

Musicweb International

12 x 12 - A Musical Zodiac

Karlheinz STOCKHAUSEN (1928-2007), Tierkreis, op.41 (1974-75) [37:34] with interpolation of material by Machaut, des Molins, Ciconia, Pykini, da Bologna, de Cluny and anonymous composers [38:37]

Capilla Flamenca; Het Collectief
ec. deSingel Arts Campus, Antwerp, Belgium, October 2010. DDD
ETCETERA KTC 4042 [76:11]



Is this the way into Stockhausen for newcomers, or for those who have previously tried and failed? This enterprising CD combines one of the composer's most accessible and popular works, the twelve zodiac pieces originally for musical boxes that constitute Tierkreis, with songs and instrumental pieces from the 1300s, an astonishingly avant-garde period known as Ars Nova and Ars Subtilior.

Sometimes the works are discrete, but often they are melded seamlessly into one another or even alternate sections in quick succession. Stockhausen leaves the detail to the performer, concentrating himself on the conceptualisations. Despite the outwardly simple idea - a character piece to represent each mystical Sign of the Zodiac- when it comes to intricacy, Stockhausen never disappoints. In Tierkreis tone rows jostle with arithmetic-based rhythms in typically modernistic density. Het Collectief and Capilla Flamenca, specialists in contemporary and early music respectively, are free to improvise and do so with gusto, and must indeed take some of the credit for the basic ear-friendliness of the overall effect of this recording,

Stockhausen's occasional 'proper tunes' notwithstanding. Furthermore, the fourteenth-century pieces chosen by the performers add further dimensions of variety and colour to the soundscape, bevelling the angularities - most of them! - inherent in Stockhausen's maths-driven directions. In fact, a good deal of intelligence lies behind their selections, and in juxtaposition similarities between Stockhausen's music and that of the Ars Subtilior composers especially are striking.

Questions will linger in many minds as to the depth of artistic merit of Tierkreis - in some regards, it is more about calculation than inspiration, and Stockhausen's basic music, over which performers are free to elaborate almost freely, amounts to a maximum of 25 minutes or so. Yet whether or not Stockhausen was as important to music history as his disciples insist, Tierkreis has plenty to offer the curious ear, and in this deluxe version by the splendid Capilla Flamenca and Het Collectief the listener gets an aural treat of uncommon fascination.

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