

CHORAL & SONG

Sir John Eliot Gardiner shows his range conducting Bach and Stravinsky; Mark Padmore gives a powerful push to Thomas Larcher; plus Matthias Goerne presents a thoughtful Schubert recital

BBC MUSIC CHORAL & SONG CHOICE

Colourful and arresting

George Pratt admires Voces8's persuasive and committed Purcell



THE SPICE OF VARIETY:
Voces8 finds arresting colours and expression



PURCELL • MORLEY

Purcell: O God, Thou Art my God; Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem; How Happy the Lover; Cold Song; My Heart is Inditing; Bid the Virtues; Hail! Bright Cecilia; Strike the Viol; Fairest Isle; Full Fathom Five, etc. **Morley:** Second Dirge Anthem
Voces8; Les Inventiones
Signum Classics SIGCD375 70:18 mins
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This 'perambulation', as the liner described it, could hardly fail: eight beautifully integrated solo voices and the stylish strings, oboes, recorders and continuo of Les Inventiones cherry-pick 14 pieces from the best of Purcell. The selection, if fairly

predictable, ranges from the large-scale – the anthem *My Heart is Inditing*, rich in dissonant 'English' cadences and spine-tingling wrong-note harmonies – to the 'Cold Song' from *King Arthur*, bass and strings shivering with vibrato on stuttering repeated notes. A more sophisticated wit characterises the final 'Alleluia' of

The ground bass recurs hypnotically beneath unfolding variations

Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem, opening in a weighty 3/4 time and gradually morphing into a lively 6/8 as it dances to its final cadence.

Two numbers from *Birthday Odes* include Purcell's favourite device, the ground bass, recurring hypnotically while unimaginable variations unfold above. 'Strike the viol' (*Come ye Sons of Art*) is a staggering

demonstration of how much variety can be supported by a four-note bass repeated for four minutes on end. The lesser-known 'By Beauteous Softness' from a birthday *Ode for Queen Mary*, includes a haunting countertenor solo again above a 'ground', but now the vocal phrasing wilfully ignores the regular seven-bar repeated bass. But every number here has something particularly arresting within it, all supported by persuasive and committed singing, and playing of intense charm. Recorded sound, though stereo only, envelops the performers in the spacious warming acoustic of a French church.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★



ON THE WEBSITE

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JS BACH

Easter Oratorio; Actus tragicus
Hannah Morrison (soprano), Meg Bragle (alto), Nicholas Mulroy (tenor), Peter Harvey (bass); Monteverdi Choir; English Baroque Soloists/John Eliot Gardiner
Soli Deo Gloria SDG 719 60:15 mins
Available arkivmusic.com/bbcmusic

With the release last year of the Ascension cantatas and Oratorio, John Eliot Gardiner plugged the gap in the recorded legacy of his Millennium cantata pilgrimage. But the Bach choral adventure continues. Death and Resurrection colonise a programme artfully contrasting the exquisite chamber music inventiveness of *Actus Tragicus* with the full-on three trumpets refulgence of the *Easter Oratorio* – performed here not in its final incarnation but in the version completed in 1746.

For all the Pascal jubilation of the Oratorio, it's the simple, unaffected solace of *Actus Tragicus*, however, that steals the show. With only pairs of coalescing recorders, mournful violas da gamba and continuo, Bach creates an opening Sonatina of such tender resignation that the first chorus almost sounds like a finger-wagging admonition, even though Gardiner slims his choral forces from the 23 voices of the Oratorio down to a dozen. His tempos are beautifully interrelated so that everything leads to (and from) the central pause that consigns the mystery of death to utter silence; and the textures are invested with a lightness that evokes the hushed stillness of the death chamber. It's quite a wrench as the final guttering two-note instrumental 'Amen' yields to the Oratorio whose choruses showcase the Monteverdi Choir's much-prized ebullience.

Floating on a lovely grainy accompaniment, a lullaby perhaps remembering *Actus Tragicus*, 'Sanft soll mein Todeskummer', is sung

