

ing that the program notes are so skimpy and that no English translations of Latin or German texts are included.

R MOORE

Sleeper's Prayer: North American

MUHLY: *Senex Puerum Portabat; Rev'd Mustard Installation Prelude; A Hymn on the Nativity; Take Care; Song of Ephrem the Syrian; LANG: If I Sing; Again; Sleeper's Prayer; BETINIS: Cedit, Hyems; LARSEN: I Will Sing and Raise a Psalm; GLASS: Satyagraha Conclusion for Organ; arr HANCOCK: Deep River; PAULUS: The Road Home*

Benjamin Nicholas, Alex Little, Tom Fetherstonehaugh, org; Merton Brass; Merton Choir, Oxford/Benjamin Nicholas

Delphian 34232—64 minutes

I like the singers more than I like the music. Minimalism rules much of the roost here, and the repeated patterns become too much for me after a while. The recurring sequences can be gentle repetitions or mind-numbing patterns as in the Act III conclusion to Philip Glass's *Satyagraha* heard in an arrangement for organ. Either way, I wasn't in the mood and reacted accordingly. I also don't like this version of 'Deep River', which overflows its banks with overdone harmonies that wind up drowning the hauntingly simple melody. I do admire Nico Muhly's 'Hymn on the Nativity', which breaks up the patterns long enough to infuse some joy into the proceedings. His floating arpeggios in 'Rev'd Mustard' (for organ) are also easy to like. Better still are Libby Larsen's staunch setting of a hymn of St Francis and Abbie Betinis's depiction of the nativity vanquishing the bleakness of winter. (Nice flute solo.) Stephen Paulus's 'Road Home' is always a pleasure. If you give this a pass, don't hesitate to seek out Merton College on their other offerings for this label. They are very good and have been recorded handsomely by the Delphian engineers.

GREENFIELD

Russian Hymns to the Mother of God

PaTRAM Institute Singers/ Peter Jermihov

Reference 737—79 minutes

Orthodox Christianity venerates the Virgin Mary no less than Roman Catholicism. Prayers and rituals differ some between East and West, but the love affair is as intense in Alexandria, Istanbul, and Moscow as it is in

American Record Guide

Rome. This anthology gives musical voice to Mother Russia's veneration of the *Theotokos*, the woman who gave life to the life-giving Son of God. The selections make it clear that Mary's name has been blessed by just about every Russian choral composer worthy of the name. Bortniansky, Kastalsky, Titov, Sviridov, Chesnokov, Rachmaninoff, Kalinnikov, Tchernin, Gretchaninoff, Lvovsky, Tolstiakov and Nikolsky are just some of the composers affirming the Virgin's blessedness among women.

Despite the common ethnicity and theme, the music covers so much ground chronologically and stylistically that the program stays interesting. Polyphonic gestures from Vasily Polikarpovich Titov (c 1650-c 1715) praise the Holy Mother in a festive style redolent of Baroque Venice. Our old friend Dmitri Stepanovich Bortniansky (1751-1825) was another Russian who tipped his cap to the West. Fast forward a couple of centuries and you come to the extraordinary Georgy Vasilevich Sviridov (1915-98) who flirted with modernistic harmonies (Shostakovich was his teacher) while conjuring up the deep, dark sonorities of Russia's past. Rachmaninoff's 'Theotokos Ever-Vigilant' sings out with the lush, spiritually-charged harmonies we know from his *Vespers*. There's also a delicate embrace of the Sacred Feminine in 'All of Creation Rejoices' by Nikolai Mihailovich Danilin (1878-1945), who presided over the premiere of Rachmaninoff's choral masterwork with his Moscow Synodal Choir.

Another nifty piece is 'Do Not Lament Me' by Sergey Sergeevich Zheludkov, which includes a tangy solo for the bass oktavist. I don't know which is harder to believe; that the basso profundo who sounds like the very soul of the Rodina is an American fellow named Glenn Miller, or that Zheludkov, who fits in rather nicely with the old masters, was born in (gasp!) 1989. Add in the usual goose bumps from Kastalsky, Gretchaninoff, Chesnokov, and the rest and you have a program well worth exploring.

As we've noted before, the PaTRAM performers are Americans who were born to sing this music. At first, the Cyrillic-English booklet is a nightmare, but once you mark the pages and learn to keep the listings on the back of the case handy, you can follow the action pretty well.

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