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CLOUD AND MIRRORS: A BELGIAN-BRITISH TRIBUTE TO ALAN CHARLTON

written by Knopskaya on January 5th, 2020

The late Alan Charlton (1970-2018), a British composer who left us far too soon, cuts a fascinating figure on the contemporary musical scene. The scope of his oeuvre, in contrast to the works themselves, could be described as belonging to a "bygone age", in the best sense of the expression.

He wrote works for large orchestra, chamber music and solo pieces in interesting and compact configurations. Chamber music lay especially close to his heart; he even went as far as writing a chamber opera, *The Golden Bough*. The titles of his works are intriguingly mystical. He wrote about clouds, golden boughs and snow. He acknowledged all traditions and made grateful use of poems. An example is his six-part song cycle for soprano and piano on *The Cloud*, by Percy Byssche Shelley (1792-1822). He also wrote choral pieces around the figure of Christ. Charlton was the kind of composer who marvelled at life's rich tapestry of which he could be a thread. It is this form of serenity that radiates from this album released by Etcetera Records.

Etcetera is a label that still shows a real sympathy for Belgian artists, and for artists who have stood close to us in space and/or time. This makes the album a fine example of synergy between artists separated only by a narrow channel. The works for choir, voice and piano are the result of a collaboration between the Brussels Chamber Choir conducted by Helen Cassano, pianist William Vann and the American soprano April Fredrick. Our own Belgian Edenwood Duo, consisting of cellist Wouter Vercruyse and guitarist Catherine Struys, is the ideal choice to perform the Suite for cello and guitar.

Charlton himself sang in choirs from a young age, which no doubt explains his drive to write his own choral music. In so doing he used a unique musical language, akin to the expressive harmony of the early 1920s, in which composers tested the bounds of atonality in search of a certain dramatic lyricism.

In the bonus track - *Fantasy* - which shows Charlton's versatility as a composer and his sense of experimentation, you can hear the man himself on the electronic piano.

Translation Dutch-English: Brussels Chamber Choir

<https://www.cultuurpakt.be/cd-lp/cloud-and-mirrors-een-belgisch-britse-hommage-aan-alan-charlton/>