

Have you ever been on a rocket to Mars? You'll think you are on one once you listen to this astounding recording, just released by Ionian Arts. The Seattle-based Tudor Choir, joined by J. Melvin Butler on organ, a brass quintet, three percussionists, a carillonneur, an assistant conductor, and perhaps most crucially, the inimitable recording savvy of Bill Levey (Via Audio, Seattle) and production management of Roger Sherman – all joined forces in the exceptional acoustical setting of St. Mark's Cathedral, Seattle, to make a sonic banquet of cosmic thrust, bewitching beauty, and transformative rapture.

Nothing about this music or this recording is commonplace. The music itself is not like anything else you've ever heard, even from the pen of Hallock. It fluctuates between a frightening awesomeness and angelic serenity. With the aid of modern recording and rerecording techniques, layers of music are placed on top of each other, much like floating in outer space. The cosmic implications are not coincidental. The poetry of The Last Judgment comes from the Exeter Book, – roughly the latter part of the eighth century. The text is not tame. Images of prophets and saints collide with apocalyptic fury. Hallock has merged text and music together in a completely new way.

The performers do a magnificent job. Intonation is consistently excellent with an ideal blending of voices and stacking of overtones. Every performer in these two works has a challenging part to execute; and they succeed brilliantly. The enormous Flentrop organ at St. Mark's has a major voice in this music. We hear its colors and intense character coming through again and again.

As glorious as the music and the performances are, still more glorious is the sensation to the ears (and via the ears to the mind and the heart). There is a warning on the CD booklet about volume settings on your stereo. This music fluctuates from a very distant ppp to an in-your-face fff, with everything in between. There are times when you feel like you are coming out of your own skin; the music has that much power of delivery. If you have a good stereo system at home, this will be the system's favorite CD! Nothing that I have ever heard matches the complexity of this sound. It's worth purchasing the CD for nothing else than the thrill of the sound! You know you're in for a treat when the CD booklet contains information about types of microphones, pre-amps, etc. Not that that means anything to most of us, but it does tell us the degree of care that was placed on making a remarkable recording.

This is music to be savored, music to transport you. The combination of Hallock's sensuous writing (perhaps his greatest statement), the stirring performance, and the sonic capturing of the two will leave you a changed person.

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Association of Anglican Musicians
November 2011