



LAWO
CLASSICS

HEGE HØISÆTER

HIMMELSKYGGE

MORE NORWEGIAN
CONTEMPORARY SONGS

HIMMELSKYGGJE

BY HEGE HØISÆTER

Death is generally dreaded, yet life without it is inconceivable. Shadows play an important part in grounding visual composition. They bring contrast and depth, and are essential in adding dynamism and three-dimensional presence. In much the same way, death can serve as a shadow to existence. The two go hand in hand.

Confronting mortality may be frightening, sometimes a form of release – but is often transformative not only for the departed but also for those who remain. It stands as the only absolute certainty we possess.

On this CD I have gathered words and music of diverse artists to take us on a journey in the vicinity of this unknown borderland. Artistic expressions created from intuition, affection, devastation, loss, fear, and even yearning. I am convinced that cultivating an awareness of mortality and dealing with death yields invaluable perspective and greater depth to life. “Himmelskygge” is my modest contribution.

About the songs:

“In 2014,” composer Olav Anton Thommessen recalls, “the soon-to-be retired singer Hege Høisæter, together with the director of the Norwegian Opera and Ballet Company at the time, took the initiative to commission several works that sought to activate the retired soloists and chorus members of

the ensemble with compositions designed especially for them. I thought it necessary to base my work on the fate of an elderly lady. Whom to choose? Why not Cosima Wagner as she has left us with a wonderful diary in which she nearly admits having caused her husband’s death in the midst of an argument about infidelity. Like Queen Victoria, she thenceforth dressed only in black and became the legendary leader of the Bayreuth Festival until 1930 as the formidable “Cosimama”. ”

Composer Kari Telstad Sundet writes about her song cycle *The Drift*: “Over the years I have composed a number of songs centered on Emily Dickinson’s death-themed poems. They were originally written as musical meditations on the poems, meant mostly for myself, but have now been re-written specifically for Hege Høisæter and Jorunn Marie Bratlie. The title of the collection of songs, “The Drift,” is derived from a letter Dickinson wrote to her cousins after her mother’s death in 1882, where she refers to death as “The drift called the infinite”.

“Mother’s dying almost stunned my spirit... She slipped from our fingers like a flake gathered by the wind and is now part of the drift called “the infinite.”

We don’t know where she is, though so many tell us.”

Sparre Olsen (1903-1984) was a Norwegian composer whose music was known for beautiful melodies with roots from Norwegian folk tunes; harmonically he continued the late Grieg tradition. His Three Songs, op. 26, were composed around 1935, published in 1940. His song “I denne jord” was published in 1970.

The process of involving Theis Jakob and his jazz trio Tov a Vot was a kind of experiment. I was curious about the outcome of a meeting of our different genres and working methods. I wrote the lyrics for “Siren” when it was decided that my son Theis would contribute to the CD. He “commissioned” it from me in a slightly dystopian-young-man phase – death can sometimes seem almost alluring to some. We recorded the lyrics in Sofienberg Church, and Tov a Vot created the comp and recorded it. Theis took it all to the laptop and produced and edited the final result. We used the same method with my vocal lines for “Before Being Born”. I selected the lyrics which are originally from the Old Testament, inspired by Brahms’ “Ich wandte mich,” from *Vier ernste Gesänge*, and recorded detached, unaccompanied melody lines. Tov a Vot came up with this “song” built around the vocal lines, and Theis completed and produced the track on the computer.

Gisle Kverndokk’s *Ave Verum* was commissioned by the New York Opera Society in

2008, and premiered by Hege Høisæter and Thorild Fimreite in 2009, at the Norwegian National Opera and Ballet. “Ave verum corpus” is a 14th-century Latin eucharistic hymn meaning “Hail, true body,” referring to the Catholic belief in the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. The text praises the body of Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, who suffered on the cross, and from whose body flowed water and blood.



HEGE HØISÆTER,
MEZZO-SOPRANO

Born and bred in Bergen, Norway, Hege Høisæter studied opera in Manchester (UK) and Oslo.

From 2002 to 2016 she was a house soloist at The Norwegian Opera and Ballet (DNO&B) where she premiered a handful of roles writ-

ten especially for her, in addition to singing traditional mezzo-soprano repertoire.

After retiring from DNO&B she has been freelancing actively, for example singing in all of Wagner's "Ring Cycle" operas at The Gothenburg Opera, as well as performing extensively in diverse opera settings in Norway. In 2024 she was nominated for a Hedda Award (a Norwegian theatre award) for her role as Ameli in the world premiere of *Fram* by Synne Skouen for DNO&B.

Hege regularly performs in chamber music contexts and particularly in semi-staged shows such as her own "Dømte dronninger" ("Royal Divas Doomed"), which has been very warmly received both at home and abroad.

Following her idea, a chamber piano/concert organ version of Bartok's *Bluebeard's Castle* came into being, and she has toured widely as Judith with this production.

While continuing to explore the few roles that exist in the traditional repertoire for senior singers, she feels especially committed to having new operas and music created where mature voices should be heard and explored to a greater extent.

In 2019, with LAWO Classics, she released the solo CD *Jordlys – Norwegian contemporary songs*. This was nominated for Solo Song Recording of the Year by Opus Klassik.



JORUNN MARIE BRATLIE,
PIANO

Since her debut at the age of 15, Jorunn Marie Bratlie has had a career spanning over more than 50 years as a performing pianist, with extensive activities as a soloist, accompanist and chamber musician.

She has given concerts all over Norway, in the USA, Germany, England, Spain, Romania, China, etc. She has been a soloist with our largest symphony orchestras in central works from the piano literature, and in premiere performances with the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra and the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra.



TOV A VOT, TRIO

Tov a Vot is a dynamic musical trio from Norway, featuring Ola Grindbakken on drums, Vetle Nærø on piano/keys, and Theis Jakob on bass. The band emphasizes individual expression through intuitive interplay and vibrant collaboration. Their music resides in a modern, beat-oriented jazz soundscape, where they explore the relationship between beautiful melodies, rhythmic complexity, and the unique musical voices of the band members.

Richard Wagner/Olav Anton Thommessen
Cosima minnes

Text: Robert Browning/Cosima Wagner

(Translation to Norwegian by O.A. Thommessen)

PROLOG

Frykte døden? - å føle tåken i min hals,
Disen i mitt ansikt,
Når snøen faller, og vinden forteller meg
At jeg nærmer meg stedet,
Nattens makt, stormens trykk,
Stedet hvor fienden står; Erkefienden i synlig
form,
Slik at de sterke må forgå.
Reisen er forbi og fjellets topp er nådd,
Barrierene faller.

I. En legetime viser at mine hjerteslag er sterkere
enn noengang, og siden han også var helt tilfreds
med Richards helsetilstand, vitset vi mens vi
spiste frokost om at ingen av oss to ville
noengang dø.

Det regner igjen,
så det blir ingen tur idag.

II. I det øyeblikk jeg er ved å sovne hører jeg ham
uttale himmelske ord til meg, ord jeg ikke tør gjen-
ta, ord som tvinner seg rundt meg som beskyt-
tende engler og som borer seg dypt ... dypt inn i
mitt hjerte som de edleste skatter. "God natt, god
natt min engel", sa jeg til ham i går. "God natt, min
kjære, kjære hustru ... det betyr så mye mer".

PROLOGUE

*Fear Death? – to feel the fog in my throat,
The mist in my face.
When the snows begin, and the blasts denote
I am nearing the place,
The power of the night, the press of the storm,
The post of the foe;
where he stands, the Arch Fear in visible form,
Yet the strong man must go:
For the journey is done and the summit attained,
and the barriers fall.*

*I. A consultation reveals that my heartbeat
is the strongest imaginable, and since he is also
completely satisfied with Richard's condition,
we joke at breakfast that neither
of us will ever die!*

*It is raining again,
consequently no outing.*

*II. As I fall asleep, I hear him speaking divine
words to me, words I may nor repeat, words
which wrap around me like guardian angels
and settle deep, deep in my heart like the
most sacred of my treasures. "Good night, my
angel," I said to him yesterday, "Good night my
dear wife – that means much more."*

III. Jeg var alltid en som kjempet, så
– en kamp til,
Den beste og den siste!
Jeg skulle hate at døden svøpte
mine øyne
Og forlangte at jeg måtte krype forbi.
Nei! La meg smake det hele,
Bære byrden
av smerte, mørke, og kulde.
For plutselig de verste tvinger de beste til
modighet,
Det svarte øyeblikket er slutt.

IV. Når jeg lå i seng hørte jeg ham snakke høyt;
jeg stiger opp for å gå inn til ham.
Han omfavner meg ømt og lenge.
«Jeg tenkte på Undine, vesenet som lengter
etter en sjel.»
Han går til klaveret og spiller det klagende tema:
"Rheingold, Rheingold," og fortsetter med:
"Falsk og nedrig er alle de som bor i høyden.
Tenk at jeg innså dette så tidlig".
"Jeg føler en sånn kjærlighet til dem, disse dy-
pets vesener som lengter så fryktelig".

EPILOG

Disse var de siste ordene jeg skrev ...
i min dagbok.
Neste dag fikk Wagner slag, og døde i
mine armer.

Å få dø i samme stund ble meg
ikke forunt.

*III. I was ever a fighter, so
– one fight more,
The best and the last!
I would hate that death bandaged
my eyes and forebore,
And bade me creep past.
No! Let me taste the whole of it,
Bear the brunt,
Of pain, darkness and cold.
For sudden the worst turns the best
to the brave,
The black minute's at end.*

*IV. When I am lying in bed, I hear
him talking loudly;
I get up and go into his room, and he embraces
me tenderly and long.
"I was thinking about Undine, the being who
longed for a soul." He goes to the piano, plays
the mournful theme 'Rheingold, Rheingold,'
continues with 'False and base all those who
dwell up above'.
"Extraordinary that I saw this so clearly
at that time!"
"I feel such love towards them, these creatures
of the deep, with all their yearning."*

EPILOGUE

*These were the last words I wrote
in my Diary.
The following day, Wagner suffered a heart
attack and died in my arms*

*The simultaneous death for which I had always
longed did not come to pass.*

Sparre Olsen:

I denne jord

Text: Johan Falkberget

I denne jord
er mine fedres sange forseglet av Gud.
I fattige ord de sang om savn og nød og strid
for brød.
Og tunge i sinn tydet de tegn i sol og vind og
snø og regn.
I denne jord
Skal også en gang min fattige sang
forsegles av Gud.

In this earth

*In this earth
the song of my fathers is sealed by God.
With humble words, they sang of longing and
need and struggle for bread.
And with burdened minds, they read the signs in
the sun and wind and snow and rain.
In this earth
My humble song too shall be
sealed by God*

Kari Telstad Sundet:

The Drift

Text: Emily Dickinson

Beati mortui

Beati mortui
in Domino morientes deinceps
Oh, it sweeps around me like a sea

*Blessed are the dead
who henceforth die in the Lord*

I felt a Funeral, In my Brain

Ah – I heard a Funeral, in my Brain.
And Mourners to and fro.
Treading, ah, treading - till it seemed
That Sense was breaking through –

And when they all were seated,
A Service, like a Drum –
Kept beating – beating – till I thought
My mind was going numb –

Then I heard them lift a Box,
And creak across my Soul
With those same Boots of Lead, again,
Then Space – began to toll,

As all the Heavens were a Bell,
And Being, but an Ear,
And I, and Silence, some strange Race,
Wrecked, solitary, here –

Then a Plank in Reason, broke,
I dropped down, and down –
And hit a World, at every plunge,
And Finished knowing – then –

The Only Ghost I Ever Saw

The only ghost I ever saw
Was dressed in mechlin, – so;
He wore no sandal on his foot,
And stepped like flakes of snow.
His gait was soundless, like the bird,
but rapid, like the roe;

Dropped Like Stars

Oh, they dropped.
 They dropped like flakes,
 they dropped like stars
 Like petals fall from a rose.
 When suddenly across the june
 A wind with fingers goes.

They perished in the seamless grass, –
 (Oh, they dropped like stars)
 No eye could find the place;
 But God on his repealless list
 Can summon every single face.

A certain Slant of light

There is a certain Slant of light
 Winter Afternoons –
 That oppresses, like the Heft
 Of Cathedral Tunes –

Heavenly Hurt, it gives us –
 We can find no scar,
 But internal difference
 Where the Meanings, are –

None can teach it – Any –
 'Tis the Seal Despair –
 An imperial affliction
 Sent us of the Air –

And when it comes, the Landscape listens –
 Shadows – hold their breath –
 And when it goes, 'tis like the Distance
 On the look of Death –

This is the Hour/Beati mortui II

This is the Hour of Lead –
 After a great pain, a formal feeling comes –
 The Nerves sit ceremonious, like Tombs –
 The stiff Heart questions

Beati mortui.
 Oh, it sweeps around me like a sea

Was it He, that bore
 And Yesterday,
 or Centuries before?

**Sparre Olsen:
Tre sanger (op. 26)****God Natt**

(Text: Olav Nygard)

Kvite vengjer kvile
 yve deg i natt,
 alveandlèt smile
 under skymingshatt:
 ljose alvar sanke
 nøring åt din tanke
 til du vaknar att.

Himils draumar linde
 i sitt blomspinn
 dine sviv, og binde
 rosar på di kinn.
 Må din draum deg sanke
 det din vakne tanke
 trår men aldri finn.

Bånvise

(Text: Tore Ørjasæter)

Sov, sov liten son,
 vesle mor skal vake.
 Snart so kjem han store far
 og skal bånnet take.
 Sov, sov, rosebån.

Sov blidt, din bånsmil
 er som soli bjarte.
 Drøyme so din uskuldsdraum
 i Guds reine hjarte.
 Sov, sov, rosebån.

Good night

*White wings are resting
 above you tonight,
 fairy faces are smiling
 beneath the twilight sky:
 bright fairies are gathering
 strength for your thoughts
 until you wake once more.*

*Dreams from heaven wind around
 your fleeting thoughts
 in a weave of flowers, and bind
 roses upon your cheek.
 May your dream gather
 what your waking mind
 follows but never finds.*

The Child's Song

*Sleep, sleep little son,
 your little mother will keep watch.
 Soon the great father will come
 and take the child away.
 Sleep, sleep, rose child.*

*Sleep happily, your child's smile
 is as bright as the sun.
 Dream your dream of innocence
 within God's pure heart.
 Sleep, sleep, rose child.*

Til min Gyllenlakk
(Text: Henrik Wergeland)

Gyllenlakk, før du din glans har tapt,
da er jeg det hvorav alt er skapt.
Ja før du mister din kronas gull,
da er jeg muld.

Idet jeg roper: med vinduet opp!
Mitt siste blikk får din gyllentopp.
Min sjel dig kysser, idet forbi
den flyver fri.

To ganger jeg kysser din søte munn;
ditt er det første med rettens grunn,
det annet give du, kjære husk,
min rosenbusk!

Utsprungen får jeg den ei å se;
ti bring min hilsen når det vil skje,
og si jeg ønsker at på min grav
den blomstrer av.

Ja, si jeg ønsker at på mitt bryst
den rose lå du fra mig har kyst.
Og gyllenlakk vær i dødens hus
dens brudebluss!

To My Wallflower

*Wallflower, before your shine is lost,
I shall be that from which all is made.
Yes, before your lose your crown of gold,
I shall be mould.*

*As I call: open the window!
My final glance falls upon your golden head.
My soul kisses you as
it flies free.*

*I kiss your sweet mouth twice;
the first belongs to you by right,
the second you must give, remember,
to my rose bush!*

*I will not get to see it bloom;
so give my regards when it thrives,
and say I wish for it to shed its blossoms
upon my grave.*

*Yes, say that I wish the rose you kissed
might rest upon my chest.
And wallflower in the house of death
be its guarding flame!*

Tov a Vot/Theis Jakob:
Two Dystopian Songs

Siren
(Text: Hege Høisæter)

no body
no!
nobody
no soul

undermanned
freedom unlimited
erased writing ...
shallow traces
shallowing, ever shallower
ever ... untraceable
also in the mind of God?
dissolving paper

every body
everybody
lining up
why?
why not
love everlasting
eternal bliss

candle flame wavering
a fragile streak of smoke waiting to download
walking the walk
bravely forward - from here

ahead of me but not far
with flashing blue eyes you are
leading the way
knowing and cold - my willpower sold
in an abandoned market

fear not the journey poor sweet soul
just come along
bad, good, young, old
I'll show you where
come here ...unprepared
I don't care
my task and beauty will bring you onwards
so - I don't have wings
but I'm sure and cold
and immaculately
I can only execute this

this now
no less, not more
on a resisting shore
empty for ever?

a change of mode
to a somehow known abode
of skinless ease
nobody there to please

Before being born
(Text from the Old Testament:
Ecclesiastes 4:1)

Again I looked
I saw tears
Power was on the side of their oppressors
And they have no one

I praised the dead who had already died
More than the living
Who are still alive

But better than both
Is the one who has never been born
Who has not seen the evil that is done
Under the sun

Gisle Kverndokk:
Ave Verum
(Text: Latin hymn)

Ave Verum Corpus
natum de Maria Virgine
Vere passum, immolatum
in cruce pro homine,
Cujus latus perforatum
unda fluxit et sanguine:
Esto nobis praegustatum
in mortis examine.

*Hail, true body,
born of the Virgin Mary
Truly suffered. Sacrificed
On the Cross for mankind
From whose pierced side
Flowed water and blood:
Be for us a foretaste [of Heaven]
In our final trial of death.*



HIMMELSKYGGE

More Norwegian Contemporary Songs

1. **Cosima minnes** __12:55
Richard Wagner (1813-1883) /
Olav Anton Thommessen (*1946)
Text: Robert Browning (1812-1889) and
Cosima Wagner (1837-1930)

2. **I denne jord** __01:25
Sparre Olsen (1903-1984)
Text: Johan Falkberget (1897-1967)

The Drift

Kari Telstad Sundet (*1987)
Text: Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

3. **Beati mortui** __03:04
4. **I felt a Funeral, In my Brain** __05:23
5. **The Only Ghost I Ever Saw** __03:10
6. **Dropped Like Stars** __05:31
7. **A certain Slant of light** __05:03
8. **This Is the Hour/Beati mortui II** __05:15

Tre Sanger, op. 26

Sparre Olsen

9. **God natt** __02:12
(Text: Olav Nygard; 1884-1924)
10. **Bånvis** __02:02
(Text: Tore Ørjasæter; 1886-1968)
11. **Til min Gyllenlakk** __03:24
(Text: Henrik Wergeland; 1808-1845)

Two Dystopian Songs

Theis Jakob (*2000)

12. **Siren** __03:45
Text: Hege Høisæter
13. **Before Being Born** __05:51
(Text: Ecclesiastes 4:1)
14. **Ave Verum** __05:12
Gisle Kverndokk (*1967)
Text: Latin hymn

MUSICIANS:

Hege Høisæter, mezzo-soprano
Jorunn Marie Bratlie, piano
Tov a Vot, trio – Tracks 12 and 13.
Vetle Næra, piano/keys
Theis Jakob, bass
Ola Grindbakken, drums

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