Between Spheres

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REVIEW

New horizons for wind and brass

[…] Creating a dialogue with new music is also a subtext running through the Boreas Quartett Bremen album, Between spheres (audite 97.784, issued 2023). I suspect that the recorder consort has one of the most longstanding relationships with contemporary music for an early music ensemble; indeed, in my experience the recorder is one of the instruments most commonly to be found juxtaposing old and new in recital programmes (a hunch that would benefit from an empirical study!). The Boreas Quartett Bremen sustain a broad-minded approach to their repertory, drawing upon a seemingly infinite range of colours to illuminate the counterpoint of their varied and provocative music. Most striking of their programme is the way in which works by Alessandro Poglietti (c.1600–83) and Markus Schönewolf (b.1977) interlace; despite some 300 years of distance, the music of these two composers for recorders creates a fitting pairing. The Boreas Quartett succeed in their mission ‘to invite the listener to join them on a musical journey which makes the centuries between the compositions fade away’. […]

What do these recordings tell us about the outlook for wind and brass in early music in the current climate? Firstly, they highlight the potential for new writing on old instruments in bringing people together and building a wider community; the crowd-funding approach for Northern Soul shows how a new work can revitalize and revisit old practices. Secondly, they demonstrate that new technical boundaries can be emulated and often broken—though performing artists of the 17th and 18th centuries reached the apogee of their crafts, one should not assume that the same accomplishments may not be achieved by performers today, despite the modern sound world within which we inhabit. Thirdly, they show the value of continued efforts to record unfamiliar repertory—Werner’s Requiem must, surely, be heard as an essential precursor to those by Michael Haydn and Mozart and deserves more attention on the concert platform. The foreboding use of trombones, executed with grace by Alexander Brungert and Cas Gevers, provides one of the most tragic timbres of 18th-century writing. I find it a tantalizing opportunity to inspire a new work—one can only wonder what possibilities could emerge for a 21st-century requiem for chorus with trombones. With motivation and commitment, there is tremendous potential for wind and brass projects in early music: rich horizons indeed.

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