



## Signals from Heaven

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GRAMOPHONE

[...] Signals from Heaven brings a striking mix of 17th-century Baroque, African American spirituals and works by Toru Takemitsu and Duke Ellington. The Baroque pieces make a considerably stronger impression here than they do on the Brass United disc, partly a result of the larger forces used (a dozen players including a percussionist) but also because of the vitality of the performances. The Toccata from Monteverdi's Orfeo (a piece which also opens the Vespers) has tremendous panache and the five sonatas and canzonas by Giovanni Gabrieli are wonderfully expressive and sonorous, the polychoral writing heard to splendid effect in the spacious acoustic of the Lukaskirche Dresden. Ellington is represented by an instrumental arrangement by the jazz musician Boris Netsvetaev of 'Come Sunday' from the Sacred Concerto No 1. The four spirituals on the disc include the traditional 'Sometimes I feel like a motherless child' as well as Gershwin's 'Summertime'. All are sung by Berwaerts, who reveals a silken vocal technique in addition to his skills on the trumpet. The highlight of disc is the performance of Takemitsu's Signals from Heaven, which marries of beauty of sound with spiritual fervour. This is altogether a very impressive release. [...]



# GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

## BOLD AS BRASS

**Christian Hoskins** takes stock of a varied range of brass discs, from Baroque to contemporary, via jazz and African American spirituals



Brass United play a mixture of arrangements on their album *Pitch Black*

It would be difficult to imagine a more varied group of recordings than this quartet of releases of music for brass. **Pitch Black** by Brass United, an ensemble comprising five current and former players from a number of leading European orchestras, features music composed between the 18th and 21st centuries. The first 10 arrangements on the album, grouped under the heading 'Pulcinella Suite 2.0', are derived from the same musical sources as Stravinsky's ballet. In this case, however, the works of Pergolesi, Monza, Gallo, Wassenauer and Parisotti feature in arrangements for brass quintet and harpsichord by the Belgian trombonist and composer Steven Verhelst. For all the skill of the playing, I found the results somewhat uninvolved, especially when compared with Stravinsky's original version for chamber orchestra. The musicians are on surer ground with Berio's *Call*, scored for brass quintet, as well as MacMillan's *A New Song* for four-part choir and organ, the latter instrument retained in the new arrangement. In the case of Jacob TV's *Pitch Black*, a piece that features a pre-recorded and manipulated voice track, the result arguably sounds more effective with Verhelst's scoring than the original version for four saxophones. The selection also includes three pieces from Albéniz's *Suite española* and Bartók's complete *Romanian Dances* arranged by the group's tuba player, Stéphane Labeyrie.

**sevenfive** brings a contemporary programme of music centred on the American composer John Corigliano and

five of his former pupils, who composed a number of pieces for their teacher's 75th birthday in 2013. Other than Corigliano's *Gazebo Dances Overture*, which was originally composed for piano four hands, all the pieces were specifically scored for brass ensemble, and all but one, David Sampson's *Entrance*, receive their first recordings. Gaudete Brass's core quintet is supplemented by additional forces for Corigliano's noble *Antiphon* and searching *Fanfares to Music*, perhaps the most immediately appealing pieces on the disc. Jeremy Howard Beck's *ROAR* makes use of mutes and flutter-tonguing and builds to a visceral climax, while Corigliano's 75th birthday is reflected not only in the title of Steven Bryant's *sevenfive* but also by the use of intervals of sevenths and fifths and rhythmic groupings of seven and five. The four movements of Jonathan Newman's *Prayers of Steel* evoke the rural and urban landscapes of the Midwest, while David Sampson's slowly unfolding *Still* brings echoes of Copland. Conrad Winslow's tripartite *The Record of a Lost Tribe*, depicting an imaginary bygone civilisation, is perhaps the most challenging music on the disc but also the piece I suspect will most justify repeated listening. All the pieces receive committed performances from Gaudete Brass and are superbly recorded.

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**Fantasy** showcases the talent of Philip Cobb, principal trumpet of the London Symphony Orchestra since 2009. The majority of tracks on the album, Cobb's third, feature the cornet and involve arrangements from the popular and jazz repertoire, the principle exception being an appearance of Dvořák's Song to the Moon. Highlights include a bravura rendition of Bellstedt's *Napoli* and a sublime performance of Landesman and Wolf's 'Springtime can really hang you up the most' in an arrangement for flugelhorn and vibraphone. The Central Band of the Royal Air Force provide a spirited backing, although sound rather distantly recorded in comparison to Cobb. However, the solo playing is what's important here and no one is likely to be disappointed at the quality of musicianship on offer. **C**

## THE RECORDINGS

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|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | <b>Pitch Black</b><br>Brass United<br>Channel Classics © CCS38717                        |
|  | <b>sevenfive</b><br>Gaudete Brass<br>Cedille © CDR90000 169                              |
|  | <b>Signals from Heaven</b><br>Jeroen Berwaerts; Salaputia Brass<br>Audite © AUDITE97 725 |
|  | <b>Fantasy</b><br>Philip Cobb; Central Band of the RAF<br>Doyen © DOYCD366               |