

Tacoma Opera Intermezzo Series Presents

Årstider
Norwegian Seasons

Performed and Recorded January 16, 2022

Laura Loge, soprano

Steven Luksan, piano

Sommer - Summer

Lille due, Op. 27, No. 2

Signe Lund
(1868-1950)

Hvile i skoven, Op. 5, No. 3

Halfdan Kjerulf
(1815-1868)

Kløvereng, Op. 62, No. 1

Agathe Backer Grøndahl
(1847-1907)

Høst - Autumn

På skogstien, Op. 26, No 5

Edvard Grieg
(1843-1907)

Regn, *Fire Obstfelder sanger*, No. 3

Steven Luksan
(b. 1988)

November-måne, *7 sanger til dikt av Stein Mehren*, No. 1

Frank Havrøy
(b. 1969)

Vinter - Winter

Sne

Anne-Marie Ørbeck
(1911-1996)

Salme, *Fire Obstfelder sanger*, No. 4

Luksan

Vår - Spring

Vaarlængsel, Op. 1

Anna Severine Lindeman
(1859-1938)

Blonde nætter, Op 13, No. 1

Alf Hurum
(1882-1972)

Staresang

Ørbeck

Konklusjon - Conclusion

Så kort ein sommar menneska har

Gisle Kverndokk
(b. 1967)

Norway is known for dramatic landscapes and seemingly unspoiled nature, with its midnight sun in the summer and northern lights cutting through constant darkness in winter. Norwegians have always maintained a philosophy of *friluftsliv* – where every person has the right to enjoy unhindered access to the outdoors and to fully experience the beauty and power that humanity experiences in our ever-changing world.

This program explores that human/nature interaction as time progresses through the year, seamlessly transitioning from one season to the next through music and poetry created throughout the past two centuries. As we strive to understand what it means to be human in this world, we include the diverse voices of as many composers and poets as we can who have been inspired by the beauty of Norway, highlighting living composers as well as those long gone, both women and men, those who lived their full life in Norway, those who immigrated to the United States, and even those who compose Norwegian songs, yet do not claim Norwegian heritage.

In summer, a time of constant sun in the north, lush plants, insects, and animals thrive. The opportunities of the season are not lost on Norwegians, who do everything they can to embrace the nature around them. Signe Lund's "**Lille due**" (Little Dove) invites us to an eternal summertime, protected in a nest of our own, with a text by Gabriel Scott (1874-1958), an author best known for his children's literature, plays, novels and poems. Lund's setting, published while living in the mid-west in 1911, suggests the simplicity of a children's song, but with hints of darkness, reminds us summer cannot last forever. Like the dove protected in a nest, Haldan Kjerulf's "**Hvile i skoven**" (Rest in the Woods), published in 1868 with a text by J. S. Welhaven (1807-1873), places the singer in a protected glen in the woods, who in the heat of summer, enjoys a gentle breeze and shade from trees in the cool grass. The strophic song is as uncomplicated as the setting – simple, gentle, and delightful. Agathe Backer Grøndahl's "**Kløvereng**" (Cloverfield), composed in 1901 with a text by Theodor Caspari (1853-1948), gives us a closer look at what might be lurking in the grass all around us. Grøndahl's late-romantic style is on full display in this song, with drama ebbing and flowing through the music to imitate a breeze that courses through the clover field and encounters insects and flowers along the way.

As summer ends, autumn creeps slowly over the land. In Edvard Grieg's "**På skogstien**" (On the Stone Path), composed in 1876 to a text by John Paulsen (1851-1924), the memory of summer is still fresh, but a chromatically winding melody and dissonant harmonies grow in desperation and depth. The appearance of autumn comes with withering leaves and changing weather outside, but in this song, the change is also inside our own minds. Along the coasts of Norway, especially, autumn brings rain. Steven Luksan's setting of "**Regn**" (Rain), composed in 2018 to a text by Sigbjørn Obstfelder (1866-1900), provides a glimpse of joy we can find in the seemingly unending rain. Presented like a children's rhyme, the text perfectly illustrates how rain can sometimes feel incessant, even though we know it is good for us and the earth. As autumn persists, we look inward toward those we are with on this earth. Frank Havrøy's "**November-måne**" (November Moon), published in 2021, is a setting of a text by one of Norway's most prolific 20th century poets, Stein Mehren (1935-2017). The musical setting enhances this sensual poem, as darkness and stillness of coming winter inspires us to embrace our own intertwined lives.

Autumn gives way to a season of contrasts. Though winter's darkness is inescapable in the far north, northern lights reflect brilliantly off pure white snow covering the ground. Anne-Marie Ørbeck is perhaps Norway's most prestigious 20th century female composer, with a successful performing and composing career during her lifetime, yet her distinctively original songs are almost never performed. Instead of adopting atonality that was popular in mid-century Europe, Ørbeck's musical style retains tonal and modal harmonies. In **"Sne"** (Snow), composed in 1959 to a text by Arnulf Øverland (1889-1968), Ørbeck sets the scene of the first snowfall of the season. As the landscape turns white, the world becomes silent and time stands still. Even in the miniature form of a single song, the music acts as a tone poem evoking a specific occurrence, that magical moment when the snow begins to fall. In the solitude and cold of winter we can no longer avoid our own feelings. Steven Luksan's **"Salme"** (Psalm), again to an Obstfelder text, faces that frozen grief head on. Longing for relief for a heart that feels locked in grief, the poet sees only the hard beauty of the world through windows glazed with frozen ice-crystals.

After the long night of winter, it comes as no surprise that a yearning for spring provides inspiration for many Norwegian poems and songs. Anna Lindeman's **"Vaarlængsel"** (Spring Longing), composed in 1909 with a text by amateur poet Thora Busæth (1874-?), is one such piece. The mostly strophic song sits comfortably within the mainstream of the national-romantic style but sparkles with charm and longing for the return of warmer, brighter days. Alf Hurum is one of the few Nordic impressionists, and the influence of French impressionism is clear in his songs. **"Blonde nætter"** (Fair Nights) published in 1918 with a text by Vilhelm Krag (1871-1933), freely uses beautifully dissonant, parallel chords, and incorporates the sounds of water and birds to tell the story of an early-spring evening stroll where the longing is not just for spring but for an absent human connection. Even God cannot resist the spring song of a starling in **"Staresang"** (Starling Song), composed by Anne-Marie Ørbeck in 1964 to a text by Inge Krokann (1893-1962). Ørbeck created a perfect musical representation of a starling by opening the song with a clear birdcall, a motive repeated and developed through the rest of the song. In the end the heavens open up to full-fledged spring sunshine.

When long sunny days return to Norway, we find ourselves back in a summer meadow, watching a dove build a nest. However, as the final song muses, "All things happen again and again, but nothing happens exactly the same way." The cyclical nature of our lives is the theme of **"Så kort ein sommar menneska har"** (So Short a Summer People Have). Composed by Gisle Kverndokk in 2016 to a text by poet and farmer Liv Holtskog (1934-2014), our connection to the earth and nature is seen in this song through a modernist, Christian-humanist lens. Kverndokk's style is both accessible and intricately intertwined with the text, exploring not only the immediacy of nature around us, from aromas and sounds to physical sensations and sights, but also the complicated, yet simple, meaning of life: that we only get one brief time on Earth, and even if everything happens again and again, it will never be exactly the same for us. Throughout the year, and through the years, we must embrace what we are given, share with our fellow beings, and appreciate the beauty around us. We hope this music offers you a chance to enjoy the simple beauty of the present moment.

We are grateful to the following people for permission to perform these songs on today's program:

- Kjetil Ørbeck Smitt, son of Anne-Marie Ørbeck for her beautiful songs
- Solrun Krokann, Åslaug Krokann Berg, Sveinung Berg, and Sunniva Berg, daughter and grandchildren of Inge Krokann, poet of "Staresang"
- Steven Luksan, Frank Havrøy, and Gisle Kverndokk for permission to perform their songs