

Monteverdi

'Madrigali, Vol 3 - Venezia'

Madrigals: Book 7 - Al lume delle stelle; Chiome d'oro; Con che soavità; Interrotte speranze; Lettera amorosa; Tempo la cetra; Tirsi e Clori. Book 8 - Altri canti d'Amor; Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda; Dolcissimo uscignolo; Lamento della Ninfa

Les Arts Florissants / Paul Agnew

Harmonia Mundi © HAF890 5278
(75' • DDD • T/t)



This third and final disc from Les Arts Florissants' cycle of madrigals by

Claudio Monteverdi is, in every way, a fitting end to their journey. Each disc has been organised by the cities in which Monteverdi worked: Cremona (Books 1-3), Mantova (4-6) and, now, Venice (7 & 8), presenting lesser-known gems alongside famous works.

And what a journey! Just compare the opening of this album to that of Vol 1 to grasp how far Monteverdi's dense, intense textures have expanded, and how the singers have grown with them. Take, for instance, the little-recorded 'Al lume delle stelle', where rising vocal phrases unfurl and look towards the stars as Tirsi is reminded of the glint in his lover's eyes. The phrasing is incredibly spacious and, even at its slowest, text is always the driving force, to the extent that one can almost taste it. In the solo madrigals, Miriam Allan's sublime singing in 'Con che soavità' is delicately imbued with a knowing glint. And in the extraordinary 'Lettera amorosa' Lucile Richardot finds a breathless immediacy quite different from Montserrat Figueras's long, languid opening phrases (Alia Vox, 2014) but equally engaging.

As the focus shifts to Book 8, the diaphanous singing of Hannah Morrison and Miriam Allan in 'Dolcissimo uscignolo', in which Paul Agnew introduces voices in a sequential fashion, shows the remarkable balance of these performances. The disc ends with 'Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda', famous for its *stile rappresentativo*. Here I prefer a more imposing narrator and more closely miked instruments, such as found on record by Rinaldo Alessandrini (Naïve, 12/98), yet the vivid atmosphere of Agnew's performance is palpable and, as so often in these discs, his text-driven subtlety wins over.

Edward Breen

Mozart

'Whispering Mozart'

Abendempfindung, K523. Als Luise die Briefe, K520. An Chloë, K524. An die Bescheidenheit, K392. An die Einsamkeit, K391. An die Freude, K53. An die Freundschaft, K148/125h. An die Hoffnung, K390. Die betrogene Welt, K474. Daphne, deine Rosenwagen, K52/46c. Geheime Liebe, K150. Die ihr unermesslichen Weltalls Schöpfer ehrt, K619. Im Frühlingsanfang, K597. Komm, liebe Zither, K351. Das Lied der Trennung, K519. Sehnsucht nach dem Frühlinge, K596. Das Traumbild, K530. Das Veilchen, K476. Zaide - Brüder, lasst uns lustig sein. Der Zauberer, K472. Die Zufriedenheit, K473

Marianne Beate Kielland *mez*

Nils Anders Mortensen *pf*

LAWO Classics © LWC1111 (65' • DDD • T/t)



Let us get one thing clear. Despite the odd title there is no whispering on this

disc. The booklet promises performances of Mozart's Lieder that remain confined within their 'delicate and simple limits', as if the words are being intimately whispered in a salon, but what we hear is Mozart-singing not appreciably different in style from other singers of recent years – except, that is, for the distinctive beauty of Marianne Beate Kielland's voice.

While most Mozart Lieder discs have been recorded by sopranos or occasionally tenors, Kielland is a mezzo who can draw upon darker, more deeply rooted colours. In the simpler, strophic songs like 'An die Einsamkeit' and 'Im Frühlingsanfang' there is a bright surface to the voice that keeps heaviness at bay, and 'An die Freundschaft' especially benefits from her gleaming tone. As Mozart ventures towards greater complexity in the Lied, she is able to bring a deeper seriousness into play, giving weight to the heartfelt feelings of 'Das Lied der Trennung' and casting a shadow of grief over 'Abendempfindung' (how lovely, incidentally, was Elisabeth Grümmer in this song). In *Eine kleine Deutsche Kantate*, K619, after Nils Anders Mortensen's stately introduction, Kielland follows a grand opening recitative with a more flowing, warmly coloured main aria.

There is little or nothing here not to like. Those who prefer a high voice in their Mozart Lieder might turn to Barbara Bonney (Teldec, 1/92), who has an appealing lightness of touch. The classic disc casting a giant shadow over this repertoire is the pairing of Elisabeth Schwarzkopf and Walter Gieseking (EMI/Warner Classics, 2/56), and their Mozart

really is in a different style, mainly thanks to Schwarzkopf's gift for wringing the maximum import out of every phrase. Whisper it softly, but Kielland may be the safer choice. **Richard Fairman**

Poulenc

Ave verum corpus. Litanies à la Vierge Noire.

Mass. Quatre motets pour le temps de Noël.

Quatre motets pour un temps de pénitence.

Salve regina. Un soir de neige

The Sixteen / Harry Christophers

Coro © COR16149 (65' • DDD • T/t)



Any new recording from The Sixteen is going to be well worth hearing. It

almost goes without saying that the singing will be of a technical standard beyond reproach, while Harry Christophers's innate musicianship will ensure a performance of supreme artistic worth. This latest release does not disappoint. This is a sumptuous recording of flawless singing and intense music-making.

However, while this is a truly exquisite piece of choral singing, it almost seems too perfect. It's as if Poulenc's directness of expression and raw emotional impulses are filtered through a thick, highly polished veneer. In short, it misses the honesty and openness that are such potent features in the recent recordings from the Netherlands Chamber Choir and Tenebrae.

Despite the wonderfully vivid organ colours Robert Quinney adds to *Litanies à la Vierge Noire*, The Sixteen sound too comfortable and self-assured. Their singing of the *Motets pour le temps du Noël* is certainly unutterably lovely, yet at times it feels almost over-sung – the clarity of detail in 'Quem vidistis pastores' verges on the musically pretentious – and the warm, sultry tone they exude in *Un soir de neige* seems to look at Poulenc's desolate winter landscapes as if through a window while seated in front of a roaring log fire.

No reservations at all with the Mass, where they effortlessly negotiate Poulenc's difficult chromatic lines, articulate the delicate tracery of the widely separated pitches and cut a purposeful path through his thick, closely woven textures. The gloriously buoyant sopranos may not have quite the same sense of 'sweet joy' (to quote Poulenc's comment on the score) as James O'Donnell's Westminster choristers in the *Sanctus*, but the fullness of the choral sound is hard to beat and their rhythmically exhilarating *Gloria* is the stuff of dreams.

Marc Rochester