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CHORAL JOURNAL



Benjamin Britten's Noye's Pludde

composers' needs.

Excellent high school choruses could sing any of Ockeghem's music with conductors who understand the intricacies of polyphony and the importance of not overpowering the vocal line. The Sørensen works are as dense in their polyphony, but the harmonic language is much more challenging, as are the demands on the vocal range.

Rich Brunner
North Hollywood, California

***In Paradisum:
The Healing Power of Heaven***

South Dakota Chorale
Brian A. Schmidt, conductor
Gothic G-49279 (2012; 55 min.)

The South Dakota Chorale's *In Paradisum: The Healing Power of Heaven* is a stunning debut recording for this relatively young ensemble. Containing a variety of stylistic works, *In Paradisum* includes a shimmering interpretation of the rarely recorded organ-only version of the Duruflé *Requiem*.

The South Dakota Chorale, a pro-

fessional chorus based in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, combines the talents of singers locally, regionally, and across the nation. Under the ambitious leadership of founder Brian Schmidt, the ensemble was formed in 2009 and has only recently begun achieving the status it so richly deserves in the professional choral arena.

The strength of the opening work, Guiseppi Sarti's *Niñe sili ñebésniya* [Now the Powers of Heaven], lies in Schmidt's dynamic interpretation. The development and fluidity of the ensemble's phrasing make this work a demonstra-



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tion of melodic cohesiveness and near-perfect blend.

Included in the recording are two well-known arrangements of spirituals, Norman Luboff's *Deep River* and Moses Hogan's *The Battle of Jericho*. While each performance is worthy of its own merit, mention must be made of the stunning performances of soloists Tom McNichols (*Deep River*) and Amber Wellborn (*Battle of Jericho*). McNichols' bass voice is impeccably demonstrative while Wellborn's dominant soprano voice rings with clarity and precision.

Run On features basses McNichols and Trevor Neal in a spirited rendition of the American folk song. Rarely does one hear vigorous bass soloists comparable to this duo, and the work succeeds due to their vitality. The ensemble provides mere background assistance, but its musicality provides a foundation upon which the basses are allowed to flourish.

While the shorter works already mentioned are alone worth consideration, it is the Duruflé *Requiem* that unequivocally showcases the musical depth of this ensemble along with Schmidt's masterful musicianship. From the opening phrases of the Introit to the hauntingly melodic, powerful Offertory and the chant-influenced and commanding *Libera Me*, the beauty of Duruflé's masterpiece is triumphant.

A review of the recording would not be complete without mentioning the contribution of organist Jesse Eschbach. Eschbach performs the Duruflé work flawlessly and with the sensitivity it demands.

Alan Denney
Estes Park, Colorado

Thomas Weelkes:

Grant The King A Long Life

Choir of Sidney Sussex College,
Cambridge
Fretwork
David Skinner, conductor
Obsidian CD708 (2012; 63:22)

The tragedy of Thomas Weelkes is well known to admirers of the English Renaissance; a brilliant musician dogged by disgrace because of insobriety. His early music written for Winchester College, where he had been a chorister, was vigorous and sufficiently impressive that he secured in 1601/2 the post of Organist and Choirmaster of nearby Chichester Cathedral. At first, his trajectory of success continued with the publication of his fourth book of madrigals, but by 1609 he was being reprimanded for unexcused absences. Soon thereafter, he was upbraided for drunken and outrageous behavior, a pattern that led to his dismissal in 1617. He was widowed in 1622, fell into debt, and died in November of the following year at the home of an ironically named friend, Henry Drinkwater.

Most of the selections on this new release by the young Cambridge choir have been recorded elsewhere, and very well, so one may wonder if such a disc is entirely necessary. Certainly, the performances by their neighbors at Trinity College (Conifer) and by the Oxford Camerata (NAXOS) are very satisfying, but the Sidney Sussex choir has much to offer, not the least of which in some changes of *musica ficta* and the astringent playing of Fretwork. David Skinner is an acknowledged authority on this music and he brings to his interpretations a sure hand to coax the best from the performers. Many of his *tempi* are sprightly, especially when compared with other recordings, but they always seem well-judged. Like Monteverdi, Weelkes can take brisk speeds even when his har-

mony is complex. Moreover, the chapel of Sidney Sussex College provides a supportive acoustic for these performances, which are marked by a brightness and clarity ably caught by engineer Jim Gross. Executive producer Martin Souter founded Obsidian "to give listeners an atmospheric and realistic experience by combining vocal and instrumental music in a natural recorded sound," and this release using the SADiE technology more than supports his vision.

The recording is structured as a complete recital, opening with Weelkes's stirring version of *Hosanna To The Son Of David* and concluding with the disc's title track, *O Lord, Grant The King A Long Life*. In between, full and verse anthems alternate, punctuated by a series of instrumental solos, either for organ played by the college organ scholars or for viol consort (Fretwork). In such a satisfying compilation it seems a little churlish to criticize any particular aspect of the performance, but one or two of the soloists drawn from this youthful choir might have benefited from a few more years, or at least another take. On the whole, though, it is remarkable how good this choir is, given the intense competition for strong singers in Cambridge. Sidney Sussex College, now fortified with David Skinner and Composer-in-Residence Eric Whitacre, are clearly a force to be reckoned with, and one looks forward to more recordings by them.

Philip Barnes
St. Louis, Missouri

