

Maxine Thévenot

Review of Tell of His Love by Murray Somerville - **The American Organist**

TELL OF HIS LOVE. The Choirs of the Cathedral of St. John, Albuquerque, N.Mex.

Maxine Thevenot, director and organist; Edmund Connolly, assistant organist.

111/65 Reuter, Opus 2210.

Raven OAR-144.

Having said that the repertoire on this disc is imaginative and elegant, and the performances are immaculate and beautiful, what more can one say? Most importantly, that this whole recorded program has a wonderful spirit that expresses the title; somehow the combination of New Mexico's wide-open spaces and progressive ethos, combined with the conductor's skill and Canadian sense of community, produces a heartwarming whole that feeds the soul in this time of upset and dissension. This is enhanced by the charming photos of choir members in the booklet: not just formal group shots, but small groups of singers young and old clearly just enjoying making excellent music together, along with a touching dedication to a recently departed bass singer who seems to have doubled as resident choir humorist.

Forty-one singers are heard in various combinations; seven young women make up the Cathedral Choristers, and sixteen of the adults also form a chamber chorus for several pieces. All combine for the final track, a first recording of a challenging work written for the cathedral by well known British composer Andrew Carter, on a text by Christina Rossetti.

The choristers are heard on their own in eight of the pieces, allowing one to relish their beautiful blend, exquisite tuning, and elegant phrasing in music by Simon Lindley, George Dyson, Richard DeLong, and Canada's own Barry Cabena, as well as James Gibson's lovely setting of "Brother James's Air: • Soloist Jordyn Tatum contributes an ethereal performance of Faure's familiar Pie Jesu.

A welcome novelty comes in hearing selected altos, tenors, and basses contribute an expressive performance of Samuel Wesley's *Si iniquitates observaveris*, a seldom-heard miniature masterpiece. And the centerpiece of the entire program is the *Magnificat* and *Nunc dimittis* written for the choir by

Aaron David Miller, a colorful and energetic setting of a contemporary version of the text. This work gives choir, organist Edmund Connolly, and the large Reuter organ, with its commanding solo reeds, a real workout.

It's good that we also get to hear a little of Thevenot's fine organ playing; on the opening track she plays an evocative set of variations on *Ubi caritas* by Canadian composer Denis Bedard. She also plays a lovely chorale prelude on *LLANFAIR* by her teacher McNeil Robinson; from him we hear also a first recording of the French-influenced treble-voice *O sacrum convivium*, as well as a setting of the *Improperium* for massed altos, with a plangent sense of abandonment heightened by the obbligato organ solo line. His *Haec dies* alternates sensitively sung male-voice plainsong passages with an ebullient triple-time full-choir refrain.

Pablo Casals' well-known *O vos omnes* is given a radiant performance, with exciting but always controlled climaxes; the exuberant setting of *O sacrum convivium* by the Englishman Philip Moore is another commissioned work. Edmund Connolly gives us a taste of his own solo playing with Kenneth Leighton's imposing "Fanfare;" while the Chamber Singers bring us a sensitively paced performance of an *Alleluia* by another Canadian, Stephanie Martin, of the younger generation, who uses simple materials to create a mood of serene exultation.

Here then is a choir of great skill, under a director of imagination who is equally gifted as conductor and organist, and who has built a team around her (including her singer/organist husband) who clearly share a great devotion to each other and to the highest standards of Anglican choral music-making. This is a recording where the final impression is even greater than the sum of its parts; one is left not only with admiration for the skill of this group, but more than that, with gratitude for the spirit of love that shines through all that they do.

MURRAY SOMERVILLE