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## Daniel and the Lions (Ludus Danielis) - New York's Ensemble for Early Music/Frederick Renz director - Fonè

*Not the first Play of Daniel on records, but the first in surround*

Published on August 19, 2005



**Daniel and the Lions (Ludus Danielis) - New York's Ensemble for Early Music/Frederick Renz director - Fonè 016 Multichannel SACD, 70:33 \*\*\*\*:**

The Play of Daniel (Ludus Danielis) is a medieval work, part of a Christmas cycle of liturgical dramas presenting the story of Daniel: his interpretation of "the writing on the wall", his elevation to Belshazar's advisor, and the attempt of jealous court members to destroy him. It was written by members of the Episcopal School of Beauvais, c. 1140. The Play of Daniel is not new to recordings. The first recording (as far as I know) was of Noah Greenberg conducting the New York Pro Musica in 1958 (Decca DL 7 9402). It was available on a now-deleted two-CD MCA set, with The Play of Herod.

I tried without success to find the Greenberg recording for comparison, not only for performance style and quality, but to learn why the Renz recording is 30 minutes longer, and (I hoped) to resolve the issue raised by the following comment in the liner notes: "The music of the Ludus Danielis was transcribed and furnished with suitable rhythmic patterns by Frederick Renz. He also added the instrumentation as suggested by the melody and by his knowledge of how medieval music was performed, transforming the Ludus Danielis into a living and colorful reality after seven centuries of oblivion." So we're to believe that this is the first recording of the work, and we have Mr. Renz, director of New York's Ensemble for Early Music, to thank for it? I'm sure Mr. Greenberg, were he alive, would vigorously disagree.

I'm not an expert on medieval musical practice, but this performance sounds authentic at least in the way I'm accustomed to hearing medieval music. The recording makes full use of surround sound, with the performers positioned to



the sides as well as the front. There's plenty of motion, both laterally and front/back (though most of the latter is produced by changing gain, rather than moving the performers toward or away from the mic).

Although this is a legitimate surround recording, it is labeled as having been recorded in November, 1986, using mic preamps, cabling, and [digital](#) recorders that did not exist at that time. This is clearly an error. Highly recommended, both for performance and sound.

- William Sommerwerck

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