

Guillaume de Machaut – Dreams In The Pleasure Garden (Chansons) [1998]



1 *Tant Doucement* 5:00 2 *Comment Puet On* 4:29 3 *De Fortune* 5:53 4 *Mors Sui* 5:05
5 *Se Quanque Amours* 5:58 6 *Je Ne Cuit Pas* 5:20 7 *Liement Me Deport* 7:04 8 *Je Puis
Trop Bien* 4:17 9 *Certes Mon Oueil* 5:37 10 *En Amer A Douce Vie* 5:58 11 *He! Dame De
Valour* 3:36 12 *Une Vipere* 6:33 13 *Ma Fin Est Mon Commencement* 6:16 14 *De Toutes
Flours* 6:46 Orlando Consort: Angus Smith (Tenor) Charles Daniels (Tenor) Robert
Harre-Jones (Countertenor) Donald Greig (Baritone)

Machaut: Chansons by the Orlando Consort in Archiv Production's *Al Fresco* series -- a series of reissues to celebrate Archiv's 60th anniversary -- was originally issued in 1998 as *Dreams in the Pleasure Garden*. This new edition is emblazoned with a blurb from the magazine *Gramophone* that "Nothing quite like this has happened before; a disc devoted entirely to Machaut's songs, all performed with voices alone." Nevertheless, in the LP era it was more common for unaccompanied singers to record Machaut than to present his songs with instrumental groups, as is the habit in the CD era, it's just that their voices were not as pure or well intoned as those of the Orlando Consort. Nor were the older groups' command of Machaut's archaic form of French necessarily as well handled, not even by French groups. The monophonic song "*Liement me deport*" is just that; sung by a solo singer without drones or other distractions from the purity of Machaut's melodic line, it's a good way into this project as a whole.

This program contains 14 of Machaut's chansons, generally adjudged the finest extant from the fourteenth century and among the earliest examples of purely secular polyphonic music. All but one of the chansons is based on courtly texts that alternatively praise and damn the "noble lady" variously for her sweet nature, capriciousness, pleasing graces, and seeming predisposition toward evil. The one exception is the famous "*Ma fin est mon commencement*" (My end is my beginning) in which the text spells out the palindromic form of the composition itself. Machaut's artfulness is part of his great appeal, and achieving an understanding of that is a good deal easier through his secular chansons than in his great sacred works such as the

Messe de Nostre Dame or in the confusion of his multi-texted motets. Even two-part Machaut chansons, however, can sound busy, and no other aspect of his output contains more of Machaut's most complicated harmonic business than the chansons. Listeners new to late medieval music should try Machaut: Chansons in short braces of tracks at first to get a feel for his oblique harmonies and rolling rhythms, rather than ingesting it all at once, lest you come down with a case of polyphonic ague. In terms of interpretation, one could hardly make a better choice for this music than the Orlando Consort, as it concentrates strongly on clarity of delivery of his polyphonic lines and agreement of vocal blending; text painting is nonexistent in Machaut, so projection of emotions that relate to the content of a given chanson isn't an issue. The recording, made at the medieval St.-Osdag-Kirche in Mandelsloh, is clear and direct.

The obvious disadvantage to this very minimal, though comparatively less expensive, reissue package is the lack of texts or notes inside, though that doesn't mean one cannot access them at all; underneath the CD a link is provided on the web where one may print a 36-page .pdf file containing Machaut's lyrics and liner notes by Daniel Leech-Wilkinson. While the rather bulky sheaf of papers one accumulates in this fashion may not be the most convenient method to get at the information -- and in Machaut's case, access to the texts is rather important -- the printout you get is at least easy to read. ---Uncle Dave Lewis, AllMusic Review

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