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Review of Andrea Gabrieli, Missa Pater Peccavi, Motets and Instrumental Music, 2003 His Majestys Consort of Voices, His Majestys Sagbutts and Cornetts, Timothy Roberts, conductor. Hyperion, 2000

Vicki Stroehler

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they were recorded. The value of this disc is found in its range of music and performers and the history they represent, as well as in the sublime listening experience it affords.

*Steven R. Gibson
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*Andrea Gabrieli: Missa Pater Peccavi,
Motets And Instrumental Music*
His Majestys Consort of Voices, His
Majestys Sagbutts and Cornetts
Timothy Roberts, director
Hyperion CDA [DDD] 67167 66'22
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ANY recording that focuses solely upon the music of Andrea Gabrieli, the other Gabrieli, risks languishing in store bins,

forgotten by all but the most musicological of listeners. This recording, fortunately, should not suffer that fate. Director Timothy Roberts, His Majestys Sagbutts and Cornetts and the newly formed His Majestys Consort of Voices have put together a celebration of Andrea Gabrieli that is as well performed as it is researched. Though some of the scoring choices are unusual, the performances are nearly impeccable with but a few exceptions.

Performing music of the late Renaissance raises a number of issues not easily resolved, including the mixing of voices and instruments, problems of dynamics and *tempi*, and in the case of the Mass, whether to treat it as a compositional whole, or disrupt its parts as it would have been in its original church setting. These are all matters for intensive debate. Certainly no consensus has been reached, as the controversies the authenticity movement sparks remind us. Roberts and his two consorts have thoroughly considered their response to each of these issues and offer very carefully constructed renderings of each work. This is not to say that some of their choices will not raise eyebrows: those who expect a wholly choral performance will be sorely disappointed; those who are willing to listen with new and open ears will be pleasantly surprised.

Dynamics and *tempi* are handled with aplomb and without much to stir controversy. Dynamic levels are cautious, but have enough contrast to keep the listener interested. In the *tempi* there is nothing untoward, and some of the dance-like sections in the Credo and Sanctus sparkle. Likewise, the level of virtuosity in both the instrumental and vocal consorts is astounding, as is their intonation and, particularly in the case of the instruments, their tone. The instrumentalists make rather ornery instruments sound facile. One of the bass voices often has an interesting timbre that doesn't, however, entirely match his colleagues.

Perhaps the most prominent issue in this recording is that of scoring. Citing contemporary descriptions and iconogra-




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phy dating from the time of Gabrieli, Roberts justifies his use of instrumental doubling and the performance of vocal lines by a solo instrument in the mass and the two motets. Throughout the movements of the mass, the vocal parts are doubled, except in those sections that lend themselves to a mixing of voices and instruments (as in the "Christe" to effect a sense of texture reduction). For the most part, the decisions work. What seems to suffer most, however, is text clarity, although Roberts cautions in the liner notes that the mass "eschews elaborate counterpoint – or rather, wears its polyphonic art lightly—so that the words and their meaning may be clearly understood by the listener." Often the instruments overshadow the voices, despite faultless diction, clear tone and sublime intonation from the singers. One must remember, however, that this is a historically informed recording using authentic instruments and vocal techniques. As such, some would consider problems of balance part of the territory. The varying timbres allow what is most important in the texture to float through. Sometimes, however, what results is a wash of sound, particularly when the full ensemble of voices and instruments is performing. Roberts hoped to achieve "a variety that does not distract from the music's essential simplicity," and in this he succeeds. In creating variety in the mass, he also underscores its complexities, which to this reviewer is an added bonus. While choices made for the replacement of voices with instruments are at times puzzling, they never fail to intrigue.

The first motet, *De profundis clamavi ad te, Domine*, features the most unusual scoring of voices and instruments, and the least successful effort on the recording. The third and fifth voices, tenor and baritone respectively, are sung, while a cornett and three sackbuts replace the other four. The instruments almost completely cover the voices, and the soaring, vibrato-less soprano voice is not well replaced by the timbre of the cornett. In the final motet, *O sacrum convivium*, the soprano functions almost like a soloist, with the four voices taken by the sackbuts. As a result, the antiphonal portions of the work display a gratifying timbral contrast. Although the presence of only one singer might stretch our concept of

"motet," soprano Anna Sarah Pickard's very tasteful and delightful ornaments bring charm to this performance.

The recording looks at first glance like an attempt to recreate a plenary mass from start to finish, given the emphasis on the cover to the *Missa Pater peccavi*. Alas, this is not its aim. The parts of the mass are interspersed between purely instrumental works and the motets, but the arrangement does not follow any liturgical plan. There is a sense of design, nevertheless, as the longest of the mass movements, the Credo, falls in the center, and a *ricercar* that includes all eight instruments comes at the end. Whether the listener will find the arrangement of works puzzling or delightful is a matter of personal taste. Though the lack of a coherent picture of the *Missa Pater peccavi* is lamentable, the various alternations of timbre and genre are refreshing, especially since the purely instrumental works are performed so well.

Timothy Roberts, His Majestys Consort of Voices and His Majestys Sagbutts and Cornetts offer a rare glimpse of the music of Andrea Gabrieli through performances that are aesthetically and intellectually sensitive. This recording would be a grand addition to any serious collection or library.

Vicki Stroehler
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-CJ-

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