
Gothic Voices

Selected Reviews

The Splendour of Florence with a Burgundian Resonance – Linn Records (Released November 2022)

"Gothic Voices and veteran harpist Andrew Lawrence-King realise [the French chansons] with warmth and affection, retaining and revitalising the vintage Gothic Voices sound. The ensemble is incisive, ripe-toned and finely balanced, and the hypnotically repeating strains of the various rondeaux (including the mesmerising pan-European 'hit' *De tous biens plaine*) are subtly varied with different scorings and timbres – delicate as a fine French tapestry." – **Kate Bolton-Porciatti, BBC Music Magazine*******

"More than four decades since its foundation, the ensemble Gothic Voices – usually four voices, with occasional additions – has lost none of its finesse or gleam. Newer groups, inspired by their example, have sprung up since, but Gothic Voices' performance of medieval music remains peerless. Their pioneering 1985 album of music by Hildegard of Bingen, *A Feather on the Breath of God*, remains the best (and bestselling) of its kind... Whether or not this music [from *The Splendour of Florence*] really mirrors the magical proportions of the city's most famous landmark, it is certainly just as sublime."

- Fiona Maddocks, The Guardian

"Gothic Voices maintains its standing as one of the outstanding vocal ensembles specializing in music before the Baroque. The voices are lovely, the balance exquisite, the sound captured in Boxgrove Priory warm and clear."

- J. F. Weber, Fanfare Magazine

"Atmospheric and of high quality, a program coordination from a sensitive and understanding hand. Once again, the Gothic Voices meet with approval. The completely unforced vocal art is beautiful in sound, without pretending to be beautiful, thanks to a lot of silence and space the music is not stifled, but can unfold freely. Perhaps unspectacular qualities in themselves, but they open up whole worlds. The occasional accompaniment this time is not a lute instrument, but the sometimes wonderfully buzzy harp sounds of Andrew Lawrence-King. (...) "The splendor of Florence - with a Burgundian resonance" is the apt title of this CD. While Brunelleschi's impressively large, completely cantilevered cathedral dome is considered the epitome of the Renaissance, the soundtrack comes from Northern Europe - made to resound by this terrific English vocal ensemble."

- BR Mediathek

"A tribute to the place where people travelled from our regions to make music and gain recognition. The beautiful Florence of the past, by voices of the present."

- CultuurPakt

"Fifteenth century song recitals are rare enough for this recording to be welcomed with open arms, particularly as a few of these are, if not first performances, then the first by performers of this calibre thus"

- Fabrice Fitch, Gramophone

"It's all done undogmatically, with that stylistic expertise that has always distinguished Gothic Voices. For these vocalists, such music is virtually their daily bread, and the interpretation is just as effective, carried by a high degree of naturalness. Every melodic phrase gets exactly the space it needs to blossom calmly. Nothing seems "made" or even pimped. The music breathes and flows, and this also applies to the few chorale pieces."

- Concerto

Echoes of an Old Hall – Linn Records (Released June 2021)

"It bears recalling that the core cast of singers goes back to Page's time; but the grain of the voices is fresh and subtly different – I was going to write 'a touch mellower', but then their keen edge can still take the breath away. In this the ensemble is backed by a sound image of great detail and immediacy, which truly captures the grain of the voices....

...Perhaps most unexpectedly of all, the account of Dunstable's four-voice *Veni Sancte Spiritus* (one of the best-known, oft-

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recorded pieces of the 15th century) is unquestionably one of the finest yet made."

- Fabrice Fitch, *Gramophone* [Editor's Choice]

"...acerbic clashes and angular, thrusting lines are fashioned by these singers into a compelling sonic journey. The slightly later English style of sweet concordant harmonies (called by the Burgundians the 'contenance angloise') perfectly suits their expertise in close harmony, and their performances of Forest's 'Qualis est dilectus' and Damett's 'Beata Dei genetrix' are entrancing."

- Anthony Pryer, *BBC Music Magazine*

"There is always room on my shelves for a new selection of music from the Old Hall Manuscript, particularly when the music is as well sung as it is here. Gothic Voices, always leaders in the field of mediaeval and early Renaissance polyphony, bring a wealth of joint experience to this CD... This is not just a random and generous selection of music from Old Hall though – it is extremely carefully structured, using the extraordinary 'singers' manifesto' represented by the opening piece, Arae post libamini by Mayshuet de Joan, as a template. The second half of the programme, headed 'reverberances' is recorded partly at a distance, a radical departure for a group that in earlier times usually insisted on a very close recording ambience. This is an enthralling CD, imaginatively programmed with an excellent note by Julian Podger and compellingly performed. It will undoubtedly win many new admirers to the remarkable Old Hall Manuscript and its hugely important contents."

- D. James Ross, *Early Music Review*

"The combination of musical influences from the continent with the strongly indigenous elements of the Anglo-Saxon tradition make this repertoire a point of synthesis of extreme interest, which the four soloists of the Gothic Voices group enhance in an excellent way, also thanks to their perfect technical mastery and balanced amalgam of voices." - *Medioevo*

"The singing is classic Gothic Voices: accurate, immersive, beautiful ... Full of subtlety and beauty, there's plenty of solo plainchant but these are experienced singers invested with a timeless freedom that's really instructive. We can feel for ourselves how the English fashion affected Dufay's music and the last piece is a wonderfully resonant coda and a vivid performance."

- *BBC Radio 3 Record Review*

"...they display the easy nonchalance of true virtuosi. The rhythmical approach to the opening track demonstrates what I mean perfectly. There is not a hint of stiffness. And only a singer steeped in this music could attempt the almost improvisatory freedom of Catherine King's Gregorian chant on track two.

So instead of excited discovery, feeling their way into the music, what we get is sublime confidence and, above all, a deep sense of love for this music."

- David McDade, *Musicweb International*

"Their goal is to "bring medieval music into the mainstream", but I observed at the time that their outstanding virtuosity and scholarly integrity guarantee that this is not a cheap popularizing of early music, but a communication of the vitality that is inherent in the medieval repertory. That ideal is certainly evident the present recording with highly engaging performances of music seldom heard in public. We are treated to amazingly clean tone with astoundingly precise ensemble and a nearly miraculous blending of solo voices."

- William J Gatens, *American Record Guide*

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"...sustenance for the soul, a short-cut to bliss..."

- *The Times*

"Gothic Voices' flair and accuracy brought this music vividly to life"

- *The Scotsman*

"...their tuning, intonation and tone control were perfect..."

- *Early Music Review*

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"...with intonation and ensemble of this consistency, it is possible to revel...in sheer sonority..." - **The Gramophone**

"...King's mezzo rose with the sun to a central ecstasy for which not even the beauty of earlier pieces had prepared us..."
- **The Gramophone**

"Nothing is overstated but at the same time nothing is allowed to pass without a burning musical conviction in the performances. Everything – words, intervals, decorations – has a crystalline audibility." - **The Gramophone**

Nowell syng we bothe al and som – Linn Records (Released Oct 2019)

"it makes for bracing listening. Gothic Voices sing with such passion that there's never a hint of dry scholarship. Favourite tracks? John Dunstaple's thrilling motet *Gaude virgo salutata* and the poignantly simple carol *Ther is no rose of swych vertu*."
- **Geoff Brown, The Times *******

"The glowing blend of tone and fluidity of phrasing in Dunstaple's 'Gaude virgo salutata' is typical of all 25 tracks on the recording. Among these, mezzo-soprano Catherine King's gently caressing 'Lullay, lullay: Als I lay' and the jubilant 'Nowell: Owt of your slepe' are obvious highlights, and the sound is excellent."
- **Terry Blain, BBC Music Magazine ******

"This marvellously varied programme is rounded off with the joyous carol *Nowell: Now man is bryghter*, a sentiment the listener will surely agree with by the end of the disc. Whether you're interested in the early development of a distinctively English musical style or simply want the authentic taste of a medieval Christmas celebration, Gothic Voices' immensely involving and stylish singing, beautifully recorded in Boxgrove Priory, Chichester, will prove a festive treat. There are excellent notes by tenor Julian Podger (the ensemble's director), full texts and modern English translations, and handsome presentation. All in all, a uniquely absorbing Christmas disc that really stands out from the crowd."

- **Europadisc [Disc of the Week]**

"This has to be my Advent and Christmas choice this year...As of old, they eschew dressing the music up for a modern audience: there are just four first-rate voices at play here, with no cornetts, sackbuts or even an organ, and the results are as pure and perfect as on those earlier recordings."

- **Brian Wilson, musicweb-international**

Louth Contemporary Music Society, June 2018

"The exquisite Gothic Voices built new music out of old: 13th-century troubadour songs leading to sweet-sour music by Karen Tanaka and Linda Buckley."

- **Kate Molleson, The Guardian**

"The Dufay Spectacle" – Linn Records (Released April 2018)

"Voices and instruments alike swiftly entice the listener with their excellence and evocative atmosphere, Gothic Voices magnificently transporting us to their 15th-century sound world." - **Martin Cullingford, Gramophone (Editor's Choice)**

"The take-away [from this disc] is that Gothic Voices fill this music with life. For all the clarity of the presentation – and this is exemplary, even when instruments are added – the expression always comes first." - **Detlef Krenge, BR Klassik**

"Exquisite French chansons (in the formes fixes of rondeau and ballade) sit alongside richly textured Latin motets and

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arrangements. The four singers of Gothic Voices, the mezzo Clare Wilkinson and a quartet of instrumentalists seem perfectly attuned to Dufay's intoxicatingly elegant, graceful style." **– Stephen Pettitt, The Sunday Times**

"Their beautiful renditions of motets and chansons by Guillaume Dufay sound as if in the time of our great composer." - **Stemband**

"The four members of "Gothic Voices" and their five guests present with this CD a magisterial, atmospheric evocation of the immense, poetic and musical richness of the era of the Burgundians, the Hussite, the Council of Basel (1431) and the time of the counterpauses (eg Amadeus of Savoy as Pope Felix V). The beautiful performance, both vocal and instrumental, has an unparalleled technical and expressive perfection. Magisterial! Cannot be missed!" **– Michel Dutrieue, Stretto**

"What a pleasure, then, to be able to welcome this Dufay recording as matching all the qualities that made Gothic Voices absolute leaders in the field. This time it looks very much as though Julian Podger is the presiding genius; and he has chosen the repertory very well [...] To mention all the glorious details here would break the banks of this review but I cannot avoid mentioning the marvellously experienced singing of Catherine King and her duetting with Steven Harrold: that is seriously classy." **– David Fallows, Gramophone**

York Early Music Christmas Festival, December 2016

"During its 30 years, the distinguished vocal group Gothic Voices have built up quite a following. The National Centre for Early Music was full for their evening of late medieval music for Advent and Christmas last Friday. Their authority in this repertoire was obvious, and made for characterful and convincing performances. Close harmonies in the 12th-13th century *Verbum Patris Humanatur* sounded both ancient and curiously modern, while *In Natali Novi Regis* was touchingly intimate. The 13th-century *Dou Way Robin/Sancta Mater Gratiae* exuded seemly humility, and *Alleluia Psallat* brought a joyfully energetic close to the first half; its solo verse interlude showed mezzo-soprano Catherine King at her vibrant, intense best, with power in reserve. Rhythms crackled in the anonymous 15th-century carol *Alleluya: A Newe Werk*, while the anonymous narrative *Nowell, Nowell, Nowell* had an engaging rusticity. *Ther Is No Rose Of Swych Virtu* displayed the rich yet peaceful sonic purity of three perfectly blended voices.

Care and artistry were also lavished on liturgical items, including Dunstaple's resonant *Magnificat* and the magnificent *Gloria* from the 15th-century *Missa Caput*. Queldryk's contrasting setting of the *Gloria* seemed to revel gleefully in its text's sheer wordiness... this was a thoroughly enjoyable concert, presented with scholarly authenticity." **– The York Press**

"York early music Christmas festival created an opportunity to hear how the words of the Magnificat flowered in the minds of composers over some 250 years. The earliest, by the 15th-century English composer John Dunstaple was a sublimely minimal three-part setting sung by medieval specialists Gothic Voices" **– The Guardian**

Spitalfields Winter Festival, December 2016

"Across town, Spitalfields Music, celebrating 40 years of Festivals, launched its latest winter edition... The vocal quartet of Gothic Voices unfolded an imaginative Marian sequence of 12th – 15th century settings, with modern interpolations by Joanne Metcalf and Andrew Smith, in the beautiful little history-soaked Chapel Royal of St Peter ad Vincula at the Tower of London".

– Paul Driver, The Sunday Times

"Mary Star of the Sea" – Linn Records (released August 2016)

"Ancient and modern often sit alongside in sacred music. In putting together a musical portrait of Mary, mother of Jesus,

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Gothic Voices have turned to composers medieval and contemporary. The mood throughout is one of serenity and grace. In new works by Joanne Metcalf and Andrew Smith, American and English respectively, the old reverence takes on a subtly distinctive modern tone. The membership of Gothic Voices has changed over the years, but the present four singers have lost nothing of the group's original purity and fine sense of balance."

– **Richard Fairman, Financial Times**

"the beauty and security of the a capella singing...is a sheer joy throughout...The effect of the ambience of Boxgrove Priory gives a wonderful sense of background silence and timelessness. There are glories throughout...just lovely!"

– **Michael Wilkinson, MusicWeb International "Recording of the Month"**

"Just four voices, often only one or two at a time, but singing with a clarity of focus and keen beauty that's always affecting, in musical territory they seem able to inhabit like few other ensembles."

– **Andrew McGregor, BBC Radio 3 Record Review**

"This welcome revitalisation of an iconic group is characterised by warmth of tone and beautiful blend. Their selection of Marian medieval monody and polyphony, arranged with the greatest care and taste into two parts expressing her heavenly and human attributes, includes Latin and old English texts, offering differently intimate sound worlds. Alongside glorious, delicately nuanced new works by the brilliant American Joanne Metcalf, including the magical 'Music for the Star of the Sea', and the affectionately sonorous 'Stond wel Moder, under rode' from Andrew Smith, here is a thoroughly engaging recording of impeccable clarity."

– **Rebecca Taverner, Choir and Organ**

"The four singers of Gothic Voices produce an exceptionally good consort sound as well as impressing in their various solo roles...[a] beautiful recording."

– **Andrew Benson-Wilson**

"A fascinating release... Gothic Voices are still a formidable force."

– **Gary Higginson, MusicWeb International**

Choral at Cadogan, Cadogan Hall, April 2015

"stunning performances... mesmeric stage presence... superbly devised and slickly presented... reminding us that here is a corner of late-medieval repertoire in which Gothic Voices are supreme"

– **Edward Breen, Early Music Today**

"Stylish vigour... a stunning performance from the singers"

– **Robert Hugill, Planet Hugill**

"A Laurel for Landini - 14th Century Italy's Greatest Composer" – Avie Records (released autumn '08)

"There could be no better introduction to the delights of late-medieval music...enjoyably intriguing...Gothic Voices make imaginative use of varied scorings, and their lively, expressive performances are first class."

– **Elizabeth Roche, Daily Telegraph**

"This CD is a delight. It contains music which is focused; intimate without being breathily urgent; lightly melodious and shot through with clean, expressive singing... Gothic Voices have the gift of being able to bring such music to life so effortlessly...This is an exciting, profound and excellently executed CD."

– **Mark Sealey, MusicWeb International**

"superbly blended Gothic Voices... the performances capture Landini's almost jazzy, syncopated rhythms, lively counterpoint and melodic flourishes to perfection."

– **Robert Levett, International Record Review**

"Taking intelligent and tasteful programming to even greater heights, Gothic Voices in 'A Laurel for Landini' showcase the 14th

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century maestro in an ideal balance...exceptionally fine and virtuosic performance."

- Rebecca Tavener, Choir and Organ

"The Unknown Lover – songs by Solage and Machaut" - Avie Records (released autumn '06)

"Over the last 25 years the ensemble has delighted listeners with performances of the utmost clarity and beauty. Those contained on the latest release are no exception: listen to tenor Steven Harrold in the opening track, Solage's *Le Basile* ('The Basilisk') as he bewails the effects of envy and deceit while his three companions negotiate the accompaniment with great precision and a real feel for the highly syncopated rhythms; or the same composer's astonishingly modern-sounding *Fumeux fume par fume* ('From dreams the dreamer dreams') in which descending motifs explore distant tonalities, the low tessitura further adding to the hypnotic effect; or mezzo Catherine King's affecting simplicity in Machaut's monophonic *Se je souspir parfondement* ('If I sigh deeply')...the music itself is allowed to impact upon the listener, such is the pristine balance and intonation of the singers."

- Robert Levett - International Record Review

"The performance triumphantly affirms the ensemble's claim to fame, and establishes that of Solage. Gothic Voices continue to exude vitality while masterfully controlling the most complex structures. Solage's output brings out their distinctive strengths: precision (of intonation, voice exchange and blend), edginess (of tempos and line), and clarity (of timbre and pronunciation). Perhaps most impressive is their facility for making highly esoteric music, including the vocalised accompaniment, engaging without compromising it's sophistication."

- Berta Joncus, BBC Music Magazine

"The singers manage with perfect ease the long vocalisations and rhythmic complexities of some of the ballades, for example *S'aincy estoit*: their performance flows as naturally as a gentle stream"

- Mary Berry, The Gramophone

"After a quarter of a century as mainstays of Hyperion's catalogue, Gothic Voices go it alone with their debut Avie release. The intricate poetic art and refined music of Guillaume de Machaut, servant to the king of Bohemia, and a shrewd politician, supplies part of their mouth-watering medieval programme. The balance holds the complete surviving works of Solage, best known for his *Fumeux, fume par fume*, probably written for an eccentric literary clique in the 1380's. Gothic Voices catch hold of the extravagant weirdness of works written with highly educated connoisseurs in mind, propelling them into the 21st century with irresistible dash and enthusiasm."

- Andrew Stewart, Classic FM Magazine