

# July



*In such sure hands (and throats) as these, Monteverdi's psalm-settings reach their fullest capacity to enchant and astonish*

David Vickers admires a reconstruction of Venetian Vespers using music from Monteverdi's *Selve morale e spirituale*, superbly performed by I Fagiolini and Robert Hollingworth

## 'The Other Vespers'

**Castello** Sonata in D minor **Donati** *Dulcis amor Iesu!* **Frescobaldi** Toccata terza **G Gabrieli** Magnificat a 14 **Monteverdi** Beatus vir I. Confitebor tibi, Domine II. Dixit Dominus II. Laudate Dominum I. Laudate pueri I. Salve, o regina. Ut queant laxis **Palestrina/Bovicelli** Ave verum corpus **Usper** Sonata a 8 **Viadana** Deus in adiutorium  
**I Fagiolini; The 24; The English Cornett & Sackbut Ensemble / Robert Hollingworth**  
 Decca © 483 1654DH (80' • DDD • T/T)

There is only one eyewitness report of Monteverdi directing Vespers music after his permanent relocation to Venice: the Dutch tourist Constantijn Huygens attended a Vespers for the Feast of St John the Baptist on June 24, 1620 (probably at SS Giovanni e Paolo), and 'heard the most perfect music I think I shall ever hear in my life'. This enigmatic occasion has prompted several speculative reconstructions of an alternative Monteverdi Vespers making use of music selected from his large Venetian

anthology *Selve morale e spirituale*, published in 1641 but its content presumably written across many years; the collection is rich in multiple settings of psalms necessary for important male saints' feasts (and much else), so Robert Hollingworth's mischievously titled 'The Other Vespers' represents just one of a range of possible alternatives.

Recorded during chilly November conditions at St George's Church, Chesterton, there is plenty of warmth and animation in the superb music-making. I Fagiolini's consort and solo singing are exemplary, and on a few occasions fuller choral moments are bolstered by eight talented students from The 24 (Hollingworth's recently founded chamber choir at the University of York). Five psalms and a hymn from *Selve morale* are placed within a plausible liturgical context between plainchant antiphons (sung with unaffected simplicity) and plenty of music by Monteverdi's contemporaries.

Viadana's response *Domine ad adiuvandum* (1612) is adorned with liberal embellishments from cornettist Andrea Inghisiciano; Gawain

Glenton's seductive cornett floats sensitively above a fascinating sacred contrafactum of a Palestrina madrigal, its polyphony reworked by Giovanni Battista Bovicelli into a stylishly devised example of how to ornament (*Ave verum corpus*). Castello's Sonata in D minor (1629) is played with conversational charm by violinist Bjarte Eike, and organist Catherine Pierron demonstrates a nimble touch in a Frescobaldi Toccata (1637). The English Cornett & Sackbut Ensemble displays its expertise in a solemn eight-part Sonata by Monteverdi's Venetian colleague Francesco Usper (1619). The largest-scale music is a 14-part *Magnificat* by Giovanni Gabrieli (1615), which captures the perfect incongruity of polished gutsiness, whereas five solo voices sing with eloquent intimacy in Ignazio Donati's motet *Dulcis amor Iesu!* (1616). Throughout proceedings the continuo realisations of theorbists Lynda Sayce and Eligio Quintiero are impeccable.

In such sure hands (and throats) as these, Monteverdi's psalm-settings reach their fullest capacity to enchant and astonish. *Dixit Dominus*