

# *Prospectus for the 2020 / 2021 Season*

The **Huelgas Ensemble** once more presents a variety of new programmes chosen especially for the upcoming season. Our artistic director, **Paul Van Nevel**, has carefully chosen a wide range of diverse themes. Audiences will be able to enjoy the ensemble's exciting **new discoveries** alongside **famous names** of the repertory such as Guillaume Du Fay or Josquin Desprez, whilst experiencing myriad themes from a variety of new perspectives.

As in previous years pride of place is of course given to the quality of the music. We do not wish to present unknown works for the sake of it, rather we want to perform them to prove that there is a **hugely rich seam of high quality repertoire** from the medieval and Renaissance periods that is rarely, or indeed yet to be, performed. There is still so much to do, so sit back with your audiences and enjoy these revelations!



Simon Marmion: Les Visions du chevalier Tondale (J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles)

In this prospectus you will find "**a cappella**" programmes, programmes that involve both **singers and instrumentalists**, and a small selection from the Huelgas Ensemble's immense and ground-breaking repertoire spanning nearly 50 years since its inception.

It goes without saying that any **specific programme requests** or themes are also welcomed. Our artistic director Paul Van Nevel, with his extensive knowledge of the repertoire, is always happy to tailor programmes to specific concepts and needs.

## „a cappella“ programmes

### Polyphony “alla Napolitana”

The conquest of the city of Naples by the Spanish-Aragonese prince Alphonso I in 1442 marked the beginning of a cultural heyday that was to last, with only brief interruptions, until 1860, when Giuseppe Garibaldi finally annexed Naples and Sicily to Italy. The combination of a culturally fertile environment and isolated geographic location allowed the development of a uniquely sophisticated musical culture.

The programme consists of three parts, each highlighting in different ways the extraordinary developments in polyphony created on the periphery of Europe:

1. The 15<sup>th</sup> century - here represented by the Neapolitan *maestro di cappella* Johannes Tinctoris, who described his own music as “irregular”.
2. The 16<sup>th</sup> century – here explored via the torrent of prints and manuscripts, dedicated to the tradition of popular Neapolitan song (e.g. villanelle Napolitane).
3. The unique and edgy Neapolitan madrigal repertoire from the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century with its exclusive treatment of vocal range, chromaticism and tonality. This “stravagante Pensiero” (extravagant thinking) is represented in works by Scipione Lacorcia, Agostino Agresta, Giuseppe Palazzotto and Giovanni de Macque, all of whom composed in a far bolder way than the highly acclaimed Gesualdo!

In addition to the aforementioned composers the programme also includes works by Johannes Cornago, Giovanni Ferretti, Rocco Rodio, Stefano Felis.

### ut re mi fa sol la

This programme is intentionally dedicated to polyphonic compositions based on the hexachord, the medieval and Renaissance scale, so to speak. The hexachord, i.e. the six-level scale and its solmization system were, thanks to Guido of Arezzo, the basis of a musician's education for centuries. Every musician learned this model as a child “at his mother's knee”. So it is not surprising that countless composers were inspired to craft creative and imaginative works using what at first glance seems a rather rigid framework. The programme, however, also unearths an astonishing repertoire of surprising versatility and contrapuntal virtuosity. The hexachord is used as a cantus firmus or as a melodic motif in a variety of constantly shifting forms - a programme full of remarkable creativity and unexpected twists!

The programme includes mass movements, motets, canzone and other secular works by Orlandus Lassus, Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina, Francesco Soriano, Stefano Felis, Vincenzo Ruffo, Josquin Desprez and Robert de Févin.

### A Polyphonic Masterpiece:

#### **Missa super voces musicales sex vocum of Francesco Soriano (1548 - 1621)**

Francesco Soriano was an exceptionally gifted composer and director of music who, aside from a five-year sojourn in Mantua, spent his entire life in Rome. He started out as a pupil of Palestrina before working as composer and cantor at some of Rome's most important churches. In spite of his somewhat difficult and arrogant personality – he dared, for instance, to rework his mentor's renowned six voice “Missa Papae Marcelli” into his own eight-voice version! – he appears to have been held in high regard by his employer (the Borghese Pope Paul V) and his colleagues. Even Palestrina himself thought highly of him as is evinced in letters between the revered composer and the Duke of Mantua. For his whole life Soriano remained faithful to his master's style, proving to be his equal in contrapuntal virtuosity. His works comprise of madrigals, hymns (including up to eight voice “Canoni et Oblighi” on “Ave maris stella”), motets and masses.

The centrepiece of this programme is his “Missa super voces musicales”, without question one of the summits of late Renaissance polyphony. Alongside the mass are a selection of madrigals and hymns, giving a fuller picture of Soriano's versatility.

## „a cappella“ programmes

### Music of the Cathedrals 1000 - 1800

European music history would be inconceivable without the musical culture shaped and developed by the church and its institutions. This programme focuses in particular on the magnificent works that were created in the most important centres: cathedrals and large collegiate churches. The interplay between music and the impressive architecture of the great Romanesque and Gothic churches created peerless works of art. Over centuries the interaction between spirituality, visual impact and extraordinary acoustics inspired numerous composers to reach the peak of their musical powers. Our programme is a musical journey during which the audience will hear works sung in the Romanesque and Gothic buildings of Winchester, Seville, Paris, Geneva, Evora, Naples, Rome, Cambrai, El Escorial and Tournai, among others. Starting with an anonymous organum from Winchester Cathedral originating from around 1000, the audience travels to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century hearing the motet "Ex Sion species decoris" by Gaudenzio Battistini (1722-1800, *maestro di cappella* at the Basilica of Novara). Found in-between these two pieces are compositions by Josquin Desprez (c. 1455 - 1521), Richard de Loqueville (c. 1370 - 1418), Thomas Ashewell (c. 1478 - after 1513), Pierre de Manchicourt (c. 1510 - 1564), Bernardino de Ribeira (c.1520 - 1570), Stefano Felis (1538 - 1603), Géry de Ghersem (c. 1574 - 1630), Claudio Monteverdi (1567 - 1643) and Sebastián Alfonso (1616 - 1692).

### MS 5557 - a Burgundian choirbook

The Royal Library in Brussels holds one of the most important testimonies of musical life at the Burgundian court: manuscript MS 5557. This choirbook is one of the few extant and comprehensive sources in north-western Europe for sacred polyphony from the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The core of the codex was compiled in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, most likely at the behest of the Burgundian court chapel itself. Its safe transmission to us today is a real stroke of luck in terms of the time and location that it was created.

We have compiled an anthology from the choirbook that represents the top calibre of this repertoire: exclusive "one-offs" (a mass by Cornelius Heyns), examples of virtuoso vocal artistry (including works by Antoine Busnois) and last but not least English repertoire (John Plummer) which was apparently very popular with the Burgundian court at Coudenberg Palace in Brussels.

A Burgundian evening not dedicated this time to Burgundian wine but uniquely to Burgundian polyphony, whose complex flavours remain on one's palette for a pleasingly a long time.



Huelgas Ensemble in Talant, Bourgogne (photo: Luk Van Eeckhout)

## „a cappella“ programmes

### Polyphony on the periphery: high culture on the borders of Europe

In this programme, the listener is confronted with works that are far removed from traditional European music centres such as Rome, Paris, Cambrai, Munich or Venice. On this expedition through the "provinces" we discover some real lucky finds from Cyprus, Naples and Palermo, each of which as captivating as the next thanks to their high quality and autonomous creativity.

Cyprus was a French colony in the late Middle Ages, and the court of Nicosia developed a style of music that deviated strongly from the traditional forms of the mainland. A particular manuscript attests to this, containing more than 300 polyphonic compositions. Rest assured, the Huelgas Ensemble will present some of its more surprisingly potent works. The Renaissance courts of Naples and Palermo could also be referred to as colonies in a certain way, since they were conquered by the Aragonese court in 1442. Towards the end of the Renaissance, an "avant-garde" movement emerged in the musical circles here, creating, above all, madrigals of a highly idiosyncratic and expressive nature. Significantly, local composers such as Agostino Agresta, Giacomo Tropea, Scipione Lacorca, Giovanni de Macque and Giuseppe Palazzotto described their compositions as "Stravagante Pensiero" and "Affinamento del gusto musicale" - not a single phrase in their works sounds "normal".

### The Landscape of the Franco-Flemish

In the summer of 2018 Paul Van Nevel's book "Het landschap van de Polyfonisten – De wereld van de Franco-Flamands" was released. In his book Van Nevel traces the hypothesis that the melancholic and imitative style of Franco-Flemish composers was shaped by the character of the landscapes, which they would have experienced in their childhood (stillness, a safe environment, melancholia). Together with the photographer Luk Van Eeckhout Paul Van Nevel spent over twenty years journeying through the Franco-Flemish scenery to produce a fascinating and substantial work with no fewer than 168 magnificent photos.

In this concert the audience is presented with this hypothesis head-on: for each of the thirteen works performed the landscapes of each composer's childhood will be projected for all to see. Listeners will be swept away to another Franco-Flemish world by a total of twenty-five photographs of landscape and pictures of Franco-Flemish cathedrals, whilst the Huelgas Ensemble performs works by Antoine Busnois, Nicholas Gombert, Johannes Ockeghem, Josquin Desprez and Pierre Manchicourt, to name but a few. Audience members will experience the interplay between landscape and music in the most arrestingly intimate way.



Huelgas Ensemble in Talant, Bourgogne (photo: Luk Van Eeckhout)

## *Programmes for voices and instruments*

### **From Guido of Arezzo to Guillaume de Machaut: a Panorama of Medieval "Inventio"**

This programme focuses on the tremendous creativity of the Middle Ages. From the very start of polyphony, with its almost meditative early forms, we trace the pioneering developments that swiftly followed. Organa from Paris introduced the invention of modal notation creating the most breathtaking, gothic structures, while distinctive, almost quirky, secular motets stretch the limits of content comprehension with their fascinatingly overcrowded multi-textuality. The earliest settings of mass movements together with works of great sensitivity from the *ars subtilior* add further perspectives to this period of unprecedented musical invention. The listener is sent on a voyage of discovery to a magical world in which conformism and academism did not yet exist.

The concert contains works from c. 800 to c.1360, with anonymous compositions as well as works by Johannes Affligem, Leoninus, Perotinus, Francesco Landini, Pierre Fontaine, Solage, Matteo da Perugia and others.

*This programme can also be performed in an "a cappella" version.*

### **Guillaume Du Fay (c. 1400 - 1474): Homo universalis**

There are composers that simply cannot be underestimated, with Guillaume Du Fay (c. 1400 - 1474) being a prime example. His breath-taking isorhythmic motets, for example, formed a bridge between the constructivism of the Late Middle Ages and the sophisticated counterpoint on which future generations would build.

Crafted during a busily itinerant life Du Fay's output unequivocally surpasses that of his contemporaries in both quantity and quality. Not one genre of polyphonic music escaped his innovations and inimitable form of style, even making him renowned across Europe in his own lifetime. It was not only in his sacred compositions but also in his ceremonial commissioned works, and his Italian and French secular pieces that he was able to demonstrate his unrelenting creativity and originality.

Added to this Du Fay acted as an ambassador, either serving or accompanying the foremost ecclesiastical (Rom, Kamerijk/Cambrai, Bruges) and secular (Malatesta, Savoy, Florence) establishments, bringing Franco-Flemish art to the most far-flung corners of Europe.

This programme displays every facet of Du Fay's art – both vocally and instrumentally.

### **The Ear of Christopher Columbus (before 1451 - 1506)**

With this program, we go on the hunt for music that Christopher Columbus might have heard during his adventurous lifetime. A life spent, apart from his four famous voyages of discovery, firmly on dry land! A decisive moment in the life of Christopher Columbus was his meeting with *Los Reyes Católicos* in May 1486 in Córdoba. From this year on he very much became a firm favourite of Ferdinand and Isabella's house. Most of the repertoire at the court of Ferdinand and Isabella consisted of secular music sung in vernacular. What is striking here is the fragile simplicity of both the lyrics and the music, which, in contrast to the "imported" Franco-Flemish polyphony, was primarily homophonic. Columbus would, of course, also have been familiar with the Franco-Flemish repertoire. As chance would have it Columbus was present in Valladolid when Isabella and Ferdinand received a visit from the Burgundian Duke Philip the Fair, who arrived with his entire court. Philip's musical entourage consisted of a number of compositional figureheads, including Mabrianus de Orto and Alexander Agricola. The latter, incidentally, was to die in Valladolid on August 15, 1506, just three months after the death of Christopher Columbus. It is almost certain that Columbus heard music by these two composers.

The music of the first part of this programme comes from another world - Columbus' Italian childhood. These compositions written in the Frottola tradition, with their intricately interwoven counterpoint and their harmonious warmth, provide a fitting contrast to the world of Spanish melancholy.

A programme focused on Columbus was released by Sony in May 2019.

*This programme can also be performed in an "a cappella" version.*

# Repertoire

The following selection presents a small but representative range of repertoire that the Huelgas Ensemble has been building up since 1971.

## **Alpha & Omega – Polyphony of the Middle Ages**

An “a cappella” programme that runs the gamut of medieval music

## **Francesca Caccini (1587 - 1640): La Liberazione di Ruggiero - balletto con prologo e tre scene**

A concert performance of the first opera composed by a woman (CD Sony, 2018)

## **The Mirror of Claudio Monteverdi (1567 - 1643):**

### **Missa da Capella a sei voci fatta sopra il motetto in illo tempore del Gomberti**

Monteverdi's epic work in the “prima prattica” style sharply contrasted with progressive madrigals of his predecessors (CD Sony, 2016)

## **The Eton Choirbook (c. 1480 - 1505)**

The choirbook from Eton College, Windsor: the sublime sounds of the Tudor period (CD Sony, 2012)

## **Claude Le Jeune (1528 - 1600)**

The portrait of an “enfant terrible” of the French art of composition: motets, chansons, canzonetti and madrigals (CD Sony, 2014)

## **Wolfgang Rihm (\* 13. 3. 1952): “Et lux” (2009)**

For doubled-up vocal quartet, and string quartet: Huelgas Ensemble & Minguet Quartett (CD ECM, 2015)

## **The cycle: The Ear of...**

In this series of programmes the Huelgas Ensemble ask the question: what would certain figures or groups of people have heard musically...

These programmes can be performed separately, and there is also the possibility of a combined “Ear Programme” as one cycle.

### **The Ear of Rogier van der Weyden (1399/1400 - 1464)**

### **The Ear of Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472 - 1553)**

### **The Ear of Francisco de Zurbarán (1598 - 1664)** (CD Cypres, 2014)

### **The Ear of Pieter Paul Rubens (1577 - 1640)**

### **The Ear of the Huguenots** (CD Sony, 2017)

### **The Ear of Theodoor Van Loon (1581/82 - 1649)** (CD Cypres, 2018)

### **The Ear of Bernard Van Orley (c.1490 - 1541)**

### **The Ear of Christopher Columbus Kolumbus (before 1451 - 1506)** (CD Sony, 2019)

## **Monographien**

- Nicolas Gombert (c. 1495 - c. 1560)
- Jean Richafort (c. 1480 - c. 1547)
- Pierre de Manchicourt (c. 1510 - 1564)
- Orlando di Lasso (1532 - 1594)
- Giovanni Pierluigi Palestrina (1525? - 1594)
- Michelangelo Rossi (c. 1601 - 1656)
- Jacobus De Kerle (1531/1532 - 1591)
- Jacob Clement (c. 1510/15 - 1555/56) alias Clemens non Papa
- Alexander Agricola (1446 - 1506)
- Thomas Ashewell (c. 1478 - nach 1513)
- Robert White (c. 1538 - 1574)
- Firminus Caron (c. 1440 ? - c. 1495)



**Huelgas Ensemble**

Groot Begijnhof 16  
3000 Leuven  
Belgium

**Paul Van Nevel**  
artistic director

**Silke Jacobsen**  
general manager

GSM: +32 (0) 468 12 89 10  
Mail to: sales@huelgasensemble.be

**Ann Meijers**  
office manager

GSM: +32 (0) 471 22 82 40  
Mail to: office@huelgasensemble.be

**Tom Phillips**  
production manager

GSM: +44 (0) 7496 77 71 76  
Mail to: production@huelgasensemble.be

**[www.huelgasensemble.be](http://www.huelgasensemble.be)**