

Colin Davis takeover Prom that served to honour both Solti and Princess Diana.

**Mike Ashman**

*Selected comparisons:*

NBC SO, *Toscanini* (12/56<sup>8</sup>) (RCA) GD60299

LSO, *Bernstein* (11/70<sup>8</sup>) (SONY) SM2K47639

ORR, *Gardiner* (4/95<sup>8</sup>) (DG) 479 1044GB30

*Philh Orch, Muti* (7/96<sup>8</sup>) (EMI) 098020-2 or 586239-2

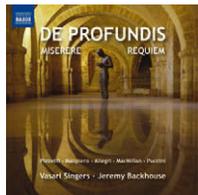
## 'De profundis'

**Allegri Miserere MacMillan Miserere Malipiero**

De profundis **Pizzetti** De profundis. Messa di Requiem **Puccini** Requiem

**Vasari Singers / Jeremy Backhouse**

Naxos © 8 573196 (70' • DDD • T/t)



The thesis of this disc isn't a new one but it is always a welcome approach and has been

originally addressed. It couples two settings of three texts – the *De profundis*, the *Miserere* and the Requiem – in contrasting pairs. The most startling contrast, surprisingly, does not involve the only non-Italian piece on the disc – James MacMillan's *Miserere*, commissioned in 2009 by The Sixteen as a companion to the Allegri – but the two Requiems, which were written close to each other in time but differ so totally in outlook, both stylistically and in length, that they provide testament to the intelligence of the programming.

One of the most notable characteristics of such accomplished amateur choirs is that, although they can often lack the final polish of professional ensembles, there is nevertheless a strong sense of commitment to the sound that can surpass that of their full-time counterparts. And so it is here – the tuning is not always perfect and there are occasionally some standout voices (particularly from the back rows) that interfere with the blend – but that is ultimately forgivable solely on the basis that their corporate engagement with the music and the overall sound is so tangible in their performance. In the Italian pieces that can sometimes be at the expense of the breezy operatic sound that they really need; but the close recording of the full-choir passages supports a warm, broad sound that more than does an English style of justice to those Italianate pieces. And the audible corporate breathing in the choir that is particularly noticeable in the Allegri is (almost) silent testament to the greatness of English choirs. **Caroline Gill**

## 'I dilettanti'

**Astorga** In queste amene selve **Benedetti** La Gelosia **Bigaglia** Più ch'io cerco del mio bene

**Maccari** Non mi si dica più **B Marcello** Lucrezia **Ruggieri** Armida abbandonata - Deh m'adita, ò bella Dea; Vinto son della mia fede

**Xavier Sabata** *countertenor*

**Latinitas Nostra / Markellos Chryssicos** *hpd*

Aparté © AP093 (59' • DDD)



This has a genuinely interesting concept: music for alto voice and basso continuo

by six accomplished 'dilettante' composers, some of whom were aristocrats or professional men who composed and performed simply out of artistic and philological inclinations. Some don't fit the profile perfectly: Giacomo Maccari was a paid tenor at St Mark's from about 1720; his *Non mi si dica più* is performed by Xavier Sabata and the continuo trio of Latinitas Nostra with complete emotional commitment and dramatic directness, albeit not without a few exaggerated solecisms.

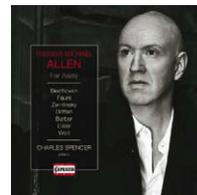
Baron Emanuele d'Astorga eventually inherited his Sicilian family's title and estates in 1714, and later held official positions in Spain; the melancholic centrepiece of *In queste amene selve* is performed sweetly by Sabata, Theodoros Kitsos (theorbo), Iason Ioannou (cello) and Markellos Chryssicos (harpichord). Other bona fide dilettanti include Giovanni Maria Ruggieri, whose music strongly influenced Vivaldi's *Gloria* settings; Sabata has sourced continuo-only accompaniment versions of two arias from Ruggieri's popular Venetian opera *Armida abbandonata* (produced numerous times between 1707 and 1715) from a manuscript in the British Library, and the gentle 'Vinto son della mia fede' shows the countertenor's singing at its most tenderly persuasive, accompanied weightlessly by just theorbo and cello. *Più ch'io cerco del mio bene* reveals that Diogenio Bigaglia, Benedictine prior of San Giorgio Maggiore, composed prettily melodic ideas, to which Latinitas Nostra add some strange *pizzicato* interludes that insinuate the Venetian *villota*. A more familiar nobleman dilettante is Benedetto Marcello, who served the Venetian Republic variously as a magistrate, governor and financial officer – but was also an inquisitive composer whose *Lucrezia* is a tautly dramatic conclusion to this fascinating anthology. **David Vickers**

## 'Far Away'

**Barber** *Mélodies passagères*, Op 27 **Beethoven** An die ferne Geliebte, Op 98 **Britten** Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo, Op 22 **Eisler** Hollywood Liederbuch **Fauré** Cinq Melodies 'de

Venise', Op 58 **Weill** Street Scene - Lonely House. Lady in the Dark - My Ship. Love Life - Here I'll Stay **Zemlinsky** Walzergesänge nach toskanischen Liedern, Op 6

**Thomas Michael Allen** *ten* **Charles Spencer** *pf* Capriccio © C5194 (78' • DDD)



Young Peter Pears comes to mind (not always happily) during this recital that finds

tenor Thomas Michael Allen out of his Baroque opera element and in a wide range of vocal and dramatic thickets that he navigates with variable success. His upper range is distinctively coloured but his middle voice sounds fragile, even unsupported, and the lower range can be almost completely devoid of tension.

Such problems matter less when Allen is engaged by the texts of Britten's *Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo* (with music playing to young Pears's limited strengths at that stage in his vocal career) and, later in the recital, in selections from Eisler's *Hollywood Songbook*. Comparisons in the Zemlinsky *Walzergesänge* with the more vocally solid Teodora Gheorghiu (Aparté, 9/13) show how the less imposing Allen can bring the listener closer to the song if only because there's less voice acting as a medium between audience and composer. That's also somewhat the case with Beethoven's *An die ferne Geliebte*, an important but slender composition that benefits from not being oversold by a larger voice.

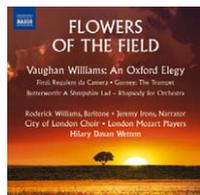
Less fortunately, the Fauré set sounds self-conscious; and as good as it is to hear Barber's seldom-sung *Mélodies passagères*, Allen's careful enunciation and vocalism impose a sameness on every phrase. His attacks have very little variation and tend to be uniformly soft, never really announcing a phrase. In the trio of Kurt Weill Broadway songs, one need not be attached to high-octave voices like Liza Minnelli's to be puzzled over Allen's blandness. Was he connecting at all with what he was singing? Pianist Charles Spencer does, with some particularly sympathetic work in the Britten, also adapting so skilfully to the Beethoven cycle you wonder if he'd switched to fortepiano. **David Patrick Stearns**

## 'Flowers of the Field'

**G Butterworth** A Shropshire Lad - Rhapsody **Finzi** Requiem da camera<sup>a</sup> **Gurney** The Trumpet<sup>b</sup> **Vaughan Williams** An Oxford Elegy<sup>c</sup> <sup>a</sup>**Roderick Williams** *bar* <sup>b</sup>**Jeremy Irons** *spkr* <sup>abc</sup>**City of London Choir; London Mozart Players / Hilary Davan Wetton** Naxos © 8 573426 (61' • DDD • T)



Absolute professional: Xavier Sabata unearths music by 'dilettante' composers of the 1700s and endows much of it with persuasive tenderness



The centenary of the outbreak of the First World War has not gone unmarked in the record industry. In the clamour of new releases I hope that this thoughtful collage of English works for chorus and orchestra doesn't get lost.

Hilary Davan Wetton conducts the City of London Choir and the London Mozart Players in a programme whose chief interests are 'premiere' recordings of Finzi's *Requiem da camera* and Ivor Gurney's chorus-song *The Trumpet* – new performing editions and reconstructions by Christian Alexander and Philip Lancaster respectively. These are framed by Butterworth's *A Shropshire Lad* rhapsody and Vaughan Williams's *An Oxford Elogy*.

Both new editions have their challenges; Lancaster must imagine an orchestral sound world Gurney barely discovered for himself, while Alexander must exceed the merits of the original Philip Thomas orchestration, so memorably captured on the Hickox recording (Chandos, 3/92). Lancaster amplifies Gurney's chamber textures into fuller forces that borrow from

Parry and Elgar, colouring ever-present strings with thrilling flashes of brass. Alexander, exchanging Thomas's consoling flute for anguished oboe in 'Only a man', finds greater yearning – a bittersweet nostalgia matched by Roderick Williams's solo, which eschews the declamatory intensity of Stephen Varcoe's for something more inward. This is a work that deserves attention: if not quite the equal of Vaughan Williams's *Dona nobis pacem*, then certainly a youthful glance in that direction.

Jeremy Irons makes an understated reader for *An Oxford Elogy*, offering a more matter-of-fact, contemporary take than we're used to in the more Victorian moments of Matthew Arnold's verse. He is deftly supported by the London Mozart Players, whose wind solos throughout the disc are especially fine. The only blot on this pastoral landscape are the chorus, who lack the vocal youth and energy so crucial to this collection of young men's music.

Alexandra Coghlan

### 'Invitation au voyage'

L Boulanger Clairières dans le ciel. Nous nous aimerons tant. Vous m'avez regardé avec toute votre âme Debussy Le balcon. Harmonie du soir. Le jet d'eau. Recueillement. La mort

des amants. Soupir. Placet futile. Eventail Duparc L'invitation au voyage. Soupir. Chanson triste. La vie antérieure Hahn La chère blessure. A Chloris La Presle Odelette. Voeu. Dédette. Nocturne Stéphanie d'Oustrac mezz Pascal Jourdan pf Ambronay © AMY042 (71' • DDD • T/t)



So much beauty, so much perfumed languor, so much rapture intermingled

with sorrow is inhabited in this collection of 'mélodies françaises'; the question is if you can stand a full 71 minutes of it. But never does this disc sink into dreamy sameness – and it emerges as one of the best of its kind to come out in recent years. The conviction, artistry and intelligent musical sequencing of mezzo-soprano Stéphanie d'Oustrac and pianist Pascal Jourdan are much in evidence in this thoroughly first-class package, with its rich but direct sound quality and packaging with full translations.

The usual chronological arrangement of composers is rejected in favour of an emotional arc that begins with traditionally shaped Duparc songs, progressing into the