

Dowland in Dublin

Dossier de presse / *Press Release*

Jay Harvey Upstage

Monday, July 1, 2013

Getting down with Dowland: La Nef and tenor Michael Slattery grace the Early Music Festival

As La Nef founding member Sylvain Bergeron told the audience, a threesome of instrument pieces in the middle of its concert's first half Sunday was the program's brief indulgence in happy music. "Will Kempe's Jig," "Mistress Winter's Jump" and "My Lady Hunsdon's Puffe" followed in quick succession, with the last-named piece capped by the sopranino recorder's ornamented melody.

But though its manner is breezy and animated, the Montreal-based ensemble focused on the English lutenist-composer John Dowland in his characteristic mood of melancholy. Shakespeare's contemporary, a Catholic said to be bitter about lack of preferment at court because of his religion, achieved a strong international reputation with lute songs, many of them loaded with lovelorn hand-wringing.

A peculiar English piece known as the dump had largely expired by Dowland's time, but in the alliterative spirit of a program titled "Dowland in Dublin," the composer was characteristically down in the dumps when he took pen in hand to set verses for singing. Even without texts, his creative juices flowed best when he turned to the stately pavan, a form receptive to sad thoughts. They coursed through his veins more robustly when he took up its perky northern Italian cousin, the galliard.

Those dance forms were both in evidence in La Nef's [Early Music Festival](#) concert at the GI Indiana History Center. A solo lute piece, "Lacrimae pavan," given a soulful, nuanced reading by Bergeron, made an effective prelude to "Come, heavy sleep," featuring the dulcet lyric tenor of [Michael Slattery](#). Throughout the program, the urgent expressivity of Slattery's singing never roughened his mellifluous tone and phrasing, even when he was called upon to simulate the throes of the thwarted passion ("Sleep, wayward thoughts").



Michael Slattery's well-schooled, expressive voice was featured.

La Nef in this project fancifully places Dowland in Dublin, though Grove's Dictionary slaps down on long-ago writer's claim the composer was born there rather than in the City of Westminster. What the songs' arrangements (mostly by cittern player Sean Dagher) aim for is the atmosphere of an Irish pub. The sedate, softspoken quality of most of what La Nef played made this imaginative stretch a little difficult, to be sure. But it was obvious that a largely successful attempt was being carried out to rescue Dowland's output from "the classical tradition where it doesn't sit very comfortably."

Sting's recording of a Dowland CD several years ago is an indication that the Elizabethan composer's populist appeal is worth exploring. Small wonder that Slattery and La Nef offered as an encore the best-known Dowland song, "Come again," which is also featured in Sting's cameo appearance on [Joshua Bell's](#) 2009 album, "At Home With Friends."

And you could easily correlate the instrumental "Fine Knacks for Ladies," which opened the concert's second half, with a Celtic bar band's performance, given the drive Amanda Keesm imparted to the syncopated cello line (played on a modern instrument, not the program's listed "baroque cello").

Dagher's arrangements occasionally stray from Dowland's harmonic language, as he admits from the stage. This artistic license was in service to the singer-and-backup-band vibe the program succeeded in achieving, thanks largely to the tenor's compelling performances. In "Dowland in Dublin," La Nef could be labeled by the pop term "cover band," tweaking the originals respectfully but with a fresh approach to winning over today's audiences. As measured by two standing ovations — one at the end of the program and one after the encore — and the sold-out supply of CDs during intermission, the musicians know how to meet that goal.

Classical music in West Virginia and Beyond

Semper Dowland: Michael Slattery interview

By Jim Lange

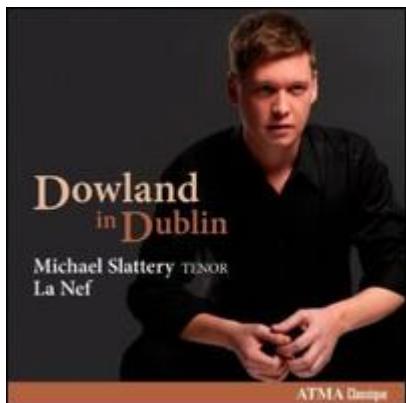
· April 16, 2012



Tenor Michael Slattery brings his terrific artistry to the songs of John Dowland.

Michael Slattery and La Nef have a new album called, *Dowland in Dublin*. This is simply a great CD and it's one that I'm very excited about. Tenor [Michael Slattery](#) and the ensemble [La Nef](#) have joined together to celebrate what they believe is the Irish connection to [John Dowland](#). There are many fine recordings of both the songs and instrumental works of Dowland, but what makes this recording shine is the treatment of the songs as Celtic folk songs and the caliber of performances by Slattery and the ensemble. The artists use an even hand, never forcing the music, and the pieces come to life like never before. These are not museum pieces treated with such reverence that they are curios from another era. Nay, this is flesh and blood, far from academia. Michael Slattery's voice is a wonder. The beauty of it might be enough, but his interpretation serves the music well. Never overpowering the songs, he gives each word, each phrase, exactly what is needed. It is perfection. I suspect even old John Dowland, whose 450th birthday is next year, would have been pleased.

Dowland in Dublin



Performers: Sylvain Bergeron (Lute), La Nef, Séan Dagher, Michael Slattery

Recorded: 2010, Église Saint-Augustin, Mirabel, Québec, Canada

Released: 2012, ATMA Classique
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Average Customer Rating: 4.0

Monday, February 13, 2012 by Craig Zeichner

[http://www.ariama.com/albums/dowland-in-dublin-\(atma-classique\)](http://www.ariama.com/albums/dowland-in-dublin-(atma-classique))

Lutenist [Sylvain Bergeron](#) raises an interesting point in his liner notes to this recording. Bergeron posits John Dowland could have been Irish and a member of the O'Dolans, a family who settled in Dublin during the mid-16th century. Bergeron also points to Dowland's dedication of the song 'From Silent Night' to his "loving countryman, Mr. John Forster the younger, merchant of Dublin, in Ireland," and the composer's honorary degree from Trinity College, Dublin as further evidence he was a son of Hibernia. This hypothesis provides the context for *Dowland in Dublin*, tenor Michael Slattery and Montreal-based ensemble [La Nef](#)'s album of Dowland songs.

Slattery, Bergeron and La Nef cittern player Séan Dagher selected some of Dowland's less melancholy songs and peeled away their denser contrapuntal accompaniments to give them a lighter, brighter feel. While some of arrangements certainly sound contemporary, 'Now O Now I Needs Must Part' has a solo flute and perhaps too many splashes of bells and chimes, but they mostly work beautifully. This ensemble of lute, baroque guitar, cittern, flute, violin, cello, gamba, double bass and percussion is really a modern take on the old broken consort (a consort of instruments of different kinds) of the Elizabethan era, so there really is nothing heretical here. When it comes to the purely instrumental pieces like 'Fine Knacks for Ladies' and a jaunty sequence of 'Kemp's Jig,' 'Mistress Winter's Jump' and 'My Lady Hunsdon's Puffe,' La Nef's easy virtuosity and improvisatory brio is intoxicating. No ensemble plays this kind of program better.

Of course everything hangs on the skill of the singer and Slattery is terrific. He's a marvelously sensitive singer with a clear, clean tone and is keenly aware of the subtleties of text, so songs like 'Come again, Sweet Love' and 'Say, Love if Ever Thou Didst Find' are deeply moving. I hope I get to hear Slattery sing *Winterreise* some day.

This is an outstanding recording in every way. Slattery cuts to the heart of these songs and La Nef are brilliant partners. This album should appeal to Dowland purists as well as novices, and there's even plenty to charm lovers of folk, world music and crossover.

ATMA Classique



UPCOMING CONCERTS:

Michael Slattery, tenor

March 14, 2012, 12:00 PM

An Afternoon of Irish Music

with tenor Robert White

The Harmonie Club, New York

March 15, 2012, 7:00 PM

Pearls, Tears of the Sea

Recital with Sasha Cooke, mezzo-soprano

Rose Studio at Lincoln Center, New York

March 20, 2012, 7:00 PM

Bach — St. John Passion (Evangelist)

The Cathedral Choir of Men and Boys

The Cathedral of All Saints, Albany

Sylvain Bergeron, lute & theorbo

March 20, 2012, 8:00 PM

Bach — St. John Passion

Les Violons du Roy

Palais Montcalm, Québec

March 25, 2012, 2:00 PM

Bach — St. John Passion

Les Violons du Roy

Carnegie Hall, New York

April 6, 2012, 8:00 PM

A. Scarlatti — Stabat Mater

Les Violons du Roy

Palais Montcalm, Québec

Praise for *Dowland in Dublin*

Michael Slattery, tenor

La Nef

Sylvain Bergeron, Séán Dagher, Michael Slattery | musical direction & arrangements

ATMA Classique ACD2 2650

www.atmaclassique.com



Was **John Dowland**, often considered the first great English composer, actually Irish? This question is the starting point for *Dowland in Dublin*, the new ATMA release featuring American tenor **Michael Slattery** and Montréal's **La Nef**. Dowland's songs take on a Celtic flavour in these arrangements, which invite listeners to hear his music in a new way. *Dowland in Dublin* has garnered unanimous praise since its release:

Los Angeles Times

"It works. Dowland's tunes are sturdy, able to thrive on a lively lilt or bring a sentimental tear to the eye when offered with sweet Irish melancholy. Slattery sings with a feel for period style and the pub, and La Nef crosses genre divides with similar ease."

CBC Music.ca

"Dowland, as it turns out, sounds great when suited up, as here he is, in Celtic attire ... They achieve a seamless, hand-in-glove result, and while the semper dolens qualities that define Dowland are evident, there's a new and mitigating sweetness brought to bear. Slattery's voice is perfectly suited to Dowland."

Ariama.com, SONY Music Entertainment

"Slattery is terrific. He's a marvelously sensitive singer with a clear, clean tone and is keenly aware of the subtleties of text ... deeply moving. This is an outstanding recording in every way. La Nef's easy virtuosity and improvisatory brio is intoxicating ... This album should appeal to Dowland purists as well as novices, and there's even plenty to charm lovers of folk, world music and crossover."

WQXR | Operavore

"Of late I have been enjoying a wonderful new recording called Dowland in Dublin with the tenor Michael Slattery and an instrumental ensemble called La Nef ... Listening to how Slattery performs Dowland's music reminds me of the Irish way with words."

Musical Toronto.org

"This is the music of life, rendered with a great deal of care. Slattery's lyric voice is a treat in and of itself, making this a must-hear album."

Further details: www.atmaclassique.com

To request a copy of *Dowland in Dublin* or an interview with the artists, please contact : Luisa Trisi | trisi@sympatico.ca | +1 (416) 481-1161 | +1 (416) 456-0499

RECORDING reviews

Edited by Tom Moore

John Dowland

Dowland in Dublin

Michael Slattery, tenor; La Nef
ATMA Classique ACD22650
www.atmaclassique.com

So, was John Dowland Irish? This release from the Québécois mixed ensemble La Nef and American tenor Michael Slattery asks that very question. Dowland (1563-1626) mentions his "countryman," an Irishman by the name of John Forster, in *A Pilgrim's Solace* (1612); given that he was a staunch Catholic and held an honorary degree from Trinity College in Dublin, perhaps he hailed not from England but from Ireland.

Though this question may never be answered, the disc is meant to demonstrate that Dowland's compositions are suited to what La Nef calls a "Celtic" flavor. The term made me cringe in fear of "lute song-meets-Riverdance," but instead of being overly dramatized or orchestrated, these versions are lilting, teasing, immediately familiar and yet pleasingly different. There are a very few moments when the instrumental introductions to the songs verge on "Celtic Woman" territory (see "Now O Now I Needs Must Part"), but if the practice of Dowland's day was to extemporize upon favorite

songs, then La Nef has simply and pleasantly followed this tradition. Over two decades, this ensemble has grown comfortable playing with and off of each other; they finish each other's thoughts with the ease of old friends.

The real star of this disc, though, is Michael Slattery; his voice is like warm honey on a summer day. Timbrally, he and La Nef were made for one another. Slattery sings with the intimacy and charm of a favored



Elizabethan courtier, without ever being smarmy; his honesty and wistfulness in the plaintive songs are especially endearing.

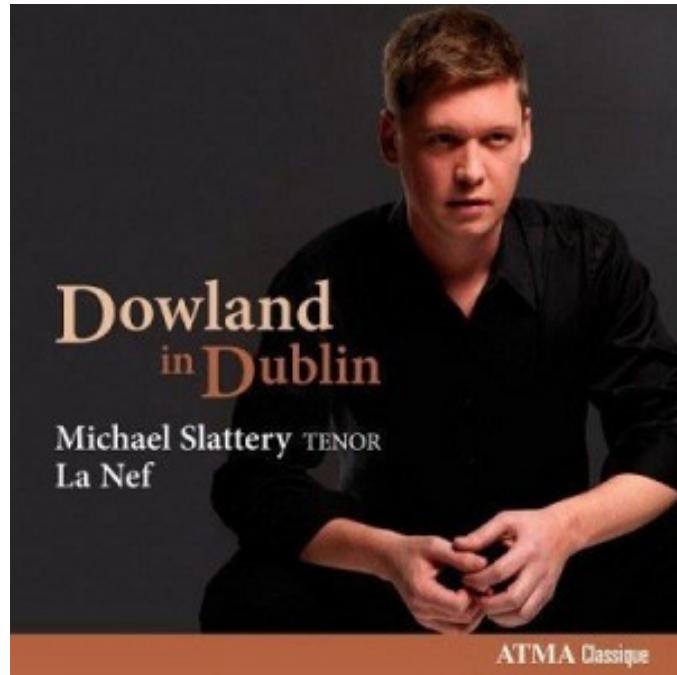
He is absolutely believable, and he imbues these pieces with a striking sense of relevance and immediacy.

The incorporation of the Indian shruti box as a drone against which Slattery can discant is a perfect addition to this recording, hearkening to its previous use by Irish musicians such as Nóirín Ní Riain. Slattery explains in the liner notes that the shruti box plays a drone similar to bagpipes, while blending with the timbre of his own voice. I'm curious, though, about the use of a non-Western instrument that has its own history of performance practice. While shruti boxes are becoming more and more popular in U.K. traditions, I wonder what reaction this use inspires in Indian musicians. I'm curious whether this is an accepted inter-cultural exchange, or whether it could inadvertently cause offense.

Standout selections are "Sleep Wayward Thoughts" (which I listened to on repeat rather frequently), "Say, Love, If Ever Thou Didst Find," and the Dowland standard "Come Again, Sweet Love," which starts slowly and melancholically but quickly accelerates to a rollicking finish, at the end of which I half expected to hear the cheers and whistles of a well-pleased pub audience.

Whatever your thoughts are on Dowland's heritage, there is no denying the musicality, charm, and approachability of this recording.

—Karen Cook



Michael Slattery: Un Anglais à Dublin

Frédéric Cardin <http://www.espace.mu/Classique/Lu-Vu-Entendu/4120>

Publié le : 16 février 2012

« Nous nous sommes amusés à dépouiller certains Ayres de Dowland de leurs accompagnements et contrepoints complexes en cherchant à leur redonner une simplicité, une saveur celtique. » – *Sylvain Bergeron, luthiste et directeur de La Nef*

John Dowland, compositeur élisabéthain par excellence, était-il Irlandais? La question a été posée par certains. Les réponses n'ont absolument rien de clair. Mais le concept est assez amusant pour que les membres de l'ensemble La Nef aient eu l'idée de revisiter la musique de ce grand mélodiste dans des parures « celtiques ». Ce genre d'entreprise n'est pas toujours heureux. Mais j'ai été agréablement surpris, voire ravi, par cette expérience audacieuse de La Nef qui s'est ici adjoint les services d'un jeune ténor prometteur, l'Américain Michael Slattery. La facture enjouée des arrangements apporte une saveur inédite aux mélodies autrement si poignantes de Dowland, une sorte de joie de vivre qu'on n'associe guère à la musique de ce compositeur (pourtant réputé bon vivant!). Cela dit, la truculence habituelle de la musique celtique n'est jamais accentuée hors des limites du bon goût grâce à d'astucieux arrangements.

On a coloré Dowland. On ne l'a pas peinturluré de haut en bas. Bravo.

J'ai aimé : les arrangements économes et délicats

J'ai beaucoup aimé : le ténor du jeune Slattery. Souple, rond, au timbre moelleux.

Arts & Music

Indiana Public Media Arts & Music
Celtic Flavor In An English Player

By **GEORGE WALKER**

Posted February 13, 2012

Dowland in Dublin CD of music by John Dowland, interpreted by Michael Slattery.

ATMAClassique. Com ACD2 2650 Quebec, Canada2012

John Dowland is usually thought of as the quintessential English composer of lute music and lute songs, but tenor **Michael Slattery** offers a different approach in a CD of music recorded with the ensemble **La Nef**.

Ireland May Have A Claim

Slattery agrees that "many people think of Dowland as English," but he says, "There's been some research that claims that he had Irish ancestry." His evidence is from an article by **William Flood**, who put forward the idea that John Dowland was born of an Irish family, the O'Dolans who settled in Dublin. Flood points to the dedication of the song in his "Pilgrim's Solace" in 1612, which Dowland dedicated "to my loving countryman, Mr. John Forster the younger, merchant of Dublin and Ireland." John Forster was the younger son of Richard Forster, and the nephew of John Forster, Mayor of Dublin.

Back To The Tunes

"The idea for this recording, beginning with the possible Irish connection, was to take Dowland 's melodies, strip them down, and treat them as though they were traditional Irish fiddle tunes," Slattery says. "The main challenge with that was finding the right songs for the project. So I sat down and read through every song that Dowland ever wrote. During that process I found myself drawn to many of the songs that are often overlooked, and I also found that there were some songs that seemed to have more Celtic flavor than others."

An American Voice, With An Irish Accent

Recent study in Ireland informed Slattery's approach. "I wanted to let the study that I had done in Ireland influence the way that I approached those texts. Although I was careful to retain my authentic American voice and accent, I absolutely wanted to steal as much as possible from the Irish tradition. The style of text declamation comes from the classes that I took in traditional Irish singing and the ornamentation that I use comes directly from the bag piping classes that I took in Ireland."

The results of Michael Slattery's approach, and his collaboration with La Nef, are on the ATMA Classique CD *Dowland in Dublin*.

What is your age?

<input type="radio"/> Under 18	<input type="radio"/> Male 18-34	<input type="radio"/> Male 35-54	<input type="radio"/> Male 55 and over
<input type="radio"/> Female 18-34	<input type="radio"/> Female 35-54	<input type="radio"/> Female 55 and over	

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Culture Monster

ALL THE ARTS, ALL THE TIME

Album review: Michael Slattery's 'Dowland in Dublin'

January 31, 2012 | 12:45 pm



Michael Slattery: "Dowland in Dublin"

ATMA Classique

The supposedly dour John Dowland is thought to need all the help he can get. His early 17th century songs have been sometimes jazzed up and sung by Sting, even. Still, Michael Slattery, the American tenor of Irish descent (who, as the sailor, was the first singer heard in the Los Angeles Philharmonic's "Tristan Project" seven years ago) has some cheek. He and the Canadian early music ensemble La Nef have given a selection of Dowland's very British songs an Irish lilt. And an Indian drone too, with a shruti box that is meant to be used for chanting.

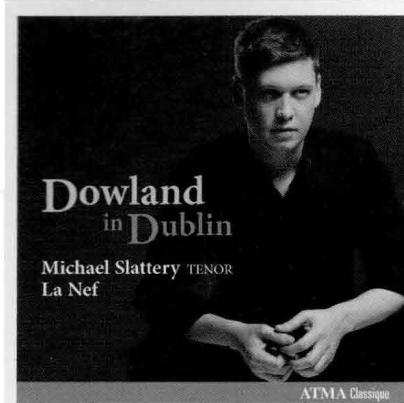
It works. Dowland's tunes are sturdy, able to thrive on a lively lilt or bring a sentimental tear to the eye when offered with sweet Irish melancholy. Slattery sings with a feel for period style and the pub, and La Nef crosses genre divides with similar ease.

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-- Mark Swed

Photo: Michael Slattery. Credit: Ned Schenck.



Michael Slattery and La Nef

□ “DOWLAND IN DUBLIN”

English texts with French translations.

ATMA Classique ACD2 2650

The great English composer John Dowland may actually have been Irish, and this entertaining CD takes a Celtic look at the composer's lute songs, stripping away the complex accompaniments the virtuoso

Dowland fashioned and published, and clothing the tunes in whimsical folk garments. It works splendidly, as Dowland's sturdy melodies stand up well to harmonic refashioning (“Time stands still” is inventively rearranged), and only the stuffiest purist will fail to be delighted and surprised by these versions, especially the medieval drone under “Behold a Wonder Here” and the introduction to “Clear or Cloudy.” A folk-waltz opening unfolds into “Sleep, Wayward Thoughts,” in an unusually rocking and gentle rendition, while a mysterious, slinky introduction gives way to a slow, sexy reading of “Say, love, if ever thou didst find.”

Tenor Michael Slattery is especially captivating, approaching each song sincerely and creatively (his wistful take on “Me, me and none but me” is gorgeous), with a naturalness that helps maintain the recital's intimate atmosphere. Slattery's sweet timbre carries “O sweet woods,” as well as more vigorous songs, such as “A Shepherd in a Shade.” Standard-issue Renaissance instruments including lute, cittern and viola da gamba are joined by a shruti-box (a drone-like bellows instrument commonly heard in Indian music) in fanciful arrangements by Sylvain Bergeron, Séan Dagher and Slattery himself. The Montréal-based early-music group La Nef brings just the right inventive attitude, keeping each tune's essence and offering several instrumental jams. With a simple open fifth, a rhythmically free look at “His Golden Locks” closes the disc pensively.

JUDITH MALAFRONTÉ

Dowland in Dublin

Posted on February 16, 2012 by [barczablog](http://barczablog.com/2012/02/16/d-in-d/) <http://barczablog.com/2012/02/16/d-in-d/>

Leslie Barcza

A professor I once had claimed that art could be understood as a kind of research. Something newly created is a proposition to be tested against the taste of every new audience, seeking a fair hearing and possibly a genuine connection; but it's not science. No, the hypothesis in a novel or poem is not being proven or refuted according to the scientific method. But there is still a kind of speculation in all art, a seeking for connections and truths.



This is especially the case with a new CD I've been listening to (my companion in the car for about two weeks, played over and over) called *Dowland in Dublin*, teaming young American tenor Michael Slattery with the Canadian baroque instrumental ensemble La Nef. I wondered about the premise, whereby the songs of English composer John Dowland should be presented in a more Irish fashion.

Sylvain Bergeron of Le Nef says the following in the liner notes to *Dowland in Dublin*: The idea for this project was sparked when, at the end of a La Nef Christmas party, Séan Dagher charmed all who were listening when he took out his cittern and began to sing "Come Again" as a folk song. Working closely with Michael Slattery, we began to strip some of Dowland's Ayres of their complex contrapuntal accompaniments, seeking to give them a simple Celtic flavour. We hope that the music on this CD, midway between folks songs and art songs, charm you as much as it does us. Cheers!

I wonder if Dagher's fun experiment came before or after they learned that Dowland may have been Irish? I never realized this possibility until reading the notes to this recording. For example, the dedication to the song "From Silent Night" published in a 1612 collection says "***to my loving countryman, Mr John Forster the younger, merchant of Dublin, in Ireland.***"

Michael Slattery's gorgeously lachrymose Dowland

posted by [Bill Richardson](#) at 5:00 AM

<http://music.cbc.ca/#/genres/Classical/blogs/2012/3/Michael-Slattery-gorgeously-lachrymose-Dowland>



A predictable and seemingly contradictory human kink is our tendency to self-prescribe sad music when we feel melancholy. You'd think something jaunty would be the pill of choice, but our reflexive impulse is to reach for something more *largo* than *allegro*, more *sarabande* than *gigue*. The company misery loves might just as well be musical.

No one was more impressively depressive than the English composer [John Dowland](#) (1563-1626). Dowland chose as his motto *Semper Dowland, semper dolens*: Forever Dowland, forever mournful; whether or not he had it monogrammed on his codpiece, no one knows. His music, as much as his motto, suggests he wasn't a fella who'd turn up at a trunk party with a bevy of fun-time gals and a mickey of rye. Here's an instrumental example of his penchant for the gorgeously lachrymose: music more for bridge than rope jumping.

Just in time for St. Patrick's Day, [Michael Slattery](#), a preternaturally youthful looking tenor with a sweet voice and boyish mien, has released [Dowland in Dublin](#) on the ATMA label. It trades on the possibility (remote) that Dowland was Irish; a dedication to one of his songs suggests this might have been so, though not much else does. Whether he was or wasn't hardly matters, because Dowland, as it turns out, sounds great when suited up, as here he is, in Celtic attire.

Slattery has collaborated with the ace Montreal early music ensemble [La Nef](#). Along with their director, lutenist [Sylvain Bergeron](#), and cittern master [Sean Dagher](#) of the [Skye Consort](#), Slattery pared the 15 songs presented here down to the melodic bone, then applied the principles and aesthetic of Irish folk music to the new arrangements. They achieve a seamless, hand-in-glove result, and while the *semper dolens* qualities that define Dowland are evident, there's a new and mitigating sweetness brought to bear. Slattery's voice is perfectly suited to Dowland – as it is to Handel, Bach, and Bernstein, too – and he also contributes the appealing hurdy-gurdy-like drone of the Indian [shruni box](#).

Interview: Tenor Michael Slattery puts charming, Celtic spin on ayres of John Dowland

— FEBRUARY 8, 2012

<http://musicaltoronto.org/2012/02/08/interview-tenor-michael-slattery-puts-charming-celtic-spin-on-ayres-of-john-dowland/>

Michael Slattery is the first to admit that Dowland in Dublin, his new album of Renaissance songs made with Montreal period-instrument ensemble La Nef, is strange. “It’s surprising for listeners because everything that we did is highly unnecessary,” he laughs. “Dowland’s music is so excellent on its own, the arrangements didn’t need to be adjusted.”

But Slattery was determined to sing something more free and folksy, beginning a three-year collaboration that produced the album, just released by Montreal’s ATMA Classique. The boyish American tenor and his instrumental collaborators literally pulled apart 14 of John Dowland’s ayres (songs) for this recording project. Once separated from the composer’s elaborately contrapuntal accompaniment, the musicians rearranged each song with a strong Celtic twist, to suit an Early Music consort. The result is something that would work equally well in a Dublin pub and a softly-lit boudoir.

“My approach was influenced by the time I spent in Ireland studying traditional Irish music,” says the Juilliard-educated lyric tenor, who is enjoying a budding opera career, as well as a reputation as troubadour. Slattery connected with La Nef through cittern player Séan Dagher, with whom he collaborated on an earlier album, *The Irish Heart*. He met lute player (and frequent guest on Toronto stages) Sylvain Bergeron during a Montreal after-concert party in 2007. The singer recalls how the collaborators read through all 90 or so songs Dowland had published in his lifetime (1563-1626) in order to put together the programme. The resulting arrangements are not the only distinguishing elements here.

Slattery also decided to ignore many conventions of what we call beautiful singing. “I tried to resist singing on vowels,” he explains. He also felt more free to breathe differently, and to play with vocal ornamentation. “While I was studying in Ireland, I kept a journal of the ornaments I heard,” says Slattery. His favourite embellishment for the Dowland album is what he calls “dirty notes.” “They’re much like the blue note in jazz,” he explains of a note sung sharp or flat to heighten an emotional effect in the text by adding tension to the underlying harmony. There’s one more highly unconventional bit of musicmaking happening here. In the background of one of the four instrumental tracks is a Shruti box drone-like instrument plucked from India’s musical tradition, and played by Slattery. Slattery tells how he had been looking for a harmonium to help accompany his solo gigs, but that the instrument was too big and heavy to make it practical. One day, a shopkeeper emerged from his back room with a Shruti box. “It was love at first sound,” says Slattery. The tenor’s instrument can play 12 drone notes in a choice of three keys, and is meant to be used with the human voice. When he arrived in Ireland, he discovered that the Shruti box was a near-perfect match to the long pipes on a bagpipe, validating his choice.

Slattery says La Nef were perfectly happy to add it to the musical mix. “I’m amazed these guys were as open as they were to these ideas,” the singer confesses. “It’s a testament to their imagination and openness. So, what is the album really like? It gets better with each listen, as the ear and brain cast off the centuries-old tradition of singing lute songs in favour of this group’s more earthy approach. This is not just Early Music’s counterpart to today’s emo kids, this is the music of life, rendered with a great deal of care. Slattery’s lyric voice is a treat in and of itself, making this a must-hear album.



DOWLAND IN DUBLIN. LE NOUVEL ENREGISTREMENT DE LA NEF !

6 FÉVRIER 2012 17 H 25 MIN

Jacques Leclerc

<http://info-culture.biz/2012/02/06/dowland-in-dublin-le-nouvel-enregistrement-de-la-nef/>

Fondée à Montréal, LA NEF est une compagnie de création et de production musicale oeuvrant dans les musiques anciennes et de tradition orale, les musiques du monde et la musique de création. Ses activités s'adressent à un public de tous âges. Sous la direction artistique de Sylvain Bergeron et Claire Gignac, elle réunit des musiciens polyvalents et inventifs, conférant ainsi à ses productions une diversité de styles et une signature unique. La Nef produit des concerts, des disques, des contes musicaux pour la jeunesse et des spectacles multidisciplinaires.

L'idée du présent CD est arrivée lors d'un party de Noël de La Nef. On s'est amusé à chanter ces airs du compositeur britannique, aux ascendances irlandaises, John Dowland à la manière folk. Séduisant essai ! Or, avec le ténor Michael Slattery, les musiciens de La Nef se sont amusés et employés à dépouiller certains Ayres (airs) de John Dowland (1563-1626) de leurs accompagnements et contrepoints complexes en cherchant à leur redonner une simplicité, une saveur « celtique ». Le résultat est à mi-chemin entre l'« Art » et le « Folk » Song.

Dans cet enregistrement, délaissant le côté triste et mélancolique, connu du compositeur Dowland, on s'est plutôt penché sur l'aspect léger, humoristique et satirique de ses compositions.

On a eu recours au jeune et talentueux ténor Michael Slattery. Le timbre, la beauté de la voix, la douceur des intonations, les nuances du jeune ténor américain confèrent à cet enregistrement tout pour en faire un moment important de découverte ou redécouverte des mélodies (Ayres) de John Dowland. Un CD majeur sans hésitations dans la production de la musique classique, ancienne au Québec cette année !

unser Herrscher" through the recitatives, arias and choruses of the "Betrayal and Arrest," "Denial of Peter," "Interrogation and Scourging," "Condemnation and Crucifixion," "Death of Jesus" and "Burial" of Christ to the peaceful final chorale "Ach Herr, lass dein leib Engelein" (Ah Lord, let thine own angels dear...) almost two hours later, our attention is held without flagging in this glorious performance. The comprehensive booklet includes thorough program notes and texts in three languages.



Concert Note: Although I was unable to find any local performances of the *St. John Passion* this month, Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* will be presented by the Grand Philharmonic Choir at the Centre in the Square in Kitchener on April 6.

And a final local concert note. On April 11 Toronto audiences can experience the pure tones of the predominantly medieval group **Anonymous 4** at Koerner Hall. This a cappella female ensemble has been charming audiences for 25 years and the "Anthology 25" program will highlight ancient, traditional and modern works from their repertoire. The recent **Harmonia Mundi** release **Secret Voices** (HMU 807510) features chant and polyphony from the Huelgas Codex, c.1300 with selections divided into "First Light," "Morning," "Mass," "Evening" and "Night." If you are not already familiar with Anonymous

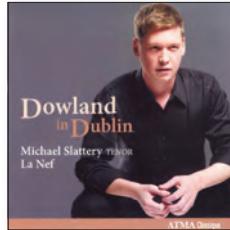
4 this would be a great place to start.  We welcome your feedback and invite submissions. CDs and comments should be sent to: *The WholeNote*, 503-720 Bathurst St., Toronto ON M5S 2R4. We also encourage you to visit our website www.thewholenote.com where you can find added features including direct links to performers, composers and record labels, "buy buttons" for on-line shopping and additional, expanded and archival reviews. 

—David Olds, *DISCoveries Editor*
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VOCAL

Dowland in Dublin
Michael Slattery; La Nef
ATMA ACD2 2650

● Was Dowland Irish or English? We will probably never know but it has not stopped tenor Michael Slattery from working with La Nef in giving



some of Dowland's compositions "a simple, Celtic flavour." Slattery in turn looked for a drone sound to accompany himself. He found it in the shruti box associated with Indian prayers ...

The contrasts in this selection emerge early; the second track, *Now, O Now*, a stalwart of Elizabethan farewells, is sung unchanged but its musical accompaniment is composed by Slattery and La Nef! *Behold a Wonder Here* is slightly altered—slowed down—but again the accompaniment is far from the courts of Europe.

This is no conventional recital of Dowland. Some of his songs are performed as purely instrumental pieces—but effectively. *Fine Knacks for Ladies* is one such; its setting would grace any Elizabethan ball. And then there are those thoughtful, introspective and melancholy songs for which Dowland is most often remembered which are included despite the artists' aim of "lightening up" his music. *Come Heavy Sleep* is performed by Slattery with the dignity its words deserve, equally respectfully accompanied by flute, lute, cittern and viol da gamba—there are some songs (*His Golden Locks* is another) that can never be changed.

Tenors are often the unsung heroes of Dowland's music, overshadowed by bass, soprano or countertenor parts. Whether or not listeners approve of the arrangements here, Martin Slattery's tenor voice excels.

—Michael Schwartz

Duetti

Philippe Jaroussky; Max Emanuel Cencic; Les Arts Florissants; William Christie
Virgin Classics 5099907094323

● Les Arts Florissants date from 1979. Founder William Christie has identified two of the finest younger countertenors,

Philippe Jaroussky and Max Emanuel Cencic, and devoted a whole CD to 24 duetti from the Italian Baroque. It is encouraging that many of the composers included are being rediscovered. There is, for example, a magnificent stately quality to the opening piece, *Pietoso nume arcier*, a duet by Giovanni Bononcini.

Longest of the tracks is the eight-minute duet *Quando veggo un'usignolo* by Francesco Bartolomeo Conti. Demonstrating the countertenors' skills at their most testing, its dialogue is a clever "echoing" of the two sets of lyrics, in turn accompanied by the baroque ensemble at its most expressive.

Two further composers, Nicola Porpora and Benedetto Marcello, supply five and eight more duets, respectively. While relatively short in duration, they combine cheerfulness and interpretative difficulty and are, perhaps, a fine introduction to the Italian



VOCAL

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—Michael Schwartz

- Classical Music Blog <http://www.npr.net/blog/these-musicians-got-memo>

Date: 03/28/2012

Contributor: John Montanari



No sooner did I [blog on Monday](#) about the NPR report on recordings of Shakespeare done in the vernacular pronunciation of his day, with wishes that musicians would likewise consider a more colloquial approach to old classics, than a CD arrived on Tuesday that does just that. Coincidence? Of course. But it's fun for a second to regard oneself as possessing such enormous influence...for the good, naturally.

According to the CD booklet, it started at a Christmas party for the Canadian early music ensemble [La Nef](#), at which one of their friends and guest performers, [Seán Dagher](#), took out his trusty [cittern](#), and started to sing some of the beautiful songs of the great Elizabethan composer [John Dowland](#) (below) — not as classical songs, but as folk songs. The result is the album "[Dowland in Dublin](#)," featuring La Nef and sweet-voiced American tenor [Michael Slattery](#) (above), doing Dowland in imaginative arrangements with a strong modern Celtic flavor. OK, so some of Dowland's exquisite part-writing is gone. We can get them from other excellent performances. But we get something else — a Dowland in the context of *our* time, just as the more authentic performances give us (or so they claim) Dowland in the context of *his* time. I love both, but admit to finding this current Dowland friendlier, more casual, easier to enjoy. It reminds me of the some of the terrific "alt-folk" I've heard recently from the likes of [Sam Amidon](#) or [Crooked Still](#). What those folks do for old folk ballads — reinterpret them freely in a contemporary context, but with the utmost care and finest musicianship — is what Slattery and La Nef do for Dowland. Check some of it out during the 3:00 hour in WFCR's classical music; we'll be playing lots more in the coming days.