

SATURDAY 11 NOVEMBER 2023

ALBUM REVIEWS

Niklas Winter (with Henry Lowther and the Utopia Chamber Choir) – 'Graduale'

ON 27 OCTOBER 2023 • ([LEAVE A COMMENT](#))

Niklas Winter: *Graduale*
(abovoice. Album review by Phil Johnson)



Unusually for a guitarist's album, there's not an overabundance of guitar on 'Graduale' by the Finnish composer and instrumentalist **Niklas Winter**. Instead, Winter – who is due to play the music from the album with his own quartet and the choir Eclectic Voices at a London Jazz Festival concert (details below) – presents a beautifully appointed suite combining solos, duos and trios featuring the superb English trumpeter **Henry Lowther**, and arrangements of pieces from the Graduale Aboense hymnbook, comprising some of the earliest written music in Finland, sung by the **Utopia Chamber Choir** from Espoo.

The result is an entirely successful run of fourteen very different tracks that hang together to provide an overall aesthetic that is both meditative and swinging. Lowther, on trumpet and flugelhorn, sounds absolutely masterful, especially on the solo features where his strong, plangent tone on flugel, heard against a sepulchral reverb, communicates a deep and stately sense of melancholy endurance.

The other players are the vibraphonist **Severi Pyysalo** and the cellist **Juho Laitinen**, both of whom sound like stars. And when Niklas Winter does consent to play, with a subtle semi-acoustic bloom to the sound that can put you in mind of Joe Pass, Jim Hall or Barney Kessel as much as Bill Frisell, his unaccompanied solos feel unerringly right. The LJF concert, with the choir parts sung by Eclectic Voices, will be directed by Scott Stroman.

LIVE: Eclectic Voices and Niklas Winter Group (Graduale – Songs of the Spirit) will be at The Actors' Church (St Paul's Covent Garden) on 10 November at 8pm as part of the EFG London Jazz Festival (<https://efglondonjazzfestival.org.uk/events/eclectic-voices-and-niklas-winter-group-graduale-songs-of-the-spirit>)