

Valentin Silvestrov – Sacred Works (2009)

Written by bluesever

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1 Liturgical Chants (2005) Litany 2 Christmas Song 3 Dithyrambic Song 4
Cherubic Song 5 Alleluia 6 Bless, o Lord 7 O Holy God 8 The Creed 9 Gloria
10 Hymn of the Cherubs 11 The Beatitudes 12 Ave Maria [play](#) 13 Two Spiritual
Songs (2006) Alleluia 14 Ave Maria 15 Two Spiritual Chants (2006) A Mercy of Peace
16 To Thee We Sing 17 Two Psalms of David (2006) Fret Not Thyself Because of the
Ungodly (Psalm 37) 18 O Praise God in His Sanctuary (Psalm 150) 19 Diptych (1995)
The Lord's Prayer 20 Testament (From the Poems of T.H. Shevchenko) 21 Alleluia
(2006) Evening 22 Morning
[play](#)
23 Night
Kiev Chamber Choir Mykola Hobdych - conductor

Here is a ravishing collection of a cappella choral works by the Ukrainian Valentin Silvestrov that perfectly illustrates his own description of his music as “a response to and an echo of what already exists”. For anyone new to Silvestrov, the initial surprise of these sacred works won’t lie in the crafted precision of their execution – a facet recognisably rooted in the composer’s avant-garde beginnings. Instead, it is the sheer beauty of sound that catches the ear. Luminous and lyrical, these miniature settings of hymns, psalms and chants seem to float in a diaphanous light that hypnotically conjures up a fleeting sense of the ineffability of faith. Glancing idiomatic echoes of near-neighbours Górecki, Pärt and Kancheli aside, what’s on offer here is Holy Minimalism only by association, its rootedness in the mystery of the mystical finding expression in a markedly more distilled, almost monastic manner. Diptych, the earliest piece here, dates from 1995 (Silvestrov came relatively late to choral music) and couples a hushed setting of The Lord’s Prayer with a poem by Taras Shevchenko that manages to be simultaneously plangent and effusive. There’s something of the bittersweet at the core of most of this music. Litany, the first of the Liturgical Chants composed in 2005, is shot through with a tangible melancholia etched into sharp relief by filigree-delicate choral writing and a deep, darkly sonorous solo bass. The following year’s three-part Alleluia moves from Evening through Morning to Night in an elongated arc that glistens with all the fleeting wonder of a shooting star evaporating into darkness. Infused with the baleful beauty of Russian Orthodoxy, the sectional voices, shifting

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harmonies and emotional thrust of Silvestrov's music accommodates absorbing introspection and joyous epiphanic release with a becoming tenderness and modesty that approaches the sublime. Undiluted spiritual bliss is given vent in the light-as-sir Christmas Song, the exuberant O Praise God in His Sanctuary (Psalm 150) and the lullaby-like Cherubic Song. Acutely sensitive performances by the Kiev Chamber Choir under Mykola Hobdych – who prompted the composition of the majority of the material here – ring out with crystalline beauty in the softly resonant acoustic of Kiev's Cathedral of the Dormition. ---Michael Quinn.BBC

Ukrainian composer Valentin Silvestrov (b1937) has described music as "the world singing of itself". Appropriately, these a cappella sacred songs recorded in the Cathedral of the Dormition, Kiev, have a self-contained beauty, politically out of fashion in the Soviet era but now finding free expression among "holy minimalists" such as Arvo Pärt and Giya Kancheli. His "Liturgical Chants", together with hymns, psalms and an Alleluia mostly written in the past five years, have a burnished, almost disembodied quality, richly communicated in the open-throated timbre of the Kiev Chamber Choir. Hypnotic and startlingly different, this music has cult potential. ---Fiona Maddocks

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