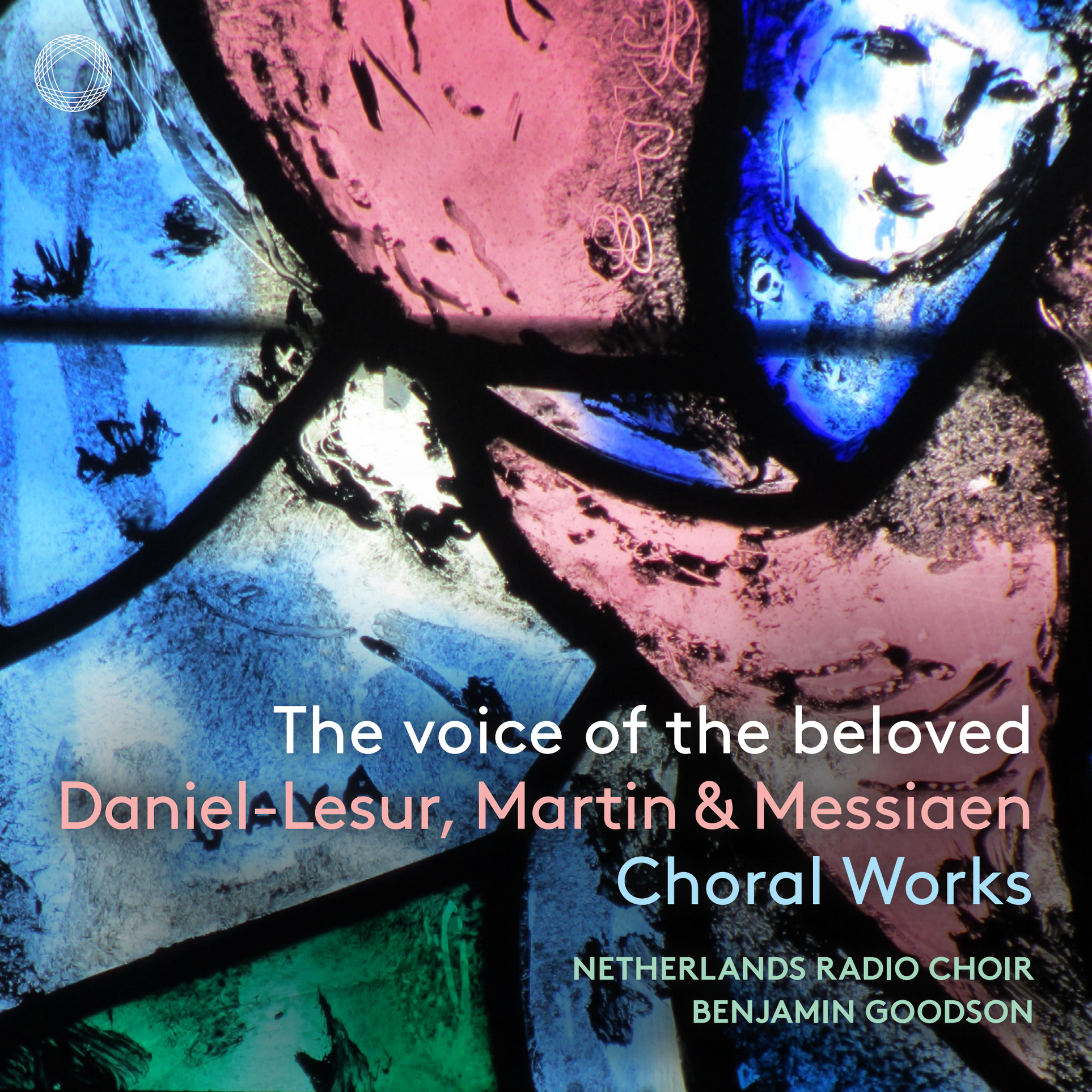

The voice of the beloved

Daniel-Lesur, Martin & Messiaen

Choral Works

NETHERLANDS RADIO CHOIR

BENJAMIN GOODSON

Frank Martin (1890-1974)

	Mass for double choir a cappella	
1	I. Kyrie	4. 43
2	II. Gloria	5. 32
3	III. Credo	5. 35
4	IV. Sanctus - Benedictus	4. 05
5	V. Agnus Dei	4. 26

Jean-Yves Daniel-Lesur (1908-2002)

	Le Cantique des cantiques	
6	No. 1, Dialogue	2. 59
7	No. 2, La voix du bien-aimé	3. 34
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9	No. 4, Le Roi Salomon	1. 36
10	No. 5, Le jardin clos	4. 11
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Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992)

13	**O sacrum convivium**	5. 38

Total playing time: 50. 34

Netherlands Radio Choir (Groot Omroepkoor)
conducted by **Benjamin Goodson**

Between body and spirit

Frank Martin's *Messe pour double choeur* is a work of profound humility and fervour. It was composed in secret and kept that way for decades. The work's opening plainsong draws us initially into an ancient setting, a sound world seemingly shaped by time-honoured wisdom. What follows, in the Kyrie's second section, is then suddenly faster, immediate and vivid. Yet the contrast creates a powerful sense of continuity: these centuries-old words and traditions are not relics, but living expressions of faith that speak now and are connected across time and space. Martin's Mass is by turns tender, ecstatic and radiant. Though the work fits beautifully in a liturgical setting – which is how I first encountered it – preparing this recording has offered a rare and wonderful opportunity to engage more deeply with its intricate harmonic language and the quiet dedication written into every page. Frank Martin settled in the Netherlands in 1946. He lived first in Amsterdam and then in Naarden, where he remained until his death in 1974.

The cover art, Marc Chagall's stained-glass window in Tudeley, reflects a spirit of dialogue: a Jewish artist working in a Christian context, responding visually to themes that, like Daniel-Lesur's *Le Cantique des Cantiques*, draw from the Hebrew Bible and are steeped in Christian mysticism. Daniel-Lesur sets texts from the Song of Songs, an ancient poem that invites us to understand faith through the body and erotic love. In the original Jewish tradition the text is often read allegorically, as a depiction of the love between God and Israel. Later Christian interpretations reimagine it as the love between Christ and the Church. Recording *Le Cantique* with the Netherlands Radio Choir offers the chance for great textural variety. Some movements we have recorded with solo voices to create a sense of individual connection and intimacy.

Others, where for example the choir speaks as the whole of the Christian communion, we performed with 48 singers, the choir in full voice, while the seductive Shulamite in the sixth movement dances with a chamber choir of 36 singers.

Messiaen's *O sacrum convivium* is suspended in a different kind of rapture – held and glowing. With a sense of timelessness, it evokes the mystery of the Eucharist not through drama, but through stillness and light.

Each of these works opens a different portal to the sacred: through awe, through longing, through patience. They remind us that religious experience is not always about answers, but about being present to mystery in all its forms.

Benjamin Goodson

Frank Martin: Mass for Double Choir

The story of Frank Martin's Mass for Double Choir (composed in 1922 apart from the 'Agnus Dei' which dates from 1926) gives us a fascinating glimpse into the composer's private motivations, his strongly-held Christian belief, and his essential modesty. In her Souvenirs de ma vie avec Frank Martin (1990), his widow Maria Martin wrote that:

In 1922, Frank wrote an a cappella Mass in Latin. At this time, he believed that the composer of a religious work should remain anonymous, since it was (and must be!) written to the glory of God and not that of its author. This was the customary view in the Middle Ages, and Frank shared it. But given that in our own time the composer ... is the centre of attention ... it would be unthinkable for his name to be a secret, so he kept the Mass in a drawer. It stayed there for forty years.

It was a request in 1962 from Franz Brunnert, a choral conductor in Hamburg, that led Martin finally to unearth the Mass and to allow its performance. The Mass was given its premiere in Hamburg on 2 November 1963. Martin himself heard it complete for the first time in June 1970, when it was performed at the 22nd International Heinrich Schütz Festival in Breda, Netherlands. On that occasion he was asked to write an introductory note in which he commented that in 1922, his view was that the work 'was a private matter between the words of the mass, the music, and myself' – a view he expressed in even simpler terms twelve years later, in 1984:
'I saw it as a matter between God and me.'

This essentially private genesis is underlined by the fact that after writing the work, Martin approached nobody to perform it (he claimed that at the time he didn't know any choral conductors who would be interested in it). This reluctance stemmed from Martin's deeply felt concern that any public performance would lead to the work being judged 'from a purely aesthetic point of view' – rather than as the act of faith he intended. He didn't keep the work's existence entirely hidden, but during a lecture given in Basel in 1946, he declared that the only acceptable way for it to be performed would have been 'in a church, without the composer's name, and as part of the liturgy.' In his note for the 1970 performance, Martin remained characteristically modest:

Even though I have used quite large forces, this is music of an entirely intimate nature. Since 1922, my musical language has evolved considerably; there are many things in this work that I could no longer write; there are some clumsy errors that I would no longer make (I would make others, who doesn't?). But there are also musical elements that are very close to me ... such as the phrase 'Et incarnatus est' ... you can find it almost unchanged in my oratorio Golgotha [1948] ... I hope that conviction, youth and some beauty can still be found in this Mass which is almost half a century old.

The *Kyrie* recalls the rise and fall of plainchant, as well as featuring passages of rich chordal harmony towards the close. The *Gloria* is more varied, with moments of rhythmic animation contrasting with reflective sections. The *Credo* opens sternly, but gives way to radiant beauty at 'Et incarnatus est' and mighty choral power at 'Et exspecto resurrectionem mortuorum'. The *Sanctus* unfolds gently until the driving rhythms of 'Pleni sunt coeli' and the joyful outbursts at 'Hosanna in excelsis'. The *Agnus Dei* brings the Mass to a sublime close.

The Mass was written long before the emergence of Martin's distinctive musical style which started to emerge in his oratorio *Le vin herbé* (1938–41). Instead, it is the work of a young man finding ways of integrating elements of plainsong (melismas), and Renaissance choral techniques (imitation, antiphonal wring) into music that is unmistakably of Martin's own time.

Daniel-Lesur: Le Cantique des Cantiques

Jean-Yves Daniel-Lesur was a fellow-pupil of Messiaen's at the Paris Conservatoire and in the 1930s they were members of the Jeune France group of composers (along with André Jolivet and Yves Baudrier). Lesur remained in friendly contact with Messiaen, but their compositional paths developed in very different directions. The contrast between them is exemplified by the works they wrote for the Ensemble vocal Marcel Couraud: Messiaen's boldly experimental *Cinq rechants* (first performed in 1950), and Lesur's more conventional – but supremely effective – *Le Cantique des Cantiques*, a large seven-movement cycle composed in 1952. Commissioned by the RTF (Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française) the first concert performance was given by Couraud and his singers in May 1953 at the Bordeaux Festival and they sung the work in Paris at a concert in the Salle Gaveau on 8 April 1954. The first recording (dating from the same period) included a note by the composer:

For many years, I dreamed of composing a work inspired by the Song of Songs without daring to do it. When in 1952 the RTF asked me – at the same time as several of my colleagues – if I would like to write a polyphonic score for a cappella voices, my plan immediately took shape: here was the opportunity being offered to me, using a choir – a symbol of humanity – to attempt … this great sacred pastoral poem, without betraying its simplicity, its directness.

Lesur next considered how to devise a suitable musical structure, given the limitations of the commission: there were no instruments, only singers, but he turned these pared-down resources to his advantage, drawing on influences from plainchant among other sources. Lesur was also careful to select verses which created a poetic and musical framework drawing not only on the *Song of Songs* but also the *New Testament* and the *Roman Missal*. He described his use of the choir throughout the work as 'like a large fan. Its opening varies according to the situation, from one to twelve distinct parts'. The imagination with which Lesur deploys his 'vocal orchestra' to illuminate the rich tapestry of his chosen texts is one of the most striking features of the work: his musical 'fan' constantly opens and closes in surprising and ear-catching ways: in *Dialogue* the writing is initially quite spare, the lines seeming to emerge from a sustained texture (sometimes hummed), until everything coalesces for the final cadence. Solo voices are prominent at the start of *La voix du bien-aimé*, its texture much more active. Parts of *Le songe* are jagged and fragmented – only the alto sings the French text while the bass sings Hebrew ('Yahvé') and the sopranos sing in Latin ('Miserere mei, dona nobis pacem'), until ending with a vocal tutti: this movement is a fine example of Lesur's creative combination of multi-lingual texts. In *Le roi Salomon*, layers of plainchant ('Hosana filio David') and fragments of French suggest the drama of a crowd calling out, until they finally come together to acclaim *Le roi Salomon* – a wonderful moment of musical affirmation. *Le Jardin clos* contrasts groups of lower and upper voices which then unite. In *La sulamite*, Lesur makes use of vocal sounds ('doun', 'bom' and the like) as well as humming, to add a further range of colours to the work. This ingenious design culminates in the seventh movement, *Épithalame*, a setting in both French and Latin celebrating the sacred union made manifest by the Sacrament of Marriage. The lower voices sing 'Veni, sponsa Christi' ('Come promise of Christ') in Latin, their melody based on the plainchant in the Liber usualis while the upper voices sing 'Pose moi comme un sceau sur ton coeur' ('Set me as a seal upon thy heart') in French, before the whole work culminates in resonant *Alleluias*.

Olivier Messiaen: O sacrum convivium

Messiaen composed this motet in early 1937, apparently as a commission from an enterprising clergyman, Abbé Brun. It was published by Durand in June 1937.

On the original edition, the scoring – unusually flexible for Messiaen – is given as 'four part mixed choir or four soloists (with organ accompaniment ad libitum)'; the first known performance was given on 17 February 1938 in a concert of *Les Amis de l'Orgue* at the church of La Trinité with Mme Bourdette-Vial and Lucile Darlay listed as solo sopranos, and organ accompaniment. The work enjoyed enormous success during Messiaen's lifetime: by the time of his death, over 138,000 copies had been sold. But this most devout of composers wrote no more liturgical pieces, and *O sacrum convivium* remains an exquisite one-of-a-kind in his output. It is written in F sharp major, a favourite key of Messiaen's, particularly for slow, ecstatic music with deeply spiritual connotations. The melody (based on one of the unusual scales or 'modes' devised by Messiaen) is supported by sonorous and richly harmonised chords, setting a text (sometimes attributed to St Thomas Aquinas) which is a contemplation of the Blessed Sacrament, underlining the profound connection between Christ's Passion and the Eucharist.

Nigel Simeone

Jean-Yves Daniel-Lesur

Le Cantique des Cantiques

1

Dialogue

A ma cavale attelée au charde Pharaon
je te compare.
Mon bien-aimé est à moi comme un bouquet
de myrrhe qui repose entre mes seins.
Que tu es belle ma bien-aimée; tes yeux sont
des colombes.
Comme le lis entre les chardons telle est ma
bien-aimée entre les jeunes filles.
Comme le pommier parmi les arbres du
verger, tel est mon bien-aimé parmi les
jeunes hommes.
J'ai désiré som ombrage et m'y suis assise
et son fruit est doux à ma bouche
Il m'a menée au cellier du vin et la bannière
qu'il dresse sur moi c'est l'amour.
Filles de Jérusalem, n'éveillez pas la bien-
aimée avant l'heure de son bon plaisir.

Dialogue

To my mare harnessed to Pharaoh's chariot,
I compare you.
My beloved is to me like a sachet of myrrh
that lies between my breasts.
How beautiful you are, my beloved;
your eyes are doves.
Like a lily among thorns,
so is my beloved among the daughters.
Like an apple tree among the trees of the
orchard,
so is my beloved among the young men.
I desired his shade and sat down beneath it,
and his fruit was sweet to my taste.
He has brought me to the wine cellar,
and his banner over me is love.
Daughters of Jerusalem, do not awaken love,
until it so desires.

2

La Voix du Bien-Aimé

J'entends mon bien-aimé: voici qu'il arrive
sautant sur les montagnes,
bondissant sur les collines.
Mon bien-aimé est semblable à une gazelle
a un jeune faon.
Mon bien-aimé élève la voix, il me dit
Hâte toi la mienne amie, ma colombe et
viens.
Car déjà l'hiver est passé,
la pluie s'en est allée et retirée
Sur notre terre les fleurs sont apparues
La voix de la tourterelle s'est fait entendre
Le figuier a produit ses figues
Les vignes florissantes exhalent leur parfum.
Montre moi ton visage,
que ta voix sonne en mes oreilles,
Car douce est ta voix et beau ton visage
Mon bien-aimé est à moi et moi à lui;
Il pait son troupeau parmi les lis.
Avant que poigne le jour
et que s'abaissent les ombres,
Reviens, sois semblable mon bien-aimé
a une gazelle au jeune faon
sur les montagnes de l'alliance.

The voice of the beloved

I hear my beloved: behold, he is coming,
leaping over the mountains,
bounding over the hills.
My beloved is like a gazelle,
or a young stag.
My beloved lifts his voice, he says to me:
"Hurry, my love, my dove, and come.
For now the winter is past,
the rain is over and gone.
Flowers have appeared on our land,
the voice of the turtledove is heard again.
The fig tree brings forth its figs,
and the blossoming vines give off their
fragrance.
Show me your face,
let your voice sound in my ears,
for sweet is your voice and lovely your face."
My beloved is mine and I am his;
he grazes his flock among the lilies.
Before the day breaks
and the shadows flee,
return—be like a gazelle, my beloved,
or like a young stag
on the mountains of the covenant.

3

Le Songe

Sur ma couche la nuit j'ai cherché
celui que mon coeur aime.
Je l'ai cherché mais ne l'ai pas trouvé.
Je me lèverai donc et parcourrai la ville
dans les rues et sur les places,
Je chercherai celui que mon coeur aime;
Je l'ai cherché mais ne l'ai pas trouvé.
Les gardes m'ont rencontrée
ceux qui font la ronde dans la ville,
Avez-vous vu celui que mon coeur aime?
Filles de Jérusalem, n'éveillez pas la bien-aimée
avant l'heure de son bon plaisir.

The dream

Upon my bed at night I sought
him whom my soul loves;
I sought him, but found him not.
I will rise now and go about the city,
in the streets and in the squares;
I will seek him whom my soul loves.
I sought him, but found him not.
The watchmen found me
as they went about the city.
"Have you seen him whom my soul loves?"
Daughters of Jerusalem, do not awaken or
stir love until it pleases.

4

Le Roi Salomon

Qu'est ce là qui monte du désert comme une
colonne de fumée, vapeur d'aromates
de myrrhe et d'encens, de tous parfums
exotiques?
Voici le lit de Salomon, soixantes hommes
vaillants guerriers l'environment, les plus fort
d'Israël
Veterans des combats, le glaive au côté
Le roi Salomon s'est fait un trone en cèdre du
Liban; Le dossier d'or, le siège de poupre.

King Solomon

Who is this coming up from the desert
like a column of smoke, perfumed with
myrrh and incense, with all the fragrant
powders of the merchant?
Behold, it is Solomon's litter;
sixty mighty men surround it,
the warriors of Israel,
all of them skilled in battle, each with
sword at his side,
trained for the terrors of the night.

Venez filles de Sion contempler Salomon
portant le diadème dont le couronna sa
mere au jour de ses noces de la joie de son
coeur.
Hosanna filio David,
Qui venit in nomine Domini.

King Solomon made himself a throne
of cedar from Lebanon.
Its posts he made of silver, its back of gold,
its seat of purple.
Come out, daughters of Zion, and behold
King Solomon, wearing the crown his
mother gave him on the day of his
wedding, the day his heart rejoiced.
Hosanna to the Son of David,
who comes in the name of the Lord.

5

Le Jardin clos

Que tu es belle ma bien-aimée.
Tes yeux sont des colombes;
Tes cheveux comme un troupeau de chèvres
ondulant sur les pentes du Galaad;
Tes dents comme un troupeau de
brebistondues quie remontent du bain;
Chacune a sa jumelle.
Tes joues sont comme deux moietiés
degrenades à travers ton voile.
Tes deux seins sont comme deux bichelots
gémaux de la biche qui paissent parmi les lis.
Tu me fais perdre le sens, ma soeur,
ma fiancée, par un seul de tes regards.

The Enclosed Garden

How beautiful you are, my beloved.
Your eyes are like doves;
Your hair is like a flock of goats
streaming down the slopes of Gilead.
Your teeth are like a flock of ewes just
shorn and coming up from the washing,
each one has its twin - not one of them is
alone.
Your cheeks are like halves of a
pomegranate behind your veil.
Your two breasts are like twin fawns,
the young of a gazelle,
grazing among the lilies.

Viens du Liban et tu seras couronnée du chef d'Amana!
Elle est un jardin bien clos, ma soeur,
ma fiancée, une source scellée.
Que mon bien-aimé entre dans son jardinet
qu'il en goûte les fruits délicieux.

You drive me out of my senses, my sister,
my bride, with a single glance of your eyes.
Come down from Lebanon, and you shall
be crowned from the heights of Amana!
You are a garden locked, my sister,
my bride, a spring enclosed,
a fountain sealed.
Let my beloved enter his garden
and taste its choice fruits.

6

La Sulamite

Pourquoi regardez vous la Sulamite
dansant comme en un double choeur?
Que tes pieds sont beaux dans tes sandales,
O fille de prince!
La courbe de tes flancs est comme un collier;
ton chef se dresse semblable au Carmel;
Tes cheveux sont comme la pourpre,
Un roi est pris à ses boucles.
Mon amour, mes délices,
Dans son élan tu ressembles au palmier;
tes seins en sont les grappes.
J'ai dit je monterai au palmier,

The Shulammite

Why do you gaze at the Shulammite,
as she dances like in a double chorus?
How beautiful are your feet in sandals,
O daughter of a prince!
The curve of your hips is like a necklace;
your head rises like Mount Carmel.
Your hair is like purple silk -
a king is held captive in its tresses.
My love, my delight -
In your stature you resemble a palm tree,
and your breasts are its clusters.
I said, "I will climb the palm tree,
I will grasp its fruit."
I am my beloved's,

j'en saisirai les régimes.
Je suis à mon bien-aimé et son désir tend vers moi.
Viens mon bien-aimé sortons dans la campagne;
Nous passerons la nuit dans les villages;
Dès le matin nous irons dans les vignes.
Là je te ferai le don de mes amours.
Filles de Jérusalem n'éveillez pas la bien-aimée avant l'heure de son bon plaisir.

and his desire is for me.
Come, my beloved, let us go out into the countryside;
let us spend the night in the villages.
At dawn, we will go into the vineyards.
There I will give you the gift of my love.
Daughters of Jerusalem, do not awaken the beloved until she so desires.

7

Épithalame

Veni sponsa Christi accipe coronam
quam tibi Dominus praeparavit in aeternum.
Alleluia.
Pose moi comme un sceau sur ton cœur,
comme un sceau sur ton bras:
Car l'amour est fort comme la mort.
La jalousie est dure comme l'enfer,
une flamme de Yahvé!
Les grandes eaux n'ont pu éteindre l'amour,
les fleuves ne le submergeront pas !
Alleluia!

Epithalamion

Come, bride of Christ, receive the crown
which the Lord has prepared for you forever.
Alleluia.
Place me as a seal upon your heart,
as a seal upon your arm:
For love is as strong as death.
Jealousy is as cruel as the grave,
a flame of Yahweh!
Many waters cannot quench love,
nor can rivers drown it!
Alleluia!

Olivier Messiaen
O sacrum convivium

O sacrum convivium,
In quo Christus sumitur,
Recolitur memoria passionis eius;
Mens impletur gratia,
Et futurae gloriae, nobis pignus datur.
Alleluia.

O sacred banquet,
in which Christ is received,
the memory of His Passion is renewed,
the mind is filled with grace,
and a pledge of future glory is given us.
Alleluia.

Sopranos
Tanja Obalski
Elise van Es
Elma Dekker
Saejeong Kim
Yun Park
Varvara Tishina
Esther Kouwenhoven
Rachel Thompson
Jolanda Janssen-Sengers
Charlotte Janssen
Titia van Heyst
Anitra Jellema
Julia Westendorp
Pauline de Lannoy
Ingrid Nugteren

Altos
Franske van der Wiel
Chantal Nijsingh
Roelien van Wageningen
Els Woldberg
Emilie Wijers
Franske van der Wiel
Asa Olsson
Jose Kamminga
Julia Mech
Susanne Meessen-Kritter
Anjolet Rotteveel
Pierrette de Zwaan
Maria Koshiishi
Mieke van Laren-Roos

Tenors
Ben Heijnen
Gerben Houba
Peter-Paul Houtmortels
Uroš Petrac
Georgi Sztojanov
Mattijs Hoogendijk
Matthew Smith
Andre do Nascimento Cruz Gomes
Edward Ross
Daniel Schmid
Alan Belk
Dolf Drabbels
Matevž Kajdiž
Albert van Ommen

Basses
Peter Duyster
Daniël Hermán Mostert
Tiemo Wang
Ludovic Provost
Jan van Zelm
Lars Terray
Andrew Hopper
Robert van der Vinne
Joep van Geffen
Itamar Lapid
Geert van Hecke
Gilad Nezer
Mitchell Sandle

Soloists in *Le Cantique des Cantiques*
Varvara Tishina, soprano
Titia van Heyst, soprano
Anitra Jellema, soprano
Franske van der Wiel, alto
Maria Koshiishi, alto
Pierrette de Zwaan, alto
Edward Ross, tenor
Dolf Drabbels, tenor
Albert van Ommen, tenor
Tiemo Wang, bass
Ludovic Provost, bass
Itamar Lapid, bass

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PRODUCTION TEAM
Recording producer & editing **Adrian Peacock**
Recording engineer & editing **Dave Rowell**
Language coach **Pauline de Lannoy** | Assistant conductor **Rory Johnston**

ARTWORK
Liner notes **Nigel Simeone** | Coordination & design **Ana Teodorović** (PENTATONE)
Cover design **Marjolein Coenrady** (PENTATONE)
Photography **Eduardus Lee**

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PENTATONE TEAM
Managing Director **Sean Hickey** | Label Director **Silvia Pietrosanti** | A&R **Alice Lombardo**
Product Management **Ana Teodorović** | Press **Allie Summers** | Distribution **Camilla Vickerage** | Audio **Wirre de Vries** | Finance **Adrie Engels** | Admin **Lineke Steffers**

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