

Early Music America Winter 2002-3

Chiara Margarita Cozzolani

Messa Paschale

Magnificat, Warren Stewart, director

Musica Omnia MO 0209

69:38 min

A few words of introduction for those not familiar with the life and works of the Benedictine nun Chiara Margarita Cozzolani (d. c.1653): Cozzolani was the most talented musician of the nuns at the convent Santa Radegonda in Milan. She received musical training at a young age and took her holy vows as a teenager. As an adult she never ventured beyond the walls of S. Radegonda and wasn't exposed to contemporary music – remarkable when you consider the sophistication of her music.

This disc, the second in a complete Cozzolani series, is a liturgical recreation of a service for Easter Sunday. Cozzolani's setting of the Mass Ordinary is suitably conservative, a four-voice work that alternates imitative writing with homophonic stretches. But it pales in comparison to her more ecstatic motets. Magnificat's director, Warren Stewart, has replaced many of the chanted portions of the liturgy with these motets, and they are stunners. The two-voice motet Ave mater dilectissima, a dialogue between Mary and Christ, radiates tender lyricism and benefits from a skilful text setting that's typical of Cozzolani.

The liturgy closes with Maria Magdelene stabat, a setting of Mary Magdalen's encounter with the angels at the tomb on Easter morning. Splashes of striking dissonance shade a musical canvas depicting grief and longing. Magnificat continues to impress. While I find the singing in some of the tutti choral passages a bit harsh on top, the individual voices blend magnificently in the motets. Tasteful instrumental accompaniment and natural sound (!!)

- Craig Zeichner