

The background is a watercolor wash in shades of brown, tan, and cream. Overlaid on this are dark, ink-like silhouettes of four people standing in a row, facing forward. The figures are slightly blurred and have a painterly quality.

I am

)) SVANHOLM
SINGERS

Conductor
Sofia Söderberg

I am

Svanholm Singers

Sofia Söderberg

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| <p>01. <i>I Know</i> 6:45
LYRICS Mayli M
MUSIC Emil Fredberg Zander</p> <p>02. <i>Wie Ein Kind I. Wiigen-Lied</i> 3:56
LYRICS Adolph Wölfli
MUSIC Per Nørgård</p> <p>03. <i>Säg mig den vägen</i> 3:27
LYRICS Sofia Söderberg based on
a text by Lars Linderot
MUSIC Sofia Söderberg</p> <p>04. <i>Let Your Soul Stand</i> 4:42
LYRICS Serhiy Zhadan, Walt Whitman,
Dag Hammarskjöld, Leo Tolstoy
MUSIC Paul Meador</p> <p>05. <i>Lonely Together</i> 4:44
LYRICS & MUSIC Tim 'Avicii' Bergling, Benjamin
Levin, Brian Lee, Magnus August Høiberg, Andrew
Wotman, Ali Tamposi
CHORAL ARRANGEMENT Henrik Dahlgren</p> | <p>06. <i>... There is Also Loneliness</i> 7:57
LYRICS & MUSIC Henrik Dahlgren

<i>I Am, I Am, I Am</i>
LYRICS & MUSIC Henrik Dahlgren</p> <p>07. <i>I. My Shadow's in a Shadow</i> 2:20</p> <p>08. <i>II. I Listen</i> 7:19</p> <p>09. <i>III. I Am</i> 4:55</p> <p>10. <i>Woods</i>
LYRICS & MUSIC Justin Vernon (Bon Iver)
CHORAL ARRANGEMENT Henrik Dahlgren</p> <p>11. <i>The Shadow Calls</i> 6:43
LYRICS Thomas Lavoy
MUSIC Phillip Cooke</p> |
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In 2023, Svanholm Singers premiered their concept performance called *Själ*. A concept where the singers of the ensemble had a chance to speak openly about mental health, loneliness, and the search for happiness in our modern world. During the creative process, the singers and their conductor Sofia Söderberg, commissioned 8 new pieces for lower voices. The present album, *I am*, contains these new pieces and in addition Per Nørgård's *Wiigen-Lied* from the suite *Wie ein Kind*, here performed with only male voices.

Henrik Dahlgren



THE WORD *själv* isn't an easy one to translate into English, for like many Nordic words it holds deep national and cultural resonances that are difficult to replicate in other languages. In its broadest sense it relates to the self, to be by oneself, to be alone and to possibly be aware of the different feelings that are associated with this solitude – loneliness, perhaps, but not always in a negative and destructive manner – something deeper and more nuanced that is encountered by many in the modern world. The idea of *själv* permeates many walks of life and different areas of our contemporary societies and this resulted in a concept-performance from the Svanholm Singers and conductor Sofia Söderberg, much of what is recorded here on *I Am*. This recording seeks to shine a light on this multi-faceted concept and how different aspects of the 'self' are important parts of what it means to be human. The recording explores key ideas of nature, masculinity, the soul, loneliness and an anxiety at feeling out of time with the rapidly changing world. It brings composers, arrangers and poets from different traditions, countries and times together to delve into this complex, but fundamental state of being and the questions asked by these creative individuals are central to understanding ourselves and our place in the modern world.

The soft, warm vocal entries that open Emil Fredberg Zander's *I Know* suggest a serene and contented piece of music, secure in its slowly changing harmonies and widely spaced chords. But the first full line of text colours the opening simplicity with sudden effect, 'I know you expected more of me to make up for less of you' states the poet Mayli and swiftly the tapestry of the music begins to fray, regularly changing texture, mood and impetus as the narrative becomes more anxious. The serene opening material returns in part but heralds the final, hollow line of the poem 'supposedly, I have it all...it has made me weak', both poet and composer aware of the weight of responsibility that comes from living in the contemporary world. Fredberg Zander's music keeps a cool distant objectivity at all times, never presenting this anxiety in its most desperate form and always choosing a clear, direct musical language to accompany the increasingly bleak poem.

If *I Know* illustrates an individual frustrated at the ennui of the world, Per Nørgård's 'Wiigen-Lied' (sic.) from *Wie ein Kind* ('Like a Child') seeks to explore a very different relationship between a man and society, here the tragic utterances of Adolf Wölfli (1864–1930). Wölfli spent much of his life in an asylum in Switzerland where painting, writing poetry and rudimentary composing helped him survive

the incarceration. After his death, some 25,000 pages of his work were catalogued, some small fragments making their way into Nørgård's choir work. 'Wiigen-Lied' (a misspelling of the German for 'lullaby' by Wölflin) has, in the composer's words, 'many psychological aspects, and it is punctuated by strange, distant calls, reminiscent of those of a street vendor or those of a mother calling from way up in a tower block to her child way down in a narrow courtyard'. What unfolds is a powerful collage of calming choral sounds, interspersed with increasingly frantic shouts and cries and even a homage to the Swedish *Hambo* dance. It is a beguiling and memorable piece that lingers long in the memory.

The next two pieces continue a similar, if less haunted, internal journey considering the soul and its importance in both sacred and secular traditions. Sofia Söderberg's beautiful meditation on the Swedish hymn *Säg mig den vägen* ('Tell me the way that leads to life') begins with softly rising vocal lines and rhythmically-free melodies before slowly unveiling the hymn tune, clothed in exquisite harmonies and colourful countermelody. Paul Mealor's *Let Your Soul Stand* brings together fragments of poetry from across the world, including such luminaries as Walt Whitman and Leo Tolstoy in a contemplative rhapsody on mankind, music and the universe. The piece ends with four Koshi wind chimes, Chinese instruments used by Buddhist monks to express emotion and counteract negative energy. This secular, or pantheistic prayer ends with the chimes, accompanied by

audible breathing and soft vocalisations, gently fading into the cosmological ether.

One of the defining features of the Svanholm Singers is the compositional creativity that exists within the group itself. As well as conductor Sofia Söderberg and tenor Emil Fredberg Zander both being talented composers there is fellow singer Henrik Dahlgren who has contributed much to realising the concept of *själv* through his original compositions and characterful arrangements of pop songs. He is represented on this recording by two of each. The first is a striking and heartfelt arrangement of Swedish DJ/producer Tim 'Avicii' Bergling's 2017 hit 'Lonely Together', though 'arrangement' probably doesn't do Dahlgren's creativity justice, he has taken a direct and simple dance tune and reimagined it as something much deeper and expressive, translating the everyday into a piece of transcendence and complexity. The inexorable bond between the damaged lovers is transfigured from the mundane into utter, inevitable heartbreak before the reverie is ruptured by a lone whistle accompanying the line 'the rush to my blood was too much and we flatlined.' The theme of being lonely in the company of others is mirrored in Dahlgren's own original composition ...*There is Also Loneliness*, which sets paraphrases of Wordsworth and Edgar Allan Poe in the composer's own text. The piece builds slowly from its beclouded opening to a climax of pure, raw emotion on the words 'And thus, all I loved, I loved alone' where the prevailing vocal *glissandi* coalesce on

fortissimo chords for full effect. It is both intensely beautiful and terribly hollow in the same breath, a moment of pure ecstasy thwarted by the poet's own experience.

The most substantial piece on the recording is Dahlgren's *I Am, I Am, I Am* which is also possibly the deepest exploration of *själv* that the Svanholm Singers have undertaken. The piece is a lengthy, internal psychodrama in which different voices, characters and emotions appear to be in conflict as the work ebbs and flows from its breathy, hesitant opening to the ecstatic outbursts that punctuate the later music and its final, slowly fading ending. Like 'Wiigen-Lied', this is a psychological work, any text is half-heard and unfinished with the opening line of 'My shadow's in a shadow' suggesting the adumbral, interior world in which the listener enters. There are difficult moments where life, the mind and the fabric of time are questioned, but there are also moments of pure elation and primal, wild joy.

The recording finishes with two works that look to nature to understand *själv* in differing but powerful ways. The first is an arrangement by Henrik Dahlgren of American indie folk band Bon Iver's 'Woods' from their 2009 release *Blood Bank*. Like 'Lonely Together', the original is simple and direct, repeating the same earnest lyrics again and again but building in intensity and sonic density with every repetition. Dahlgren seeks to replicate this with the Svanholm Singers, but without the electronic manipulation that characterises the original, relying on the whole range of the

choir, growing from a soloist to a multi-voice benediction to the healing power of solitude in nature. Nature is again present in *The Shadow Calls* by Phillip Cooke, setting a poem by American composer-poet Thomas LaVoy. Here, nature is both the danger and the salvation as the protagonist wrestles with the desire to give his body to the waves in sad desperation or whether to fight for survival. The final line of 'and climb to sky' perhaps resolves the dilemma as each member of the choir takes up the call and finishes in a majestic, euphoric cacophony of raw emotion.

Phillip A Cooke
Little Ythsie, October 2024





1. I Know

LYRICS *Mayli M*

MUSIC *Emil Fredberg Zander*

I know you expected more of me
To make up for less of you
But I was given everything for free
And the things left to fight for
Are too big for me

How am I supposed to matter
As a droplet on a hot plate
I don't think you can fathom
The weight of our generation's fate

Supposedly, I have it all
It has made me weak
Prepared to fall

I know

2. Wie Ein Kind, I. Wiigen-lied

LYRICS *Adolph Wölfli*

MUSIC *Per Nørgård*

G'ganggali ging g'gang, g'gung g'gung
Giigara-Lina Wiig Rosina
G'ganggali ging g'gang, g'gung g'gung
Rittare-Gritta, d'Zittara witta
G'ganggali ging g'gang, g'gung g'gung
Giigara-Lina, siig R a Fina
G'ganggali ging g'gang, g'gung g'gung
Fung z'Jung, chung d'Stung

Kummer fasst uns alle, keiner geht frei
Beliebig fasst uns der Kummer

English translation

Like a Child, I. Lullaby

G'ganggali ging g'gang, g'gung g'gung
Giigara-Lina Wiig Rosina
G'ganggali ging g'gang, g'gung g'gung
Rittare-Gritta, d'Zittara witta
G'ganggali ging g'gang, g'gung g'gung
Giigara-Lina, siig R a Fina
G'ganggali ging g'gang, g'gung g'gung
Fung z'Jung, chung d'Stung

Grief strikes everyone, no one is free
In torture, grief strikes us down

3. Säg mig den vägen

LYRICS *Sofia Söderberg based on
a text by Lars Linderot*

MUSIC *Sofia Söderberg*

Jag ropar; varför har du övergivit mig

Säg mig den vägen som drager till livet

Den som är en gång utstakad för mig

Sökas skall lyckan om lyckan skall finnas

Sökas av innersta hjärta och själ

English translation

Tell me what road

I call out; why hast thou forsaken me

Tell me what road leads to life

The one that was once laid out for me

Search for luck, and luck shall be found

Search with deepest heart and soul

4. Let Your Soul Stand

LYRICS *Serhiy Zhadan, Walt Whitman, Dag
Hammarskjöld, Leo Tolstoy*

MUSIC *Paul Mealar*

Everything started with music

With the scars left by songs

The music of those who cart stones from the field

It doesn't stop

I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work
of the stars

Never for the sake of peace and quiet deny your
convictions

Everything I know, I know because of love

I simply want to live; to cause no evil to anyone but
myself

Let your soul stand cool before a million universes

5. Lonely Together

LYRICS & MUSIC *Tim 'Avicii' Bergling,
Benjamin Levin, Brian Lee, Magnus August
Hoiberg, Andrew Wotman, Ali Tamposi*
ARRANGEMENT *Henrik Dahlgren*

6. ... There is Also Loneliness

LYRICS & MUSIC *Henrik Dahlgren*

I wandered lonely in the cloud
I could not look away
But where there is love, there is also loneliness
And thus, all I loved, I loved alone

I Am, I Am, I Am

LYRICS & MUSIC *Henrik Dahlgren*

7. I. My Shadow's in a Shadow

8. II. I Listen

9. III. I Am

My shadow's in a shadow as I listen to the slow beat of
my heart: I Am, I Am, I Am

10. Woods

LYRICS & MUSIC *Justin Vernon (Bon Iver)*

ARRANGEMENT *Henrik Dahlgren*

I'm up in the woods
I'm down on my mind
I'm building a still
To slow down the time

11. The Shadow Calls

LYRICS *Thomas Lavoy*

MUSIK *Phillip Cooke*

Your life is mine
The shadow calls
Wet panic of the flight through foam
The swell will be your soundless home
A trough to offer death and calm
Come down and sleep
Beneath the wave
Membrane of a wailing deep
let drop your failing limb and breathe
to rest in dust and silent cave
Lie now and dream
Among these bones
Of all you have left above
Voices that your heart as loved
That cry your name through time unknown
Defy the end, embrace the cry
Black wonder of the yellow morn
Cast your eyes into the storm
And climb to light
And climb to sky



SVANHOLM
SINGERS

CONDUCTOR Sofia Söderberg

TENOR 1

Emil Fredberg Zander
Adam Eliasson
Erik Annertz
Elias Fredriksson
Öyvind Nörregård

TENOR 2

Henrik Dahlgren
Filip Thor
Elias Lidén
Jakob Yttersjö

BAS 1

Nils Annertz
Gabriel Hamlin
Johannes Hansen
Simon Kindvall
Magne Tordengren

BAS 2

Adam Leckius
Björn Härstedt
Björn Larsson
Simon Furbacken
Thiery Marazanye

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Stereo version rendered from Dolby Atmos version

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Per Sjösten & Linus Sjösten

Per Sjösten at Sound Processing Studio

Johannes Hansen

Dolores Iglesias, Fundación Juan March

Andreas Paulsson

Jocke Wester

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GROUP PHOTO

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