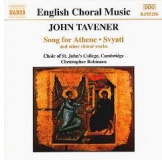


John Tavener - Song for Athene • Svyati & other Choral Works (2001)

Written by bluesever

Thursday, 05 December 2013 16:59 -

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1 *God Is With Us: Christmas Proclamation* 5:28 2 *Song For Athene* 5:42 3 *The Lamb* 3:51 4 *The Tiger* 5:22 5 *Magnificat And Nunc Dimittis* 7:35 6 *Magnificat And Nunc Dimittis* 2:58 7 *Funeral Ikos* 7:15 8 *Two Hymns To The Mother Of God* 2:36 9 *Two Hymns To The Mother Of God* 3:50 10 *Love Bade Me Welcome* 4:56 11 *As One Who Has Slept* 4:20 12 *The Lord's Prayer* 3:34 13 *Svyati "O Holy One"* 13:20 Tim Hugh - cello (13) Robert Houssart - organ Choir Of St. John's College, Cambridge Christopher Robinson – chorus master

Sir John Kenneth Tavener died 12.XI.2013.

Okay, I have to come clean right up front: John Tavener's best piece—in fact his only really great piece—is his 1985 setting of William Blake's *The Lamb*. This is one of those outstanding creations that very often emerge from composers of limited range and resources who almost accidentally one day just get everything right. It's an honest, sincere, and very tender evocation of the text; it's chorally sound and above all, it works. Almost ever since the success of this piece, brought to the world's attention in Christmas Eve performances by the Choir of King's College, Cambridge, Tavener and his music have turned more and more inward toward mystical/religious themes that with all due respect often have a greater sheen of pretentiousness than sincerity. Far be it from me to doubt another person's faith, but the way Tavener's music and his persona are marketed, with a decided emphasis on how deep and spiritual it all is supposed to be (shouldn't this come across in the music without our having to be told?), I'm put off before I even hear the first note of the next new masterpiece.

The most famous work on the disc, *Song for Athene*, is a well-wrought, sturdy, and effective piece that, like *The Lamb*, stays within its modest limits and thus leaves us feeling satisfied rather than put on. These performances are by one of England's finest choirs, one that has a long history of authoritative interpretations of English church music, and listeners will find little to criticize in the singing. The sound is not ideal—its slightly harsh edge and lack of detail is at least partly a function of the density of some of the textures, as well as volume in certain passages,

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and the generous resonance of the St. John's College Chapel. Tavener fans of course will be delighted to have all of these works, which include the Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis, The Lord's Prayer, the Funeral Ikos, and two Hymns to the Mother of God, on one disc.

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