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Old friends and new discoveries

Eight recent recordings of music from the late 15th and 16th centuries help to renew our experience of this music, revising views of well-known composers and introducing new repertoires and performing groups. The relatively new Munich-based group Stimmwerck has dedicated its first two recordings to unfamiliar German repertory. With just four singers, the group might best be compared to The Hilliard Ensemble. Blessed with a clear ringing countertenor in Franz Vitzthum, Stimmwerck combines a fine vocal blend with great care over tuning and pronunciation. On **Heinrich Finck** (Cavalli CCD 325, rec 2005, 65') they explore the music of this Bamberg-born contemporary of Josquin des Prez, including pieces recently discovered in Regensburg by David Hiley. Finck's *Missa Dominicalis* has a lot in common with Josquin, making much use of recurring motifs, but showing an original voice. There is also the hymn *Veni redemptor dominum* and some settings of Propers including a very fine *Rorate coeli*. A lively Latin Christmas medley leads into a group of German tenor-*lieder* which work particularly well with these voices, attempting as they do to reconstruct early New High German pronunciation.

On their second disc, **Adam von Fulda: Messe, Motetten, Lieder** (Cavalli CCD 330, rec 2007, 58'), the singers are joined by a cornett and two gambas for a similar mixed programme by another contemporary of Finck and Josquin. Adam's attractive *Missa Seit ich dich Herzlieb leiden muss* is again broadly Josquin-like, with much motivic repetition creating an easily accessible soundworld, and containing beautiful duos. There is also a hymn (*Ut queant laxis*), some motets, including the Christmas *Dies est laetitiae*, and German songs. The similarities of the music of these two composers who worked in quite different parts of Europe (Finck in Poland, Stuttgart, Salzburg and Vienna; von Fulda in Torgau and Wittenberg) is a useful reminder that many of the stylistic traits we associate with Josquin were commonly shared at this period. By making such fine recordings Stimmwerck are doing these composers good service as well as broadening our knowledge of the period.