

What the Press says

About Hubert Parry: *Songs of Farewell* (NAXOS)

"Sir Hubert Parry's *Jerusalem*, with which this stirring CD ends, is inextricably linked with the Last Night of the Proms rather than the start of the season, but it sits well on a disc of his 'choral masterpieces'. The uplifting anthem *I Was Glad*, written for the coronation of Edward VII in 1902, has also entered the more general choral repertoire, while the unaccompanied *Songs of Farewell*, written to texts by poets Henry Vaughan, John Davies, Thomas Campion, John Gibson, Lockhart and John Donne, equally merit the attention that the Manchester Cathedral Choir gives them with such care of expression. 'Long Since in Egypt's Plenteous Land' from the oratorio *Judith* will be familiar to anyone who has sung *Dear Lord and Father of Mankind* in church, while Parry's sold but malleable idiom in *Hear My Words, Ye People*, with Mark Rowlinson as a ringing, robust baritone soloist, will get the juices of any choral singer flowing.

Telegraph rating ★★★★★☆

Geoffrey Norris, *The Daily Telegraph*

Although Parry's *Songs of Farewell* are often sung by large choruses, their intimacy of sentiment is well suited to the 26 voices of the Manchester Cathedral Choir on this recording. The opening 'My soul, there is a country' immediately draws the listener in by its self-communing quality, and conductor Christopher Stokes intelligently punctuates Parry's response to Henry Vaughan's poetic adumbration of the afterlife.

In the more extroverted Donne setting 'At the round earth's imagined corners' a smaller group is positively beneficial in elucidating the complex seven-part writing, and Stokes's neat, incisive clarification of mood and contrast are again impressive. The choir takes most of the considerable technical difficulties here in its stride.

The Parry classics *I was glad* and *Jerusalem* might ideally benefit from more voices, but they are unfailingly stirring pieces. *The Great Service* is home territory for a cathedral choir. All told, this fine CD is an excellent primer to Parry's vocal music. Differently coupled, the Vasari Singer's version of *Songs of farewell* (on Guild) is probably still the out-and-out market leader."

Performance ★★★★★

Recording ★★★★★

Terry Blain, *BBC Music Magazine*

"The performances of the "Great" Service and the two grand *pièces d'occasion*, *I was glad* and *Hear my words*, are sung with conviction, rhythmical vitality and control, and sensitively accompanied by Jeffrey Makinson."

Jeremy Dibble, *Gramophone*, December 2009

"The CD gets off to a great start with the anthem *I was glad* ... Manchester Cathedral Choir cope well with this powerful music and the organ is heard to impressive effect."

"This present recording is a fine monument to a great musical and ecclesiastical tradition. It will be an essential addition to many collections."

John France, *MusicWeb International*, August 2009

"Christopher Stokes and his 25-voice Manchester Cathedral Choir (15 boy-and-girl trebles joined with 10 altos, tenors, and basses), along with organist Jeffrey Makinson and the Naxos production team, give lovers of this music the spacious cathedral ambience and the spirited performances they expect, technically sound and fervently expressed."

"... rarely do you hear such lovely treble singing as in the selection from Parry's oratorio Judith."

David Vernier, ClassicsToday.com

"Bright-toned trebles, both male and female, immediately catch the ear in Manchester Cathedral Choir's wonderfully confident survey of Parry's sacred choral hits.

Andrew Steward. Classic FM, October 2009

About The Spirit of the Lord (music by Stanford and Elgar)

"Stanford's Evening Service in A is sung at a brisk and buoyant tempo, the performances of the three Latin motets are luxuriously indulgent, and his two anthems A Song of peace and Pray that Jerusalem may have peace (from the Bible Songs and Six Hymns respectively) are welcome additions to the Stanford discography". There are also strong performances of Elgar's Give unto the Lord and the Spirit of the Lord."

"... the choir demonstrates fine control of dynamics in an acoustic where there is little note decay. Manchester Cathedral Choir is to be applauded for exploring this rich early-twentieth-century repertoire and producing a disc that is a worthy addition to the canon of existing recordings."

Choir Schools Today, 2005

"These works call for a fine choir, but why not rise to the challenge, if one has the voices? ... For those who do real Evensong in the Anglican Cathedral style, this disc has many fine ideas."

Victor Hill, Phd, The Journal of the Association of Anglican Musicians, March 2005

"The choir sings with an unusually expressive tonal vocabulary as well as with dynamic variation which makes it distinctive from other choirs which might have recorded this repertoire. Jeffrey Makinson's organ accompaniment is exemplary in every way; listen out for the orchestral tuba in the Magnificat! The mixed line of trebles give a good account of A song of peace, followed by its partner Pray that Jerusalem. The sound from the choir in this is more like that of a small chamber choir than what you might expect from a traditional cathedral choir. The whole thing is very refreshing."

Stephen Power, Cathedral Music

"... they and the other works deserve the good hearing they get by this competent choir of both adult men and boys and girls. There is fine music here that is little heard elsewhere."

Paul Aldridge, The American Organist

"Choir, director and organist have clearly enjoyed themselves in making this recording and it is of a very high standard throughout. The Manchester Cathedral organ comes over well throughout. Highly recommended."

DB, The Organ, September 2005

About Orlando Gibbons: O clap your hands (Herald)

"One feels a twinge of sadness when, after only just over an hour, it comes to an end and one must leave that table still hungry, yet again."

"If you like small-choir groups then you will enjoy this immensely. It is, in essence, a chamber choir and you are aware of every voice, especially so in the exciting eight part anthem which gives the CD its name. There are talented young people in this choir and it is a CD I shall enjoy often, for both musical content and performance."

Martin Carson, 2002

About Sounds Atmospheric – Organ Music of Herbert Howells (Lammas)

"Christopher Stokes is a persuasive advocate in this impressive and generous recital."

Discovery Records

"Stokes has the measure of this music and plays with consummate authority."

John Kitchen, Choir and Organ

"From the first notes of Set 1, No. 1, 1915, we know that we are in the hands of a first-rate musician -beautifully judged stretching of strong notes and finely executed piston crescendi and diminuendi, inspired colour choices, well judged accelerandi and rallentandi all make for a most satisfying performance. And so it goes throughout the CD. Christopher captures the peace and confidence of Set 1, No. 2, 1916, the drama of the 3rd Rhapsody, 1918, and makes light work of the testing convergent legato chords of Set 2, No. 1938, together with its inherent registrational difficulties. The moods of Saraband for the Morning of Easter, 1940, Master Tallis's Testament, 1940, and Saraband in modo elegiaco, 1945, are well grasped and in the Partita, 1971, it feels that he, and therefore we, are much more involved with the performance. The playing, of course, is very clean and authoritative, and we enjoy Christopher's intimate knowledge of his instrument."

Andrew Fletcher, Organists' Review, November 2006

"Christopher Stokes's performances not only communicate the deep emotion of the music, but also display an understanding of its architecture. A strong sense of rhythm ensures that, while the music often ruminates, it does not ramble. The rich sonorities of the (essentially Harrison) organ of Manchester Cathedral are ideal for Howells; Christopher Stokes blends the stops and handles registration changes with aplomb."

"I hope that we shall hear more of Christopher Stokes's dynamic and expressive playing of Howells on CD."

Christopher Maxim, Church Music Quarterly, September 2006

"Stokes's playing in general is excellent; sensitive to the detailed nuances of Howells' notated phrasing and using 'his' organ to maximum effect. The Rhapsody No. 3 is given an especially gripping reading. A very recommendable taster of some of Howells's best organ compositions, all of which receive excellent performances."

Chris Bragg, MusicWeb

"I have reviewed recordings by Christopher Stokes before. I continue to be most impressed by him, and warmly welcome this recording of some of Howells' best known organ music ... What can I say? Sumptuous music from the Anglican cathedral organ loft tradition sumptuously played on a classic organ. Very highly recommended!"

DB, The Organ

About Sounds Romantic – Organ Music of Elgar and Stanford (Lammas)

"Able professional hands have been the hallmark of Christopher Stokes' years at Manchester, where the musical scene has continued to go from strength to strength."

"His interpretation of the Elgar Sonata is a richly mature reading, revelling in the Manchester organ's ability to score Elgar's music orchestrally -including the delicious use of the velvety French Horn and a vast range of soft solo colours. Stokes finds speeds which seem always apt -quite an achievement in a work often recorded but whose soul remains just as often illusive. Stokes manages to make Stanford's stirring Fantasia & Toccata sit alongside the Elgar with no feeling of anticlimax -an achievement which, remarkably, he also brings to CVS's second set of Six Short Preludes & Postludes, which here receive readings which suggest these modest pieces are well worthy of more frequent performance -and not just by teenage pupils. This is a sumptuously rich and enjoyable feast of British high romantic organ works, revealing a player and an organ which put them up there with the best things coming out of France or Germany at the same time."

Paul Hale, Organists Review, May 2004

“Christopher Stokes has picked a programme to display the tonal quality and expressive power of the Manchester Cathedral organ. The programme really does sell itself, and the organ, though not terribly well known, bears a striking resemblance to that in King's College Chapel, Cambridge, making it ideal for this music. Every sound you would expect to hear in this orchestral music is heard. The rather more unusual Solo French Horn is heard to good effect. Christopher Stokes's playing is crisp in its precision, and he uses just right amount of rubato.”

Stephen Power, Cathedral Music

“This disc contains fine recordings of the opus 28 Sonata and the Pomp and Circumstance March No. 4, the former receiving an especially fine rendering of the Allegretto. The remainder of the disc contains a noble performance of Stanford's Fantasia and Toccata and a suitably supple rendition of the second set of his Six Short Preludes and Postludes. The recording is of a very good quality.”

Choir Schools Today, 2005

“The first time that I heard Tom Murray's dazzling recording of the Elgar Sonata in G, I said, “I've got to learn that and to play it!” I've listened to many performances and to some recordings, but the work always sounds fresh to me. My review of John Butt's recording in September 2002 shows how highly I thought of his performance. Well, Stokes plays it just as convincingly. His approach is, of course, now and then, different from mine, but how intelligent and cohesive his reading is! In particular, the Manchester organ is ideally suited to this work.”

Victor Hill, Phd, The Journal of the Association of Anglican Musicians, March 2005