

LIONHEART

2008-2009 PROGRAM OFFERINGS

JOHN THE REVELATOR: A MASS FOR OUR TIME BY PHIL KLINE

Commissioned by WNYC, Public Radio, *John The Revelator* is a new work by downtown music virtuoso Phil Kline. Based on concepts from the Bible's apocalyptic Book of Revelation and named after a song by blues legend Blind Willie Johnson, this work is a mass for the 21st century, written specifically for the early music vocal sextet Lionheart and string quartet. From vast boombox symphonies to chamber music and song cycles, Phil Kline's work has been hailed for its originality, beauty, subversive subtext, and wry humor. Celebrated for its breath-taking sound, Lionheart is best known for its interpretation of medieval and Renaissance a cappella music, with Gregorian chant as the keystone of its repertoire. The world premiere concert, with Ethel, took place Friday, November 10, 2006 at 7pm at the Winter Garden and followed with a broadcast on WNYC Radio. Lionheart can perform *John the Revelator* with a resident string quartet or small ensemble.

EL SIGLIO DE ORO

In *El Siglo de Oro* (The Century of Gold) Lionheart explores rarely performed sacred music of 16th century Spain associated with the tolerant, multi-cultural city of Toledo: from the cosmopolitan sonorities of Cristóbal Morales to the playful Andalusian exuberance of Francisco Guerrero's Canciones y Villanescas Espirituales. This concentrated, mystical music thrived in the Old World and gained a wide, accepting audience in the New World. The program will include motets, Gregorian chants, spiritual songs and villanescas, and as its centerpiece, Morales' rarely heard Missa 'Ave Maria.' Rounding out the program will be sacred works by Tomas Luis de Victoria and Francisco de Peñalosa.

WAYFARING STRANGER

Early classics and new works for men's voices.

Inspired by the traditional American folk song of the same name, Lionheart embarks on a concert journey through hundreds of years of sublime a cappella music. From the still-modern sounding early music sonorities of Perotin and Machaut to the sensual chromaticism of Cipriano de Rore to the soulful incantations of 1960's pop icon Laura Nyro, Lionheart will present the old and the new in surprisingly vivid and engaging juxtapositions. Cornerstone pieces in the concert will include a recent commission from rising-star French composer Marc-Andre Dalbavie entitled "Chant," and the monumental Tudor masterpiece of John Browne "O Regina Mundi Clara."

TYDINGS TREW: A MEDIEVAL ENGLISH CHRISTMAS

Weary of Messiah? In "Tydings Trew: Feasts of Chrstmas in Medieval England," the six-man vocal ensemble Lionheart presents carols, chants and motets for the Christmas season as it was celebrated in the cloisters, palaces and streets of England in the 15th and 16th centuries.

The medieval carol was originally a dance form with worldly and often lewd associations. Franciscan monks converted the carol into Christian usage as part of their long struggle with native English paganism. Some of the carols included in the program retain the rollicking of their profane ancestors. "Noel . . . Tydings Trew" recounts the angel's message to Mary with a boisterous chorus. Other carols are gentle and meditative, such as the well-known "Coventry Carol," a lament for the children of Bethlehem who were slaughtered by the raging King Herod.

Chants from a medieval English monastic book, and an authentic medieval English pronunciation bring to life the music and poetry of a distant age. The program follows the cycles of monastic observance through the twelve days of Christmas, which includes feasts of martyrs such as Saint Thomas of Canterbury. The carol "Saint Thomas honor we" glorifies the murdered Archbishop, who died defending the rights of the Church from the encroaching power of King Henry II. Also included are mystical motets from the Old Hall Manuscript, and "Gaude virgo mater christi," by King Henry VIII's court composer William Cornysh.

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MY FAYRE LADYE

At first you may expect this program to be sung by women, but with the first notes of the Sarum chant "Quam pulcra es," sung by the warmly resonant male voices of the ensemble Lionheart, you realize that men's voices are the appropriate means of expression for these reverent, adoring, ancient yet universal tributes to women in general, and to the one loved or worshiped in particular. This could be a lover--real or desired--or, in the spiritual realm, the Virgin Mary, to whom countless hymns, chants, and larger musical works were dedicated. This is an exceptional program of chants from the Sarum rite, more complex choral compositions from the Eton Choirbook, and rarely heard selections from manuscript collections known as Henry VIII's Book, the Fayrfax Manuscript, and the Ritson Manuscript. If you're an early music enthusiast, or if you want a fine introduction to early English vocal music, don't pass this by. --*David Vernier, Amazon.com*

IL LAUDARIO DI CORTONA: CHRISTMAS IN MEDIEVAL ITALY

Lionheart celebrates the medieval wellsprings of Christmas, Italian style. The "Laudario" of the title is a priceless 13th-century manuscript that contains not only the earliest surviving music of the Italian lauda (devotional song) tradition, but the earliest collection of poetry in the Italian language as well. Combining original scholarship with its own vibrant, engaging performance style, Lionheart gives new life to the charming and joyful melodies that have remained locked within this manuscript for centuries.

The program brings together this very early, chant-like repertoire with later styles that grew out of it, culminating in the sublime harmonies of the Renaissance composer Innocentius Dammonis, a mysterious monk whose music was first published in Venice in 1508. Three short liturgical dramas from an ancient Paduan manuscript provide a mystical and theatrical element to the program.

Although the texts and translations of the medieval Italian lyrics are printed in the program, many audiences choose to pay full attention to Lionheart's engaging stage performance or just close their eyes and let the music wash over them. Il Laudario di Cortona is a spirited and spiritual antidote to the ho-ho-ho commercialism that threatens to overwhelm the season.