

## RISING STAR Great artists of tomorrow

### Henk Neven baritone

As a young child, Henk Neven liked nothing more than to roam round castles and ruins, imagining tales of 'fair maidens, knights, and minstrels'. So when the Dutch baritone was deciding on repertoire for his debut solo CD on Onyx, the choice wasn't hard. 'Most of Loewe's Ballads are about this period in the past,' he explains. 'I like the idea that he was looking back at the same things I used to imagine. And Schumann's *Eichendorff Liederkreis* is a natural pairing. He uses nature as symbols of his inner life. It's just a masterpiece.'

The 34 year-old might have been immersed in this mythical world from a young age, but he only turned to singing as a teenager, after his voice broke. 'I played the piano from about seven, but I wasn't very motivated,' he says. 'When I started to sing, I thought that the sensation was interesting. I knew that life as

**'Something in my intuition said singing is what I wanted to do'**

a professional might not always be fun, but there was something in my intuition that said that's what I wanted to do. I just started singing because I wanted to sing.'

Lessons soon led to a place at the Amsterdam Conservatory, and since then the accolades have been rolling in. This April Neven will pick up the prestigious Dutch Music prize, while in the UK he's been making a name as a Borletti-Buitoni

Trust award winner and a BBC New Generation Artist. 'Because of the Dutch Music Prize, I've had the chance to work on Lieder with bass Robert Holl,' explains Neven.

'He really changed the way I looked at music, especially the text. He's the ideal combination of intellect and emotion.' British baritone Simon Keenlyside, 'a perfect combination of a singer and actor', is another inspiration.

Alongside Lieder, opera is a passion, with past roles including the lead in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and Frère Léon in Messiaen's *St François d'Assise*. 'For me Mozart roles are really good at the moment, and I've done Don Giovanni twice,' he



**DON AND ON:**  
'Don Giovanni is a role that's never finished'

says. 'That's a role that's never finished. Last year I recorded Schubert's *Die Winterreise*, and that's the same thing. When you've done it, you feel like you understand what it should be, but then the performances are finished!'

*Interview by Rebecca Franks*

*Henk Neven's debut disc is out this April*

