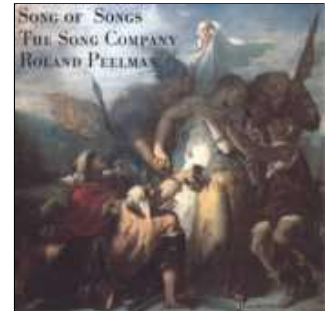


celestial harmonies

song of songs
the song company/roland peelman
celestial harmonies 13199-2
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file classification: classical/
sacred choral music



the artists

Since its inception in 1984, The Song Company has developed as one of the most interesting and outstanding vocal ensembles in the world. The group's repertoire covers vocal music from the 12th century to the present day and is unique in its stylistic diversity.

Under the leadership of Roland Peelman, who became Artistic Director in 1990, The Song Company's main focus has been music by emigrating composers during the 15th and 16th century, selected classics of the 20th century, an extensive and ongoing international commissioning program and even a long-running cabaret show. In addition, the ensemble continues to be involved in some of the most innovative contemporary music theatre in Australia and actively promotes Australian music overseas.

For Celestial Harmonies, The Song Company has also recorded the main parts of Schütz' *DER SCHWANENGESANG* (THE SWAN-SONG 13139-2), in 1997 at the Sydney Opera House, produced by Michael Askill.

the project

The title, the first line of that extraordinary book known as the *Canticle of Canticles*, *Canticum Canticorum* or *Song of Songs* means in Hebrew either 'by or for King Solomon'. As the son of King David, Solomon was renowned for the prosperity and peace he brought to the Jewish people, the temple and palace he built, and above all the legendary wisdom attributed to him.

The Song Company performs a cappella settings of compositions by Philippe Verdelot, Johannes de Lymburgia, Gaspar van Weerbeke, Josquin des Prez, Francisco de Peñalosa, Andreas de Silva, Tomás Luis de Victoria, Giovanni P. da Palestrina, Claudio Monteverdi and Melchior Franck.

This book of love poems, the only one of its kind in the bible, carries Solomon's name and has been the subject of much speculation and controversy. Not only the questions about its authorship and its chronology, but most importantly the issues surrounding its meaning and interpretation have never ceased to engage Rabbis, scholars, theologians and artists alike.

On a first and literal level, it describes the love between a country girl, a Shulamite, and a man (a king?) of the court in the most erotically imaginative terms and with a remarkable absence of sexism. Both male and female speakers remark upon their lover's dove-like eyes and at one point it is the man who has cheeks like spices and lips like lilies. Women initiate lovemaking as often as men; urgency as well as tenderness can be heard in both the male and female voice.

Yet whilst a colourful picture of nature in all its forms and metamorphoses is painted, the song is far from a poetic idyll. The text is full of complex paradox and gives free reign to expressions of anxiety and fear, particularly in those passages that suggest an urban context.

Some commentators have been at pains to superimpose a dramatic structure between a shepherd and a girl, captured for the harem where the king unsuccessfully tries to win her affection. Just as many scholars regard the work as a series of separate poems originating in Middle-Eastern folk tradition, orally transmitted and assembled by one or several writers at some time after Solomon's reign (10th century BC at the earliest).

