

works written by Rindfleisch between 2005 and 2012.

Rindfleisch's choral music is immediately accessible to the ear. The opening track, *Careless Carols*, reveals many of the compositional traits that Rindfleisch favors: polyphonic textures, added-second harmonies, close repetition of words, and a clear sense of structure. This piece, on a Rabindranath Tagore text, opens with a percolating introduction in which the words "sing" and "song" are thrown around the choir, an idea that recurs throughout the work.

Rindfleisch's take on *Mille Regretz* reflects his deep connection to music of the past. His approach encapsulates the history of the *chanson* from ancient to modern, with *organum*-like passages that give way to more colorful harmonies and moments that suggest Debussy. An understated work, it exploits the low registers of the choir.



*Anthem*, an attractive setting of Psalm 130 ["Out from the deep"], also draws on early music influences, including imitation, duet textures, and chain suspensions. The concluding "Amen" section creates a gentle, extended coda that gradually winds down to nothing—another Rindfleisch trademark. A similar "Amen" closes *Kaddish Prayer*, a calm but more harmonically stark piece.

Between these two lyrical prayers comes *Graue Liebesschlangen* ["Gray Love-Snakes"], with an evocative text by Rainer Maria Rilke. The musical language teeters between Romantic

richness and abrupt, angular Expressionist effects. Text painting is found throughout, with chromatic lines conjuring the snakes.

*Veni Sancte Spiritus* features a bell-like opening and slower, more homophonic writing when the text speaks of heavenly light. *Salmo de Alabanza*, commissioned to accompany a program of Spanish and Mexican cathedral music, offers an exciting rhythmic drive and mixed meters reminiscent of the *villancico*.

Lyricism is a strong suit of Rindfleisch's writing, but any sense of being lulled into calm is dispelled with *O Livoris Feritas* ["O Savageness of Envy"] for TTBB voices. Using techniques like aleatoric speech-song, glissandi, and abrupt silences within a dissonant harmonic landscape, Rindfleisch constructs an unsettling murmur and crescendo of voices. In contrast, the women are featured in a three-movement set *Klangfarben* [Timbres]—again with texts from Rilke—that explores the full range and colors of the female voice. These single-gender works present some of the most compelling writing and singing on the disc.

An expansive reading of *An Irish Blessing* brings the disc to a gentle close. The most straightforward work found here, it is nonetheless musically rich and displays Rindfleisch's love of counterpoint. Here is a piece that could surely find a place in the regular repertoire of capable high school, college, church, and community choirs.

Conductor Scott MacPherson elicits expressive and nuanced singing from the San Antonio Chamber

Choir. Its round, rich sound—seamless throughout the vocal range—seems perfectly suited to Rindfleisch's colorful sonorities. The basses deserve mention for delivering Rindfleisch's often-low writing with ease. A reverberant recording acoustic gives the unaccompanied choral sound an attractive presence.

Extensive CD notes accompany the disc and shed light on Rindfleisch's compositional habits. This recording follows an earlier collection of Rindfleisch works by the Isthmus Vocal Ensemble on the Clarion label (CLCD-927), also conducted by MacPherson. A harmonious match between conductor, composer, and ensemble is evident. Rindfleisch adds a worthy voice to the repertoire of contemporary American choral music, and this recording serves his music beautifully.

Kerry Glann  
Muncie, Indiana

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**Hugo Distler:**  
***Die Weihnachtsgeschichte***  
Athesinus Consort Berlin  
Klaus-Martin Breggott, conductor  
Thomas Volle, Evangelist  
Carus 83.472 (2015, 75'54")

Above all, Hugo Distler believed that his music had the opportunity to meaningfully and clearly express the Word of God. It was on this belief that all his compositions were built; no matter how beautiful the melody or how lively the rhythm, the text would always come first. It is with

this in mind that the listener must approach any recording of his work, and it is immediately evident that conductor Klaus-Martin Breggott and the Athesinus Consort Berlin were dedicated to this end.

The beautiful melody “Es ist ein Ros entsprungen” is well wrought as the cornerstone of Distler’s *Die Weihnachtsgeschichte* and is stunningly presented here. With careful attention to detail and a dedication to capturing the emotion of every cadence, the Athesinus Consort brings this composition to life for the listener. The Evangelist, sung here by Thomas Volle, is particularly impressive in his textual clarity, creating a compelling story for his audience. Each expression of the “Ros” melody begins with its own unique vitality, creating a sense of joy and awe in the listener. A highlight of the recording is the third chorus, in which Mary sings over the choir, well presented here to allow both the solo and the ensemble to be heard in their deserved splendor. Breggott’s clear attention to the craft of the piece is evident but never overshadows the music itself; his passion and enthusiasm for the music is evident throughout the recording.

Mysteriously, Breggott elected to leave out a portion of the work sung by the Evangelist that belongs between the third and fourth choral stanza. This seems an odd choice, particularly given the attention to detail that the conductor seems to pride himself on throughout the CD

notes, which specifically state that the reprise of the opening stanza is presented in order to fulfill the wishes of the composer. This, however, seems a

minor flaw in an otherwise outstanding recording.

The album opens with sounds that can only be considered quintessen-



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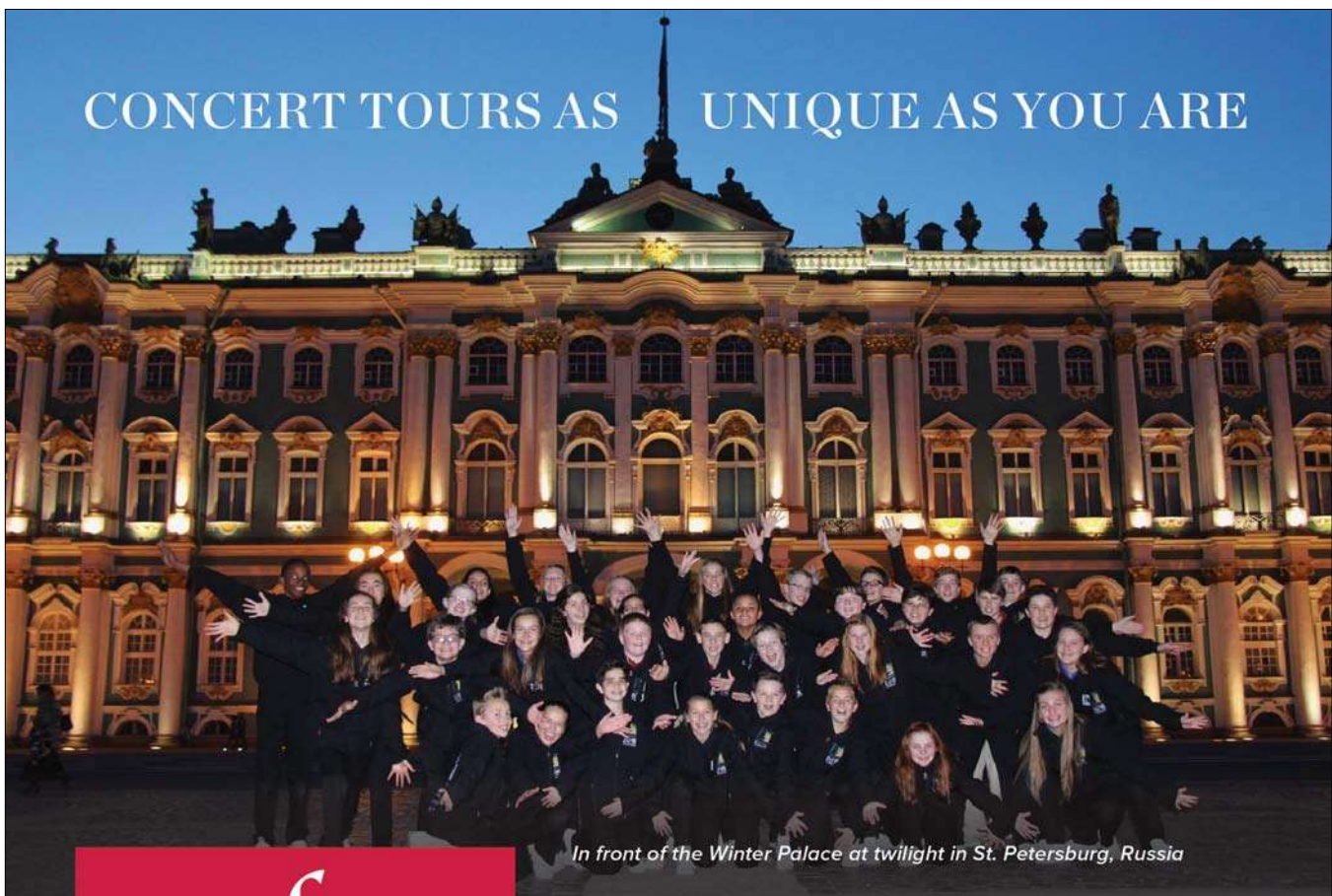
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tially Distler: a subtle, clear statement of the text “O Heiland, Reiß die Himmel auf,” which builds to a magnificent consonant cadence before moving into the exciting rhythmic polyphony, the highlight of Distler’s work as a composer. Written in 1932 and premiered in 1934, this beauti-

ful work was composed around the same time as the album’s title work (*Die Weihnachtsgeschichte*, op. 10) and gives the listener a preview of the type of writing on display in his *Geistliche Chormusik*, op. 12 (no. 4 from this collection *Singet Frisch und Wohlgemut* cleverly closes the album).

Bresgott made another brilliant choice by pulling a selection from op. 10 (*Also Hat Gott Die Welt Geliebet*) and placing it as a separate track, allowing it to act as a preview for the rest of the album. Distler himself specifically provides that the choral movements of op. 10 are suitable for performance



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as stand-alone pieces, and to highlight this is a valuable move for listeners, especially those in the choral field.

Other pieces of note include *Heut Ist Uns Ein Kindlein Geborn* (1928) and *Der Stern* (1937). The former is an example of some of Distler's earliest writing—the composer was only twenty years old at the time of its completion—while the latter remained in manuscript until 2014 when it was published by his daughter Barbara and is unique in Distler's output. The spoken words and echoing effects are a haunting and captivating introduction to the beautiful melody for “Es ist ein Ros entsprungen,” the basis for op. 10.

The album includes extensive CD notes in both English and German and translations of all the texts. For lovers of Distler or anyone looking for a beautiful Christmas album, this album is one to own.

Brad Pierson  
Toledo, Ohio

*Sacred Songs of Life & Love*  
South Dakota Chorale  
Brian A. Schmidt, conductor  
Pentatone (2015; 53'27”)

The twenty-nine-member South Dakota Chorale has quickly developed a national reputation for performance excellence of the highest caliber. *Sacred Songs of Life & Love* is the Chorale's second album in their brief five-year history following the 2012 release of *In Paradisum*, a recording of similar superior artistic

quality. Masterfully recorded in the gorgeous acoustic of the St. Joseph Cathedral in Sioux Falls, *Sacred Songs of Life & Love* pulls together esteemed works by composers of Scandinavia and the Baltic region including Ivo Antognini, Ēriks Ešenvalds, Algirdas Martinaitis, Knut Nystedt, Arvo Pärt, and Sven-David Sandström. The poignantly brilliant vocal quality of the chorale beautifully personifies the haunting harmonies and stark dissonances characteristic of composers of this portion of the world.

Of the nine recorded works, the Pärt *Magnificat* and Sandström *Four Songs of Love* stand out not only for their intrinsic compositional beauty but also for the Chorale's sensitive and expressive performance. Also notable is the glorious soprano duet of Natalie Campbell and Julianna



Emanski in Ešenvalds's *O salutaris hostia*. The ensemble demonstrates nuanced vocal contrast in style from the eerily dissonant contrapuntal lines of Antognini to the luscious sonorities of Nystedt. Their tone is rich in an appropriate eastern European style, yet they deliver each of the texts clearly and articulately throughout the greatly varied textural affects featured in this album. Throughout the album, the ensemble displays a deft fluidity of tone, engaging dynamic extremes, and pure vocal lines culminating in a performance of the loftiest vocal artistry.

To learn more about the Chorale, visit [www.southdakotachorale.com](http://www.southdakotachorale.com) or purchase their album via digital download at [www.pentatonemusic.com/sacred-songs-south-dakota-chorale](http://www.pentatonemusic.com/sacred-songs-south-dakota-chorale).

Thomas Lerew  
Tucson, Arizona

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