



Featured Artist

Piffaro

Performance Sound

★★★★☆ ★★★★★

Release Date Time

2008 65:10

Label

Navona[5809]

Album Information

Libretto/lyrics included with the album

Genre

Choral

AMG Album ID

W 185727

Review by

Uncle Dave Lewis

Philadelphia's Piffaro is a Renaissance wind band, but that doesn't mean it wants to be limited only to Renaissance music. In January 2008, Piffaro rolled out a new work by Philadelphia-based composer Kile Smith entitled *Vespers*, where it is joined by the chorus *the Crossing*, which hails from Chicago. *The Crossing* makes it a mandate not to perform any music that is more than 15 years old, and it needs not worry with Navona Records' Piffaro -- *Vespers* as it makes its bow only a little after a year after the work's debut, about as new as a large-scale classical work can be on first release. The disc, nevertheless, does not show any signs of hasty preparation, and it is beautifully, if a little distantly recorded; one may want to turn it up, or not, depending on the mood. The gentle, diatonic sound of Smith's *Vespers* well suits it for listening at ambient levels. If one had to pull a comparison out of the hat to describe the style of Smith's music the basic flavor of it will appeal to anyone who enjoys Randall Thompson's *Alleluia*, though there are hints of Stravinsky and Smith himself greatly appreciates the music of Russian choral composers such as Alexander Grechaninov. All of these influences and more work their way into Smith's music, but one never feels it is the sum of influences that make it attractive.

Interestingly, although Piffaro's name is above the title, of the three major elements it is the least heard from; really it's the chorus that's most often heard from. The passages written for Piffaro alone, however, certainly validate the faith they place in Smith; his thinking out of the centuries-old box in regard to Renaissance instruments leads to some novel combinations of texture quite different from the deconstructionist ideal employed by modernists such as Mauricio Kagel in terms of writing new music for very old instruments. Piffaro's *Vespers* is an appealing listen; Smith's music is colorful and ingratiating, and the performance of both Piffaro and the *Crossing* is of front-rank caliber.