

LARGE CHOIRS.

Here is my Top Ten large choirs which have given me much pleasure over the years and are frequent visitor to Gloria.

1. POLYPHONY.

Stephen Layton's choir has produced many excellent programmes on Hyperion with superb balance and intonation their hallmark. James MacMillan, John Tavener, John Rutter, Eric Whitacre and Morten Lauridsen have all benefited from Layton's thoughtful reading and they've recorded a great Messiah. Many will remember their concert imaginatively bringing together the music of Arvo Part and Francis Poulenc in the RTE Living Music Festival in Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin in 2008, in the presence of Arvo Part.
MY CHOICE HYPERION – HANDEL MESSIAH – CDA67800

2. ESTONIAN PHILHARMONIC CHAMBER CHOIR.

It's not just in the music of Baltic composers that this choir shines – their Mozart on the brilliant German Carus label under Tonu Kaljuste is as good as any. Paul Hillier's time with the EPCO with Harmonia Mundi was very fruitful but it was Kaljuste who conducted them on their Irish tour in 2007 – their cycle of Part's Penitential Psalms "Pokajanen" in the Pro-Cathedral was breathtaking – the bass line especially. You will find their recording of Rachmaninov's Vespers on my Desert Island List.
MY CHOICE HARMONIA MUNDI – AN ORTHODOX CHRISTMAS HMX2927410.

3. RIAS KAMMERCHOR.

This is a superb choir, based in Berlin and, mainly on the Harmonia Mundi label they have brought us many fine recordings of music from Baroque, Classical, Romantic and especially contemporary eras under the finest choral conductors – Rene Jacobs, Hans-Christoph Rademann, Uwe Gronostay, Marcus Creed, and their current director, Daniel Reuss. They are a perfect example of how a large choir can sing with considerable power without much vibrato. C.P.E. Bach's Magnificat is wonderful - with one of Germany's finest period ensembles - Akademie fur Alte Musik, Berlin. You will find their recording of Poulenc on my Desert Island List.
MY CHOICE HARMONIA MUNDI – CPE BACH – MAGNIFICAT – HMC902167

4. ACCENTUS.

The French Naïve label is full of lovely recordings and Laurence Equilbey's choir Accentus, founded in 1991, is a major attraction to the label. French choral music is fully represented (though not from the baroque era). Their 2 CDs – and a DVD - of choral transcriptions are particularly fine.
MY CHOICE NAÏVE – TRANSCRIPTIONS – V5151

5. EX CATHEDRA.

The most frequently performed works on Gloria by Jeffrey Skidmore's Birmingham based choir are taken from 3 unique programmes of baroque music from the New World on Hyperion. They brought such a programme to the Kilkenny Arts Festival in 2005 - it was a most beautiful experience. They have also recorded lovely CDs of music by Gabrieli, Lassus, Vivaldi and from the French Baroque – and a fine Bach St. Matthew Passion.
MY CHOICE HYPERION – FIRE BURNING IN SNOW – CDA67600

6. MONTEVERDI CHOIR.

John Eliot Gardiner's Monteverdi Choir has long held a top position among UK choirs. Their Bach recordings are among the very best – first on Deutsche Grammophon's early music imprint, Archiv, and subsequently on their own label SDG. Their Bach Cantata recordings from the amazing "Pilgrimage", performing all of Bach's Cantatas around the world in 2000, the 250th anniversary of his death, was a towering achievement. Since the end of this cycle SDG have produced a fine recording of the works of Sebastian's cousin Johann Christian and a new St. John Passion.
MY CHOICE SDG – BACH CHRISTMAS CANTATAS – 2CDs – SDG174

7. NETHERLANDS CHAMBER CHOIR.

It was small Dutch label, Globe, which introduced me to a number of first class recordings by this superb choir, both of the core choral repertoire and also some more unusual fare, a mass by Paul Hindemith, music by Martinu, Kodaly, Distler, Milhaud and Penderecki. Their early music, Bach motets, Andrea Gabrieli etc. are excellent too – and of course the early Dutch master Sweelinck.

MY CHOICE GLOBE – A.GABRIELI – GLO5210

8. COLLEGIUM VOCALE.

Philippe Herreweghe has been one of the leading choral conductors for many years. He founded Collegium Vocale while still a medical student in Ghent over 40 years ago, then Ensemble Vocal Europeen – I don't know how they failed to get on to the top 10 list of smaller choirs! – and then Paris based L'Orchestre de Champs Elysees and the choir La Chapelle Royale. Any of their recordings on Harmonia Mundi from Josquin to Kurt Weill may be warmly recommended – and in the last couple of years they have their own record label – Phi whose first issues, Bach Motets, Victoria Requiem, Brahms have been excellent.

MY CHOICE HARMONIA MUNDI – MOZART – CMINOR MASS – HMC901393

9. TENEBRAE.

Tenebrae on Signum guarantee musical excellence – and some interesting contemporary choral Repertoire. Signum is a small UK independent label which punches far above its weight – it has The King's Singers and other fine choirs and the recordings by Tenebrae (directed by ex-King's Singer Nigel Short) are wonderful.

MY CHOICE SIGNUM – SONGS OF FAREWELL – SIGCD267

In December 2015 Signum issued "Invisible Stars" an excellent CD by the UCD Choral Scholars under Desmond Earley.

10. LES ARTS FLORISSANTS.

I think even French music lovers will agree that American William Christie single-handedly breathed new light into the music of the French baroque. The delightful sounds of Charpentier, Couperin, Lully and Rameau and a host of lesser names first came to our ears through recordings by his Ensemble, Les Arts Florissants. He has also been responsible for introducing many new young singers to the world stage. Like so many such directors, he has moved forward and his readings of Mozart have received much acclaim. In 2015 the lucky Kilkenny Arts Festival audience in St. Canice's heard Les Arts' first foray into the music of Bach - what an honour - and what a joy - many were saying this was the finest Bach concert they had ever heard. Bach Florissant ! Roll on the inevitable recordings - and please return soon.

MY CHOICE LES ARTS FLORISSANTS – HARMONIA MUNDI – CHARPENTIER – TE DEUM – HMG501298.