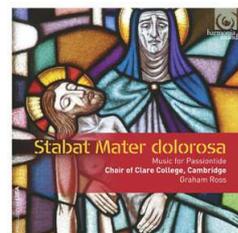


CD Review Sheet

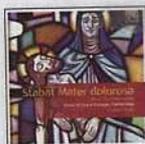
Choir of Clare College, Cambridge

Stabat Mater dolorosa: Music for Passiontide



Stabat Mater dolorosa: Music for Passiontide

Harmonia Mundi HMU907616
Choir of Clare College, Cambridge
Graham Ross | director



STABAT MATER DOLOROSA

Music for Passiontide: works by Victoria, Tallis, Lassus, Stainer, Gesualdo et al

Choir of Clare College, Cambridge / Graham Ross

Harmonia Mundi HMU 907616 75:46 mins
BBC Music Direct £15.99

The style of singing here is intimately attuned to the time of year these pieces are intended for – that of Christ's suffering and death – and what the words are saying. In Victoria's 'O vos omnes', for instance, there's a collective sense that the Clare College singers have fully internalised the text's meaning. The swell of empathetic feeling on 'sicut dolor meus' ('like to my sorrow') seems experienced from within, the hushed closing chord numbed yet glowingly blended, more than just a clever dynamic gesture.

In the Lassus motet *Tristis est anima mea* the emotions are more externalised, the soaring, vibrato-free soprano line suggesting the kind of beauty which ineluctably brings a palpable edge of sadness with it. The choir's men also contribute strongly: I specially enjoyed the sinuously expressive phrasing of the tenors in Byrd's *Ave verum corpus*, where the basic tempo is subtly tweaked to telling effect by Graham Ross.

I'm not sure how comfortably selections such as Stainer's primly Victorian *God so loved the world*, or the protracted soberness of John Sanders's *The Reproaches*, sit beside these searching earlier masterpieces. It's true, too, that the relative narrowness of the disc's emotional spectrum means consuming it in one sitting is probably inadvisable. Dipped into selectively, though, it is full of highly sentient, technically excellent performances, and is atmospherically recorded. *Terry Blain*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

"Carefully chosen, elegantly sequenced and excellently sung: one of the most attractive new Easter recordings of the year."

Andrew McGregor, BBC Radio 3 CD Review



"A great seasonal Easter release. It's hard to imagine these performances better done."

David Mellor (Connoisseurs' Choice)



"[The] choristers reflect the exceptional quality of Cambridge collegiate choral singing, arguably finer today than ever... [Graham Ross] never allows naked enthusiasm to undermine ensemble precision and immaculate intonation, cultivating instead a harmonious balance between music-making for the head and powerful expression for the heart."

★★★★ Andrew Stewart



"Warm yet pure-toned emotion pours from these 27 voices, and a fine corps of basses grounds the whole with exemplary gravitas."



"Special mention must be made of two world premiere recordings of pieces by the choir's director Graham Ross, 'Ut tecum lugeam' and the spectacular 'Precor te, Domine'. The chanting and singing, a cappella throughout, is superb and the acoustic standard excellent."

★★★★★ Stephen Whitehead, Cross Rhythms Direct

"Richly moving music ... affecting performances by one of Cambridge University's best chapel choirs. Highly recommended to all library collections."

Rick Anderson, CD HotList

"You would hardly believe that the choir is still young in its present form...they have come on in leaps and bounds and sound fully professional."

Brian Wilson, MusicWeb International

"I find it hard to believe that the music has ever been better sung than in this searing performance by the Clare choir, which I found very moving... This is an outstanding disc. For one thing, it's a triumph of thoughtful and imaginative programme planning. The singing of the Clare College choir is superb from start to finish. The blend and tuning are immaculate, as is the control, and these young singers sing with finesse and commitment."

John Quinn, MusicWeb International

"Ross draws fine performances from his young singers, who seem entirely at home in the wide variety of repertoire here. The disc focusses on Passiontide, these highly satisfying performances warrant playing at any time of the year"

★★★★, Robert Huguill, Planet Huguill

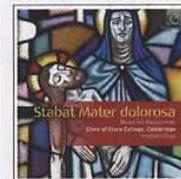
GRAMOPHONE

THE CLASSICAL MUSIC MAGAZINE

'Stabat mater dolorosa'

'Music for Passiontide'

Anonymous Stabat mater (plainchant) JS Bach St John Passion, BWV245 – Er nahm alles wohl in acht Bruckner Christus factus est Byrd Ave verum corpus. Ne irascaris Duruflé Ubi caritas et amor Gesualdo Caligaverunt oculi mei Lassus Tristis est anima mea Lotti Crucifixus a B G Ross Precor te, Domine. Ut tecum lugeam Sanders The Reproaches Stainer God so loved the world Tallis In ieiunio et fletu. Salvator mundi | Victoria O vos omnes Choir of Clare College, Cambridge / Graham Ross Harmonia Mundi © HMU90 7616 (00' • DDD)



Clare College Choir's recording of music for Passiontide, interspersed with the plainchant *Stabat mater dolorosa* text, is not only a collection of some of the most beautiful choral music to be heard but

exciting evidence of the evolving and unique identity of the choir itself. In Victoria's *O vos omnes* in particular the *crescendos* can be all-consuming, the perfect arch of the music more than making up in musical integrity what it might very slightly lack in absolute precision of consonants and consistency of tone. It bears all the hallmarks – as do all the works on this disc – of a piece that has been extensively and intelligently crafted, which is not as prevalent a practice in the performance of this repertoire as it might always be.

It is not to be ignored that this is a very young choir – the lightness of the bass-line is particularly apparent in John Sanders's beautifully intricate and rarely performed responsorial *The Reproaches*, which presents walls of sound that need an even spread all the way through the parts. But although the balance is a little thrown by that inequality – which inevitably creates an undesirable top-heaviness in the texture – it is mitigated by a smoothly robust alto line that supports the sound and runs through the texture (as it does in plenty of other places on this disc) as a strengthening and supporting thread. And besides, these are only tiny critical observations to make of this disc: highlighting them serves simply to illustrate its accomplishment. The singing and, above all, direction are of such consummate musicianship that those small perceived imperfections barely matter at all. *Caroline Gill*