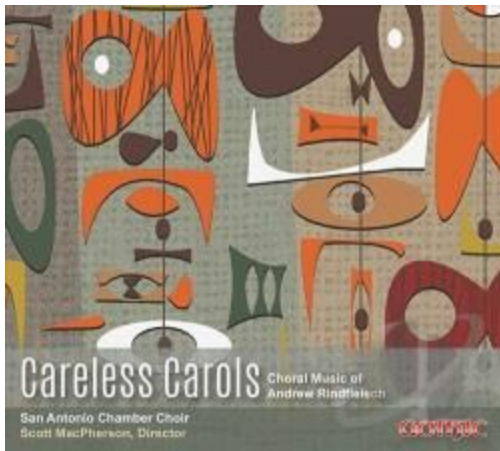


CD Review

Andrew Rindfleisch: *Careless Carols* San Antonio Chamber Choir

by Jeremy Reynolds



Back in March, the San Antonio Chamber Choir, directed by Scott MacPherson, released an album of Andrew Rindfleisch's choral music on the Gothic Records label. There's a mixture of joy and reflection on *Careless Carols* that pairs well with the end of a too-long year and this season of Thanksgiving and peace.

Rindfleisch teaches composition at Cleveland State University and heads the Cleveland Contemporary Players Artists in Residency Series. Unencumbered by complex polyphony, his music on this album is generally clean and simple-sounding.

There's a good range of quick, bright pieces — like the album's title track *Careless Carols*, *Veni Sancte Spiritus*, and *Salmo de Alabanza* — and plenty that are more tranquil and contemplative, including *Mille Regretz*, *Kaddish Prayer*, and *O Livoris Feritas*. The San Antonio Chamber Choir is consistently excellent. MacPherson, who leads the choral activities at Kent State University, conducts with a steady pulse and draws impeccable balance from the choir.

In the slower works, Rindfleisch sometimes borrows from Renaissance idioms. When the voices move in parallel intervals, there's little harmonic tension or drive toward a cadence. It feels pleasantly tranquil, a throwback to a simpler time. There's always the chance that this will lead to tedium — and it almost does in the two minutes of "Amen" at the close of *Anthem*.

Rindfleisch often creates several different musical atmospheres with the same text, without overstaying any particular mood, a technique that makes some of the songs sound disjointed.

There's also some bizarre imagery in certain of the *Careless Carols*, including such lines as Rilke's in *Graue Liebesschlangen*:

Gray love-snakes I have startled
Out of your armpits. As on hot stones
They lie on me now and digest
Lumps of lust.

The San Antonio Chamber Choir commissioned that piece from Rindfleisch in 2005, and it's quite lovely, if a bit odd. There's slithering chromaticism, sudden, startling shifts in rhythm and dynamics, and a warm, satisfying cadence at the conclusion of the piece. If you happen to be following the poem closely, it's engaging.

Rindfleisch's brighter, quicker music is delightful. The San Antonio Chamber Choir appropriately creates some lovely colors in the three movements of *Klangfarben* ("Tone Colors"), and they perform the virtuosic five-note rhythmic groupings of *Salmo de Alabanza* with ringing clarity.

The most delightful track is *Careless Carols*, which opens the album with such joy and spirit that the music itself seems to grin. ("Sing the song of the moment in careless carols... Take to your breast with a smile what is easy and simple and near.") The harmonies are simple, the reflective sections gentle.

There's some wonderful music making going on down in Texas, and this disc is a perfect example that can be enjoyed year-round. *Careless Carols* runs just under an hour and is available from Amazon.com and other retailers.

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