

**Concert Report: Quink, the Dutch vocal ensemble  
at the Church of the Savior, Cleveland Heights (February 10)**

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Organized for the 1978 Holland Festival, the five member Dutch vocal ensemble called Quink has been touring the world for the past thirty-two years and making annual US tours since 1985. On Wednesday evening (February 10), they sang a concert entitled ‘Pour voz Plaisirs’ for a good-sized audience that braved the snow drifts to hear a mostly French Renaissance and British-American 20th century program at the Church of the Savior in Cleveland Heights. And indeed, there were multiple pleasures to be had this evening.

The first half of the program featured nine French renaissance chansons scored for three, four and five voices and ranging almost precisely in chronological order from Agricola (born in 1446) through Jannequin, Gombert, de Villiers, de Manchicourt, Lupi II, Roussel and Lassus to Pierre Bonnet (who died around 1600). Tenor Harry van Berne was the spokesman, giving witty little precis of the translations before each piece, most of which had to do with the complexities of love -- from the romantic to the slightly raunchy.

The church, a spacious and rather austere gothic building that almost transported the audience to the Netherlands, did a lovely job of propagating the colorful but well blended, voices of the five singers, whose diction was a model of clarity, and who are quietly skillful at communicating with an audi-

ence. Nine end-to-end chansons might be much of a muchness, but Quink held our attention throughout the set.

These singers -- sopranos Marjon Strijk & Mariëtte Oelderik, mezzo soprano Elsbeth Gerritsen, tenor Harry van Berne & bass Kees Jan de Koning -- are extremely versatile musicians who move easily from opera to oratorio to chamber music and have always embraced new and experimental music with enthusiasm. Their theatrical backgrounds paid off richly in one of Quink’s signature pieces, Dutch avant-garde composer Simeon ten Holt’s ‘Bi Ba Bo’, which Harry van Berne explained “means absolutely nothing at all”. Written in 1980 for a group called Electric Phoenix who never got around to performing it, this more than ten-minute plunge into the world of Dada seems to have become the exclusive property of Quink. (“There won’t be another piece from him -- the composer says he hates singers!”)

Beginning with a soundless solo from Elsbeth Gerritsen, the piece unfolds in a cacophony of semi-pitched and captivatingly rhythmic sounds tossed back and forth among the singers, every now and again slipping into attractive little chorales with beguilingly traditional harmonic sequences (tuning forks were at the ready every time this happened). As the babbling lunacy ebbed and flowed, the singers variously entered into intense conversations, arguments, quarrels and whisperings. Every time the ear was beginning to tire of one effect, another clever idea arose out of nowhere. The quintet were marvelous actors as well as skilled declaimers of nonsense syllables continuously rearranged into new combinations, and some of their antics had the audience in giggles. The surprise ending was as fun as the rest of the piece. You have to see this one (and where else but on YouTube! ‘Bi Ba Bo’ is available there in the form of an experimental film by Ramon Gieling with Quink singing and acting).

After intermission, Quink departed from the printed program to sing a lovely setting of ‘Wondrous Love’ by the young Cleveland composer and Quink devotee Kevin S. Foster. Then they turned to three little pieces by Samuel Barber. ‘To Be Sung on the Water’ sets a Louise Bogan poem with quiet

harmonies and lulling, barcarolle rhythms. Barber's settings of Emily Dickinson's 'Let down the bars, O Death' and Gerard Manley Hopkins' 'Heaven-Haven' were simple and beautifully rendered musical versions of striking poems in which the composer sublimates the music to the text -- which was very clearly enunciated in both cases by the quintet. Gerald Finzi's 'Three Short Elegies' offered small sips of vintage Finzi. Matyas György Seiber's 'Thee Hungarian Folksongs', sung in English, were vigorous and colorful. The surprise in tonight's program was Quink's decision to end with two pieces by Randall Thompson: the first chorus of his 'Peaceable Kingdom' and 'Fare Well', a setting of a valedictory poem by Walter de la Mare written for three

combined high school choirs in New York. It was interesting to hear Quink in exquisite performances of repertory usually performed by secondary school and college choirs in the US. While the long lines of 'Say ye to the Righteous' are probably more successful when there are enough singers to allow staggered breathing, Quink expertly pointed up Thompson's often fussy dynamic effects and articulations. Their ability to change vocal color to suit different repertory is inspiring.

A Dutch folk song about a girl who disguises herself as a boy because she wants to work on a boat formed the encore to this stylishly sung evening of vocal chamber music.