

Johannes Ockeghem - Missa Prolationum & Marian Motets (1993)

Written by bluesever

Monday, 25 August 2014 17:06 -

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MISSA PROLATIONUM: (1 - 8) 01 - *Kyrie eleison I* [1:08] 02 - *Christe eleison* [2:39] 03 - *Kyrie eleison II* [1:12] 04 - *Gloria* [7:35] 05 - *Credo* [8:07] 06 - *Sanctus* [1:34] 07 - *Pleni sunt coeli* [0:50] 08 - *Osanna* [0:45] 09 - *Benedictus* [4:07] 10 - *Agnus Dei I* [2:00] 11 - *Agnus Dei II & III* [4:20] 12 - *Alma redemptoris mater* [5:46] (1 - 8) 13 - *Salve regina* [5:31] (1, 3, 4, 7) 14 - *Intemerata Dei mater* [8:16] (1, 3, 4, 7, 8) 15 - *Ave Maria* [3:36] (1, 3, 4, 7) 16 - *Salve regina* [10:22] (1 - 8)

THE HILLIARD ENSEMBLE: David James, alto Ashley Stafford, alto Rogers Covey-Crump, tenor John Potter, tenor Mark Padmore, tenor Gordon Jones, baritone Paul Hillier, bass David Beavan, bass Paul Hillier – conductor

In April 1988, approximately four years after their successful recording of Johannes Ockeghem's Requiem and Missa Mi-mi, the Hilliards returned to this composer, this time to record his famous Missa Prolationum and the handful of his surviving motets (all other motets accredited earlier to Ockeghem have been, it seems, proved not to be by him; even the first "Salve Regina" on this CD is probably not by Ockeghem but by a certain "Basiron"). The Missa Prolationum, says the booklet text, "ranks alongside Bach's 'Art of Fugue' as the apotheosis of contrapuntal achievement. Its movements comprise a series of canons in which pairs of voices sing the same music but in different metres and separated by different melodic intervals for each movement or section". The whole certainly makes fascinating listening, especially when performed and recorded as well as here: the interweaving voices of the eight Hilliard singers (two countertenors, three tenors, one baritone and two basses) are not only perfect in themselves (assuming that David James's rather reedy-sounding countertenor is to your taste), but are also captured on disc in a way that makes listening a joyous task – the quality of the recording here (at Boxgrove Priory in England) is considerably improved over against the Requiem recording from 1984. Paul Hillier and his troupe take their time over every detail, creating the mystic effect for which they are, in the meantime, famous.

Both the Missa Prolationum and the Requiem (as well as the motet Intemerata Dei Mater) are

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contained on a Naxos recording from 1997 by the Danish mixed choir Musica Ficta, directed by Bo Holten. This disc, too, is lovely in itself and will, perhaps, be preferred by those who cannot adjust their ears to the all-male Hilliards. Holten uses fifteen singers, doubling the parts, and has female sopranos and altos, which changes the whole tessitura and makes Ockeghem sound less heavy and mystical, especially as the Danish choir sings a lot faster than the Hilliards. The Danish recording was made in the empty Kastelskirken in Copenhagen and, although very good, lacks something of the directness and transparency of the Hilliard offering. On the whole, I think the Hilliards are just about unbeatable, with the Musica Ficta version being a good runner-up. --- Leslie Richford, amazon.com

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