

Good news: Born in 1983, composer Daniel J. Knaggs is a rising star in the sky of serious, young American composers who write choral music that does not sound like Morten Lauridsen's or Eric Whitacre's. Here an innovative and creative mind seems to explore the limits of singable new music for choirs. Even trained as a singer, speaking many languages and currently working as a church musician, Knaggs knows the medium of choir very well. Admittedly, these three chansons are not easy to conquer, so far only semi-professional and radio choirs have accepted them. But with good voice training for the sometimes extreme posture requirements, skilful rehearsal technique and a sovereign direction, savvy amateur choirs can quite cope with these highly interesting works. As the title suggests, Knaggs has made a kind of homage to Claude Debussy. But there is another important aspect of his composition: he explores - as he puts it himself - time by bringing the past into a dialogue with the future. In the first of the three songs ("Les en voulez-vous garder?"), Like Debussy, he sets to music a poem by Charles d'Orléans from the 15th century; in the third, he sets up a text of his own, and in the middle egg- by Maurice Rollinat, who, like Knaggs, was a composing poet and lived in the 19th century. Another method of dealing with time is the use of the double-leading tone, which is of crucial importance in all three pieces, as a harmonic substance and as a structuring element. The first song flows quietly, just like the rivers, which are metaphorically spoken about and can not be stopped. The cadenza is presented by female choir passages and combined with modern quint and quart sounds. The male voices join later and expand the spectrum to six-voice. The second chanson races with a quick unison, dark staccato on light lines, it is from the Valley of the thorns the speech. Virtuositic rhythm encounters fanciful harmonies, movement is the predominant element. The consistently eight-part, third piece ("Chanson d'un demain") is about a positive vision of the future in which the darkness has fallen asleep forever and the bright morning has become today. Two solo voices, soprano and alto, add an extra tonal dimension to this expansive sentence, ending with a quote from the beginning of the first chanson. The output is simple, but contains good background information, text translations, performance tips, as well as a link to the pronunciation of French. It is gratifying that editors were found for this demanding music who accepted the distribution without speculating on mass sales. For ambitious mixed chamber choirs, these songs as well as other spiritual compositions by Knaggs are a worthwhile extension of the repertoire. Sabine Wüsthö