

Puer natus in Bethlehem - A german baroque Christmas (2014)

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1. Samuel Scheidt - *Das alte Jahr vergangen ist* 2. Johann Michael Bach - *Sei, lieber Tag, willkommen* 3. Heinrich Schütz - *Deutsches Magnificat* 4. Heinrich Schütz - *O lieber Herre Gott* 5. Michael Praetorius - *Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern* 6. Samuel Scheidt - *Puer natus in Bethlehem* 7. Heinrich Schütz - *Ein Kind ist uns geboren* 8. Johann Pachelbel - *Singet dem Herrn* 9. Michael Praetorius - *Angelus ad pastores ait* 10. Hieronymus Praetorius - *In dulci Jubilo* 11. Samuel Scheidt - *O Jesulein süß, o Jesulein mild* Vox Luminis Lionel Meunier – bass, artistic direction Gdansk, St. James's Church, 10.12.2014 FM broadcast BR-Klassik, 21.12.2014

Lionel Meunier conducted his famous Belgian ensemble Vox Luminis in the most beautiful Christmas music of the German Baroque. In their masterly interpretation the artful polyphonic motets included in the programme *Puer natus in Bethlehem* sounded positively heavenly.

The group of eminent singers linked to the conservatory in The Hague, one of the most important centres of early music learning, has been conquering concert halls and festivals worldwide. The musicians are regarded as experts on German Baroque music, especially on Heinrich Schütze. Indeed, their phenomenal interpretation of his *Musikalische Exequien* two years ago rounded off the most important record awards of 2012 with the Gramophone Recording of the Year, Gramophone Baroque Vocal Award and the International Classical Music Award.

Vox Luminis perform and record under Lionel Meunier who has honed his vocal skills in such eminent ensembles as Philippe Herreweghe's Collegium Vocale Gent, Ton Koopman's Amsterdam Baroque Choir and Jean Tubéry's I Favoriti de la Fenice, and under the supervision of such greats as Tonu Kaljuste, Gustav Leonhardt, and Rinaldo Alessandrini.

For this year's Actus Humanus Festival Lionel Meunier prepared a special programme whose name comes from an eight-voice motet by Samuel Sheidt based on the chorale song Puer natus in Bethleem. Meunier divided the programme, made of polyphonic and polychoral compositions written between the 16th and the early 18th centuries for the purposes of the then crystallising protestant liturgy, into four parts: Advent, Annunciation, Birth and Adoration. The concert was filled with motets of refined sound and rich rhetorical figuration which were written by Hieronymus Praetorius, an eminent organist from Hamburg; by Michael Praetorius, Kapellmeister to the Prince of Brunswick and a great theoretician and master of erudition; Samuel Sheidt, organist of Halle; Heinrich Schütze, official composer at the court of the Elector of Saxony; and by Johann Michael Bach, the Kantor of Arnstadt.

At the time, German music remained under a strong Italian influence, full of sophisticated sounds and extreme emotions. An example of this approach was a motet by Hieronymus Praetorius with the lyrics of a popular German carol In dulci jubilo. Two compositions by Schütz, the two-choral Deutsches Magnificat and the expressive six-voice motet O Liebe Herre Gott, showcased a contrapuntal mastery. On the other hand, motets by Michael Praetorius and Samuel Scheidt sounded particularly lyrical.

Under Lionel Meunier Vox Luminis presented a range of perfect interpretations that subtly highlighted the emotional contrasts, bright colours and rhythmic energies featured in the individual pieces. In their interpretation German Christmas polyphony assumed a heavenly glow. --- en.actushumanus.com

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