



## SHEPPARD *Media vita* (Choir of New College Oxford)

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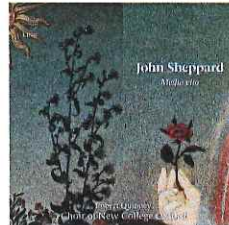
There are many reasons why this new release from the Choir of New College Oxford directed by Robert Quinney will not disappoint, and chief among them are four premiere recordings and a consistently radiant sound with confident, purposeful phrasing. The selection begins with earlier cantus firmus works, a medium in which Sheppard is pleasingly extrovert. The opening hymn *A solus ortis cardine* creates a powerful start to the programme, with the choir's blazing full sound matching the expansiveness of both text and music.

I have always admired the confident, unfussy tone of New College's trebles and the sound on this new album, in my opinion, connects back to a much older recording of Byrd's *In resurrectione tua* (CRD, 4/84, 12/91) made in the bright acoustic of their college chapel. While this new recording appears to honour that bold sound, even in the more resonant surroundings of St Michael's Summertown, balance-wise it occasionally throws a spotlight on the tenors who – despite sounding glorious – are overly prominent for my tastes.

There is much to enjoy in the contrast between upper and lower sonorities in the next motet, *Inclina Domine*, which has a ravishing false relation as well as the most spectacular 'Amen'. Yet it is the second hymn, *Sacris solemnibus* (already well known from The Tallis Scholars – Gimell, 1/90), that stands out as a particular achievement. Notable hallmarks of Sheppard's spacious style are the wide-spread chords at cadences, which the Choir of New College sing with relish.

Finally, it is pleasing to hear Sheppard's monumental *Media vita* sounding so rich and full, with a memorable countertenor sound. Sad, perhaps, that in our current pandemic the text 'in the midst of life we are in death' should strike us so poignantly but thrilling to hear such young voices do justice to one of Sheppard's finest works

Author: Edward Breen



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*A solis ortus cardine*

*Inclina Domine*

*Iudica me Deus*

*Deus misereatur nostri*

*Confitebor tibi*

*Sacris solemnibus iuncta sit gaudia*

*Media vita*

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