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REVIEWS

RECORDINGS



SERGEI RACHMANINOFF ALL-NIGHT VIGIL, OP. 37. *Gloria Dei Cantores, Richard Pugsley, director; members of the St. Romanos Cappella, the Patriarch Tikhon Choir, the Washington Master Chorale; Vadim Gan and Dmitry Ivanchenko, clergy exclamations; Mariya Berezovska, alto soloist; Dmitry Ivanchenko, tenor soloist; Peter Jermihov, conductor.* Recorded at the Church of the Transfiguration, Orleans, Mass. **Paraclete Recordings GDCD 063. Paracletepress.com.** The All-night Vigil is a Divine Service consisting of a series of hymns and canticles collected from the two Divine Services of Vespers and Matins. The Resurrectional All-night Vigil is celebrated on Saturday evenings and the Festal All-night Vigil is held on the eve of major feasts.

Rachmaninoff described his Opus 37 of 1915 as “the most important hymns of the All-night Vigil.” His settings of the 15 hymns extracted from the Divine Service is one of the finest in existence, and was a personal favorite among his works. In it Rachmaninoff expresses his sincere Christian faith imparted to him in childhood, particularly from his grandmother S.A. Butakova.

Rachmaninoff's a cappella masterpiece displays creative genius on many levels. It is particularly impressive in its use of color and in its symphonic conception, in formal layout, textures, and in its use of voices in ways similar to that of instrumental groups within the orchestra. The technically brilliant conception is but a vehicle for the expression of the deeper spiritual meaning of the texts.

This performance is a result of the

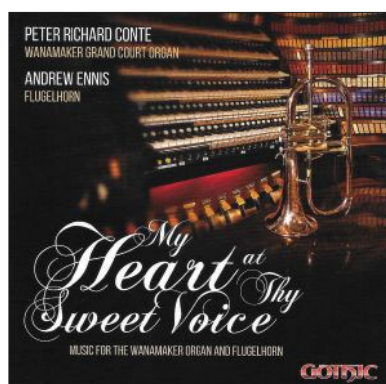
twofold vision “to combine the pursuit of musical excellence with a search for the work's distinctly Christian content,” in the words of conductor Peter Jermihov. This vision for authenticity, both musically and spiritually, has been beautifully achieved by the *Gloria Dei Cantores* (Singers to the Glory of God), comprising a total of 77 singers, with the addition of 15 singers from the *St. Romanos Cappella*, 11 from the *Patriarch Tikhon Choir*, and 9 from the *Washington Master Chorale*. The sound is warm, lush, vibrant, elegant, and luminous, with extraordinary blend at all dynamic levels from a mere collective pitched whisper to hair-raising fortissimos that constitute thrilling climaxes. While the seven octavist basses significantly contribute to the “Russian” flavor of the choral sound, the overall choral tone is less visceral and aggressive than that often associated with Russian choirs. Jermihov skillfully marshals his forces in navigating through the complex passages, highlighting one section or another in bringing out a melody within the texture, then bringing the entire ensemble back into a unified whole. He elicits a multitude of colors collectively and from individual sections as the score requires. The soloists perform their roles with similar care, allowing the technical aspects of the music to serve the spiritual intent.

All of this is realistically captured in the surround-sound recording by recording engineer Keith O. Johnson. The ambient, resonant acoustical environment is ideal for the enhancement and blossoming of choral sound at every dynamic level.

Jermihov, a Chicago native born of Russian émigré parents, not only conducts brilliantly; he is also a scholar of deep insight who shares his knowledge in an enlightening essay in the beautifully produced booklet. He provides his own transliterations and English translations alongside the original Russian texts. Several lovely photographs relevant to the subject matter are interspersed throughout the 54-page booklet.

In short, this is a heavenly performance of deeply moving music, bringing to life ancient sacred texts through the unique personal expression of the composer, conveyed through musicians for whom these texts are a central reality of their life of faith. It will satisfy the listener through its pure beauty and transport the believer

into a higher spiritual realm. No matter how many other renditions of this powerful work may be in one's library, this one is a must.



MY HEART AT THY SWEET VOICE: MUSIC FOR THE WANAMAKER ORGAN AND FLUGELHORN. Peter Richard Conte, organ; Andrew Ennis, flugelhorn. Gothic G-49294. For details of the Wanamaker organ, go to Wanamakerorgan.com or the Gothic website, Gothic-catalog.com. Also available from Ohscatalog.org. This delicious recording features the smooth, melifluous sounds of Andrew Ennis's flugelhorn in union with the luscious sonorities of the fabled Wanamaker organ under the inimitable command of Peter Richard Conte. The 16 tracks include arrangements of arias from operas of Saint-Saëns, Puccini, Verdi, Richard Strauss, Rimsky-Korsakov, Bizet, and Wagner, as well as three beloved choral works of Duruflé and popular short instrumental works of Elgar, Debussy, Kreisler-Hebble, Gounod, and Grainger. Details may be found at the Gothic website. Conte and Ennis (also an organ student of Conte) created most of these arrangements, which are very effective, taking advantage of the sonorities of both instruments individually and together. The flugelhorn reinforces the coloristic and dynamic subtleties of the Wanamaker organ resulting in delightful symbiosis. It is remarkable how, in many instances, the voices of the organ (presumably various reed stops) closely match that of the flugelhorn. Both players achieve a maximum level of expressivity through a variety of means, including variation of timbre, dynamic shading, and subtle control of vibrato. While much of this music is quiet and lyrical, there are moments of excitement and dy-

amic climax, the likes of which can only be experienced in this unique environment. All of this is beautifully captured in this excellent recording. Here we have

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