

The logo for the American Record Guide features a stylized orange treble clef and a decorative flourish on a dark green background. To the right of this graphic, the words "American Record Guide" are written in a bold, orange, sans-serif font.

# American Record Guide

September/October 2005

**SWEELINCK:** *Toccata in C; Malle Sijmen; Ricercar*

with **SCHEIDT:** *2 Echoes; Est-ce Mars;*

**SCHEIDERMANN:** *Magnificat VII toni*

Gail Archer, org – Cala 88043 – 51 minutes



Dr. Archer, director of the music program at Bernard College of Columbia University, also teaches historic performance practice at Manhattan School of Music. She plays the Fisk organ at Wellesley College in this recording, called “The Orpheus of Amsterdam: Sweelinck and his Pupils.”

With her ascetic program, mannered style (intended to seem free), widely spaced block chords, and one registration through the opening quite substantial Toccata by Sweelinck, she places herself squarely among the period performance practice organists. But as her program continues, she reveals herself as an organist of exemplary taste by thoughtful phrasing and articulation and imaginative, resourceful registrations.

After the big Toccata by Sweelinck, two echo pieces by Samuel Scheidt, one of his great German pupils, follow. These are not an unqualified success because, though the registration is pleasing, the dry acoustics of the room make the echo effects pretty stale. One of Scheidemann’s lengthy Magnificats takes more than 12 minutes. It seems like 20, since Ms. Archer’s playing is so prosaic. Moreover, not one of these first four pieces will ever qualify for the hit parade – not even organists’ hit parade.

Things brighten up with two secular pieces, Sweelinck’s ‘Malle Sijmen’ (Silly Simon) and Scheidt’s variations on Est-ce Mars, where her adroit registrations combine with real charm for an evanescent result. With the last variation, we are pleasantly surprised by the tinkling of Zimbelstern. At last, the performer seems excited about the music in Sweelinck’s grand 11-minute Ricercar. Here she generates more than a few sparks. She also introduces a good deal of color and contrast to help make this spacious fresco coherent for the listener.

In sum, the admirable outweighs the negatives. The CD’s slender content counts among these. There is so much appealing repertoire by these composers and their school that surely more of their music could and should have been included.

MULBURY