

Elgar - Cathedral Music (2003)

Written by bluesever

Friday, 30 September 2011 08:40 - Last Updated Tuesday, 05 November 2013 21:47

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01 Ave verum, motet for chorus, Op. 2/1 - 2:49 02 Ave Maria gratia plena, motet for chorus, Op. 2/2 - 2:53 03 Ave maris stella, motet for chorus, Op. 2/3 - 4:32 (with William Carslake, treble) 04 The Angelus, partsong for chorus, Op. 56/1 - 3:21 05 II Sing the birth, carol for chorus - 4:44 (with Jonathan Milton, Jeffrey Gray, Ian Bell) 06 Lo! Christ the Lord is Born, carol for chorus - 2:05 07 Psalm 48 "Great is the Lord," anthem for chorus & organ (or orchestra), Op. 67 - 9:36 08 Ecce sacerdos magnus, gradual for chorus & orchestra (or organ) - 3:05 09 O Salutaris Hostia I, for chorus & organ in F major - 2:07 10 O Salutaris Hostia II, for chorus & organ in E flat major - 3:06 11 O Salutaris Hostia III, for voice & organ - 2:52 12 Fear not, O Land, harvest anthem for chorus & organ - 3:39 13 O Harken Thou, offertory for chorus, organ & orchestra, Op. 64 - 4:28 14 Give unto the Lord (Psalm 29), anthem for chorus, organ & orchestra ad lib, Op. 74 - 9:05 Thomas Hunt (Bass) Adrian Partington (Organ) Worcester Cathedral Choir Donald Hunt – conductor

It was in Christopher Robinson's time as organist that the Choristers of Worcester Cathedral made that capital record of Scenes from the Bavarian Highlands (recorded 1974; Chandos, 9/94), so a comparable offering from the same source naturally earns a sympathetic hearing. And it surely does not disappoint, for here is a choir that brings not only the customary high professionalism but has an unusually sensitive responsiveness to direction and sings with gusto.

Comparison with its later self, under Donald Hunt, is inevitable and might be embarrassing, but the fine standard has been maintained and there is nothing to fear either way as far as performance is concerned. Some differences arise, certainly, in the items which the two records have in common, as in the fascinating piece called Angelus, written in Italy in 1909: the later recording has fine delicacy and cohesion, while the earlier one highlights the altos' two-note ostinato of "Ave, Mary". But a difference becomes clear straight away concerning recorded sound. Hyperion's team place us at a distance, while the EMI 1969 sound is immediate, the choir's presence vivid and personal. I much prefer it.

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In addition to the choral pieces are two pieces for organ. The Vesper Voluntaries of 1889 are short and not very remarkable, but the First Organ Sonata (1895) is a major work and magnificently played by Herbert Sumsion, then nearly 70. As has no doubt been said before, it is questionably written for organ: there are passages better suited to piano, others to a salon group, and perhaps the whole thing to orchestra. Still, it is rich in ideas and played with such mastery (surely ranging through all the solo stops of the Gloucester organ) that it holds the attention throughout. Altogether a welcome and unanticipated addition to this invaluable series. -- Gramophone [11/1996], arkivmusic.com

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