

## CHAMBER CHOIRS

What comprises a Vocal Ensemble rather than a Chamber Choir or what I term a Larger Choir is much less certain. Many of the large or chamber choirs will reduce the numbers of singers when the music demands. Similarly the Vocal Ensembles will expand – for instance male voice ensembles with guest sopranos.

### 1. THE TALLIS SCHOLARS.

Peter Phillips gave the first concert of the Scholars in 1973 in Merton College, Oxford and since then they have become the most famous of the many fine English choirs, bringing the delights of Renaissance Polyphony to audiences around the world. Their performances of Allegri's Miserere are legendary – their early recording from 1980 – with Alison Stamp in the stratosphere was a best seller – and Deborah Roberts has sung the top line on more than 300 occasions and, in good Sistine Chapel style, has added her own filligree roulades over the years. Other than 2 rare visits to the Orthodox repertoire, they stick to Renaissance music – as Phillips says there is so much which remains to be discovered. Certainly their recordings of such composers as John Browne, Cipriano de Rore, Cornyshe, Alonso Lobo and other “lesser names” have been thrillingly revelatory. They were the first choir to set up their own record label, Gimel. Their recording of a Mass by Josquin won the Gramophone Record of the Year Award in 1987, the first early music record to do so and they are currently involved in a series of 9 programmes of Josquin's Masses.

My CD choice. RENAISSANCE GIANTS – CDGIM207 and a DVD “PLAYING ELIZABETH'S TUNE” telling the story of William Byrd – GIMDP901

### 2. THE SIXTEEN.

Harry Christophers' The Sixteen have in some ways followed a similar path to the Tallis Scholars – they too began in Oxford, in 1979, and a number of singers are members of both groups. They have a much wider repertoire however and there are few a cappella choral masterpieces which they have not recorded – their Benjamin Britten albums for instance are unsurpassed. A number of series stand out – for Hyperion the 10 CD box of the music of pre-reformation England, Taverner Sheppard, etc. is outstanding, and the Eton Choirbook set blew me away when it was released. For the last 15 years they have brought programmes of the finest choral music around to some of the finest Cathedrals in the UK under the title “A Choral Pilgrimage” – I've caught them in Exeter Cathedral, Greyfriars Kirk in Edinburgh and in St Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin in 2013. and they've made a number of excellent programmes for BBC Four introduced by Simon Russell-Beale which have also been released as DVDs on their own record label, Coro.

My CD choice – THE ETON CHOIRBOOK – CORO 16040.

*The Sixteen will perform Monteverdi's 1610 Vespers in St Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin on October 10th 2015. I'm sure this will be a musical highlight of the year*

### 3. VOX LUMINIS

The Gramophone “Record of the Year” in 2012 was of Funeral Music by Heinrich Schutz - hardly a populist choice, but, loving his music as I do, I was thrilled. The performers were a Belgian Group Vox Luminis and when I heard it I realised why it had won. It was one of those rare occasions when I played a new CD right through - twice. I knew the music well, but it was as though I was listening for the first time - a perfect balance of intensity and control, deep seriousness and sense of bereavement, yet, with the Venetian influence of his youth, music shot through with the joy of a soul entering Heaven. Since then the Ensemble has also recorded a similar English programme - equally moving - Purcell's Funeral Music for Queen Mary.

My CD choice – SCHUTZ - RICERCAR - RIC311

#### **4. THE GABRIELI CONSORT.**

Like many conductors who make their name with early music, Paul McCreesh has "moved forward". He has conducted Brahms' Deutsches Requiem in Dublin and recorded, on his new "Winged Lion" label, an imprint of Signum records, a mammoth Berlioz Requiem. His contribution to Early Music has been considerable and his series of liturgical reconstructions absolutely fascinating - from Spain with Victoria and Morales, the Salzburg of Biber, the Leipzig of Bach and of course Venice. The Gabrieli had a long association with Deutsche Grammophon Archiv - including the best Bach St. Matthew Passion - but the super-budget Brilliant have re-issued a 5 CD box of their Venetian music. (this label is worth checking out for a number of top choirs). "Music for the Duke of Lerma" is a wonderful programme of Spanish Renaissance music, both choral, from Victoria and Guerrero and instrumental - and lots of plainchant. My CD choice - MUSIC FOR THE DUKE OF LERMA - DGARCHIV - 471694-2

#### **5. STILE ANTICO**

I can't remember a new young group of singers arriving on the scene to such 5 star acclaim. They started as members of Trinity College Chapel Choir, the finest mixed choir in Cambridge and their 5 programmes for Harmonia Mundi and concerts worldwide have shot them to the top. They are conductorless, include 3 sisters and are renowned for their high level of rehearsal - (unlike some groups whose sight-reading ability means that concerts sometime get hardly more than a quick run through!) I heard them in Dundalk some years ago and they were very impressive in every way. They also present imaginative and unusual programmes. My CD choice - MUSIC FOR COMPLINE - HARMONIA MUNDI - HMU807419.

#### **6. CHANTICLEER.**

Chanticleer are the American male voice choir to beat all-comers - I've heard them described as the King's Singers times 3 - with lower basses, adult male sopranos, one of them bald! They toured Ireland in 2009 and even hardened choral singers came reeling out of their concerts not believing what they had heard. John Tavener's Lamentations and Praises, written for them is a tour de force. (See also Plainchant list) My CD choice - Tavener - Teldec - 0927413422

#### **7. CANTUS KOLN.**

As regular Gloria listeners will know I have a particular love for the soundworld out of which grew Johann Sebastian Bach and no-one performs the music of Schutz and Buxtehude and other 17<sup>th</sup> century German composers as well as the Cologne based group under lutenist, Konrad Junghanel. Their recordings of early Bach Cantatas are superb - I do wish they would make more! My CD choice - BACH ACTUS TRAGICUS - HARMONIA MUNDI - HMC901694.

#### **8. CONCERTO ITALIANO.**

Rinaldo Alessandrini is the leader of the Italian early music movement, both as a harpsichordist and director of Concerto Italiano. Their main contribution has been to the world of the Italian Madrigal, of the astonishing 8 books of Monteverdi in particular - but the group have also produced some fine sacred music too - a splendid 1610 Vespers, and, celebrating their Italianate flavour, a first class set of Bach's Brandenburgs! My CD choice - PER LA VERGINE MARIA - NAÏVE OP30505

#### **9. THE CARDINAL'S MUSICK.**

**Andrew Carwood is one of the finest tenors around – I have never heard a better Bach Evangelist. He hit the choral headlines in 2007 when he was made Director of Music at St. Paul's Cathedral, the first non-organist to get such a top job since medieval times. He certainly knows the music as it were from the inside! His wonderful group of singers gave fantastic concerts in Kilkenny in 2009 and again in 2015 and their complete William Byrd series, first on ASV completed on Hyperion are wonderful. Their recent albums have continued at the highest level – of music by Guerrero, Robert Parsons, Allegri and an ongoing complete series of Tallis. My CD choice – Fayrfax – ASV GAUDEAMUS – CDGAU160**

#### **10. CURRENDE**

**We know Belgian Paul van Nevel from his Las Huelas Ensemble – see Top Ten Vocal Ensembles His nephew Erik directs Currende another very fine ensemble of singers and instrumentalists. I have them to thank for the most wonderful concert of my life – Monteverdi's 1610 Vespers in North Cathedral in Cork as part of the East Cork Early Music Festival in 2005. I was delighted that they are now recording on one of the best Early Music labels, Accent and can recommend anything by them. My CD choice - BUXTEHUDE - IN TE DOMINE SPERAVI - ACCENT ACC24184**