

På dette albumet samles Det Norske Jentekor og pianist Tord Gustavsen om folkelige og kjære julesanger. I tett samspill føres lytteren fra stille melankoli via ekspressive improvisasjoner til funklende, ekstatiske øyeblikk. Det hele blir ledet av Anne Karin Sundal-Ask, en dirigent med stor omtanke for hver enkelt sanger og for korets egenart. Resultatet er blitt et følelsesladet møte. Gustavsen og de unge stemmene snakker til hjertene gjennom sin varme musikalske tilstedeværelse.

The Norwegian Girls Choir and pianist Tord Gustavsen combine their talents in a programme of popular and cherished Christmas carols, leading the audience from quiet melancholy to expressive improvisations and sparkling, ecstatic moments. Anne Karin Sundal-Ask directs the performances with attention to each individual singer and to the distinctive sound of the choir as a whole. Through their warm musical presence, Gustavsen and these radiant young voices appeal to our very hearts.

Recorded in DXD 24bit/352.8kHz

■ 5.1 DTS HD MA 24/192kHz ■ 7.1.4 Dolby Atmos 48kHz

■ 2.0 LPCM 24/192kHz ■ 7.1.4 Auro-3D 96kHz

+ mShuttle MP3 and MQA

EAN13: 7041888525721



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audio



2L¹⁶⁴

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stille grender

Det Norske Jentekor
Anne Karin Sundal-Ask conductor
piano Tord Gustavsen

Alfred og Tora *en novelle av Tania Kjeldset*

Deilig er jorden

Jentungen, pleide Alfred å kalle henne. Nesten aldri Petra, som var det hun het, det eneste barnebarnet. Tora lente seg over rekkverket og så utover trekronene. Alle nyansene. Fra sitrongult til mørke sjatteringer i grønt. Hun klarte ikke å glede seg over synet slik hun pleide. Det var dette med Jentungen. Han hadde ikke sagt det da de plukket opp Petra med bilen. Ikke i morges heller, da hun kom inn til dem med kaffe på senga.

Tora strøk over rekkverket, det hadde fliset seg opp flere steder. Flaggspetten sikkert. Den hakket på alt. Mellom de viltvoksende spireaene skimtet hun den røde gensen til Alfred. Han holdt armene høyt hevet, som om han vadet på dypt vann. Stanget seg nedover mot elva på sitt underlige vis. Han pleide å kviste fram stien når de åpnet hytta om våren. Sto der i jungelen og svingte låen med de lange armene. Kom opp til henne etterpå med dampende hud, og svette som rant nedover halsen. Men det var lenge siden nå.

Et vindkast feide over kirsebærtreet, sendte en storm av hvite blomster etter ham. Alfred skjente ut til siden. Han hadde ikke rørt låen på tre år. Glemte å tømme fuglekassene. La ikke merke til det gisne treverket på solsiden. La ikke merke til henne heller. Men til elva skulle han alltid. Det glemte han ikke. Hverken elva eller grantreet.

– Vær forsiktig da! ropte hun etter ham.

Han strakte en arm i været og vinket som tegn på at han hadde oppfattet budskapet. Men han så ikke opp mot hytta, der hun sto. I stolen lå avisen igjen. Han hadde forsøkt seg på kryssordet. Fylt ut et par steder. Men gitt opp og lagt det fra seg igjen. Hun fulgte ham med blikket til hun ikke kunne se den røde gensen lenger.

– Skal farfar ned til elva igjen?

Petra sto i døra. Hun hadde funnet en kjole fra flere år tilbake og holdt den opp foran ansiktet. Tora kjente på vemodet. Det var lenge siden Petra var ei lita snelle som svingte seg i blårutete sommerstoff.

– Ja, han vil jo dit, vet du, sa Tora og tok kjolen fra henne. Hun undersøkte om det var

noe sømmonn til å legge ut, eller en fald. Det var det ikke, og det visste hun jo.

– Sommerkjoler skal ikke stramme, sa Tora og rakte henne kjolen. – De skal være like luftige som Cumulus-skyer på himmelen. Og så skal de duften. Av nystroken bomull. Hun blunket til Petra.

– Sånn var det da jeg var ung!

– Ja da! Ville bare rydde litt i skuffen.

Petra dyttet kjolen tilbake i armene hennes som om den var noe hun ikke ville vedkjenne seg, noe som luktet. Hun hadde trukket en stripepote topp over hodet, og de lange beina rant ut av et par ultrakorte shorts. Bare å ha henne i nærheten var en gave. Selv forfallet på stedet fikk et forsonende skjær over seg når Petra ga seg hen i begeistring og gjenkjennelse over alt Alfred hadde laget til henne. Hun saumfarte dukkehuset med ømme sukk, løftet fram møblene han hadde laget. Satt på huska med mobilen og sendte meldinger ut i verden. Sovnet i hengekøya med lydfiler på øret. Hun bar den hvite ledningen rundt halsen som et smykke.

– Hva hører du på nå? spurte Tora, hun syntes det var så rart at de ikke falt ut, de små proppene.

– Lydfiler. Det er til julekonserten. Det er sykt mye å lære utenat.

– Litt rart å øve på julesanger i mai, mente Tora.

– Hvorfor det?

– Nei, kanskje litt vanskelig ... å få julestemning ...

– Tydelig at ikke du går i kor, sa Petra. – Jeg tenker ikke på *det* nå. Jeg øver på stemmen min og lærer meg versene. Tenker på andre ting.

– Som hva da?

Det hadde ikke Petra noe svar på. Eller hun ville ikke svare. Det skjeve smilet hennes røpet at det kanskje heller var det siste.

– Jeg tar en tur ned til farfar, jeg, sa hun.

– Snilt av deg.

Petra stusset litt.

– Jeg gjør det ikke for å være snill, farmor.

Det var mer et spørsmål. Eller kanskje en mild irettesettelse. Hun ble stående og fingre med den ene ledningen. Hun hadde så følsom munn, Petra.

– Han har sluttet å kalle meg Jentungen, sa hun.
Tora nikket bare. Hun var så tykk i halsen plutselig.
– Jeg er jo egentlig for stor, la hun til.
– Ja, det er sikkert det, sa Tora fort.

Hun tok kjolen med seg inn på soverommet og la den i kofferten. Hun ville vaske og stryke den. Pakke den ned i en eske. Slik hun gjorde med klær hun var ekstra glad i. Hun håpet at litt av lukten til eieren ville sitte igjen som en sval erindring. Hvis hun strøk dem ekstra lenge. Livet var fullt av selvbedrag, tenkte hun. Ingenting varer. Men å åpne denne esken ga henne likevel en følelse av å holde noe fast.

Alfred gikk etter lyden. Det bruste fra fossen. Sydet og kokte. Han stilte seg midt på broa og glodde blindt ned i de frådende vannmassene. Brølet forplantet seg i ham, det stakk i halsen. Øynene rant fulle av vann. Alt han hadde bygget med egne hender. Dukkehuset. Annekset. Den nye grinden. Han forsøkte å mane fram en detalj. Et dørhåndtak. En farge. Men han så ingenting. Og han hadde ikke kjent igjen hytta.

Benken manglet en planke, men det gikk an å sitte ved elva likevel. Og Grana sto her, heldigvis. De fleste greinene pekte nedover. Den strakte seg trossig i været likevel. Sto og skrantet ved siden av små, anonyme trær som han ikke husket navnet på. Han hadde kysset Tora under denne grana en gang.

– Grana står her, sa Alfred.
Han sa det flere ganger. Stemmen var hes og litt fremmed.
– Og der borte står det en eik.

Han sa det litt høyere nå. Det var ingen som hørte ham her nede. Ordene flettet seg fint inn i bruset fra elva. En stor fugl landet på en stein. Sort og hvit var den. Vakker i grunnen. Han så den hver dag fra vinduet. En upopulær skapning. Bråkete.

– Og det er vel en kråke, sa han.
Men det kjentes ikke riktig. Nesten, men ikke helt. Noe som lignet kanskje. Sånn var det blitt. Ordene forsvant som dugg for solen. Av gammel vane stakk han hånda i lomma for å ta fram fuglekikkerten. Den var heller ikke der. Samme det, tenkte Alfred. En fugl er en fugl. De flyr

sin vei. Men Grana står her. Grana skal ingen steder. Stiller ingen spørsmål heller. Han lukket øynene. Elva fløt inn i øregangene, skvalpet og klukket der inne. Han så for seg skogen full av gamle menn. De gikk mot elvebredden, et taust opptog. Han lurte på hvor de kom fra. Men da han snudde seg, var det barnebarnet som sto og så på ham. Hun hadde hvite tråder hengende fra ørene og spurte ganske forsiktig om han hadde sovnet.

Petra holdt fram to hvite dingser og spurte om han ville høre. Det var en sang han hadde lært henne, sa hun. Hun hadde fått så langt hår. Nesten helt ned til magen.

– Har jeg lært deg sanger?
Petra lo.

– Sykt mange.
Hun bøyde seg over ham. Håret hennes kilte. Hun stakk noe i ørene hans, det var ørepropper, sa hun. Nå skulle han lukke øynene også. Men aller helst ville han jo se på henne. Og det var så mye han måtte få med seg før han glemte det igjen. De varme øynene. Fødselsmerket på halsen. Hendene hennes, med så mange rare ringer. Petra la hånda over øynene hans og lukket dem.

– Sånn, sa hun. Nå setter jeg på lyden, farfar.

Stemmen kom til ham som et kjærtegn. Den vemodige melodien. Alt var så kjent. Han sto ved siden av broen og sang. De hadde hvite skjorter. Gjennom vinduene i kirken så han at det hadde begynt å snø. Ordene bare var der. Det gikk helt av seg selv. Alfred så utover elva og sang: *Eg veit i himmerik ei borg. Ho skin som soli klåre. Der er'kje synder eller sorg. Der er'kje gråt og tåre.*

Petra satte seg ned ved siden av ham og tok proppene ut igjen.

– Du kan jo alle versene du, farfar, sa hun.
Han fortalte at han og broren pleide å synge i begravelser. Ofte var det salmer som åpnet døra til gråten. Men han klarte ikke å se på ansiktene til de sørgende. Han valgte seg noe annet. Et lys, et vindu. I den gamle kirka på Varhaug kunne de se ut på havet. Og så måtte han tenke hardt på noe helt annet. For det gikk ikke an å synge hvis man måtte gråte.

– Det vet vel du, sa han.
– Hva tenkte du på da? spurte Petra.

– Ofte var det jenter, da, sa Alfred.
Petra lo. Hun stakk hånda ned i lomma og dro opp en pose med noen sorte biter. De lignet små båter.
– Dette er det beste du vet, sa hun. – Lakrisbåter.
Alfred ristet på hodet. Han visste ikke en gang hva lakris var. Hun lurte en bit inn i munnen hans. Den var seig. Smakte ikke som sjokolade.
– Hva mer husker du, spurte han. – Om meg?
Petra tenkte seg om. Tok en bit til.
– Du pleide å kalle meg Jentungen.
– Gjorde jeg det?
Petra nikket.
– Men det er ikke så farlig, farfar, sa hun fort.
Hun reiste seg. Nesten før hun hadde kommet, skulle hun videre. Han så på henne.
– Jeg mister ordene, Petra . Alt jeg har lært. Minnene. De sprekker som såpebobler i lufta.
Men jeg skal ...
Petra strakte ut en lys arm og fanget haken hans i hånda.
– Jeg vet det, farfar, sa hun. – Ikke tenk på det.

Tider skal komme

Alfred løftet dynen til Petra opp mot ansiktet. Lukten etter det siste besøket hennes hang igjen i rommet. Solkrem, kanskje? Eller parfyme? Det var små spor etter henne overalt. En blå strikk på knaggen med noen lange hår. Kurven hun brukte til badetøyet. På kommoden lå de hvite øreproppene. Hun hadde kanskje flere. Han presset dem inn i ørene. Helt stille var det. De datt bare ut igjen.

Tora smalt med skapdørene inne i stuen. Var vel misfornøyd med et eller annet. Hun ga ham oppgaver hele tiden. Fløy rundt og sjekket alle vinduer, akkurat nå tømte hun kjøleskapet. Eller vasket hun opp? Skulle han gjøre det? Hva gjorde han inne på rommet til Petra? På kommoden lå et av de gamle albumene. Tora hadde brukt sommeren til å se på bilder. Alfred satte seg på senga og åpnet albumet. Det var bilder fra den første tiden her ute. Der satt

Tora i en fluktstol og leste. Alfred bøyde seg over bildet. Fargene var falmet. Hun hadde den blå blusen, den kjente han igjen. Håret hadde hun bundet opp med et lyst skjerf. Døra smalt opp og der sto hun plutselig, den samme Tora, men ikke like blid som på bildet.

- Hvorfor svarer du ikke når jeg roper på deg?
- Ropte du?
- Om jeg ropte!

Tora himlet med øynene.

– Jeg vil helst slippe å kjøre hjem i mørket. Du glemte jo å sjekke haspene.
Hasper. Hva var nå det igjen? Alfred begravde seg i Toras unge ansikt isteden. Hun hadde bare to bluser. Han visste at de tørket i løpet av en time i godt vær. Han visste også at stoffet i den ene blusen var florlett, på grensen til gjennomsiktig, mens den andre var stivere, vanskeligere å stryke. Når Tora skulle ha den blå, kom hun alltid litt for sent til møtestedet de hadde avtalt. Og da de endelig kunne favne hverandre, hang lukten av det varme strykejernet igjen i stoffet, en duft som han senere alltid ville forbinde med høytid.

– Putetrekket ligger jo på! ropte Tora. Dynetrekket også. Du skulle jo skifte på senga!
Han snudde seg. Det var et lite søkk i puten etter hodet til Petra. Som om hun akkurat hadde ligget der.

– Sånn!

Tora strakte seg over ham. I en sint bevegelse hadde hun fjernet puten og flerret av putetrekket.

– Du snakker aldri til meg mer, sa hun.

Han så på henne. Det korte håret hadde fått fine, grå striper. Øynene var tunge. Hun så ikke glad ut. Og det var kanskje hans skyld. Han strakte hånda mot henne.

- Jeg føler meg så alene, Alfred.
- Sett deg ned litt, da, Tora, ba han.

Alfred strøk Tora over ryggen. Det var i grunnen lenge siden, kom han på. Denne ryggen som han kjente så godt. Han viste henne bildet. Fortalte at han ofte hadde stått i porten og kikket inn i hagen. Mot tørkesnora. Tora så på ham.

- Det visste jeg ikke. Hvorfor gjorde du det?
- Jeg så etter blusene dine. Du hadde bare to, en med kort erm, en uten.

Hun lente seg inntil ham og gjespet.

- Det stemmer nok det. Vi hadde ikke så god råd.
- Den korte var lyseblå, sa Alfred.
- Og den uten erm?
- Den hadde egentlig ingen farge.
- Det var den blusen du likte best, sa Tora og lo litt.
- Er redd for det, ja, sa Alfred.

Englene sang den

- Nå slutter du nok å fryse, sa Tora og la vinterkåpa over fanget.

Kirken var godt oppvarmet, men Alfred beholdt frakken på. Han ble tynnere. Glemte å spise. Hun måtte minne ham på det hele tiden. De klemte seg sammen på de harde trebenkene for å gjøre plass til flere. Surret av stemmer gjorde henne helt ør. Forventningene lå i luften. Ingen forlot julekonsertene uberørt. Det kunne man se i ansiktene til folk når de strømmet ut igjen av kirken. De snakket mer dempet, gikk tettere kanskje, enn da de kom.

Alfred fiklet med plasteret på fingeren. Han holdt den opp foran henne, som et spørsmålstegn. Hun dro plasteret av og tok vekk bomullsdotten. Ingen grunn til å rippe opp i den legetimen nå. Han ville bare bli forvirret. Hun rakte ham programmet. Det var bilde av koret på forsiden.

- Se om du kan finne Petra, sa hun.
- Du mener vel Jentungen? sa Alfred.
- Ja, sa Tora, litt forundret.

Alfred bøyde seg over programmet. Han skalv på fingeren. Smilte da han fant ansiktet hennes.

- Hvor er hun nå?
- Står bak ved døra, sa Tora. – Koret kommer inn den veien.
- Koret, ja!

Alfred klemte hånda hennes.

- Det blir fint, Tora, sa han.

Gi ham tid, når han vil si noe, hadde legen sagt.

Lysene ble dempet. Folk slo av mobilene. Alle ventet på dirigenten. Snart ville hun løse koret gjennom krevende farvann. Hver detalj måtte sitte og klangen skulle fylle kirkerommet og ikke minst: hjertene til alle i salen. Ingen liten oppgave, tenkte Tora, men det var ikke ukjent farvann for noen av sangerne. Og der lå hele forskjellen. Som publikum slapp man å sitte i angst for at noen skulle trå feil, at konserten skulle mislykkes. Isteden kunne man åpne seg for de kjære melodiene. Kanskje føle seg løftet. Men hun hadde glemt pastillene. Hun stakk hånda i lomma på frakken til Alfred. Fant ingen pastilleske. Men det lå en ganske stor pappbit der. Alfred hadde knotet noe ned. JENTONGEN, sto det. Dirigenten stilte seg med ansiktet mot salen. Hun smilte, men det var koret hun fanget inn med blikket. Så slo hun stemmegaffelen mot hodet og ga tonen. Begynnelsen betyr alt, hadde Petra forklart henne. Før ansatsen er det ingenting som binder publikum og koret sammen. Men idet den første tonen klinger i rommet, er alle en del av musikken. Tora la lappen tilbake i lomma og sa ingenting.

Koret åpnet med en versjon av Stille natt. Dempet. Rolig. Altene formet tonene så mykt, klangen bølget mot henne som fløyel. Og sopranene svarte, førte melodien videre til den ble plukket opp av en annen stemmegruppe. Sakte skred de fram oppover midtgangen.

- Der er Petra!

Alfred satt henført og fulgte Petra med blikket helt til hun fant plassen sin oppe ved prekestolen. Julekonsertene forløste noe i ham. Han hadde denne evnen til å gå opp i musikken. Glemme alt annet. Det var vel dette båndet mellom koret og publikum som Petra snakket så varmt om. Men akkurat nå skjelte hun ned mot benkeraden. Hvem smilte hun til? Tora lente seg fram for å se. Det satt kanskje noen fra klassen hennes der, en høy gutt i Mariusgenser, et mørkt krøllete hode, var det ham?

Gjør ting dere liker, hadde legen sagt. Fokuser på det han får til.

De hadde fått hver sin stol på legens kontor. Et stort og lyst rom som vendte ut mot en parkeringsplass. Legen ville vite når Alfred var født.

- Det står vel der, hadde Alfred sagt, og pekte på skjermen.
- Men nå spør jeg likevel, sa legen vennlig.

Sekundene gikk. Legen ventet. Alfred tvinnet fingre.

- Etter krigen, sa han.
- Hvilket år?
- 1946, tror jeg.
- Det er riktig, sa legen. – Kan du si meg hvor gammel du er?
- Nei, svarte Alfred.

Tora klemte hånda til Alfred. Det skulle ikke være applaus mellom sangene. Han hadde glemt seg flere ganger allerede. For det meste holdt koret en tone gående, den lå under som en dirrende streng og knyttet sangene sammen.

Sanger er noe av det siste vi glemmer, sa legen.

Han ga Alfred et ark.

- Kan du lese hva som står der?

Alfred leste.

Due Gevær Pepper.

Legen ville at han skulle gjenta ordene litt senere. Når de hadde snakket sammen litt. Alfred nikket.

- Hvilke ord? spurte han.

Dirigenten vendte seg igjen mot publikum. Koret forberedte nå en omrokking. Jentene stilte seg opp langs sideskipene, omringet salen. De hadde lys i hendene. Alfred fulgte nøye med. Han hadde latt skjegget gro i høst. Det var hvitt og litt tørt, men sto som en fin krans rundt haken. Da dirigenten løftet armen og satte inn koret, rettet han seg opp. De klare stemmene fløt ut i rommet. Lyse og skimrende. Petra hadde øvd mye på den salmen i sommer. I hengekøya under kastanjetreet. I bilen på vei til fergen. Det var så mange vers, sa hun. *Eg veit i himmerik ei borg. Ho skin som soli klære.* Flammen fra talglyset lyste opp ansiktet til Petra. Hun sto der så rank og levende. Det var så mye fremtid i henne. Tora ble tykk i halsen. Sangen handlet jo om noe annet. *Der er'kje synder eller sorg. Der er'kje gråt og tåre.* Å få fred, tenkte

hun og gløttet opp på Alfred. – Å bli tatt imot. Tenkte de på det? De unge sangerne? Hva de formidlet? Det kunne man ikke vite. De visste det nok, men tankene fløy vel hit og dit, slik de også gjorde for henne. For ikke å snakke om for Petra. Tora gløttet opp mot himlingen der den enorme sola sendte strålene sine utover. Da hørte hun noe som skurret. En lyd som ikke passet inn. Den kom fra Alfred. Han satt og nynet. Tora dyttet til ham.

- Det er ikke allsang nå, sa hun lavt. – Det er helt til slutt.

Alfred hørte ikke. I stedet ga han på litt mer. Begynte å synge. Han husket teksten. Men å blande seg med de klare jentestemmene. Grumse til klangbildet. En utrent, gammel baryton! Folk hadde begynt å røre på seg. Noen hysjet. Alfred fortsatte ufortrødet: *Eg er ein fattig ferdamann. Må mine vegar fara. Herfrå og til mitt fedreland. Gud meg på vegen vara!* Koret sang. Dirigenten fortsatte å dirigere. Ansiktet var rolig og konsentrert. Nå vendte hun å seg mot Alfred og smilte. Hun strakte ut armen, løftet hånda og inkluderte ham i koret med en suveren gest: – Syng høyere! Så vi hører!

Stemmen til Alfred dirret, en mørk streng mot øret. Det var langt fra perfekt. Men det var rent. Tora forsøkte å forstå hva som hadde skjedd. Miskunn, tenkte hun. Barmhjertighet? Men kan man nekte en gammel mann å synge? Må alt være perfekt? Hun hadde fått et glimt av Alfred, slik hun husket ham. Sikker og trygg. Besøket hos legen hadde han glemt. Men hun kom ikke til å glemme det.

- Hvor har du hjertet ditt, Alfred? spurte legen. – Kan du peke på det for meg?

Det kunne Alfred. Han trengte ingen betenkningstid.

- Der, sa han og pekte på Tora.

Det Norske Jentekor har med sin dirigent, Anne Karin Sundal-Ask, hatt et utstrakt samarbeid med ulike samtidskomponister og musikere. Tilliten dirigenten har etablert med hver sanger, er vesentlig for nivået dette koret har nådd. Samarbeidet med Tord Gustavsen styrker og fremhever både korets og pianistens særpreg. Her blir korets homogene klang satt opp mot Gustavsens virtuositet. Det rolige foredraget og de unge stemmene skaper en nødvendig kontrast til Gustavsens tidvis ekspressive improvisasjoner. Det gjelder enten sangerne danser med ham, bærer melodistemmen eller opptrer som lydmalende kulisser i bakgrunnen

Allerede ved det første, mørke anslaget i *Carol of the Bells* skjerpes sansene. Den taktfaste, insisterende rytmen forbereder oss på en annerledes lytteopplevelse, langt fra det vi forventer av en juleplate. Ved å bruke pianostrengene, slik Gustavsen gjør i åpningssporet, oppstår et mørkt fundament, som en kontrast til Jentekorsets eteriske klang. Et memento mori slår slik an tonen for resten av platen.

Videre møter vi melankolien og den rå kraften i Gustavsens improvisasjon over samme sang, for så å bli innhyllet i skimrende, lyse akkorder. Disse danner bakteppet for melodistemmen til koret i *Det lyser i stille grender*. De tre første sangene viser hvor dynamisk og variert denne innspillingen er, både i form og uttrykk.

De fleste julesangene på repertoaret er solid plassert i norsk musikktradisjon. Likevel oppleves de her som nye. *Glade jul* omfavner julemagien med sin rolige fremførelse, i dette tilfellet uten tekst. Koret synger melodistemmen, mens Gustavsen improviserer fritt over temaet. Med mild autoritet klarer Sundal-Ask å forene den langsomme, meditative melodistemmen med jazzens blå toner.

Fremføringen av N.F.S. Grundtvigs *Deilig er den himmel blå*, vakkert arrangert av Andrew Smith, utgjør et klimaks. Gjennom tette klanger åpner koret med en stille intensitet, for så å la sangen bygge seg opp. I de glitrende crescendoene er det nesten som om himmelen åpner seg.

Dette musikalske møtet blir aldri forutsigbart. Alt er varmt formidlet i kommunikasjonen mellom pianist, dirigent og kor, mellom musikere og den som lytter.

Improvisasjonene har et pust av barokkens overdådighet, de trekker veksler på folkemusikk, jazz og elementer fra sufimusikk. I instrumentalversjonen av *Folkefrelsar*, improviserer Gustavsen fra stille melankoli til funkende, ekstatiske øyeblikk. Slik målbæres innholdet i salmen på nytt og originalt vis, uten ord.

Essensielt for resultatet er Gustavsens intuitive forståelse for korets kvaliteter, fra den lyse klangfargen hos rekruttene, til de mer modne stemmene i Jentekoret. I dette landskapet opptrer han leket og ekspressivt. Registeret går fra stille inderlighet til øyeblikkene der både kor og pianist bygger opp til forbløffende crescendoer, som i *Jul, jul strålande Jul*, *Folkefrelsar* eller *Eg veit i himmerik ei borg*.

Koret og Gustavsen avslutter med *Deilig er jorden*. Slik besegles denne juleplaten med en varm motsats til det rungende anslaget i åpningen. Musikken lindrer og omfavner lytteren.

Tania Kjeldset, 2020

01 **Carol of the Bells** 2:05

Peter J. Wilhousky / Mykola Leontovych

/: Klokkenes klang, ordløse sang,
tryller med lyd, fyller med fryd.
Kaller til fred, ber oss bli med,
ring julen inn, fyll sjel og sinn.
Ring ding-e-ling, alle omkring,
kaller til fest, kom og vær gjest.
Igjen og igjen, kvinner og menn,
liten og stor, tonenes kor.
Løfter oss opp, lyden får kropp,
hør klokkenes drønn, mektig og skjønn.
Vakkert de klinger, hør at de bringer,
bud fjern og nær, at timen er her.
Ringer, ringer, ringer inn til julen.
Ringer, ringer, ringer inn til julen.
Klokkenes klang, ordløse sang,
tryller med lyd, fyller med fryd. :/:

Klokkenes klang, ordløse sang
tryller med lyd, fyller med fryd

– mot en fredfull jul!

Norsk gjendiktning av Mike McGurk & Sigvart Dagsland

02 **The Bells** 2:04

Tord Gustavsen

/: Hark how the bells, sweet silver bells,
all seem to say, throw cares away.
Christmas is here, bringing good cheer,
to young and old, meek and the bold.
Ding dong ding dong, that is their song
with joyful ring, all caroling.
One seems to hear, words of good cheer
from everywhere, filling the air.
Oh how they pound, raising the sound,
o'er hill and dale, telling their tale.
Gaily they ring, while people sing
songs of good cheer, Christmas is here.
Merry, Merry, Merry, Merry Christmas.
Merry, Merry, Merry, Merry Christmas.
On on they send, on without end,
their joyful tone to every home. :/:

On on they send, on without end,
their joyful tone to every home.

Ding dong ding dong ... Dong!

03 **Det lyser i stille grender** (Julekveld) 2:49

Jakob Sande / Lars Søråas d.y. / Henning Sommerro

Det lyser i stille grender
av tindrande ljøs ikveld,
og tusende barnehender
mot himmelen ljøsa held.

Og glade med song dei helsar
sin broder i himmelhall,
som kom og vart heimsens frelsar
som barn i ein vesal stall.

Der låg han med høy til pute,
og gret på si ringe seng,
men englane song der ute
på Betlehems auðe eng.

Der song dei for fyrste gongen
ved natt over Davids by,
den evige himmelsongen
som alltid er ung og ny.

Den songen som atter tonar
med jubel kvar julenatt
om barnet, Guds Son, vår sonar,
som døden for evig batt.

The glow of a peaceful village,
the glitter of Christmas lights,
a multitude of hands upheld
towards shimmering heavenly heights.

Joyful in song they welcome
their brother in heaven's hall,
who came down to be our Saviour,
A child in a cattle stall.

He lay there with hay his pillow,
and cried on his lowly bed,
while angels sang in the skies above,
the shepherds of Bethlehem

They sang for the first time ever,
that night over David's town,
the heavenly song eternal
whose words to this day resound.

A song that will ever echo
with joy on each Christmas morn,
when Jesus, God's son, our Saviour,
death's conqueror, was born.

04 **Deilig er den himmel blå** 3:05

N. S. F. Grundtvig / J. G. Meidell / Andrew Smith

Deilig er den himmel blå,
lyst det er å se derpå,
hvor de gylne stjerner blinker
hvor de smiler, hvor de vinker
/: oss fra jorden opp til seg :/
Da med ett det ble å skue, en så klar på himlens bue.

Stjernen ledet vise menn
til den Herre Kristus hen;
Denne stjerne lys og mild
som kan aldri lede vill,
er hans Guddoms ord det klare,
som han lot oss åpenbare
/: for å lyse for vår fot :/
Vi har og en ledestjerne og når vi den følger gjerne.

05 **Jul i svingen** 2:17

Kjetil Indregard / Odd Nordstoga
bearbeidet av Anne Karin Sundal-Ask

Stille senker natten seg, over deg og over meg.
Snøen faller, alt er hvitt, se så vakkert alt er blitt.
Snart er julen her på ny, i hver bygd og i hver by.

Se nå daler snøen hvit, julenissen kommer hit,
til vår fjerne lille sving. Der vi samlet står i ring,
rundt vår lille julelykt. Alt er godt og alt er trygt.

Jorden snurrer rundt seg selv, lys blir mørke, dag blir
kveld. Rekk meg hånden kjære venn, la ditt øye gli
igjen. Her står vi i et vennskapsbånd, varmen går fra
hånd til hånd.

Sky so full of purest blue,
our delight it is to view,
where the golden stars do glitter
how they smile and beckon thither
/: from our worldly realm to theirs :/
And in the firmament, behold, a star so bright of purest gold.

The star led wise men on their way
and showed them where the baby lay;
This gentle star, as bright as day
will never lead us from our way,
it is His word, so clear and pure,
revealed within the star we saw
/: To be a lantern to our feet :/
We, too, have a guiding star to follow on our journey far.

Softly falls the night in darkness over you and me.
Softly falls the snow and all is beautiful to see.
Christmas is coming soon to every village, every town.

See, the snow falls white, Santa's on his way to our
corner of the world. We gather round our snow
lantern's warm light. All is safe and all is right.

Earth is spinning, dims the light and now the day will
soon be night. Let me take your hand, my love, and
your eyes may gently close. Joined in friendship, hand
in hand, Christmas warmth throughout the land.

06 **Glade jul** (Stille natt) 2:23

Franz Gruber (*uten ord*)

Silent Night

07 **Joleklokker over jorda** 3:45

Anders Hovden / Rikard Nordraak / Tone Krohn

Joleklokker over jorda,
ring no høgt frå tårn og tind,
ring no ut dei sæle orda:
Fred frå Gud i alle sinn!
Klokker vidt om verda kime
mildt til alle hjarto ned.
I vår Frelsars fødselstime,
arme jord, ha jolefred!

Fader, send din fred til alle
dei som sit i sorg og sut,
ljøse himmelklokker ringer
dei frå lidingsnatta ut!
Vis på jorda alle stader
bur ei ætt av same blod,
kjøpt til born av same Fader,
sysken, eitt i hug og mod.

Send oss, Gud, din kjærleiks Ande,
gjer det mellom kristne greitt,
knyt i nåde syskenbandet,
samanbind oss rett til eitt!
Våre stridar må du jamna,
småleg kiv og ovunds ferd,
alle kristne sysken samna
til ein samlynd Herrens hær!

Christmas bells across the earth,
sound your chimes from every tower,
ring out loud the joyful words:
Peace from God to all this hour!
Bells across the world, call softly
to the hearts of all beneath.
As the Saviour's birth we herald,
o pitiful earth, have peace!

Father, send your peace to all
of those who deep in sorrow grieve,
bright bells in God's kingdom, call
and grant them from their pain relieve!
Reveal to them that on this earth
there dwells a race of all one kin,
who by the Father, from their birth,
are brother, sister, saved from sin.

Breathe upon us, Lord, your love,
and bring your people close together,
make us children by your grace,
bind us all to one another.
Quench our thirst for war and conflict,
petty quarrels, evil ways,
your Christian family, united
to do your will and sing your praise!

08 **Eg veit i himmerik ei borg** 2:32

Bernt Støylen / trad / Linn Andrea Fuglseth
bearbeidet av Anne Karin Sundal-Ask

Eg veit i himmerik ei borg,
ho skin som soli klåre,
der er kje synder eller sorg,
der er kje gråt og tåre.

Eg er ein fattig ferdamann,
må mine vegar fara
herfrå og til mitt fedreland,
Gud, meg på vegen vara!

Me takkar deg til evig tid,
Gud Fader, alle saman,
for du er oss så mild og blid
i Jesus Kristus! Amen.

09 **Jul, jul, strålende jul** 4:02

Edvard Evers / Gustaf Nordqvist / Carl-Bertil Agnestig

Jul, jul, strålende jul,
glans över vita skogar,
himmelens kronor med gnistrande ljus,
glimmande bågar i alla Guds hus,
psalm, som är sjungen från tid till tid,
eviga längtan till ljus och frid!
Jul, jul, strålende jul,
glans över vita skogar!

In heaven there stands a palace fair,
as radiant as the sun she beams,
no sin or sorrow find we there,
nor bitter tears nor evil dreams.

A pilgrim, through this world I roam,
let every path where'er I stray
lead safely to your heavenly home,
protect me, Lord, along the way.

We give you thanks for evermore,
God Father, all, and every one,
for you are gentle, mild and pure
in Jesus' holy name! Amen.

Yule, Yule, radiant Yule,
shining above the white forest,
heavenly crowns of brilliant light,
glittering bows in God's house everywhere,
hymn that is sung from age to age,
eternal longing for light and peace!
Yule, Yule, radiant Yule,
shining above the white forest!

Kom, kom, signade jul!
Sänk dina vita vingar
över stridernas blod och larm,
över all suckan ur människobarm,
över de släkten, som gå till ro,
över de ungas dagande bo!
Kom, kom, signade jul!
Sänk dina vita vingar!

10 **Jeg er så glad hver julekveld** 6:28

Marie Wexelsen / Peder Knudsen / Andrew Smith
*Sopransolister: Janna Dons Strøm, Elida Angvik Hovdø og Agnes
Onshus Grønn. Altsolister: Anna Elisabeth Giercksky Russnes,
Amalie Eikenes Randen og Anne Magdalene Bru Rem*

/: Jeg er så glad hver julekveld,
for da ble Jesus født;
Da lyste stjernen som en sol
og engler sang så søtt. :/:

Jeg er så glad hver julekveld,
da synger vi hans pris;
da åpner han for alle små
sitt søte paradis.

Da tenner moder alle lys
så ingen krok er mørk;
hun sier stjernen lyste så
i hele verdens ørk.

Come, come, blessed Yule,
lower your snow-white wings
over the blood and noise of conflict,
over the sighing of humankind,
over generations going to rest,
over the young where life blossoms!
Come, come, blessed Yule!
Lower your snow-white wings!

/: I feel such joy each Christmas eve,
when Jesus Christ was born;
the star shone brightly as a sun
and angels praised the Lord. :/:

I feel such joy each Christmas eve,
we sing his praise on high;
he opens wide for all the young
the gates to paradise.

My mother lights the candles
so the darkness cannot hide;
she says the star shone just like this
across the world so wide.

Hun sier at de engler små,
de synger og i dag
om fred og fryd på jorderik
og om Guds velbehag.

Jeg holder av vår julekveld
og av den herre Krist,
og at han elsker meg igjen,
det vet jeg ganske visst.

11 **Nå tennes tusen julelys** 3:31
Emmy Köhler / Emmy Köhler

Nå tennes tusen julelys
på jorden mørk og kald
og tusen, tusen stråler og
I himlens høye hall.

12 **Mitt hjerte alltid vanker** 8:28
Hans Adolph Brorson / trad / Henning Sommerro

Mitt hjerte alltid vanker
i Jesu føderom,
der samles mine tanker
som i sin hovedsum.
Der er min lengsel hjemme,
der har min tro sin skatt;
jeg kan deg aldri glemme,
velsignet julenatt.

She tells me that the angels small,
still sing their song today
of peace and joy to one and all
and of God's holy grace.

I love this time of Christmas joy,
I love Lord Jesus too;
and that he loves me in return,
I full know to be true.

A thousand Christmas lights ablaze
upon the dark, cold earth
and many, many thousands more
in heaven's great halls above.

My heart will always linger
at the birth-place of our Lord,
my thoughts will ever gather there
and yearn with one accord.
My longing finds its dwelling place,
my faith, its one true goal;
remembering that Christmas night,
forever in my soul.

Den mørke stall skal være
mitt hjertes frydeslott,
der kan jeg daglig lære
å glemme verdens spott.
Der kan med takk jeg finne
hvori min ros består,
når Jesu krybbes minne
meg rett til hjerte går.

Jeg gjerne palmegrene
vil om din krybbe strø,
for deg, for deg alene
jeg leve vil og dø.
Kom, la min sjel dog finne
sin rette gledenstund,
at du er født her inne,
i hjertets dype grunn!

13 **Folkefrelsar** 5:48
Bernt Støylen / trad. Einsiedeln / Tone Krohn
*Sopransolister: Janna Dons Strøm, Elida Angvik Hovdøl
og Agnes Onshus Grønn*

Folkefrelsar, til oss kom,
fødd av møy i armodsdø!
Heile verdi undrast på
kvi du soleis koma må.

Herrens under her me ser,
ved Guds Ande dette skjer.
Livsens ord frå himmerik
vert i kjøt og blod oss lik.

Your stable, dark and dim, shall be
a palace for my heart,
where I can daily pray and learn
from worldly scorn to part.
In gratitude I there might find
wherein salvation lies,
remembering your lowly crib
for you, my heart still cries.

Branches of the choicest palms
I scatter where you lie,
for you, and only you, my Lord,
I long to live and die.
Come, for there my soul shall find
its one and true delight,
that you were born for all mankind,
deep in my heart that night.

Come, thou Redeemer of the earth,
and manifest thy virgin-birth!
Let every age adoring fall;
such birth befits the God of all.

Begotten of no human will,
but of the Spirit, Thou art still.
The Word of God in flesh arrayed,
the promised fruit to men displayed.

Utan synd han boren er
som all synd for verdi ber.
Han er både Gud og mann,
alle folk han frelsa kann.

Frå Gud Fader kom han her,
heim til Gud hans vegar ber,
ned han fór til helheims land,
uppfór til Guds høgre hand.

Du som er Gud Fader lik,
ver i vanmakt sigerrik!
Med din Guddomsvelde kom,
styrk oss i vår armodsdom!

Klårt di krubbe skina kan,
ljuset nytt i natti rann,
naud og natt til ende er,
trui alltid ljuset ser.

Lov og takk, du Herre kjær,
som til verdi komen er!
Fader god og Ande blid,
lov og takk til evig tid!

14 **Ljuset nytt i natti rann** 4:15
Tord Gustavsen

The virgin womb that burden gained
with virgin honor all unstained.
The banners there of virtue glow;
God in His temple dwells below.

Forth from His chamber goeth He,
that royal home of purity,
a giant in two-fold substance one,
rejoicing now His course to run.

From God the Father He proceeds,
to God the Father back He speeds!
His course He runs to death and hell,
returning on God's throne to dwell.

O equal to the Father, Thou!
Gird on Thy fleshly mantle now;
the weakness of our mortal state
with deathless might invigorate.

Thy cradle here shall glitter bright
and darkness breathe a newer light!
Where endless faith shall shine serene,
and twilight never intervene.

15 **Deilig er Jorden** 3:37
Bernhard Severin Ingemann / trad. schlesisk folketone

Deilig er jorden,
prektig er Guds himmel,
skjønn er sjelenes pilgrimsgang.
Gjennom de fagre
riker på jorden
går vi til paradís med sang.

Tider skal komme,
tider skal henrulle,
slekt skal følge slekters gang.
Aldri forstummer
tonen fra himlen
i sjelens glade pilgrimssang.

Englene sang den,
først for markens hyrder,
skjønt fra sjel til sjel det lød;
Fred over jorden!
Menneske fryd deg!
Oss er en evig Frelser født!

Fair is our dwelling place,
fairer still God's heaven,
noble the path of the pilgrim souls.
Traversing the riches
of worldly beauty
we enter paradise with song.

Time, ever changing,
time, ever passing,
generations born and gone.
The music of heaven
shall never fall silent
in the soul's joyful pilgrim song.

First sung by angels,
to shepherds in the fields,
resounding with joy from soul to soul;
Peace to all on earth!
People, rejoice!
Our eternal Saviour is born!

*Fairest Lord Jesus, ruler of all nature
O thou of God and man the Son
Thee will I cherish, Thee will I honor
Thou, my soul's glory, joy, and crown*

*Fair are the meadows, fairer still the woodlands
Robed in the blooming garb of spring
Jesus is fairer, Jesus is purer
Who makes the woeful heart to sing*



Alfred and Nora

a short story by Tania Kjeldset, translated by Don Bartlett

Fair Is Creation

Alfred used to call her the Young Lass. Rarely Petra, which was her name, their only grandchild. Nora leaned over the railing and gazed across the treetops. All the subtle hues. From lemon-yellow to dark green tones. She wasn't able to enjoy the sight as she once had. It was the words Young Lass. He hadn't said them when they picked up Petra in the car. He didn't this morning either when she brought coffee to them in bed.

Nora ran her hand along the railing; it had splintered in several places. A woodpecker probably. It pecked at everything. Between the wild spirea bushes she could make out Alfred's red jumper. He was holding his arms aloft as though wading through deep water. Pushing forward down to the river in the strange way he did. He used to hack down the undergrowth when they opened the cabin in spring. Standing in the jungle, swinging a scythe with his long arms. Afterwards he would come up to her, steam rising from his skin, sweat running down his neck. But that is a long time ago now.

A gust of wind swept across the cherry tree, sending a storm of white flowers after him. Alfred moved to the side. He hadn't touched the scythe for three years. He forgot to empty the bird boxes. Didn't notice the poor state of the timber on the southern side. Didn't notice her either. But he would always go to the river. He didn't forget that. Not the river and not the spruce tree.

'Be careful!' she shouted. He raised an arm and waved to show he had received the message. But he didn't look up at the cabin, where she was. The newspaper lay on the chair. He had been doing the crossword. He had managed a couple of clues. Then gave up and put it down. She watched him until she could no longer see his red jumper.

'Is Grandad going down to the river again?' Petra was standing in the doorway. She had found a dress she used to wear and held it to her face. Nora could feel the sadness. It was a long time since Petra had been a little girl running around in a blue-checked summer dress.

'Yes, he likes going there, you know,' Nora said, taking the dress from her. She examined

it to see if there was a seam she could take out or a hem. There wasn't and she knew there wouldn't be.

'Summer dresses shouldn't be tight,' Nora said, passing her the dress. 'They should be as light and airy as cumulus clouds in the sky. And they should give off a fragrance. Of pressed cotton.' She winked at Petra. 'That's how it was when I was young.'

'Right. I was just tidying the drawer,' Petra pushed the dress into her hands as though it were something she didn't want to acknowledge, something that smelled. She had pulled a striped top over her head and her long legs stretched out from a pair of ultra-short shorts. Just having her around was a gift. Even the decaying cabin took on a conciliatory glow when Petra gave vent to her joy at seeing anything that Alfred had made for her. She inspected the doll's house with fond sighs and lifted pieces of furniture he had made. Sat on the swing with her phone, sending messages into the world. Slept in the hammock, with music in her ears. She wore the white wire around her neck like jewellery.

'What are you listening to now?' Nora asked. It was so strange the little earbuds didn't fall out, she thought.

'Music for the Christmas concert. There's sooo much to learn.'

'Bit odd to be practising carols in May,' Nora said.

'Why?'

'Well, bit tricky ... to get into the Christmas mood ...?'

'It's obvious you aren't in a choir,' Petra said. 'I'm not thinking about that now. I'm just training my voice and learning the lines. Thinking about other things.'

'Such as what?'

Petra had no answer to that. Or she didn't want to answer. Her arch grin suggested the latter.

'I'm going down to see Grandad,' she said.

'That's kind of you.'

Petra reacted with surprise.

'I'm not doing it to be kind, Grandma.'

It came as a sort of question. Or a mild reproof. She stood fingering one wire. Petra had such a sensitive mouth.

'He's stopped calling me young lass,' she said.

Nora just nodded. All of a sudden her throat was thick.

‘Actually, I’m too big,’ Petra added.

‘Yes, that’s probably why,’ Nora said quickly.

She took the dress with her into the bedroom and laid it in the suitcase. She would wash and iron it. Pack it in a box. As she did with the clothes she had a special fondness for. She hoped some of the wearer’s fragrance would remain as a soothing memory. If she kept ironing them. Life was full of self-deception, she thought. Nothing lasts. But opening this box gave her a sense that she was holding onto something permanent nevertheless.

Alfred followed the noise. The roar of the waterfall. As the water seethed and boiled. He stood in the middle of the bridge and stared down blindly at the masses of foaming water. The racket transplanted itself into his body; his throat smarted. His eyes filled with tears. All the things he had built with his own hands. The doll’s house. The annexe. The new gate. He tried to summon up one single detail. A door handle. A colour. But he couldn’t visualise anything. And he hadn’t recognised the cabin.

The bench was missing a board, but you could still sit by the river. And the Spruce was here, fortunately. Most of its branches pointed downwards. It still towered defiantly in the air though. Ailing, it stood beside small, anonymous trees whose names he couldn’t remember. Once he had kissed Nora beneath this tree.

‘The Spruce’s here,’ Alfred said.

He said it several times. His voice was hoarse and slightly unfamiliar.

‘And over there’s an oak.’

He spoke a little louder now. No one could hear him down here. The words wove elegantly into the roar of the river. A large bird landed on a rock. It was black and white. Beautiful actually. He saw it every day from his window. An unpopular creature. Noisy.

‘And I suppose it’s a crow,’ he said.

But the word didn’t feel right. It almost did, but not quite. It was a maybe. That was how it was now. Words disappeared like morning dew in the sun. Out of habit he put a hand in his pocket to take out his bird-watching binoculars. They weren’t there. Never mind, Alfred

thought. A bird is a bird. They fly away. But the Spruce is here. It isn’t going anywhere. It doesn’t ask any questions either. He closed his eyes. The river flowed into his auditory canals, splashing and gurgling. He pictured the forest full of old men. They were walking towards the river bank, in a silent procession. He wondered where they came from. But when he turned, it was his grandchild watching him. She had white wires hanging from her ears and asked softly if he had been asleep.

Petra took the thingummies from her ears and asked if he wanted to listen. It was a song he had taught her, she said. She had such long hair now. Almost down to her stomach.

‘Have I taught you songs?’

Petra laughed. ‘Sooo many,’ she said, bending over him. Her hair tickled. She put something in his ears, they were the earbuds. Now he was supposed to close his eyes too. But what he most wanted to see was her. And there was so much he had to take in before he forgot again. Her warm eyes. The birthmark on her neck. Her hands, bedecked with so many strange rings. Petra placed her hand over his eyes and closed them.

‘That’s it,’ she said. ‘Now I’ll put on the sound, Grandad.’

The voice came to him like a caress. The sad melody. Everything was so familiar. He was standing by his brother and singing. They were wearing white shirts. Through the church windows he could see it had started to snow. The words were just there. They came of their own accord. Alfred gazed across the river and sang: *I know of a heavenly stronghold, shining as bright as the sun; there are neither sin nor sorrow, and never a tear is shed.*

Petra sat down beside him and took out the earbuds. ‘You know all the words, Grandad,’ she said. He told her he and his brother used to sing at funerals. Often it was the hymns that opened the floodgates. But he could never look at the mourners’ faces. He hunted for something else. A candle, a window. In the old Varhaug church they could look out onto the sea. And then he had to think hard of something completely different. Because you couldn’t sing if you were on the verge of tears.

‘But you know that, don’t you,’ he said.

‘What did you think about then?’ Petra asked.

‘Often it was girls,’ Alfred said.
Petra laughed. She put her hand in her pocket and took out a bag of some black things. They looked like small boats.

‘These are your favourites,’ she said. ‘Liquorice boats.’
Alfred shook his head. He didn’t even know what liquorice was. She coaxed one into his mouth. It was hard. It didn’t taste like chocolate.

‘What else do you remember,’ he asked. ‘About me?’

Petra gave this some thought. She took another boat.

‘You used to call me young lass.’

‘Did I?’

Petra nodded. ‘But it doesn’t matter, Grandad,’ she said quickly.

She stood up. Almost before she had arrived she was on her way. He looked at her.

‘I’m losing words, Petra. Everything I’ve learned. Memories. They burst like soap bubbles in the air. But I will ...’

Petra reached out a pale arm and held his chin. ‘I know, Grandad,’ she said. ‘Don’t give it a thought.’

Ages Are Coming

Alfred lifted Petra’s duvet to his face. The aroma of her last visit still lingered in the room. Sun cream perhaps? Or perfume? There were little traces of her everywhere. A blue elastic band on a peg with some long hairs attached. The basket she used for her swimming things. On the dresser were the white earbuds. Perhaps she had more of them. He put them in his ears. Total silence. They just fell out again.

Nora was banging the cupboard doors in the sitting room. She was obviously annoyed about something. She kept giving him jobs to do all the time. She was flying around checking all the windows. At this moment she was emptying the fridge. Or was she washing up? Should he do that? What was he doing in Petra’s room?

On the dresser was one of their old photo albums. Nora had spent the summer looking at

pictures. Alfred sat down on the bed and opened it. They were photographs of their first time here. Nora was sitting in a deck chair reading. Alfred leaned over the photo. The colours were faded. She was wearing the blue blouse, the one he recognised. She had her hair tied up with a light-coloured scarf. The door banged open and there she was, the same Nora, but not as cheery as in the photo.

‘Why don’t you answer me when I call you?’

‘Did you call me?’

‘Did I call you?’ Nora rolled her eyes heavenwards.

‘I’d prefer not to drive home in the dark. You forgot to check the window catches, didn’t you.’ Window catches? What were they again? Alfred immersed himself in Nora’s young face instead. She had only two blouses. He knew they dried within an hour in good weather. He also knew the material of one of them was feather-light, verging on transparent, while the other one was stiffer, harder to iron. If Nora wanted to wear that one, she always arrived a little late at wherever they had arranged to meet. And when they were able to hug each other, finally, there was still the smell of the hot iron in the material, one he was always to associate with solemnity later.

‘The pillow cover is still on,’ Nora shouted. ‘And the duvet cover. You were supposed to change the bed linen!’

He turned. There was a little hollow in the pillow from Petra’s head. As though she had just been lying there.

‘Like this.’ Nora stretched over him. In one angry flourish she grabbed the pillow and removed the cover. ‘You never talk to me any more,’ she said.

He looked at her. There were fine, grey stripes in her short hair. Her eyes were heavy. She didn’t look happy. And that was perhaps his fault. He extended a hand towards her.

‘I feel so alone, Alfred.’

‘Sit down for a while then, Nora,’ he said.

Alfred stroked Nora’s back. In fact, it had been a long time, he realised. This back that he knew so well. He showed her the photo. Told her he had often stood in the gateway staring at the garden. At the clothes line. Nora looked at him.

'I didn't know that. Why?'

'I stared at your blouses. You had just the two. One short-sleeved; one sleeveless.' She leaned against him and yawned.

'You might be right at that. We didn't have a lot of money.'

'The short-sleeved one was light blue,' Alfred said.

'And the sleeveless one?'

'It didn't really have a colour.'

'That was the blouse you preferred,' Nora said with a chuckle.

'I'm afraid so, yes,' Alfred said.

Angels Proclaimed It

'You'll catch yourself a chill,' Nora said, laying her winter coat over his lap.

The church was well heated, but Alfred kept his coat on. He was thinner. He forgot to eat. She had to keep reminding him. They squeezed up on the hard wooden pews to make room for others. The buzz of voices was making her quite dizzy. Anticipation hung in the air. No one left the Christmas concert unmoved. You could see that in people's faces as they streamed out of the church. They spoke in softer tones, walked closer together, than when they arrived.

Alfred was fiddling with a plaster on his finger. He held it up to her, like a question mark. She pulled the plaster off and removed the cotton wool. No reason to go back over the doctor's appointment now. It would only confuse him. She passed him the programme. There was a picture of the choir on the front.

'See if you can find Petra,' she said.

'You mean the Young Lass, don't you?' Alfred said.

'Yes,' Nora said, somewhat taken aback.

Alfred leaned over the programme. His finger shook. He smiled when he located her face.

'Where is she now?'

'Standing by the door,' Nora said. 'That's where the choir comes in.'

'The choir, yes.'

Alfred squeezed her hand. 'It'll be fine, Nora,' he said.

'Give him time and space when he wants to say something,' the doctor had said.

The lights went down. The congregation switched off their mobiles. Everyone waited for the conductor. Soon she would lead the choir through challenging waters. Every detail had to be right and their singing had to resound through the church and, not least, the hearts of all those attending. No small task, Nora thought, but this wasn't unfamiliar waters for any of the singers. And there lay the difference. The audience didn't have to sit in fear that someone might make a mistake or that the concert would come to grief. On the contrary, you could open your soul to the well-loved melodies. Maybe find yourself elevated. But she had forgotten the pastilles. She put her hand in Alfred's coat pocket. No tin of pastilles. But there was a big piece of cardboard in there. Alfred had noted something down. YUNG LASS, it said.

The conductor stood facing the auditorium. She smiled, but it was the choir she caught with her gaze. Then she tapped the tuning fork on her head and gave them the tone. The start is everything, Petra had explained to her. Beforehand, there is nothing to bind the audience with the choir. But as the first note resonates in the church everyone is a part of the music. Nora put the piece of cardboard back in his pocket and said nothing.

The choir opened with *Silent Night*. A muted, calm rendering. The altos shaped the notes so carefully that the sound rippled towards her like velvet. And the sopranos responded, taking the melody further, until it was picked up by another group of voices. Slowly they made their way up the central aisle.

'There's Petra.'

Entranced, Alfred watched Petra until she took her place with the others by the pulpit. Christmas concerts released something within him. He had this ability to become totally absorbed in music. To forget everything else. This must have been the link between the choir and the audience Petra had been talking about with such passion. But at this moment she was staring down the row of pews. Who was she smiling at? Nora leaned forward to see. Perhaps someone from her class was sitting there, a tall boy in a Marius sweater, dark curly hair, was that him?

Do things you enjoy, the doctor had said. Focus on whatever he can manage.

They had been sitting apart in the doctor's surgery. A light, spacious room looking out on a car park. The doctor wanted to know when Alfred had been born.

'Must be on there,' Alfred had said, pointing to the screen.

'But now I'm asking you,' the doctor said in a friendly voice.

Seconds passed. The doctor waited. Alfred twiddled his fingers.

'After the war,' he said.

'Which year?'

'1946, I think.'

'That's correct,' the doctor said. 'Can you tell me how old you are?'

'No,' Alfred answered.

Nora squeezed Alfred's hand. There wasn't supposed to be clapping between songs. He had already forgotten a few times. Most of the time the choir held a note; it underpinned and connected the songs like a quivering string.

Songs are among the last things we forget, the doctor said.

He gave Alfred a piece of paper. 'Can you read this to me?'

Alfred did. 'Dove – Gun – Pepper.' The doctor wanted him to repeat the words a little later. After they had chatted for a bit. Alfred nodded.

'What words?' he asked.

The conductor turned to the congregation again. The choir was regrouping. The girls stood in the side-aisles and ringed the auditorium. They were holding candles. Alfred watched closely. He had let his beard grow this autumn. It was white and a little lifeless, but formed a fine wreath around his chin. When the conductor raised her hand and the choir came in, he sat up straight. The limpid voices spilled through the church interior. Bright and sparkling. Petra had practised this hymn a lot during the summer. In the hammock under the chestnut tree.

In the car on the way to the ferry. There were so many verses, she said. *I know of a heavenly stronghold. Shining as bright as the sun.* The flame from the tallow candle illuminated Petra's face. She stood so erect and alive. There was so much future in her. Nora's throat constricted. The song was about something quite different. *There are neither sin nor sorrow. And never a tear is shed.* About having peace, she thought, and glanced up at Alfred.

About being received. Did they think about that? The young singers. About what they were communicating? It was impossible to know. They probably did, but their thoughts most likely flew hither and thither, as indeed hers did. Not to mention Petra's. Nora stared up at the ceiling with the enormous sun. Light was pouring in there too. Then she heard a grating noise. A noise that didn't fit. It came from Alfred. He was humming. Nora nudged him.

'It isn't a sing-along now,' she whispered. 'That's at the end.'

Alfred didn't hear. Instead he went for it. Started to sing. He remembered the lyrics. He joined in with the girls' crystalline voices. Muddying the tonescape. An old baritone, untrained. People had started to stir. Some hushed him. Alfred continued regardless: *I am a weary traveller; May my path lead me. From here to the land of my father; God, protect me on my way.* The choir sang. The conductor conducted. Her face was calm and concentrated. Then she turned to Alfred and smiled. She extended an arm, raised a hand and included him in the choir with a lofty gesture: 'Sing louder! So that we can hear.'

Alfred's voice trembled, a dark tone. It was far from perfect. But it was in tune. Nora tried to understand what had happened. Compassion, she thought. Charity? But can you deny an old man if he wants to sing? Does everything have to be perfect? She had been given a glimpse of Alfred as she remembered him. Confident and assured. He had forgotten the visit to the doctor. But she wouldn't.

'Where's your heart, Alfred?' the doctor asked. 'Can you point it out to me?'

Alfred could. He didn't need any time to reflect.

'There,' he said, pointing to Nora.

The Norwegian Girls Choir, with their conductor Anne Karin Sundal-Ask, has had extensive collaborations with renowned Norwegian ensembles, soloists and composers within a wide range of genres. Part of the choir's success is due to the deep trust established between the conductor and her singers. In this recording the unique qualities of both the choir and pianist Tord Gustavsen are brought forward and strengthened as a result of the encounter. The homogeneous sound and quiet dynamics of the choir contrast with the virtuosity of Gustavsen, whether they dance with him, express the melody, or provide a background of supporting sound constellations.

We may find our senses sharpened from the very first, dark sounds of the piano in *Carol of the Bells*. The insistent rhythmic beat in this first carol prepares us for a listening experience that differs from what we normally expect from a Christmas album. The dark foundation created by Gustavsen's direct use of the piano strings is contrasted with the ethereal sound of the Girls Choir – the dark and the light are equally responsible for the pure and full expression that sets the tone for the rest of the album.

In *The Bells* we are met both with melancholy and the raw power of Gustavsen's improvisations on the theme from *Carol of the Bells*. The opening bars of *Det lyser i stille grender* shroud the listener in shimmering, scintillating chords that form the backdrop when the melody emerges from the choir. These three opening pieces demonstrate the dynamic and varied compositional forms, tonal constellations and expressions found on this album.

Most of these Christmas carols have a solid place in the Norwegian music tradition, yet they emerge here as fresh and new. The holy Christmas magic in *Silent Night* is embraced in a peaceful, wordless performance. The voices deliver the melody while Gustavsen freely improvises over the more than 200-year-old carol theme. With natural authority Sundal-Ask manages to unite the slow, meditative vocal expression with the blue colour of jazz.

The performance of N.F.S. Grundtvig's *Deilig er den himmel blå*, arranged by Andrew Smith, represents a climax. The choir opens this carol with a varied tonal cluster of quiet intensity. The gradual dynamic buildup moves the listener through sparkling crescendos, creating a feeling of endless ascension.

The fused sound of the Norwegian Girls Choir and Tord Gustavsen never becomes predictable. It is the result of a seamless communication between the pianist, the conductor, and the choir, unifying the musicians with the listener.

The improvisations bring with them a breath of Baroque opulence, drawing inspiration from folk music, jazz and elements of Sufi music. Gustavsen guides the listener through melancholic landscapes and sparkling ecstatic moments in the instrumental version of *Folkefrelsar*. His approach communicates the message of each carol in new and original ways, wordlessly.

The intuitive understanding Gustavsen shows for the qualities of the choir is essential to the final result. He spontaneously expresses himself around different vocal hues and registers, from the sheer, natural sound of the young recruits to the more mature vocal timbre of the Girls Choir. Gustavsen has a playful and expressive approach that invites us to explore this landscape with him. The choir and the pianist affect the listener through demanding, heart-felt crescendos. We find examples of this slow and impressive buildup in *Jul, Jul strålende Jul*, *Folkefrelsar*, and *Eg veit i himmerik ei borg*.

Deilig er jorden seals this Christmas album. The Norwegian Girls Choir and Tord Gustavsen conclude their journey with a warm contrast to the initial resounding piano strings in *Carol of the Bells*. We rest in a soothing embrace – silently ready for Christmas.

Tania Kjeldset, 2020, translated by Katrine Kristiansen





2L (Lindberg Lyd) records in spacious acoustic venues: large concert halls, churches and cathedrals. This is actually where we can make the most intimate recordings. The qualities we seek in large rooms are not necessarily a big reverb, but openness due to the absence of close reflecting walls. Making an ambient and beautiful recording is the way of least resistance. The real challenge is to find the fine edge between direct contact and openness! A really good recording should be able to bodily move the listener. This core quality of audio production is reached by choosing the right venue for the repertoire, and by balancing the image in the placement of microphones and musicians relative to each other. There is no method available today to reproduce the exact perception of attending a live performance. That leaves us with the art of illusion when it comes to recording music. As recording engineers and producers we need to do exactly the same as any good musician; we must interpret the music and the composer's intentions and adapt to the media where we perform. Immersive Audio is a completely new conception of the musical experience. Recorded music is no longer a matter of a fixed one-dimensional setting, but rather of a three-dimensional enveloping situation. Stereo can be described as a flat canvas and Surround Sound as a field, but Immersive Audio is a sculpture that you can literally move around and relate to spatially. Surrounded by music, you are here able to move about in the aural space and choose angles, vantage points, and positions.

Morten Lindberg balance engineer and recording producer

Recorded in Uranienborg Church, Norway February 2020 by Lindberg Lyd AS

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Produced with support from Fond for Utøvende Kunstnere, Talent Norge,
Bergesensstiftelsen, Oslo Kommune, aktivitetsmidler for kor and Color Line

Tord Gustavsen appears courtesy of ECM Records



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This recording was made by Lindberg Lyd AS with DPA microphones and HORUS converters to a PYRAMIX workstation on Ravenna AoIP with Genelec ONE monitoring. Digital eXtreme Definition is a professional audio format that brings analogue qualities in 24 bit at 352.8 kHz sampling rate.

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- 1 Carol of the Bells 2:05
- 2 The Bells 2:04
- 3 Det lyser i stille grender 2:49
- 4 Deilig er den himmel blå 3:05
- 5 Jul i svingen 2:17
- 6 Glade jul (Stille natt) 2:23
- 7 Joleklokker over jorda 3:45
- 8 Eg veit i himmerik ei borg 2:32
- 9 Jul, jul, strålande jul 4:02
- 10 Jeg er så glad hver julekveld 6:28
- 11 Nå tennes tusen julelys 3:31
- 12 Mitt hjerte alltid vanker 8:28
- 13 Folkefrelsar 5:48
- 14 Ljoset nytt i natti rann 4:15
- 15 Deilig er jorden 3:37