

AWAKE, MY SOUL, AND SOUND YOUR STRINGS

HEINESEN: *Awake, my soul, and sound your strings.*
WAAGSTEIN: *Paraphrase.* BAEK: *Pictures.* RASMUSSEN: *Caccia; Suite for Guitar.* BLAK: *40 Mile Ground.*

Olavur Jakobsen with **Alvi Joensen** (second guitar on *Caccia*)

FKT 061 CD

31 years ago, I was squinting at the *Reader's Digest Atlas* wondering what interest the Argentines had in an archipelago between Scotland and Scandinavia. Yes, I'd foolishly guessed the hitherto obscure Falklands lay somewhere near the Faroes. So as the Falklands debate enters the headlines yet again, it's delightfully ironic to report on a premium grade offering in which a Faroese guitarist unveils the music of his native terrain.

Jakobsen eases us in with ten variations on an *a capella* hymn. This promises much, but William Heinesen (1900-91) only partly unlocks its ethereal qualities. More developed is *Paraphrase* by Jógvan Waagstein (1879-1949), based on the Faroese melody to an Icelandic hymn. This and the Heinesen are referred to as 'arrangements', the original instrumentation being unclear. What's certainly clear is that Olavur Jakobsen is a stylish and assured player, qualities increasingly evident in all that follows.

Pictures by Kári Baek (b.1961) is a modern 'mini Mussorgsky', complete with *Promenades*. The paintings are reproduced in the booklet and are of Faroese origin. No movement is especially arresting but all are pleasingly succinct.

Baek's contemporary, Sunleif Rasmussen, enjoys a double innings starting with *Caccia*, in which Jakobsen is joined by his former student, Alvi Joensen. A persuasive contemporary middleweight, the work requires both players to whistle. Stepan Rak used this to charming effect in live performances of *Czech Fairy Tales*, although some might be uncomfortable with it in a less folksy context.

There are no reservations concerning Rasmussen's *Suite for Guitar*, in which the four staple movements of the baroque suite are revisited with electronics. Although our metal-strung brethren embraced this technology long ago (remember John Martyn performing *Small Hours* on the *Old Grey Whistle Test*, surrounded by clunky 70s gizmos?), classical guitarists have mostly been slow in following the lead. This is perhaps because much of the music produced so far is either impenetrable or just not very interesting, such as *Hinchinbrook Riffs* by Nigel Westlake. *Suite for Guitar* changes all that, the church-like echo in the *Allemande* being so subtly applied that it could almost have been captured acoustically. Too bad the longish but not unwieldy *40 Mile Ground* by Kristian Blak had to follow Rasmussen's multi-layered soundscapes.

Although this review was typed in January 2013, the CD arrived before Christmas. So can I retrospectively nominate it as my pick of 2012?

Paul Fowles