

16th century

EDITIONS

ANTHOLOGY OF SPANISH RENAISSANCE MUSIC FOR GUITAR:

Works by Milán, Narváez, Mudarra, Valderrábano, Pisador, Fuenllana, Daça, Ortiz

Transcribed by Paolo Cherici

Bologna: Ut Orpheus, 2017 CH273

accid

This well-chosen anthology comprises solo music for the vihuela transcribed into staff notation for the modern guitar, and music for the viola da gamba with SATB grounds arranged for two guitars. For the vihuela pieces the guitar must have the third string tuned a semitone lower to bring it into line with vihuela tuning. Paolo Cherici selects a wide variety of pieces from all seven printed sources of vihuela music, including well-known favourites and pieces which are not too difficult. From Luis Milán's *El Maestro* (1536), there are ten Fantasias (nos 1-5, 8, 10, 11, 12 and 14), all six of the popular Pavanas, and a long prelude-like Tentos (the only piece in the anthology which has a page-turn). Milán's information preceding each piece has been included in Spanish with the music, and a translation into Italian and English is helpfully provided in Cherici's Preface. Editorial changes are given as footnotes, and missing notes are supplied in brackets. In Fantasia 2 I would have let Milán's accidentals stand in bars 30 and 31, but I like the inclusion of a' in bar 57, which maintains imitation amongst the voices. A footnote for Fantasia 4 offers an alternative transcription of six bars, which is no different from the main text. I guess the editor meant one version to have a strict three-voice texture and the other not, but somehow the two versions have accidentally ended up the same. From Luys de Narváez's *Los seys libros del Delphin* (1538) come four Fantasias (including the delightful Fantasia 2, which found its way into the Willoughby lute book in Nottingham), variations on Conde Claros, his evergreen variations on Guardame las vacas, and La Cancion del Emperador (which is an intabulation of Josquin's Mille regretz). There are 13 pieces from Alonso Mudarra's *Tres Libros de Musica en Cifras para Vihuela* (1546). I suppose it is inevitable that Cherici should choose the old war-horse, Fantasia che contrahaze la harpa en la manera de Ludovico. Where else does a renaissance composer advise the player that the "wrong"

notes towards the end of the piece are deliberate, and won't seem so bad if you play them well? In bars 115 and 117 Cherici reproduces the notes as Mudarra had them, but I wonder if there is a case for changing them to match the rest of the sequence from bars 111 to 122, if only in a footnote. In three of the Fantasias by Mudarra the player is required to use the "dedillo" technique – using the index finger to play up and down like a plectrum. Of the nine pieces from Enriquez Valderrábano's *Silva de Sirenas* (1547), three are marked "Primero grado", i.e. easiest to play. Diego Pisador is less well known than the other vihuelists, perhaps because his *Libro de musica de vihuela* (1552) contains pages and pages of intabulations of sacred music by Josquin and others. However, there are some small-scale attractive pieces of which Cherici picks five including a simple setting of La Gamba called Pavana muy llana para tañer. The eight pieces from Miguel de Fuenllana's *Orphenica Lyra* (1554) include Juan Vasquez's well-known De los alamos. Estaban Daça is represented by two Fantasias from his *El Parnasso* (1576), the second designed to "desemvolver las manos". Cherici completes his anthology with eight Recercadas and Quinta pars from Diego Ortiz's *Tratado de glosas* (1553), which he has arranged for two guitars. Guitar 2 plays a simple ground – Passamezzo Antico, La Gamba, etc. – arranged for four voices, while Guitar 1 plays Ortiz's entertaining divisions, noodling around the other voices up and down the fingerboard. To maintain a range similar to the bass viol (with a top string tuned to d') for a guitar (with a top string e') Cherici raises the pitch by a tone for Recercadas 4, 6, 7 and 8, but for the other pieces the music is transposed down a third for Guitar 2, and up a sixth for Guitar 1. This is sensible, since the original keys of G minor and F major, which are somewhat awkward to play on the guitar, are now transposed to a more comfortable E minor and A major. Lowering the third string of the guitars by a semitone to match the tuning of the vihuelas is not essential for the Ortiz pieces, but it would make life easier for Guitar 2, particularly for chords of B major and some chords of D major.

All in all this is an excellent anthology, with lots of useful information in the Preface, and I wish I had a copy when I used to play Spanish renaissance music on my classical guitar years ago.

Stewart McCoy

RECORDINGS

BYRD: CONSORT MUSIC AND SONGS

bFIVE Recorder Consort, Sunhae Im *soprano*

64:54

Coviello Classics COV91725

Byrd's 533 surviving works divide into five broad categories: Latin church music, English church music, keyboard music, consort music, and songs. There have been complete recordings of three of these repertoires. Missing so far are the complete English church music and of the songs. Easy though it would be to round up all of Byrd's Anglican repertory onto a couple of discs, the greater need is for a comprehensive recording of his large and disparate number of songs. Many are in published collections, but a good number survive only in manuscript. Those that were published in his lifetime tend to be partsongs of various types; those unpublished tend to be consort songs. There is some overlap between these two categories, as alternative versions survive for many songs. It is a repertory replete with outstanding pieces, and recordings have been made of similar repertoires by other composers, but currently Byrd's song *oeuvre* is spread across any number of commercial recordings. Some are on single discs devoted to his music alone like the one under review. Other songs make single or isolated appearances for Byrd on anthologies or themed discs which include works by several composers. It's a mess. Meanwhile we have to be grateful for recordings such as this one, albeit they include some songs which have been recorded several times already, but which also include at least one premiere recording. Usually the accompanying consort is of viols, but occasionally it is of recorders, as is the case here. (Keyboards, cornetts, sackbuts and even saxophones – surprisingly successful – are not unknown.) It also happens routinely that such discs consist mainly of songs, but also include a selection of Byrd's instrumental consort music. Contrariwise here, of the 21 numbered tracks, the majority – eleven – are the consort music of the title, and only ten are songs.

The recorders begin the disc with the third Fantasia a6, which Byrd published in his *Psalmes, songs, and sonnets* of 1611. All three of Byrd's six-part fantasias are represented, including the early example which is thought by most critics to be the original form of his motet *Laudate pueri* from the *Cantiones sacrae* published jointly with Tallis in 1575; though some dissenting voices assert that the motet

came first. In any event, B-Five perform it as it survives instrumentally, and not with the small differences found in the published vocal version. (Of the two preceding recordings, the Rose Consort play it the former way, Phantasm the latter – misguidedly, in my opinion.) The recorders also play all five of Byrd's surviving five-part In nomines, *Browning*, the five-part Pavan which is the original of Byrd's *First Pavan* for keyboard, and an unnecessary modern arrangement of its galliard.

The disc's premiere recording is of *When first by force*. Nothing in this repertory seems to come without the need for explanations. In those sources where the work survives as a consort song with a complete text, that text is a poem beginning *I that sometime*. However, other such sources that are fragmentary and lack any underlay give the title as *When first by force* which is the text attached to it when it appears as a partsong in Byrd's *Songs of sundrie natures* from 1589. That text is the one used here.

Of lesser known songs seldom recorded, *And think ye nymphs* survives only as a partsong – in Byrd's 1589 *Songs* – but is presented here in a frenetic version arranged for solo voice and recorders. An *aged dame* is a *bona fide* consort song with a text which teeters between the ghoulish and the surrealistic. Meanwhile *How vain the toils* finds Byrd near the end of his career in his *Psalmes, songs, and sonnets* of 1611 with a consort song in what is mainly a collection of partsongs, right at the top of his game with a work that manages to be both magisterial yet subtle.

Inevitably some more familiar items have been included. *Though Amaryllis dance in green* is taken at one heck of a lick; sometimes one wonders whether such an interpretation is recorded more to showcase the performers than the music, for which it does little. Nearly as familiar is *My mistress had a little dog* but here full credit goes to the musicians for playing up to Byrd's obviously intended histrionics. Notable and creditable is the singer's clearly audible and expressive drop of a fifth in the first line on the word "Royal", a crucial rhetorical gesture by Byrd often glossed over by singers who lack the range for convincing lower notes.

The combination of soprano and recorders is not to everyone's taste, and occasionally Sunhae Im's slight vibrato grates against the smoother timbre of the higher recorders. That said, her experience as a Baroque opera specialist gives many of her interpretations considerable profundity. The sordid narrative of *Susanna fair* which has so many contemporary resonances, unfolds quite rivetingly, and *Ye sacred Muses* is an outstanding version of a song that seems

always to draw the best out of whoever records it.

The many felicities, and the neglected gems brought to sparkle in the light, make this an album that is easy to recommend. The overall presentation is enhanced by notes provided in the form of an interview with Kerry McCarthy, a guarantee of omniscience and elegance. All the musicians show an aptitude for this repertory, so much so that one would hope for more discs from them of Byrd's songs and consort music. A few of the former remain unrecorded, and although there have been two complete recordings of Byrd's complete (sic) consort music, there are some fine incomplete settings in four parts of plainsong hymns that have had their missing treble part reconstructed and which deserve a commercial hearing.

Richard Turbet

LUDFORD: MISSA DOMINICA

Trinity Boys Choir, Handbell Choir Gotha, Lewis Brito-Babapulle, David Swinson

79:21

Rondeau Horizon ROP8001

This CD provides a window on a neglected area of repertoire, the generally small-scale settings by Renaissance composers of the extended ordinary for Lady Mass. While the excellent Nicholas Ludford has never quite regained the reputation he deserves as an outstanding and highly original Renaissance English composer, at least his larger-scale mass settings have all been recorded several times. The same cannot be said of his three-part settings of the Lady Mass, one of which is recorded here for the first time. Presenting the music in two different guises, for unaccompanied choral voices, and for solo voices accompanied by organ, both of which work very well, is an excellent concept. The handbells, something of an add-on in this programme, supply two accounts of the Square Le Roy, as well as joining the boys in one of the later modern works. Although much of the singing is pleasantly lyrical, there is occasional downward pressure on the intonation. Having said that, the clear tone of the boys' voices blends beautifully with Ludford's imaginative writing for them, suggesting that these settings are well worth further exploration. In addition to the Mass, the choir provides lovely performances of the medieval carols *There is no Rose of Swych Vertu* and *Angelus ad Virginem* (with some curious choices of hard and soft consonants) as well as two modern pieces. The Trinity Boys Choir are to be congratulated for tackling this neglected and technically

demanding music, and this CD very usefully provides a window on an important part of Ludford's output and a generally overlooked body of early polyphony.⁴⁵⁵⁵

D. James Ross

WILLIAM MUNDY: SACRED CHORAL MUSIC

Choir of St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh, Duncan Ferguson Organist and Master of the Music

65:15

Delphian DCD 34204

“They order, said I, this matter ...” differently in Scotland. St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh, which is in the Scottish Episcopal Church, part of the Anglican Communion, has the only surviving choir school in Scotland, where the Church of Scotland, aka The Kirk, which is presbyterian (no bishops!), is the Established Church. For some decades the choir has had a mixed treble line, and the occasional female alto lay-clerk. Since the arrival as OMM of Duncan Ferguson, the Choir has made many highly regarded recordings of demanding music throughout all generations, including two featuring Latin compositions by, respectively, Taverner and Sheppard. Their relatively neglected but equally gifted contemporary William Mundy is the focus of this new release, with another Latin programme that is demanding to sing, stimulating to hear, and altogether delightful.

To be clear, all the tracks listed above are interesting, rewarding and enjoyable, but two stand out: first, the Marian antiphon *Maria virgo sanctissima*. This is a premiere recording – not too surprising, as there are a certain number of Mundy's motets which get the nod for recordings but quite a few others that continue to languish unrecorded. But apart from the fact that it is a magnificent piece which the Edinburgh choir drives to a fine climax in a quite glorious final amen, it also represents a collaboration with the most exciting project in recent years to feature Tudor music: this is “Tudor Partbooks: the Manuscript Legacies of John Sadler, John Baldwin and their Antecedents” which has been supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and led by an outstanding scholar of the music from this period, Magnus Williamson at Newcastle University. That the AHRC has provided funding for this initiative is massively praiseworthy. Part of the project involves digitizing these precious original manuscripts that – most significantly in the case of Sadler – are in a dangerously fragile state, but it also involves, where possible, making usable editions of works which are to a greater or lesser

extent fragmentary. *Maria virgo sanctissima* lacks its tenor, and it has been provided by Magnus Williamson in the edition used for this recording; it is only appropriate that the logos of AHRC and “Tudor Partbooks” appear in the accompanying booklet.

The other stand-out work on this disc is the tripartite *In exitu Israel* in which the first and longest section is by Sheppard, the senior composer of the trio; the second section is by Byrd (the booklet correctly disposes of suggested alternatives to the then (late 1550s) adolescent William); and the third section is by Mundy himself. The Cardinall’s Musick first recorded this historical oddity on the second disc of their Byrd Edition (Gaudemus CD GAU 178) but the two versions could hardly be more different. It is a work to be sung in procession, and while TCM presents it as a static performance, albeit recorded in a Roman Catholic church, St Mary’s sings it while processing in the Cathedral, even with audible thurible at the required moment (disappointingly the thurifer is not credited in the booklet!). They sing the polyphonic sections at TTBarB pitch with their trebles chanting the plainsong, while TCM sing at SSAT with men chanting. Neither of these versions follows precisely the instructions in the Sarum liturgy in which the decani side of the choir should sing the plainsong and cantoris the polyphony. This would of course provide spatial differentiation during a live service or performance. Nevertheless both versions have the benefit of perhaps providing more aural variety for those listening to discs, when the spatial differentiation between decani and cantoris would not be so apparent. The sense of movement in a procession is well sustained by St Mary’s, and given that the disc features Mundy, it is appropriate that the polyphony becomes most distinct for his concluding contribution to this work. The booklet is clear about which verses are set by each composer.

There are two further premieres, both settings of *Alleluia. Per te Dei genetrix* either side of the exquisite motet *Sive vigilem* which is joined by two other fine shorter works, *Beatus et sanctus*, another motet, which gets the disc off to an excellent start, and the psalm setting *Adolescentulus sum ego*. We have had two stand-out works already, but without doubt the outstanding work on the disc, and the one best known, most discussed and most recorded, is the giant votive antiphon *Vox patris caelestis*. This has been the subject of two major articles in recent years by Kerry McCarthy and John Milsom. As in the Marian antiphon, there are resonances of the pieces in the Eton Choirbook, as Mundy marshals his vocal forces in a virtuoso display

of contrasts, all the way using strong melodies, punctuated by occasional homophony as at “Te omnes” in a dramatic intervention towards the conclusion, to drive the music forward.

Performances are of a uniformly high level. The sound is unlike that of The Sixteen on the other disc devoted to Mundy’s music: that is very much the adult chamber choir giving perfect renditions in a selected (unspecified) acoustic (Helios CDH55086). St Mary’s is a liturgical choir, singing in its own cathedral, with trebles rather than sopranos and therefore, the presence of some girls (and a female alto) notwithstanding, closer to what Mundy would have expected. The overall sound seems more focused than on previous Tudor recordings by St Mary’s, giving a grainier texture to the lay clerks (there is one bass with quite an old-fashioned vibrato) and some grit to the trebles, but this is never to the detriment of the music, and reflects the authenticity of the performance: short of being there in Edinburgh, this is the next best alternative as a compact disc. Credit to all concerned: for choosing such a rewarding composer as Mundy, whose style effortlessly migrates from the floridity of the Eton Choirbook to the conciseness of the Elizabethan motet without losing his personal touch; for selecting a varied and interesting repertory; and for performing it in an accessible and engaging way.

Richard Turbet

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CIPRIANO DE RORE: PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST

AS A STARVED DOG

Graindelavoix, Björn Schmelzer

75:22

Glossa GCD P 32114

Regular readers of my reviews will have charted my growing disenchantment with the recordings of Graindelavoix, and this latest album does nothing to buck the trend, although perhaps some of the more obnoxious features of previous releases are not as pronounced. In his frankly rambling and idiosyncratic notes to this programme of madrigals by Cipriano de Rore, the group’s director Björn Schmelzer states that they will be presenting the music in its ‘simple form’ as defined by the Renaissance musician Luigi Zenobi. It is certainly the case that they generally eschew extended decorative *passagi*, but in some of the accounts there is scarcely a note which isn’t bent, wobbled or swooped up to or down from, creating a most unpleasant and unsettling effect. A very close and dense recorded ambiance with a curious tinny after-echo, which

recalled Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody* or Sting's unfortunate brush with Dowland, serves to exaggerate the wealth of self-indulgent mannerisms in the singing to the point of obscuring the original music. Rather than ornamenting according to any sort of historical precedent, each of the singers just seems to be doing whatever comes up their back, while vocal production seems to be allowed to range wildly from a pure focussed sound to raw shouting. All this would be more than enough to put me off these accounts, but there are also regular examples of uncomfortable intonation and lack of rhythmical unanimity. On the instrumental front, Floris de Rycker's *ceterone* is much too closely recorded, giving it an unpleasant tinny tone, and only the cornett of Lluís Coll i Trullàs seems to escape the generally inept recording. The completely bonkers title of the CD, which seems to rely entirely on a link in Schmelzer's fevered imagination between Dylan Thomas, a portrait of a rather gaunt Cipriano and the starving dog featured in the corner of Dürer's engraving of Melancholia, seems like an excuse to distort the rather happy world of de Rore's music into a nightmare of the group's own warped imagination. I can only hope that only Graindelavoix fans - and there must still be some, I suppose - will invest in this grotesque distortion of the music, while the general listening public will be warned off by the macabre title.

D. James Ross

STOLTZER: MISSA DUPLEX PER TOTUM ANNUM,
3 PSALM MOTETS

Weser-Renaissance, Manfred Cordes

61:50

cpo 999 295-2

A prolific composer in the first quarter of the 16th century, Stoltzer's reputation has suffered somewhat from the fact that he worked away from the main centres of musical activity, spending the final years of his life in Hungary, and his music missed out on much of the modern research into the music of the period. As might be expected from the chosen court composer of Maria of Hungary, Stoltzer is an accomplished composer in the style of Heinsich Isaac, although in the Psalm motets, three of which are performed here, the influence of Josquin can be detected. Weser Renaissance perform the Psalm motets with a blend of instruments and solo voices, a sound which they have cultivated over many years and have applied to a wide range of repertoire. It is both beautifully expressive and wonderfully blended, and I would have liked to have heard

the mass movements being given the same treatment. This is particularly the case as the unaccompanied voices never sound quite so secure, and the intonation is sometimes a little dodgy. The mass is performed *in alternatim*, with the Credo, not set by Stoltzer, entirely chanted. The Agnus Dei is apparently from a different setting by Stoltzer, for which the German-only notes offer no explanation that I can find. In addition to the vocal music advertised, the disc includes two attractive instrumental pieces.

D. James Ross

EARLY MODERN ENGLISH MUSIC 1500-1550

Tasto Solo

58:00

passacaille 1028

Music by Ashton, Cooper, Henry VIII, Preston & anon

The three members of Tasto solo play organetto, hammered clavisimbalum and Renaissance harp respectively, and, notwithstanding the name of the group, usually together in ensemble. Any reservations I have about historical evidence that three instruments of this kind ever played music of this kind together are blown away by the sheer musicality and dynamism of Tasto solo's performances. Guillermo Pérez's complete mastery of the organetto means that he can articulate and shape notes like on a recorder, while his fellow performers' virtuosity on their respective instruments is also stunning. Repertoire which in some performances can sound dead in the water - who has not sat through stultifying renditions of dreary early Tudor music? - comes vividly to life here, while highly imaginative juxtapositions of the different timbres of the instruments and a wonderfully vivid recording make for a winning combination. If you have any familiarity with this repertoire, you will love what these musicians do with it, and - if you don't - you will just be right royally entertained.

D. James Ross

ORPHEUS ANGLORUM

Lute music by John Johnson and Anthony Holborne

Yavor Genov lute

72:36

Brilliant Classics 95551

John Johnson (c. 1545-1594) was lutenist to Queen Elizabeth I, (a post coveted but never gained by John Dowland,) and he composed some very fine music,

which was still being played long after his death. The first track of the CD is Johnson's *Flatt Pavan*, and judging by the numerous surviving sources, it was one of Johnson's most popular pieces. Yavor Genov has chosen the version from the Euing lute book. Where possible, it is important to stick to one source rather than conflate sources to create something which never existed, yet one must distinguish between acceptable variants and unacceptable errors. Genov reproduces what is clearly an error in bar 6 of the manuscript – a nominal C major chord (not very Flatt) instead of C minor. He starts the piece slowly with *minim* = 38, but reaches *minim* = 42 by the end of the first section. There is no copy of the *Flatt Galliard* in the Euing manuscript, so Genov uses the version in Dd.2.11. He opts for a slow speed at *minim* = 42, which really should be a bit quicker as a contrast to the Pavan.

For Johnson's *Delight Pavan and Galliard* Genov turns to the Board lute book, c. 1620. A feature of this late source is the extensive use of ornaments, yet Genov misses most of them out. For example, the first section has 24 ornaments of which Genov plays two. Unlike other sources, the Board manuscript has two six-note chords in bars 2 and 4 of the third section. They are made special, because they have to be spread, since a player does not have six fingers on his right hand. Genov reduces them both to four-note chords, which are not spread, and not special. Most lute music of this period has final bars which involve a broken chord of some kind to sustain the sound. Genov is understandably keen to get quieter through the bar to give the music shape, but he often overdoes it, so that the last note of the bar is scarcely audible. At its most extreme the last note of the second section of the *Delight Galliard* vanishes altogether both times through.

Johnson's music has much variety; it has attractive melodies and exciting and sometimes unusual divisions. If we put academic considerations to one side, Genov plays the music quite well. *Gathering of Peascods* from the Board lute book may be short of ornaments, but Genov instils brightness and jollity. He gives a nicely paced performance of Johnson's variations on *Carman's Whistle*, enlivened with some swift semiquaver divisions, and he produces an upbeat interpretation of Johnson's *Passing measures Pavan*, with its quirky broken chords over repeated *minim* bass notes.

The second half of the CD is devoted to music by Johnson's contemporary, Anthony Holborne (c. 1545-1602), beginning with the *Pavan* from 17v of Lbl Add 31392. Genov sustains it well, albeit with rather a lot of

rolled chords. However, there seems to be something wrong with the recording halfway through bar 6, where it suddenly skips straight to bar 7 omitting half a bar. Halfway through bar 22, something is not quite right either, which sounds more like badly patched takes rather than bad playing – two extra notes are clumsily inserted, which match the divisions for the repeat in bar 30. The next track, *The New Year's Gift*, also suffers from something similar – the first two sections are played without repeats, but the third section has a repeat starting halfway through the second section.

The last two tracks, *Muy Linda* and *As it fell on a holiday*, are played at breakneck speed. *Muy Linda* races on apace, so that there is no way of telling where one section ends and the next begins. The unfortunate exception is when Genov goes back for the repeat of the third section. The last bar has a final flourish involving four semiquavers, which Genov cannot possibly play at the speed he is going. He slows down, as if bringing the piece to an end, to be able to play them at half speed; he then goes back for the repeat a tempo, sounding as if he had forgotten he had a repeat still to play. To avoid all this, he could have re-written the final bar for the first time around, as he does with a similar final bar in *As it fell on a holiday*, and saved those semiquavers up for a *rallentando* only at the very end. Alternatively he could have played the piece slower.

Stewart McCoy

THE EARS OF THE HUGUENOTS

Huelgas Ensemble, Paul Van Nevel

65:09

deutsche harmonia mundi 88985411762

Music by Animuccia, Costeley, de L'Estocart, Goudimel, Le Jeune, Mauduit, Palestrina, Servin & anon

The unexpectedly varied music of the early Protestant church and home is presented beautifully here by the voices and strings of the Huelgas Ensemble. The CD opens with plain but harmonically imaginative four-part psalm settings by Jacques Mauduit and Claude Goudimel. Inventively varying the performance medium between various permutations of voices and strings, as would have undoubtedly been the case in the mainly domestic performances of this music at the time, the ensemble capture perfectly its dignified elegance and understated nobility. Goudimel was one of many Huguenots who perished in the St Bartholomew's Day Massacres of 1572, and tellingly this CD includes a section of music eligible to have been performed in Rome on receipt of the 'good news' of the

Massacres. This militantly counter-reformation repertoire features a curious anonymous 16th-century *lauda* and music by Giovanni Animuccia and Palestrina, the Agnus Dei from whose *Messa 'Ut re mi fa sol la'* is perhaps an oddly placatory choice given the circumstances. The third and most interesting section of the programme explores the slightly later and more adventurous music by some mainly Huguenot 'big hitters' – Paschal de L'Estocart, Claude le Jeune and the until recently almost completely overlooked Jean Servin. Setting text from the rhyming Latin Psalter by Scottish intellectual George Buchanan, Servin's eight-part *Stellata coeli* is one of several masterpieces the composer produced in a volume presented to James VI, King of Scots. In one of the great what-ifs of musical history, due to circumstances this type of opulent Protestant polyphony failed to take root at this time, although we can perhaps hear faint pre-echoes of Schütz here. By some way, this is the most interesting music on the CD, and it is a shame that a second Servin piece promised by the programme notes seems to have ended up on the cutting-room floor. On reflection it would have been more interesting to have cut the rather gratuitous counter-reformation section and to have included more Servin – but perhaps the ensemble will return to the sizeable and idiosyncratic Servin legacy in the future.

D. James Ross

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