

Utopia

Belgian handmade polyphony



Programme
2027

“Music from the 16th century
does not merely tell
of the past.

It speaks of loss,
longing,
beauty
and silence.

Polyphony once again
becomes
a living language.”

Utopia

Belgian handmade polyphony

In this brochure, we present a series of concert programmes in which the Utopia Ensemble combines its familiar sonic ideal — transparency, expressiveness and harmony — with new thematic focuses. Recent years have brought international recognition, including a Diapason d'Or and the Preis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik, as well as a further deepening of our artistic direction: 16th-century music that is not only of historical value but also has something essential to say today.

Within this programme, three current projects deserve special attention.

The new programme *The Cathedral of Antwerp*, which will also be released as a new album in the autumn of 2026, pays tribute to the 16th-century chapel masters and to the special place of Mary in the city's musical and religious life, right up to the arrival of Rubens.

With *Lassus: Lamentations – Comfort and Reflection in Times of Loss*, the Utopia Ensemble turns its attention to one of the most poignant musical forms of the Renaissance. Orlandus Lassus's lamentations open up a space of stillness, mourning and reflection, but also of comfort: music that is centuries old and yet sounds remarkably close to home.

En Terre Estrange took on a new and definitive form in 2025, following the Utopia Ensemble's anniversary concert at AMUZ (B). Historian and writer Philipp Blom was commissioned by the ensemble to develop a thematic reflection on exile, identity and the longing for a home — themes that remain recognisable even today.

Through these programmes, the Utopia Ensemble aims to demonstrate that early music can be more than just a historical repertoire: it can address themes that remain recognisable and meaningful today. We warmly invite you to discover our programmes and explore with us how they might be incorporated into your season, festival or concert series.

With musical regards,
Utopia Ensemble

EN TERRE ESTRANGE

The Impossible Return



Line-up: Utopia Ensemble and an actor/narrator Jobst Schnibbe

Music by Lassus, Gombert, Isaac, Clemens, Senfl and Festa

Texts by Philipp Blom

*Entitled *En terre estrange (On Foreign Soil)*, the ensemble explores the tension between the dream of an ideal society and the reality of the unknown and unfamiliar. Thomas More's *Utopia* sketches an imaginary, remote world, far removed from the harsh reality of his time. This idea of a distant, ideal society resonates to this day, as many leave their homeland in the hope of building a better and more just existence. However, the road to a new world is often fraught with uncertainty, loss and alienation.*

This concert programme combines the vocal power of the Utopia Ensemble with texts written especially for this occasion by author Philipp Blom. His words, performed by Jobst Schnibbe, offer a poignant and personal reflection on migration, alienation and the search for identity. Blom's texts enhance the musical experience and deepen the themes of utopian dreams and the human reality of exile and transformation.

Lamentations by Lassus and literature merge in this unique concert, which focuses on the profound themes of migration and identity. The audience is invited to let themselves be carried away by a landscape of sounds and words, and to reflect on the dreams of utopia and the reality of those who are seeking their own path to a new home.



THE ANTWERP CATHEDRAL

Marian Polyphony before Rubens

Line-up: Utopia Ensemble

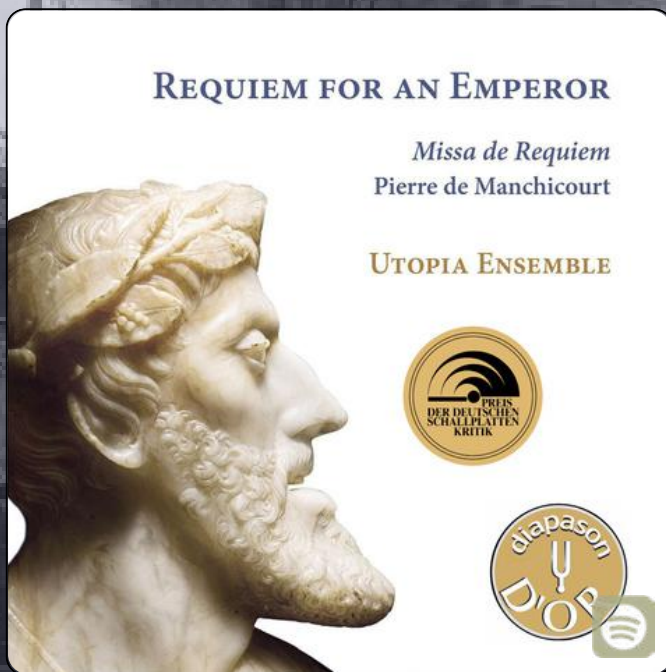
Music by Pullois, Obrecht, , Barbireau, Cornet, Pevernage and van Turnhout

Antwerp's Cathedral of Our Lady has been a source of devotion, art and inspiration for centuries. This programme revives the rich musical flowering of this iconic place in the sixteenth century, with polyphonic masterpieces in honour of Mary.

Utopia Ensemble performs works by the chapel masters who helped shape the musical glory of the cathedral: Jacob Obrecht, Severin Cornet, Andreas Pevernage, Jacobus Barbireau and Geert van Turnhout. Each piece is linked to an important historical moment in the history of the cathedral.

The journey ends with a symbolic climax: the transition to the Baroque, depicted in Rubens' first painting for the cathedral — a visual echo of a musical and cultural renaissance.

Optionally, the polyphonic chants are interspersed with Gregorian music, performed by the Psallentes ensemble conducted by Hendrik Vanden Abeele, which enhances the spiritual depth of the liturgy.



REQUIEM FOR AN EMPEROR

An intimate commemoration

Line-up: Utopia Ensemble & Jan Van Outryve, lute

Music by Pierre de Manchicourt, Josquin des Prez, Thomas Crecquillon and Nicolas Gombert

Emperor Charles V was one of the most powerful and influential monarchs of the Renaissance. As a statesman, he reshaped the European landscape. But he also left his mark on the cultural world of the 16th century as a patron of artists and musicians. He was also a devoutly religious man. After his long reign full of wars, he withdrew to the Spanish monastery of Yuste, for silence and contemplation. In his will, he ordered thirty thousand memorial masses to be said, to ensure the peace of his soul after his death.

Pierre de Manchicourt, court composer of Charles' son Philip II and head of his Capilla Flamenca, played a major role in this immense task with his impressive Requiem. This work, imbued with serene beauty, shows Manchicourt's virtuosity in polyphonic composition technique and his masterful use of Gregorian chant as a foundation. But Utopia also searches for the man behind the monarch. They shed light on Charles' emotional world in his last days through motets and chansons by Franco-Flemish greats such as des Prez, Crecquillon and Charles' favourite Gombert.

This concert offers a unique opportunity to hear not only the grandeur of Charles V, but also his inner emotional world, supported by the refinement of Renaissance polyphony.

SALVE SUSATO

Treasures of the Antwerp
Golden 16th century



Line-up: Utopia Ensemble and Jan Van Outryve (lute)

Music by Tielman Susato, Orlandus Lassus, Jacobus Clemens and Nicolas Gombert

Around 1530, Tielman Susato arrived as an immigrant to the bustling city of Antwerp, in the middle of its Golden Age. During this period of unprecedented economic and cultural prosperity, he built up a leading music publishing house, while also making a name for himself as a musician and composer. Antwerp, the cultural hub of Europe, offered the perfect breeding ground for his versatile talents.

As a pioneer in music publishing, Susato published works by great masters such as Lassus, Gombert and Josquin. His famous chanson *Mille regrets* was not only published by Susato, but also received a unique “réponse” from his hand. Although he is often remembered for his instrumental work, it is precisely his vocal music that is central to this programme. Utopia Ensemble performs his masterpieces, including the beautiful five-part mass *In illo tempore quum audissent apostoli* and the motet *Salve quae roseo*, an ode to the Antwerp that gave him so much.

Through this programme, Utopia Ensemble invites the public to rediscover the musical wealth of Antwerp's Golden Age. The awarding of this recording with the prestigious "Diapason d'Or" underlines the exceptional quality and historical value of this repertoire. A unique experience that lifts every concert agenda to a higher level.



LASSUS LAMENTATIONS

Comfort and reflection in times of loss

Line-up: Utopia Ensemble

Music by Orlandus Lassus

The *Lamentationes Hieremiae Prophetae à 5* are among the most moving works from Orlandus Lassus's late period. Published in 1585, they set nine passages from the Lamentations of Jeremiah to music, intended for the Tenebrae services during Holy Week.

The texts were written in response to the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. They describe the grief of a community that has lost its city, its security and its future. Jerusalem is portrayed as a desolate and mourning woman. Although these words are deeply rooted in a historical event, they have never lost their power of expression. In the figure of the mourning Jerusalem, loss, abandonment, guilt and hope take on a human form that has continued to resonate with generations of readers and listeners.

Lassus was one of the most celebrated composers of his time. In this cycle, he combines a masterful polyphonic style with an exceptional sensitivity to the text. The music draws its power not from dramatic contrasts, but from a subtle and intense musical expression of human emotions.

Each lament ends with the same plea: Jerusalem, Jerusalem, *convertere ad Dominum Deum tuum* – 'Jerusalem, return to the Lord, your God.' As a recurring refrain, this plea lends the cycle its distinctive character: a lament in which grief and hope remain constantly side by side.



MIROIRS

Sixteenth-century pictorial motets reflected

Line-up: Utopia Ensemble and Bart Rodyns (organ)

Music by Verdonck, Lassus, Daniel Raymundi and Benjamien Lycke

Images: Benjamien Lycke

MIROIRS is a unique concert programme in which Utopia Ensemble combines sixteenth-century illustrated visual motets with contemporary compositions, creating a fascinating dialogue between past and present. Pictorial motets, typographic works of art from sixteenth-century Antwerp, played an important role in the Counter-Reformation. They were distributed to encourage believers to lead a virtuous and merciful life, and thanks to their uniqueness were recognized in 2012 as masterpieces of Flemish heritage. Their message of mercy is as relevant today, spurred on by the need for empathy, solidarity and compassion in our modern, fast-paced world.

In MIROIRS, Utopia links these historical masterpieces to contemporary reflections, in which composer, lyricist and designer once again join forces, this time with digital art forms. These reflections offer concertgoers the opportunity to reflect on the theme of compassion in a new context. The result is a concert experience that is not only musically stimulating, but also offers space for reflection and deepening.

For concert organisers, MIROIRS is a programme that brings the audience into contact with cultural heritage and contemporary art in an innovative way, enriching it with deeper themes that will leave a lasting impression.

In collaboration with





BRUEGEL

Paintings translated musically

Line-up: Utopia Ensemble a capella or with Arnaud Van de Cauter (organ)

Music by Lassus, Gombert, Crecquillon, Janequin, de Rore and Sweelinck

Pieter Bruegel, one of the most fascinating painters of the sixteenth-century Netherlands, knew better than anyone how to capture nature, the seasons and the daily life of the common man. But Bruegel also painted surreal scenes full of mystery, inspired by Hieronymus Bosch, often with a religious undertone. His eye for detail continues to amaze museum visitors to this day. In the concert programme “Bruegel” Utopia Ensemble is inspired by his iconic paintings such as The Triumph of Death, The Tower of Babel, and Peasant Wedding.

This musical portrait of Bruegel combines folk songs, religious works and love songs from his time. The programme reflects the versatility of Bruegel's art: from raw, folk themes to deeply religious reflections. With music by contemporaries from the Low Countries, Utopia brings the different facets of Bruegel's character to life in a layered experience. This results in a captivating concert without self-censorship: folk songs in contrast with religious works and devotion or somewhat bawdy love songs give the facets of our grand master of the canvas new color. This concert guarantees a rich and varied musical journey through the world of Bruegel.



OHIMÉ!

Love poetry in polyphony around 1600

Line-up: Utopia Ensemble and Korneel Bernolet (harpsichord) and Thomas Baeté (viola da gamba)

Music by De Wert, Monteverdi, Willaert and Marenzio

“Ohimé!” and “Si dolce è il tormento” – Italian sounds like music to the ears, and that is no coincidence. The language is the soul of the madrigal, a sixteenth-century genre in which passion, love's happiness and sorrow are sung. What many do not know is that this typically Italian genre owes its origins largely to the influence of Franco-Flemish composers. Utopia Ensemble invites the audience on a musical journey through the beautiful poems of Guarini, Ariosto and other Italian masters. This poetry, full of longing, pain and love, is brought to life in a fabric of refined polyphony. The madrigals in this programme are not only an expressive painting of human emotions, but also a meeting between Italian and Flemish musical traditions. Let yourself be enchanted by these beautiful gems of musical expressiveness.



BIOGRAPHY

The Utopia Ensemble, founded in 2015 and named after Thomas More's famous book, which was written in Antwerp, is the benchmark for Flemish vocal polyphony from the sixteenth century. From its home base, St. Paul's Church in Antwerp, the ensemble brings this music to life with rare transparency, expressiveness and harmony.

Utopia is a collective without an artistic director: decisions are taken collectively, which translates into a perfect balance between voices and vision. The ensemble builds on the rich tradition of Flemish polyphony, but at the same time seeks new ways to make this heritage resonate today. It is a fixture at prestigious festivals such as Laus Polyphoniae and the MA Festival, and also performs internationally in the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Portugal and the United Kingdom.

Since its inception, Utopia has released five internationally acclaimed CD recordings: from Morales and Luther to Pevernage and Susato (awarded a Diapason Découverte and Diapason d'Or) to the recent Requiem for an Emperor, which received both the Diapason d'Or and the Preis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik. Concert organisers can count on Utopia's unique expertise in Flemish polyphony, combined with a contemporary, well-considered approach. *"Utopia masterfully connects the past and the present"*, wrote one admiring critic, aptly summarising the artistic mission that has driven the ensemble since its inception.

WHAT THE PRESS SAYS

"Das Utopia Ensemble musiziert mit vollkommener Intonation und einem Stilgefühl, das uns zutiefst beeindruckt zurücklässt."

**Preis Der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik
about Requiem for an Emperor**

"Écoutez la chanson « O malheureuse journée » de Nicolas Gombert, modèle d'interprétation tant par la beauté plastique des textures que le soin du détail apporté à chaque ligne !"

Diapason (Diapason d'or) about Requiem for an Emperor

"Très bel équilibre entre une matière vocale très précise (captée en proximité) et une réverbération dense et opulente. Une image particulièrement homogène des cinq voix, au service de la polyphonie."

Diapason (Diapason d'or) about Salve Susato

"The performances by the Utopia Ensemble (5 solo voices: mezzo-soprano, countertenor, tenor, baritone, and bass) are outstanding. One can hardly imagine a better blended consort of voices or more sensitively shaped performances."

American Record Guide about Salve Susato

"De leden van het Utopia Ensemble bereiken een voortreffelijk geluid, met een delicate combinatie van hun stemmen en een grote gevoeligheid in de dynamiek van het zingen, die ze met veel beheersing en variatie aanpassen aan het karakter van elk stuk."

Scherzo about Salve Susato

"La séduction qui opère doit aussi beaucoup à l'exceptionnelle qualité du jeune ensemble belge. Les cinq chanteurs – un par partie – phrasent avec une douceur et une fluidité absolue, ciselant une polyphonie transparente et d'une extrême lisibilité."

Diapason Magazine about Pevernage

"Utopia have a much lower centre of gravity yet maintain similar clarity while simultaneously warming the texture with soft Flemish-tinged vowel sounds. The results are beautiful, intimate and thoroughly engaging."

The Gramophone about The Seven Lamentations

UTOPIA ENSEMBLE IS

Michaela Riener, mezzo

Bart Uvyn, countertenor

Adriaan De Koster, tenor

Lieven Termont, baritone

Guillaume Olry, bass



MEDIA



CONTACT

info@utopia-ensemble.be

Tel: +32 (0) 485 40 45 34

www.utopia-ensemble.be

