Review

I have just been asked to review a new CD with the somewhat extended title Commemoration, Ritual and Performance, The Iberian Connection, Medieval and Renaissance music from The St Laurence Chamber Choir. Perhaps the title was chosen by a committee but, whatever the reason, the contents are sublime. Directed by one of Sydney’s most outstanding church musicians, Dr Neil McEwan, and recorded in St Scholastica’s Chapel, Glebe, the CD is a result of a Symposium on Commemoration and Ritual held at Sydney University in July 2004. Quoting from the CD booklet: ‘all of the music recorded here commemorates an important aspect of the life of the Western church as it was celebrated on the Iberian Peninsula before 1600’. The Project Director was Jane Morlet Hardie who is to be congratulated on such a fine initiative.

Not surprisingly, the CD notes are informative and scholarly and include translations. For me there was only one familiar piece, the exquisite motet O quam loriasum of Victoria. Some of the music has previously never been recorded. There are tracks where liturgical chant is interspersed with polyphony and motets by composers Francisco de Peñalosa (c.1474-1528) Francisco Guerrero (1528-99) and Cristóbal Morales (c.1500-53).

So, if you like your church music to be contemplative, from a long valued tradition, where flowing chant and seamless phrases and passages of ethereal beauty are sung by pure young voices, expertly directed, this variety could be for you. The CD is purchasable via the Centre for Medieval Studies (web + credit card), Michael’s Music Room, and Christ Church St Laurence.

- RCSM (Royal School of Church Music) Australia

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