

Early Music REVIEW

PEDRO RUIMONTE IN BRUSSELS

📅 FEBRUARY 11, 2018

Music at the archducal Court of Albert and Isabel Clara Eugenia

La Grande Chapelle, Albert Recasens

114:35 (2 CDs)

Lauda LAU017

This double CD highlights the music of Pedro Ruimonte, a composer new to me, but also very usefully casts an additional spotlight on an unsuspected musical golden age in the early 17th-century Low Countries. Following the popular uprising against Habsburg rule, music was in a parlous state, and it seems to be due almost entirely to the arrival of the new culturally engaged Habsburg rulers – the Albert and Isabel of the CD title – that a spectacular blossoming of the arts ensued. Side by side with the painters Brueghel the Elder and Rubens, the court employed the English composers Peter Philips and John Bull, as well as the Fleming Gery de Ghersem and the Spaniard Pedro Ruimonte. Considerable Habsburg financial resources allowed a great flourishing of music-making, while the renewed urgency of the Counter-Reformation provided impetus. The voices and instruments of La Grande Chapelle provide a rich and varied programme of music by Ruimonte and Philips but also including works by Pieter Cornet, Richard Deering and Frescobaldi. Grafting the Flemish tradition on to the more adventurous Venetian style, this repertoire is on a grand scale and of a very high standard of craftsmanship. Peter Philips' music, so often presented in purely vocal accounts, receives rich and very effective performances here, combining voices with brass and stringed instruments, while there is also a lovely and unexpected motet for two solo voices and continuo. Ruimonte's rich church music stands up very well in comparison with that of his English contemporary, but he is also represented by some attractive madrigals and *villancicos*, suggesting a composer of considerable versatility. Ruimonte is a fascinating discovery, and fine performances by La Grande Chapelle both of the large-scale works and the more intimate material help to re-establish his reputation, but also help to paint a picture of an obscure musical flourishing and its full artistic context.

D. James Ross