

Critic's Pick: Alessandro Grandi - Vespri Beata Vergine (Carus)

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Alessandro Grandi (1586–1630) was among many classical composers whose work was undervalued and not very well known. Though, next to Monteverdi, his music was arguably the pivotal force in the development of early baroque music. His exploration of the *concertato* style marked the beginning of the era, and his study of the cantata foreshadowed the music of J.S. Bach. Yet, his entire career was overshadowed by his mentor, Claudio Monteverdi, who is most famous for introducing his listeners to polyphony and *basso continuo*. Therefore, he is nicknamed the pioneer of baroque music.

Here, Carus seamlessly patches together much of Grandi's music into a cogent vespers service. The CD was recorded live during the 'Musikfest Stuttgart 2010'. It shines some deserved musical spotlight on Grandi, paying rightful tribute to his musical breadth and depth.

The Gächinger Kantorei Stuttgart musicians are wonderful. They are complimented by an impressive roster of soloists. Deborah York (soprano), Daniel Taylor (altus), Ed Lyon (tenor), and Peter Harvey (bass). The balance on the recording favors the

vocalists, which speaks well to Grandi's use of instrumentation as mere accompaniment to the singers. Though, some modern listeners might prefer a more balanced sound between the instrumentation and the voices. The blend between the soloists and choir is also impressive. Perhaps at times, slightly less vibrato, or even a more forward resonance, might have yielded a crisper sound, particularly in the choral polyphonic sections. However, the choir is entirely unified and most often in tune.

Because this compilation of Grandi's work represents such a diverse cross-section of musical styles, listeners will have their own favorites. My personal ones are the 'Dixit Dominus' (track three), 'O Quam Tu Pulchra Es' (track ten), and the 'Ave Maris Stella' (track twelve). The 'Dixit Dominus' demonstrates a well balanced, unified choral sound, with interspersing solos that are filled with articulate and buoyant melismas. The 'O Quam Tu Pulchra Es' is just too beautiful for words, and Lyon's vocal nuance grants it the delicate quality it deserves. The 'Dixit Dominus' features a stunning call and response between the men's chant, the orchestra, and the soloists.

If for no other reason than to give some deserved spotlight to Alessandro Grandi, you should own this recording. You too will have your favorites, some of which you may wish to share with your choirs around the world.

Listen music samples here: <http://goo.gl/dcppg>