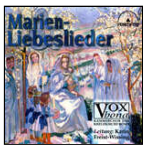
# Vox Bona




## Songs to the Virgin Mary and Lovesongs

John Farmer | John Wilbye | John Bennet | Robert Parsons | Johannes Brahms | Robert Schumann | Hugo Distler | Heinrich Poos | Arvo Pärt

CD aud 20.024

**Osnabrücker Zeitung 08.12.1997 (Susanne Brandt-Köhn - 08.12.1997)**

[...] die CD [öffnet] einen Zugang zu Maria und belebt warm und sinnlich protestantische Nüchternheit.

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# Es ist ein Ros' entsprungen – Choir and Organ Christmas Music

Michael Praetorius | Heinrich Kaminski | Wolfgang Seifen | Jan Sandström | Max Reger | Morten Lauridsen | Johannes Brahms | Hugo Distler | Arnolt Schlick | Johann Sebastian Bach

SACD aud 92.565

**www.musicweb-international.com November 2009 (Dan Morgan - 18.11.2009)**

According to Audite the idea behind this collection is to create 'a link between the 16th and 21st centuries'; this it certainly does, encompassing music from the likes of Michael Praetorius and Morten Lauridsen. But, despite the unifying use of the 16th-century carol Es ist ein Ros' entsprungen - prosaically rendered as 'A twig sprang forth' or, more poetically, as 'Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming' - I did wonder how comfortable these disparate elements would be on the same disc. Also, I couldn't see the logic of pairing a cappella works and organ improvisations of the same pieces; and, as the Vox Bona choir and organist Stefan Horz are both associated with Bonn's Kreuzkirche, why are the organ and choral contributions split between two different venues with very different acoustics?

Enough cavilling, what about the music? The German composer Michael Praetorius is credited with the first proper setting of Es ist ein Ros' entsprungen in his Musae Sionae of 1609. The choir sing with astonishing clarity and focus right across the range, but there's not much sense of a church acoustic here. With nary a pause we are plunged into Horz's organ improvisation, which sounds rather bland compared with those of formidable French improvisers such as Marcel Dupré and Thierry Escaich. Traffic noises - always a problem when recording in public buildings - are very audible in the quieter, more sustained passages.

The 19th-century carol Maria durch ein Dornwald ging ('Mary walked amid the thorns') is sung here in a setting by Heinrich Kaminski, whose professorship at the Prussian Academy of Arts in Berlin in the 1930s was cut short by revelations of his Jewish ancestry. Now this sounds more like a church acoustic, with a greater sense of space and a pleasing 'ring' to the voices. Again, Horz's contribution cuts in too soon, but this time it's much more engaging than his earlier effort. Indeed, the music 'flowers' rather beautifully in the organ's higher registers, with warm, sustained pedals below.

The contemporary German composer and organist Wolfgang Seifen's setting of Die Nacht ist vorgedrungen ('The night is nearly over') also has unhappy connections with the Third Reich; the original carol was penned by Jochen Klepper in 1937, just five years before Nazi persecution drove him and his family to commit suicide. It's not a carol I know, so texts and translations would have been very useful here. That said, I soon found them via Google, and what a moving, albeit rather sombre, view of our redemption from 'guilt and pain'. Vox Bona sing it with a passion and feeling I've not heard thus far, Karin Freist-Wissing coaxing beautiful, well-blended sounds from her choir. Not uplifting in the traditional sense, perhaps, but for all that Seifen finds a dark radiance here that is utterly compelling. After music of such sustained intensity Horz's Messiaen-like improvisation could only be a let-down - and it is.

Moving north to Sweden, we have Gloria, Jan Sandström's hymn to the Mother of God. It's a multi-faceted work, with ethereal solos rising from the body of the choir and the singers dividing to create antiphonal effects. In feeling it reminds me of Knut Nystedt's Salve Regina, surely one of the most beautiful Marian settings around. This is first-rate singing, varied, virtuosic and, above all, deeply felt. The mood is spoilt by

a rather tremulous start to Max Reger's Ave Maria. A hymn to Mary it may be, but that's not enough to warrant the latter's proximity - cheek by jowl, as it were - to the light and lovely Gloria. Poor programming? Yes, I'm inclined to think so.

At least the American composer Morten Lauridsen doesn't disappoint, his light-filled, awe-struck O Magnum Mysterium sung with great poise - and surprising inwardness - by Vox Bona. Those long, melismatic lines - which in themselves connect with a more distant devotional past - are superbly managed. High loveliness and proof, if it were needed, that this choir deserve a disc all to themselves. Brahms's take on Es ist ein Ros' entsprungen sustains the devotional mood rather better than Reger's Ave Maria, and for once I found myself engaging more fully with Horz's organ playing. As for Hugo Distler's variations on the same carol, from his Weihnachtsgeschichte, they are refreshing direct in style and execution. Add to that beautiful solos from alto Charlotte Quadt and you have a piece that really does capture the warmth and wonder of Christmas.

**www.SA-CD.net November 16, 2009 (John Miller - 16.11.2009)**

I'm usually averse to Christmas discs, but this one has a uniquely attractive...

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**Der neue Merker 29. Jahrgang - Nr. 47 (Michael Karrass - 25.11.2009)**

Der lauten, geschäftigen Außenseite des Weihnachtsfestes stellt der Chor Vox...

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**Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung Samstag, 12. Dezember 2009 Nr. 291 (Lars von der Gönna - 12.12.2009)**

Das ist die CD für alle, deren Weihnacht nicht zwischen Schneespray und...

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**RBB Kulturradio Donnerstag, 17. Dezember um 13.30 Uhr (Bernhard Morbach - 17.12.2000)**

**"Es ist ein Ros' entsprungen"**

*Chor- und Orgelmusik zu Weihnachten*

An den großen englischen Colleges und Kathedralen, Heimstätte der traditionsreichen Knabenchöre, ist es ein altehrwürdiger Brauch, im Gottesdienst an Heiligabend alte und neue Weihnachtslieder sowie traditionelle Weihnachtslieder in alten und neuen Sätzen mit Orgelkompositionen und -improvisationen zu verbinden.

Die positive oder negative Reaktion eines "kontinentalen" Hörers ist schlicht von dessen musikalischer

Sozialisation abhängig. Hier gilt das schlichte Prinzip: "Geschmackssache", das auch im Fall der vorliegenden CD als einzig legitimes intersubjektives Beurteilungskriterium anerkannt werden kann. Aber eines ist gewiss objektivierbar: nämlich die hohe künstlerische Qualität des Chores, seiner Leiterin und des Organisten (inkl. des Instruments).

Die Auswahl der Kompositionen vom 16. bis 21. Jahrhundert orientiert sich an kompositorischer Substanz und ist geschmackvoll getroffen, wobei die jeweiligen Kontraste nie allzu schroff oder gar bizarr wirken. Vielmehr betonen sie sogar die stilistische Individualität der Stücke. Hier ist auf beeindruckende Weise der Versuch gelungen, Älteres und Neueres, welches in unserer Musikkultur in der Regel ein isoliertes Dasein fristet, nicht nur zu verbinden, sondern geradezu miteinander zu versöhnen.

**Glaube + Heimat - Mitteldeutsche Kirchenzeitung Nr. 51/52 vom 20. Dezember Weihnachten (Michael Klein - 20.12.2009)**

Chor- und Orgelmusik: Schon die Beachtung skandinavischer Chorkomponisten der...

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**ouverture Das Klassik-Blog Samstag, 5. Dezember (reagenz - 05.12.2009)**

Diese Super Audio CD widmen Karin Freist-Wissing, Leiterin der Chor- und...

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**Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 23. Dezember 2009 (Christiane Tewinkel - 23.12.2009)**

**Singe, wem Gesang gegeben**

Singe, wem Gesang gegeben

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**Online Musik Magazin Dezember 2009 (Stefan Schmöe - 01.12.2009)**

**Verinnerlichte Weihnachtsmusik**

Verinnerlichte Weihnachtsmusik

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**Gramophone December 2010 (Fabrice Fitch - 01.12.2010)**

GRAMOPHONE
THE WORLD'S BEST CLASSICAL MUSIC REVIEWS

**A festive feast**

*Bach! The Herald Angels Sing*

Few countries have shaped the experience of Christmas more decisively than Germany and, with one exception, the remainder of these discs are from German labels and ensembles. A highly enjoyable and off-the-beaten-track pair comes from the label Audite, whose releases are commonly issued in Super Audio format. The all-organ recital by Johannes Strobl on the great organ of the Abbey of Muri consists of music by l8th- and 19th-century South German, Austrian and Bohemian composers of whom I'd never heard. These preludes, pastorellas, pifas and the like, undemanding and undemonstrative as they are, make for instructive listening: the common emphasis on rocking cradle rhythms is a sufficient programme in itself. And let's be honest: no century has, more than the 18th, been confined to such a restricted pantheon of composing figures. It makes a change from Bach ... on which, however, more presently. The second disc, "Es ist ein Ros' entsprungen", fearures the organist Stefan Horz and the vocal ensemble Vox Bona in a wide-ranging programme centred on the famous tune. The choral items, composed in an accessible, modern style, are a mixed bag, but as an enterprising move away from the same old Christmas programming both discs together give a positive, coherent impression of the label's aims.

# Moon - Night - Dream

Johannes Brahms | Robert Schumann | Benjamin Britten | Harald Genzmer | Hugo Wolf | Joseph Gabriel Rheinberger

CD aud 97.483

**klassik.com 28.04.2003 (Erik Daumann - 28.04.2003)**
**Quelle: http://magazin.klassik.com/reviews/revie...**

**Multae Voces Bonae**

Multae Voces Bonae

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**Musikmarkt 06/03 ( - 03.02.2003)**

Das Wechselspiel zwischen Tag und Nacht hat schon immer Reiz auf die Menschen...

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**American Record Guide 4/2003 (Lindsay Koob - 01.07.2003)**

Vox Bona, the chamber choir of the Kreuzkirche Bonn, offers us here a lovely and reflective a cappella theme collection of mostly late-romantic German pieces about the moods and mysteries of the night.

As the rather philosophically-toned notes point out, nighttime for most of us means protection and threat at the same time; it is "the place of demonic powers as well as the stronghold of comfort and security". Small wonder that night has fired the creative impulses of artists of all kinds. German poets and musicians--particularly in the romantic period--have left us especially sensitive and lovely evocations of the cycle of daily darkness. Some of the best of these are heard here, most of them for normal mixed chorus.

Three fine pieces from Max Reger, all in the style of German folk music, begin the program. 'The Moon has Risen', his second piece, is a drawn-out prayer, asking for peaceful repose and rest from the world's troubles. It is the first of several pieces here to draw parallels between nighttime and the "long night" of death. The most memorable of Brahms's four choral gems here are the two intense 'Night Vigil' songs, setting poetry by Ruckert. These offer stark contrast to his folk-flavored 'Furtively the Moon Rises'. Robert Schumann's single selection, 'Uncertain Light', for double chorus, impulsively explores the common romantic theme of the driven wanderer, stumbling resolutely through the night in pursuit of a distant and mysterious flicker of light. Hugo Wolf's lush and gentle Eichendorff setting, 'Resignation', is a particular treat; and Josef Rheinberger's imploring 'Evening Song' is a happy discovery.

More complex sonic moods and effects are heard in the three pieces by Harald Genzmer (b.1909). The most arresting of them is the Latin-hued 'Black Moon', with softly insistent men's voices spinning out a subtle dance rhythm beneath the women's sensual singing. Only two non-German composers are included. Kodaly's ecstatic 'Evening' speaks of nocturnal joy and peace in striking harmonic language. Perhaps the most disturbing offering of the lot is Britten's 'Long Night', from his eight Sacred and Profane pieces--a piece of bitter resignation.

The wonderful singers of Vox Bona produce the kind of clean, clear, yet robust singing often heard from German ensembles. Their sonorities are consistently pleasing, save for a few slightly shrill-sounding passages from the sopranos at the top of their volume and range. Otherwise, their sense of smooth ensemble and subtle emotional intensity makes this nocturnal music a real joy to hear.

Notes and texts are impeccable, and the English translation is quite elegant. Sound is vividly detailed and transparent. This is deep, thought-provoking, and mostly very beautiful material.



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