

CHORAL CHOICE



A *Carmina Burana* to rank among the very best

Jeremy Pound is entranced by a thrilling live recording of Orff's much-loved secular cantata



Massed forces: Detroit's Orchestra Hall hosts a magnificent performance of Orff's *Carmina Burana*

Orff

Carmina Burana

Chen Reiss, Reginald Mobley et al;
Audi, Detroit Opera Youth Chorus, Detroit
Symphony Orchestra/Jader Bignamini
Pentatone PTC5187519 61:06 mins

While you can't go far wrong with *Carmina Burana*'s famous opening and closing 'O Fortuna' choruses – the huge vocal and orchestral forces, plus dramatic percussion look after themselves – the hour-or-so in between can either enthrall or so easily irritate, depending on the performance. Lingering tempos, ragged choral singing and, above all, over-mannered soloists can all test the patience.

Pleasingly, none of the above accusations can be levelled at this thrilling live performance from Detroit's Orchestra Hall, which is driven forward with a gripping sense of purpose by conductor Jader Bignamini, right from the first let's-go-for-it timpani thwacks. Though Bignamini does allow the music room to breathe in its occasionally more tender, seductive or reflective moments, this is, in general, a maestro with eyes ablaze.

Everything is done with immaculate discipline but exceptional pizzazz

The solo contributions from soprano Chen Reiss and baritone Andrzej Filończyk are both polished and characterful, while in the 'Olim lacus colueram' aria – that gruesomely mournful lament of a swan being roasted on a spit – countertenor Reginald Mobley achieves the tricky balance of sounding pained without tipping over into comic grotesquery. Mobley's woes are all the more affecting when set against the menacing presence of the Audi chorus, who are on superb form throughout – whether frolicking on the lawn, getting rowdy in the pub or scaling the top Cs of 'Primo vere', everything is done with immaculate discipline but exceptional pizzazz. They clearly love it.

Orff's much loved 'secular cantata' has, unsurprisingly, enjoyed a vast number of recordings over the years. This one can happily sit among the very best. ★★★★★

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Haydn

Harmoniemesse

Mélissa Petit (soprano), Beth Taylor (mezzo) et al; Les Arts Florissants/William Christie

Harmonia Mundi HAF8905413
53 mins



Although he still had another seven years to live, Joseph Haydn's 1802 *Harmoniemesse*

was his last major work. It was also his final setting of the mass. This disc from William Christie and Les Arts Florissants shows that, with the onset of ill health and old age, the composer was glancing over his shoulder at recent large-scale successes and looking further back to his earliest masses.

The mass was nicknamed 'Harmonie' after the German term for wind band and, like *The Creation* oratorio and the other masses he composed for his Esterházy patrons at the turn of the 19th century, it is scored for large orchestra with a prominent wind section of flute, oboes, clarinets, bassoons and horns. What impresses in this recording is the restrained playfulness with which Haydn – and Christie – utilise these forces. The sprightly joy of the Gloria is especially infectious, set against the solemnity of the preceding Kyrie.

The optimism of Haydn's own religious beliefs is caught in his *Missa brevis Sancti Joannis de Deo*. Written three decades earlier for the Brothers of Mercy in Eisenstadt – whose chapel was a stone's throw from the Esterházy palace in eastern Austria, it is lightly scored for two violins, organ and bass continuo, plus chorus and soprano.

As soloist, Mélissa Petit makes the most of the graceful Benedictus, with Christie himself playing the organ. But at just 14 minutes, the *Missa brevis* is too brief to accompany the *Harmoniemesse* and to adequately fill a CD that runs to less than 54 minutes. John-Pierre Joyce ★★

Schnittke

Three Sacred Hymns, Concerto for Choir

Yekaterinburg Philharmonic Choir/Andrei Petrenko
Fuga Libera FUG865 50:28 mins