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Superb baroque music and a stunning success for Czech performers, 15 Jan 2011

By [Stephen Midgley](#) (Tarbrax, West Calder, UK) - [See all my reviews](#)

This review is from: [Laudate Pueri Dominum \(Audio CD\)](#)

From the very first notes, this imaginative programme of baroque sacred music from Bohemia captivates the listener. The lovely opening Kyrie of JCF Fischer's Litaniae is characterised by delicious harmonies, with four fine soloists among whom the soprano, Hana Blaziková, sings like an angel with a gloriously pure, silvery voice and impeccable baroque style to match.

In fact, Johann Caspar Ferdinand Fischer himself was not Bohemian but German, one of a number of composers represented on this disc whose music was written for or associated with the Piarist religious order in Bohemia and Moravia. This monastic order provided free education for children of the poor, with a special emphasis on music. The other Piarist composers here are Antonín Maschat, Vojtech Pelikán, Jan Offner and Johann Ferdinand Richter, and all of the music is of extremely high quality. Most of the pieces are written for soloists and instruments, sometimes also with choir.

Especially fine is the Mass by Pelikán, a lovely work whose highlights include a Kyrie of beautiful melody and texture, fugal sections at the end of the Gloria and Credo that go with a real swing, and several glorious instrumental passages. Richter's Dixit Dominus is richly scored, with frequent brilliant fugal sections that are sung with beauty, energy and feeling by the superb boys' choir. The same composer's Magnificat is another splendid, tuneful and energetic work, with lovely duetting between soprano Hana Blaziková and mezzo Petra Noskaiová at "Quia respexit" and a superb passage for bass Vojtech Šafarík at "dispersit superbos". Fischer's Salve Regina is a heartfelt devotional piece, showing the soloists at their very best and bringing the programme to a memorable conclusion.

Several of these works are richly scored for strings, natural trumpets and continuo instruments. I haven't yet mentioned the players of the Capella Regia Praha but they too are absolutely outstanding; creating the lovely, silvery texture that characterises the very best groups of players of authentic instruments, they perform with skill, insight and in superb baroque style under the inspired direction of Robert Hugo. The vocal soloists - soprano, mezzo, two tenors and two basses - are all excellent and the boys' choir, Pueri Gaudentes, are simply brilliant.

The CD is finely presented in a slip-case and accompanied by a generous booklet with thorough documentation, background notes, texts and translations, and engaging photos of the performers taken during recording sessions. Oddly, though, the text of the Mass is not included - perhaps we are supposed to know it by heart already or, more likely, find it in some other CD booklet if necessary. The church recording is outstanding in both atmosphere and clarity.

This enterprising programme of first recordings has been brilliantly conceived, selected and arranged to bring nearly 80 minutes of fascination and delight to lovers of the baroque. It is a great credit to the Supraphon label and, above all, to Robert Hugo and his wonderful musicians, and altogether it's a stunning success.

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