



Signals from Heaven

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My introduction to this fine German brass ensemble came only recently, in a recording of lively big band-style arrangements (M/J 2017: 155). This program is nothing like that one, though there are big-band moments. Actually, I am smitten. After an exciting account of the little Toccata from Monteverdi's Orfeo, next comes my number one favorite piece of music: Giovanni Gabrieli's profound 'Sonata Pian' e Forte'. It is also a brass-ensemble test piece. Can they express the sadness, beauty, wonder, and courage without taking the bait and playing giant fortissimos instead of dignified fortes? In this case, the answer is yes. Salaputia Brass maintains gravity and taste at all times. They could go a little slower and express more depth of feeling, give the impression they don't want this wondrous work to end. But it is a lovely reading, and so are their accounts of four other Gabrieli canzonas. In the little 'La Spiritata' quartet, they do interesting things with articulation and add tasteful yet virtuosic ornaments. In the famous 'Canzon per Sonar Septimi Toni 2' they seem ready to end with a very loud chord, but instead they make it golden. The lively triple-meter portions are given dance pulses and articulations. This brass ensemble really understands Gabrieli's music.

How about the rest of the program? It is wonderful. I am moved and impressed by Boris Netsvetaev's arrangements of Gershwin's 'Summertime', Duke Ellington's 'Come Sunday', and the spirituals 'Sometimes I feel Like a Motherless Child' and 'Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen'.

Toru Takemitsu's little 2-movement, 5-minute Signals from Heaven also manages to recall Gabrieli while indulging in rich harmonies.

Belgian trumpeter Jeroen Berwaerts is the center of attention in this recording. I have heard him in excellent albums by Stockholm Chamber Brass (J/A 2013: 171) and of the Hindemith brass sonatas (M/J 2015). Here he is not only solo trumpeter but also vocalist in 'Summertime' and three spirituals. He has a terrific voice and singing style.

The album ends with Peter Dorpinghaus's setting of 'Swing Low', which begins with a long and beautiful study on Gabrieli's 'Sonata Pian' e Forte'. Berwaerts then sings the song, there is a moment of call-and-response singing (with brass players who sing very well), and then the arranger has a field day, moving skillfully from one style to another. At the very end of this amazing album, and especially in the very last chord, the players finally let loose with some brilliance.