

Janne Mark with Arve Henriksen – ‘Kontinent’

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Janne Mark with Arve Henriksen – *Kontinent*
(ACT 9742-2. Review by Julian Maynard-Smith)

Janne Mark
Kontinent
with Arve Henriksen



‘Hymn’ is a word freighted with emotional connotations: yours may differ from mine, but for me the dominant image is the turgid Victorian hymns I was forced to sing in chilly chapel services at school, and mumble through at weddings and funerals. It nearly put me off reviewing this CD by **Janne Mark**, described as a ‘singer, songwriter and hymnist’ who is ‘a strong voice in contemporary hymn writing’. Of course ‘hymn’ can also embrace the joyousness of gospel music and centuries of breathtakingly beautiful European choral repertoire – and I’m glad these counterexamples helped me to keep enough of an open mind to listen to this album.

The music’s most certainly not gospel – in fact, it’s at the opposite end of the extraversion/introversion spectrum, a set of reflective pieces with a strong sense of Nordic and Celtic folk music, reinforced by several pieces being sung in Danish (but with English translations in the CD booklet) – a mood further reflected in the booklet photos of Mark standing against a seascape backdrop of misty greys. Mark’s intimate vocal style put me in mind at times of a Danish version of Norma Winstone or late period Kate Bush, beautifully counterpointed by the whispery softness and vocal expressiveness of the trumpet of **Arve Henriksen**, who also provides atmospheric electronics, and produced the album.

The piano, bass and drums (**Henrik Gunde**, **Esben Eyermand** and **Bjørn Heebøll** respectively) provide very discreet support: spacious lines rather than walking bass, brushes and cymbal splashes rather than sticks and hi-hat. These sonic textures are further coloured by Gunde’s harmonium, mellotron and vibraphone; and by **Nils Økland** on violin, and hardanger fiddle and viola d’amore (both violin-like instruments supplemented with sympathetic strings).

The most strident the music gets is *Kingsfold*, a folk tune thought to date from the Middle Ages, with march drums and English lyrics from a nineteenth century pastor called Horatius N Bonar giving a church-like feel. Another ancient piece is the seventh century Celtic lullaby *Taladh Chriosta*, although many tunes are Mark’s own compositions. Other influences include poetry, the lyrics for *Har døden taget noget fra dig så giv det tilbage* (*When Death Takes Something From You Give it Back*) quoted from the Danish poet Naja Marie Aidt.

No hymns as I knew them, then – all the tunes are far lovelier and more delicate than that.

***Kontinent* is released on ACT music today, 13 November 2020.**