

European Tour

Nordic Brass Ensemble

2L 128 [SACD, Blu-Ray] 76 minutes

These are some of Scandinavia's best brass players—four trumpeters, a horn player, four trombonists, a tuba player, and a percussionist—from orchestras in Oslo, Bergen, Stockholm, Trondheim, and Gothenburg. The ensemble formed in 1993, and it assembles twice a year.

The program offers 32 little pieces from the 16th Century. Some are dances in suites, such as a set of seven from Michael Praetorius's *Terpsichore*. A few are new to me: 'Battalia de Morales' by Francisco Correa de Arauxo, the deeply beautiful 'Circumdede me runt' by Cristobal de Morales, 'Jerigonza' by Mateo Flecha, three works by Andre Danican Philidor, a couple by Anthony Holborne.

People who know brass ensemble literature will recognize most of the pieces by Susato, Holborne, and Le Jeune, but they will notice that all are newly arranged (by two of the group's members). Things are enlivened with skillfully played ornaments and timbres that are by turns cylindrical and conical, open and muted. The percussion work is outstanding.

I enjoy this album very much, but I suspect I might enjoy some of the pieces more if there were a conductor to rein things in a bit. It's not that they need a stick to stay together; they don't. But these orchestral musicians obviously relish the chance to play with no one to stifle their enthusiasm. Many of the energetic works end too spectacularly. I realize that might seem like an odd statement, but the showing off is excessive.

And I continue to wait for a brass group that will play Gesualdo madrigals in a flexible way. There are two here, and the playing is warm and expressive, but there are also unwavering tempos. Gesualdo's astonishing pieces need some freedom.

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