

JEREMY BACKHOUSE conductor



PLAINCHANT SAILING: Jeremy Backhouse directs the Vasari Singers in Duruflé in Tonbridge School chapel

SLEEVENOTES

Work Maurice Duruflé: Requiem
Artists Vasari Singers, Sarah Connolly, Christopher Maltman, Robert Cohen/Jeremy Backhouse
Label Signum
Recorded Tonbridge School chapel

Why have you recorded the disc in Tonbridge School chapel?

We've done a couple of CDs there and we find it very suitable for choral singing. It also has a wonderful Marcussen organ, a very bright, brilliant instrument with a lot of colour. Jeremy Filsell does wonderful things with it. So the two combined make it an ideal place to record in.

How have the sessions gone?

It was a fantastic occasion – we've been working with some fantastic soloists: mezzo-soprano Sarah Connolly, baritone Christopher Maltman and cellist Robert Cohen. We recorded them on the Friday night and spent the rest of the weekend recording the choir. In the past we've used soloists from the choir, but having the likes of Sarah and Chris makes us do our absolute utmost. The Duruflé Requiem is a piece we've done many, many

times and although I was in two minds whether the market really needs another version, I think we've got something pretty special here.

How do you keep spontaneity alive in repetitive recording sessions?

The Vasaris always enjoy recording. There is, of course, an element of repetition, but each time the red light goes on, we strive for something better than the previous take. Our producer Adrian Peacock knew when to put the pressure on and when to encourage us.

What's do you find appealing about the Duruflé Requiem?

The way the composer brings life to the plainsong is magical, and its harmonic language is, I think, very appealing. The melodic lines suit the choir very well – we try and attain a very pure sound by restricting overuse of vibrato. We're more in the Anglican tradition than the looser French tradition! We're looking for purity, but expressive purity. Blend is absolutely key.

There are a few versions of the Requiem's accompaniment

including organ alone, and organ and orchestra. Which did you use?

We did the organ solo version. Jeremy Filsell is a brilliant player and makes the organ sound quite orchestral. He manages to conjure up extraordinary sounds out of the instrument. There are passages which you don't normally hear that he manages to bring out.

But does not having an orchestra mean you miss a vital element?

Both versions are equally valid. An orchestra would add additional colours, but Duruflé was so much an organist that the organ part has enough tonal and harmonic interest to hold the ear.

What other pieces are appearing on this recording?

We're not going down the traditional route of coupling the *Missa cum júbilo* with the Requiem. We're doing the *De profundis* by Jean-Jacques Grunewald, a less well-known organist who was at St Sulpice after Dupré. It's a remarkable piece – angular and ascetic and very much influenced by Dupré.

*Interview by Oliver Condy
Disc reviewed in the June issue*