



Georg Muffat: Missa in labore requies & Church Sonatas by Bertali, Schmelzer & Biber

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Gramophone (Lindsay Kemp - 2016.09.01)

GRAMOPHONE

Lucky Johannes Strobl! Director of music at the drippingly Baroque Abbey Church of Muri in Switzerland, with its two historic organs either side of altar, he has the resources to hone the spatial and tonal niceties of the Austrian polychoral repertoire currently best known to us today from works such as Biber's 53-part Missa Salisburgensis. Georg Muffat, a colleague of Biber's at Salzburg Cathedral from 1678 to 1690, is familiar mainly for his instrumental music but one sacred composition of his survives: the Missa in labore requies for five groupings of voices and instruments including trumpets, drums, cornetts, sackbuts, organs and strings.

This is not its first recording but it is surely the most effective, as much as anything for its skilful use of the building; voices and instruments really do seem to come at you in waves from all directions—some from a distance, some from closer to—but regulated with such care that, rather than seeming like a dinning battle of the choirs, it is all satisfyingly of a piece. In short, this is a smoothly impressive performance of a beautifully crafted work, gentler than Biber and numbering among its highlights an impressive build-up in the 'Cum Sancto Spiritu' with sparingly used trumpet bursts, a glowing setting of 'Et homo factus' and, most striking of all, momentary muted trumpets and drum at 'passus et sepultus est'.

The Mass lasts 46 minutes and the disc is filled out with sonatas by some of Muffat's Austrian contemporaries. Bertali's are big and colourful, a pair of Biber string sonatas deliciously light and springy, and Schmelzer delights with an unusual line-up of trumpets, trombones and high cornettini.

If you already like this kind of Habsburg Baroque, this is a disc you'll be wanting. If you've yet to fall for it, this could be the one to seduce you.