The interval of a

tritone gains hegemony towards the end, making for an uncertain, somewhat unsettling conclusion.

The next sonata in the collection – **op. 125 no. 30** – is written for the alto recorder. Its first movement is meditative, even somewhat somnolent in character, with phrases ending on long notes. The golden section fittingly brings a few moments of increased tension. Part of the opening material returns at the end. The second movement is marked 'marziale'. Here finally rhythm comes to the fore in an almost dancing fashion. Fongaard even specifies some triplets of three or five repeated notes. The music turns declamatory before the appearance of insistent tritones marks the golden section. Like in the previous sonata, that disconcerting interval is given the final word.

The unsettling carries over to the next work on the album, "**In Memoriam**" by Åse Hedstrøm. The work can be perceived as a study of the way speed and slowness offset one another. The Ligeti-like maze of rapid notes in the beginning seems to be searching for an exit that suggests itself in different forms: uneven trills, angry tremolos... A sudden ascending line manages to dispel all activity. An extended melody consisting of long notes that ascend in pitch and grow in intensity asserts its presence, only to wind back into the maze. Distress becomes palpa-

ble, leading to a quick repetition of a single note. The process is then reversed: a descending line brings the music back to the former trills and tremolos, now calmer but reinforced by sharp accents. Soon silence gains the upper hand, providing eloquent spaces in between the remaining short phrases.

According to the composer Terje Viken, his work **Riss** (scratch) "is based on intuitive motifs 'scratched' out – a gestural movement, a point and a plane. Almost in the manner of a game the motifs are varied both in strict structure and in a more improvisatory way." A very apt description of the work that requires very little additional information. The beginning seems like an interrupted fanfare. A Morse-code-like repetition of one note develops into a playful melody consisting of quick staccato notes with intuitive rhythms. The phrases rest on long notes. Eventually the short notes morph into clicks. The rest of the piece accommodates a dialogue between these and strands of music in the mellifluous character of the opening. The random sounding staccato sounds have the last word.

Johan Kvandal can be seen as a spiritual grandchild of Edvard Grieg, particularly where it concerns his interest in folk music. He represents a conservative vein in Twentieth Century Norwegian music. He referred to his music as "tonal modern-



ism". Although practically an exact contemporary of Bjørn Fongaard's (they were born a mere six months apart) the way the two composers approached their work could hardly be more different. Whereas Fongaard – in the works presented here – teasingly takes us through a labyrinth of half suggested tonalities that never consolidate, Kvandal, in his **Suite for Recorder** is quite content to stick to one tonal centre (D) for its seven and a half minutes. The first of its three movements is a theme with five variations. The theme has the character of a religious folk melody.

The second movement returns to the musical space inhabited by the theme of the first, enigmatically ending on the seventh degree of the predominantly Dorian scale.

The work ends with a rondo that finally embraces a wish to dance that had been seemingly absent from the first two movements. All the same, it does not stray too far from the chapel. No effects: only notes chosen 'to see if they make friends'. A simplicity that manages to conjure up a mysterious, almost elusive kind of magic.

Øystein Sommerfeldt is yet another Norwegian composer born – like Fongaard and Kvandal – in 1919. His aesthetics lie closer to that of Kvandal's. However, there is a stronger leaning towards both romanticism and impressionism in Sommerfeldt's music, whereas classicism seems to be Kvandal's guiding principle. Both composers share their love of folk music.

Sommerfeldt composed **Spring Tunes** for flute in 1975. The present recording is a recorder adaptation of the work by the translator and amateur recorder player Axel Amlie (1922-1996).

As is the case with Kvandal's Suite, Sommerfeldt, in his five short pieces relies entirely on the traditional sound of the recorder, with no extended techniques in sight.

The first miniature, "Fløytelåt" (tune for the flute) seems to engage with Nature. It rises and falls with a natural melodic design adorned by small arabesques.

"Veslebekken" (the small brook) is, as the title suggests, flowing in character. The glitter of light on the water is suggested by the sprightly levity of the music. The small stops may bring to mind the way the water stumbles upon rocks along the riverbed.

"Lys Vårmorgen" (bright spring morn) is the most folk-like of the movements and the closest in character and general

atmosphere to Kvandal. It seems to embrace enjoyment without a care in the world.

"Fjell-Lengt" (mountain longing) is searching in quality. Of the four movements, it is the one that conveys unrest. The repeated major seventh at the end (echoing the more energetic version of the interval at the end of "Veslebekken") leaves the listener with an unresolved feeling...

...which the final "Leik I Vårbakken" (Spring Play in the Hills) quickly and effortlessly dispels. It is a playful and impish dance in triple meter, reminiscent of a Norwegian Springar. It concludes this collection of brief impressionistic morsels on a happy note.

Kjell Marcussen is, like his 32 years older colleague Bjørn Fongaard, a guitarist. His wide experience as a performer and pedagogue has imbued his music with a natural musicality that communicates directly with his performers. Marcussen shares with Fongaard an innate feeling for melody. His style is, however, closer to Sommerfeldt's music, although within a more adventurous and far-reaching tonal language. His love of folk-music, which he shares with Kvandal and Sommerfeldt, manifests itself in the five-movement suite for recorder **Norwegian Herbarium**. However, rather than imitating or referencing old tunes, Marcussen ingeniously explores

in this work the significance of flowers in ancient folklore.

"Bekkeblom" (Marsh Marigold) was a harbinger of spring. With its bends, evocative and ornate melodic turns and intuitive rhythms, its given music creates a sensuous atmosphere.

"Søterot" (Purple Gentian or, literally "sweet root") has a deceiving name: it is in reality a bitter flower. As a Setesdal legend has it 'if you call me sweet I will heal your wound; if you call me bitter, I will give you no succour'. The music, in which distant echoes of Hindemith can be felt, is light-footed and dancing in character. It appears intent on convincing the observer about the flower's self-alleged sweetness.

"Balderbrå" – Wild camomile; literally "(the god) Balder's brow" – was used to predict marriage prospects and one became supposedly blind if one stared at it for too long. Its music here is pleading and mournful, with melodies that keep returning to common pitches. As it reaches, halfway through the movement, the high register of the tenor recorder, a tinge of despair becomes apparent.

Calm and contemplation characterize "Revebjelle" (foxglove). The embracement of falling sequences suggests the characteristic hanging bell-like petals of the flow-

er. In legend, a fox would catch your lamb if you picked the flower.

The sopranino recorder channels the "Rosenrot" (rose root sedum) in the final movement. The flower used to be planted on the roof, above a house's main entrance, in order to – supposedly – prevent it from burning in the event of being hit by lightning. This putative protector chooses to present itself musically as a carefree, scurrying and weightless being. Should the music be played two or three octaves below, it would certainly invite to wild dancing. In Marcussen's imagination it becomes a Tinker Bell-like elusive creature.

Playfulness, of the frivolous kind, is entirely absent from Trond Kverno's **Tryptychon** for descant recorder. That is not to say that the music is, in any way, dour or humourless. Although there are no tinges of earthly sensuousness in the work, an elemental light seems to shine through its seven odd minutes of outwardly inexpressive music. Kverno is, primarily, a composer of sacred music and has worked extensively as church organist. He is also an ordained deacon, priest and bishop.

A **Tryptychon**, or triptych is, as we know, an altar piece comprising three pictures. Kverno gives detailed descriptions of the inspiration for each movement. Jubal, placed on the left, is 'father of all who handle the harp and flute'. He is also a de-

scendant of Cain. Mary is, of course, the Mother of God and is also 'the new Eve'. She is in the middle of the triptych. On the right we have King David, the great psalmist and an icon of Christ.

Jubal's music begins with the same four opening notes as Brahms' first cello sonata. Its rather static surface material is characterized by repeated, frozen figures, of which the insistent tritones and, particularly, octaves are most apparent.

Mary's music has grace and poise. Although its structure is repetitive, there is a charming hint of lightness to it.

David's given music has a slight air of severity albeit with traces of poetic freedom. Jubal's octaves are back and the repetition of motifs is starkly present throughout.

Common to all three movements (or pictures) is the appearance of a downwards expanding small arabesque toward the end, followed by the material that has characterized the movement up to that point.

As the icons that tend to grace church triptychs, the music of this work is highly stylized. It seems to embrace objective beauty, removed from mundane concerns.

Morten Gaathaug's **Elegie für Markus** was, like Greenager's and Viken's works on this recording, written in 2022. Of the three, Gaathaug's piece is the one with the

more traditional aesthetics, devoid of any special effects. As befits a homage to a dead friend, a numbness of feeling permeates this brief composition, as if the music is unable to process the grief brought by loss. As was the case with Kverno's Triptych, Gaathaug's Elegy embraces repetition, with diverse melodic cells being reiterated, at times literally, at others in different transpositions. At six different times, flow comes to halt by way of repeated notes dejectedly exhaled. A brief attempt at playfulness is made about 1 minute and 40 seconds into the piece. It stands in contrast to the general gloominess of the music, which indeed dominates the rest of the composition. Although stylistic comparisons can be made between the works by Kverno and Gaathaug presented here, the latter composer gives us a more personal expression, in contrast to Kverno's deliberately impersonal account.

Lux Aeterna is the only work on this recording written by a recorder player and by a composer not originating from Norway. Said composer (Markus Zahnhausen) is the Markus for whom Gaathaug wrote his Elegy, which commemorates Zahnhausen, a great friend of Norway and Norwegian music until his untimely death in 2022.

Zahnhausen's work is itself an elegy, written in memory of the composer Jens Rohwer (1914-1994).

Zahnhausen expertly uses the instrument, which he conceives as a four-fold entity. He describes this as four levels of timbre: 'flauto traverso, harmonics, whistling and ordinario'. The first is achieved by blowing into the recorder's finger holes with a flute embouchure. The harmonics, with their otherworldly, almost disembodied quality, are achieved by minimum air pressure. Zahnhausen sees whistling – literally the performer whistling, detached from the instrument – as a timbral mediation between the above mentioned sounds and the 'ordinario' playing. Besides these special techniques, which are integrated organically into the fabric of the music, Zahnhausen introduces quarter tones in the impassioned build-up that precedes the conclusion of the work. *Lux Aeterna* is a composition of great simplicity and serenity. Silence is an intrinsic part of the music, as we saw in the final section of Hedstrøm's own *In Memoriam*.

Ricardo Odriozola,
April 26th 2024

CAROLINE EIDSTEN DAHL

Caroline Eidsten Dahl (b. 1980) is one of Norway's most active recorder players. With a special interest to promote Norwegian music, she has commissioned, performed, and recorded several new works for recorder, both solo and chamber music.

She is a founding member and a regular participant of, among others, the Woodpeckers recorder quartet, Ensemble C4, and Ensemble Freithoff. As a versatile performer, Caroline is a popular musician and performs with various ensembles and in musical projects covering a wide range of repertoire.

2014 saw the release of Caroline's debut solo album *Blockbird*. Norwegian Recorder Music on the LAWO Classics label, receiving rave reviews both on the home front and abroad. She has since recorded four solo CDs and several chamber music CDs.

In the spring of 2007, she was one of three winners of Concerts Norway's launch program "Intro-klassisk" for performances during the 2008-2009 season. Under the direction of Concerts Norway, she travelled to India and China performing Norwegian and Chinese music with musicians from Shanghai.

Caroline has performed at numerous festivals including the Festival International

de Música in Portugal, Innsbruck Festival of Early Music, where she played with Academia Montis Regalis, the Early Music Festival in London, Stockholm Early Music Festival, the Stavanger International Chamber Music Festival, and the Oslo Chamber Music Festival to mention some. In 2024, she made a concert tour in Japan with her duo Dahl/Steinsland band.

Caroline received the Arts Council of Norway's scholarship for artists for a three-year period from 2023.





CAROLINE EIDSTEN DAHL, RECORDER

LENE GRENAKER

Kullsorte Katedraler

1. I. Kullsorte Katedraler — 02:29
2. II. Vinterstormenes Mørke Lunger — 03:39
3. III. Et Djevelorgels Sorte Piper — 03:35

BJØRN FONGAARD

Sonate for Sopranblokkfløyte
Op. 125 Nr. 29

5. I. Adagio — 03:42
6. II. Allegretto — 02:48

Sonate for Altblokkfløyte
Op. 125 Nr. 30

8. I. Largo — 03:41
9. II. Marziale — 02:10

ÅSE HEDSTRØM

10. In memoriam for solo recorder — 09:16

TERJE VIKEN

11. Riss — 06:01

JOHAN KVANDAL

Suite for blockfløyte — 07:31

12. No 1 Andante — 03:14
13. No 2 Andante espressivo — 01:17
14. No 3 Allegretto grazioso — 02:55

ØISTEIN SOMMERFELDT

Spring Tunes Op. 44B

15. I. Fløytelåt — 01:13
16. II. Veslebekken — 00:39
17. III. Lys vårmorgen — 01:44
18. IV. Fjell Lengt — 01:47
19. V. Leik i vårbakken - 01:37

KJELL MARCUSSEN

Norwegian Herbarium

21. I. Bekkeblom - 02:02
22. II. Soterot — 01:42
23. III. Balderbrå — 02:30
24. IV. Revebjelle — 02:53
15. V. Rosenrot — 02:06

TROND KVERNO

Triptychon

25. I. Jubal - de Profundis — 02:43
26. II. Maria - Magnificat — 01:58
27. III. David - Miserere mai, deus — 02:42

MORTEN GAATHAUG

28. Elegie für Markus — 04:21

MARKUS ZAHNHAUSEN

29. Lux aeterna — 05:20

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