

## CD: Firminus Caron – Twilight of the Middle Ages : review

### Early Music Review

Posted on May 1, 2016

Of the 15th-century Franco-Flemish composer Firminus Caron practically nothing is known. He may have been a pupil of Dufay and his masses and chansons were widely admired by, among others, Tinctoris and copied throughout Europe during his lifetime. In modern times his work has fared less well, appearing as fillers on several CDs, but not receiving anything like the attention it deserves, so this complete if rather short CD devoted entirely to his sacred and secular music is truly welcome. Rather than record one of his complete settings of the mass, Van Nevel selects consecutive movements from five different settings, giving us a valuable cross-section of the composer's contribution to the genre. The music is indeed distinctive and accomplished with more than a passing similarity to the music of his more famous near-contemporary Josquin – as we have no record of Caron's death he may have continued composing into the 16th century, and much of his sacred polyphony and indeed his chansons sound as if they come from after the turn of the new century. In this respect the title of the CD is slightly misleading in that Caron's idiom looks forward to the Renaissance rather than back to the Middle Ages. The Huelgas Ensemble, highly experienced in the choral music of this period, give musically powerful and sensitive accounts of Caron's sacred music under the insightful direction of Paul Van Nevel. The second half of the CD is devoted to Caron's secular music, with his famous chanson *Accueilly m'a la belle* providing a nice link, following his own *Agnus Dei* based upon it. The chansons are suitably performed by solo voices, with the exception of the raunchy *Corps contre corps*, and are given beautifully delicate performances – not every vocal ensemble is as versatile as to be able to sing this sort of sacred and secular music equally effectively. The singing on this CD is comprehensively enjoyable, and the performers make a very good case for Caron's re-instatement alongside his contemporaries Busnois, Ockeghem and Josquin.

D. James Ross