

Toccatà: Alte Musik aktuell (Nov-Dec 2002)

Cozzolani: Vespro della Beata Vergine

Magnificat. Warren Stewart. Musica Omnia mo0103

(2001; 2 CD)

Cozzolani: Messa Paschale

Magnificat. Warren Stewart. Musica Omnia mo 0209

(2002; 69:38)

Cozzolani: Marienvesper

Aus Salmi a otto voci concertati (1650) und Concerti Sacri (1642).

Orlando di Lasso Ensemble. Detief Bratschke Thorofon CTH 2461/2 (2000; 2 CD)

A new star has appeared in the heaven of women composers. Chiara Margarita Cozzolani (1602-ca.1677) has earned a place of honour alongside Barbara Strozzi, Bianca Maria Neda, Isabella Leonarda, Rosa Giacinta Badalla and Elisabeth-Claude Jaquet de la Guerre. Despite her calling as a nun in Northern Italy, Cozzolani composed and, contrary to the usual anonymity of cloistered life, also sang. And her sometimes frankly avant-garde works made her something of a "trend-setter" in the world of church music. Outstanding features of Cozzolani's writing – the virtuosity, the angelic part-writing have the capacity to stir, even shock the soul of the listener. The fame of the "singing nuns of Milan" was so great that the local church authorities (then, as now) sought to curtail their musical activities. Thank God (now, as then), unsuccessfully!

The music of the nuns, which stretched in an unbroken line from the late 16th to the 18th centuries drew and enchanted multitudes of people. In her day, truly Milan's most celebrated women vocalists were located in the convent rather than the opera house. Only, in later years, would the Ospedale della Pietà in Venice match the musical fame of Santa Radegonda. Cozzolani's music as presented in these recordings is sensational. Rarely have I heard such boldness, melodic richness, sheer joy in experimentation and a fundamental spirituality. The psalms and concerti seem to be suspended somewhere between the usual church and secular styles, combining the best elements of each resulting in the highest level of compositional perfection. From the outset, the Marien Vespers recordings by Magnificat and the Orlando di Lasso Ensemble distinguish themselves. Magnificat, following Cozzolani's own practice gives the tenor and bass parts to women, with the Orlando di Lasso ensemble following the usual SATB configuration with male voices on the lower parts. Between the two recordings the psalm settings used are identical, while the concerti selected are different in each case (fortunately for the listener to both recordings). The Magnificat recording displays vast reserves of richness, colour, contrast and rhetorical expression. Add to that a spontaneous freshness, frankly stylish and dazzling singing by virtuosi of the highest order and these performances seem like an obvious first choice. The Orlando di Lasso Ensemble are more sober in their performances, perhaps paying more attention to diction and fine musical detail. The addition of male singers enriches the texture with an irreplaceable depth of sound. So praise to Musica Omnia and Thorofon which have presented us here with a discovery of real importance. I heartily recommend all three of these recordings which greatly enrich the already available repertoire of the "Donne Barocche".

GEA

(Trans. by Peter Watchorn)