

Recorded to mark the 400th anniversary of Giovanni Gabrieli's death, *La Musica per San Rocco* is one of those programmes which revives the kind of music event which would have been a highlight in 17<sup>th</sup> Century Venice. A starting point for the present release is quoted from Thomas Coryat's 1611 London publication 'Coryat's Crudities': "The third feast was upon Saint Roches day being Saturday and the sixth day of August, where I heard the best musicke that ever I did in all my life both in the morning and in the afternoone, so good that I would willingly goe an hundred miles a foote at any time to hear the like... This feast consisted principally of musicke, which was both vocall and instrumentall, so good, so delectable, so rare, so admirable, so superexcellent, that I did even ravish and stupifie all those strangers that never heard the like..."

As common with these Arts label releases, the booklet notes are lengthy and detailed, acknowledging Paul McCreesh's work in this field and also the degree of guesswork which is inevitable in such a reconstruction. As such this recording sits nicely alongside something like McCreesh's *Venetian Coronation*, which brings a comparatively speculative approach to another historic event. Elena Sartori and the production team do not however go in for the 'total immersion' effect generated by the bells and bangs of McCreesh's Signum programme. Imaginative and at times spectacular though this approach can be, I don't miss the attempt at being transported into the atmosphere of 17<sup>th</sup> century Venice. Well researched and beautifully performed and recorded, what we in essence have here is a compilation of suitable works, including three from virtuoso falsetto singer and composer Bartolomeo Barbarino, whose presence at this Feast for Saint Roch has been established beyond doubt. Counter-tenor Alessandro Carmignani shares the part of Barbarino, and his distinctive vocal signature is a defining aspect for some of these performances - rich and firm-toned, but improbably and at times disconcertingly pure and high - in a good way, I hasten to add. The virtuosity of the high male voice is as you would expect explored most in Barbarino's own pieces, and the second counter-tenor voice of Aurelia Schiavoni has a degree of extra flexibility in providing soloistic vibrato and ornament in something like the *Venite as me*, over the minimal accompaniment of a chitarrone. Carmignani's solo in the *Audi, Dulcis Amica Mea* is fine, but with evidence of some editing just into the first minute - always tricky to do in such a huge acoustic. The solo voices are in general very good, though not always entirely perfect. Alberto Allegrezza's tenor is a touch on the grainy side, as evidenced in the *In Ecclesiis*, and intonation can sound a touch exposed though not disturbingly so - the gorgeous *Domine Deus Meus* is beautifully done, though the wide variety in character amongst the voices is perhaps not ideal.

Contrast in the instrumental pieces ranges from the intimate grace of three violins in the *Sonata No. 21*, to the more spectacular cornetts and sackbuts of the *Canzona No. 14*. Gabrieli the organist is represented in two fugues and the *Toccata e Ricercare*, to which pieces some decently subtle percussion has been added to heighten the dance nature of the works. Not much can top the glory of the 19-part *Buccinate in Neomenia Tuba*, the spacing of the four *Coro* bringing the surround effect of this tremendous recording into full thrill-mode. The final *Magnificat* is a suitably magnificent conclusion.

Vocal ensemble Melodi Cantores and La Pifarescha on historic instruments are directed to great effect in this recording by Elena Sartori, and this is a highly enjoyable release which sounds terrific in plain stereo, and can blow your socks off in multi-channel surround. Latin texts are given at the back of the booklet, and as a one-stop place for some tremendous Venetian music both moving and evocative as well as a stirringly inspirational test of your woofers, this is a thoroughly attractive recording.

**Dominy Clements**

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