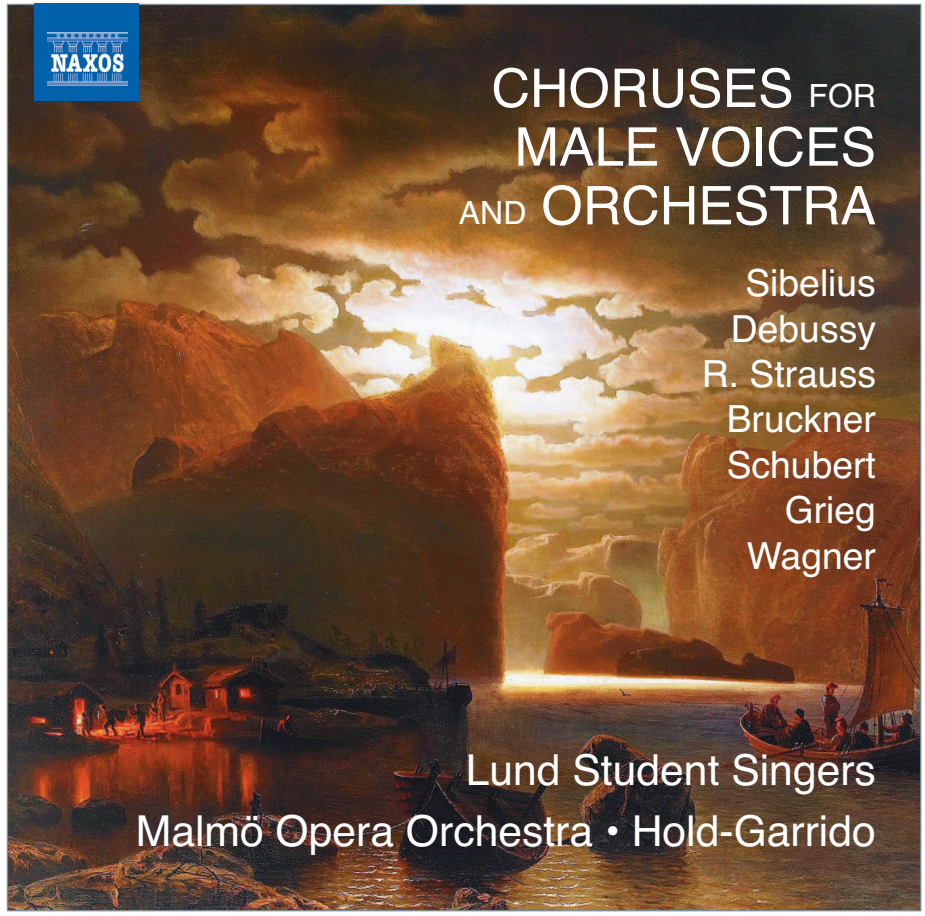
NAXOS
CHORUSES FOR
MALE VOICES
AND ORCHESTRA
Sibelius
Debussy
R. Strauss
Bruckner
Schubert
Grieg
Wagner
Lund Student Singers
Malmö Opera Orchestra • Hold-Garrido

Choruses for Male Voices and Orchestra

Sibelius · Debussy · R. Strauss · Bruckner · Schubert · Grieg · Wagner

Jean Sibelius grew to maturity at a time of fervent Finnish nationalism, as the country broke away from its earlier Swedish and later Russian overlords. Brought up in a Swedish-speaking family, he acquired a knowledge of Finnish language and traditional literature at school and the early Finnish sagas proved a strong influence on his subsequent work as a composer. After early training in Helsinki and later in Berlin, he made his career in Finland, where he was awarded a state pension. Although he lived until 1957, he wrote little after 1926, feeling out of sympathy with current trends in music.

Paavo Cajander's *Vapautettu kuningatar* (The Captive Queen) and the setting by Sibelius was first scored for mixed choir and orchestra and in a second version for male voices and orchestra. The queen of the title, imprisoned in a castle set on a rugged hill, overlooking the plain, is eventually recognised. Words and music had an overt political message, with the queen representing Finnish and the national identity of Finland, held captive by Russia. The original work was performed in 1906 to mark the centenary of the birth of Johann Vilhelm Snellman, a champion of Finnish language and culture.

In common with other young and ambitious French musicians, Claude Debussy, at the beginning of his career, took the necessary step of entering for the Prix de Rome, the competition that brought its winner prestige, a period of residence at the Villa Medici in Rome and a small stipend for a few years. The competition involved an initial formal test, the composition of a fugue and setting of a given text. Success in this would allow entry to the main part of the competition, the setting of a given text. Debussy's first attempt in 1882 brought failure in the initial test. In 1883 he entered again, this time passing the fugue test and the chorus setting of Lamartine's *Invocation*, the set text. Admitted this time to the main part of the competition, he duly set the text of *Le Gladiateur*, by Emile Moreau, winning the second Premier Prix. The following year, with his setting of *L'Enfant prodigue* by Edouard Guignand, Debussy won the Premier Prix. *Invocation*, designed for male voices and orchestra, was published posthumously in the composer's own scoring for voices and piano duet.

Although he seems to belong to another world, Richard Strauss was a near contemporary of Debussy. His setting of Eichendorff's *Tageszeiten* (Times of the Day) was made in 1928, the year after the completion of his opera *Die ägyptische Helena* (The Egyptian Helen), his penultimate collaboration with Hugo von Hofmannsthal, who died the following year. The Eichendorff setting of the four poems form a song-cycle, *Morning*, *Noon*, *Evening* and *Night*, and was written for Viktor Keldorfer and his Vienna *Schubertbund*. The second of the set, *Mittagsruhe* (Midday Rest), scored for male voices and orchestra, allows the latter to depict the time of day, the peace of a summer noontide.

Anton Bruckner, born near Linz in 1824, is known chiefly as a symphonist. He was trained as a schoolteacher and organist, and served in the second capacity in Linz until moving in 1868 to Vienna to teach harmony, counterpoint and organ at the Vienna Conservatory. His success as a composer was varied in his life-time, his acceptance hampered by his own diffidence and his scores posing editorial problems because of his readiness to revise what he had written. He was nine years the senior of Brahms, who outlived him by six months. Bruckner continued Austro-German symphonic traditions on a massive scale, his techniques of composition influenced to some extent by his skill as an organist and consequently in formal improvisation. His choral compositions include a number of works for church use, both large and small scale, and a repertoire of secular settings. *Helgoland*, a setting of a poem by the Austrian poet August Silberstein and scored for male voices and orchestra, was written in 1893 and published posthumously. It was one of Bruckner's compositions designed for the Vienna Männersangverein. Wagnerian in its instrumentation, the chorus honours the Saxon inhabitants of ancient Heligoland, saved by divine intervention from Roman subjugation. The work, with its contrasts of mood reflecting the changes of fortunes of the Saxons and their enemies, mounts to a climax of praise for free Heligoland. It should be added that in 1890, in the Zanzibar Treaty, Heligoland, which had been ceded by Denmark to Britain in 1814, had been exchanged with Germany for Zanzibar, while German claims to Uganda were surrendered, a matter of some contemporary controversy.

The significant contribution made by Franz Schubert to choral repertoire for male voices has generally been eclipsed by the attention paid to his very many solo songs. From 1812 until the last year of his life he continued to write setting after setting of works for male voices, compositions that largely suited the social circles in which he moved in Vienna, which provided both performers and audience. Schubert's first setting of Goethe's mystical poem *Gesang der Geister über den Wassern* (Song of the Spirits over the Waters) was written in 1819 for four-part unaccompanied male voices. This was followed by a version with piano accompaniment, written in December 1820. He continued with a version for eight voices, with accompaniment for two violas, two cellos and double bass and a further version for the same forces in February 1821. His first attempt to tackle the setting of this text had been in September 1816, with an attempted and incomplete version for solo voice and piano. The poem, written after Goethe's visit to the Staubbach at Lauterbrunnen, the spectacular waterfall in the Bernese Alps, presents the rushing water, flowing from the cliff-face downwards, as an image of the soul of man, which, like the water, comes from heaven, ascends to heaven and comes down to earth again, always changing.

In May 1872 a fête was held at the Norwegian Akershus fortress in aid of the restoration of Trondheim Cathedral. For the occasion the poet Bjørnsterne Bjørnson wrote his poem, *Landkjenning* (Land Sighting). A history of the kings of Norway by the twelfth-century Icelandic poet Snorri Sturluson tells how the tenth-century Norwegian king Olav Tryggvason, returning to Norway, where he established Christianity, planned to build a church at Nidaros. For this poem Edvard Grieg provided a correspondingly monumental setting, scored originally for double male chorus, baritone solo, wind and organ. In 1881 Grieg rescored the work for full orchestra, dedicating it to the piano manufacturer Karl Hals.

Richard Wagner's earlier career brought various difficulties, as he sought to establish himself. In 1841, however, when the possibilities in Paris had been exhausted, news came that his opera *Rienzi* had been accepted for Dresden, allowing him to move there with his wife, Minna. *Rienzi* was staged in October 1842, and proved successful. *Der fliegende Holländer* (The Flying Dutchman), the following year, was less well received, but Wagner was appointed conductor in Dresden, although his ambitions sought a wider sphere. It was at this time, in 1843, that he was invited to join the committee of the Dresden Liedertafel and wrote for them the biblical scene *Das Liebesmahl der Apostel* (The Feast of Pentecost), for which he wrote the text. For the performance of the work Wagner recruited a very large chorus and orchestra, but apparently found the result relatively disappointing, although he was able to give an account of the performance in glowing terms to a friend in Paris. With an unusual display of gratitude, he dedicated the work to the widow of his old teacher, Christian Theodor Weinlig. The first performance was given in the Dresden Frauenkirche, and Wagner was able to make use of spatial effects, with voices from above, in the cupola, and separation of groups of singers, with the twelve apostles represented by twelve basses. The work opens with an unaccompanied section, here omitted. This is followed by the entry of the large orchestra, at first with the sound of a drum roll and tremolo strings. The whole chorus wonders at the sound from above that fills the air, but the Apostles tell them to be of good cheer and listen to the Spirit, bidding them to look to the whole world, a field in which to spread the news of the Saviour. In a foretaste of *Parsifal* the people resolve to preach the word of God, to whom be all glory for ever and ever.

Keith Anderson

Mikael Stenbaek

Mikael Stenbaek studied at the Royal College of Music, Stockholm, from 1996 to 2002 and established himself during that time as one of his country's leading concert-, oratorio- and church-singers, active both in Sweden and beyond. Stenbaek has a special interest in J.S. Bach's evangelist parts and arias and has performed his *St John* and *St Matthew Passions*, *Christmas Oratorio*, *Mass in B minor* and numerous cantatas, as well as Mozart's *Requiem* and *Mass in C minor*, Handel's *Messiah* and *Solomon*, Haydn's *The Creation* and *Stabat Mater*, Mendelsohn's *Paulus*, Telemann's *Christmas Cantatas* and other oratorios, masses and cantatas. His has performed with Sweden's and Europe's leading baroque and modern orchestras, including the Drottningholm Baroque Ensemble, ReBaroque, Ensemble Elbipolis, Ensemble Akadémia, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra of Stockholm and Il Fondamento. Stenbaek has performed on a regular basis with conductor Eric Ericson since 1997 in numerous concerts both national and international. Other conductors that he has worked with include Andrew Parrot, Paul Goodwin, Lawrence Renes, Andrea Marcón, Peter Dijkstra, Gary Graden, Françoise Lasserre and Paul Dombrecht.

Daniel Hällström

Swedish baritone Daniel Hällström studied at the Royal College of Music and the Royal Opera Academy in Copenhagen. Early engagements included Dandini in *La Cenerentola*, the Father in *Hansel and Gretel*, Schaunard in *La Bohème*, Taddeo in *L'Italiana in Algeri*, Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Sheringham and Walsingham in B. Tommy Andersson's *William* and Gaston in *Beauty and the Beast*. During the 2007-2009 seasons Hällström was hired as first baritone at Opera Leipzig where he sang rôles such as Belcore, Marcello, Papageno, Escamillo, Don Giovanni and Figaro in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. Daniel Hällström is often engaged as a concert and oratorio soloist for works such as *Saul* and *The Messiah* by Handel, Bach's *Mass in B minor*, *Christmas Oratorio*, and the *St John* and *St Matthew Passions*. He has collaborated with conductors such as Giordano Bellincampi, Nicholas Braithwaite, Tobias Ringborg, Andrew Greenwood, Jan Wagner, Staffan Larson, Giancarlo Andretta and Ion Marin.

Lund Student Singers

Lund Student Singers (LSS) was founded in 1831 and is one of the oldest choirs in Sweden. In spite of its long history, the choir has maintained its vitality over the years thanks to a combination of professional and dedicated choral directors and invigorating turnover of singers – a typical feature of a university-based choir. Today the choir counts about 50 members, led by Choral Master Michael Bojesen. In addition to their five releases on Naxos, the Lund Student Singers have also recorded J.P.E. Hartmann's *Vølvens Spaadom* (Prophecy of the Seeress) as part of the Danish Cultural Canon Project. The choir's repertoire reflects its ambition to maintain and share the vast treasure trove of Swedish and Nordic songs with an international audience, as well as bringing the international contemporary male choral repertoire to a Swedish audience.

Malmö Opera Orchestra

Photo: Roos & Tegnér

Malmö Opera Orchestra was founded in 1991, making it one of the youngest in Sweden. The original and continuing rôle of the orchestra is the performance of opera and musical shows at Malmö Opera, but over the years they have also given concerts and made a number of recordings. This is their first on the Naxos label. Malmö Opera Orchestra is characterized by its ability to master a wide range of musical styles, creating a unique flexibility and sense of intimacy. The sixty-two musicians are just as familiar with classic opera repertoire as they are with modern musical and contemporary opera. Their present musical director is the senior conductor Leif Segerstam, who succeeded Joseph Swensen.

Alberto Hold-Garrido

Alberto Hold-Garrido was born in Barcelona and raised in Denmark. He studied choral and orchestral conducting at the Royal Academy of Music in Copenhagen, and continued his studies at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki in the legendary conducting class of Jorma Panula. He also took classes with Sergiu Celibidache in Mainz, Germany. After his graduation from the Sibelius Academy in 1994, Hold-Garrido worked as assistant conductor at the Finnish National Opera and also at the Savonlinna Opera Festival, where he assisted Maestro Leif Segerstam, who eventually invited him to work as a conductor at the Royal Opera House in Stockholm. From 2001 to 2003 he succeeded Segerstam in Stockholm as music director and principal conductor. In Stockholm Maestro Hold-Garrido developed a huge repertoire of operatic titles. Highlights included *Don Carlos* with Hillevi Martinpelto and Peter Mattei, preserved in a highly acclaimed recording, as well as a tour of *Norma* to the Deutsche Oper Berlin in 1998 with soprano Marina Mesheriakova in the title rôle. He has also had the honour to work with many distinguished stage directors, such as August Everding, Renata Scotto, and Giancarlo del Monaco. In addition to his career in Finland and Sweden, Maestro Hold-Garrido has been invited to many other countries all over the world. He has worked with the Belgian National Orchestra in Brussels, the Odense Symphony Orchestra, Welsh National Opera, Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz, Deutsche Nationaltheater, Weimar, Frankfurt Opera, Teatro Municipal, Santiago, Theater St Gallen, Graz Opera, Novaja Opera, Moscow, Teatro Nacional de São Carlos, Lisbon, Trondheim Symphony Orchestra, and the Estonian National Opera.

Drawing on the romantic spirit in music, Schubert's moving setting is of a poem by Goethe which compares a rushing waterfall to the soul of man, while Strauss's gorgeous *Mittagsruhe* depicts the peace of a summer noontide. Narrative vocal traditions are heard in Sibelius's nationalist *Vapautettu kuningatar*, Bruckner's heroic *Helgoland*, and Grieg's *Landkjenning*, which tells of the 10th century Norwegian king Oleg Tryggvason. *Das Liebesmahl der Apostel* anticipates the religious ecstasies of Wagner's *Parsifal*, while Debussy's early cantata *Invocation* resonates with Gallic sparkle.

CHORUSES FOR MALE VOICES AND ORCHESTRA

1. **Jean Sibelius (1865-1957): Vapautettu kuningatar, Op. 48 (The Captive Queen)** 10:11
2. **Claude Debussy (1862-1918): Invocation*** 7:16
3. **Richard Strauss (1864-1949): Mittagsruhe from *Tageszeiten*, Op. 76, No. 2 (Noonday Rest from *Times of the Day*)** 6:25
4. **Anton Bruckner (1824-1896): Helgoland** 12:06
5. **Franz Schubert (1797-1828): Gesang der Geister über den Wassern, D714 (Song of the Spirits over the Waters)** 10:19
6. **Edvard Grieg (1843-1907): Landkjenning, Op. 31 (Land Sighting)†** 6:40
7. **Richard Wagner (1813-1883): Das Liebesmahl der Apostel (The Feast of Pentecost)** 8:58

Mikael Stenbaek, Tenor* • Daniel Hellström, Baritone†
Lund Student Singers
Malmö Opera Orchestra • Alberto Hold-Garrido

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