

## CHORAL & SONG CHOICE



# A powerful meditation on life and death

*Paul Riley* finds balm for the soul in soprano Ruby Hughes's latest imaginatively programmed album



Haunting voice: Ruby Hughes sings with 'enrapt understatement'

## End of My Days

**Works by** Tavener, Dowland, Ravel, Brian Elias, Caroline Shaw, Errollyn Wallen et al

Ruby Hughes (soprano); Manchester Collective  
**BIS BIS-2628 66:30 mins**

Imaginative, sensitive programming has been a constant feature of Ruby Hughes's collaborations; and this latest with the perennially adventurous Manchester Collective is no exception. A product of the first lockdown, it's a meditation on life and death whose title is taken from Wallen's setting of her own poem, which stares mortality in the face with vivacious equanimity.

Predictably eclectic, the disc unites John Dowland and Tavener, and makes fellow travellers of Debussy and Caroline Shaw, Brian Elias and Mahler (the 'Resurrection' Symphony's 'Urlicht' movement surprisingly resilient when repurposed for soprano and string quartet rather than the refulgence of full orchestra). Then again, some of the most affecting numbers are pared back: whether to voice and violin

in Vaughan Williams's plangent Housman-setting *Along the Field* or, for voice alone, in Elias's innocent, fluid *Meet me in the Green Glen*.

It's offset by the citrussy instrumental spritz of Shaw's *Valencia*. An evocative arrangement of the old Shetland folk song 'Da Day Dawn' perfectly sets the scene for Ravel's dolorous *Kaddisch*. Hughes floats seductively over Jake Heggie's sultry fleshing out of Debussy's *Trois chansons de Bilitis* (see 'Background to', p81) – rising

powerfully to their few but fastidiously-plotted climaxes. And although enrapt understatement is often her default mode, Hughes unleashes a chilling outburst in the first of Tavener's *Akhmatova Songs*. A disc to concentrate the mind and enfold the soul.

**PERFORMANCE**

★★★★★

**RECORDING**

★★★★★

**Errollyn Wallen's setting of her poem *End of My Days* stares mortality in the face**

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