

COME SHINE + KORK

Norwegian Caravan

LAWO Classics LWC1104

To jazz fans outside of Norway, neither Come Shine nor KORK may mean a great deal. Once they have listened to and enjoyed this album, I suspect that not only will that omission have been rectified but they will have developed an appetite for more. Come Shine are a Norwegian jazz group who made their concert debut in 1999. Composed of a singer (the exceptional Live Maria Rikken) and a pianist, bass and drums, they specialised in unorthodox arrangements of jazz and other standards. They disbanded in 2004 after a relatively brief but highly successful recording career, having released three best selling jazz albums during a period of only four years. One of those was with their partners on this album, The Norwegian Radio Orchestra, known to Norwegians as “KORK”. Come Shine re-formed in 2012, seemingly even more imaginative and open to experiment. They released a further disc *Red And Gold* in 2014. The Norwegian Radio Orchestra has a high profile in its native country. Classically trained, the versatility of the musicians is such that they can creatively engage with any genre. Come Shine pianist and Hammond B3 organist, Erlend Skomsvoll, provides arrangements for Come Shine as well as for the orchestra on this occasion.

One of the great soul classics [*Sittin' On The*] *Dock Of The Bay*, forever associated with Otis Redding, is given a mesmerising treatment. Rikken almost whispers the lyrics yet still manages to inject sensuality into her singing. Hers is a distinctive sound, oblique in the way that, say, Norma Winstone can be. The backing is highly effective and there is an exquisite violin solo from Concertmaster Kolbjørn Holthe. *Willow Weep For Me* is notable for a variety of reasons, whether for the way, for instance, Come Shine and the orchestra combine to offer a truly inventive interpretation of this well-loved standard, or for Rikken's haunting take on the melody. There's a passage of scat worthy of Diana Torto (and she is one of the best when it comes to using the voice as an instrument). Another standout is Monk's *Well You Needn't*, where the orchestra rocks along like a Charles Mingus band, driven by Johansen on drums. The arrangement is idiosyncratic (well, it is a Monk tune!) and Rikken is once more superb. Another successful part of the mix are the solos by (unusually) the contrabass and also the trombone. *I'll Be Seeing You* had the potential to be at least as good as the tracks I've mentioned above. Live Maria Rikken delivers the lyrics of this familiar standard from the late 1930s beautifully, and bassist Sondre Meisfjord plays with passion. For me, what took the edge off it a little was the reading in Norwegian, of one of his poems, by Jan Erik Vold, over the music. I'm sure it was sensitively done but it tended to detract from the piece.

Elsewhere, the brief opener *Norwegian Caravan* segues into *Caravan* proper, so to speak. If there was any question of whether KORK could do justice to a jazz arrangement, such doubts are dispelled here. The clarity and jazz intonation of Rikken are obvious and there is some formidable piano from Erlend Skomsvoll. On *The Man Comes Around*, a Johnny Cash number of all things, Live Maria recites rather than sings but even pulls that off with flair. The orchestral accompaniment is vigorous, even exciting. The overall effect is dramatic and reminds us of why jazz has been described as 'the sound of surprise'. *Ode To The Silent Birds* is a short reverie with flute solo and minimal orchestral support. *Something To Live For* was the first Billy Strayhorn composition to be recorded by Duke Ellington. Rikken's voice brings out the beauty of the melody

and the poignancy of the lyrics. Once more, there is a classy contribution on bass from Meisfjord. The final track, *Danny's Dream*, is from the pen of the Swedish baritone saxophonist, Lars Gullin, with lyrics by Lars Söderberg. Maybe it is more conventional than some of Riggen's earlier vocal offerings but it still delights. Skomsvoll on piano and Holthe on violin, in particular, bring added lyricism to the proceedings.

This album proves to be tremendous fun as well as deeply moving at times. The orchestra is full of energy and musicianship while *Come Shine* reveal the musical benefits of long association. Above all, there is the adventurous vocal talent that is Live Maria Riggen. Music like this both stimulates and satisfies.

James Poore

(I was delighted to see the Austin A40 GP4 on the cover. It was the first vehicle I ever owned. - Len Mullenger)

http://www.musicweb-international.com/jazz/2017/come_shine.htm