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Saturday, 3 September 2016

Aksel!

Labels: [cd review](#), [video](#)



Handel arias from *Eternal Source of Light Divine*, *Joshua*, *Alcina*, *Rinaldo*, *Messiah* and *Samson*, Bach arias from *St John Passion*, *Magnificat*, Mozart arias from *Le nozze di Figaro* and *Exsultate Jubilate*; Aksel Rykkvin, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Nigel Short; Signum Classics

Reviewed by Robert Hugill on Sep 1 2016

Star rating: 4.0

The 13 year old Norwegian treble shows himself up to the not inconsiderable challenge of this selection of bravura baroque arias

[Aksel Rykkvin](#) is thirteen-year-old Norwegian treble who has become something of a phenomenon. This disc on [Signum Classics](#), recorded in January 2016 thanks to significant crowd-funding, sees Rykkvin performing arias by Bach, Handel and Mozart with the [Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment](#), conducted by [Nigel Short](#). And it certainly isn't a disc of easy pot-boilers, Rykkvin includes some pretty challenging music including Bach's *Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen* and *Ich folge dir gleichfalls* (from the *St John Passion*), Handel's *Eternal*

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A debut in the land of enchantment: I chat to Rhian Lois about performing Zerlina in Santa Fe



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Source of Light Divine and arias from *Joshua*, *Alcina*, *Rinaldo*, *Messiah* and *Samson*, two arias from Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* and the *Alleluia* from *Exsultate jubilate*. One of the interesting things about the programme is that most of the Bach arias, and the arias from Handel's *Alcina* were in fact written for the treble voice, but rarely sung like that nowadays.

Aksel Rykkvin (born 11/4/2003) was a member of the Children's Chorus of Norwegian National Opera & Ballet, and Oslo Cathedral Boys' Choir. His recent appearances have included a role in Rolf Wallinn's new opera *Elysium* which premiered in Oslo this year.

He has a bright, forward-sounding voice which has an enviable ease up to the top with only a very slight tightness in the upper notes. But what distinguishes him is his strong technique so that, as with more mature soloists, you listen to what he does with the music rather than whether or not he can negotiate the notes.

That the music on the disc takes no prisoners is indicated by the opening aria Bach's *Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen* which is taken at quite a lick and sung with a more than creditable degree of bravura. The passagework in some of the arias is slightly less than perfect, but a big of smudginess here and there is something which happens with many singers three times Rykkvin's age. *Ich folge dir gleichfalls* (from the *St John Passion*), is similarly poised and despite the complexities of the vocal part, Rykkvin manages to not only get through it with honours but he bring a shape to the music. *Bist du bei mir* is simply charming, as is *Angenehmer Zephyrus*, and *Quia respexit* from the *Magnificat in D major* is poised and beautifully controlled.

The two arias from Handel's *Alcina* bring out the sub-theme of this disc, the arias (including most of the Bach ones) originally written for the treble voice to sing.

But puberty occurs so much earlier nowadays (during Bach and Handel's day the onset of puberty causing the voice to break occurred between 16 and 19), so this means that few trebles are able to sing this music. Rykkvin's Handel singing is impressive, and he brings a wonderful brio to *Barbara! io ben lo so* from *Alcina*, whilst creating a creditable sense of emotional atmosphere and a lovely sense of line in *Lascia ch'io pianga* from *Rinaldo*.

Eternal Source of Light Divine brings out all that is best in Rykkvin, a beautiful clarity of tone, superb top note (concert A flat), very fine sense of line and a feeling for the long paragraphs in the music, but it has to be admitted that his sung English is nowhere near as clear as his German or Italian. Handel tended to use female sopranos for the *Messiah* solos, but it wasn't unknown for him to use trebles and here Rykkvin gives us a finely graceful *How beautiful are the feet*, and a rather brilliant *Thou art gone up on high*, followed by a joyful account of *Let the bright Seraphim* from *Samson* which simply makes you forget his age completely. *Had I but Jubal's Lyre*, his final Handel aria, demonstrates the sheer technical control he is able to achieve.



Aksel Rykkvin, Nigel Short and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment
at recording sessions in January 2016



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Mozart's Cnerubino in *Le nozze di Figaro* is played by a woman, though the character depicted is an adolescent boy. The sheer perfection of Mozart's music brings a challenge to all performers, and here Aksel acquits himself with credit. *Voi, che sapete* though well sung does rather lack emotional depth, but *Non so piu* is engagingly vivid. He concludes the recital with the *Alleluia*, from *Exsultate Jubilate* sung with superb confidence.

Throughout Nigel Short and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment accompany with poise, and give us some lovely instrumental solos in the many arias.

This is a lovely disc, a record of a voice which will inevitably change and no-one can predict that the adult Aksel Rykkvin will sound like. But the disc is more than simply a record of a moment, Rykkvin's not inconsiderable talents mean that the disc can simply be enjoyed in its own right.

- Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen, BWV 51 - Johann Sebastian Bach
- Also hat Gott die Welt geliebt, BWV 68 - Johann Sebastian Bach
- Joshua, HWV 64: Happy, oh thrice happy we - George Frideric Handel
- Alcina, HWV 34: Chi m'insegna il caro padre? - George Frideric Handel
- Alcina, HWV 34: Barbara! io ben lo so - George Frideric Handel
- Rinaldo, HWV 7: Lascia ch'io pianga - George Frideric Handel
- St. John Passion, BWV 245: Ich folge Dir gleichfalls - Johann Sebastian Bach
- Ode for the Birthday of Queen Anne, HWV 74: Eternal Source of Light Divine - George Frideric Handel
- Bist du bei mir, BWV 508 - Johann Sebastian Bach
- Messiah, HWV 56: How beautiful are the feet - George Frideric Handel
- Messiah, HWV 56: Thou art gone up on high - George Frideric Handel

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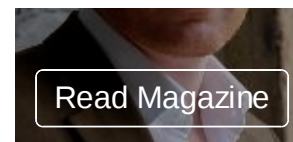
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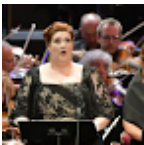
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