

The ear of Theodoor van Loon : review

Early Music Review

Posted on January 8, 2019

This is one of those CD programmes which seek to use a visual artist as a hook for music of the period – this concept has always struck me as rather strange, as the visual, literary and musical arts tend to be at relatively different stages of development at different periods, and in my experience have little to say to one another – think of contemporary artists, writers and composers. Anyway, Theodoor van Loon, a practically unknown Flemish follower of Caravaggio, did at least travel between Brussels and Rome, where he could conceivably have heard all of the music on this CD. And quite honestly I would accept any excuse, however far-fetched, to hear the excellent Huelgas Ensemble singing and playing the music of this period. Among the sacred music which could have charmed the ear of van Loon are works by the two Palestrina students, Francesco Soriano and Felice Anerio, both of whom deserve more attention than they currently get. From the former we get the Agnus Dei from a ‘souped-up’ eight voice version of his master’s *Missa Papae Marcelli*, while from each we have an equally showy and sonorous motet, all of which obviously shows the influence of Palestrina, but also how music in Rome had moved in the direction of ever-increasing opulence as the 17th^h-century progressed. From Gery de Ghersem we have the superb Agnus Dei from his seven-part *Mass Ave virgo sanctissima*, this productive composer’s only complete surviving work, all the rest having heartbreakingly perished in the Lisbon earthquake and fire of 1755. The CD concludes with sacred music by Giuseppe Zamponi and Peter Philips. As ever, the Huelgas Ensemble provide wonderfully balanced and exquisitely musical accounts of this opulent repertoire, gradually introducing instruments into the choral textures until we reach the beautifully rich and full concluding account of Philips’ *Hodie nobis de caelo*, where the voices are joined to luminous effect by violins and recorders. In among the largescale sacred music we have more intimate secular vernacular works by Philips, but also by Paolo Quagliati, Luca Marenzio, Domenico Mazzochi, Pedro Rimonte and instrumental music by Nicolaus a Kempis, where various mixtures of solo voices and instruments devised by the ever-imaginative Paul van Nevel provide beautifully animated performances. I think I could listen to the Huelgas Ensemble perform their way through the phone book, but with this CD their unique performance talents are applied to very worthwhile material, much of which, like their painterly inspiration van Loon, is nowadays virtually unknown.

D. James Ross

Quote:

“...As ever, the Huelgas Ensemble provide wonderfully balanced and exquisitely musical accounts of this opulent repertoire...”