

**a** **KLEIBERG** Violin Concerto. Double Bass Concerto  
 • Daniel Reuss, cond; Marianne Thorsen (vn); Göran Sjölin (db);  
 Trondheim SO • 2L 59 (Hybrid multichannel SACD 50:54)

I came very close to passing on reviewing this CD based solely on the album title, “Treble & Bass,” and the fact that the composer, Ståle Kleiberg, was born in 1958. So sure was I that the works on this disc would be of an aesthetic persuasion to make Eminem sound like Mozart that I hesitated even to listen to it. But just as I was about to set the disc aside, I suddenly remembered reviewing Kleiberg’s *Requiem for the Victims of Nazi Persecution* (see 29:1), a work I called “profoundly moving.” Well, you know what they say about a book and its cover. Had I failed to play this new CD, I would have missed out on a transfixing experience and a transfiguring event. This music is of such transcendent beauty, words are inadequate to describe it. And searching the *Fanfare* Archive, I found myself not entirely alone. Paul Ingram, reviewing a recording of the composer’s symphonies in 27:6, mused, “I’m sure new music is not meant to be this enjoyable, straight off. Aren’t we meant to struggle and strain a bit?”

Ten seconds of the Violin Concerto are all it will take for you to be hooked; and you will spend the next 50 minutes simultaneously mesmerized by the music’s gorgeous outpouring and wondering where you’ve heard it all before. There are so many influences in these scores, it’s hard to apprehend all of them as they pass by. At one moment, one hears what sounds like a passage from Strauss’s *Don Quixote*, the next moment, a fleeting reference to Shostakovich’s 11th Symphony. There goes a snippet of Barber’s Violin Concerto, and there a snippet of the exquisitely beautiful but far less widely known 1978 Violin Concerto No. 2 by Lee Holdridge, a score I would not expect Kleiberg to know. Many others join the parade: Dvořák, Goldmark, Sibelius, Nielsen, Hindemith, Ravel in *Tzigane* mode, and even Chausson in *Poème* mode, if you can



believe that last one.

Some critics will call this so much derivative pap and claim that it abandons the pursuit of new modern music in the 21st century. They're wrong. Those who say this are the ones who are behind the times; for what they really mean is that it abandons the pursuit of 20th-century *avant-gardism*. The truth of the matter is that more and more composers born after WW II, who are maturing today into their fifties, as is Norway's Ståle Kleiberg, have recognized the bankruptcy of serialism, indeterminacy, the *musique concrète* crowd, minimalism, and the other isms and schisms of the latter half of the 20th century, and they are reestablishing the primacy of melody, harmony, and yes, beauty, in music. Are there young composers who still persist in making noise instead of music? Yes, but they are actually the ones who are the throwbacks to an earlier era. Today's real "modern" composers are the ones who are writing music that audiences can understand, appreciate, and love.

Both of the concertos on this disc are in three movements and as classically structured as are most of their 19th-century antecedents. But their sumptuous Romantic tapestries are woven on a modern loom that colors them in striking orchestral effects and often bold and imaginative harmonic and rhythmic reliefs.

Marianne Thorsen, in the Violin Concerto, can go from some of the most expressive *dolce* playing I've heard to navigating breathtaking technical cadenza-like passages with ease as effortlessly as a chameleon changes colors. And if proof be needed that the double bass can be an instrument of limpid and liquid vocal song, the playing of Göran Sjölin is the embodiment of that proof. It's rare for a release of this nature to vault immediately to my Want List, displacing another I'd already chosen, but as our publisher has often reminded us, it's always best to wait for a surprise late entry. For me, this one is it. And fantastic as 2L's recorded sound is in two-channel stereo, I'm sure those with full surround-sound capabilities will find it even more stunning. Five gold stars; and more Kleiberg, please. **Jerry Dubins**

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