

Melodious Melancholye - The melodious sounds of Medieval England (2008)



1. *Worldes Blis Ne Last No Throwe* 2. *Hevene quene, for ensemble (after the song 'Edi beo thu hevene quene')* 3. *Miri it is while sumer ilast, estampie* 4. *Ar ne kut ich sorghe non* 5. *Bryd one brere (Bird on a Briar), song* 6. *Dou way, Robin / Sancta mater gracie, motet* 7. *Wel were hym that wyst, song* 8. *Abide, I hope it be the best, song* 9. *Plus penser que dire, faux-bordon chanson in 3 parts* 10. *Alas, departynge is ground of woo, song* 11. *Walter Frye - Alas, alas is my chief song, for 3 voices* 12. *Walter Frye - So ys emprinted, cantus melody* 13. *Robertus de Anglia - O fallaze e ria Fortuna, three-part song* 14. *Johannes Bedyngnam - Agwillare for 2 voices (attrib.)* 15. *My wofull hert of all gladnesse* 16. *Lullay, lullow* Ensemble Belladonna: Miriam Andersen - voice, harp Rebecca Bain - voice, fiddle Susanne Ansorg - fiddle, rebec

Ensemble Belladonna consists of three women -- Miriam Andersén, Rebecca Bain, and Susanne Ansorg -- who hail from Sweden, Canada, and Germany, respectively. The group specializes in singing music of the medieval and early Renaissance periods, and if one were to compare it to Anonymous 4, Ensemble Belladonna might well find such suggestion flattering as its members are avid admirers of the "the girls." Nevertheless, Ensemble Belladonna is significantly different from Anonymous 4 in that the group plays its own instruments: Andersén the medieval harp, Bain the fiddle, and Ansorg the vielle and rebec. The members of Ensemble Belladonna met while studying at the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis in Basel, Switzerland, and while they have been together since 1997, Raum Klang's *Melodious Melancholye* appears to be their first release on disc.

"Melodious" is an apt choice of adjective for these musicians, as their voices are very strong, pleasant, and beautiful. Their enunciation of Middle English -- ergo, this collection is subtitled "The Sweet Sounds of Medieval England" -- is pure and convincing in a manner that surpasses many native speakers of modern English. The instrumental performances are likewise cogent and skillful, and Ensemble Belladonna's offhand and casual style of playing seems idiomatic in a way that seems to the manner born, nothing in the performances smack of conspicuous realization. The program consists of a wide variety of English songs dating from the beginning

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of the thirteenth century to the early decades of the fifteenth; there are many highlights, though "Abide, I hope it be the best" and their rendition of the Christmas carol "Lullay lullow" are standouts. The annotation of Melodious Melancholye is sensible and contains details on sources for each piece within the track listing. Raum Klang's recording is a little quiet, but one only turn it up if need be; in every other way this maiden voyage for Ensemble Belladonna is a superb effort, and should win the group both wide admiration and many fans. ---Dave Lewis, Rovi

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