

Lassus

Ad Dominum cum tribularer. Ego cognovi. Nectar et ambrosiam. Prolongati sunt dies mei. Quam bonus Israel Deus. Deficiat in dolore vita mea. Qui timet Deum. Respicit Dominus vias hominis. Timor Domini principium sapientiae. Vidi calumnias quae sub sole gerentur. Beatus homo. Cantabant canticum Moysi. Diligam te, Domine. Recordare, Jesu pie

Collegium Vocale, Ghent / Philippe Herreweghe
Harmonia Mundi © HMC90 1984 (54' • DDD • T/t)

A release that somehow fails to engage despite moments of great beauty



Philippe Herreweghe has few peers as a Lassus specialist: he is responsible for one of the finest Lassus recordings, a searing reading of his swansong, the *Lagrime di San Pietro*, also for Harmonia Mundi. The *Cantiones Sacrae* also date from 1594, the year of Lassus's death, so there was every reason to expect something exceptional here. And while these are secure performances, they somehow fail to communicate the sense of interiority typical of late Lassus. This may be a matter of programming: the selections chosen are nearly all sombre and pithy, and it's nearly unthinkable that Lassus would have expected to have so many performed at a single hearing, as modern concerts and recordings encourage us to do.

The publication includes some lighter pieces, of which it may have been worth including a few for the sake of variety. But even then, the ensemble seems to miss the music's lighter moments, as when Lassus portrays those who "die without instruction" (in *Respicit Dominus*) with repeated consecutive fifths, thus breaking the first rule of counterpoint: an "in-joke", to be sure, but effective none the less. So these readings lack the mercurial touch that comes so naturally to Lassus, and intonation and rhythmic ensemble are often below the standard one expects from a group of this calibre. But there are moments of great beauty, for all that; the last track, *Recordare, Jesu pie*, is a pendant to the motet that concludes the *Lagrime*, and has the same quality of distanced expression of pain: very moving. **Fabrice Fitch**