

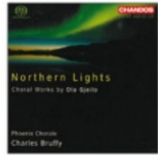
CHORAL CDS

NORTHERN LIGHTS: CHORAL WORKS BY OLA GJEILO

Phoenix Chorale / Charles Bruffy (dir)

Chandos CHSA 5100 [59:43]

★★★★★



Norwegian Ola Gjeilo (b.1978) lives in New York since studying at Juilliard and his tonal language synthesises the textures and soundworld of Americans Manz, Lauridsen and Whitacre, and nods towards Rutter too. The 27 professional voices of Arizona-based Phoenix Chorale under Charles Bruffy paint limpid washes of sound with polished intonation, ensemble and balance. The music draws on sacred texts, some ubiquitous, others novel, and, save a couple of moderately-paced pieces, all the tracks are slow and meditative. Listeners and choirs wanting more of this 'brand' of choral music and will find plenty here, delivered with fine engineering and full sleeve notes.

MATTHEW POWER

ALEC ROTH: SHARED GROUND; EARTHRISE; PONTICELLI

Ex Cathedra, Philippe Honoré (vn) / Jeffrey Skidmore (dir)

Signum Classics SIGCD 270 (2CDs) [42:27; 48:57]

★★★★★



It scarcely seems possible that Birmingham-based chamber choir Ex Cathedra and their founder-director Jeffrey Skidmore entered their fifth decade of performing together in 2009. The group's repertoire has always been wide, but everything that marks out Ex Cathedra as one of the UK's leading vocal ensembles can be heard on this memorable two-disc set of music by Alec Roth: even tone, perfect intonation, clarity of diction, but above all whole-hearted commitment to the material in hand. Skidmore offers authoritative readings of four of Roth's choral pieces, several of which were composed for Ex Cathedra. An excellent follow-up to Signum's earlier disc of Roth's *Songs in Time of War*. Warmly recommended.

PHILIP REED

MOZART: VESPERAE SOLENNES DE CONFESSORE; CORONATION MASS IN C; AVE VERUM CORPUS

Laurence Kilsby (treble), Jeremy Kenyon (a), Christopher Watson (t), Christopher Borrett (b), Tewkesbury Abbey Schola Cantorum, Charivari Agréable / Benjamin Nicholas (dir)

Delphian DCD 34102 [54:59]

★★★★★



A *C&O* reviewer last year described the Tewkesbury scholars' singing as 'fearless' and the word is spot-on. They approach these three cherished sacred works with a confident freshness and not a hint of affected solemnity or syrupiness.

The Merton College Chapel acoustics are both resonant and intimate and producer/engineer Paul Baxter gets his usual bright, detailed sound. A top-drawer recording.

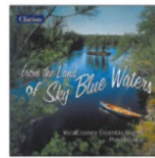
BRIAN MORTON

FROM THE LAND OF SKY BLUE WATERS

VocalEssence Ensemble Singers / Philip Brunelle (dir)

Clarion CLCD-942 [57:34]

★★★★★



This celebration of the music of Minnesota's choral composers, singer-songwriters and the songs sung by those who have made Minnesota their home over the last 150 years is an enjoyable survey, though possibly aimed at the Minnesotan rather than the international market. A couple of compilation medleys embrace songs by, among others, Bob Dylan (*Blowin' in the wind*), Harold Arlen (*Somewhere over the rainbow*), *From the Land of Sky Blue Waters* (Hamm's Beer Theme) and Monty Python's *SPAM Song*. Brunelle and his fine VocalEssence Ensemble Singers perform to the manner born.

PHILIP REED

JOHANN CHRISTOPH BACH: WELT, GUTE NACHT

Julia Doyle (s), Katherine Fuge (s), Clare Wilkinson (m-s), Nicholas Mulroy (t), James Gilchrist (t), Jeremy Budd (t), Matthew Brook (b), Peter Harvey (b), English Baroque Soloists / John Eliot Gardiner (dir)

Soli Deo Gloria SDG 715 [78:11]

★★★★★



The latest offering from Gardiner's SDG label is of music by Johann Christoph Bach (1642-1703), a cousin of Johann Sebastian's father. Recorded live at Cadogan Hall in 2009, this disc is a veritable treasure trove of arias, laments, motets and dialogues arranged by Gardiner into a most satisfying and illuminating sequence. Subtlety of gesture and effect is the key to Johann Christoph's style, and his music can never have had such care lavished on it as evinced by the performance captured here. The singing and playing is of the highest standard (as one would expect from this source). The disc is dedicated to the memory of viola da gambist Richard Campbell, who not only contributes playing of distinction to the recording but also an excellent essay to the finely produced booklet and packaging for the CD. Not to be missed.

PHILIP REED

J.S. BACH: CANTATAS VOL.50

Bach Collegium Japan / Masaaki Suzuki (dir)

BIS SACD 1941 [74:57]

★★★★★



This latest volume of cantatas is drawn from the Leipzig cycles from 1726-29: BWV 149 (Michaelmas, 1728), BWV 145 (Easter Day, 1729), BWV 174 (Whitsun, 1729), and BWV 49 (20th Sunday after Trinity, 1726). Suzuki's Dutch training is amply in evidence in terms of tempi, articulation and the vitality with which these performances abound.

The (European) soloists – Hana Blazikova (soprano), Robin Blaze (counter-tenor), Gerd Türk (tenor) and Peter Kooij (bass) – are well-suited to the repertoire and give good focused performances. I enjoyed hearing the reworking of Brandenburg 3 as the opening of Cantata 174, and many other treasures are herein revealed.

DAVID PONSFORD