

Josquin des Prés - Missa Pange Lingua e Missa La Sol Fa Re Mi (2001)

Written by bluesever

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Pange Lingua 01. *Pange Lingua* Missa Pange Lingua 02. I. *Kyrie* 03. II. *Gloria* 04. III. *Credo* 05. IV. *Sanctus & Benedictus* 06. V. *Agnus Dei I, II & III*
Missa La Sol Fa Re Mi
07. I. *Kyrie* 08. II. *Gloria* 09. III. *Credo* 10. IV. *Sanctus & Benedictus* 11. V. *Agnus Dei I, II & III*
The Tallis Scholars Peter Phillips - director

Josquin lived nearly a century before Palestrina and Lassus. He is thought to have spent some time in Italy and thus to have contributed to the Flemish influence on Italian polyphony, in which matter he was followed by Lassus himself. These two masses are widely separated by date, and is easy to discern a development in his style from the sectional structure of the Missa La sol fa re mi to the more continuous manner of the Missa Pange Lingua. The stylistic feature of antiphonal responses between the parts is one in which he was conspicuously followed by Lassus and much less by Palestrina, and may be a distinctively Flemish characteristic.

There are three works on this disc, and there is a separate style of recording for each. We are evidently dealing with a very clever recording consultant here. The plainsong *Pange Lingua*, one of the most marvellous of the plainchants, is given an echoing acoustic suggestive of the standard image of hooded monks as one might encounter that in, say, a Vincent Price film. I buy the effect wholeheartedly, except to say that it certainly does not recall to me the acoustic of the impressive but hardly monastic chapel of Merton College Oxford. Meretricious or not, the effect has at least one out-and-out admirer, and my pleasure was further enhanced on hearing the last two stanzas, the dreaded *Tantum Ergo* of so many excruciating Victorian settings, sung to its great original melody.

The Missa La sol fa re mi, (the notes A,G,F,D,E in modern parlance and cantance) seems to be

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regarded as a triumph here by commentators in general. Whether this short canto fermo originated in a parody of the phrase 'Lascia faremi' or 'Be missing', supposedly associated with some unknown but clearly important personage, is not established. The singing and mastery of style that we have come to associate with so many Oxford and Cambridge groups in recent years are here blessed with a recorded sound that is a masterpiece of clarity and natural resonance. Something changes for the Missa Pange Lingua. I cannot myself perceive here any unsuitable affinity with the style of Palestrina. The vocal line itself is most un-Palestrina-like, and the rendition has a slightly nervy alertness that would not suit Palestrina to my ears. What is conspicuously different is the recorded sound, this time more constricted and slightly more distant. If this was a misjudgment, it was at least a misjudgment in the right direction, as the style of this Mass is less 'winning' than that of the other, and more austere. I am reluctant to be judgmental about this, given the obvious virtuosity of the recording engineer. Whether I like the different effect or not, I can't suspect it was unintentional.

A notable issue one way or the other, and heartily recommended. ---David Bryson, amazon.com

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