

LESSONS
from
NIGHTINGALES

SONGS OF SUFI MYSTERIES

by

MEHMET ALİ SANLIKOL

BLUE HERON & DÜNYA

SCOTT METCALFE

LESSONS FROM NIGHTINGALES

SONGS OF SUFI MYSTERIES

BY MEHMET ALİ SANLIKOL (b.1974)

THE TRIUMPH (2024)

For vocal ensemble, ney,
yaylı tanbur & percussion

DEVİRAN (2017)

For vocal ensemble

1 I. Kainat (The Universe) 4:20

2 II. Sır (The Mystery) 4:21

3 III. Tecella (The Revelation) 5:12

4 IV. Kenz (The Treasure) 4:15

5 V. Fetih (The Triumph) 6:48

6 I. Ey gönül neylersin sen bu cihanı 6:42

7 II. Mevlam senin aşıkların devran
iderler Hu ile 7:56

Soprano solo: Sonja DuToit Tengblad

TOTAL TIME: 39:34

Blue Heron / DÜNYA / Scott Metcalfe conductor

BLUE HERON 1-7

Sarah Brailey, Sonja DuToit Tengblad, Teresa Wakim *soprano*
Cecilia Duarte, Kim Leeds, Laura Pudwell *mezzo-soprano*
Corey Dalton Hart, Jason McStoots, Aaron Sheehan *tenor*
Paul Guttry, Steven Hrycelak, David McFerrin, Sumner Thompson *bass*
Scott Metcalfe *artistic director*

DÜNYA 1-5

Beth Bahia Cohen *yaylı tanbur*
George Lernis *percussion*
Tareq Rantisi *percussion*
Mehmet Ali Sanlikol *ney, artistic director*

Recorded October 20–22, 2024, at First Parish Milton (Milton, Massachusetts)
Engineer Joel Gordon
Assistant engineer Peter Atkinson
Session producer Brad Michel
Editing Mehmet Ali Sanlikol & Joel Gordon
Mixing & Mastering Joel Gordon

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and supporting it through her enthusiastic advocacy.

With roses in hands like pages
Nightingales recite lessons
They see the light of Truth in everything
And call to prayer while saying Hu

Anonymous [source: Ali Ufki (1610-75)]
Translated by Mehmet Ali Sanlıkol

LESSONS FROM NIGHTINGALES

by Mehmet Ali Sanlıkol

The Triumph

After many years of researching a variety of Sufi brotherhoods (including the Mevlevi, whose traditions are featured in *Devran*) I came to the conclusion that the one I most identified with was the Bektaşî brotherhood, and ever since then I have had my eyes on this particular poem by Edip Harabi (1853-1917). Blue Heron's commission was the perfect opportunity to set it to music.

The poem belongs to the Sufi *devriyye* (cyclical) genre—*devran* and *devriyye* are related, the words originating from *devir* which means “cycle”—well-known among the Bektaşî Sufi dervishes. This type of poetry expresses the cycle of existence through the concepts of *vahdet-i mevcud* (unity of all existence) and *vahdet-i vücud* (unity of being). The Bektaşîs are known to be quite heterodox among all Sufi orders and in their hands *devriyye* poetry becomes shocking, to say the least: a simple reading of this poem is nothing less than jaw-dropping! But a deeper reading reveals that this is Harabi's commentary on all of existence being God. Man is nothing but a drop in the ocean that is God; all creatures, altogether, reveal God.

In the poem there are many references to the Koran, the Bible, and Sufi saints. For example, the “Kaf and Nun command” mentioned in the first line is a reference to God uttering the word “Kûn” (“Be”) to bring the universe into existence—“Kûn” is written in Arabic with the letters Kaf and Nun. So Harabi is saying that God was ever-present, even before the universe existed. However, since according to this philosophy all of existence is God, then Harabi too was present before the universe came into being. But only men who have attained the state of perfection can sense this reality. Otherwise, for “ordinary” men God is the kind of being that is described in sharia, a punishing Creator.

It was quite a challenge to set this particular text to music. While all five quatrains evoke strong imagery and thought (such as the beginning of the universe and seeing the very face of God), they are quite varied in content and themes. I decided to remain musically unified by maintaining the same instrumentation throughout and by placing *makam* (mode) in the center of the whole work, but set each quatrain as

a separate movement in order to create musical contrast, and picked a specific *usul* (rhythmic cycle) as well as an individual musical style and form for each. The first movement (The Universe) is based on the sparse Japanese *Gagaku* (an ancient court music), the second movement (The Mystery) is an Ottoman/Turkish *şarkı* (classical song), the third (The Revelation) follows the Sufi practices of *perde kaldırma* (modulating ostinati) and *zikir* (ostinato or repeated phrases invoking the names of God), the fourth (The Treasure) is based on the art of fugue, and the final movement (The Triumph) starts out with music inspired by Renaissance polyphony but ends with a *nefes*, the kind of sacred song sung by Bektaşî dervishes. I also decided to shrink the number of beats in each rhythmic cycle as I progressed between movements. The first movement has the *Muhammes* rhythmic cycle with thirty-two beats, the second movement has the *Bereşşan* cycle with sixteen beats, the third has the *Düyek* cycle with eight beats, the fourth has the *Yürük Semai* cycle with six beats, and the final movement has the *Sofyan* cycle with four beats.

The Triumph was composed for Blue Heron's twenty-fifth birthday celebration and premiered by Blue Heron and DÜNYA in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on October 19, 2024.

Devran

The starting point of this project was *Devran*, an *a cappella* piece I wrote in response to widespread stereotyping of Muslims around and after the US election in 2016. The Turkish word *devran* has a number of meanings, including the world, life, fate, time, and the times people live in, as well as whirling or turning. It is often used in Islamic mystical literature in the Sufi tradition and occurs in the text of *Devran's*



Blue Heron and DÜNYA performing *The Triumph* in its world premiere on October 19, 2024, at First Church in Cambridge, Congregational (Photo: Nick Papps)

second movement, where it seems to reference the Mevlevi (so-called “whirling”) dervishes, followers of the thirteenth-century mystic Rumi.

When the new Republican administration proposed the so-called “Muslim ban” in 2017, many Americans attempting to “defend” Muslims deployed their own stereotypical images of Islam: women wearing head scarves and men bent over prayer rugs. Islamic culture, however, includes not just the religious mainstream, but also secular Muslims, Sufi dervishes, and much more. In fact, even those Muslims who

adhere to the mainstream differ enormously: consider the Muslims of the Gulf region versus those in Turkey, Indonesia, or Morocco. Therefore, when composing *Devran* I decided to honor pluralism within Islam with a choral piece like a motet—a staple of Renaissance European Christian music—setting texts by Turkish Sufi dervishes. The musical idea was to combine Renaissance polyphony and various Middle Eastern musical elements into an artistic whole. More specifically, while the imitative style of sixteenth-century counterpoint is the main influence, especially dominating the second movement, the Middle Eastern *makam* (mode) tradition and elements of Turkish Sufi music contribute substantially to the musical effect. For example, the first movement incorporates *zikir* (*Ya Allah, ya Rahman, ya Batın, ya Cabbar*) and the second movement includes a soprano solo which evokes the vocal improvisations of the Koranic chanters called *Hafız*.

Devran was premiered at the New England Conservatory on November 9, 2017, by the NEC Chamber Singers under the direction of Erica Washburn, and subsequently performed by Blue Heron in March 2022 and October 2024.

TEXTS & TRANSLATIONS

THE TRIUMPH

I. Kainat

Kaf ü nun hitabı izhar olmadan
Biz bu kainatın iptidasıyız
Kimseler vasıl-ı didar olmadan
Ol Kabe Kavsey'nin ev ednasıyız

II. Sır

Yok iken Adem'le Havva alemde
Hak ile hak idik sırr-ı mübhemde
Bir gececik mihman kaldık Meryem'de
Hazreti İsa'nın öz babasıyız

III. Tecella

Bize Peder dedi tıfl-ı Mesiha
"Rabbi erni" deyu çağırdı Musa
"Len terani" diyen biz idik ana
Biz Tur-u Sina'nın tecellasıyız

IV. Kenz

"Küntü kenz" remzinin olduk agahı
Aynel-yakin gördük Cemalullahı
Ey hâce bizdedir sırr-ı ilahi
Biz Hacı Bektaş'ın fukarasıyız

I. The Universe

Before the *Kaf* and *Nun* command was revealed
We are the beginning of the universe
Before anyone seeing the face [of God]
We are the closest to in between the eyebrows

II. The Mystery

Before there was any Adam and Eve in the world
We existed with the Divine Reality in impenetrable mystery
For one night we were the guest of Mary
We are the real father of Jesus

III. The Revelation

The child Messiah called us Father
Moses cried "O Lord, show thyself to me"
We are the one who said to him "Thou shalt not see me"
We are the revelation made on Mt. Sinai

IV. The Treasure

We became aware of the mystery of "I was a treasure"
We saw the very face of God Himself
O *hodja*, the divine secret is with us
We are the humble followers of Hacı Bektaş

V. Fetih

Zahida şanıımız "inna fetahnâ"
Harabi kemteri serseri sanma
Bir kılı kırk yarar kamiliz amma
Pir Balım Sultan'ın budalasıyız

Edip Harabi (1853-1917)

DEVRAN

I.

Ey gönül neylersin sen bu cihanı (vay)
Kala sanma sana bu mülk-i fani

Ne alır gidersen dünya evinden
Söyüne bir gün ömrün şem' danı

Ya Allah, ya Rahman, ya Batın, ya Cabbar

Hani şol aleme sultan olanlar
Koyuban gittiler nam-u nişanı

Ya Allah, ya Rahman, ya Batın, ya Cabbar

Felekler tacını başından almış
Türab etmiş nice sahib-kıranı

Hakiki gafil olma aç gözünü
Ecel erir vermez bir gün amanı

V. The Triumph

O ascetic, we're known by "Indeed, we have granted triumph"
Do not think of Harabi as humble or low-life
While we are mature enough to split a strand of hair into forty
We are also crazy about saint Balım Sultan

Kaf, Nun Arabic letters spelling kûn; as in "He is the One who has originated the heavens and the earth, and when He wills to (originate) a thing, He only says to it, Be (kûn), and it becomes": Quran 2:117 / "O Lord, show thyself to me"; "Thou shalt not see me" Quran 7:143 / "I was a hidden treasure" a hadith / hodja imam / Hacı Bektaş Saint Bektaş (c. 1209–1271) Islamic scholar, mystic, and philosopher / "Indeed, we have granted triumph" the beginning of Quran, Surah al-Fath / Balım Sultan (1457-c. 1517/19) founder of the Bektaşî Sufi order

I.

O soul, why do you care for this world?
Don't think that this mortal wealth will remain with you

Whatever you end up doing in this world
One day the light of your life will be blown out

O God, o the Compassionate, o the Hidden, o the Mighty

Where are those who became sultans in this world?
They are all gone, with their reputations and distinctions
left behind

O God, o the Compassionate, o the Hidden, o the Mighty

Destiny took their crowns from their heads
And turned those powerful rulers into earth

Don't be a real fool, open your eyes
One day death will come and not let you ask for mercy

II.

Mevlam senin aşıkların
Devran iderler Hu ile
Yolundaki sadıkların (sultanım hay)
Cevlan iderler Hu ile Aşkın şarabından içip
Fani halayıktan geçip
Vaslun hevasında uçup (sultanım hay)
Meydan iderler Hu ile

Güller alıp eller varak
Bülbüller okurlar sabak
Her şeyde görür nur-u Hak
Ezan iderler Hu ile

Bunca meratib geçmeye
Dost illerine uçmaya
Hakka erip raz açmaya (sultanım hay)
İn'am iderler Hu ile

Hak Dost

The texts originate from two anonymous devotional songs (ilahî) transcribed by Ali Ufki (1610-75) in his Mecmua-i Saz-u Söz ("Collection of Instrumental and Vocal Music," c. 1650); additional text in italics.

II.

My Lord, those who are in love with you
Whirl while saying *Hu*
Those loyal to you on your path (O my sultan)
Turn while saying *Hu* They drink the wine of Love
Go beyond the mortal female servants
Sail in the skies of reunification (O my sultan)
And perform their rituals while saying *Hu*

With roses in hands like pages
Nightingales recite lessons
They see the light of Truth in everything
And call to prayer while saying *Hu*

To pass through many ranks
To fly toward the lands of the Friend
To reach the Truth and unveil secrets (O my sultan)
They give blessings while saying *Hu*

True Friend

Hu a name for God in Sufism / *True Friend* a common way of addressing God in Sufism

MANY VOICES

by Scott Metcalfe

Blue Heron's particular specialty is vocal music from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but the ensemble's repertoire extends both before 1400 and after 1600, including plainchant, late thirteenth-century organum from Notre Dame, music of Machaut and the following generation of Ars subtilior composers, Praetorius, Fauré's Requiem, the twelve-voice *Cantique des cantiques* by the mid-twentieth-century Frenchman Jean-Yves Daniel-Lesur, and a small handful of new pieces. Leaving aside the plainchant (which served as the basis of a great deal of later composition), what connects all of this is the practice of polyphony, especially the sort of equal-voiced, contrapuntal polyphony for which the late Middle Ages and Renaissance were a Golden Age: "The simultaneous combination of a number of parts, each forming an individual melody, and harmonizing with each other; the style of composition in which the parts are so combined; polyphonic composition; counterpoint" (from the entry "polyphony" in the *Oxford English Dictionary*).

One of the things that makes Mehmet Ali Sanlıkol's music so attractive to Blue Heron, and a good match for the skills we have developed as an ensemble, is his cultivation of polyphonic counterpoint. Counterpoint emerges gradually in *The Triumph*, which begins in aleatoric chaos (an element of complete uncertainty is introduced by the use of bowed cymbals: the player has no real control over what sounds they may produce at one time or another) and culminates, in the opening of the last movement, in Renaissance-style polyphony. In *Devran* it is the dominant technique throughout. Sanlıkol draws on elements of Turkish traditional music, including modes (*makam*), rhythmic cycles, and (in *The Triumph*) an instrumental ensemble featuring bowed *tanbur* (long-necked lute), *ney* (end-blown flute), and an array of percussion, while a distinctly jazz-influenced harmonic palette and way of building chords lends a glamorous color to both pieces. Because Sanlıkol is a masterful practitioner of both jazz and Turkish music and at the same time a "classical" composer deeply informed by the Western European tradition, all these styles are fully integrated into his music. The melodies often sound Turkish, but may then be combined imitatively; the harmonies are jazzy, but emerge out of counterpoint, as do the modal harmonies of Renaissance music. The listener will perceive other influences here and there, such as the brief, peculiarly Stravinskian intrusion of a solo soprano in the first movement of *The Triumph*, set in a distant key and distinct meter. Yet another domain where seemingly disparate styles converge in Sanlıkol's composition is his fine sensibility to matters of tuning and temperament. Renaissance music and certain Turkish modes have in common the use of just intonation, in which all the intervals of the scale are tuned pure to the final or tonic; the melodic modes employed in *The Triumph* are all of this kind, and we have aimed for just intonation as the basic tuning system of *Devran* as well.

* * *

The best note one could add to this program of Sufi-inspired vocal music might be Coleman Barks's free translation of a poem by Rumi known to English speakers as "Only breath." Barks's version is a sort of riff on Rumi, condensing here, expanding there (Rumi does not actually mention Hinduism, Buddhism, or zen). One may debate whether Barks conveys the essence of Rumi, or whether his poem is more a new creation, a sort of companion work of art to Rumi's Farsi original, which must remain inaccessible to those of us who do not understand the language. Whichever it may be, it speaks directly to the purpose and practice of music as I conceive of it, especially music for human voices.

ONLY BREATH

Not Christian or Jew or Muslim, not Hindu,
Buddhist, sufi, or zen. Not any religion

or cultural system. I am not from the East
or the West, not out of the ocean or up

from the ground, not natural or ethereal, not
composed of elements at all. I do not exist,

am not an entity in this world or in the next,
did not descend from Adam and Eve or any

origin story. My place is placeless, a trace
of the traceless. Neither body or soul.

I belong to the beloved, have seen the two
worlds as one and that one call to and know,

first, last, outer, inner, only that
breath breathing human being.

Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī (1207-73)

Translated by Coleman Barks in *The Essential Rumi*

Blue Heron has been acclaimed by *The Boston Globe* as “one of the Boston music community’s indispensables” and hailed by Alex Ross in *The New Yorker* for its “expressive intensity.” The ensemble ranges over a wide repertoire from plainchant to new music, with particular specialities in 15th-century Franco-Flemish polyphony and early 16th-century English sacred music, and is committed to vivid live performance informed by the study of original source materials and historical performance practices.

Founded in 1999, Blue Heron presents a concert series in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and has appeared at the Boston Early Music Festival; in New York City at Music Before 1800, The Cloisters (Metropolitan Museum of Art), and the 92nd Street Y; at the Library of Congress, the National Gallery of Art, and Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, D.C.; at the Berkeley Early Music Festival; at Yale University, the University of Chicago, and the University of California, Davis; in Cleveland, Kansas City, Milwaukee, Montreal, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Providence, St. Louis, San Luis Obispo, Seattle, and Vancouver; and in England, Germany, and Belgium. Blue Heron has been in residence at the Center for Early Music Studies at Boston University and at Boston College and has enjoyed collaborations with A Far Cry, Dark Horse Consort, Les Délices, Parthenia, Piffaro, and Ensemble Plus Ultra.

Blue Heron’s first CD, featuring music by Guillaume Du Fay, was released in 2007. Between 2010 and 2017 the ensemble issued a 5-CD series of *Music from the Peterhouse Partbooks* (available as a set entitled *The Lost Music of Canterbury*), including many world premiere recordings of works copied around 1540 for Canterbury Cathedral and restored by Nick Sandon; the fifth CD in the series was awarded the 2018 Gramophone Classical Music Award for Early Music. Jessie Ann Owens and

Blue Heron won the 2015 Noah Greenberg Award from the American Musicological Society to support the world premiere recording of Cipriano de Rore’s *I madrigali a cinque voci*, released in 2019. Between 2015 and 2023 Blue Heron celebrated the circa-600th birthday of Johannes Okeghem (c. 1420-1497) by performing his complete works in a multi-season project entitled Okeghem@600 and recorded all of his songs for a two-CD set, *Johannes Okeghem: Complete Songs*. Volume I of the set was named to the *Bestenliste* of the *Preis der deutschen Schallplattenkritik*. Blue Heron’s recordings also include a CD accompanying Thomas Forrest Kelly’s book *Capturing Music: The Story of Notation*, the live recording *Christmas in Medieval England*, a compilation of medieval songs entitled *A 14th-Century Salmagundi*, Guillaume de Machaut’s *Remede de Fortune* (in collaboration with Les Délices), and *Christmas & New Year’s in 15th-Century France & Burgundy*, released in December 2024.

DÜNYA (the Turkish, Arabic, Persian, and Greek word for “world”) is a musicians’ collective and record label based in Boston. Its goal is to explore a cosmopolitan view of the world through the lens of a wide range of Turkish traditions, alone and in conversation with the musics of the formerly Ottoman peoples—Greeks, Jews, Armenians, Arabs, Kurds, mystics—as well as with western and other world traditions. The DÜNYA collective includes specialists in Ottoman music, early European music, Middle Eastern Christian and Jewish music, ethnomusicology, jazz, contemporary composition, and popular music. In DÜNYA projects, research and translation combine with original composition, improvisation, and musical experimentation to create lively presentations, recordings, and publications aimed at engaging contemporary audiences. DÜNYA seeks to work with a wide range of cultural and religious organizations and relies on no particular political, governmental or religious affiliation or support of any kind.

THE MUSICIANS



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RANTISI



MEHMET ALI
SANLIKOL



AARON
SHEEHAN



SONJA DUTOIT
TENGBLAD



SUMNER
THOMPSON



TERESA
WAKIM

Grammy-nominated composer and New England Conservatory faculty member **Mehmet Ali Sanlikol** hails from Cyprus and Turkey. A jazz pianist, multi-instrumentalist, and singer, Sanlikol has been praised by critics all over the world for his unique, pluralist, multicultural, and energetic musical voice. *The Boston Globe* noted that Sanlikol's "music is colorful, fanciful, full of rhythmic life, and full of feeling. The multiculturalism is not touristy, but rather sophisticated, informed, internalized; Sanlikol is a citizen of the world ... who could play a decisive role in music's future." Sanlikol has composed for, performed with and toured with international stars and ensembles such as Dave Liebman, Bob Brookmeyer, Billy Cobham, Antonio Sanchez, Anat Cohen, Ingrid Jensen, Tiger Okoshi, Miguel Zenón, John Patitucci, Gil Goldstein, Esperanza Spalding, The Boston Camerata, The Boston Cello Quartet, A Far Cry string orchestra, American Composers Orchestra, Okay Temiz, Erkan Oğur, and Birol Yayla. Sanlikol's first book, entitled *The Musician Mehters*, about the organization and the music of the Ottoman Janissary Bands was published in English in 2011 by The Isis Press and in Turkish by Yapı Kredi Yayınları. His second book, *Reform, Notation and Ottoman Music in Early 19th-Century Istanbul: EUTERPE*, was published by Routledge in 2023. He is currently the director of the New England Conservatory's Intercultural Institute and the project director and curator of Nilüfer Municipality Dr. Hüseyin Parkan Sanlikol Musical Instruments Museum.

Scott Metcalfe is widely recognized as one of North America's leading specialists in music from the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries and beyond. Musical and artistic director of Blue Heron since its founding in 1999, he was music director of New York City's Green Mountain Project from 2010-19 and has been guest director of TENET (New York), the Handel & Haydn Society (Boston), Emmanuel Music

(Boston), the Toronto Consort, The Tudor Choir and Seattle Baroque, Pacific Baroque Orchestra (Vancouver, BC), Quire Cleveland, and the Dryden Ensemble (Princeton, NJ), in music ranging from Machaut to Bach and Handel. He also enjoys a career as a baroque violinist, playing with Les Délices (dir. Debra Nagy), L'Harmonie des Saisons (dir. Eric Milnes), and other ensembles. Metcalfe's scholarly work, centered on the historical performance practice of medieval and Renaissance vocal music, has been published in numerous program and recording notes, and he is the author of two essays in *Music, Politics, and Religion in Early Seventeenth-Century Cambridge: The Peterhouse Partbooks in Context* (forthcoming in 2025) and two articles in the *Journal of the Alamire Foundation* (2022 and 2025). He has edited music by Francisco de Peñalosa for Antico Edition (UK) and songs from the Leuven chansonnier for the Alamire Foundation (Belgium); other editions are in the works, including a new edition of the songs of Gilles Binchois (c. 1400-1460). He has taught at Boston University, Harvard University, the New England Conservatory, and the Peabody Institute, and served as director of the baroque orchestra at Oberlin Conservatory. He received a bachelor's degree from Brown University (1985), where he majored in biology, and a master's degree in historical performance practice from Harvard (2005).

BLUE HERON RECORDINGS

**GUILLAUME
DU FAY**
MOTETS
HYMNS
CHANSONS
SANCTUS PAPAŁE



**I MADRIGALI
A CINQUE VOCI**
CIPRIANO DE RORE
2-CD SET
World-premiere
recording

**JOHANNES
OCKEGHEM**
COMPLETE SONGS
VOL. 1



**JOHANNES
OCKEGHEM**
COMPLETE SONGS
VOL. 2

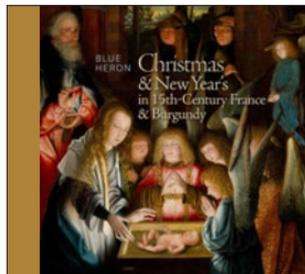
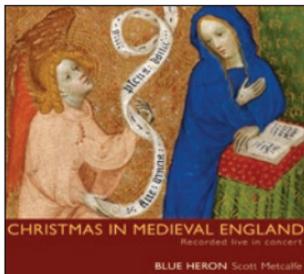


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BLUE HERON RECORDINGS

**CHRISTMAS
IN MEDIEVAL
ENGLAND**



**CHRISTMAS
& NEW YEAR'S
IN 15TH-CENTURY
FRANCE
& BURGUNDY**

**GUILLAUME
DE MACHAUT
REMEDE DE
FORTUNE**

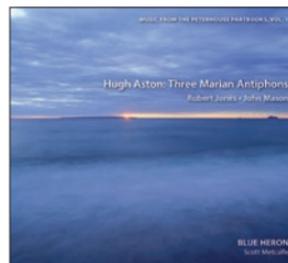


**A 14TH-CENTURY
SALMAGUNDI
MACHAUT,
SENLECHES,
LANDINI
ET AL.**

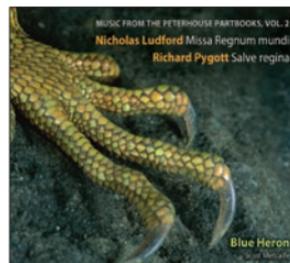
BLUE HERON RECORDINGS

MUSIC FROM THE PETERHOUSE PARTBOOKS (Canterbury Cathedral, c. 1540)

VOL. 1



VOL. 2



VOL. 3



VOL. 4



VOL. 5



**THE LOST MUSIC
OF CANTERBURY**

5-CD SET



