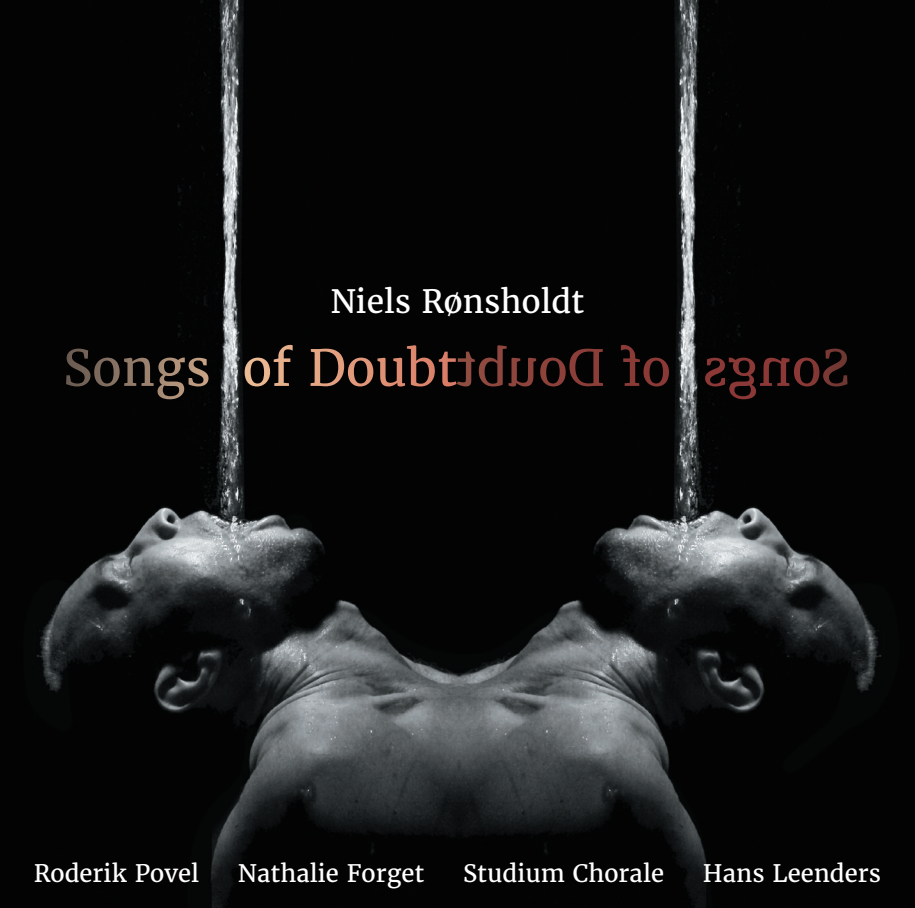




Niels Rønsholdt

Songs of Doubt

Roderik Povel

Nathalie Forget

Studium Chorale

Hans Leenders

Niels Rønsholdt
Songs of Doubt

Roderik Povel, *vocals* · Nathalie Forget, *ondes Martenot*
Studium Chorale · Hans Leenders, *conductor*

Songs of Doubt (2015)

for choir, male solo voice and ondes Martenot (text: Niels Rønsholdt)

1	The Night	4:31
2	You Said	5:53
3	The Lake	7:26
4	All I Care About	5:53
5	Forest of Light.	8:06
6	It's Only You	4:46
7	Waiting	4:25
8	Clouds	5:48
9	The Rain	5:07
10	The Wind	4:37

Total 56:32

"Each moment of important decision in our lives makes a radical distinction between before and after, between the past and the future ... The piece is shaped as a series of very simple songs that undergo the complications of decision – of doubt and hesitation. The music seems to be looking both forward and backward – alternating between prospect and retrospect, between expectation and memory." This is how Niels Rønsholdt himself describes *Songs of Doubt*.

"I'll depart, I'll return, I'll depart"

"A conclusion arrived at after consideration" – this is one of the dictionary definitions of the word 'decision'. It sounds so calm and rational. You write a list of pros and cons, and the longest list settles the matter – for or against. That is how you buy sofas, choose wall colours, decide on how to dress for the day.

But when you turn your back on your lover forever, when you come out of the closet, jump off a cliff, declare your love for the first time, say a final farewell, take the other path, turn away, say yes to having a child – when you make that kind of decision, which actually means something, then there are no 'pros' and 'cons'.

No, with that kind of decision there's the sound of *Songs of Doubt*: the sound of sick longing and uncomprehending wisdom.

"how does it feel to look down the endless black water of the lake"

"In doubt the torment arises when each of two opposite possibilities with greater or lesser force draws the mind in its own direction" – this quote too is from a dictionary, where it is one of many examples illustrating the entry 'Doubt'.

The title of the work is *Songs of Doubt* and it has the subtitle *Prospect / Retrospect: View/ view back, Forward perspective/rear-view mirror*. The music literally looks forward and backward. As in the work *Me Quitte* from 2014, Rønsholdt works with letting the performers sing the music backwards. This sound effect is not achieved by means of electronics and recordings, but simply by having the phonetic transcription of the text sung backward so that the singers

perform this text as it would sound as if it was on an old reel-to-reel tape played backwards. In the score, clear grey triangles mark when the music sounds forward and when it sounds backward. This effect can do strange things to your perception of time, for music – like time – moves in one direction only (or at least that is how we perceive it) and that is forward. Life, time, cannot be run backward, nor can music. Even though it sounds backward it is on the way forward, and perhaps it is we and our ears that are the mirror of time and make the music sound inverted and the water run upwards.

"you thought you hoped you're lost"

Songs of Doubt was written for choir, male vocal soloist and the electronic instrument known as the *ondes Martenot*, which was invented in the 1920s and produces an electronic note that can both be precise like that of the later synthesizers, or glissando like that of the theremin, another early electronic instrument. The sound can be close to that of the human voice, and along the way in *Songs of Doubt* the instrument seeps through the choral sounds and the voice of the soloist. At other times it has its own voice booming amidst the vocal sounds. When an *ondes Martenot* is the only instrument among human voices it extends the voices into an electronic space, and when at the same time, as in *Songs of Doubt*, it is used to sound 'backward' with the voices, the instrument functions as an extension and an elaboration of the expression and the musical material.

"forest of brightness and the faces of fallen"

Rønsholdt trained with among others Helmut Oehring in Berlin and Bent Sørensen and Karl Aage Rasmussen in Aarhus, where he himself also teaches at the Royal Academy of Music. One must always be careful about tracing lines back to teachers and institutions when one is describing an artist, but the background in the Danish composing environment, which has never been afraid of simplicity, and the cultivation of the German experimental environment have perhaps helped to leave the marks of an undaunted experimentation and a search for the personal idiom that are characteristic of Rønsholdt's creative efforts. This applies equally when the path pushes the envelope of the emotive, as in the work *Me Quitte* from 2014, which is based on, or bores its way into, a French chanson, and approaches the limits of the private as in the visual side of the performances of *Songs of Doubt*, which consists exclusively of shots of the

composer himself. By displaying our most banal emotions and by turning the focus on himself in other roles than that of the composer (singer, model, performer) he pulls the rug from under his audience. He gives us no chance to remain in our 'professional' role as audience. Disturbingly, we are forced to be present as human beings.

Another element that makes Rønsholdt's works surprising is his insistence on the sensual, the sensory and the sensitive; these are not three words that normally take pride of place when one is describing new composition music, but they are quite indispensable when one is speaking of Rønsholdt. The music and the visuals in his works are never mawkish. For that they are simply too fragile and strange. But they engage with breathing, moaning, panting, skin and the delectable quite without irony and without raised eyebrows.



Screen grabs of the video visuals used in the concert performance of *Songs of Doubt*.

“I can hear you right near by”

Niels Rønsholdt's music is the princess's pea which, through all the layers of caresses, silk, velvet, breath, sensual touches, overwhelming chords and soft rhythms, ensures that we wake up from the listening experience with black and blue marks on the soul.

“don't look back”

In *Songs of Doubt* there are certainly an 'I' and a 'You'. But who they are, what relationship they have to each other or when, is not evident. Nor is there an unambiguous timeline (of course) – but perhaps a succession of nows? However, the cycle ends with the song *The Wind*, which

includes the line “Don't look back/If you turn you might fall” which suggests that a decision has been made and a direction (forward?) has been laid down. On the other hand, in this sentence there are also reminiscences of the myth of Orpheus, the singer who fetched his beloved Eurydice from the underworld, and who did in fact turn around, only – through that action – to send her back again. It is not a given that he/she/we have the strength of spirit not to look back. Just one more time.

The last line fits so well with the very first line of the work: “The moment you fall ...” So the endless ring of doubt and great decisions comes full circle: “If you turn you might fall ... The moment you fall ...” We never escape from the doubt, from the uncertainty of not knowing what would have happened is we had not said yes/said no.

“back and forth in vain”

The music on this CD refuses to be pigeonholed. The soundscape is distinctive, because it is a mixture of classical choir, amplified solo voice and electronic sounds. Although the listener may along the way be reminded auditively of the B-side of Kate Bush's 'Hounds of Love', gospel hymns, the early operas of Philip Glass, blues, Gregorian chant, hangover groans and the singing of angels, *Songs of Doubt* is undoubtedly entirely its own, purely Rønsholdt-like song cycle, and it makes no sense to compare it to other expressions of contemporary music. It is shamelessly original.

Trine Boje Mortensen is the Promotion Manager at Edition Wilhelm Hansen and a music journalist specializing in contemporary music.

Vocalist and composer **Roderik Povel** explores the progressive outskirts of the musical landscape and songs from all eras and continents. His work includes the cycle *When The Caged Bird Sings*, songs to poems by Paul Laurence Dunbar, Jazz and Gregorian Music in cooperation with Schola Maastricht, the solo a cappella programme *Alone* for Intro in Situ, and more. Povel mainly sings and plays original compositions, working with composers such as Niels Rønsholdt, Wolfgang Braun, Jesse Passenier and Frans Ehlhart. Povel is a music scholar and a senior lecturer in Jazz Vocals, Choir and Ensemble at the Jazz department of Conservatorium Maastricht, and the initiator of the Junior Jazz Conservatorium Maastricht.

roderikpovel.eu

Nathalie Forget is one of the leading exponents of the electronic instrument ondes Martenot, for which she was unanimously awarded First Prize at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Paris. She has played across Europe as well as in the United States and Mexico with leading conductors and ensembles including Hans Zender, Simone Young, Sylvain Cambreling, Heinz Holliger, Kent Nagano, Pierre Boulez, the London Sinfonietta, the NDR Sinfonieorchester Hamburg, the Rai National Symphony Orchestra, the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, the Philharmonic Orchestra of Radio France. She's an interpreter of major works for ondes by Messiaen, Honegger, Milhaud, Varèse, among others. She is also dedicated to contemporary music, improvisation and rock music, and in premiering radical new repertoire for the instrument. Nathalie Forget is ondes Martenot professor at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Paris.

nathalieforgetondes.com

Studium Chorale was founded in 1972 and is today one of the most influential chamber choirs in the Netherlands. The composition of the choir varies from eight to forty singers depending on the music to be performed. A very broad repertoire includes five centuries of chorale music, from Renaissance polyphony to recent commissions. Studium Chorale performs on a regular basis both within the Netherlands and elsewhere, and records for television, radio and for CD. The choir is subsidised by the Regional Council of Limburg Province and the City of Maastricht.

studiumchorale.nl

Hans Leenders is the artistic director of the professional chamber choir Studium Chorale and vocal ensemble Cantatrix and artistic advisor of the Dutch Gregorian Chant festival and the festival L'Europe & l'Orgue. He is a principal teacher of organ at the Maastricht Conservatory, conductor of the conservatory choir and Basilica choir Maastricht, and teaches Gregorian chant during summer courses at the Folkwang-University of Arts in Essen, Germany. Hans Leenders is the principal organist of the Basilica of our Lady in Maastricht and organist-titular in the Kopermolen in Vaals; guest conductor with Radio Choir Slovenia, Groot Omroepkoor, Cappella Amsterdam, Europa Cantat and several conservatories in Europe. He has conducted orchestral productions with Philharmonie Zuidnederland, Symfonieorkest Vlaanderen, Concerto d'Amsterdam, Florilegium Musicum and Ensemble '88, specialized in contemporary music. As a composer he is known especially for his vocal music, editions by Ascolta, Harmonia and De Haske.

hansleenders-organist.nl

Intro in Situ is known as an innovative production house for contemporary music performances. Also it serves as an important stage for young pioneers in music and performing arts. Based in Maastricht, the Netherlands, Intro creates productions in which all possible influences of modern musical styles from jazz, pop, classical wind music, Gregorian chant to heavy metal are to be found, and in which adventurous crossovers are never left out. Intro has a special interest in young talented artists at the beginning of their career.

introinsitu.nl

"Øjeblikket for enhver stor beslutning i vores liv skaber en skarp skillelinje mellem før og efter, mellem fortiden og nutiden ... Værket er formet som en serie af meget enkle sange, der gennemgår valgets komplikationer – tvivl og tøven. Musikken synes at se både fremad og bagud, skiftende mellem prospekt og retrospekt, mellem forventning og minde." Således beskriver Niels Rønsholdt selv *Songs of Doubt*.

"I'll depart, I'll return, I'll depart"

"Hvad man bestemmer sig til som resultat af en overvejelse" – Dette er en af definitionerne af ordet 'Beslutning' i Ordbog Over Det Danske Sprog. Denne beskrivelse af 'Beslutning' lyder så fredelig og rationel. Man skriver en liste af *pros* og *cons* og den liste, der er længst, afgør beslutningen: for eller imod. Det er sådan man køber sofaer, vælger vægfarve, beslutter sig for dagens påklædning.

Men når man vender ryggen til kæresten for altid, når man springer ud af skabe, ned fra klipper, udtaler sin kærlighed for første gang, siger endegyldigt farvel, går den anden vej, drejer fra, siger ja til et barn – ja, når man tager den slags beslutninger, dem, der rent faktisk betyder noget, så er der ingen "pros" and "cons".

Nej, ved den slags beslutninger er det lyden af *Songs of Doubt*: Lyden af kvalmende længsel og uforstående vished.

"how does it feel to look down the endless black water of the lake"

"I Tvivlen opstaar Smerten ved, at to modsatte Muligheder mere eller mindre voldsomt drage Sindet hver til sin Side" – Dette citat stammer også fra Ordbog Over Det Danske Sprog, hvor det blandt mange andre illustrerer opslaget 'Tvivl'.

Værkets titel er *Songs of Doubt* og har undertitlen *Prospect/Retrospect*: Udsigt/tilbageskuen, Fremtidsperspektiv/bakspejl.

Musikken drager bogstavelig talt fremad og tilbage. Som i værket *Me Quitte* fra 2014 arbejder Rønsholdt med at lade sangerne synge musikken baglæns. Det er ikke ved hjælp af elektronik

og optagelser, at denne klanglige effekt opnås, men simpelthen ved at lave lydskrift af teksten sunget bagfra, så sangerne synger denne tekst, som den ville lyde, hvis det var et gammeldags spolebånd, der blev spillet baglæns. I partituret er klare grå trekanter markører for, hvornår musikken klinger forlæns og hvornår den klinger baglæns. Denne effekt kan gøre mærkelige ting med ens tidsopfattelse, for musik bevæger sig – lige som tid – kun i én retning (eller: det er i hvert fald sådan, vi opfatter den) og det er fremad. Livet, tiden, kan ikke spoles baglæns, og det kan musikken heller ikke. Selvom den klinger baglæns er den på vej frem, og måske er det os og vores ører, der er tids-spejlet, der får musikken til at klinge omvendt og vandet til at løbe opad.

"you thought you hoped you're lost"

Songs of Doubt er skrevet for kor, mandlig sangsolist og det elektroniske instrument Ondes Martenot. Ondes Martenot blev opfundet i 1920'erne, og instrumentet giver en elektronisk tone der både kan være præcis, som de senere synthesizere, eller glidende som thereminen, et andet tidligt elektronisk instrument. Klangen kan ligge tæt op ad den menneskelige stemme, og undervejs i *Songs of Doubt* sniger instrumentet sig frem gennem korklangene og solistens stemme. Andre gange er den sin helt egen buldrende stemme midt i vokalklangene. Når en Ondes Martenot er eneste instrument blandt menneskestemmer, kommer den til at forlænge stemmerne ind i et elektronisk rum, og når den samtidig, som det er tilfældet i *Songs of Doubt*, benyttes til at lyde "baglæns" sammen med stemmerne fungerer instrumentet som en forlængelse og en uddybning af udtryk og musikalsk materiale.

"forest of brightness and the faces of fallen"

Rønsholdt er uddannet hos bl.a. Helmut Oehring i Berlin og hos Bent Sørensen og Karl Aage Rasmussen i Aarhus, hvor han også selv underviser ved Det Jyske Musikkonservatorium. Man skal altid passe på med at drage linjer tilbage til undervisere og institutioner, når man beskriver en kunstner, men baggrunden i det danske kompositionsmiljø, der aldrig har været bange for enkelhed, og dyrkelsen af det tyske eksperimenterende miljø har måske været med til at sætte de spor af uforfærdet eksperimenteren og søgen efter det personlige udtryk, der kendetegner Rønsholdts virke. Det gælder også, når vejen går til grænsen af det patetiske, som i værket *Me Quitte* fra 2014, der bygger på, eller borer sig ind i, en fransk chanson, og til grænsen af det

private som i billedsiden til opførelserne af *Songs of Doubt*, der udelukkende består af optagelser af komponisten selv. Ved at stille vores mest banale følelser til skue og ved at sætte fokus på sig selv i andre roller end som komponist (sanger, model, performer) trækker han tæppet væk under sit publikum. Han giver os ikke chancen for at forblive i vores professionelle rolle som publikum. Vi bliver foruroligende nok nødt til at være til stede som mennesker.

Et andet element, der gør Rønsholts værker overraskende, er hans insisteren på sensualitet, sanselighed og følsomhed. Ikke tre ord, der plejer at ligge i toppen, når man beskriver ny kompositionsmusik, men de er helt uomgængelige, når man taler om Rønsholdt. Musikken og billedsiderne til hans værker er aldrig kæln. Dertil er de simpelthen for sarte og sære. Men de dyrker vejtrækning, støn, gisp, hud og lækkerhed helt uden ironi og uden løftede øjenbryn.

“I can hear you right near by”

Niels Rønsholts musik er ærten, der gennem alle lagene af kærtegn, silke, fløj, åndedrag, sanselige berøringer, overvældende akkorder og bløde rytmer sørger for, at vi vågner op fra lytteoplevelsen med blå og gule mærker på sjælen.

“don’t look back”

I *Songs of Doubt* er der med sikkerhed et jeg og et du. Men hvem, i hvilket forhold de står til hinanden eller hvornår, fremgår ikke. Der er heller ikke en entydig tidslinje (selvfølgelig), men en række nuer, måske? Dog slutter cyklussen med sangen *The Wind*, der indeholder linjen “Don’t look back/If you turn you might fall” der tyder på, at der er blevet taget en beslutning og en retning (fremad?) er stukket ud. På den anden side er der i denne sætning også reminiscenser af myten om Orfeus, sangeren, der hentede sin elskede Eurydike i dødens rige, og som netop vendte sig om for blot med sin handling at sende hende tilbage igen. Det er ikke givet, at han/hun/vi har sjælsstyrken til ikke at kigge os tilbage. Bare en gang til.

Den sidste linje slutter sig jo så godt til værkets allerførste: “The moment you fall ...” så den uendelige ring af tvivl og store beslutninger er sluttet: “If you turn you might fall ... The moment you fall ...” Vi slipper aldrig for tvivlen, for usikkerheden i ikke at vide, hvad der ville være sket, hvis vi ikke havde sagt ja, sagt nej.

“back and forth in vain”

Musikken på cd’en her er ikke til at putte i kasser. Klangbilledet er specielt, fordi det er en blanding af klassisk kor, forstærket solostemme og elektroniske klange. Selvom om man som lytter undervejs kan blive auditivt mindet om B-siden på Kate Bush’s ‘Hounds of Love’, gospel hymner, Philip Glass’ tidlige operaer, blues, greogoriansk sang, tømmermandsgrynt og englesang, så er *Songs of Doubt* utvivlsomt helt sin egen Rønsholdtske, renfærdige sangcyklus, og det giver ikke mening at sammenligne med andre udtryk i nutidsmusik i dag. Det er skamløst originalt.

Trine Boje Mortensen er Promotion Manager hos Edition Wilhelm Hansen og musikskribent, som specialiserer sig i ny kompositionsmusik.

Sangeren og komponisten **Roderik Povel** bevæger sig i de mere progressive yderområder af et musikalsk landskab fra alle tider og kontinenter med sangen i centrum. Han har bl.a. skabt cyklussen *When The Caged Bird Sings*, sange til digte af Paul Laurence Dunbar, jazz og gregoriansk musik i samarbejde med Schola Maastricht, solo a cappella programmet *Alone* for Intro in Situ, m.m. Povel opfører primært originale kompositioner. Han har arbejdet med komponister som Niels Rønsholdt og Frans Ehlhart og som solist med Studium Chorale under Hans Leenders. Povel underviser i jazzvokal, kor og ensemble ved Conservatorium Maastricht og er initiativtager til Junior Jazz Conservatorium Maastricht.

roderikpovel.eu

Nathalie Forget er en af de førende udøvere af det elektroniske instrument ondes Martenot, som hun har modtaget den højeste udmærkelse for ved Conservatoire National Supérieur de Paris. Hun har spillet over hele Europa samt i USA og Mexico med fremtrædende dirigenter og ensembler som Hans Zender, Simone Young, Sylvain Cambreling, Heinz Holliger, Kent Nagano, Pierre Boulez, London Sinfonietta, NDR Sinfonieorchester Hamburg, RAI orkestret, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra og den franske radios Filharmoniske Orkester. Hun har fortolket større værker for ondes af bl.a. Messiaen, Honegger, Milhaud og Varèse. Hun er ligeledes engageret i den ny musik, improvisation og rockmusik samt uropførelser af helt nyt og ukonventionelt repertoire for instrumentet. Nathalie Forget er professor i ondes Martenot ved Conservatoire National Supérieur de Paris.

nathalieforgetondes.com

Studium Chorale blev dannet i 1972 og er i dag et af de toneangivende kammerkor i Holland. Korets besætning varierer fra otte til fyrrer sangere alt efter den programsatte musik. Et meget bredt repertoire strækker sig over fem århundreders kormusik fra renæssancens polyfoni til ny musik på bestilling. Studium Chorale optræder jævnligt i og uden for Holland og medvirker i tv, radio og på CD-indspilninger. Koret modtager offentlig støtte fra det regionale råd i Limburg provinsen og fra byen Maastricht.

studiumchorale.nl

Hans Leenders er kunstnerisk leder af det professionelle kammerkor Studium Chorale og vokalensemblet Cantatrix samt kunstnerisk rådgiver for Dutch Gregorian Chant Festival festivalen L'Europe & l'Orgue. Han er hovedlærer i orgel ved Maastricht konservatoriet, dirigent for konservatorie- og Basilica-koret i Maastricht og underviser i gregoriansk sang på sommerkurserne ved Folkwang-universitetet i Essen, Tyskland. Hans Leenders er førsteorganist ved Vor Frue Kirke i Maastricht og organist-titular i Kopermolen in Vaals; gæstedirigent hos Det Slovenske Radiokor, Groot Omroepkoor, Cappella Amsterdam, Europa Cantat og på adskillige konservatorier i Europa. Han har dirigeret orkesterproduktioner med Philharmonie Zuidnederland, Symfonieorkestet Vlaanderen, Concerto d'Amsterdam, Florilegium Musicum og Ensemble '88, som er specialiseret i ny musik. Som komponist er han særlig kendt for sin vokalmusik, udgivet af Ascolta, Harmonia and De Haske.

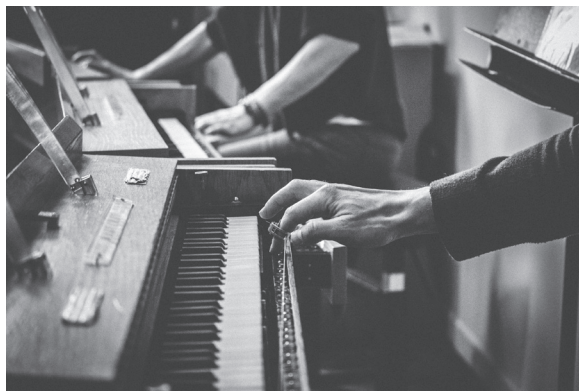
hansleenders-organist.nl

Intro in Situ er et nytænkende produktionshus for performances med ny musik og tjener som en vigtig scene for unge pionerer inden for mange udøvende kunstarter. Med base i Maastricht, Holland, skaber Intro produktioner med rum for alle tænkelige stilarter fra jazz, pop, klassisk blæsermusik, gregoriansk sang til heavy metal, hvor eventyrlystne crossovers aldrig er udeladt. Intro har en særlig interesse i unge talentfulde kunstnere, som er i starten af deres karriere.

introinsitu.nl



Roderik Povel



Nathalie Forget and Niels Rønsholdt working with the ondes Martenot during rehearsals.

The singers of Studium Chorale on this recording:

Soprano

Elisabeth Blom, Marleen Everink, Mette Rooseboom*, Loes van Schothorst

Alto

Juliane Cromme, An Meeusen, Cecile Roovers, Martina van Westen

Tenor

Ruben de Grauw, Michiel Haspeslagh, David van Lith, Laurens Wyns

Bass

Philip Barkhudarov, Robert Brouwer, Frans Gommers, Jeroen Spitteler

* solo *The Night* 1

DDD

Recorded at the Danish National Opera (the rehearsal hall, Søren Frichs Vej, Aarhus), 13–14 May 2016

Recording producer: Peter Barnow

Editing and mix: Peter Barnow and Niels Rønsholdt

Mastering: Morten Bue

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