

Profoundly Spiritual Performance by Collegium Vocale Gent



United Kingdom **Edinburgh International Festival 2014 (8)** – Lassus, *Lagrima di San Pietro*:
Collegium Vocale Gent, Philippe Herreweghe (conductor), Greyfriars Kirk, Edinburgh, 12.8.2014 (SRT)



The *Tears of St Peter* is a beautifully crafted cycle of 21 motets, wherein a mournful St Peter looks back, at the end of his life, at his denial of Christ. They derive their power from their concentrated intensity (the motets are broadly the same length and have a broadly similar structure) but, in the hands of the Collegium Vocale Gent, there is never any danger of them becoming dull. Instead, Herreweghe's singers spin an ineffably beautiful web of sound that does more than anything I've heard in a long time to put the listener in touch with the divine.

I wasn't really prepared for how spellbinding I'd find this performance but, for [the second time in 24 hours](#), sitting in the resonant acoustic of Greyfriars Kirk, time seemed to stand still as these expert musicians seemed to lead us out of time and into a profoundly beautiful spiritual place. It struck me that Greyfriars is a peculiarly appropriate place for these early evening concerts of spiritual music, a place set apart from the hurly-burly of everyday life, but also somewhere distinct from a concert hall and its commercial imperatives. Maybe it's my imagination, but I think that a space like this, be it for Lassus or for [Messiaen](#), gives this music room to soar in an entirely different and uniquely spiritual way. (However, I did wonder a couple of times what the Protestant reformers, who built this church in 1620, would have thought at an arch-Catholic work of the Counter-Reformation being performed in their sanctuary!)

CV Gent don't go in for ethereal perfection, like [Harry Christophers' Sixteen](#). They have a more carefully shaded colour than the crystalline Sixteen. Their tone is a shade more earthy, grounded in a rich, syrupy tone that makes them that touch more earthbound than Christophers' singers. However, that brings them closer to our experience and allows us to empathise with the content of their singing all the more. Still, they yield to no-one in the precision and clarity of their singing, and the togetherness of their sound is a wonder to hear. Herreweghe directs them with clarity and mellifluous continuity, still pointing up the occasional moment that needs special colour, such as the element of bass dissonance at the moment in the eighteenth motet which talks about a "daunting challenge." This was a wonderful evening; one which I wish I could relive again.

The Edinburgh International Festival runs until Sunday 31st August in venues across the city. For full details [click here](#).

Simon Thompson