

comparable forces. To my knowledge it's been more than 20 years since they were last recorded as a set with boy trebles. The Choir of Westminster Cathedral's approach is placid but not overly reverential: the longer-texted movements are formally clear and energetic where required. In comparison with the accounts from Christ Church and Winchester Cathedrals, the treatment of tempi is relatively unobtrusive, notwithstanding the usual shifts at 'Quoniam tu solus' in the *Glorias* and 'Et resurrexit' in the *Credos*. The choir is perhaps heard to best effect in the more tranquil later movements, the *Agnus Dei*s in particular: the use of solo voices at the beginning of the five-voice one is an effective touch. For the three-voice Mass the top voice is taken by a well-blended combination of boy altos and countertenors, making this the most distinctive interpretation of the three.

In previous reviews of this choir I've remarked on the spacious recorded sound. Here it compounds the one feature I'd fault: the lower voices sport a wider vibrato than the upper (the basses especially so), clouding the texture in fully scored and faster passages, such as the endings of the longer movements. Moreover, when the basses rise above their clef they are inclined to shout, which proves a distraction on repeated listening. The trebles are as bright as the sound image permits but in the concluding *Ave verum* they are not only perfectly clear but poignantly plangent.

Fabrice Fitch

Masses – selected comparisons:

Winchester Cath Ch, Hill (12/90) (ARGO) 430 164-2ZH
Christ Church Cath Ch, Darlington (REGI) RRC1336

Byrd • Philips

Byrd Adoramus te Christe. With lilies white. Wretched Albinus. Domine secundum actum meum. How vain the toils. Constant Penelope. Attollite portas. Haec dicit Dominus. Ah silly soul
Philips Pavana & Galliaro. Passamezzo Pavan. Viae Sion lugent. Trio in the third mode. Ego sum panis/Et panis quem. Fantazias – No 1 a 6; No 2 a 6. Pavana and Galliarda Dolorosa. Trio in the first mode. Pater noster
Clare Wilkinson *mez* **The Rose Consort of Viols** Deux-Elles © DXL1155 (73' • DDD)



The pairing of the Catholics William Byrd and his student Peter Philips is logical both biographically and musically. Precisely because Byrd's music is the better known, the opportunity to confront them in closely related genres is instructive.

Byrd's consort songs and motets are balanced by motets by Philips, with Clare Wilkinson as the soloist. The penitential tone of the vocal pieces lends the recital a clear focus, leavened by the more varied affects of the instrumental pieces by Philips that make up the remainder of the recital. These are very fine, barring the odd passage that coins the stylistic small change of the time. The 'Dolorosa' Pavan and Galliard pair is splendid.

These are impressive interpretations. The Rose Consort's tone is placid and soft-centred but they cope very well with energetic passagework. This isn't faint praise, for there's surely room for a more relaxed approach than the exhilarated calisthenics of Phantasm. Clare Wilkinson turns in perhaps the finest performances I can remember from her in this repertory. The elegy for Lady Margaret Montague, *With lilies white*, is particularly memorable. It bears a strong resemblance to the better-known laments for Sir Philip Sidney and Thomas Tallis. A nice touch is the use of period anglicised Latin pronunciation for the Byrd motets and Roman pronunciation for Philips's, but whether the latter would have applied in the Low Countries where Philips worked is a moot point. In other respects, the comparison does Philips no harm at all. **Fabrice Fitch**

Frescobaldi

Messa sopra l'aria della Monica. Toccata II. Civitas Hierusalem. Canzone XI a due canti detta la Plettenberger (Il primo libro delle canzoni). Ricercar dopo il Credo (Fiori musicali). Toccata IV per l'organo da sonarsi all'Elevazione (Il secondo libro di toccata). Iesu flos Mater Virginis. Ego sum panis vivus. Canzone II a due canti e due bassi. Capriccio V sopra la bassa fiamenga

Il Teatro Armonico / Alessandro De Marchi Christophorus © CHE0193-2 (69' • DDD)
Recorded 1991-92. From Symphonia SY91S08



Frescobaldi was never officially *maestro di cappella* of any institution,

although the renowned keyboard composer was employed as organist in some of Rome's most important churches. A clutch of small-scale motets are preserved but the linchpin of this non-specific liturgical reconstruction is an eight-part Mass setting based loosely on the secular song 'Madre, monaca non mi vo'far', its manuscript in the archive of St John Lateran attributed somewhat insecurely to Frescobaldi. Proceedings are

fleshed out as necessary with Gregorian chants, three of Frescobaldi's certifiable short motets and a few keyboard pieces played excellently by Attilio Cremonesi on an organ built in 1545.

Early music twitchers may spot that the now-defunct Il Teatro Armonico included luminaries such as cornettist Jean Tubéry and singers Rossana Bertini, Marco Beasley and Furio Zanasi (who leads the plainchant); the performers are organised into two choirs, each consisting of revolving teams of four singers and four instruments, often with an instrument playing certain passages within the texture instead of a voice singing the line. The sound is often a bit rough around the edges but the fluent and skilful performance of the three-part motet *Ego sum panis vivus* (for two sopranos, tenor and basso continuo) contradicts criticism by the 17th-century writer Antimo Liberati that Frescobaldi was 'unhappy and inept as a composer of vocal music'. **David Vickers**

Grieg

Haugtussa. Six Songs, Op 25.

Twelve Songs, Op 33

Marianne Beate Kielland *mez*

Nils Anders Mortensen *pf*

LAWO Classics © LWC1059 (75' • DDD)



This all-Grieg recital opens with *Haugtussa*, surely one of the most loveable song-cycles

outside the German-language repertoire. Like a Nordic *Frauenliebe und -leben*, it follows the story of a shepherd girl's first love from early enchantment to loneliness and despair, set against a chill northern landscape of blueberry fields and mountain brooks. The mezzo-soprano Marianne Beate Kielland brings to it a gleaming voice, lit with cool sunlight from the north, and a native Norwegian's way with the words. There is a simplicity and directness about this performance, mirrored in Nils Anders Mortensen's accompaniments, that brings a deep-seated kind of satisfaction.

Kielland couples *Haugtussa* with two complete sets of songs, the twelve Op 33 songs to poems by Vinje and six Op 25 songs to poems by Ibsen. In these the tone is immediately more varied, from the dark, tragic mood of 'Guten' ('The Youth') through to the playful 'Med en vandlilje' ('With a waterlily', a favourite Schwarzkopf encore, though here with sentimentality briskly banished). A handful of songs from these collections – notably 'Vären' ('Last spring') and 'En svane'