

Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber
Vesperae longiores ac breviores (1693)

Early Music America

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Yale Schola Cantorum, Simon Carrington, conductor
Yale Collegium Players, Robert Mealy, violin, director
Yale Schola Cantorum (self-produced; available at www.choralcds.org)
59:53 minutes

It's been a bumper crop year for Biber (1644-1704) sacred music recordings. We have had two disks of his *Missa Christi resurgentis* (Andrew Manze and Andrew Parrott), a recording of *Requiems* (Paul McCreech) in B and F, and now this excellent recording of the *Vesperae longiores ac breviores* of 1693, reconstructed by musicologist Brian Clark. This disc is a composite of two live performances given last year by the Yale Schola Cantorum, directed by Simon Carrington. Since Biber only set the psalms and litany for his published *Vesperae*, the remaining music in the service is by Rupert Ignaz Mayr (1646-1712), Emperor Leopold I (1640-1705), and Giovanni Legrenzi (c. 1620-1690).

Biber's setting is smaller-scaled than his grand masses and is scored for four voices (solo and tutti), two violins, two violas, and continuo. Biber might have had bigger plans, though; there is a set of manuscript for wind instruments that would have doubled the choral parts.

There are so many good things happening on this recording. The repertoire is excellent; the Biber psalm settings are all top-flight, and the instrumental works that are interpolated between them are well chosen and played to perfection by violinist Robert Mealy and a small string ensemble. The music by the other composers holds up, too. The *Sancta Maria* by Mayr is a gem for solo soprano and strings, and Legranzi's *Salve Regina* provides a grand conclusion to the service.

The performances are excellent. It's heartening to hear fresh, enthusiastic young voices (they are Yale students) joyfully singing. Carrington—one of the choral world's elite though not known as an early music specialist—is quite at home in this work. His intelligent pacing, wise sense of proportion and remarkable gift for getting the best from a choir make this disc well worth acquiring.