Lucrezia Vizzana - Componimenti Musicali 1623 (1998)



1 Filii Syon Exultate 2:37 2 Veni Dulcissime Domine 2:56 3 Paratum Cor Meum 2:12 4 Protector Noster 3:09 5 Ave Stella Matutina 3:30 6 Usquequo Oblivisceris Me Infinem? 2:52 7 Domine, Quid Multiplicati Sunt 3:39 8 Praebe Mihi 2:44 9 O Invictissima Christi Martyr 3:23 10 Sonet Vox Tua 2:54 11 Omnes Gentes, Cantate Domino 3:07 12 Confiteantur Tibi 2:54 13 Amo Christum In Cuius Thalamum Introibo 3:02 14 O Si Sciret Stultus Mundus 3:16 15 Ornaverunt Faciem Templi Coronis Aureis 2:52 16 O Magnum Mysterium 3:20 17 Domine, Dominus Noster, Quam Admirabile 2:59 18 Domine, Ne In Furore 3:25 19 Exsurgat Deus Et Dissipentur 2:28 20 Omnes Gentes Plaudite Manibus 2:29 Musica Secreta: Deborah Roberts, soprano Tessa Bonner, soprano Mary Nichols, alto John Toll, organ David Miller, chitarrone John Toll, organ + Catherine King, mezzo-soprano

In the words of a contemporary politician (whom I won't name), "I don't make predictions – especially as regards the future". Well, neither do I; but in the next few years a feminist opera will be composed, based on the life of Lucrezia Vizzana. (Just remember, you'll have read it here first.) Packed off to a convent as the child of impecunious parents, she received what sleeve-annotator Craig Monson describes as "illicit composition lessons" from a local composer, which culminated in the publication of these Componimenti Musicali (1623) when she was in her early thirties. She was subsequently driven mad, possibly by the politicking of fellow nuns, jealous of her fame; whatever the reason, no other music survives from her pen. As Monson has it, she was "indirectly, but effectively, silenced". Not any more, though: all 20 motets in the collection are recorded here.

Surprisingly for a composer in holy orders, the music is typical of the seconda prattica rather than of the conservative stile antico: typical and reminiscent of Monteverdi and others, but admirably wrought and certainly worth discovering. Then there is the scoring, from one to four high voices and continuo; this is not so surprising, since the pieces must have been intended for performance at the convent. Besides, there was a ready market for them outside, with the vogue of women-only repertory established by (male) composers of the previous generation. It

is precisely for this repertory that Musica Secreta was formed, and the ensemble already has a disc of music by a female composer (the rather more famous Barbara Strozzi – Amon Ra, 1/95) to its credit. The group's cast is a recommendation in itself, and there is no doubt that music and interpretation are evenly matched. Just occasionally (especially in the upper reaches but, more surprisingly, elsewhere as well) a certain blandness creeps in, and I cannot help feeling that a more assertive characterization of individual voices would have done wonders for the music's dramatic potential. Listening to this disc has made me realize how much my mind's ear has been coloured by the work of Italian ensembles such as Concerto Italiano. A few years ago one might have said that Musica Secreta "sound almost Italian"; today one need only compare the singing here with (say) the soprano duets in the recent Monteverdi disc from Il Complesso Barocco (Virgin Classics, 5/98). The Italian singers are fuller in tone than their English counterparts, and equally secure, but their ability to project the words of their native language is unquestionably greater. That is not to criticize Musica Secreta for sounding unmistakably English; but it is certainly a sign of changing times.' ---Fabrice Fitch, gramophone.co.uk

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