



Polychoral Splendour

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Fanfare (James A. Altena - 21.12.2012)

The coupling of works by Giovanni Gabrieli and his star pupil Heinrich Schütz is so self-evidently logical that one is surprised not to find it done more often. This disc (titled "Polychoral Splendour") alternates seven sacred concerti of the German master with six of the instrumental canzoni and sonatas for brass of his teacher. In addition, these works were recorded in the four galleries of the Abbey Church in Muri, near Basel in Switzerland, to reproduce some of the spatial sonic configurations of the fabled St. Mark's Cathedral in Venice where the two composers labored together. The final draw is the use of SACD recording technology.

The overall result is commendable if not ideal. The Cappella Murensis, consisting of eight members (two sopranos, four tenors, and two basses), is a polished ensemble that has no trouble filling the available acoustic space. Les Cornets Noirs consists of two violins, two violones, two cornetts, six trombones, and four (!) organs; its members play ably and are well balanced with the singers. The SACD recording technology provides some extra amplitude and richness, but I have heard other SACD discs produce considerably more powerful results. The performances are scrupulously clean and stylish, but a little too correct and on the cool side where more fervor is desirable. Complete German-English texts are provided; the booklet thoughtfully also uses a small diagram and coding system to show not only which performers play or sing in which pieces, but also their respective stations inside the abbey church. However, full names are not provided for the abbreviations used to designate singers and instruments; while most can be figured out without any difficulty, it remains a mystery to me exactly what "EpO," "EvO," and "TrO" stand for in designating the different organs used. If you want to hear Venetian polychoral splendor in SACD sound and cannot wait, this disc can be safely recommended, but I expect even better to follow soon.