

material records presents:

**Mahler Lieder**

**Elisabeth Kulman & Amarcord Wien**

MRE027-2

Elisabeth Kulman, Mezzosopran  
Sebastian Gürtler, Geige  
Michael Williams, Cello  
Gerhard Muthspiel, Bass  
Tommaso Huber, Akkordeon

Producer: Wolfgang Muthspiel  
Co-Producer: Elisabeth Kulman

release date: September 16, 2009

Elisabeth Kulman and Amarcord Wien show proof to the fact, that it is possible to present a well known and popular composer like Gustav Mahler in a new and fascinating way! In the performance tradition of Mahler's Lieder they find between the extremes of „voice and piano“ and „voice and orchestra“ another, chamber-music-orientated approach of interpretation - with astonishing results!

The dialogue between Elisabeth Kulman's velvet mezzo-soprano and the unconventionally cast – with regard to Mahler - ensemble Amarcord Wien, creates an atmosphere between subtle simplicity and folkloric minstrelsy. Their interpretation enables us to realise the striking modernity as well as the folksong-roots of Mahler's musical themes.

This is Elisabeth Kulman's first solo-CD. The album impressively proves what has been evident already to listeners of her concert and opera performances: that she has an absolutely perfect voice for recording. Her precise, sensitive, delicate and intense singing impresses on CD as much as it did on the concert and opera stage over the past years. As a member of the Vienna State Opera performing leading roles she has already reached the highest possible status of an opera singer in her home country. It is almost impossible for a compatriot to convince the domestic audiences in Vienna of one's merits – but she did! As soon as she reached an international standard in her home country, she spread her wings and her global career flourished. In Paris she was asked to perform Gluck's „Orpheus“, in Berlin „Carmen“, in Munich Bach's „Saint John's Passion“, in Barcelona she sang Mozart arias, on to Tokyo for Strauß' „Fledermaus“, and the list goes on ... Among the conductors regularly inviting Elisabeth Kulman are world-famous names like Nikolaus Harnoncourt, Seiji Ozawa, Zubin Mehta, Thomas Hengelbrock, Franz Welser-Möst and Peter Schreier. In the opening premiere of the Salzburg Festival in 2010, she is invited to sing the title role in Gluck's „Orfeo ed Euridice“, conducted by Riccardo Muti.

The ensemble Amarcord Wien have a unique position in Austria's musical life. Their non-traditional formation, with violin, violoncello, double bass and accordion is regularly mentioned, but also because of their repertoire, which has no limitations or boundaries in terms of genre. Also because of their special methods of developing interpretations and creating arrangements within rehearsals. This open-minded, down-to-earth-approach to music and their permanent search of dialogue with other musicians enables them to approach recording with startling results. This album of Lieder created, together with Elisabeth Kulman is an interpretation of some of Mahler's finest songs that oscillates between melancholia and cheerfulness. A worthwhile and innovative new encounter with Gustav Mahler's famous Lieder!

**Album presentation & brief concert:**

October 19, 2009: State Opera, Vienna (A), 6 pm

October 22, 2009: Allerheiligen Hofkirche, Munich (D), 8 pm

## **Biographical notes**

### ***Elisabeth Kulman***

The Austrian mezzo-soprano and contralto Elisabeth Kulman impresses audiences with her combination of a distinctive, colourful timbre, musical authority and a charismatic presence. Her vocal flexibility, stylistic empathy and linguistic talents allow her to perform virtually any repertoire, from early music to classical, and from romanticism to contemporary music. She successfully sang Carmen at the Berlin Staatsoper unter den Linden, Orpheus (Gluck) at the Opéra National de Paris and Marina in Mussorgsky's Boris Godunov, as well as Verdi's Mrs. Quickly (Falstaff), Ulrica (A Masked Ball), Fenena (Nabucco), Polina and Olga in Tchaikovsky's operas "Pique Dame" and "Eugen Onegin", Brigitta (The Dead City/Korngold), Suzuki (Butterfly/Puccini), and many other roles at her home venue, the Vienna State Opera. She was awarded the Eberhard Waechter Medal in 2007 for her interpretation of Prince Orlofsky in Strauß' "The Bat". That same year, her interpretation of the title role in the opera "Il Giustino" by the baroque composer Giovanni Legrenzi at the Schwetzingen Festspiele (conducted by Thomas Hengelbrock) helped it to gain the honour of "Rediscovery of the Year". At the Vienna State Opera, she will embody the role of Gora in the debut performance of Aribert Reimann's "Medea" in the 2009/10 season and will debut as Waltraute (Twilight of the Gods) and Fricka (The Rhine Gold, The Valkyrie) in Wagner's "Ring". In the opening premiere of the Salzburg Festival in 2010, she is invited to sing the title role in Gluck's "Orfeo ed Euridice", conducted by Riccardo Muti.

Besides opera roles, another focus of Elisabeth Kulman's musical activities is concert performances. As an internationally sought-after soloist, she is a regular guest at Vienna's Musikverein and Konzerthaus, and she has collaborated with conductors including Nikolaus Harnoncourt, Franz Welser-Möst, Adam Fischer, Thomas Hengelbrock, Zubin Mehta and Sebastian Weigle. A recording of J.S. Bach's "Christmas Oratorio" with Peter Schreier as the evangelist and conductor has been released on DVD. Her upcoming highlights in 2009 include Franz Schmidt's "The Book with Seven Seals", conducted by Nikolaus Harnoncourt, and Wagner's "Wesendonck Lieder" at the Vienna Musikverein.

Elisabeth Kulman is also a devoted lieder recitalist. In November 2007, she made her highly acclaimed debut with a multilingual evening of songs at Vienna's Musikverein, accompanied by pianist Walter Moore. Besides duets, she also carries out her own projects in collaboration with exceptional ensembles: She compiled a Mussorgsky programme with an international jazz quartet, and she is singing new adaptations of Mahler songs together with the ensemble Amarcord Wien. Both projects will soon be available on CD.

Background: Elisabeth Kulman first studied Slavic and Finno-Ugric linguistics at the University of Vienna, and only set out on her path to a professional vocal career at a later stage. She completed her vocal studies with honours as a soprano in both opera and Lied/oratorio with Helena Lazarska at the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna in 2001. She received the Award for Academic Excellence from the Austrian Federal Ministry of Arts and Culture for her exceptional artistic achievements. That same year, she made her splendidly successful stage debut as Pamina at the Vienna Volksoper and quickly established herself in other Mozart roles, such as Contessa and Donna Elvira. In the summer of 2004, she completed her transition to the mezzo-soprano and contralto Fach and received the Salzburg Festival Prize at the International Summer Academy of Fine Arts in Salzburg for her interpretation of the Wesendonck Lieder. Elisabeth Kulman continues to receive vocal advice from Helena Lazarska.

## **Amarcord Wien**

Amarcord Wien is a Quartet Violin-Cello-Bass-Accordion.

Although the musicians have their roots in the classical tradition, they are not bound to any particular style. Thrilling interpretations of such diverse composers such as Astor Piazzolla, Modest Mussorgskij and Erik Satie, are complemented by their intuitive and original arrangements of ethnic music from all corners of the world.

A remarkable sense of tonal quality, a broad stylistic pallet and the sheer joy of performing have become the trademarks of Amarcord. They have given many performances throughout Austria, including in the celebrated concert venues of Vienna such as the Konzerthaus Wien, Radiokulturhaus, and the renowned Jazz club, Porgy&Bess; developing a substantial and dedicated following. In 2002 they performed at the opening of the Architecture-Biennale in Venice, and in 2003 they took part in the opening of the Klangwolke in Linz.

Sebastian Gürtler is a unique violinist; he can both stun you with his virtuosity and seduce you with his tone. This unconventional artist draws you with him in his continual search for new and more fertile musical pastures. Sebastian studied in music academies in Brussels, Geneva and Vienna. Many of the AMARCORD arrangements flow from his hand. Born near to Salzburg he for 10 years has been 1st Concertmaster at the Vienna "Volksoper" and since 2005 is 1st violinist of the Hugo Wolf Quartet.

Michael Williams is the cellist. He was born in France, and grew up in Australia. Michael is the ideal counterpoint to Sebastian Gürtler. Classically trained in Sydney, Basel and Vienna and recipient of numerous awards, his broad chamber-music experience evolved into a search for new means of expression. Amarcord gives him this forum. What was originally a Trio grew into a quartet, enriched by Michael Williams' strong musical personality. He is also 1st. Principal Cellist of the Vienna Chamber Orchestra.

The Bass player Gerhard Muthspiel belongs to a renowned Austrian musical family. His father Kurt Muthspiel left behind a great legacy as composer and collector of folk-music; brothers Christian and Wolfgang are internationally acclaimed jazz musicians. Alongside his deeper frequencies Gerhard Muthspiel is responsible for the majority of the managerial tasks. Included in his broad spectrum of instrumental achievements is the position Principal Bass of the Vienna "Volksoper".

Tommaso Huber, the accordion player from Amarcord, was surrounded by folk music from his early years in his home town in Upper Austria. There he learned the accordion from his father. Later he took up the bass and studied at the Music University in Vienna. Tommaso feels equally drawn to, and equally at home with classical and folk music. As bassist he is a member of the "Volksoper" Vienna and as accordion player his special synthesis of classical and ethnic music resonates throughout Amarcord's music.

A fundamental principle of the ensemble is to enable the arrangements to evolve together through intensive rehearsal, seeking new forms and exploring the expressive potential of the works, not shy to deviate from the original. Every arrangement is continually reborn and never becomes stagnant. This playful and irreverent approach to the musical material characterizes the difference between Amarcord and other classical ensembles. The joy of playing takes preference over academic correctness, whatever style of music it might be.