

Editorial Reviews

Monday, August 01, 2011 by Craig Zeichner

With the motet [Johann Sebastian Bach](#) returned to one of the oldest forms of sacred choral music. Bach wrote six motets, but by the time he penned the most famous of the set, *Jesu meine Freude*, the form was already out of fashion. It's one of the delicious musical ironies that these old-styled pieces have enjoyed an unbroken performance history to the present day at Bach's Thomaskirche in Leipzig. With women singing the soprano and alto parts and the discreet use of instruments, what we hear on this recording is not the way Bach heard the motets. On the other hand, Bach probably never heard the motets performed with the note-perfect precision and beauty that Collegium Vocale Gent and its director, [Philippe Herreweghe](#) bring to these performances.

Bach took a catholic approach to the motets, some are scored for four and five voices while others are for double choir. Herreweghe's approach is also broad, particularly in his use of instruments. With the support of strings, oboes and bassoon the double choir motets *Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied* and *Der Geist hilft unser Schwachheit* play like full-blown cantata movements. Herreweghe opts for a darker and richer instrumental palette in *Fürchte dich nicht* by adding cornetto and trombones. We've come a long way from the time when the motets were performed a cappella or with simple organ accompaniment.

Collegium Vocale Gent is superb. The twisting contrapuntal lines that are at the heart of so much of this music sing out clearly and beautifully. This is particularly evident in the complex fugue at the center of *Jesu meine Freude*. There are also solo opportunities and it's here that Collegium Vocale Gent's roster of early music stars raise things to a higher plane. Soprano Dorothee Mields, countertenor Robin Blaze and basses Peter Kooij and Stephan MacLeod all make fine contributions in the solo passages. Choir, instrumentalists and conductor are in perfect sync making this one of the best collections of Bach motets currently available.