

## György Kurtág - Complete Works for Ensemble and Choir (2017)



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Natalia Zagorinskaja Soprano Harry van der Kamp Bass Elliott Simpson Guitar Tamara Stefanovich Piano Jean-Guihen Queyras Violoncello Gerrie de Vries Mezzosoprano Csaba Király Pianino, Spoken Word Netherlands Radio Choir Asko-Schönberg Ensemble Reinbert de Leeuw – conductor

This fine, triple-CD collection of music by Hungarian composer György Kurtág is titled with uncharacteristic imprecision by ECM: it is a collection not of works for ensemble and choir, but of ensemble, vocal, and choral works. As such, it covers a good many of the milestones of this composer's output, which hovered for many years between western Europe and the East Bloc scene, covering developments from the sparse text-setting of the earlier major song sets to the newer accessibility that were explored by other composers, but maintaining a distinctive voice all the while. The performances were painstakingly rehearsed, sometimes under the supervision of Kurtág himself. The set could easily serve as a basic Kurtág entry in a library of contemporary music, but in places it's much more than that. Get your hands on the best piece of sound equipment you can, and sample one of the pieces on CD 2 bearing the notation that the instruments should be "dispersed in space," perhaps Samuel Beckett: *What Is the Word*, Op. 30b (CD 2, track 7). Beyond the novelty of hearing Beckett in Hungarian, and the usefulness of addressing the importance of the minimalist Irish playwright in Kurtág's own thinking, you get ECM's engineering at its most awesome, as nearly as possible reproducing the sense of space that a physical performance would have had. An ambitious release that lives up to its aims; highly recommended. ---James Manheim, AllMusic Review

Recorded in Amsterdam's Musikgebouw and Haarlem's Philharmonie between March 2013 and July 2016, this 3-CD Set is a milestone in the documentation of Hungarian composer György Kurtág's work and also a labour of love. It brings together all of Kurtág's works for ensemble and for ensemble and choir. The insightful and precise performances bear witness to extensive preparation by the dedicated Asko/Schoenberg Ensemble. Conductor Reinbert de Leeuw speaks of "learning Kurtág's oeuvre step by step, and performing these pieces repeatedly over a period of twenty years." De Leeuw consulted extensively with György and Márta Kurtág before and after each session: "There were moments when I was overwhelmed at first hearing", says the famously-demanding Kurtág, "and we could embrace the result immediately. But sometimes we were critical. The fact that Reinbert always listened to our

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remarks and re-recorded fragments or even whole pieces makes this publication authentic.” Works heard here are presented in chronological order of composition, beginning with the Four Capriccios (1959-1970, rev. 1993) and continuing with Four Songs to Poems by János Pilinszky (1975), Grabstein für Stephan (1978-79, rev. 1989), Messages of the late Miss R. Trousova (1976-80), ...quasi una fantasia... (1987-88), Op. 27 No. 2 Double Concerto (1989-90), Samuel Beckett: What is the Word (1991), Songs of Despair and Sorrow (1980-1994), Songs to Poems by Anna Akhmatova (1997-2008), Colindă-Baladă (2010), and Brefs Messages (2011). Extensive CD booklet includes all song texts with translations, an interview with Reinbert de Leeuw, liner notes by Wolfgang Sandner and Paul Griffith, and a statement by György Kurtág. ---ecmrecords.com

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