

Music of Tudor & Jacobean England

Works by Byrd, Randall, Bull, Phillips, Gibbons, Munday, Tisdale, Anonymous

Peter Watchorn (harpsichord)

Musica Omnia mo0104

(distr. www.musicaomnia.com) 117 mins

(2 disc. plus documentary disc)

Disc I is identical to the collection called Chi Passa released on Orbis (Jan/Feb 1998);

Disc 2 includes works by Gibbons (Pavans in G minor and A minor and 'The Italian Ground'), Bull ('Dr Bull's My Selfe' and 'Vaulting Galliard'), Byrd ('Lord Willobies Welcome Home', a Pavan and Galliard in D minor, and the Tenth Pavan and Galliard from My Lady Nevell's Book), John Munday ('Robin'), Tisdale ('Mrs Katherin Tregian's Paven'), and finally an anonymous Pavan.

(I'm grateful to Watchorn for including where each of the pieces can be found in published editions.)

Disc 3 is a 20- minute talk on virginal music by the eminent scholar Howard Schott punctuated here and there by musical excerpts-included as a complementary bonus.

Schott's talk is engaging and entertaining and I'm glad to have it: in the future I'll actually begin by listening to the lecture before I listen to any of the music. Watchorn plays two different instruments by Walter and Berta Burr: a single-manual Ruckers 1640 harpsichord for the first disc and a 1642 double-manual Ruckers on the second-the first has plectra of crow quill. Both instruments are lovely. The miking on the harpsichord is farther back on the first disc; while I prefer the closer, more intimate sound on the second, the engineering and production on both discs capture harpsichord sound better than almost any other recording I've heard recently. The performances from Disc I hold up quite well after three years - the inexorable buildup Watchorn achieves in Bull's 12th 'In Nomine', for example, is as fresh and powerful as ever. On the second disc I'm impressed by Watchorn's expressive range. Bull's hilarious 'Vaulting Galliard' shows Watchorn's lusty, mirthful side; the Byrd pavans, with their careful phrasing and subtle variety of arpeggiation and timing, exemplify the enviable intensity and nobility that marks Watchorn's greatest work. Even the accompanying booklet is of the highest quality, with liner notes by Schott and many gorgeous shots of the two Burr instruments. Yes, this release is an absolutely indispensable guide to English virginal music and belongs in every music lover's library.

-HASKINS