

RECORDINGS

15th century

OBRECHT: MISSA GRECORUM & MOTETS

The Brabant Ensemble, Stephen Rice

74:13

Hyperion CDA68216

+ *Agnus Dei* (attrib.), *Cuius sacrata viscera*, *O beate Basili*, *Mater Patris*, *Salve regina* a6, *Sancta Dei genitrix*

Thanks to a stunningly vivid portrait by Hans Memling, Jacob Obrecht is one of the very few early church composers we can put a face to. This is particularly pertinent in the case of Obrecht, whose distinctive music makes his stand out anyway in the generation of Josquin. Mainly represented by some 26 masses, a considerable total for the period, Obrecht also composed many motets, four of which are represented here, along with an isolated motet attributed to him by Rob Wegman. Like his older contemporary Ockeghem, he seems to delight in mathematical complexity, and in the *Missa Grecorum* the unidentified cantus undergoes a particularly tortuous series of treatments. Also like Ockeghem, Obrecht is capable of writing music of surpassing lyricism, but just occasionally I feel both men get a little bogged down in their own cleverness. This is certainly the case with the present mass, and it has to be said the performance by the Brabant Ensemble also doesn't seem to be quite up to their normal transcendent standard. Whether by design or lack of it, extended passages of the mass seem to be sung without much passion or expression and there are uncharacteristic moments of dodgy intonation. I would be interested to read Rob Wegman's reasons for attributing the anonymous Wroclaw Codex *Agnus Dei* to Obrecht – it sounds rather formulaic and frankly too dull to me to be by a composer of the first rank such as Obrecht. I am normally a huge Brabant Ensemble fan, admiring the passionate and illuminating performances they have given in the past of often wholly neglected material, but I'm afraid this recording didn't entirely do it for me.

D. James Ross

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