



## **Symfonie Orkest and Collegium Instrumentale Brugense together under one roof**

*Being brought together under one financial management board has given the Symphony Orchestra (of Flanders) (Symfonieorkest van Vlaanderen) and the Collegium Instrumentale Brugense a new lease of life. During recent months, there has been much anticipation as to what the new chief-conductor of the 'Collegium', Ivan Meylemans, would do with the legacy of Patrick Peire. **The critics are practically unanimous: the performances are of an extremely high standard.** An interview with the CEO and chief-conductor.*

The past year has been a tempestuous one for the 'Collegium'. Patrick Peire, founder and conductor, retired and the Anciaux government first cut their subsidy completely, but later relented and revoked part of this decision. To make the best of this situation, the *Collegium* and the *Symphony Orchestra* (*Symfonieorkest van Vlaanderen*) were united under the financial management of Dirk Coutigny. Patrick Peire was succeeded by the young trombone player, Ivan Meylemans.

### **Why did the two orchestras just not merge?**

*Dirk Coutigny:* 'It's very simple – a merger would have had no additional value whatsoever. Both orchestras have their own niche that is unique in Flanders. It would have been stupid to destroy that. Uniting their administration provided clear benefits.'

'A merger would have led to an orchestra of 80 musicians, but there are already several such orchestras in Flanders. We opted for a small, flexible symphony orchestra, together with the only remaining chamber music orchestra in Flanders. It's true that the minister threw the chamber orchestra a life line, but it's up to us to use that life line to save the orchestra. We are working extremely hard on this and it is looking as if our efforts are paying off.'

### **As a young conductor, is it not even more difficult for you to receive such a difficult inheritance?**

*Ivan Meylemans:* 'I have inherited a wonderful gift from a tremendous man, Patrick Peire, whose work is still having an influence. On the other hand, it is difficult because the meagre subsidies give me the feeling that they do not make it easy to be a young conductor. But, ok, they've given me another chance and I'm grateful for that.'

*Dirk Coutigny:* Money is important if you want to do beautiful things, but it is not the only important factor. Our main motivation is to create something beautiful. To do this, we will create quality ourselves instead of buying it in. In this way we are building a future and creating first rate quality.

### **How far do the Collegium's ambitions reach?**

*Meylemans:* 'Our aim is to find a repertoire for chamber orchestras that is not played often. A repertoire that is both artistically challenging for our musicians and the audience that comes to listen to it. We are remaining faithful to the 'sandwich formula'. This means that we often play technically demanding but little-known music by someone like Michael Tippett in combination with Handel and Britten. We present difficult music in an appropriate setting. At the moment, the audiences are making us feel as if we are on our honeymoon.'

**Exit, Luc Fossaert, Jan 2008**

