

Maxine Thévenot

Review of **The Immortal Air** in **Classical Music Sentinel**
by **Jean-Yves Duperron** - January 2014

About three years ago now I had reviewed another fine disc by these same forces (listed here), which I thought to be rather impressive. This new recording is even more so. The Choirs of the Cathedral of St. John Albuquerque, New Mexico, under the direction of choirmaster and organist Maxine Thévenot, certainly have matured, and polished their delivery dramatically. One need only listen to their account of Gerald Finzi's *God is gone up* to hear great singing. The clear enunciation, the way they roll the Rs in the words "praise" and "trumpets", the level of power they infuse into the word "shout", all of these qualities make for an exhilarating rendition. If you ever need an emotional or spiritual lift, this will do it. And not only do these choristers sing well, but you can tell that they actually "feel" what they are singing, and project the emotional weight of each piece across to the listener. They seem to naturally, somewhat like a chameleon, adapt their sound to the character of each piece. And all the pieces on offer in this great collection present a kaleidoscope of styles and moods. In the aforementioned Finzi the singers, and organist

Stephen Tharp, give it all they have to great effect. In the haunting *A New Song* by James MacMillan, the men's voices in particular seem to carry within them mysteries of ancient times. The simple and naïve way in which they present *Here I am Lord* by Maxine Thévenot, a composition simultaneously harmonically barren and fertile, reinforces the pieces deceptively unassuming character, while at the same time revealing its odd beauty. Another highlight on this CD is the harmonically rich *Evening Hymn* by Henry Balfour Gardiner with an amen beautiful enough to raise the hairs on the back of your neck. The ever so soft choir and organ become one at the end, and produce a final chord so expressive it defies description.

This new CD of *Anthems and Canticles* on the Raven label, specialists in organ and choral recordings, is a sonic delight. Maxine Thévenot, assistant organists Stephen Tharp and Edmund Connolly, and all the singers deserve a standing ovation for all the hard work that has gone into this project. It's nice to know that some people still care.