



The English Orpheus reviews

Jonathan Freeman-Atwood, Gramophone Magazine, August 2017

“A considered exposé of Purcell’s still woefully under-exposed genius is always welcome, especially one as varied and intelligent as Andrew Arthur’s, with his aptly named ensemble, Orpheus Britannicus, supporting his young mixed Choir of Trinity Hall, Cambridge. The lingua franca here for Arthur is the composer’s church music – although Gallic influence is mere surface finery compared to Purcell’s extraordinarily expressive and indigenous canvas – with a representative selection of anthems and canticles neatly offset against stylishly delivered instrumental contributions.

Making the most of Purcell’s deeply elegant music requires a particular sensitivity to linear shape, lyrical articulation and clarity of texture, not least in order to draw upon the pungency of the harmonic language. Arthur finds a remarkably atmospheric palette throughout, evident from the sprightly opening strains of O sing unto the Lord to the colourful and noble projections of the Te Deum, a grandiloquent conceit which translated easily from the panegyrics of William and Mary to influence Handel’s Georgian fare.

Alongside these pleasingly idiomatic features, the correlation between solo verses, string interludes and the full group in these pieces makes for a profoundly consequential experience, each section organically emerging from the last. Arthur never forces the pace or engages in quick-win mannerisms. The Bell Anthem is a case in point, where its lightly cascading opening (an almost Newtonian musical metaphor) sets the scene with an easy nonchalance, gradually injected with its delicious blend of inward reflection and balletic fervour. The solo singing is not always super-refined and ‘placed’ but rarely fails in its good judgement and affecting imagery.

Of the other pieces, relish Arthur’s own playing of the mesmerising Voluntary and the bittersweet pearls of the great G minor Chacony. Jehova, quam multi sunt, that most exquisite creation by a teenager, is afforded just the right balance between abstract wonder and rhetorical purpose. With this kind of expert control and youthful responsiveness, the poignancy of the music should penetrate the hardest of hearts. The recorded sound is outstanding.”

Organists’ Review, November 2017

“What a glorious CD. I was riveted from the first bar. There is no attempt to gild the lily. Andrew Arthur allows the music to speak for itself, which it does most eloquently. Ensemble is paramount. Solos are provided ‘in choir’ with no ego. Do buy this wonderful disc, and enjoy the relaxed freshness from these consummate musicians. In closing I must mention Sebastian Gillot whose exquisitely sensitive harpsichord playing is sans pareil!”