



A close-up photograph of a white fabric basket filled with several star-shaped gingerbread cookies. A red and white checkered ribbon is draped around the cookies. The background is a soft, warm-toned surface, possibly a tablecloth or another piece of fabric.

The quest for suitable compositions turned out to be an adventurous journey of discovery. Many pieces were available only in manuscript form and were difficult to access or almost impossible to locate. We were often surprised to find what excellent works were freely available but had hardly ever been performed. This album aims to expand the conventional repertoire and provide a different view of Swiss music-making. So why not listen to Christmas in a different way? In Switzerland, we bake our Christmas biscuits fresh every year, after all – and enrich them with new ingredients.

*Music to discover, to listen to
over and over again – and to love.*



ABOUT THE WORKS

Gion Antoni Derungs is the best-known Graubünden composer of our time. The Romansch folk song deeply inspired and influenced him, as is demonstrated by his many choral works in which the Rhaeto-Romanic language plays a central role. The *Consolaziun dell'olma devoziusa* published in the 17th century also held great fascination for the composer, who repeatedly explored this collection of sacred texts and melodies. Derungs wrote the *Nadal* op. 1 cycle in 1981. To this day, it is unclear why he called the work op. 1, as he had written other works much earlier. A little Christmas mystery.

Carl Rütli is one of Switzerland's most creative composers. A sojourn in England awakened in him a love of choral music, and the rich musical heritage of the English choral tradition as well as his affinity for the organ still influence his style today. The polyphonic structure of his works poses great challenges to any ensemble – but performers are rewarded with enchanting harmonies and an unmistakable tonal language.

The Swiss-American dual citizen **Julia Schwartz** has set two texts by the poet Anna Ritter, who also attended a boarding school in Neuchâtel in her youth, to music for the Schweizer Vokalconsort. Ritter is best known for her playful Christmas poems, and her lyrical

style is influenced by folklore and neo-Romanticism. In her composition, Julia Schwartz approaches Ritter's linguistic images with relish and rhetoric, and experiments with the interaction between monophonic and polyphonic passages, short phrases and surprising pauses.

Maria durch ein Dornwald ging is one of the best-known Advent carols in the German-speaking world. The catchy language, rich in imagery, is combined with a searching, sombre melody. In the third stanza, **Gottfried Wolters'** setting adopts a particularly skilful and surprising approach to the connection between thorns and roses. After the war, Wolters, who had written music for the Hitler Youth in the 1930s and 40s, distanced himself from the Nazi ideology and became increasingly receptive to the vocal traditions of other nations. With César Geoffroy, he founded the *Europa Cantat* organisation, which is still flourishing today. Wolters published monthly song sheets from 1951. The 120th and final edition, issued in 1968, was entitled “Shalom” – Peace.

As of 1891, the Appenzell spa town of Heiden became a second home for **Heinrich von Herzogenberg**, who built a summer house there with a view of Lake Constance. He composed a significant number of his later works in this magical place. Herzogenberg's friendship with

Johannes Brahms and his intense preoccupation with Johann Sebastian Bach are clearly audible in his compositions. He exchanged letters with Brahms for years, and also visited him in Leipzig. After Herzogenberg's death, his works were largely forgotten, and only since the beginning of the new millennium have they begun to enjoy something of a renaissance.

André Ducret is an influential figure in the Swiss choral landscape. Among other things, he regularly worked with the Swiss Youth Choir and directed the innovative Chœur des XVI for many years. It is always audible in his compositions that he has spent his entire life working with choirs, and that he skilfully showcases the strengths of the human voice. His setting of the French Noël entitled *La marche des Rois* is bursting with humour and the joy of song. Each verse has its own character and transports the listener to unknown realms.

André Sala was born in Evian and spent most of his childhood and youth in Fribourg. Having lost his sight shortly after birth, he attended an institute for young blind people in Switzerland. In music he found fulfilment and access to a new language. In parts, *Que j'aime ce divin enfant* is reminiscent of the mood of the famous *Noël nouvelet*, and the composer skilfully handles the alternation between solo voice and choir.

In 1930, the Bärenreiter publishing house issued a collection of Christmas carols under the title *Quempas*, which soon became hugely popular with families and choirs. The title refers to the first syllables of the Latin carol *Quem pastores laudavere*. In his new *Quempas* songs, **Peter Appenzeller** sets to music the German version of this well-known text, entitled *Den die Hirten lobeten sehre*. Born in St. Moritz, he has worked as a school musician and choir director for more than 40 years. His compositions are characterised by the ideal of freely oscillating sound. He works effectively with tonal overlays, inserted choral elements and the alternation between female and male voices, and has them culminate in one great, final "Hallelujah!"

Robert Lucas Pearsall spent much of his life outside his native England. After periods in Mainz and Karlsruhe, he moved to Schloss Wartensee, a castle near Rorschach in Switzerland, where he lived until his death. *In dulci jubilo* is one of his best-known compositions. He translated the German parts of the text into English and anchored the old German song in the local repertoire. Pearsall's manuscript with the original German text is archived in the library of the monastery of Einsiedeln. The Schweizer Vokalconsort has recorded this version for the first time.

Markus Fricker worked for many years as a school musician and wrote numerous works for his own choral formations. These short

compositions were often inspired by the melodies of folk songs and romantic song and the romantic Lied genre. His musical gem, *Bim Monschyn*, is now part of the core repertoire of Swiss choirs. Together with Eugen Meier, Susanne Würmli-Kollhopp, Hansruedi Willisegger and many other composers, he is making an active contribution to the renaissance of the Swiss-German folk song.

The Winterthur composer **Burkhard Kinzler** explores music from different periods in his works. At times, he refers to compositional techniques of the Renaissance, at others he moves in the realms of free jazz. Nevertheless, each work unmistakably bears his personal signature. Kinzler's work focuses on vocal music, and the many nuances of musical expression available to the human voice remain a constant source of inspiration for him. His version of *Still, still, still* is a skilful take on the well-known melody; featuring hovering harmonies, it oscillates between different worlds of sound.

Marco Amherd

Translated by Toby Alleyne-Gee



A portrait of Marco Amherd, a man with dark hair and a light beard, wearing a white button-down shirt and dark trousers. He is standing against a dark, textured background, possibly a wall or a large piece of wood. He is looking towards the camera with a slight smile.

SCHWEIZER VOKALENSEMBLE & MARCO AMHERD

Das Schweizer Vokalconsort setzt sich aus professionellen Sänger:innen aus der ganzen Schweiz zusammen und trat unter anderem am Davos Festival, am Bachfest Schaffhausen und am Festival frauenkomponiert in Basel auf. Das Ensemble wurde 2018 von Marco Amherd gegründet und präsentiert seither Raritäten, die im normalen Konzertbetrieb meist vernachlässigt werden. Musiziert werden Programme, die eine Brücke von Alter zu Neuer Musik schlagen und verschiedene Klangwelten miteinander verbinden. Ein weiterer Schwerpunkt liegt bei Musik aus der Schweiz. Das Ensemble bringt neue Schweizer Vokalmusik in Umlauf, vergibt Kompositionsaufträge und führt Vergessenes wieder auf.

MARCO AMHERD studierte Dirigieren, Orgel und Wirtschaftswissenschaften in Zürich, Freiburg im Breisgau und Toulouse. Er ist Intendant des Davos Festivals und dirigiert mehrere Ensembles in der Region Zürich.

Schwerpunkte seines Repertoires sind die Vokal- und Orgelmusik von Bach, Schütz und Reger sowie Kompositionen des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts. Marco Amherd ist Preisträger zahlreicher internationaler Wettbewerbe (u.a. Bach Wettbewerb Wiesbaden, Silbermann-Wettbewerb Freiberg, Kurt-Bossler-Wettbewerb Freiburg, Mendelssohn-Wettbewerb Aarau). Von 2016 bis 2018 war er Stipendiat im Forum Dirigieren des Deutschen Musikrats.

Die Verknüpfung von Musik, Literatur und gesellschaftlich relevanten Themen liegt ihm besonders am Herzen. So folgen seine Konzertprogramme stets einem roten Faden und erzählen dramatische, humorvolle und manchmal ernste Geschichten.

SCHWEIZER VOKALENSEMBLE & MARCO AMHERD

The Schweizer Vokalconsort is made up of professional singers from all over Switzerland. Since being established by Marco Amherd in 2018, the ensemble has presented rarities that are usually neglected in conventional concert programming. The ensemble's repertoire bridges the gap between early and contemporary music, combining a variety of soundscapes. The group also focuses on music from Switzerland – bringing new Swiss vocal music into circulation, commissioning compositions and performing long-forgotten works.

The ensemble has sung at the Davos Festival, the Bach Festival Schaffhausen and the frauenkomponiert festival in Basel, among others.

MARCO AMHERD studied conducting, organ and economics in Zurich, Freiburg im Breisgau and Toulouse. He is the Artistic Director of the Davos Festival and conducts several ensembles in the Zurich region.

His repertoire focuses on the vocal and organ music of Bach, Schütz and Reger as well as compositions of the 20th and 21st centuries. Marco Amherd has won prizes at numerous international competitions (including the Bach Competition Wiesbaden, Silbermann Competition Freiberg, Kurt Bossler Competition Freiburg, and the Mendelssohn Competition Aarau). From 2016 to 2018, he held a scholarship at the German Music Council's Conducting Forum.

Linking music, literature and socially relevant topics is particularly close to Marco Amherd's heart. His concert programmes thus always follow a common thread, telling dramatic, humorous and at times serious stories.

WWW.MARCOAMHERD.COM WWW.SCHWEIZERVOKALCONSORT.CH

