The BACH Collection

"Superlative, demonstrating all The Sixteen's familiar virtues."

BBC MUSIC MAGAZINE

The HANDEL Collection

"Overall, this disc ranks as The Sixteen's most exciting achievement in its impressive Handel discography."

GRAMOPHONE on Coronation Anthems

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Bach, Handel and Vivaldi: surely the three greatest composers of the baroque era and without doubt the most versatile. On this album we get a glimpse of their very different and contrasting approaches to sacred music: the Catholic effervescence of Vivaldi, the majesty and dramatic perspicacity of Handel and the indisputable Lutheran genius of Bach.

There can be few more popular sacred works than Vivaldi’s *Gloria*, sparking, simple, yet very effective. Exquisite solo writing abounds, be it the pastoral nature of *Domine Deus* with its tenderly beautiful oboe obligato or the energetic strings excitedly accompanying *Qui sedes*. All this is far removed from the complexity of Bach’s *Lutheran Mass*. However, just as Vivaldi has adapted part of his *Gloria* from another Italian composer’s work, Bach plagiarises himself. He transforms the opening chorus of *Cantata 79* from a joyous ceremonial processional with triumphant horns and insistent drum to a graceful, almost madrigalian, *Gloria*; horns are transferred onto the upper voices with a delicacy and precision that simply accentuates Bach’s genius. Whilst Vivaldi evokes sheer beauty and simplicity in his aria *Domine Deus* with that tender oboe solo in conversation with the soprano, Bach treats us to a highly ornamental *Quoniam* where oboe and tenor create a dialogue of word painting in abundance.

Not to be outdone, Handel also plagiarised not only other composers’ works but, like Bach, his own as well. Much of his oratorio *Esther* is borrowed from his earlier works, but the *Grand Chorus* which closes *Esther* is something of a rarity. First and foremost, it is one of the longest choruses Handel ever wrote, coming in at close on ten minutes in length; in actual fact, it is not so much a chorus but a verse-anthem of rejoicing conceived on the grandest scale possible.

Three composers, three highly individual voices, all of whom call on the versatility and emotional diversity of their performers. What a wonderful legacy the Baroque era has left for us to enjoy and revel in today.
One might well wonder why Bach, a composer whose life and work aligned him so closely with the Lutheran church, should have written settings of the Latin Mass. Yet the Lutheran liturgy did allow for the use of the Mass, even if customarily it was only the Kyrie and Gloria sections that would receive settings for voices and instruments. Bach composed five of these 'Lutheran Masses' during the 1730s, one of which later formed the first half of his great full-length Mass in B minor. 'Composed' may not be the most appropriate word, however, for almost all the individual numbers in these Masses are adaptations of movements from Bach's own church cantatas. As Kantor of St Thomas's in Leipzig from 1723, he produced at least three annual cycles of German-language cantatas for Sunday services, but with many of them related to specific (and often obscure) occasions in the church calendar, recycling and revising choice movements into more universal vessels such as the Mass must have seemed a good way of extending their longevity. The Mass in G major adapts music from four cantatas composed between 1723 and 1726, starting with a serious fugal Kyrie and a joyful Gloria brilliantly re-imagined from a movement in which the willowy opening lines for sopranos and altos were originally written for horns. Three contrasted solo numbers follow, and the work ends with a joyful chorus for which Bach supplied a brief but imposing new introductory section.

Although it was as a composer of Italian opera that Handel first arrived in London in 1710, a brief period in 1718-19 as resident composer to the Duke of Chandos at his country house at Cannons, near Edgware, became a significant step on his subsequent
route to English oratorio, for it was there that he first experimented with dramatic music in English. *Esther* is the second of two ‘masques’ he composed at Cannons (the first was *Acis and Galatea*) and sets an anonymous text in which the bravery of the eponymous Jewess, married to the Persian king, prevents a massacre of her people. The Overture is for the most part a somewhat subdued scene-setter, though it strikes an ultimate note of optimism that is vindicated in the work’s final chorus, ‘The Lord our enemy has slain’, cast in the form of a massive celebratory anthem.

We think of Vivaldi primarily as a composer of instrumental music, but in fact he was hardly less active as a composer for the voice. True, his 20-or-so surviving operas (at least 20 more have been lost) have only begun to be heard again in recent years, but his sacred output has long been better known, with one work in particular securing a place among the most popular of all Baroque choral compositions. The well-known *Gloria*, like many of his sacred works, probably dates from the period after 1713 when Vivaldi was temporarily in charge of vocal music at the Ospedale della Pietà, the Venetian foundling hospital famed for its all-female choir and orchestra which employed him as its violin teacher and maestro de’ concerti. Strangely, Vivaldi set his choruses out in the normal four-part scoring for sopranos, alto, tenors and basses, which leaves us to ponder how they could have been sung by an all-female choir. Whatever the answer is to that, Vivaldi either intentionally or unintentionally left open the possibility of performance by a standard choir — the way, indeed, in which these works are usually presented today.

The *Gloria* is in twelve sections, beginning with what has become one of the most familiar passages of Baroque sacred music: stamping orchestral octaves and ‘Gloria in excelsis Deo’ joyfully declaimed by the choir. This is followed by an appropriately contrasted, gently throbbing but harmonically teased-out ‘Et in terra pax’, and then nine more delightfully varied movements, among them the light-footed ‘Laudamus te’ for two sopranos, the sweetly lilting soprano-oboe duet for ‘Domine Deus, rex coelestis’ (a fine example of Vivaldi’s deceptively artless elegance), a moving slow aria for mezzo-soprano dialoguing with solo cello and chanting chorus at ‘Domine Deus, Agnus Dei’, and a cleverly filleted reprise of the opening music at ‘Quoniam tu solus sanctus’. The work closes, unexpectedly for Vivaldi, with a fugue. In fact, while the composer showed himself on a number of occasions well able to write fugues, he was happy here to borrow one from a *Gloria* by his fellow Venetian, Giovanni Maria Ruggieri. Whether out of laziness or simply acknowledgement of his own imagined limitations, he certainly chose well.
TEXTS & TRANSLATIONS

Johann Sebastian BACH (1685-1750)
Mass in G major (BWV 236)

1 Kyrie chorus

Kyrie eleison.
Christe eleison.
Kyrie eleison.

Lord, have mercy upon us.
Christ, have mercy upon us.
Lord, have mercy upon us.

2 Gloria chorus

Gloria in excelsis Deo,
et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.
Laudamus te, benedicimus te,
adoramus te, glorificamus te.

Glory to God in the highest.
And on earth peace to men of good will.
We praise you, we bless you,
we worship you, we glorify you.

3 Gratias aria: Eamonn Dougan bass

Gratias agimus tibi
propter magnam gloriam tuam.
Domine Deus, Rex coelestis,
Deus Pater omnipotens.
Domine Fili unigenite Jesu Christe.

We give you thanks
for your great glory,
Lord God, heavenly King,
almighty God and Father.
Only-begotten Son, Lord Jesus Christ.

4 Domine Deus duet: Grace Davidson soprano, William Purefoy alto

Domine Deus, Agnus Dei, Filius Patris,
qui tollis peccata mundi,
miserere nobis.
Qui tollis peccata mundi,
suscipe deprecationem nostram.
Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris,
miserere nobis.

Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
who takes away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us.
You who takes away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer.
You who sits at the right hand of the Father,
have mercy on us.

5 Quoniam aria: Jeremy Budd tenor

Quoniam tu solus sanctus,
tu solus Dominus,
tu solus altissimus
Jesu Christe.

For you alone are the holy one,
You alone are the Lord,
You alone are the most high
Jesus Christ.

6 Cum Sancto Spiritu chorus

Cum Sancto Spiritu
in gloria Dei Patris, amen.

With the Holy Spirit
in the glory of God the Father, Amen.
George Frideric HANDEL (1685-1759)

Esther (HWV 50, 1718 version)

Overture: Andante and Larghetto

Grand Chorus: The Lord our enemy has slain

The Lord our enemy has slain,
Ye sons of Jacob, sing a cheerful strain!
The worship of our God is free!
The Lord our enemy has slain,
Ye sons of Jacob, sing a cheerful strain!
For ever blessed be thy holy name,
Let heav’n and earth his praise proclaim.

aria: Michael Chance alto
Let Israel songs of joy repeat,
Sound all ye tongues Jehovah’s praise.
He plucks the mighty from his seat,
And cuts off half his days.

chorus
For ever blessed be thy holy name,
Let heav’n and earth his praise proclaim.

duet: (Esther): Lynda Russell soprano
(Mordecai): Mark Padmore tenor
The Lord his people shall restore,
And we in Salem shall adore.

chorus
Et in terra pax hominibus
bonae voluntatis.

Overture:

Antonio VIVALDI (1678-1741)

Gloria in D (RV 589)

Gloria in excelsis Deo chorus
Gloria in excelsis Deo,
Glory to God in the highest,

Et in terra pax hominibus chorus
And on earth peace
goodwill to men.

Laudamus te duet: Lynda Russell, Gillian Fisher soprano
Laudamus te,
benedicimus te,
adoramus te,
glorificamus te.

We praise you,
we bless you,
we worship you,
we glorify you.

Gratias agimus tibi chorus
Gratias agimus tibi
We give you thanks
13 Propter magnam gloriam tuam  

Propter magnam gloriam tuam.  
For your great glory.

14 Domine Deus  

aria: Lynda Russell soprano  

Domine Deus, Rex coelestis,  
Deus Pater omnipotens.  

Lord God, heavenly King,  
almighty God and Father.

15 Domine Fili unigenite  

chorus  

Domine Fili unigenite,  
Jesu Christe.  

Only-begotten Son,  
Lord Jesus Christ.

16 Domine Deus, Agnus Dei  

aria and chorus: Alison Browner alto  

Domine Deus,  
Agnus Dei,  
Filius Patris,  
qui tollis peccata mundi,  
miserere nobis.  

Lord God,  
Lamb of God,  
Son of the Father,  
who takes away the sins of the world,  
have mercy upon us.

17 Qui tollis peccata mundi  

chorus  

Qui tollis peccata mundi,  
Suscie deprecationem nostram.  

You who takes away the sins of the world,  
receive our prayer.

18 Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris  

aria: Alison Browner alto  

Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris,  
miserere nobis.  

You who sits at the right hand of the Father,  
have mercy on us.

19 Quoniam tu solus sanctus  

chorus  

Quoniam tu solus sanctus,  
tu solus Dominus,  
tu solus aliiissimus  
Jesu Christe,  

For you alone are the holy one,  
you alone are the Lord,  
you alone are the most high,  
Jesus Christ,

20 Cum Sancto Spiritu  

chorus  

Cum Sancto Spiritu  
in gloria Dei Patris.  
Amen.  

With the Holy Spirit,  
in the glory of God the Father.  
Amen.
The Sixteen

Soprano: Grace Davidson, Julia Doyle
Alto: Robin Blaze, William Purefoy
Tenor: Jeremy Budd, Mark Dobell
Bass: Ben Davies, Eamonn Dougan

Flute: Christine Garratt, Rachel Helliwell
Oboe: Hannah McLaughlin, Catherine Latham
Bassoon: Sally Jackson, Zoë Shevlin*
Horn: Anneke Scott, Joseph Walters
Timpani: Charles Fullbrook
Organ: Ian Watson
Theorbo: David Miller

* Track 4 only

Recording Producer: Mark Brown
Recording Engineer: Mike Hatch (Floating Earth)
Recorded at: St Augustine's Church, Kilburn, London, 20-24 May 2013

Soloists: Alto: Michael Chance · Esther: Lynda Russell · Mordecai: Mark Padmore
Bass I: Robert Evans · Bass II: Simon Birchall

The Sixteen

Soprano: Fiona Clarke, Libby Crabtree, Sally Dunkley, Helen Groves, Carys Lane, Rebecca Outram
Alto: Andrew Giles, Michael Lees, Philip Newton, Christopher Royall
Tenor: Simon Berridge, Philip Cave, David Roy, Matthew Vine
Bass: Simon Birchall, Robert Evans, Timothy Jones, Francis Steele

Violin I: David Woodcock (Leader), Walter Reiter, James Ellis, Kirsten Linder, Claire Sansom
Violin II: William Thorp, Peter Fender, Stefanie Heichelheim, Pauline Smith
Viola: Nicholas Logie, David Brooker
Cello: Susan Sheppard, Imogen Seth-Smith
Bass: Peter Buckoke
Oboe: Anthony Robson
Bassoon: Sally Jackson, Noel Rainbird
Horn: Roger Montgomery, Martin Lawrence
Trumpet: Crispian Steele-Perkins
Harpsichord: Ian Watson
Organ: Laurence Cummings
Theorbo: Robin Jeffrey
Triple Harp: Jan Walters

Recording Producer: Mark Brown
Recording Engineer: Mike Hatch (Floating Earth)
Recorded at: St Jude's on the Hill, Hampstead Garden Suburb, London, 18-22 May 1995
Re-released on CORO in 2004
Harry Christophers stands among today's great champions of choral music. In partnership with The Sixteen, the ensemble he founded almost 40 years ago, he has set benchmark standards for the performance of everything from late medieval polyphony to important new works by contemporary composers. His international influence is supported by more than 150 recordings and has been enhanced by his work as Artistic Director of Boston's Handel and Haydn Society and as guest conductor worldwide.

The Sixteen's sound world, rich in tonal variety and expressive nuance, reflects Christophers' determination to create a vibrant choral instrument from the blend of adult professional singers. Under his leadership The Sixteen has established its annual Choral Pilgrimage to cathedrals, churches and other UK venues, created the Sacred Music series for BBC television, and developed an acclaimed period-instrument orchestra. Highlights of their recent work include an Artist Residency at Wigmore Hall, a large-scale tour of Monteverdi's Vespers of 1610, and the world premiere of James MacMillan's Stabat mater; their future projects, meanwhile, comprise a new series devoted to Purcell and an ongoing survey of Handel's dramatic oratorios.

Harry has served as Artistic Director of the Handel and Haydn Society since 2008. He was also appointed as Principal Guest Conductor of the City of Granada Orchestra in 2008 and has worked as guest conductor with, among others, the London Symphony Orchestra, the BBC Philharmonic, the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra and the Deutsches Kammerphilharmonie. Christophers' extensive commitment to opera has embraced productions for English National Opera and Lisbon Opera and work with the Granada, Buxton and Grange Park festivals.
He was appointed a CBE in the Queen’s 2012 Birthday Honours for his services to music. He is an Honorary Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, as well as the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, and has Honorary Doctorates in Music from the Universities of Leicester and Canterbury Christ Church.

Whether performing a simple medieval hymn or expressing the complex musical and emotional language of a contemporary choral composition, The Sixteen does so with qualities common to all great ensembles. Tonal warmth, rhythmic precision and immaculate intonation are clearly essential to the mix. But it is the courage and intensity with which The Sixteen makes music that speak above all to so many people.

The Sixteen gave its first concert in 1979 under the direction of Founder and Conductor Harry Christophers CBE. Their pioneering work since has made a profound impact on the performance of choral music and attracted a large new audience, not least as ‘The Voices of Classic FM’ and through BBC television’s Sacred Music series.

The voices and period-instrument players of The Sixteen are at home in over five centuries of music, a breadth reflected in their annual Choral Pilgrimage to Britain’s great cathedrals and sacred spaces, regular appearances at the world’s leading concert halls, and award-winning recordings for The Sixteen’s CORO and other labels.

Recent highlights include the world premiere of James MacMillan’s Stabat mater, commissioned for The Sixteen by the Genesis Foundation, an ambitious ongoing series of Handel oratorios, and a debut tour of China.

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