

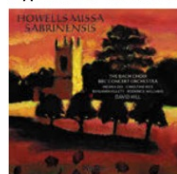
each other on to raise the expressive stakes a little; but overall these performances are what one might call coolly beautiful.

By the time you have listened to Gesualdo's *Tenebrae Responsories*, Couperin's exquisitely composed world will seem far away. Even for a madrigalist known for his extreme use of dissonance, this is extraordinary stuff, playing out Jesus's betrayal in tortured, jagged music that in places is almost too painful to listen to. The singing of six members of *Tenebrae* (Doyle and Davidson the sopranos) is accomplished, snappy and defined, with firm control of changing dynamics. Nigel Short shows a strong sense of mannerist storytelling, using the text as a spur to action and unafraid to assault the ear when things get chromatically heated; the way the words sometimes shout into the silence of the church is immensely powerful. This is angry, compelling music, not to be mistaken for easy background polyphony.

Lindsay Kemp

Howells

Missa Sabrinensis^s. Michael, A Fanfare Setting
^sHelena Dix ^{sop} ^aChristine Rice ^{mez} ^aBenjamin
 Hulett ^{ten} ^aRoderick Williams ^{bar} The Bach Choir;
 BBC Concert Orchestra / David Hill
 Hyperion © CDA68294 (72' • DDD • T/t)



'Its proportions are modest in comparison with the Mass in B minor or the *Missa solemnis*', wrote *The Musical Times* rather dismissively in 1954 of Herbert Howells's latest work. The comment is also deeply misleading, because the *Missa Sabrinensis* is monumental, vast – a great wave of near-operatic emotion and intensity breaking over an intricate structural scaffolding.

Often closer to Verdi than Vaughan Williams, Howells's Mass-setting goes further than even *Hymnus Paradisi* at full spate towards giving the lie to the casual dismissal of the composer as one of England's pastoral also-rans. The scope of the piece and its layered, contrapuntal construction – more choral symphony than conventional Mass, as Jonathan Clinch's illuminating booklet note points out – set it apart. Choral voices become a single strand, soloists another, in a densely woven texture in which the orchestra is less support than rival, sparring partner, urging on and amplifying.

Shaped in an arc, building up to the insistent collective cries of 'Sanctus' before falling away to a hazy-soft conclusion in the

Agnus Dei, the Mass is an appealing mixture of baleful, modal Englishness and more perfumed Continental Impressionism. Solo lines rise up out of the choral body of the *Kyrie* like incense smoke, weaving and dissolving into one another. It's a texture that returns, suddenly exposed, in the *Benedictus*, where solo soprano and a single flute pass phrases lazily to and fro – a moment of exquisite intimacy at the heart of a work that's all about the collective, the massed.

While *Hymnus Paradisi* and the Requiem have been well served on disc, just a single account of the *Severn Mass* has existed until now. The 2005 Chandos recording by the LSO and Gennady Rozhdestvensky is lush but hazy, indistinct. Washes of sound and gesture catch the essence of the work but not its close-up detail – something we get here in a texturally high-definition performance from David Hill and the superbly trained amateurs of The Bach Choir.

Hill also has the edge with soloists. Bigger voices ride and soar over the chorus and BBC Concert Orchestra, led by Helena Dix's ecstatic, rapturous soprano. Singing the music's lines rather than its genre, she steers us firmly into the opera house, supported by Christine Rice in heady moments of duet, with tenor Benjamin Hulett and baritone Roderick Williams risking daring and heroic things below.

It's an electrifying performance: one of those you never knew you were waiting for but can't imagine now ever doing without.

Alexandra Coghlan

Comparative version:

LSO, Rozhdestvensky (6/95^o) (CHAN) CHAN241-27

Lewandowski

Eighteen Liturgical Psalms

Hungarian Radio Choir / Andor Izsák

DG © 483 7724 (81' • DDD • T/t)



Unfamiliar as I was with the music of Louis Lewandowski

(1821-94), the first name that came to mind on listening to his music was Mendelssohn; and surely enough, the fascinating booklet notes by the conductor Andor Izsák inform us that Lewandowski was taken under the wing of Alexander Mendelssohn, a cousin of Felix. His ascent was rapid, not only on that account but also because he was an extremely talented musician, and the dramatic intensity of the psalm-settings recorded here is testimony to his compositional gifts.

Lewandowski was also a reformer, and pushed for the introduction of the organ and of mixed choirs into synagogue worship, something that was highly controversial. Most of the settings here are brief but there are some longer-breathed works that show what a Lewandowski oratorio might have been like, such as *Deine Wege, Ewiger, mache mir kund*, a setting of verses from Psalm 25, which includes a dramatic solo superbly rendered here by Lúcia Megyesi Schwartz. The two longest settings are *Wie lieblich sind deine Wohnungen* (Psalm 84), with a substantial organ introduction and effective use of canonic writing in alternation with dramatically shaded homophonic passages and, once more, an extended solo, and *Preise, meine Seele, den Ewigen* (Psalm 103), which has two solo sections interspersed with some of the most affirmative, jubilant writing on the disc.

Izsák, who directs the Hungarian Radio Choir in performances that are colourful and full of energy, notes that this music, printed in 1879, was thought to be lost until it was rediscovered a hundred years later and published by Breitkopf & Härtel in an edition by him; this is the first recording. His investment of time and effort has certainly paid off in this excellently recorded disc, which sheds a valuable light on the work of Jewish music in general during this period and particularly on that of this innovative and talented composer who began life in a small Prussian village. Ivan Moody

B Parry

'The Hours'

Ar hyd y nos. Ave verum corpus. Early one morning. Eclipse. First Day. God be in my head. Golden slumbers. Lighten our darkness. The Lord's Prayer. Music: An Ode. My heart's in the Highlands. My spirit sang all day. New Year Carol. Nunc dimittis. O nata lux de lumine. Sonnet XXVII. Snow. Two Spring Sonnets. Sun Soul. Ye banks and braes o' bonnie Doon

The Choir of Royal Holloway / Rupert Gough with

Simon Marlow pf Liam Condon org

Signum © SIGCD629 (78' • DDD • T)



As a former Swingle Singer and currently artistic director and principal conductor of the National Youth Choirs of Great Britain, Ben Parry knows better than almost anyone what works for young voices, what they enjoy singing and how to get the best out of them. You can hear the results clearly in this collection of his own choral music, efficiently recorded