

When David heard that Absalom was slain:

Francis Pott

When David Heard is a 12-minute setting of words, adapted from the Second Book of Samuel, describing King David's grief as he learns of the death of his son. Francis Pott's music is further evidence of this composer's vivid and unusual aural imagination, as well as his dramatic sense. This is the first recording of this beautiful work.

William Hedley, International Record Review, October 2012

The disc concludes with *When David Heard*, an astonishing piece by Francis Pott. I first came across this when I was reviewing a disc that included Eric Whitacre's setting of the same text. There's much to admire in Whitacre's setting but I feel that it loses its way in the middle, a trap which Francis Pott seems to me to avoid completely. Pott builds the music inexorably and in his writing it seems to me that he conveys on the one hand the raw emotion of King David's grief and, on the other, the need for him to preserve regal dignity, at least in public. Eventually the piece achieves a searing climax on the words "Absalom, my son", which sound as if they've been wrenched from the king's heart. After this the music sinks back into the hushed, grave mood from which it first emerged. This eloquent, demanding piece is superbly performed. ...This is a disc that should be investigated by all those who are interested in contemporary choral music.

John Quinn, Musicweb International, October 2012

British composer Francis Pott has yet to attain the familiarity with which American choral musicians regard his countrymen Bob Chilcott and Judith Bingham, though they are of a similar vintage. This disc may go some considerable way to rectifying this imbalance.

So to the music: personal experience will testify to its challenges, but what rewards await those brave enough to perform this rapturous, enveloping polyphony! Here is mature music, unafraid to make demands upon its singers without ever 'stepping over the mark'; a mature composer too, willing to offer his own response to well trodden texts such as the Mass, Ubi Caritas, I Sing of a Maiden, and even Balulalow. This last exquisite carol exemplifies Pott's sensitivity to text, and more than justifies his tackling words familiar from earlier settings. This is a composer always seeking to meld the artistic with the intellectual, as his frank and engaging booklet notes attest. Pott says he has attempted to move from his inheritance of Tallis and Byrd and discover new directions within a harmony that springs directly from his 16th century antecedents. It is the brilliance of his musical imagination that enables him to avoid any sense of pastiche and develop his own compositional voice.

...The selections on this new Naxos make for compelling listening. Such terrific writing, expressive singing and illuminating booklet notes (by the composer himself) make this disc an absolute 'must have'. It deserves to be played again and again - until Pott's expansive polyphony permeates your memory, and you find yourself nodding at its final, hushed "Amen". Amen, indeed.

Philip Barnes, Journal of the American Choral Directors' Association, May 2012

I especially enjoyed Francis Pott's *When David Heard*, an intense, grief-wracked setting of the Old Testament text... Here the raw, lacerating emotions of personal loss are laid bare for the listener in searing harmonies and tight, tensely contesting intervals. The Vasari Singers grip the work with evident relish and commitment, producing the CD's most potently arresting performance.

Terry Blain, BBC Music Magazine, October 2012

I've been enjoying Francis Pott's music quite a bit of late and his very daring setting of the text *When David heard that Absalom was slain* (famously set by Thomas Tomkins in the 17th century) is marvellous. This is a powerful setting, particularly the way Pott sets King David's cry "Absalom my son!"

Craig Zeichner, Ariama.com, USA, November 2012

Backhouse and his Vasari Singers perform this music to the manner born, with gorgeous tone that rejoices in the rich harmonies and fluid part-writing. Pott's Tomkins-inspired *When David Heard* is a particularly effective reading.

Philip Reed, Choir & Organ, 2012

Francis Pott's *When David Heard* is a lovely, austere work of compelling character.

Robert Cummings, Classical.net, 2012