

**L'esprit de la Contrareforma**

Lluís Vich Vocalis—LMG 4005—56 minutes

This recording contains a wide-ranging selection from across Europe of renaissance choral works representative of the counter reformation. In addition to psalms, hymns, and responsories by Palestrina, Victoria, and Byrd, three motets by Jacobus Gallus and Jacobus de Kerle's complete Mass, 'Regina coeli' are also included. Lluís Vich Vocalis is a Spanish all-male choir whose sound reminds me of the English singers who recorded Josquin under Jeremy Noble in about 1972 (Vanguard). Both were recorded in a very live acoustic and, because the highest parts were sung by countertenors, many of the works have a very dark sonority owing to the need to transpose the music to a lower pitch level. The balance and intonation of the Spanish singers is impeccable, though their tone color may sound a bit earnest when compared to the very clean sound typical of English groups, such as the Tallis Scholars. The low tessitura of some pieces does cause the lower voices to be a bit muddy, but never at the expense of the overall clarity of the polyphony. The recording also includes full texts and English translations.

BREWER

**Les Plaisirs du Palais**Janequin Ensemble/ Dominique Visse  
Harmonia Mundi 5908224 [2CD] 2 hours

This is a limited-edition reissue of two excellent recordings of 16th Century French secular music by the Ensemble Clement Janequin (Sept/Oct 1995: 284 & Sept/Oct 2001: 276). Both the earlier of the two recordings, based on the composers known to Rabelais, and the later collection (which gives its title to this reissue) include a wide range of musical repertoire, from deeply serious polyphonic love songs from the composers around Josquin des Prez to the light and risqué chansons from a later generation of French and Flemish composers. The performances on both remain quite satisfying, both in the sensitivity of the performers to the moods of the songs (sometimes smooth and sensuous, sometimes nasal and raucous in the drinking songs).

The only unique addition to this reissue is a collection of medieval and renaissance recipes. While I am not fully qualified to judge their modern usefulness (notably lacking is any specific information on amounts for any of the ingredients), they do supply a verbal "flavor" to this release. Both recordings should be in any serious collection of renaissance music, and this reissue includes all the original annotations along with complete texts and translations.

BREWER

**Ludi Musici: Spirit of the Dance**Hesperion XXI/ Jordi Savall  
AliaVox 9853—76:22

For this release Jordi Savall has made an eclectic but effective selection from a number of his earlier recordings of instrumental and vocal dance music from the renaissance and early baroque periods. The breadth of this collection is great, including dances from as far afield as Turkey and Afghanistan, Italian and Spanish dance songs from both the Old and New Worlds, and elaborate works from the courts of France and Germany. All are performed with Savall's signature inventiveness, especially in his varying instrumentations and the addition of extra improvised ornamentation. In contrast to a number of other compilation recordings I have heard recently, this has been selected with evident care and organized into an interesting and varied anthology. Complete texts and translations are also included, something quite rare in other recent samplers. As always, the original releases are to be preferred, but this is a good overview of Savall's work.

BREWER

**The Elfin Knight**Ballads & Dances from Renaissance England  
Joel Frederiksen; Ensemble Phoenix Munich  
Harmonia Mundi 901983—79 minutes

I practically sang the *Nunc dimittis* when I saw this release: "Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, For mine eyes have seen..." I have waited a good many years (since 1993, to be exact) to see a release with "Joel Frederiksen" printed in big letters across the front.

Listeners familiar with the Boston Camerata might remember hearing Frederiksen's unusual bass voice in various numbers. I was first captivated by his solo rendition of 'The Heavenly Courtier' on the *American Christmas* album from Boston Camerata, released on Erato in 1993 (and still available).

This program is worth the wait. Joel Frederiksen now heads his own Munich-based ensemble, and here he sings ballads from both England and America. Frederiksen is interested in the musical ties that unite England and America from a long time back, and he presents songs here that exemplify these ties. The 23 selections here begin and end with two variants—'Whittingham Faire' and 'Scarborough Faire'—arising from a common source, a ballad called 'The Elfin Knight'. Another song, here called 'The Lovers' Tasks', is also related to the same ballad; it consists of the maiden's response to the three impossible tasks her lover gives her in the first two songs. 'Scarborough Faire', Frederiksen says, is one of his

favorites, and it's one of mine also; he sings it with heartbreaking beauty.

And there's so much more here, too—a rollicking reading of 'Greensleeves'—Frederiksen makes it different from anyone I've ever heard—a salacious rendition of 'Watkin's Ale' (not that there's really any other way to sing that song!); the first modern recording of a song called 'Lord Darly' that is apparently a version of the story of Lord Henry Stuart Darnley, who was a great nephew of King Henry VIII and the second husband of Mary Queen of Scots; and much more!

Where possible, some historical background is given in a fat booklet that has full texts and translations as well as a nice interview with Joel Frederiksen.

There's no point in going on and on about how well this music is performed, because if you know and love Frederiksen's voice, you'll know. But Frederiksen has also gathered an outstanding ensemble of musicians who do their part to make this release what it is—a glorious feast of early music. And nearly 80 minutes of it, too! I could have used a double-disc set, though. Maybe we won't have to wait long for another.

CRAWFORD

### ***Court of the Counts von Büнау I***

Bläser-Collegium Leipzig; Ensemble Alte Musik Dresden; Ludger Rémy org, Constanza Backes, Maria Jonas, s; Eric Menzel, a; Michael Schaffrath, t; Reinhard Decker, b

Raum Klang 9403—50 minutes

This is the first in a series of recordings designed to acquaint listeners with music from various regions of the Electorate of Saxony before 1815. This is subtitled *Saxon Musical Landscapes in the 16th and 17th Centuries* and is devoted to music from the court of the Counts of Büнау, in the Erzgebirge region of Saxony. The program consists of nine German sacred concertos by six composers: Daniel Selichius (1581-1626); Stephan Otto (1603-56); Hermann Finck (1527-58); Samuel Seidel (1615-65); Anton Colander (1590-1621); and Esaias Hickmann (1638-91). Inserted between these large vocal-instrumental works are dance suites in the form of Pavane and Galliard pairs by Andreas Hammerschmidt (1611-75) and Johann Ghro (1575-1626).

Those familiar with the sacred concertos of Heinrich Schütz, *Kapellmeister* at the Saxon court of Dresden, will recognize the character of these works of his contemporaries. The dramatic, nearly operatic interplay between soloists and orchestra that is typical of Schütz's concertos is unmistakable here, too. The appearance of this Italianate form of

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music at this provincial court of the Büнау at Weesenstein demonstrates how broad its influence on German art music was. These works do not diminish the importance of Schütz's concertos, of course; he is still the genius in the crowd of German composers. The point is that there was a crowd of German composers in the Protestant north who eagerly adapted the modern Italian style of Gabrieli and Monteverdi to the tastes of their patrons.

The singing and playing here is of a very high caliber. As Wolfram Steude writes in his notes, "Not everything which lies dormant in archives and old libraries is worth bringing back to life". The music brought to life here, though, is lovely. It reminds me that the canon of baroque music one hears performed time and again in concert and on recordings is really only the tip of the iceberg. I eagerly await the later releases in this series. Notes and texts in translation.

LOEWEN

### ***Reges Terrae***

from the Time of Charles V

Nordic Voices—Chandos 5050 [SACD] 49 minutes

A program that covers works from Renaissance Spain, Austria, and the Netherlands from the reign of Charles V reminds us of how large a domain he ruled as Hapsburg emperor. Hearing similar methods of composition in the motets of Cristobal Morales and his student Franciscan Guerrero as well as in the music of Nicolas Gombert, Pierre de Manchicourt, and Jacob Clemens non Papa gives one pause to consider what role a patron's tastes might have had in the cultivation of a musical style in this era. Not all of these composers worked at the imperial court itself, but historical and documentary evidence clearly shows that Charles encountered their music through copies prepared for him and through his many state visits in his own domains and abroad.

The motets are glorious and beautifully sung. The ensemble of men and women bears the influence of the Tallis Scholars, I think. Their sensitivity to text and musical phrasing is quite apparent in Morales's 'Regina Caeli'. The echo of motives in the "Alleluia" that concludes the second part of the motet is given the most delicate dynamic treatment. Clemens's Christmas motet 'O Magnum Mysterium' is another delight. The jubilant echo between male and female voices in the refrain "Noe" [Noel], at the end of the first and second parts of the work, gives the piece a naive character. The light, brilliant sound of the sopranos (Tone Elisabeth Braaten and Ingrid Hanken) breathes such a festive cheer into these passages.

I liked these performances so well that I lis-

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