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IGOR STRAVINSKY

Monumentum; Mass; Choral-Variationen (on "Vom Himmel hoch"); Symphony of Psalms
Collegium Vocale Gent
Royal Flemish Philharmonic

Philippe Herreweghe

PentaTone- 5186 349(SACD)

Reference Recording - Symphony: Ancerl (Supraphon)

Artistic Quality **9/9** *Sound Quality*

This is an excellent, imaginative coupling of familiar and unfamiliar works united in being either religious in inspiration, or consisting of imaginative reworkings of earlier music--Gesualdo in the case of Monumentum, Bach in the Chorale-Variations. Philippe Herreweghe's performances are crisp and sharply etched: Stravinsky surely would have approved. In the Symphony of Psalms the swift tempos, smallish chorus, and ideal balances between voices and instruments are hard to beat. In the second movement, at figure 12 after the first large choral exordium, there is a still moment for the lower strings and solo trombone (with the fugue theme) that is heart-stoppingly beautiful. You may miss the richness and power of Ancerl's choir, but of its type this version is terrific.

The other pieces are all smaller in scale and so questions of sheer numbers don't arrive. The brief Mass for voices and winds is really wonderfully sung. In the Chorale-Variations the instrumental lines truly dance around the choir's intonation of the chorale theme. Monumentum, oddly, sounds remarkably like Stravinsky in its characterful juxtapositions of timbre. Throughout the sonics are extremely natural in all formats. Whether you're filling a gap in your Stravinsky repertoire, or just looking for top-notch new performances of any of these pieces, this release deserves strong consideration.

--David Hurwitz

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