
Paul McCreesh

Selected Reviews

Recording CD: *Purcell The Fairy Queen 1692, Gabrieli Consort, Signum Classics SIGCD615 (April 2020)*

"A fine recording ... scholarly and sensitive... McCreesh and his performers give their impressive all to the miraculous score."
- **The Times**

"McCreesh's production rises to the occasion: original voicing, unorthodox continuo, project-specific trumpet design and rediscovered string techniques bring out qualities missing from earlier recordings. Purcell's hornpipes were never livelier, nor his chaconnes statelier, than in this performance."
- **BBC Music Magazine (Opera Choice)*******

"Impeccable ... McCreesh's labour of love has abundant nuances and transcendent beauty."
- **Gramophone (Editor's Choice)**

"For his work there can be nothing but praise, from the subtle subdued hues produced by his strings, set up and bowed in accord with 17th-century practice, to the gossamer-like touch he brings to so much of the score... McCreesh's Purcell ... has no rival."
- **Opera Magazine**

"...a blissful marriage of musicological inquisitiveness and artistic creativity."
- **David Vickers, Gramophone**

"As always with Gabrieli, the music-making itself is top-notch ... recommended in particular for Purcell enthusiasts."
- **The Classic Review**

"Paul McCreesh and Gabrieli have become so accomplished at breathing new life into historical works and occasions that it's difficult to give this latest recording the praise it deserves without becoming repetitive. Their trademark approach to authenticity continues to be a winning formula – recapturing the spirit, rather than the precise letter, of the original – and the performers all flit effortlessly between the narrative's changes of mood. I can't think of anyone who could give a better rendition of this Restoration 'feel-good' masterpiece."
- **David Smith, Presto Classical**

"Applying the latest research, Paul McCreesh and his forces give a performance of engaging freshness and vitality . . ."
- **Robert Hugill, Planet Hugill*******

Purcell King Arthur, Gabrieli Consort, St John's Smith Square (October 2019)

"Above all, though, this was an evening of joyous, wonderfully elegant music-making. Nine singers shared the songs and choruses between them, a flawless ensemble of equals... The playing, meanwhile, had everything one could wish for in its deftness, grace and lightness of touch."
- **Tim Ashley, The Guardian*******

Recording CD: *Purcell King Arthur 1691, Gabrieli Consort, Signum Classics SIGCD589 (October 2019)*

"Enter **McCreesh** and his team. They've re-thought not just the score, but the instruments and practices of Purcell's day. In their *King Arthur*, choruses are more vibrant, dance rhythms more percussive and solos more delicate than in any previous recording. Above all, McCreesh and his artists make us hear Purcell's genius for word-setting. ...McCreesh's new performing edition, which contains re-ordered numbers and a finale forged from other works by Purcell, is the catalyst for this intimate, intensely energetic production."
- **Berta Joncus, BBC Music Magazine**

"Throughout the opera McCreesh's speeds are relaxed rather than driven – no bad thing, to my mind, and it results in Dryden's wonderful poetry being acted with personable clarity, and the lucidity of musical gestures ensures that affection and intimacy are hallmarks of a performance that conveys a humane smile."
- **David Vickers, Gramophone**

"Overall, this is a cultivated performance, well sung and played"
- **Richard Fairman, The Financial Times*******

"Paul McCreesh follows convention by giving us only the musical numbers, but unlike most conductors he gives us a performance benefitting from years of living with and thinking about the work, constantly evolving his approach to it. The result tempts only superlatives, for the new recording is as accomplished and richly satisfying an experience as anyone could hope for... Throughout, indeed, the outstanding orchestral plating is one of the great pleasures of the performance, beguiling or rhythmically buoyant and pointed as circumstances demand."
- **Brian Robins, Opera Magazine**

"Purcell's *King Arthur*, in a crisp and clean new recording of a scholarly new performing edition from the Gabrieli Consort under **Paul McCreesh**. Don't fear if that sounds a little dusty, because new string articulation, coarser reeds for wind instruments and

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natural trumpets mean that the music has a vivid and lively personality."

- Francis Muzzu, *Opera Now******

Recording CD: *An English Coronation, Gabrieli Consort, Signum Classics SIGCD569 (May 2019)*

"A project delivered with McCreesh's customary attention to detail...it's a labour of love and sounds it...Incisive in the orchestral works – what scintillating woodwind playing he secures in Elgar's Pomp and Circumstance March No. 1 – McCreesh is at his considerable best in the choral items."

- Paul Riley, *BBC Music Magazine******

"On his tireless voyage of ceremonial and liturgical reconstruction, Paul McCreesh's 20th-century coronation anthology is arguably his most ambitious and intricate to date... Well-articulated insights into the rich theatrical dimension of this quartet of coronations work best in the large works, all of which sound spectacular in the ringing acoustic... One can imagine the virtuosity required by every contributor, at every turn, to make this a reality, let alone a dazzling triumph."

- Jonathan Freeman-Attwood, *Gramophone*

"Elgar's sombre, introspective Coronation March is performed with real style, the articulation crisp, the transparent orchestral sound allowing every detail to register... Experience and innocence collide to staggering musical and sonic effect: listen to this lot in Parry's I Was Glad or Handel's Zadok the Priest and be amazed at the visceral punch of these forces at full pelt. Girding, anointing, oblation and 'orb delivery' are omitted, but otherwise we get a remarkable sense of what being sat in Westminster Abbey must have been like... Walton's Coronation Te Deum is sensational, as is Crown Imperial, these pieces surrounding David Matthews's exquisite, newly commissioned Recessional, which leads straight into his arrangement of the National Anthem. Its second verse features almost 1,000 performers, massed trumpets and bells suggesting Janáček's Glagolitic Mass. A treat, even for those with republican leanings. Signum's production values are exemplary, the two CDs presented in a covetable hardback book. Really, really impressive, and fun to boot."

- Graham Rickson, *The Arts Desk*

"Paul McCreesh's reconstruction projects always feel like events; six months on his celebration of the grandeur and grace, drama and dignity of the British coronation remains as moving as it is memorable."

- Martin Cullingford, *Gramophone*

Mozart & Tchaikovsky, Kammerorchester Basel (May 2019)

"The impulses he gives to the interpretation with his eloquent hands are perfectly enough."

- Gerhard Dietel, *Mittelbayerische*

Bach *St Matthew Passion*, Gabrieli Consort, Bachkirche Arnstadt (April 2019)

"The Gabrieli Consort & Players performed under the thoughtful direction of Paul McCreesh ... an admirable unity of song and orchestra, of religious content and musical interpretation emerged. Thus, the *St. Matthew Passion*, originally intended for religious edification, became a musical treat of the highest quality."

- Klaus Ehring, *Thüringer Allgemeine*

Purcell *King Arthur*, Gabrieli Consort, Elder Hall, University Of Adelaide (February 2019)

"McCreesh led the group, with some very lively conducting, joining in with the vocals in the full ensemble sections. His enjoyment of the performance was obvious, and there were plenty of smiles from the singers and musicians, too. This enthusiasm for the work came across, adding to the superb performances, and thunderous applause was heard at the end of the first half and the end of the piece."

- Barry Lenny, *Broadway World*

Handel *Messiah*, Orchestre Symphonique de Montreal (December 2018)

"... the delivery of the singers and instrumentalists of the OSM led by Paul McCreesh was quite exceptional ... Like that of Nikolaus Harnoncourt, and others, the *Messiah* of McCreesh is not one to exhaust itself in the first part, that devoted to the prophecy of the coming of the Messiah and the Nativity. It reveals itself and is consumed in the second part, that of *Passion and triumph*, with a radiance that lasts in the third, that of life after death. ... With high demands, Paul McCreesh went almost as far as Trevor Pinnock with the *Violons du Roy* four years ago. And the OSM has been admirable of precision, proving that the eloquence in this repertoire is more a question of rhetoric than of instruments."

- Christophe Huss, *Le Devoir*

Recording CD: *A Rose Magnificat, Gabrieli Consort, Signum Classics SIGCD536 (May 2018)*

"Paul McCreesh's choir is in superlative form for this well-varied programme ... The transitions from introspection to elated

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confidence in Howell's *Salve Regina* are beautifully managed by McCreesh and his singers"

-Terry Blain, *BBC Music Magazine******

"this exquisitely crafted recital of English Marian motets and Magnificats from the Gabrieli Consort and Paul McCreesh. Performances are pristine: carefully balanced and always cleanly tuned, and a more muscular, characterful top line offers a welcome contrast to some of the ensemble's English rivals. McCreesh's ear for a contemporary classic is unerring"

-Alexandra Coghlan, *Gramophone*

"The radiant purity of the singing is framed by the depth and clarity of the recording, and the choral virtuosity in the title track at the end of the album is breathtaking."

-BBC Music Magazine Awards 2019: Choral Nomination

Bach *B Minor Mass*, Gabrieli Consort & Players, Holy Week Festival, St John's Smith Square (April 2018)

"Paul McCreesh and his Gabrieli Consort and Players brought period-instrument intimacy and chamber-sized vitality to Bach's *B minor Mass*."

-Fiona Maddocks, *The Times*

Recording CD: *Silence & Music*, Gabrieli Consort, Signum Classics (October 2017)

"The Gabrieli Consort, conducted by Paul McCreesh, sings Stanford's "The Blue Bird" with such abstracted beauty that enchantment sets in from the opening minutes."

-Richard Fairman, *The Financial Times******

"The Gabrieli's latest themed CD, beautifully produced in all respects, celebrates the concision and intensity of 20th-century British part songs, from Elgar and Warlock to James MacMillan and Jonathan Dove, from the stark (Grainger's *The Three Ravens*) to the ethereal (Vaughan Williams's *Rest*). The opening song, Stanford's *The Blue Bird*, uses a group of sopranos on the top line – apparently as the composer intended – instead of the usual soloist. The effect is arresting, and typical of the attention to text and score demonstrated by Paul McCreesh and his singers in each of these songs ... These miniatures are rich, each in need of proper savouring."

-Fiona Maddocks, *The Guardian*****

"The musical care and the easy, unforced shaping of lines from the Gabrielis is all the ornament works like Elgar's *There is sweet music* and Howells's *The summer is coming* need, and the two Vaughan Williams settings – *Silence and Music* and the expansive *Rest* – sit just the right side of sentimentality... The result is a clever mixture of moods – a disc that takes the part-song into the 21st century not only in repertoire but also in style"

-Alexandra Coghlan, *Gramophone*

"Sometimes the best discoveries in music aren't pieces that you've never heard before, but those you have, made new by remarkable interpretations. That's certainly the case with Stanford's *The Blue Bird*, long a staple of the English Choral Repertoire, as sung by the Gabrieli Consort on this new recording. The feeling of partial, hovering detachment conductor Paul McCreesh creates between the gently lapping four-part underlay, and the five sopranos gliding 'across the waters' in unison, is magical, creating the special frisson intended by Stanford as he translated a fleetingly wonderful scene from nature into music. Sometimes similar happens in Elgar's *Owls*, where McCreesh and his super-sensitive singers distil a gripping sense of mysterious nocturnal rustlings. [...] This is a beautifully constructed programme, sung with consummate assurance and self-effacing artistry"

-Terry Blain, *Choral and Song Choice* *****

Recording: Haydn *The Seasons*, Gabrieli Consort & Players, Wrocław Baroque Orchestra, National Forum of Music Choir (Spring 2017)

"McCreesh clearly relishes the sheer range of colours which the period instruments are able to bring to Haydn's music, this is a recording which is full of colour ... by rediscovering the work's essential qualities and not trying for portentousness, McCreesh has enabled me to enjoy the work far more for its own qualities ... some period instrument performances simply re-work a piece into a pre-conceived image, but here McCreesh has enabled us to listen to Haydn's *The Seasons* with new ears."

-Planet Hugill

"A musical hit from McCreesh"

-Trouw

"Substantial choral and orchestral forces captured in sound that is both expansive and immediate."

-Recording of the Month, *ClassicalMusic.com*

"For the first time this recording aims to present a period performance on an authentically grand scale... Paul McCreesh conducts his own English version, perfectly enunciated by the British/Polish choir, and the communal sense of joy is infectious. The three soloists are first-rate. So is the recording. An uplifting performance all-round."

-Financial Times

"...this recording brings [The Seasons] thrillingly to life... Paul McCreesh assembles a massive throng of singers and players, the

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numbers that might have performed the piece in 1801. And what a noise they make! McCreesh's fresh new translation animates the top-class solo singing, while the massed choruses blow the roof off. Glorious." **-The Guardian**

"This recording is well worth acquiring, to get to know one of Haydn's most treasurable works"

-Classic FM

J.S. Bach Easter Oratorio, Gabrieli Consort & Players (April 2017)

"[the performance] acquired exceptional energy and zest. Every line, every texture could be heard... all felt natural and alive, as if this had to be the sound Bach wanted, on these exact instruments. We can never know absolutely, but if a performance convinces you, the musicians have done their job." **-The Guardian**

Handel Messiah, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra (December 2016)

"How do you keep Handel's great oratorio sounding fresh and relevant...? Hiring Paul McCreesh is one solution. The English conductor is a choral specialist, and he brought a rare clarity and dynamism to the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra's Messiah...McCreesh's take on Handel's masterpiece was bracingly direct and free of pomposity." **-Star Tribune**

J.S. Bach B Minor Mass, Royal Northern Sinfonia (March 2016)

"McCreesh, a master in the art of conducting massed forces, led the line wonderfully... Everyone on stage showed total commitment to climbing this 'Everest', and the orchestral performances from all sections were of the highest quality... Full marks all round." **-Chronicle Live**

Bach St Matthew Passion, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra (October 2015)

"... it was the arresting vision of McCreesh and his confident way of bringing it into life that impressed the most... this was a performance so meticulously crafted that it was hard to find fault in anything... If you've longed for a concert that gives Bach the full measure of greatness that he deserves, you aren't going to find many that succeed as well as this." **-Twin Cities**

"though his tempos were lively without feeling pushed — the crowd scenes, for instance, were delivered with special punch — the conductor managed to sustain the work's essential quality of introspection and repose." **-Star Tribune**

Recording: L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed Moderato, Gabrieli Consort & Players (Summer 2015)

"we find ourselves immersed in an enchanted literary world – very distant from ours, but beguiling. ...The way Paul McCreesh and his excellent Gabrieli Consort & Players tackle the Handel-Milton mix is a great joy." **-Forbes**

"It's a pleasure to hear conductor Paul McCreesh return to Handel, and his thoughtful approach is matched by passionate, deeply felt performances, especially from the chorus and orchestra. Handel left no overture; McCreesh's choice of the composer's Concerto Grosse, Op. 6, No. 1, sets a stately opening, with violins in refined discourse while the cellos glide elegantly beneath." **-Opera News**

"The music-making throughout is ripe and affecting, its perfection of execution in constant service to the music and text. The segues from solo voices to chorus and back are so seamless you've usually made the transition before noticing you have...what you're more likely to take away is the smile smeared all over your face." **-Bay Area Reporter**

"McCreesh paces and colours the music with an acute feeling for its specific tinta: say, the graceful, buoyant dance lilt of 'Come and trip it', the evocation of 'the far-off curfew' or the murmuring, secretive strings in the drowsy finale of Part 1... Handel lovers can hardly fail to enjoy the mingled finesse and hedonistic delight of this new recording." **-Gramophone**

"Handel's ravishing score, here realised to perfection by Paul McCreesh and his Gabrieli forces, evokes these scenes with colourful precision... A glorious recording: I cannot recommend it too highly." **-The Observer**

Recording: Britten War Requiem, Gabrieli Consort & Players (August 2015)

"McCreesh leads an electrifying and fastidiously detailed account of the Britten. Both choruses and orchestra are absolutely first-rate, and the recording, from performances in three different venues, is almost freakishly lifelike." **-Dallas Morning News**

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Purcell *King Arthur*, Gabrieli Consort & Players, St John's Hall (July 2015)

"The orchestra played with admirable verve and sensitivity under Paul McCreesh's stylish direction." **-Evening Standard**

"McCreesh is one of today's finest Purcell interpreters, and musically this was rather special, played with an admirable mixture of sensuousness and majesty, and sung with consistent finesse and élan by nine singers sharing the songs and choruses between them." **-Guardian**

Wagner, Britten, Mozart, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra (May 2015)

"McCreesh was a joy to watch, coaxing a dancing quality from the music at every opportunity, floating in place on the first movement and turning the minuet into a foot-stomping mazurka... this Mozart performance bore the earmarks of the kind of fresh, enthusiastic perspective that evangelists for the early often bring to their interpretations." **-Pioneer Press**

Mendelssohn *Elijah*, Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Sydney Philharmonia Choir (May 2014)

"[The performance] brought the scale and force of Mendelssohn's gestures into spectacular focus. After a portentous opening, the angular orchestral fugue of the Overture led in a straight line to a startling, thrilling choral outburst *Help Lord*, which certainly gets straight to the point. In the hours that followed the musical precision and balance made absorbing listening... The Sydney Symphony Orchestra bristled and glowed with finesse." **-Sydney Morning Herald**

Schubert, Prokofiev & Beethoven, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Ordway Center for the Performing Arts (February 2014)

"the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra - under the intensely taut direction of English conductor Paul McCreesh - gave an electrifying performance of Prokofiev's Second Violin Concerto, one that skillfully captured the contradictions roiling within the composer during the mid-1930s." **-Pioneer Press**

***Incarnation*, Gabrieli Consort & Players, Trebles of the Copenhagen Royal Chapel Choir (Winged Lion) (December 2013)**

"When you're on a roll, you're on a roll: this is the sixth Gabrieli Consort issue on its own 'Winged Lion' imprint, and easily matches the outstanding quality of its predecessors... The Gabrieli's rapt and intense performance is remarkable in its poise and tonal control at mainly low dynamic levels... At the heart of everything is the consummate technical ability and sense of idiom displayed by the 28 Gabrieli singers, and McCreesh's inspirational direction. It's the type of artistry that completely avoids the impression of artifice: you simply feel you're listening directly to what the composer meant by the music." **-BBC Music Magazine***** , recording of the month**

Mendelssohn, Schumann, Schubert , Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchester & Gabrieli Choir, Leipzig Gewandhaus (September 2013)

"After the interval the stage was set for a powerful, and powerfully eloquent, *Walpurgis Night*. The Gewandhausorchester's representation of blazing flames, the clamour of the poem's "torches and rattling sticks" and the fervent evocation of light made for a remarkable experience, filled with both spine-chilling savagery and quiet contemplation. The magnificent Gabrieli Consort provided the choruses, and every word of its heartfelt laments and furious howling came across clearly – listening to them is an experience you just never want to come to an end..."

And the tumultuous spirit of the music was matched by the enthusiastic applause in the packed hall. Schumann's *Nachtlied* (Night Song) for choir and orchestra provided a point of calm to counterbalance the turmoil that had gone before, bringing the concert to a dazzling close. But there had already been a moment of magic from the Gewandhausorchester and McCreesh in the first half of the concert, with Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony*. The conductor reached deep into the jewellery box in the *Allegro moderato*, taking the movement at a sublime, unhurried pace to conjure forth delicate, flawless gems. In contrast, he focused more on individual sections in the *Andante con moto*, shaping them with energetic precision and drawing out beautiful solos from the clarinet, oboe and flute." **-Leipziger Volkszeitung**

Britten *War Requiem*, 1962, Gabrieli Consort & Players, Wroclaw Philharmonic Choir & Orchestra (Autumn 2013)

"McCreesh creates a vast crescendo and pauses for an awe-struck moment before an incandescent *Hosanna*, with heart-stopping results. The Gabrielis and Wroclaw Philharmonic Choir are joined by a host of young voices, and it shows in a choral sound of airy, pure brilliance. His New College choristers have the ideal mix of celestial glow and nimble impatience; his orchestra is wonderfully articulate. And the sound picture has the greatest depth and range of all the recordings [of this work]... the profundity and coherence of McCreesh's recording sets a new standard for this work." **-BBC Music Magazine*******

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"The transparency of the textures and the crisp outlines are a delight. You hear more of the subcutaneous detail of Britten's scoring, I think, than on any previous recording. McCreesh opts for an all-British trio of soloists: Susan Gritton thrillingly hieratic, John Mark Ainsley a tenor very much in the Peter Pears mould, Christopher Maltman making every word matter."

-The Guardian

"Thrilling... sensationally good instrumental playing."

-The Times

"The McCreesh War Requiem...has the presence and intensity of a live cathedral performance: it sets new standards for this strangely moving choral work. The Wroclaw Philharmonic Choir projects the Latin liturgical texts with radiant luminosity, matched by the trebles of the Choir of New College, Oxford, while the three soloists – Susan Gritton, John Mark Ainsley and Christopher Maltman – combine poise and conviction. McCreesh brings astonishing clarity to the work's musical syntax: the performance culminates in a transformative 'Libera me.' Here is a recording worthy of the Britten centenary."

-Financial Times*****

"Another triumphant realization of a complex, multi-layered work..."

-Independent

Agrippina, Flemish Opera (November 2012)

"Flemish Opera decided not to hire a specialized and expensive baroque orchestra, but made the adventurous choice of using its own symphony orchestra. Luckily, it had an excellent conductor in British maestro Paul McCreesh, who is internationally renowned for his expertise in the Renaissance and Baroque repertoires and who led the orchestra with precision and panache."

-British Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies

Schubert, Saint-Saëns, Tchaikovsky, Dvořák, Danish National Symphony Orchestra, with Sol Gabetta (cello) (March 2012)

"Paul McCreesh was down on the floor – right in front of the musicians, stirring each other almost in the style of chamber music. He leaned forward, jumped up on his toes and down to his knees. With energetic arms, he let the orchestra roar like a fire or fade to nothing in the melodic sequence. [...] Rarely has Schubert sounded so lively."

-KPN

Haydn *The Seasons*, The Barbican Centre, London (January 2012)

"McCreesh conducted it quite wonderfully, with an almost innate sense of its ebb and flow, summoning impeccable, incisive playing and some glorious choral singing from his Gabrieli Consort and Players."

-The Guardian

Mendelssohn *Elijah*, 1846, Gabrieli Consort & Players, Wroclaw Philharmonic Choir & Orchestra (Winged Lion) (2012)

"...The sound is massive when required, but the articulation is never unwieldy and there is delicacy too ... this is a triumph..."

-Gramophone

"...McCreesh has succeeded admirably in re-creating, as clearly as possible, the kind of impact this masterpiece must have made at its first performances ... here is singing of the highest international standard and musical intelligence..."

- International Record Review

"...Paul McCreesh here totally re-imagines it: the big choruses are transparent as well as massively impressive – with young Gabrieli voices and a Polish choir in the lead – and there is no danger of religiosity in the fresh-voiced soloists ... In all, a spectacularly successful reinvention of the British choral tradition."

-Observer

"...The sound is tremendous ... but as in the recording of the *Grande Messe des Morts*, one of the striking aspects of the performance is the way that Paul McCreesh so naturally places the great set pieces within the context of a multifaceted expressive whole ... a definite first choice."

-The Daily Telegraph

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"...A thrilling performance ... The sound is spectacular, just as it should be, right now there is no recording of *Elijah* to which I'd rather listen..."

-**CD Review, BBC Radio Three**

Recording: Berlioz Grande Messe des Morts, Gabrieli Consort & Players, Signum SIGCD280 (October 2011)

"The concept of Berlioz's Requiem Mass may embrace a certain element of grandiosity but, listening to this performance, it is impossible to forget that Berlioz was a supreme orchestrator and a composer with a broad dramatic talent."

- **Gramophone**

Mendelssohn *Elijah*, Gabrieli Consort and Players, Leipzig Gewandhaus (September 2011)

"The tremendous cry of 'Help, Lord!' bounced off the walls, and this first choral entry made it abundantly clear that this performance of *Elijah* was going to be something special; something significant. Two and a half hours later, it was even more than that: this was one of the most vivid performances of Mendelssohn, or indeed of any piece from the choral repertoire, that had been heard in Leipzig in recent times. Paul McCreesh and the Gabrieli Consort and Players, along with their choir of hundreds incorporating the Wrocław Philharmonic Choir, gave a full-on performance of Mendelssohn's biblical opera-oratorio, delivering the force of the Old Testament with unbridled power. And yet McCreesh balanced out the seething drama by lending his orchestra a classical spring to its step, and allowing it to breathe. And that is exactly what Mendelssohn's music is: the future, encased in the traditional."

-**Leipziger Volkszeitung**