

Critic's Pick... Graces & Voices: *Mysterium Crucis* – Rondeau Production ROP6067



Reviewed by Jonathan Slawson, journalist

Graces & Voices, an all female ensemble, was founded by Adrija Čepaitė and Antanina Kalechyts in 2010. Its members hail from Austria, Belorussia, Lithuania, and Singapore. Each member is a professional musician in her own right, and all hold degrees either in Gregorian chant, conducting, Church music, organ, recorder, violin, or vocal music. Their international makeup – seven ladies, four countries – is compelling, inasmuch as it illustrates the transcending, universal nature of the choral art form.

Graces & Voices explores repertoire written primarily for the Church. They perform primarily Gregorian chant and sacred polyphony, as well as contemporary and instrumental music as well. This relatively new ensemble is a rising star in the choral community, as they continue to find and develop their collective musical voice. In 2012, they were recognized at the International Gregorian chant festival in Watou, Belgium. That same year, they participated in the international Chant festival in Bratislava, Slovakia. The ensemble is excited to launch two European tours in 2013.

'Mysterium Crucis', recorded at Sommerrefektorium des Stiftes Rein, Steiermark, Österreich, explores the *Invention cruces and Exaltatio cruces* – Gregorian Chants for the Two Feasts of the Cross. It excites a listener to witness such a talented group of classically well-trained, singers in their infancy stage of ensemble development. This CD is filled with glimmers of breathtaking uniformity, as should be the case always with plainchant style singing. The listener grows eager to track their continued progress as they perform around the globe and find their collective voice, and discover what it is, beyond

their international makeup, that makes them unique in the choral community. It is a feeling of 'getting in on the ground floor,' so to speak, of an ensemble with limitless potential.

The present disc is stripped of elegance and over stylized musical nuance. It has a rawness that is certainly appropriate for the Church. In the context of a musical recording, however, perhaps the ensemble might have paid greater attention not only to achieving near pitch-perfection and a warm, rich unison, but also further developing their sense of musical line, or their vocal viewpoint on the text. One of the most popular choral musical devices in Chant to achieve this sense of cadential direction is to emphasize the penultimate note of each cadence, allowing a delicate 'landing' of each musical phrase. This is rarely done here, but when it is – it is so profoundly beautiful.

For more information, please visit:
<http://www.gracesvoices.com>

And listen to music samples here:
<https://itunes.apple.com/it/album/graces-voices-mysterium-crucis/id529445318>