



Polychoral Splendour

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Early Music Review (CB / Wayne Plummer - 2012.08.01)

REVIEW Ideal recording. The right instruments (2 cornetti, 2 violins, s6 sackbuts, 4 organs & 2 violones in G), eight voices (SSTTTTBB), plausible scorings, stylistic awareness. The programme is neat: vocal pieces by Schütz alternating with canzonas and sonatas by Giovanni Gabrieli.(1) The low sounds are magnificent, the tempi suitable, the music apparently speaking for itself. I wonder, though, whether there are still vestiges of the early early-music tendency to phrase by the bar and to sing and play just a touch too detached. To take track 2, the first 1597 canzona, the long-short-short opening was, by then, such a cliché so shouldn't the first three notes lead through a little to the more interesting new note? And I was puzzled by the almost jilly singing of the repeated "Saul"s: a reaction, maybe, against over-expressive performances. I wonder, too, whether cornetts might restrain from embellishing the theme before it has been heard plain: fine with settings of standard tunes, but would one embellish the opening of a Bach fugue? These are quibbles, though: it's a fine recording: enjoy and learn from it. (CB)

Not having SACD available, I've asked a better equipped person (and a cornettist to boot) to comment further

Now I am glad I have an SACD player (and Clifford hasn't!). This disc really shows off the multi-channel feature to great effect, as well as being a fine recording of great performances of some of my favourite music on period instruments in what sounds to me like a splendid venue.

In the vocal pieces (the pieces by Schütz), the recording engineers have captured splendidly the positioning of the choirs in the four corners of the sound space (the dispositions of the choirs handily being laid out in the cover notes). I agree with Clifford that the pace of Saul is slightly too jaunty but, after the initial surprise, it is still highly enjoyable.

In the instrumental pieces (i.e. the Gabrieli), often a choir of sackbuts is described as being positioned "unten in der Kirche"; here their sound is intriguingly non-directional. All told, the multi-channel effect literally adds an extra dimension to the listening experience; if you are a fan of this kind of music, this might be the disc to make it worth investing in an SACD player.

Wayne Plummer

The founder of the Cappella Murensis, Johannes Strobl, is the director; The Black Cornetts were founded by Gebhard David and Bork-Frithjof Smith (I think I've finally got Frithjof spelt uniformly and correctly in our address books!) Do check <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wJq6VmUwysU> to see the church, the layout of the choirs and an introductory talk on the recording. (CB)

(1.) Six pieces by each plus one by both: Gabrieli's Lieto godea appears instrumentally in SWV 34, the chiavetti clefs re-notated at sounding pitch down a fifth.

