



DIETERICH BUXTEHUDE: MEMBRA JESU NOSTRI

Vox Scaniensis / Peter Wallin (dir)

Lawo Music LWM 010

[59:09]



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Duke Vespers Ensemble, Cappella Baroque / Brian Schmidt (dir)

MSR Classics MS 1530

[56:20]



Arguably, this cycle of seven cantatas on the limbs of the suffering Christ is Buxtehude's finest and best-known work. Its power, intimacy and poignancy need to be captured, but the manner of realising these aspects lead to very different results in these recordings, one American and one Swedish. Both use baroque instruments, but Duke opt for larger resources, contrasting a 22-voice choir with solo voices, accompanied by an ensemble based on a 16ft violone at a pitch one semitone lower than the Swedes. Vox Scaniensis use solo voices and instruments throughout, based on an 8ft cello. This gives the ensemble greater focus, clarity and vibrancy, whereas the Duke choir sounds less immediate and there are some tuning issues. Comparing both recordings, tempi in individual movements vary considerably, but with no lack of conviction in either – would that we knew more about Buxtehude's performance practices. Both booklets are beautifully produced, the Duke presentation having a series of specially commissioned illustrations by Robyn Sand Anderson to accompany the text of each cantata (CD notes being a new medium for works of art in future, perhaps?). Both recordings offer many memorable expressive details, although Vox Scaniensis capture the emotional intensity of the music.

DAVID PONSFORD