

Marshall University

Marshall Digital Scholar

Music Faculty Research

School of Music

5-2004

Review of Trio Mediaeval, *Soir, dit-elle*, ECM Records 2004 and *Words of the Angel*, ECM Records 2001

Vicki Stroehler

Follow this and additional works at: https://mds.marshall.edu/music_faculty



Part of the [Musicology Commons](#)

Compact Disc Reviews

David Castleberry, editor <castlebe@marshall.edu>

Words of the Angel

Trio Mediaeval

ECM New Series 1753; 289 461 782-2

2001 ECM Records GmbH

65:45

Soir, dit-elle

Trio Mediaeval

ECM New Series 1869; 80001847-02

2004 ECM Records GmbH

62:56

THIS PAIR OF DISCS by Trio Mediaeval offers an imaginative soundscape of music both ancient and new. Trio Mediaeval's approach to the ancient is laudable and lovely, but the contemporary compositions written specifically for this all female group seem to give them their truest voice.

The older recording, *Words of the Angel* (2001), intersperses movements of the Tournai mass—one of the earliest manuscript compilations of polyphonic settings of the texts of the Ordinary—among monophonic laudae and English Marian motets and sequences. The various styles provide textural and harmonic relief, a real concern in a completely unaccompanied recording. The recording takes its name from the one contemporary composition, a 1998 work by Ivan Moody, composed for the group. This work, appearing near the end of the disc, is a harbinger of the marvelous things to come in the second recording.

The newer recording, *Soir, dit-elle* (2004), follows the same format as the earlier by interspersing movements from Lionel Power's *Missa 'Alma Redemptoris Mater'* among monophonic laudae and other polyphonic compositions. However, the monophonic laudae and polyphony date not from the Middle Ages but the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The result is a heady juxtaposition of the sweetness of the *countenance anglaise*

with the more dissonant styles of these neo-Medieval works.

Listening to the newer recording first may have been a mistake. Judgment of the older is undoubtedly clouded by the experience afforded by the newer: purity of sound, sureness of pitch – particularly in the dissonant patches, intriguing vocal timbres, and exquisite ensemble that characterize the group's performance of the contemporary works. Then, there are the compositions themselves. While some might dismiss their obvious imitations of chant, Notre Dame and Ars Nova styles, the composers have, nonetheless, brought a sensibility and vocabulary that could only arise from a post-modern outlook. This retrenchment seems *apropos* of a world beset by tragedy and war, desperately in search of meaning. After experiencing such, it is difficult to hear the early music of the first disc with anything other than modern ears. The second disc

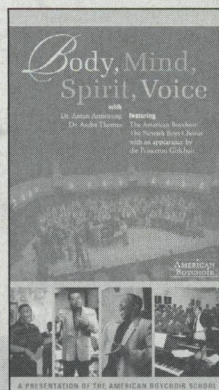
eclipses the first in emotion, performance and surety of "voice."

The new works—by Ukrainian composer Oleh Harkavyy, and British composers Gavin Bryars, Andrew Smith and Ivan Moody (represented on both discs)—are hauntingly beautiful and Trio Mediaeval's performance of them stunning. In the polyphonic works, the group's voices engage an otherworldly means of expression. The monophonic laudae (by Bryars) feature the range of timbres in each of the women's solo voices. Special mention must be made of Torunn Østrem Ossum's extraordinary work in Bryars's *Laude novella*, for which she creates a timbral antiphony between refrain and verse.

Certainly the same qualities that the group and individuals display in the new compositions on both discs are present in their performances of the early works. The voices are simply beautiful, and the

Body, Mind, Spirit, Voice

AMERICAN BOYCHOIR



with

Dr. Anton Armstrong
of St. Olaf College
Dr. André Thomas
of Florida State University

featuring

The American Boychoir
The Newark Boys Chorus
with an appearance by the
Princeton Girlchoir

Body, Mind, Spirit, Voice shows how two of the world's top choral directors – Dr. Anton Armstrong and Dr. André Thomas – melded a group of young people into an amazing musical instrument. This 90 minute videotape tells the story of how the arts can inspire and instruct, helping young people learn the values of hard work, responsibility and self-confidence.

Recorded at The American Boychoir's National Choral Conference in September of 2002. Directed by Emmy Award winning producer Robert E. Frye.

To purchase your VHS copy, please visit us on the web at www.americanboychoir.org or call 1-888-BOYCHOIR.

performers bring to the texts a stillness that belies a deep understanding of the original function of the works. Their voices are not earthbound, but soar toward heaven to communicate with the Divine.

This is to add one more voice to the apparently long list of reviewers who find the lack of translations for the Latin (and even the Latin for the masses) in the liner notes unconscionable. John Potter's protestations not withstanding [see

<www.ecmrecords.com> for his response to the uproar], all of the works are (and were) about the texts. The texts give the works their contexts, both new and old. Even if the singers are bringing new meanings to the works, each *listener* will bring different experiences to the same, and thus deserve to have all the resources before them.

While the lack of text translations is a shortcoming, it is ultimately a small one in the face of such an engaging group as Trio Mediaeval. I highly recommend both discs for any library or collection, and hope that there are more to come from this ensemble.

*Vicki Stroehler
Huntington, WV*

T

Associate Director of Music

for a 3,900-member congregation with a tradition of excellence in music. This new position's primary emphasis will be on developing music opportunities for middle and high school age youth. The successful candidate should have effective organizational and interpersonal skills. Advanced keyboard and vocal conducting skills required. Organ service playing considered a positive. Send resume to:

**Music Associate Search Committee
P.O. Box 6161
Charlotte, NC 28207**

New from the St. Olaf Choral Series!

The St. Olaf Choral Series is the premiere brand of sacred choral music for church, college, high school, and community choirs. Anton Armstrong and John Ferguson of the St. Olaf College music department hand pick compositions that will enhance any choir's library.

Nunc Dimittis, by *Rene Clausen*

Stunning setting written for the 100th St. Olaf choral festival.

Orchestral score and parts available online.

0-8006-7643-2

Jesus Loves Me, by *John Ferguson*

A gentle, sensitive arrangement for any choir.

0-8006-7648-3

Spotless Rose, by *Graeme Morton*.

A Christmas anthem for advanced high school choirs and up.

0-8006-7662-9

A Mighty Fortress, by *John Ferguson*.

A strong, faithful setting that is sure to become a classic.

0-8006-7642-4



St. Olaf Choral Series

525015-304

Keycode: AS6066

1-800-328-4648 • www.augsburgfortress.org

Augsburg Fortress