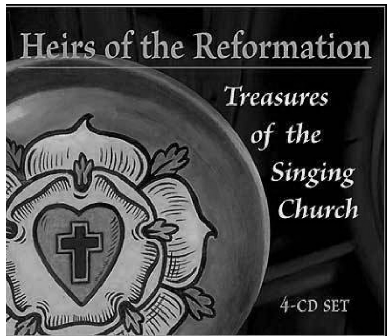




Compact Discs

*Heirs of the Reformation:
Treasures of the Singing Church.*
4-CD set.
Concordia Publishing House
(99-2258WEB), \$44.95.

In these days of praise bands and easy-listening anthems, *Heirs of the Reformation: Treasures of the Singing Church* is a powerful reminder of all that is good (and even great) in the Lutheran musical heritage. Chorale tunes which might seem dry and irrelevant at first glance come alive on this 4-CD set. The variety of musical styles, instrumentation, and accompaniments is a sonic smorgasbord. Executive producer David A. Johnson, director Phillip Spray and their team of musicians and engineers have selected forty five pieces of Lutheran heritage music. All of the best-known chorales are represented (with the notable exception of "A Mighty Fortress"), with many lesser-known chorales represented as well. Also included are several important free pieces such as "Psallite" by Praetorius and "Woman, Why Weepst Thou" by Schuetz. The charming "Quempas Carol" is a welcome addition, as is "Christians, to the Paschal Victim (Victimae Paschali laudes)" alternating with "Christ Is Arisen (Christ ist erstanden)." The early music has all the rough edges of the Renaissance era, a perfect companion to the stark theology of sin and redemption. Almost all of the material is published by Concordia Publishing House, a reminder of CPH's role as the keeper of the flame of Lutheran heritage music. This choral literature deserves to be remembered, recorded, and retained as part of a vital worship tradition.

An attractive companion booklet provides program notes for each piece. The notes are partly devotional, partly historical. They are written to be helpful to a professional musician or to give both a spiritual and historical context for the lay-listener.

The chorale settings can be divided into two groups: (1) historical settings by composers such as Bach, Buxtehude, Crueger, Hammerschmidt, Hassler, Pachelbel and Schuetz, and (2) modern settings by familiar names like Bender, Busarow, Pelz, Schalk, and Wolff. A relatively-new setting of "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded" by Bradley Nelson is particularly lovely. The modern settings sound comfortable, like a fine, exciting worship experience in an American church.

However, purists beware! The early music presents two sound ideals. The accompaniment by period ensemble *Musik Ekklesia* provides a convincing period sound. However, the vocal style is warm and with a light vibrato, a thoroughly modern sound. All texts are sung in English. The acoustical environment is agreeable, but has the sound of a studio or perhaps a modern American church. The producers have made the same kind of compromises that most church music directors make. The result is a good model for exciting worship in a Lutheran church in America even if the performance practice is not completely authentic. Concerns about historical accuracy aside, the set is successful in presenting enjoyable performances of Lutheran heritage music, both old and new. It would make a fine addition to the CD library of professional musician or lay-listener alike. KO