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# Phantasm

## Selected Reviews

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### Matthew Locke: 'For Lovers of Consort Music' Linn Records CKD 594

"it is indisputably superb. Phantasm's performances are compelling, their immaculate ensemble always internally balanced to best effect, their near-miraculous transparent textures brilliantly captured by the engineer. Dreyfus's choices of tempo and application of rubato are both refreshing and nuanced. It is recordings of this calibre that will attract new listeners to the English consort repertoire." - **Julie Anne Sadie, Gramophone**

"One of Phantasm's most distinctive qualities is its airy (phantasmal?) sound. With weightless bowing and wispy articulation, Locke's dance music floats and contrapuntal threads are woven into a fabric sheer as gossamer...Phantasm trips the light fantastic, with Elizabeth Kenny's thrumming theorbo adding pizzazz." – **Kate Bolto-Porciatti, BBC Music Magazine \*\*\*\*\***

"Phantasm play everything with loving attention to detail, a delicate, silvery sound and wonderfully elastic phrasing" – **SWR2**

"Tuning throughout is flawless, rhythms are tight, with brilliantly alert upbeats, and the beautiful shaping of phrases is a source of constant wonder. Recorded in Broxgrove Priory, Sussex, the sound is warm, sympathetic but stunningly clear and detailed, and the balance between bowed viols and the plucked theorbo is ideal and natural." – **Europadisc**

"Performances by Laurence Dreyfus's ensemble Phantasm are always worth treasuring, although there's a special glory about this album devoted to Matthew Locke" – **Geoff Brown, The Times**

"So alive not just for the lightness of the dance movements but also the extraordinary harmonic twists and turns of Locke's fantazie movements where he seems to delight in emphasising the unexpected – celebrating the grit in the oyster. The playing is everything we've come to expect from Phantasm and if you've enjoyed their recordings of William Lawes this should be next and I'm told it's the first of a series exploring Locke's music." – **Andrew McGregor, BBC Radio 3 'Record Review'**

### Musica Antiqua Reutlingen (August 2018)

"Anyone watching his facial expressions got an impression of the lightness, the precision and the concentration behind such an appearance. The Renaissance pieces are characterized by simple yet elegant melody. With perfect technique and rhythmic precision, the group mastered the hardest runs, such as in a complex "Aire" by Lawes. The mainly older listeners heard choir-like cantilenas, magical sound bows, difficult tempo changes. Some pieces were reminiscent of courtly round dances, others spread elegiac melancholy." – **Mattias Reichert, Schwäbisches Tagblatt**

### Aschaffenburg Bachtage (July 2018)

"Bach's 'Art of Fugue' is a definite part of the viol consort Phantasm's repertoire. It quickly becomes clear that the four musicians around Laurence Dreyfus are not playing the programme for the first time. The phrases are so extraordinarily homogenous, so thoughtfully phrased, and so sensually musically heard. The four musicians of this ensemble, which was created in 1994 on the initiative of Dreyfus, are tonally fused" – **Anja Jaskowski, Leipziger Volkszeitung**

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### Chamber Music New Zealand Tour: Pearls of Polyphony (May 2018)

"Works by Ferrabosco, Byrd and Tomkins, would have been, in their day, played by civilised amateurs; this concert offered the opportunity to enjoy a rare surrogate music-making experience. How many, like me, were drawn into the lilting rhythms and criss-crossing lines as if we were part of the group? How many experienced goosebumps and shivers, caught up in the volatile flow between major and minor, or held the breath when pianissimo chords seemed to float in their own radiant firmament above us?"

– **William Dart, NZ Herald**

"Phantasm is a group of musicians from the very top drawer, and the music-making was breathtakingly fine. The Elizabethan period was highlighted by William Byrd, but the absolute highlight, for me, were the four Fantazias of 1680 by Henry Purcell – some of the last music written for the viol. The concert ended with music that was not written for viol, but fascinating nonetheless; the music of J.S.Bach. First we heard three fugues from the Well Tempered Clavier arranged for quartet by Mozart, and, finally, four pieces from his Art of Fugue. Then an encore – an atypical piece from Domenico Scarlatti. All in all, the finest viol playing I have ever heard in concert." – **John Button, Dominion Post**

### Misteria Pascalia Festival: Dowland's Lachrimae (April 2018)

"The British but now Berlin-based viol consort Phantasm, joined by lutenist Elizabeth Kenny (pictured above), gave a stirring performance of Dowland's Lachrimae, with every note at once clear and crisp yet beautifully rounded...The lush dissonances teased out during the pavans were deliciously wistful and the rhythmic interplay displayed in the dance movements gave an infectious, impish quality with a real swing." – **Miranda Heggie, The Arts Desk**

### Christopher Tye: Complete Consort Music Linn Records CKD 571

"The five-voiced English viol consort Phantasm lays the greatest weight on the wealth of sound and expression so that the entire Tye album is turned into an event, even an adventure. With just the right feeling to do justice to Tye's art, his rhythmic complexity and harmonic richness with a seriousness nursed of deep conviction, the musicians assembled around the ensemble founder Laurence Dreyfus further ennoble the ten remaining pieces. Not to mention that the six-minute lamentation-like "Sit fast" on its own belongs to the absolute marvels of 16th-century consort music - provided it's played as it is here by Phantasm" – **Guido Fischer, Rondo Magazine**

"There are several very fine viol consorts currently active, but if I had to pick a favorite, it would be Phantasm. Their playing is technically unimpeachable, and their warm tone is beautifully recorded here with every part distinctly audible. What I find most admirable is their keen sense of forward movement and phrase trajectory. At the same time they maintain that quality of conversation among friends that I believe to be the essence of consort music." – **William J Gatens, American Record Guide**

"Phantasm is an inspired fit for this repertoire. The musicians' distinctive sound - immediately warm but spiced with an edgy kick - is as assured as ever, ideal for Tye's oft-madcap In nomines...Phantasm delight in the eccentricities of his writing climaxing in the extraordinary Sit Fast, Tye's longest, breathtakingly complex, barline-free escapade (which bore, and warranted, the composer's advice '...feare not!)" – **Hannah French, BBC Music Magazine**

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"Phantasm's craggy, deep-dug performances follow the composer's instructive titles – 'Hold fast', 'Follow me', 'Believe me' – to the letter, gamely celebrating the oddities as well as the felicities of works whose fixation with 54 notes of plainchant by John Taverner (taken from the Benedictus of his Missa Gloria tibi Trinitas) has never fully been explained. Discovering the unexpected sensuality of the In nomine 'Round', the yelping, insistent plaints of the In nomine 'Cry' and the provocative dramatics of the In nomine 'Re la re', Phantasm are skilled musical tour guides to Tye's challenging terrain." – **Alexandra Coghlan, Gramophone**

"Sometimes plangent, often ebulliently uplifting, these are ever unpredictable pieces, which can switch from high mood to low, content to unease, on a sixpence. All are exquisitely played by Phantasm, directed by Laurence Dreyfus." – **Richard Fairman, Financial Times**

"with sudden mood swings, rogue metre changes and harmonic mayhem making the ground feel as though it is always shifting under your feet. But what strikes me about this recording is its suaveness, its evenness, its consistent beauty. Phantasm ride the impish contours of Tye's imagination with unbending calm. Even in a stunning "free" composition such as the three-part Sit Fast — which breaks out of its lamentations into sudden squalls of dance, like someone who forgets they are at a funeral and goes a bit disco — Phantasm's control is absolute. The playing is remarkable, and technically flawless" – **Kate Molleson, The Guardian**

## Wigmore Hall (February 2018)

"But if the composer is great, as Byrd undoubtedly was, an evening-long immersion is bound to reveal all kinds of things lurking under an apparently unvaried surface. That was the case with this superb concert from Phantasm, one of the best viol consorts around (ok, it's not a crowded field, but there are others). These players know how to aerate Byrd's smooth weave of independent lines, by slipping in telling pauses. They enliven the dances by pointing up the ingenious way Byrd makes the melodies skip across the regular underlying tread. Viol consorts often play with a perfectly smooth reedy sound, but these players – above all the founder and treble violist Laurence Dreyfus – weren't afraid to warm the sound with a touch of vibrato." – **Ivan Hewett, The Telegraph**

## Musikfestspiele Potsdam Sanssouci (June 2017)

"Thanks to their admirable instrumental skill and great discipline, the ensemble Phantasm managed to offer interpretations marked by the most subtle dynamic shadings and lovely intensifications. Just as important: their joy in music-making, their pleasure in taking fast tempos and their explosive tone production which did not come amiss. This combination came clearly to fruition in the delicate quartet movements. The intonation was immaculate, in the slow-moving passages as much as in the more lively sections. Articulation was crisp, and phrasing meticulous and varied. The sonority was relatively gentle, echoing the fundamental characteristics of the instruments." – **Klaus Büstrin, Potsdamer Neueste Nachrichten**

"The art of ensemble in a viol consort can be compared with a string quartet, but even more so than in the later repertoire, one has to play with one breath and yet remain individual. In the best cases there arises a wonderful sense of suspended balance, an inspired play of tacit and expressive understanding. Consort! Phantasm realises this ideal in a deeply touching manner that takes the breath away. In the earlier part of the programme a strictly contrapuntal mass by William Byrd managed even without words to convey the deep religiosity of Catholics in a hostile Protestant milieu. The atmosphere then cheered up with Ferrabosco in a luminous fantasy." – **Clemens Goldberg, rbb Kultur**

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### **Berlin Philharmonic Kammermusiksaal / Concerto Melante (March 2017)**

"When these musicians play the five- or four-part compositions of Purcell, William Bird, Christopher Tye or John Jenkins, it becomes tangible that this is great music. The euphony of the flowing voices is overwhelming, but so is the artful polyphony, which is accompanied by a strong character drawing: in the terrifyingly free dissonance of Purcell as well as in the drumming rhythms of Christopher Tye, who seems to anticipate Monteverdi's "stylish concitato" by several years." – **Martin Wilkening, Berliner Zeitung**

### **Thomas Tomkins: Anthems & Canticles (Choir of Magdalen College, Oxford/Phantasm) Opus Arte CD9040**

"Phantasm plays with precision and authority. Viols tend to have a wispy sound (compared to modern stringed instruments), but there's nothing anemic about Phantasm." – **Robert Aubry Davis, Millenium of Music**

"The interpretations are well done; both the tutti and the solo episodes are convincingly executed. Between these, Phantasm also plays some works for viol consort. These have very different characters. There are several chromatic passages in the two pieces, which is all the more remarkable as Tomkins shies away from harmonic experiments in his vocal works. Such passages reach their fully potential under Phantasm...All in all a beautiful and interesting musical portrait of one of the most prominent English composers of the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century" – **Johan van Veen, Toccata**

### **John Dowland: Lachrimae or Seven Tears Linn Records CKD 527**

"Phantasm's performances are totally convincing and absorbing. Drawing richly on their depth, intensity and homogeneity of tone, their acuity to the music's ever-active emotional flux leaves them unafraid to use forceful gestures of articulation and dynamics to make a point. This keen awareness of the music's power extends to their performances of the 14 other pieces Dowland included in his Lachrimae publication, most of which are arrangements of his own songs and dances. But while many are light-hearted, short and familiar, nothing is routine in Phantasm's hands. Semper Dowland semper Dolens (rather more in the mould of the seven pavans) ends in crushing silence, The King of Denmark's Galliard is proud of its manly power, while The Earl of Essex his Galliard or Mr George Whitehead his Alman really rock with what Dreyfus defines as rhythmic 'jumps' and 'landings'. Even the timings of the gaps between pieces are part of the act, carefully judged to create effective groupings and segues." – **Lindsay Kemp, Gramophone [Gramophone Early Music Award Winner 2017]**

"This set of seven pieces for viols and lute still sounds as sensuous and beguiling as it must have done then. Partly through its unique combination of instruments, partly through the richness of its harmonies, the melancholy of the music touches a nerve. Phantasm and lutenist Elizabeth Kenny offer heartfelt playing and add a generous selection of 14 no less enjoyable Dowland dances." – **Richard Fairman, Financial Times**

"The performances are elegant, rich-textured and beautifully phrased. Affecting." – **Stephen Pettitt, The Times**

"The most sensuously tuneful hour of music ever written", is Phantasm director Laurence Dreyfus's wittily provocative description of Dowland's Lachrimae; you might expect it to be said of Puccini or Gershwin, but of Dowland in 1604? Yet it's apt, because several

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of the lively dances that follow the sad pavans are versions of Dowland's wonderful songs. Can She Excuse My Wrongs works better as The Earl of Essex Galliard, with its repeated notes and syncopated rhythms. At the heart of this disc are the seven variants of the utterly memorable Lachrimae theme, played by Phantasm with their expressive warmth and exquisite subtlety." – **Nicholas Kenyon, The Guardian**

"Under the laser-sharp direction of Laurence Dreyfus, the viol consort Phantasm here offers the same flawless playing that has earned its members consistent, well-deserved accolades. Despite the brooding nature of the music, their sound is luminous and tempos are fluid, highlighting Dowland's lyricism; indeed, many of these pieces began life as, or subsequently became, songs." – **Kate Bolton-Porciatti, BBC Music Magazine**

## Lammermuir Festival: Bach's Art of Fugue (September 2015)

"JS Bach never finished his epic contrapuntal masterpiece The Art of Fugue: the final passage, in which he enigmatically encrypted his own initials, simply cuts out mid-sentence and nobody quite knows why. The manuscript doesn't specify instruments, and Phantasm made it their own, spinning each line with a sense of lyrical, wide-eyed storytelling that summed up Bach's love of song and dance as much as the formidable mathematics of his counterpoint." – **Kate Molleson, The Guardian**

## William Lawes: The Royal Consort, Linn Records CKD 470

"The rhythmic vivacity and pungent push-pull swing of their playing rocks, while their ear for authentic period non-tempered tunings is exquisite." – **Philip Clark, Limelight Magazine [Chamber Music Prize Winner 2016]**

"The playing is so expressive, wonderfully lyrical in the Pavens and Ayres, boisterous in the Sarabands. They use vibrato judiciously, the texture never clouded. The tone is always crystal bright, the articulation beautifully controlled, ranging from boisterously detached to sinuous legato, the theorbo (Elizabeth Kenny) matching their every move." – **Robert Oliver, Early Music Review**

"Unter der Leitung von Laurence Dreyfus spielt das Ensemble 'Phantasm' mit viel Eleganz und Wärme und gibt mit eben so viel gestalterischer Fantasie einen guten Einblick in den frühbarocken Reichtum von Lawes' Musik, deren Chromatik bei 'Phantasm' bestens aufgehoben ist." – **Remy Franck, Pizzicato**

"Phantasm's playing brims with imaginative fantasy and dance-like momentum" – **David Vickers, Gramophone**

"In the hands of the ensemble Phantasm - resident in Oxford - this world-leading group of gamba players presents the original version of the work for the first time for four viols and theorbo. Exemplary ensemble playing, secure intonation, magnificent technique and - not least - the compelling and swinging pace, all make this recording into one of the high points of the current Early Music offering." – **MDR Figaro**

"In his sleeve notes, treble viol player and Phantasm director Laurence Dreyfus makes the point that "Lawes composes his parts as if the performing musicians are themselves dancing". It's a brilliant starting point, and the Phantasm players really run with it: twist after turn of lapping, pliant lines and spirited counterpoint, all done with a real sense of swing. The ensemble sound is luxuriantly rich, powered by Elizabeth Kenny's feisty theorbo strumming." – **Kate Molleson, The Guardian**

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"The group Phantasm leaves no room for doubt how dance-like this music was intended to be - and how far Lawes distanced himself from traditional and courtly norms of dance music. This is music that breathes, pants, and gasps; it leaps, strides and creeps along, every time in a different way with flowing transitions as well as shocking harmonic stumbling blocks. Magnificent! ... Fantastic music performed by Phantasm." – **Albert Hosp, ORF Austria**

"Highest art, deepest feeling. The musicians of Phantasm bring the two together happily, play the intellectual card with meticulous portrayal of the adventurous polyphonic lines of this music, just as pleasurable as they immerse themselves in their rich emotional sounding, reveling and raving about pain, jubilation, anger, ridicule. Masterful music, masterfully played." – **Andreas Grabner, BR Klassik Radio**

## William Byrd: Complete Consort Music Linn Records CKD372

"The score is sculpted by the tip of the bow and humanised thanks to a moderate use of vibrato. This playing avoids extremes: surely the only way to render this highly stylised repertoire. But at the same time the flame is always kept ablaze, allowing one to follow the 'circulatory flow' of ideas in the counterpoint... reminds us of what separates a good disc of Early music from an exceptional success: that each track be a forest bustling with life" - **Harold Lopparelli, Diapason d'or août [Golden Diapason Award Winner 2011]**

"The players of Phantasm handle the complexities and nuances of Byrd's style with perfection. His agile melodies sound spontaneous. His rich harmonies emerge as full-bodied colors. His dense counterpoint sounds easygoing. Indeed, the earthy elegance of William Byrd's music is perfectly matched to this ensemble's temperament." – **Tom Manoff, NPR Music**

"The ensemble's director, Laurence Dreyfus (himself something of a Renaissance man), combines rigorous intellect with sensitive musicianship. He leads his colleagues through a series of urbane discourses exploring the abstract, cerebral nature of Byrd's consort music, beyond its earthy, folk-influenced style. Ensemble and intonation are flawless; keen rhythms and featherlight bowings give a lightness of touch to the dances." – **Kate Bolton, BBC Music Magazine**

"The playing is quite simply divine. Phantasm have long been known for their musical precision, to which they bring to this music a warm, woody, soft-edged articulation that suits it very well. The pacing of individual pieces and sections within them seems particularly sensitively judged and Byrd's textures sublimely balanced."- **Julie Anne Sadie, Gramophone – Editor's Choice**

"From the unhurried ease of the "Fantasia a3" to the final cadence of "Prelude and Goodnight Ground a5", Phantasm's new recording is intoxicating. The disc spans more than 40 years of Byrd's life, incorporating robust, rustic dances, madrigalian allusions to bird calls and decorous versions of "Te Lucis..." and "Christe redemptor omnium". In three, four, five and six parts, the blend, balance, ensemble and tuning is faultless, the sound sweet but never cloying." – **Anna Picard, Independent on Sunday**