

Choral

Biber · Bernhard · Fux · JM Nicolai

Bernhard Herr, nun lässest du deinen Diener.
Tribularer si nescirem **Biber** Requiem in F minor
Fux Omnis terra adoret, K183. Sonata a 4, K347
JM Nicolai Sonata a 6 in A minor
Vox Luminis; Freiburg Baroque Consort / Lionel Meunier
Alpha © ALPHA665 (72' • DDD • T/D)



Biber's F minor Requiem of 1692 has had a decent spray of recordings, with couplings ranging from the composer's own instrumental music (Pickett; L'Oiseau-Lyre, 6/94) to assorted reflections on death (McCreesh; Archiv, 2/05). For their new recording, Vox Luminis and the Freiburger Barockconsort have dispensed with specific historical or geographical connections and surrounded it with music by three contemporaries without any apparent links to Biber: two Lutheran motets by Christoph Bernhard, a typically German deep-textured string sonata by Johann Michael Nicolai, and a motet and sonata by Johann Joseph Fux, music director at the Viennese court. These are rarities on record all right, linked by a rich and serious tone well suited to Vox Luminis's familiar strengths. It is a pleasure to find Lionel Meunier's marvellous ensemble devoting time to them.

Bernhard's *Herr, nun lässest du deinen Diener*, a gloss on the Song of Simeon, has something of the calm splendour of a French *grand motet*, while *Tribularer si nescirem* is a hymn to Christ's mercy that opens with over a minute of madrigalian harmonic wrangling on its opening word. Fux's rather old-fashioned, Venetian-style Sonata is light and colourful, and his *Omnis terra*, another motet for voices and instruments, is a sing-song ray of light to end the programme with a Purcellian lilt.

In the middle of all these sits the Biber, given out with typical care for expressive beauty by Vox Luminis. This is not a Requiem packed with musical incident, which in any case would hardly have stood out in the echoing spaces of Salzburg Cathedral, its probable place

of first performance. Rather, it relies on maintaining the dignified and sombre simplicity of texture established at the outset by voices with strings and trombones, only occasionally breaking out into more active word-painting in the 'Dies irae' or at 'de poenis inferni' ('the bottomless pit'). Even there, however, these performers preserve the music's poise and tenderness, while keeping it alive with nicely judged momentum; this piece has been called 'dreary' in these pages, but no movement outstays its welcome here. The firmer timbres of Pickett or the grander drama of McCreesh are valid alternatives, but admirers of Vox Luminis will know already to expect something heart-warming from them. **Lindsay Kemp** (April 2021)

Bruckner

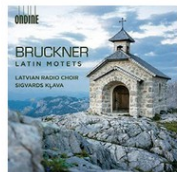
'Latin Motets'

Os justi. Christus factus est, WAB11. Locus iste. Ave Maria, WAB6. Libera me, WAB21^a. Kronstorfer Messe. Tantum ergo - WAB32; WAB41/2; WAB42^a; WAB43^a. Virga Jesse, WAB52. Pange lingua. Salvum fac populum. Tota pulchra es^b. Vexilla regis

^bJānis Kurševs *ten*^{ab}Kristine Adamaite *org*

Latvian Radio Choir / Sigvards Kļava

Ondine © ODE1362-2 (59' • DDD • T/D)



Sigvards Kļava's latest recording with the Latvian Radio Choir features not only first-rate performances of some of Bruckner's better-known motets but also a number of his infrequently heard early works. Bruckner was working as an assistant teacher in Kronstorf when he wrote the *Kronstorfer Mass*, also known as the 'Mass without *Gloria* and *Credo*', some time during 1843 and 1844. Lasting only six minutes, this melodious, contemplative work finds the composer, not yet 21, confidently writing for unaccompanied voices and experimenting with unorthodox modulations. The lively and warm-hearted *Libera me* in F, composed for choir and organ, also dates from this time. The collection also includes four different versions of *Tantum ergo*, including the C major setting from the set of four designated WAB41, completed by

Bruckner in 1846 at the beginning of his stay at St Florian Monastery.

The remainder of the collection comprises works from Bruckner's maturity, ranging from the exquisite *Ave Maria* of 1861 to the last of the motets, *Vexilla regis*, completed in 1892. These pieces have been recorded multiple times before, but the unforced natural expressivity of the singing as well as the accuracy of the intonation at all dynamic levels puts this new version very near the top of the list. Among the finest of the performances is that of *Tota pulchra es*, which communicates a feeling of ineffable timelessness at the opening as well as a sense of tremendous majesty at the organ-supported climax. Similarly impressive is the account of *Virga Jesse*, with its ethereal calls of 'in se' sung by the sopranos and gently echoed by the rest of the choir. Moments such as these linger long in the memory. The excellent recording, made in Riga Cathedral, suits the performances perfectly.

Christian Hoskins (February 2021)

Dussek

Messe solemnelle

Stefanie True *sop* Helen Charlston *mez* Gwilym

Bowen *ten* Morgan Pearse *bar* Choir and Orchestra of the Academy of Ancient Music / Richard Egarr
AAM Records © AAM011 (60' • DDD • T/D)



The *Solemnal Mass* of Jan Ladislav Dussek (1760-1812) appears to have been composed

for the name day in 1811 of the euphoniously monickered Princess Maria Josepha Hermenegilde Esterházy (née Liechtenstein). She it was who was entertained annually by Haydn's six late Masses, as well as by later such works by the likes of Hummel and Beethoven (his Mass in C), despite her husband's lack of interest in music much beyond simple march tunes. Dussek is best known now via his teaching pieces for piano, although he was a versatile and wide-ranging composer, popular in his day and accompanied by a whiff of scandal that saw him criss-cross the continent, covering an area from St Petersburg to London as he fled revolution, bankruptcy, accusations of