

Maxine Thévenot

Review of **Missa Orbis Factor** by **Lindsay Koob** - **American Record Guide** (Mar/Apr 2009)

Albuquerque's Cathedral Church of St. John serves as both a champion of Anglican and Episcopalian liturgical traditions and a source-via commissions to major composers—of vital new sacred works. Firm evidence of both roles is found in this recording.

The album's centerpiece is a marriage of two different settings of the *Missa Orbis Factor*, an anonymous Gregorian Latin mass. The choral settings, by Gerald Near (b. 1942), correspond to the Latin texts most commonly set by composers: Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus, Benedictus, and Agnus Dei. These are interspersed with Peter Togni's (b. 1949) solo organ settings from his *Liturgical Suite*, based on the same ancient plainchant themes.

Seeking a point of reference online, I found a partial performance of the original Gregorian mass and learned that both composers were very true to their source materials. Near's organ-supported choral arrangements never stray far from the original melodies and rarely lose the limpid, flowing 'feel' of plainchant. Yet his imaginative, uncontrived harmonic elaborations and the organ's subtle underpinnings lend the work a distinctly modern aura. Likewise, Togni's organ interludes bear strong, if somewhat more complex allegiance to the original themes. The net effect is quite ethereal and soothing.

Framing the mass at either end, we hear five other modern works. The program begins with a beguiling setting of the classic Magnificat text set by the late David Hogan (b. 1949), followed by 'New Every Morning is the Love'—a very moving piece recently commissioned from Stephen Paulus (b. 1949). Following the mass is Judith Bingham's classic *Ave Verum Corpus* text. The final choral offering is 'The Head that Once was Crowned with Thorns', a potent anthem by David Arcus (b. 1958). The program ends with Director of Cathedral Music Quinn's own remarkable organ *Toccata on Victimae Paschali Laudes*.

The Cathedral Choir is first-rate in every respect—definitely one of the better American church ensembles I've heard lately. Raven's vivid sound does them full justice; the booklet is complete and very informative. Episcopalian choirmasters seeking to treat their congregations to accessible and stirring new music are urged to check this one out.

Review of **Missa Orbis Factor** by **Craig Smith** - **Pasatiempo, Santa Fe New Mexican** (Mar. 6-12, 2009)

Some good Raven CDs have come out of Albuquerque since Iain Quinn and Maxine Thévenot took over the music program at the Cathedral of St. John several years ago, including solo-organ discs by both and the premiere recording by Las Cantantes, a University of New Mexico women's group conducted by Thévenot. This release features Quinn and Thévenot conducting the mostly volunteer cathedral choir and accompanying or soloing at the organ console. The disc's anchor piece is former Santa Fean and noted American composer Gerald Near's sensitive setting of the Gregorian "Orbis Factor" chant as a Mass, plus Canadian composer Peter Togni's organ interpretation of the same chant. Anthems by Stephen Paulus, Judith Bingham, David Hogan, and David Arcus provide other sonic landscapes, and the pieces unroll as they would in an actual service. The coral singing is good though not perfect, and Quinn and Thevenot make sure every consonant is correctly placed and most vowels well matched between sections. Brent Stevens' recording and engineering paints a consistent acoustic picture of the cathedral space. No small task: the choral selections were recorded in October 2007 and the first-rate solo-organ performances—Thévenot on the Togni and Quinn on his own multipart, flourish-filled *Toccata on Victimae Paschali Laudes*—in May 2008.

Review of **Missa Orbis Factor** by **Shirley Radcliffe** - **Choir & Organ** (Mar/Apr 2009)

The Church has a long history of commissioning new music for the liturgy, and the Cathedral Church of St. John, Albuquerque is no exception. The central works are two settings of the *Missa Orbis Factor*: Canadian composer Peter Togni's four interludes from his *Liturgical Suite* for organ based on themes from the Mass interspersed with Gerald Near's choral setting. These works neatly dovetail together and are enhanced by clear, expressive singing in the choir and the sympathetically registered organ playing of Thevenot. Accompanying works are by Hogan, Paulus, Bingham, Arcus and Quinn's *Toccata on Victimae Paschali Laudes*, a powerful work magnificently played by the composer on the cathedral's impressive Reuter organ. There is much to admire here.

Review of **Missa Orbis Factor** by **Victor Hill** - **The Journal of the Association of Anglican Musicians** (Dec 2008)

This disc is subtitled "New Works for the Liturgy" and contains some excellent new repertory, including no fewer than eight first recordings. Our colleagues Iain and Maxine produce, with their singers, an expertly sung and played program of music that adds significantly to the literature.

The featured work is the *Missa Orbis Factor* of Gerald Near (not one of the first recordings). It is interspersed with selections (Prelude, Offerotay, Communion and Postlude) from the Liturgical Suite of the Canadian composer Peter Togni--itself based on the *Missa Orbis Factor*--to make a full Eucharistic sequence. Near uses the Gregorian melodies as the basis for an attractive Mass setting, enjoyable for singers and accessible to a congregation.

The program opens with the Magnificat from the Mt. St. Albans set of David Hogan and continues with a new setting of *New every morning is the love*, by Stephen Paulus. Following the Mass is a new *Ave verum corpus* by Judith Bingham, in which a repeated rhythmic motif is described by the composer as representing Christ 'dragging the cross to the crucifixion'. This rather astringent piece poses some tricky intonation problems, which the choir negotiates adroitly. (under the direction of Thevenot) The program closes festively with a new anthem on *The Head that once was crowned with thorns* by David Arcus and Iain's stirring *Toccata on 'Victimae Paschali Laudes.'* The liner includes extensive program notes, credits, biographies, and some nice photos.