

INTERVIEW

Dirk Snellings

The music of the 14th century is very exceptional. At the beginning of the Ars Nova era we see that it really comes from Paris, then it spreads north, to the Low Countries where I live.

There are the very famous manuscripts of Guillaume de Machaut, in which he preserves all his poetry and compositions. And then it was discovered, in the binding of some books from a later time, that there were some pieces of parchment that were just used to preserve and make a thicker book, and there were hidden there some fragments of music.

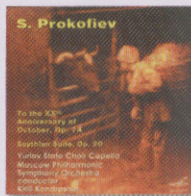
In putting together this repertoire, I focused on important cities, seeing what fragments and what sources we have. In Ghent there is a collection of 10 pieces, from Brussels about 12 pieces, Utrecht 20 pieces, and other cities too – so in total I had almost 100 pieces from which to work.

In this period we still have the cultivation of court poetry. You're going back to an old medieval tradition of the troubadour literature, which is about bringing the best out of humanity, noble ideas, the love for the eternity, for the noble lady.

What distinguishes these songs from this region? When you start singing in another language there is of course something coming in from the language itself, that can impact the flow of the phrase, the intonation of the phrase, the rhythm of the phrase.

As regards performance approach, you have the music, and also a mixture of information from listening to specialist groups, material about the culture of the period, and about the context of the piece. I also try to get as much information as I can from paintings – when you look at paintings from the 14th century you see the instruments which we can play.

Interview by
Martin Cullingford



misrepresentation as Prokofiev's *Cantata for the 20th Anniversary of the October Revolution*? Some commentators read a kind of satiric intent into Prokofiev's massive

celebration. Others view this as fanciful indeed, given the background of the Great Terror, marvelling rather that Prokofiev should have presented the authorities with so audacious a melange. Elements of Twenties agitprop and Thirties socialist realism jostle for supremacy in a score deploying a massive orchestra, large chorus, military band, accordions, bells, siren and speaker. Despite its cinematic sweep and intimations of *Alexander Nevsky*, the music is not much played even now. Two portions set texts by Stalin himself: there's something here to embarrass everyone.

Kyryll Kondrashin conducted the delayed Soviet premiere on April 5, 1966, and his subsequent taping, though incomplete, has unmatched punch and splendour. Nikita

'Elements of Twenties agitprop and Thirties socialist realism jostle for supremacy'

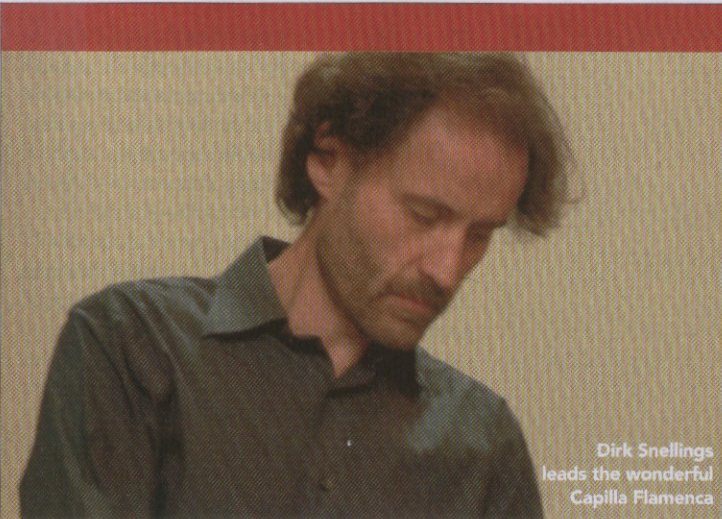
Khrushchev's condemnation of Stalin's "cult of personality" having remained in force even after his own removal from power, the tainted movements had to be excised, while the penultimate, "Symphony" section was drastically cut too. The complete score has since been championed by Neeme Järvi whose fine recording, made in conjunction with a Royal Festival Hall performance in June 1992 (the first time the entire composition had been heard in the West), boasts none other than Gennady Rozhdestvensky as the voice of Lenin. More recently Valery Gergiev has taken up the cudgels in the concert hall and on television.

It would be understandable if listeners chose to start elsewhere, yet Kondrashin's mutilated torso has the urgency of his best work and benefits from unexpectedly good sound. His crack orchestra also puts on a fine, timbrally distinctive display in the *Scythian Suite* but the *Cantata* is the *raison d'être* of the present reissue and aficionados will not be fazed by less-than-helpful booklet-notes. **David Gutman**

Rossini

Songs – Il Salotto, Vol 13

Danse sibérienne. Le Sylvain (Romance). Les amants de Séville. Le dodo des enfants. La chanson du bébé. Soupirs et sourire. Le chant des Titans. Au chevet d'un mourant. Ariette villageoise. L'esule. À Grenade. Ridiamo, cantiamo che tutto sen va. Preghiera. Addio ai viennesi. Le départ des promis. Chanson de Zora. La notte del Santo Natale. Toast pour le nouvel an. ▶



Dirk Snellings leads the wonderful Capilla Flamenca



Capilla Flamenca on sparkling form for these Dutch and Belgian musical fragments

'En un jardin'

Anonymous En discort. D'ardent desir/Nigra est/Se fus d'amer. Adieu vous di. Or t'am va. De plus souvent. Je suis toujours. Cheulz qui volent. En un jardin. Ist my bescheert **De Cluny** Apollinis eclipsatur/Zodiacum signis/In omnem terram **De Vitry** Vos, quid admiramini/Gratissima virginis/Gaude gloriosa. Adesto sancta trinitas/Firmissime fidem/Alleluia **Benedicta Fabri** Sinceram salutem care. Eer ende lof **Machaut** Se vous n'estes **Pykini** Playsance or tost **Vaillant** Par maintes foyes **Vinderhout** Comes Flandriae/Rector creatorum/In cimbalis

Capilla Flamenca / Dirk Snellings
Musique en Wallonie © MEW0852 (58' • DDD)

Much of what we know about the song repertory in the Low Countries in the years around 1400 comes from two bundles of fragments, one in Utrecht and the other in Leyden; a few even smaller fragments fill out the picture. Alongside songs in Flemish or with obvious local connections these fragments also inevitably contain some of the classics of the time, in particular works by the French composers Philippe de Vitry and Guillaume de Machaut. So what the excellent Capilla Flamenca present here is an anthology of music that was plainly known and performed there around 1400. Nicely organised according to the four seasons, this amounts to a pleasing and varied anthology performed at a very high professional level, though the copious booklet material may not make it easier for the listener to know what is local and what not.

It is a slight disappointment that one of the most successful songs of all, "En discort", should be performed here with only the first of its three stanzas and with considerable time taken up with instrumental interludes, particularly since this may be its first recording; similarly with the marvellous song "Eer ende lof" by Martinus Fabri and most sadly of all with the title-song of the disc, the anonymous "En un jardin", beautifully sung by Marnix De Cat. In Machaut's "Se vous n'estes", Tore Denys in an otherwise meltingly beautiful performance omits both refrains in the text, leaving them to a recorder as though the refrains had nothing to do with the poem. Nobody would get away with treating a Schubert song like that; and I don't see why they should be allowed to do it to Machaut.

On the other hand, we have here dazzling performances of the motets "Apollinis eclipsatur" and "Vos, quid admiramini", excellent vocal ensemble work in "Cheulz qui volent" and Martinus Fabri's "Eer ende lof", and glorious solo singing.

David Fallows