

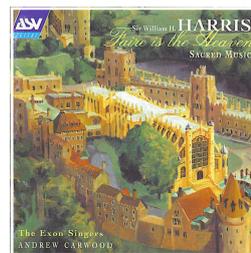
CD Reviews:

Sir William H. Harris *Faire is the Heaven*

The Exon Singers

Andrew Carwood ; Patrick Russill

ASV CD DCA 1015 (1996)



Gramophone (extract)

November 1997

The beauty of choral sound is immediately apparent in these compositions: their other strengths take time and a more energetic approach than they might seem to invite in order to be appreciated. Take *Faire is the Heaven*, best known and probably finest of these anthems: it is so lovely in sheer sound (the antiphonal richness of double choir, the serene arch of phrases, the simple effectiveness of modulation) that its intricacy and firmness of structure may elude recognition. The word-setting, too, is more specific than one might suppose. Similarly, *Strengthen ye the weak hands* is strong in its live responsiveness to words (the sudden blaze as the eyes of the blind are opened) and in the “thusness” of its construction (the appendage of “O Saviour of the world” is a thoughtful, deliberate and rather inspired decision). In shorter works such as the Champion setting, *Sing a Song of Joy* and the Quarles, *Eternal God!*, we find again the skills of a master-craftsman in choral sound, spanning the verses, spinning a seamless texture.

This disc provides the great service of bringing him into focus. We have had isolated anthems scattered around in the anthologies, but this tells so much more about what he was.

The performances are remarkably sensitive in their handling of all that has been mentioned here – lyrical, incisive, expressive. The singing is fine, as is Patrick Russill’s playing of the delightful organ solos.

An excellent booklet accompanies the disc, which probably does more for Sir William

Harris’s memory than anything else since his death – which occurred, at the age of 90, in 1973.

JBS

BBC Music Magazine

Performance ****

Sound ****

Lucky William H. Harris, to have found two such ardent champions as Carwood and Russill. Their enthusiasm shines through in the tone and sheer quantity of the booklet notes, and in the performances – from the bright, rounded sound of *Praise the Lord, O My Soul*, which opens the disc, to the seamless legato of *Bring Us, O Lord God*, which closes it. Harris’s life (1883 - 1973) spanned the reigns of six British monarchs and some huge leaps forward in Western music. He seems to have remained unperturbed, however: he was happy to continue writing conservative music, with rich textures reminiscent of Parry’s partsongs. At their best, his anthems are pure inspiration, but they are never less than superbly crafted. **The recorded sound is very good, bright and immediate.**

Janet Banks