

## CD REVIEWS

## MEDIEVAL

Magister Leoninus Vol. 1. Red Byrd (John Potter, Richard Wistreich) 71' 10" Hyperion Helios CDH55328 ££ (rec 1996)

These accounts of the music of the 12th-century French master Leonin were greeted with rave reviews when they first appeared in 1997. If nowadays these performances by John Potter and Richard Wistreich can sound a little languid, the sense of improvisation and discovery are ever present, and the tone and intonation throughout these lengthy and complex works are always impeccable. As work continues on the traditions of improvised harmonisation of plainchant, the work of Leonin and Perotin appears perhaps less earth-shattering than it once did and more part of a gradual process of musical development, but at the same time it is difficult not to wonder at the sustained, protracted and constantly inventive exploration of such simple source material.

D. James Ross

15<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

Busnois (attrib.) *L'Homme Armé Cantica Symphonia*, Giuseppe Maletto 71' 49" Glossa GCD P31906

In 1990 Paul van Nevel and his Huelgas Ensemble brought out a disc called *La Dissection d'un Homme Armé* (Sony SK 45860) which presented various movements of *L'Homme Armé* masses from the celebrated Naples Ms VI E 40. Almost twenty years have passed and little more can be deduced about this puzzling MS and its complex contents, although the name of Busnois has been tentatively attached to the contents. Here, the Italian ensemble Cantica Symphonia presents very enjoyable performances of a further selection, effectively mixing instruments and voices, so pleasingly complementing the previous recording in performance manner and underlining the urgent need for a complete account of this remarkable material. A particular highlight is the beautiful soprano voice of Laura Fabris, surely a voice perfectly crafted for this repertoire. This CD is prefaced with a performance of a Magnificat also attributed to Busnois. Some excellent and thought-provoking programme notes by Guido Magnano hint at the intriguing nature of the manuscript and its contents – I feel a Dan Brown novel coming on.

D. James Ross

16<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

[Isaac] *Choralis Constantinus 500: Vocal liturgical music in the Habsburg imperial court according to 15th and 16th-century practices* Corvinas Consort etc 63' 48" CC-001 (from [www.mkkiado.hu](http://www.mkkiado.hu))

Music by Isaac + Josquin In te Domine speravi; Kotter Salve Regina; Ockeghem Alma redemptoris mater; Senfl Beati omnes & chant

The title is that of a project to celebrate the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Isaac's setting of the propers of the mass based on the *Graduale Pataviense*. One name is missing from the front cover: Isaac. All the polyphony is by him apart from the items listed above. This CD relates to the celebrations for the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Isaac's *Choralis Constantinus*, which was commissioned in 1508. Events are continuing for several years. The programme is presented as a mass, but for a variety of feasts. There is no inserted material with the disc, and only a single page of general information which has nothing about this particular disc (apart from listing contents and performers), so it isn't clear whether it is an anthology from the various celebratory events or a single programme. It appears to be live, since there are noises of a congregation/audience, distracting since they aren't substantial enough to give the feel of a real service. But the music and performances are fine, and it is good to hear the music in context, even if an artificial one.

Details at [www.choralisconstantinus.hu](http://www.choralisconstantinus.hu). For more information, see p. 15 for a review of editions of the chant, which are part of the same project. CB

Senfl *Werke für Martin Luther und die Reformation: Missa super Nisi Dominus, Motetten* Ensemble Officium, Wilfried Rombach 59' 29" Christophorus CHE 0147-2

This CD casts a long-overdue spotlight on two intriguing areas of music, the output of Ludwig Senfl in general and more particularly the Latin church music of the Lutheran Reformation. A friend of Luther, the Swiss-born Senfl was composer to the Hofkapelle of the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian before switching his allegiances to the Bavarian Duke Albrecht IV, writing both church and secular music of a distinctively individual nature. The present Mass is dedicated to Luther and conforms to the latter's requirements for a Protestant mass while the other works, settings of Psalms and other liturgical material, can also be associated either

with the Reformation or with Luther personally. This provides a fascinating window on a repertoire, which the hardening of attitudes in the years following the Reformation has almost completely overshadowed. The compositional style is intentionally transparent – the priority for Senfl is textual clarity; but the music is gently inventive and beautifully crafted. While the singing of the Ensemble Officium is not always of the very high standard we expect of choral ensembles on CD these days, it is consistently adequate, and the unusual nature of the repertoire make this a valuable recording.

D. James Ross

Thomas Tallis's *Secret Garden Ensemble* européen William Byrd, Graham O'Reilly passacaille 963 70' 21" *Audivi vocem, Dum transisset, Gaude gloriosa, Loquebantur, Salve intemerata, Suscipe quaeas Domine + Lamentations II*

*Ceremony and Devotion: Music for the Tudors* The Sixteen, Harry Christophers Coro COR6077 75' 48" *Byrd Domine praestolamur, Haec dies, Infelix ego, Laudibus in sanctis; Sheppard Media vita, Sacris solemnis; Tallis Iam Christus astra, Jesu salvator saeculi, Misereri nostri*

Comparison between this and the 16's latest CD (foretasting their 2010 Cathedral tour) is interesting, with no easy decision of preference. There are advantages in discs containing a variety of composers: greater contrast, and a well-shaped programme. But Tallis had a long career, so the Byrd Ensemble disc has considerable variety, though one genre at which he excelled is left to The 16, who include two Tallis hymns, whose chords sound thicker than the number of parts would make one expect, and with a characteristic straining of the inner parts against the texture (I'm praising the music, not critiquing the singing!) Both discs have a 'big piece'. The Tallis begins with one of the outstanding works in the Tudor repertoire, the Marian antiphon *Gaude gloriosa*. I can't remember when I first heard it, but it immediately (if one can use that word of a work 20 minutes long) gripped me. Brevity may be a virtue, but so is length in a repertoire that is comprised mostly of short pieces. The large piece (24' 31") in The 16's programme, *Media vita*, doesn't work so well for me, despite being shaped by the repeated sections. It could be that I've never sung it (but I didn't sing *Gaude gloriosa* till five years ago); I think also that it is because, other than chant