

DIAPASON June 2009

After a deluge of song recitals these last few years, this collection of Handel's Great Choruses is a welcome breath of fresh air. Since the days of Michael Costa, Eugene Ormandy and Robert Shaw, such programmes have gone out of fashion. But one can never really tire of these richly ornamented phrases, heroic fugues and choral theatre where biblical drama co-exists with pastoral delights, and where common fervour merges into celestial harmony.

David Hill, esteemed musical director of The Bach Choir clearly does not. His approach is to bring together the virtues of a big choral sound, and rigorous scholarship: on the one hand, the numerous and disparate voices of the venerable Bach Choir that Bernard Shaw teasingly wrote about over a century ago, and on the other, the period instruments of the English Concert.

Predictably, the solemn sound of "The mighty Pow'r" from Athalia, and of "Hear Jacob's God" from Samson, and of the Coronation Anthem "Zadok the Priest" have more success than the dumbstruck emotion of "He saw the Lovely Youth" (Theodora), or the sonorous polyphony of "The People shall Hear" (a masterpiece above all other) from Israel in Egypt. But throughout, all goes well. The collection, mixing favourites with less well-known pieces is marvellously sustained. Carolyn Sampson is delightful ("Let the Bright Seraphim") and Robin Blaze's scintillating counterpoint is nothing less than mesmeric!

[Translation by Jo Sullam]