



Elisabeth von Trapp: Heart and faith

By Jim Lowe Times Argus Staff / Photo: Stefan Hard / Times Argus

Waitsfield singer-songwriter Elisabeth von Trapp just released a new album of her arrangements of sacred music, *Love Never Ends: Sacred Sounds*.

Elisabeth von Trapp is one of those rare singers who, when they express their personal faith in music, doesn't seem to be preaching. Rather, in her new album, "Love Never Ends: Sacred Sounds," von Trapp shares the joy she feels from her heart – and it's a beautiful joy.

This is said nowhere better than von Trapp's arrangement of the traditional black spiritual, "Deep River." She successfully uses her simple golden soprano, accompanied by her own guitar, longtime colleague Erich Kory on cello and Dan Rivers on bass, to express the depth of the lyrics. It's von Trapp at her best, and one of the gems of the album.

Von Trapp has adapted or arranged 16 hymns, chants and other traditional sacred works for herself and her small chamber ensemble. Her arrangements, and those of her colleagues, lend a freshness to these time-honored works.

Easily the most spectacular – and joyful – is "Rivers of Babylon," in which she is joined by Vermont jazz singer Sandra Wright. While nobody will mistake von Trapp for a gospel singer, together with Wright's rich, blustery voice, this has a real gospel flavor – granted, a WASP gospel flavor. They are joined by some of

Vermont's best musicians, including Charles Eller on Hammond organ and Paul Asbell on guitar. With this mix, it's rich, evocative and delightful.

Von Trapp took a big risk in adapting Mozart's beloved and exquisitely simple motet, "Ave Verum Corpus," for a folk album. Understanding that, she didn't tamper with its basics, performing it simply with her own voice layered, Kory's cello pizzicato and Marilyn Haskel on synthesizer, replacing the orchestra. It works – and there's no more beautiful music on earth.

Taking the opposite tack, von Trapp, with pianist Dan Skea, turned "The Call," with music by English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams, into a satisfying jazz ballad. With lively interplay between Chris Peterman's really nice sax and Skea's piano, it's quite effective.

With "Peace, Perfect Peace," adapted from a song by Renaissance composer Orlando Gibbons, von Trapp chose the perfect closing. Eller's synthesizer and von Trapp's voice blend perfectly to the point that the vibrato seems to match. With Kory's cello obbligato, it's simple and effective – no pretense, just a heartfelt belief delivered beautifully.

Von Trapp may owe this trademark ethereal style to legendary New Age musician Paul Winter. Another success in that style is "Love Never Ends," a biblical text from Corinthians set to music by von Trapp. The voice is beautiful, the melody is beautiful, the message is beautiful – it's a beautiful, lyrical song.

Another gentle expression of faith is Bob Burford's "Be Not Afraid." Peterson's fine saxophone solos match von Trapp's vocal expression, and she plays guitar as well. Peter Riley, who also plays bass, adds vocals. The warmth of von Trapp's voice comes from her heart – and you can hear that.

If there is any way von Trapp can be faulted, it's that she occasionally favors beautiful voice over the emotion behind the words. Still, the traditional hymn "Come, O Thou Traveler," with Eller on piano, is straightforward and effective.

Kory's cello plays a big part in this album. The jaunty traditional hymn "Jerusalem, My Happy Home" is full of life with his fabulous cello obbligato, which becomes a rhythm section in itself.

There's even more joy to be had in this innovative album. Von Trapp's music, as ever, is straight from the heart.