

## John Sheppard – Media Vita (2017)

Written by bluesever

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*Media vita 1 Media vita in morte sumus [4'57] 2 Sancte Deus [5'04] 3 Nunc dimittis [1'46] 4  
Ne proicias nos in tempore senectutis [2'19] 5 Sancte Deus [5'02] 6 Noli claudere aures tuas  
[1'49] 7 Sancte fortis [3'52] 8 Qui cognoscis occulta cordis [2'13] 9 Sancte et misericors  
Salvator [2'56] Gaude, gaude, gaude Maria 10 Gaude, gaude, gaude Maria [4'05]  
11 Gabrielem archangelum scimus [1'09] 12 Dum virgo Deum et hominem genuisti [6'36] 13  
O benigna quae sola [1'11] 14 Gloria Patri et Filio [1'48]  
Missa Cantate  
15 Gloria [10'14] 16 Credo [11'40] 17 Sanctus [4'05] 18 Benedictus [3'08] 19 Agnus Dei I  
[1'36] 20 Agnus Dei II [2'15] 21 Agnus Dei III [2'00]  
Westminster Cathedral Choir Martin Baker (conductor)*

Even by the standards of a time and place—Tudor England—in which masterpieces of choral polyphony appear to have been virtually an everyday occurrence, there is something uniquely and intensely compelling about the surviving works of John Sheppard. This is music designed to be sung by liturgical professionals, and none rise to its demands quite like Westminster Cathedral Choir. ---hdmusic.pw

Annotator Jeremy Summerly, in his evocative notes here, chalks up the general neglect of John Sheppard's music to a paucity of biographical information. Others might simply find Sheppard's free polyphony, devoid of points of imitation or obvious connections to the text, difficult to follow. Yet another explanation might be that his music has rarely been programmed intelligently, and that problem has been solved here by the Choir of Westminster Cathedral, an ideal ensemble for Sheppard's soaring spaces, and its director Martin Baker. The program consists of three large works (which may not be clear from the packaging), each with multiple sections. Each

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differs in mood, and also in technique according to the nature of patronage at the time, which shifted during Sheppard's career. The opening Media vita in morte sumus, which Martin Luther adapted and brought down to the present day, is one of those vast works that's hard to get a handle on in isolation. But here, placed in contrast with the more intimate Marian motet Gaude, gaude, gaude Maria and the clearer polyphony of the Missa Cantate, it begins to yield its secrets. Sheppard does, after all, respond to the text: certain ideas are associated with certain vertical sonorities, or with the pungent dissonances that appear from time to time. The opening section has the vast, cathedral-like splendor you associate with Sheppard, but it's followed not by similar works but by pieces that illustrate Sheppard's choices. Both sumptuous and informative, this is a superior Sheppard recording. ---James Manheim, AllMusic Review

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