

Sincero

By

Merrill Collins

Written by

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The subject of Gregorian chants dates back many years and has been used to enhance many new age albums including just recently *Kevin Wood* and *Eternal*, not to mention *Enigma*, *Kevin Kendle*, *Lesiem* and many others, all have touched the hem of this style and genre, but this is not just back ground ambience, this is taking the subject to a whole new level and thus this fascinating album from *Merrill Collins*, **Sincero** is born.

We start on this harmonic convergence with the first piece entitled **Veni, Creator Spiritus**. When you hear a rich and textured voice like *Andrew Bennetts*, you sit in awe at its splendour and simply enjoy, the piano of *Collins* is the supreme conductor of this amazing starting point and eases us into the concept of the album with such sublime precision.

Salve, Regina has the most wondrous combination of instrumentation you're ever likely to hear, its flows with such passion and the most delightful tapestry of tone weaved into its passionate matrix. *Bennett* is once more a pleasure to listen to and his dream like narrative seems to float all around us, the flute here of *Laura Halladay* is mesmeric and partnered with *Collins* on the piano delivers one of the finest offers on the release.

The chime at the start of the tracks was very meditative and gave one a chance to settle down into the composition. **Ave Maria**, a song most of us know very well, is now upon us and the mournful but magical Cello of *Maksim Velichkin* weaved a pattern of respect to allow the single most textured performance of this particular chant to occur from Tenor *Andrew Bennett*.

Jesu Dulcis Memoria starts with a flourishing segment on piano by *Merrill Collins*, this magical moment brought a superb energy to the piece and ably partnered by *Halladay* on Flute, created something sparkling before we were once more treated to another pitch perfect performance by *Bennett*. I found this piece quite deep, but even so, there was a defined energy of sensitivity here, that made this composition so light filled.

The peace and tranquillity that this album brings is extremely pleasant, just listen to this next piece entitled **Regina Caeli**, it is supremely attractive, but also highlights the amazing abilities on flute of *Laura Halladay*. There is a deep sense of reflection in this arrangement that is deeply moving, while the chimes and bowl sounds are scene setting; one could easily imagine listening to it in the country, watching the doves spiralling up into a crystal blue sky in the grounds of an old abbey somewhere.

My personal favourite is **Ave, Maris Stella**. The production quality of this piece and indeed the whole album is pristine and *Bennett's* precise vocal brilliance almost echoes through the halls of time itself. For me there is something so respectfully moving about this arrangement. The flowing nature of *Collins* on this track is as sensitive as a newly grown flower; the symbiosis of *Maksim Velichkin* mixed into the weave here is simply breath-taking and extremely emotional at times.

As we move to the deeper water of the album we follow the bowl chime and sink deeper into this meditative moment of Gregorian majesty, through the piece **Ubi Caritas**. Through the flute and piano of *Collins* we are gifted a beautiful mood, the piano here manifests such a sumptuous level of ambience before *Bennetts* chant takes us to a land of tranquil bliss. There is also a delicate sense of energy about this composition that I enjoyed greatly; the combination of instrumentation brought a truly colourful nature to the arrangement.

Conditor Alme Siderum is our penultimate offering and I know I may have said this before, but I rate *Merrill Collins* as one of the most ambient pianists since *David Naegele* of *Temple in the Forest* fame. One can feel a slight elevation in tempo here and the double harmonies were simply beautiful, creating a scene of such an aged time. The structure of this piece was fascinating; it flowed like

a mountain stream and grew with a magical musical abundance, while *Halladay* excelled in an almost *Terry Oldfield* style, when *Velichkin* joined the throng, they drew this quite picturesque piece to a sparkling crescendo.

We have followed the path of musical mastery all the way to the very last offering of the album and this parting gift is entitled **Veni Sancte Spiritus**. The energy and essence of this arrangements composition is incredibly artistic and well crafted, the tempo is raised to allow us to leave the album with a sense of fulfilment and peace.

Merrill Collins has done it again; she has created an album in **Sincero** that is utterly unique and absolutely stunning, the production quality of the album is perfection personified and the chants of *Andrew Bennett* precise, pristine and mesmeric, one could easily place this album on que to listen to, and forget time even existed at all. *Collins* has manifested an album here that combines quality new age styled music and musicians, with sacred Gregorian chants and made the whole project accessible and magical to all.