

**RECORDING OF THE MONTH****Carlo GESUALDO DA VENOSA (1566 – 1613)***Moro lasso* (1611, orch. Tõnu Kaljuste) [4:33]*O crux benedicta* (1603, orch. Erkki-Sven Tüür) [4:14]**Brett DEAN (b. 1961)***Carlo* (1997) [20:37]**Erkki-Sven TÜÜR (b. 1959)***L'ombra della croce* (2014) [6:57]*Psalmody* (1993, rev. 2011) [22:08]

Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir  
 Tallinn Chamber Orchestra/Tõnu Kaljuste  
 rec. Tallinn Methodist Church, February 2014

**ECM NEW SERIES 2452 (4811800) [58:31]**

At first glance these composers may seem to be strange bedfellows but the programme as a whole will readily clear any misgivings. As the cover of this disc makes it quite clear: Gesualdo is the central figure although he is represented here by a mere nine minutes of music.

The programme opens with a piece by Gesualdo - *Moro lasso* from *Il Sesto Libro di Madrigali* of 1611 - heard here in a very fine arrangement for strings made by Kaljuste. This piece provides most of the basic material for Brett Dean's *Carlo*. This was originally scored for strings, sampler and tape and in this version was released some time ago on BIS CD-1576 that [I reviewed here](#). Suffice to say that it draws both on Gesualdo's music and life since its main climax may be experienced as an almost graphic representation of Gesualdo's stabbing his wife and her lover. When reviewing that performance I concluded by saying that it was the most impressive work in that most welcome release. However, what is heard now is somewhat different in that Kaljuste suggested that the Gesualdo madrigal — *Moro lasso* — heard on tape in the original version as well as some material from the sample might be sung 'live'. The composer admits that he had always been fascinated by "the eerie phenomenon that emerges in the work through hearing yet not seeing the recorded voices". The presence of 'live' voices somewhat modifies the music's global perspective and when given a committed performance as the one here, the impact is truly shattering. The score is imbued with an otherworldly element which complements the work's tale of love, death and passion.

The other Gesualdo item (*O crux benedicta* from *Sacrarum cantionum liber primus* of 1603) is also heard in a transcription for strings made this time by Erkki-Sven Tüür and provides the basic material for Tüür's *L'ombra della croce* composed for this recording. It is a free fantasia on Gesualdo's theme somewhat in the same vein as Vaughan Williams' *Tallis Fantasia* albeit shorter and in a rather different stylistic vein. This short but very beautiful work is dedicated to Manfred Eicher.

The final item here is not related in any way to Gesualdo; at least not as far as I can make out. *Psalmody* has had a rather chequered genesis and has been subject of a number of revisions and re-workings before achieving the form heard here. It was originally written for Hortus Musicus, an Estonian early music ensemble, in 1993. It seems that the composer was not entirely satisfied with the results and eventually revised it in 2005 for mixed chorus and early music ensemble. This version is available on an Estonian disc ERR ERRCD 0005. Later still (2011), Tüür undertook yet another revision and it is now scored for mixed chorus and orchestra. Although the 2011 revision is much in tune with the 2005 one Tüür admits that having recomposed part of it, "brought balance to the form". The changes also involved additions to the choir parts. *Psalmody* nevertheless preserves much of its original character as well as the three original sections and the music firmly harks at American Minimalism. It sometimes brings to mind the music of John Adams rather than Steve Reich. As implied by the title, *Psalmody* sets words from Psalm 67, Psalm 136 and Psalm 150 respectively. This

relatively early work remains one of the most attractive and endearing entries in his catalogue. I wish that it was heard more often.

This intelligently planned and superbly performed programme is a pure delight from first to last. Recording and presentation are up to ECM's best standards. The composers' notes express what they have to say with most welcome clarity and avoid sliding into the nebulous indulgences sometimes to be found in this label's liner-notes. Allow me however to mention that Tüür's *Psalmody* is scored for chorus and orchestra and not for string orchestra as stated on the inside cover of the booklet. This need not deter anyone from enjoying this well planned and superbly performed release. My *Recording of the Month*, for sure, and it will be high up in my *Recordings of the Year*.

**Hubert Culot**