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Power and feeling in Amsterdam with Collegium Vocale Gent

★★★★☆

By Rosemary Carlton-Willis, 03 December 2013

Under the direction of Philip Herreweghe, acclaimed chamber choir Collegium Vocale Gent joined forces with period instrument ensemble Concerto Palatino for a concert which combined formal elegance and raw, piercing beauty. Selections from Schütz' *Psalmen Davids* (1619) formed the bulk of the concert, thoughtfully programmed alongside works by Schütz's teacher Gabrieli and colleague Praetorius. This vivid, colourful programme allowed the

Reviewed at Concertgebouw: Main Hall, Amsterdam on 1 December 2013

PROGRAMME

Schütz, *Psalmen Davids: Der Herr sprach zu meinem Herren, SWV 22*

Schütz, *Psalmen Davids: Warum toben die Heiden, SWV 23*

beautiful, clear voices of the choristers to be heard at their disciplined best.



Collegium Vocale Gent Choir and Orchestra

© Richard Termine

The works in question, all composed between 1590 and 1620, displayed the polychoral style of the Venetian school, where choir, vocal soloists and instruments are divided into separate groups that sing in alternation with each other, sometimes using a call-and-response style, sometimes echo effects, and sometimes a complex multi-layering of sound and text, in which instruments and voices imitate or contrast with one another. The style also utilises clear contrasts between short sections within a larger formal architecture. This grand formal coherence was mirrored in the programme order itself, in which each half of the concert followed a strict pattern of psalms alternated with instrumental selections, each culminating in a different setting of the *Magnificat*.

The audience was thus situated at the heart of an ordered structure which was systematically built up around us. Fred Luiten, organiser of the series of early music concerts of which this was a part, pointed out that this kind of music is, in the Netherlands, usually performed in churches, and that it was something of an experiment to perform it in the Concertgebouw, but appropriate, since the Concertgebouw was itself a temple to music. In this concert the music itself became the intangible temple, creating a sonic architecture in which the audience could experience the reordering of

Schütz, *Psalmen Davids: Ach Herr, straf mich nicht in deinem Zorn*, SWV 24

Schütz, *Psalmen Davids: Aus der Tiefe ruf ich, Herr, zu dir*, SWV 25

Schütz, *Psalmen Davids: Ich hebe meine Augen auf zu den Bergen*, SWV 31

Praetorius, *Polyhymnia caduceatrix: Meine Seele erhebt den Herren*

Schütz, *Psalmen Davids: Ich freu mich des, das mir geredt ist*, SWV 26

Schütz, *Psalmen Davids: Der Herr ist mein Hirt*, SWV 33

Schütz, *Psalmen Davids: An den Wassern zu Babel*, SWV 37

Schütz, *Psalmen Davids: Ist nicht Ephraim mein teurer Sohn*, SWV 40

Schütz, *Psalmen Davids: Die mit Tränen sößen*, SWV 42

Schütz, *Psalmen Davids: Wohl dem, der den Herren fürchtet*, SWV 44

Schütz, *Deutsches Magnificat*, SWV 494 (*Meine Seele erhebt den Herren*)

PERFORMERS

Collegium Vocale Gent

Concerto Palatino

Philippe Herreweghe, *Conductor*

Hana Blazikova, *Soprano*

Dorothee Mields, *Soprano*

Damien Guillon, *Countertenor*

Thomas Hobbs, *Tenor*

Peter Kooij, *Bass*

Stephan MacLeod, *Bass*

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Goerne and Eschenbach lull a miller to his death at Carnegie Hall

David Allen, 6th March

Risks bring rewards as Matthias Goerne and Christoph Eschenbach present *Die schöne Müllerin* at Carnegie Hall.

★★★★★

our own mental state through sound and praise. The only disadvantage of the Concertgebouw for this style of music was the fact that the ensembles could not be placed around the audience, but had to remain on stage at the front. In the 16th and 17th centuries, much of this style of music was written for churches where the groups of singers and instrument could be strategically placed in galleries around the building, with the audience or congregation really in the centre of the sound.

Concerto Palatino, led by cornettist Bruce Dickey and trombonist Charles Toet, provided a versatile ensemble of cornetti, period trombones and violins and continuo group, including both theorbo and archlute. The stark sound of the historic brass instruments was gloriously valiant and bright, and the agility of the cornetti was outstanding. The violins and cornetti matched one another in extremes of flexibility and dynamic control, with some breathtaking pianissimo *fioriture*.

In Gabrieli's instrumental *Canzon VI à 7* (1615) the trombones achieved a remarkably delicate, refined sound. In the second Gabrieli piece, *Canzon Duodecimi Toni à 10* from his *Sacrae Symphoniae* (1597), the trombones and cornetti engaged in lovely passages of exchange and imitation, with some precise and imaginative divisions, and outstanding trills. The dominance of the cornetti in this delightfully Christmassy piece made for a warmer, sweeter timbre and transparent overall texture, through which one could really hear and enjoy the soft chamber organ as an equal contributor.

The choir adapted splendidly to singing in an unequal temperament, making the most of the wide semitones and relishing the powerful dissonances. Among the fine vocal soloists, the soprano Dorothee Miels was outstanding, with a cleanly shining tone and very sensitive use of vocal colour. Praetorius' *Magnificat* (1619) offered some lovely moments, with Miels echoed by a lone member of the choir, who sang from a further corner of the stage in a graceful echo effect.

The two quartets of soloists gave a fresh and crisp account of the syllabic delivery of text in "Ach Herr, straff mich nicht in deinem Zorn" (SWV 24) and "An den Wassern zu Babel" (SWV 37). The continuo section in SWV 37 offered some very fine playing, with the sensitive use of vibrato as an ornament, and the arpeggiated chords of the archlute came through beautifully. The magical lyrical chromaticism of the

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Nagano tackles three "monstres sacrés" in Montréal

Richard Turp, 5th March

A substantial musical menu of works by Wagner, Liszt and Berlioz, the poster boys of 19th century Romanticism, along with a world première, presented by l'Orchestre symphonique de Montréal, Marc-André Hamelin and Kent Nagano.

★★★★☆

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Pierrot Lunaire à Kings Place

Elodie Olson-Coons, 6th March

Cette année, King's Place célèbre le 140ème anniversaire de la naissance de Arnold Schoenberg, compositeur autrichien surtout connu pour s'être distancé de la tonalité classique et avoir développé le dodécaphonisme.

★★★★☆

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A warm and exuberant Mozart extravaganza from the Bach Choir and Orchestra of the Netherlands

Rosemary Carlton-Willis, 5th March

Pieter Jan Leusink and the Bach Choir and Orchestra of the Netherlands give an exuberant and warm-hearted performance of Mozart's *Coronation Mass* and *Requiem*.

★★★★☆

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Herreweghe, Philippe

Collegium Vocale Gent

Hobbs, Thomas

Miels, Dorothee

Blazikova, Hana

Kooij, Peter

Guillon, Damien

MacLeod, Stephan

Praetorius, Michael

opening phrases of “Wie lieblich sind deine Wohnungen” (SWV 29) was hauntingly sung by the choir. The soloists lingered sensuously on the tasty dissonances in “Lobe den Herren, meine Seele” (SWV 39), while the choir sang the refrain of “Lobe den Herren” with joyous rhythmic drive and precision.

Philip Herreweghe’s direction was taut and economical, allowing the music always to speak for itself. Both in concept and execution this concert combined uncompromising adherence to formal clarity with constant awareness of the underlying emotional richness of the music. The result was a performance with power, grace and feeling.

Schütz, Heinrich
