

mostly secular, including the very beautiful nature-inspired meditations included here: the final three pieces from 12 Part-Songs on Poems by Jakov Polonsky. These predominantly dreamy numbers, spiced with more dramatic moments, seem every bit as spiritual to me as any sacred item. Finally, the singers tip their collective hat to 20th-Century notable Sofia Gubaidulina with a convincing rendition of her Suite for Mixed Choir in Five Movements (1984). Setting a more enigmatic and disturbing brand of sacred poetry, this remarkably imaginative music is chock-full of striking musical structures and rich and often unusual vocal effects; it's well worth hearing.

I've always been a total sucker for well-performed Russian choral fare, and so fell head-over-heels under the spell of these fine Stuttgart singers. While lacking the rumbly, bass-dominated roughness and heart-on-sleeve emotional effect of many Russian ensembles, this group's sweet smoothness, refinement of execution, and subtle sacred nuance took me straight to choral heaven. Excellent sound plus a complete booklet round out a package that any Russian choral fan will cherish.

KOOB

#### Radiant Dark

**SHEPPARD:** *Media Vita*; **PEARSALL:** *Lay a Garland*; **TALLIS:** *In Manus Tuas*; **PALESTRINA:** *Nunc Dimittis*; **WHITE:** *Lamentations*

The 13/ Matthew Robertson

13 301—58 minutes

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The theme that links the music on this program is death. In the 16th Century premature death and the ravages of epidemics were more present in daily life than they are today. As Matthew Robertson observes in the prefatory remarks to this recording, the musical treatments of the subject presented here have a luminous quality that neither denies the reality nor allows it to crush the spirit; hence the title.

The two largest works frame the program. The opening is John Sheppard's *Media Vita*, a setting of a Lenten antiphon. It is an expansive setting in six parts of a lengthy liturgical text that includes a chanted Nunc Dimittis. The concluding work is Robert White's *Lamentations* in five parts, a setting of part of the liturgy of Tenebrae. Between them are shorter works: the eight-part madrigal 'Lay a Garland' by Robert Lucas Pearsall (1795-1856), 'In

Manus Tuas' by Thomas Tallis, and an alternative Nunc Dimittis by Palestrina. Apart from the Pearsall madrigal, all of the music is from the 16th Century. Apart from Palestrina, all of the composers are English.

The Thirteen is a chamber choir of professional singers from the New York area. The similarity in name to the English choir, The Sixteen, directed by Harry Christophers, cannot be accidental. The Thirteen was founded in 2012. This is their third CD recording; more are planned. Their concert and touring activities include university residencies. As heard here, they have a tight and attractive vocal blend and excellent choral discipline. The straight-toned sopranos are not shrill, though they do not always sound completely comfortable in the stratospheric treble writing of Sheppard's *Media Vita*. There is a good sense of phrase and deliberate forward movement even without exaggerated or artificially imposed dynamic contrasts. Listeners interested in this repertory will not go wrong.

GATENS

#### Music for Remembrance

**DURUFLE:** *Requiem*; **VAUGHAN WILLIAMS:** *Lord, Thou Hast Been Our Refuge*; **MOORE:** *3 Prayers of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*; **HOWELLS:** *Take Him, Earth, For Cherishing*; **TAVENER:** *The Peace That Surpasseth Understanding*

Christine Rice, mz; Roderick Williams, bar; Robert Quinney, org; Westminster Abbey Choir; Britten Sinfonia/ James O'Donnell

Hyperion 68020—75 minutes

All of this is set before us as Memorial Music composed in Britain and France in the shadows of the two calamitous World Wars of the 20th Century. Duruflé didn't complete his Requiem until 1947, but the origins of the work go back to the collaborationist Vichy Government, from which the composer had accepted a commission six years earlier. Vaughan Williams served with Britain's Royal Artillery and Medical Corps during WW I, so he knew the horrors of armed conflict firsthand. Composed in 1921, his 'Lord, Thou Hast Been Our Refuge' is a dark, somber work that ascends brilliantly out of the depths of despair. A solo trumpet recalls the sadness, but also effects the change. It's a wonderful piece.

From Philip Moore (b 1943), retired organist at York Minster, comes the Bonhoeffer set, which illumines the austerity of the martyr's prayers with the light of conscience. Herbert Howells appropriated one of the most heart-breaking texts I've ever come across in his