

*Beloved's Am* (or at least the opening section) sounds more like John Tavener than the Tavener work included here, *Take Him, Earth, for Cherishing!*

Performances throughout are outstanding, the BBC Singers showing their customary ability to jump any stylistic or technical hurdle, under the sure direction of Stephen Cleobury, and with sterling contributions from organist Stephen Disley. This is a fascinating collection that should be investigated by anyone interested in the British choral tradition. **Ivan Moody**

### The Hours Begin to Sing New CD/SACD

**Bolcom** Cabaret Songs<sup>d</sup> – Song of Black Max; Can't sleep; At the last lousy moments of love; Angels are the highest form of virtue; George. **Corigliano** Three Irish Folksong Settings<sup>b</sup>. **D. Garner** Vilna Poems<sup>abcd</sup>. **Getty** Four Emily Dickinson Songs<sup>d</sup>. **Heggie** From the Book of Nightmares<sup>acd</sup>. **L. P. Woolf** Rumi: Quatrains of Love<sup>acd</sup>.

**Lisa Delan** (soprano) with <sup>a</sup>**Maxim Rubtsov** (flute); <sup>b</sup>**David Krakauer** (clarinet); <sup>c</sup>**Matt Haimovitz** (cello); <sup>d</sup>**Kristin Pankonin** (piano). **PentaTone Classics PTC5186 459** (full price, 1 hour 19 minutes). English/Yiddish texts and English translations included. *Website* www.pentatonemusic.com **D** *Producer* Job Maarse. *Engineer* Roger de Schot. *Date* September 2012.

It's always a pleasure to find *IRR* quoted in a CD booklet, and all the more in this case since I can't do better than Nigel Simeone when he wrote in the June 2009 issue that Lisa Delan is a singer 'with an unusually versatile voice, ranging from rich operatic tones to Broadway belt'. Here she is, with a distinguished team of instrumentalist friends, in a recital of contemporary American vocal works, most of which were composed for her and for this collection. All the sung texts appear in the booklet, translated into English where necessary, along with an introduction to each work by its composer

A child's nightmare is the subject of Jake Heggie's short cycle. Not every composer would have found Galway Kinnell's poetry suited to musical setting, and you might not have grasped that the cycle is a 'tender meditation about our brief, impermanent time on the planet' had the composer not told us so in the booklet. The musical language can be challenging, though there are sweeter sounds in the last song, a kind of lullaby as the child returns to bed. The instrumental postlude immediately loses touch with tonality once more, suggesting that there will be more nightmares to come.

Avrom Sutzkever was a Lithuanian poet who endured two years in the Jewish ghetto in Vilnius. His poems, written in Yiddish, are sombre, though the subject matter ranges widely. There is defiance there, and no self-pity. This mood has been skilfully re-created

by David Garner in *Vilna Poems*, and the imaginative writing for the instrumental trio is a major part of this. David Krakauer's characteristic clarinet playing is particularly brilliant. Less compelling, I think, are the flute arabesques and harmonic underpinnings that accompany the voice in John Corigliano's *Three Irish Folksong Settings*. Delan's singing, too, seems rather too artful, though folk songs in any real sense they are not.

This is the first music I have heard by Gordon Getty, famous for another reason, and the impression is favourable. Emily Dickinson's verse is sparing with words and the subject matter narrow. Getty's equally sparing music proves an effective vehicle, with the old-fashioned virtue of aiming to complement or enhance the meaning. It is a brave composer indeed who decides to take on Copland by setting *Because I could not stop for death*. Getty refers to the 'clip-clop of the hearse carriage', and indeed the early part of the poet's journey 'toward eternity' is jaunty and sounds like fun. The setting makes more sense as it progresses, and the short piano postlude is highly effective.

*Rumi: Quatrains of Love* is made up of ten short settings, none exceeding two minutes, of texts by the thirteenth-century Persian poet Rumi. The cycle explores differing aspects of love, including its 'dangerous' side – loss of identity and freedom'. Death – the end of love – rears its ugly head towards the end. If you respond to ideas such as 'I wasn't conscious day or night. / I thought I knew who I was, but I was you' then you might respond more favourably than I to Luna Pearl Woolf's settings. The opening quatrain is sung into the open piano so that the strings resonate, not a new idea, not ineffective, but it hardly seems to 'grow' out of the text. Much of the work is successful: the setting of the words quoted above, for example, is both appropriate and beautiful. Later, though, when Delan successfully 'kills' her tone for the quatrain that begins 'When I die, lay out my corpse', she cannot transform the music into anything more than a fairly predictable response to the words. The work is expertly written for the forces here and superbly performed by all concerned.

Many cabaret songs feature in William Bolcom's catalogue, and, as one might expect, the five recorded here inhabit quite a different world from the rest of the programme. A female organ-grinder, a woman cruelly betrayed, Messiaen, Puccini and a murdered, transvestite singer all feature in Arnold Weinstein's texts, and Bolcom has conjured up music that fits like a glove. Like the best songs of this type, they are funny, serious and even horrific, sometimes simultaneously. The high note at the end of the last song brings the house down, and I'll risk the wrath of the superb musicians on this disc by saying that it is in this work, of the six, that Delan sounds most at home. **William Hedley**

### Libera nos

#### The Cry of the Oppressed.

**Byrd** Civitas sancti tui. Infelix ego. Miserere mei Deus. Plorans ploravit. Quomodo cantabimus?. **Cardoso** Sitivit anima mea. **Cristo** Inter vestibulum. Lachrimans sitivit anima mea. **Monte** Super flumina Babylonis. **Peerson** Laboravi in gemitu meo. **Tallis** In jejuniis et fletu. Libera nos. Salvator mundi.

#### Contrapunctus/Owen Rees.

**Signum Classics SIGCD338** (full price, 1 hour 10 minutes). Latin texts and English translations included. *Website* www.signumrecords.com **D** *Producer* Adrian Peacock. *Engineer* Dave Hinit. *Dates* November 26th-28th, 2012.

Owen Rees's credentials as musicologist and conductor of, in particular, Iberian and English polyphony with the Cambridge Taverner Choir and A Capella Portuguesa are well established. This is the first time I have heard his more recently founded group, Contrapunctus: the results are impressive indeed. The programme is an intelligent and fascinating mixture of English and Portuguese works on the theme of 'cries of the oppressed'. Lest that subtitle lead anyone to think that there is the slightest risk of monotony, it should be pointed out immediately that this is avoided by the remarkable variety of compositional voices in the music chosen.

The proceedings begin with stately accounts of Byrd's *Civitas sancti tui*, surely one of the perfect expressions of the symbolism of the destruction of Jerusalem ever written, and a vocal reconstruction of Tallis's magnificent *Libera nos*, hitherto considered as a purely instrumental work. Byrd's *Quomodo cantabimus?* receives a similarly inspired reading. The three Portuguese works, by Cardoso and Pedro de Cristo, provide very interesting company for the English pieces not only for thematic reasons but for their stylistic differences and similarities. The lamenting intensity of Cardoso's masterly *Sitivit anima mea*, beautifully captured in this performance, is certainly on a par with the works by Byrd recorded here.

Martin Peerson's music remains little known, so it is particularly good that his impressive *Laboravi in gemitu meo* is included here (the uppermost voice has been reconstructed by Richard Rastall – the absence of this voice in the manuscript containing Peerson's motets is of course a principal reason for his neglect on the part of performers), though the classical poise of the Byrd *Miserere* that follows is the more telling after Peerson's madrigalistic style.

The sound of the ensemble is in general rounded and well blended, though there are moments when a voice (usually an inner one) will be noticeable precisely for the lack of such blend, generally, I think, on account of an excess of enthusiasm, and there are one or two entries that could have been tidier. These are very tiny quibbles, however, and the choir's sound is beautifully captured by Signum's team. **Ivan Moody**