

Quink, the Dutch vocal quartet at the Church of the Saviour, (February 20)

by Daniel Hathaway



Formed for the occasion, the Dutch *a cappella* vocal quartet, Quink, made a fine initial impression at the Holland Festival in 1978, and has been touring ever since. Remarkably, after 37 years, founding members Harry van Berne, tenor and Kees Jan de Koning, bass, are still singing in the ensemble, along with mezzo-soprano Elsbeth Gerritsen, who joined in 2006, and soprano Marjon Strijk, who signed on in 2008.

On Friday evening, February 20, Quink sang a program of English, American, Hungarian, Israeli and Dutch secular music in the lovely Gothic ambiance of the Church of the Saviour in Cleveland Heights. Entitled “Silence and Music,” the 75-minute program drew a small, brave audience into an exquisite world of unaccompanied vocal chamber music.

Beginning impressively with Ralph Vaughan Williams’s haunting, 1953 setting of *Silence and Music* (on a text by Ursula Wood, the composer’s second wife), the first set went backward in time to visit three Elizabethan part songs and two other Vaughan Williams songs, *Fain would I change that note*, and *Love is a sickness full of woes*.

Capable of a lovely blend at all dynamic levels, the quartet demonstrated its tuning acumen in seven *Songs of Springtime* by E.J. Moeran, an English composer who was highly influenced by the works of Frederick Delius. Complex harmonies abounded, along with humor (the “Hey, nonny nonnies” in “Sigh no more, Ladies”) and bonhomie (the drinking song, “Good Wine”).

Four songs by Frank Bridge, Benjamin Britten’s composition teacher, continued the British theme and ended with chromatic humming in *The bee*.

After a brief intermission, Quink turned to folk song settings: *At the foot of yonder mountain* and the *Riddle Song* (“I gave my love a cherry”) from the USA, and lovely settings of *Linden Lea* by Vaughan Williams and *Down by the Sally Gardens* by John Vine.

Three Hungarian folksongs by Mátyás György Seiber (sung in English), a trio of Israeli folksongs and three final Dutch folksongs alternated lovely stories with low humor and special vocal effects. A fourth Dutch song about a knife sharpener made a delightful encore.

Throughout the evening, Strijk’s clear, limpid soprano, Gerritsen’s rich mezzo, van Berne’s lyrical, focused tenor and de Koning’s resonant bass congealed into a lean, colorful vocal texture that any *a cappella* group would sell their collective souls to achieve. And, in a quiet Dutch way, they seem to be having great fun singing together.

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