Review
by Stephen Eddins

Karlheinz Stockhausen's Tierkreis (Zodiac) is one of his most immediately appealing and engaging compositions. He developed the material in a variety of ways in several pieces, but in its simplest, most straightforward form, it is scored for 12 music boxes. He also intended that performers should have the freedom to bring their own creativity to performances, and Belgian ensembles Capilla Flamenca (which specializes in music of the 14th, 15th, and 16th centuries) and Het Collectief (which focuses on contemporary repertoire) have taken full advantage of the interpretive license the composer encouraged. The combined groups' 12 members approached stockhausen's rigorously constructed music with their own rigor, using the astrological meanings of the 12 signs as a guide in systematically integrating the Stockhausen with 14th century music from the Flemish School, played on a combination of ancient and modern instruments, and sung, and incorporating the composer's written commentary on the Zodiac. It sounds like an awfully complicated process, and the program notes assure us that in fact, it was, but the music is best appreciated freely and intuitively, because attempts to sort out a rationale underlying the result are likely to cause befuddlement and frustration. For listeners willing to abandon the need to understand *why* things are happening and simply listen to *what* is happening, the album can be wonderfully rewarding. It is indeed very quirky, but it feels honest and true on a pre-rational, subliminal level, and it is often just plain lovely. It helps that the performers are such masterfully skilled musicians; they haven't set up an easy task for themselves, but they perform it with astonishing virtuosity. (The violin solo in "Löwe," played by Wibert Aerts is nothing short of breath-taking.) The excellent sound is clean, crisp, vibrant, and atmospheric. Adventurous listeners, take note!