

W. Lawes Ayres La Rêveuse (Jeffrey Thompson T, Bertrand Cuiller *hpscd*, Florence Bolton *tr & b viols*, Benjamin Perrot *lute, theorbo, baroque guitar*) 69' 14"

Mirare MIR177

A pleasing mix of songs, mostly by Henry Lawes, plus a couple by Nicholas Lanier, songs and instrumental pieces by Henry's brother William, divisions by Norcombe, Gaultier, Christopher Simpson, Francis Withy and a prelude by Bachelor, makes an interesting selection of largely unrecorded repertoire, very well played and sung, and well worth having.

It is high time that singers paid attention to Henry Lawes. In his considerable output are many very fine songs, perhaps concealed by the large number of light and rather inconsequential ones. Playford's early song publications state that they can be accompanied by "theorboe lute or bass viol": the bass viol alone with the voice, a marvellous combination, is sparingly used here, but to great effect. Throughout the accompaniments are lively and imaginative, with added and delightful instrumental interludes between verses.

The singer approaches the songs with an extravagant, very theatrical style, for which his formidable technique well equips him, but which, for me, is in danger of overpowering some songs. He varies his use of vibrato, and I like it best when he uses less, or none at all. His words are wonderfully clear, he ornaments with ease, and his soft singing is often very beautiful. His rendering of Lanier's 'No more shall meads be decked with flowers' is melancholy, as though the lover has lost his case, as it were. Yet one source for the poem calls it a 'ciacono' which implies a faster tempo than he adopts. The song has always seemed to me to be putting the hard word on Celia with a degree of optimism as to the outcome. However he sings with impressive control and affecting intensity, particularly in Lawes' setting of John Donne's 'Sweet stay awhile', which is beautifully performed.

The instrumental pieces are excellently played, and Florence Bolton is a fine player of both treble and bass viols, dashing off the divisions by Withy, Norcombe and Simpson with great virtuosity and flair.

Robert Oliver