



# AMERICAN RECORD GUIDE

## MAY/JUNE 2013

*Messages to Myself*  
Musica Sacra/ Kent Tritle  
MSR 1411—78 minutes

I was surprised to learn that Musica Sacra—the longest continuously performing professional chorus in New York City—has made no recordings since 1993. I own their well-known rendition of *Messiah* and have heard several of their other releases. While they sing everything from plainchant on, they're known as steady and important performers of the newest choral music, having commissioned and premiered many worthy compositions—including several of the ones heard here. This is a fascinating survey of a cappella music written by living composers over the past 25 years. We have reason to expect more before long, as this is the first of a series.

In his introductory booklet comments, choirmaster-organist Kent Tritle (Musica Sacra's director since 2008) describes the composers performed here as "near and dear to me"—his friends, colleagues, schoolmates from Juilliard, and one of them even a former student of his. I must laud his musical judgement, as there's not a single work in this mixed sacred-secular program that lacks a high level of musical craftsmanship, imaginative treatment of texts, or strong listener appeal. More substantial, multi-section works include Michael Gilbertson's Three Madrigals after Dowland, Christina Whitten Thomas's Choral de Bêtes, Daniel Brewbaker's Mother, Father, and Christopher Theofanides's Messages to Myself. Shorter, but no less worthwhile pieces are Zachary Patten's 'Magnificat, Amen', Bezhad Ranjbaran's 'We are One', Robert Convery's 'The Lamb', Aaron J Kernis's 'Effortlessly, Love Flows', and Elliot Z Levine's 'I Thank You God'.

This is a sweetly sonorous and technically refined chamber ensemble of just under 30 voices, and Tritle has surely drawn some of New York's finest vocalists to its ranks. MSR gives them their full due, with both a useful booklet and first-rate sound.

KOOB