

Choral

CPE Bach · JC Bach · JS Bach

CPE Bach Magnificat, Wq215 H772

JC Bach Magnificat, E22

JS Bach Magnificat, BWV243

Joëlle Harvey *sop* Olivia Vermeulen *mez*

Iestyn Davies *countertenor* Thomas Walker *ten*

Thomas Bauer *bar* Arcangelo / Jonathan Cohen

Hyperion © CDA68157 (77' • DDD • T/t)



Three *Magnificats*, by the three most famous members of the Bach family, make for a delectable triptych from a 40-year span, with each strikingly promoting their distinctive musical priorities. If Johann Sebastian's first Leipzig Christmas in 1723 impelled him to display all his high-Baroque wares in a canticle of mesmerising variety, then both his cosmopolitan sons accept the subsequent challenge with alacrity in their colourful settings – with the more substantial CPE score now beginning to enter the canon.

For their father's perennial masterpiece, Jonathan Cohen and Arcangelo snap into their festive sparklers with grand authority and lithe ebullience, sweeping effortlessly from verse to verse with considerable purpose. There's something attractively straightforward about 'Quia fecit' with the characterful Thomas Bauer agreeably supported by Cohen's present harpsichord, not least because it has a delicious effect on the languid curves of Iestyn Davies's and Thomas Walker's 'Et misericordia', which follows. One is struck throughout by the exceptional balance of the voices and instruments yet without forgoing Cohen's animated and imaginative way with text. Indeed, when one reaches the 'Gloria Patri' at the close, the music seems to have evolved imperceptibly in a generous seam of exquisitely judged verses.

Arcangelo's voyage into the sons' *Magnificats* is no less well paced or astutely textured. As we move into Johann Christian's third setting (thought to be for Milan Cathedral in 1760), the new idiom becomes decidedly operatic, riven with self-conscious conceits and reeking of *galant* suavity. But it goes down very nicely in around 10 minutes, especially

the expectant choral interpolations in 'Fecit potentiam' and even the slightly perfunctory doffing of the cap to dad with a decent enough fugue to end.

Carl Philipp Emanuel's *Magnificat* is a substantial homage to his father's setting (there are some obvious quotes), especially in the successful combining of so many contrasting elements. If CPE is rather less succinct than Johann Sebastian, there's no denying that there are some brilliant and affecting set pieces, especially when carried by Joëlle Harvey's uniformly dramatic and engaging singing – not to mention the supreme final double fugue when the choir and orchestra all but take off. It's 40 years since King's College Choir Cambridge under Philip Ledger recorded the work in what seemed a rather muddy and elusive idiom. Not here, where Cohen and Arcangelo bring us an illuminated Bachian constellation of three canticles colliding in captivating relief.

Jonathan Freeman-Attwood

Gounod

'Cantatas and Sacred Music'

Marie Stuart et Rizzio^a. Fernand^b. La Vendetta^c.

Messe vocale pour la fête de l'Annonciation^d.

Christus factus est^e. Hymne sacrée^f. Messe de

Saint-Louis-des-Français^g

^aGabrielle Philipponet, ^cChantal Santon-Jeffery,

^bJudith Van Wanroij *sops* ^fCaroline Meng *mez*

^gArtavazd Sargsyan, ^eSébastien Droy,

^dYu Shao *tens* ^hAlexandre Duhamel *bar*

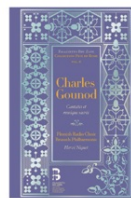
^hNicolas Courjal *bass* ⁱFrançois Saint-Yves *org*

^d^gFlemish Radio Choir, ^{abcdefg}

Brussels Philharmonic / Hervé Niquet

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(129' • DDD • T/t)



'My sole aim', Gounod wrote of his Conservatoire days in his *Mémoires d'un artiste*, 'was the Grand Prix de Rome, which I was determined to win, at all costs.' He did, in fact, carry off the coveted prize on his third attempt in 1839, and the latest volume in Palazzetto Bru Zane's Prix de Rome series, issued to mark his bicentenary, examines both the route he took to achieve it and the immediate impact on his work of the

two years scholarship at the Villa Medici that it afforded.

Success did indeed come, it would seem, at the cost of reining in his enthusiasm and originality. The first disc presents us with his second-round dramatic cantatas, written to prescribed texts. Gounod won with *Fernand*, an Orientalist three-hander set during the siege of Granada, in which a Spanish nobleman risks both life and honour to reunite Zelmire, the Muslim girl he adores, with Alamir, her lover in the enemy ranks. Elegant and attractively orchestrated, it is by no means negligible, but seems cautious, harmonically and melodically, when placed beside its more adventurous predecessors. *Marie Stuart et Rizzio* (1837) is very much a young hothead's work – a real roller coaster of a piece, emotionally confrontative and characterised by an almost Berliozian recklessness of harmony and expression. *La Vendetta* (1838), set on Corsica and depicting a mother swearing her son to avenge his murdered father, is more introverted: the tension and oppressive mood are unwaveringly sustained, though the Meyerbeerian closing duet is a bit stiff.

Gounod initially found Rome disappointing: 'Provincial, ordinary, colourless and dirty almost everywhere', he wrote. But his encounter with the city's church music, Palestrina in particular, fired his imagination. The second disc surveys his sacred works composed in Rome itself and in Vienna, where he briefly lived after his studies were complete. His Mass for Rome's French church, Saint-Louis-des-Français, strongly prefigures the *St Cecilia* Mass of 1855, in which Gounod reused some of its material. The real revelation here, though, is the unaccompanied *Messe vocale* of 1843, which shows how much he learned from Palestrina without becoming imitative. Each section is preceded by a chorale setting of a versicle associated with the Virgin Mary, which then becomes a cantus firmus in the movement proper. The polyphony is exquisite, and the overall effect is one of timelessness rather than archaism. It is a most beautiful work.

As with the previous volumes, Hervé Niquet conducts the Brussels Philharmonic and Flemish Radio Choir in performances that are for the most part exemplary. There are minor cavils over some of the soloists: