

Francisco Courcelle Masses For Celebration

Orchestra of New Spain
Grover Wilkins, conductor
Dorian90903
www.dorian.com

....Under the direction of Grover Wilkins, the Orchestra of New Spain is composed of forty musicians, instrumentalists and singers, specializing in Baroque music as well as ideal exponents of the dramatic music of the 18th century. The stability of the Orchestra's membership brings to the repertory an unusual sensitivity to its original purpose and the expression thereof.

....There is a pleasurable relentless quality to Courcelle's choral music, an insistent forward momentum that grabs the listener and barely lets up for the entire length of a piece. Courcelle imparts to these masses an effortless grandeur without resorting to pomp and circumstance. The instrumental and vocal textures are varied and effective, and the composer sets up a compelling dialogue between the soloists and larger choral forces. Wilkins and his orchestra deliver a sound that's full-bodied yet perceptive to detail, and they immerse themselves fully in the excitement of the music. This is a wonderful recording—thrilling music and captivately performed.

Berna Can, Early Music America, April 2010

Grover Wilkins, who wrote the composer's entry for the current New Grove, has been unearthing the forgotten music of Courcelle and his contemporaries in Spain for 20 years. A decade ago, he recorded a sampling of the music for the Spanish Radio/TV label, a program of a Mass, a Matins responsory, and two works by contemporaries. About the same time, he included two Matins responsories on a Dorian recording of Courcelle's contemporaries. The two masses heard here, dating from 1750 and 1763 respectively, are fine examples of the Classic style heard in Haydn's early works. The Gloria and Credo are divided into contrasting movements with none of the textual compression that was briefly observed in Vienna. The two works are characterized as based on hymn tunes, but "Exsultabunt sancti in gloria" is not actually a hymn (only a gradual and an offertory exist on that text).

Wilkins, who works in Dallas and Madrid, recorded both masses at a concert in Dallas after 16 months of concerts focused on Courcelle. The singers and players are expert, making a very impressive sound for the 40-member ensemble. Except for the applause at the end of each Mass, there is no hint of the audience. After Wilkins's two previous recordings and a recent Glossa disc that includes one of his works, this is the most impressive example of Courcelle's music that we have. It is worth noting that, while the familiar texts of the Mass are omitted (no loss), the printed notes are ample and need not be downloaded from the label's Web site. This is highly recommended.

FANFARE: J. F. Weber www.arkivmusic.com

....As in so many religious works of the time the influence of the opera is clearly noticeable, in particular in the solo sections. A striking example is 'Quoniam tu solus sanctus' from the Gloria of the Missa Exultabunt sancti in Gloria. In addition to the solo sections there are duets, trios and quartets, and some tutti sections also contain short passages for solo voices.

These are live performances of a concert in Dallas in Texas, USA. As a consequence there are some technical imperfections, but by and large these performances are pretty good. Choir and orchestra are doing a fine job, and the soloists are mostly good as well.....This is definitely a very interesting and musically compelling disc of a composer who fully deserves attention. This recording has made me curious about other music by Courcelle. Hopefully we will hear more from his oeuvre in the future.

www.hbdirect.com