

# Vocal

GRAMOLA

GRAM 98946



Richard Wigmore reviews Liszt from Angelika Kirchschrager: *'Kirchschrager sings with bushed inwardness, culminating in the rapt solemnity of the final invocation'* ► REVIEW ON PAGE 78



Lindsay Kemp reviews Paul McCreech's coronation remake: *'If the new recording has a less crowd-pleasing edge, there are gains in the subtler riches and overall know-how'* ► REVIEW ON PAGE 80

## Allegri

**Allegri** *Christus resurgens ex mortuis*. Missa  
*Christus resurgens*. Missa In lectulo meo. *Miserere Bonhomme* In lectulo meo  
Choir of King's College London / David Trendell  
Delphian © DCD34103 (72' • DDD • T/t)



First recording for two of Allegri's surviving Masses

One wonders how Gregorio Allegri would have reacted to his posthumous fame. Past the initial amazement at being remembered at all, I suspect, his mirth would have turned to disgruntlement on realising that the piece to which he owes it has been so transmogrified as to misrepresent him. 'Give the other stuff a chance!' I hear him say (just about). Here we're given a chance to do just that.

Allegri's style is best described as post-Palestrinian, the favoured manner of 17th-century Rome at prayer. Though it is startling to think of this supreme style existing alongside the daring inventions of a Frescobaldi, Allegri's Masses bespeak a solid workmanship and are enjoyable enough to sustain repeated listening. The two eight-voice Masses chosen for this recording are his most richly scored, and the motets on which they are based (one of them Allegri's own) are also included. The inevitable *Miserere* is there too, and it's rather ironic, in a recording presumably intended to present him in a way his contemporaries might have recognised, to hear it done yet again in the Atkins edition.

The Choir of King's College London deliver performances that are secure and confident for the most part, though in the slower sections of the Masses in particular (try the 'Et incarnatus' of the *Missa Christus resurgens*) pitch and tone quality tend to falter. But their advocacy gives Allegri's music the sympathetic hearing it undoubtedly warrants. For that, the composer might well thank them, and so can we.

Fabrice Fitch

## W Arlen

Three Fragments from The Song of Songs. Four Robert Frost Songs. Five Songs of Love and Yearning. Sonnets to Orpheus. Es geht wohl anders. Sonnets of Shakespeare. Le tombeau de Gabriel

Fauré. The Poet in Exile. *Endymion*. Wiegand  
Rebecca Nelsen sop Christian Immler bar  
Danny Driver pf  
Gramola © 2 GRAM98946 (122' • DDD)



Nelsen and Immler sing songs of Viennese émigré Arlen

Composers from the between-the-wars lost generation keep coming to the surface and, just because their achievements are modest compared to the best of Korngold, Braunfels and Schulhoff, they still command attention for purely artistic reasons and as unorthodox case histories in creative survival. Walter Arlen, the latest discovery by the former Decca label executive Michael Haas, has such a soft-spoken compositional voice that you understand why he has been obscure until now. The most emotionally restrained Fauré and pared-down Killmayer seem garrulous next to some of the songs on this well-performed two-disc selection, making the set problematic for continuous listening. Any one of the three- and four-song cycles would be exquisite relief on a recital programme of dense Wolf or Brahms. But hearing an entire disc in one sitting is tough.

Born in Vienna, Arlen (né Walter Aptowitz) fled from the Nazi regime and arrived first in Chicago and later in Los Angeles, where his composing life was eclipsed by his need to make a living, specifically as a *Los Angeles Times* music critic. The booklet-notes refer to some of his songs being drawn from earlier larger works that he wrote with little hope for a performance. As much as one has romantic notions about composers writing masterpieces for their desk drawers, that's hardly the optimum situation, realistically speaking, since creativity rarely flourishes in isolation. In effect, he wrote for himself, or rewrote. Many songs here were rewritten three times over many years. Remarkably, there's no sign of creative patchwork. The vision is sure. If only the music had a stronger pulse.

Never does Arlen pursue the same relationship between words, vocal line and piano in any two songs, and he is particularly free to do so given his taste for through-composed songs and with a harmonic

language that might be described as vaguely tonal. Both in terms of form and harmony, Arlen seems to enjoy netherworlds. His taste in poetry (mostly in English) is wide and impressive, from plain-spoken Robert Frost to St John of the Cross to Constantine Petrou Cavafy to Shakespeare's sonnets, the latter pieces reimagined in a highly personal way, and without any signs of poetic intimidation. Such is the luxury of composing for oneself. Intriguingly, poem, piano and voice sometimes seem to be living in three separate zones, throwing sparks off of each other, almost with a sense of chance about what meaning might arise. At times, the piano frames the vocal line, but in a way that wanders away from the voice's meaning.

Performances are anchored by pianist Danny Driver's strong personality and sense of continuity. Baritone Christian Immler has a good, virile sound and fine musical intelligence but a limited range of colour and expression. Soprano Rebecca Nelsen has the sort of lyric soprano that suggests good Richard Strauss roles to come, though in one song from the *Endymion* cycle, she adapts an innocent, vibrato-less boy voice. What does that have to do with a ballad-like song about an emperor dressing in the clothes of a monk? It's yet another Arlen moment with no set answer, and is likely to mean different things on as many days.

David Patrick Stearns

## JS Bach

St John Passion, BWV245

Christoph Genz ten Evangelist Jens Hamann bass  
Christus Gerline Sämman sop Petra Noskajová contr  
La Petite Bande / Sigiswald Kuijken  
Challenge Classics © 2 55 CC72545  
(104' • DDD/DSD)



Kuijken's 'petite' Passion directed from the band

Sigiswald Kuijken's thoughtful and measured *St John* presents quite a contrast to two recent readings, from the comparatively uneventful Nico van der Meel and the collective emotional impact of Alexander Weimann. In the booklet, Kuijken discusses his usual perspective on the benefits of a one-to-a-part vocal ensemble –