

Maxine Thévenot

Review of **My Dancing Day** by **Philip Greenfield** - **American Record Guide** (Nov/Dec 2010)

A tribute not just to the spirit of Christmas but to the spirited brand of music-making going on at the University of New Mexico. Las Cantantes, the University's 20-voice women's chamber choir, does the Alma Mater proud with sensitive, heartfelt singing in such spiritually-charged works as Jean Langlais's exquisite 'Ave Mundi Gloria', the jaunty 'Personent Hodie' from John Rutter's cycle of carols called *Dancing Day*, and the handsome 'Magnificat' for voices, marimba and oboe composed by Bradley Ellingboe, Director of Choral Activities at UNM's Department of Music. You'll hear some strain in Rutter's 'Virgin Most Pure' (also from *Dancing Day*) as the verses are passed between different soloists and choral subdivisions with less than unanimous results. But on the whole, the choir sounds just fine under the baton of Dr. Maxine Thevenot, an organist-conductor trained at the Manhattan School. The instrumentalists on loan from the New Mexico Symphony, Santa Fe's ProMusica Chamber Orchestra, and Albuquerque's Cathedral Church of St. John are first-rate. From the sound of things, the University of New Mexico would be a wonderful place not only to share the melodies of Christmas but to study and perform music year-round.

Review of **My Dancing Day** by **Barry Kilpatrick** - **American Record Guide** (Nov/Dec 2009)

Just as sleigh bells conjure images of Christmas, so the sound of a women's chorus evokes angels — and so a Christmas album would seem like a good idea for a women's chorus. Las Cantantes is a vocal ensemble at the University of New Mexico, and it sounds very good. Only occasionally, when pitch sags slightly or confidence seems to waver, are we aware that these are singers in training. Thanks to Director Maxine Thevenot's good work, those moments are few and brief.

The fine harpist Lynn Gorman DeVelder is heard in a number of selections. The choir is also accompanied ably by organist Iain Quinn, oboist Claudia Giese, and percussionist Jeff Cornelius.

Review of **My Dancing Day** by **Craig Smith** - **Pasatiempo, Santa Fe New Mexican** (12 Dec 2008)

This debut recording by Las Cantantes, the women's choir of The University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, is a little gem in many ways. First off, the group itself, which had 19 members during the 2007-2008 academic year, sounds well schooled and well prepared, and the actual singing laid down during the May 2008 recording sessions is solid for an amateur/student ensemble. Second, the repertoire chosen by conductor Maxine Thevenot mixes familiar holiday fare, most of it in new arrangements, with pieces being recorded for the first time. Third, there are excellent supporting musicians—organist Iain Quinn, harpist Lynn Gorman DeVelder, oboist Claudia Giese, and percussionist Jeff Cornelius, and their fine contributions help even out some of the choir's vocal inconsistencies, which are few, though noticeable, especially in moments of tight blend. Finally, even through the nonvisual medium of a CD, one can feel how precisely and warmly Thevenot conducts this music and how carefully recording engineer Brent Stevens worked to make each piece come to life. (The venue was Albuquerque's Cathedral Church of St. John.) I listened to this on the car stereo, on the computer, and on the home system, and I enjoyed it each time.

Among the best moments are Albuquerque composer Frederick Frahm's sensitive and piquant *Magnificat & Nunc Dimittis*, ethereally sung by the group and deftly accompanied by Quinn; UNM professor Bradley Ellingboe's *Magnificat*, also a compelling setting of the biblical text with the unusual yet very effective accompaniment of marimba and oboe; and John Rutter's big-scaled *Dancing Day*, a selection of carols and interludes. In the many movements of this third piece, DeVelder sounds especially fine, and the women's voices often blossom like Christmas roses. Additional selections include Praetorius' exuberant *Psallite*, which gets the disc off to a shaky start that soon clears up; Langlais' *Ave Mundi Gloria*, new to me; the effective arrangement of *Silent Night*; and a sweetly sung take on Hugh Martin and Ralph Blane's *Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas* arranged by Ellingboe. As the cherry on the cupcake, the liner booklet offers full and accurate repertoire notes, comprehensive performer biographies, and original-language texts and English translations of the full program. I wish some of the big labels did as well as Raven does here.

Review of **My Dancing Day** by Victor Hill – **The Journal of the Association of Anglican Musicians** (April 2009)

This 19-voice, four-part treble ensemble has a fresh and sweet tone, and their program offers some admirable repertory. One of the highlights is the St. Luke Service of Evening Canticles by Frederick Frahm. He is described in the liner as “a Post-Modern American composer,” a phrase that sounds oddly contradictory (or else pretentious) to me; given that “modern” means “of or pertaining to present and recent time,” it seems logical that anything “post-modern” must be still in the future! It would be more informative to characterize the style of these delightful canticles as tunefully eclectic. The settings are fluent, generally simple in style, but thoroughly convincing; the organ part provides gentle support. The music for the Balulalow by Antony Baldwin is bright, enlivening the 16th century Scottish text. Bradley Ellingboe’s highly imaginative and expressive Magnificat, like the Frahm and Baldwin, receives its first recorded performance on this disc. It is scored for soprano solo, chorus, organ, oboe, and marimba. Oboist Claudia Giese has supple phrasing and nice tonal inflections; percussionist Jeff Cornelius is adroit and supportive. The soprano soloist is not

identified by name, but she has ingratiating lyricism. The largest work on the disc is the cycle *Dancing Day* of John Rutter, which has come to be a welcome change from the wonderful but ubiquitous Britten *Ceremony of Carols*, clearly the inspiration for Rutter’s work. Harpist Lynn Gorman DeVelder is eloquent here and in a solo arrangement of *Lo, how a Rose e’er blooming*. It sounds like a refreshing breath of spring, which is also suggested by the photo of the dancer on the front cover— somewhat seasonally incongruous to this New Englander, but certainly reflecting the joy of Christmastide. A Christmas Lullaby with text by Malcolm Dalglish incorporates a charming Scottish Folk melody and would grace any Christmas concert or worship service. Works of Praetorius, Langlais, and Fauré, along with two idiomatically sung folk song arrangements and two old standards complete the program. (I confess that I detest *Have yourself a merry little Christmas*, but at least Ellingboe brings the freshness of his Magnificat into his pleasantly restrained setting.) Much to my approval, publishers are credited in the liner, which also contains program notes, personnel, biographies, and full texts. The Cathedral of St. John in Albuquerque provides a sympathetic acoustic for the singers and the Raven recording team.