



SEPHARDIC JOURNEY: *Wanderings of the Spanish Jews*

Traditional Sephardic songs and chant; plus works by Rossi Hebreo
Nell Snaidas (soprano), Karim Sulayman (tenor), Jeffrey Strauss (baritone);
Apollo's Singers; Apollo's Fire/
Jeannette Sorrell

Avie AV 2361 63:35 mins

In strictly musical terms, this record enters a field which is already well-tilled thanks to Jordi Savall's numerous forays. But where Savall is weak – his scrupulously multi-faith approach results in a very predictable mix, and his programme books give hardly any musicological information – Jeannette Sorrell and co are strong: for me at least, their liner-notes have been revelatory.

Taking their cue from the fact that the Jewish people's enforced wanderings led them via Spain to Turkey and Italy, Sorrell and her musicians have chosen music coloured by those countries, but their most interesting focus is on what Jewish composers did in Renaissance Italy, and in particular on the activities of Salamone Rossi (1570-1630). This virtuoso violinist, a court musician with the Duke of Mantua, is best known in the West for his pioneering compositions in the trio sonata form, but his extracurricular achievement was no less remarkable: a collection of sacred Jewish music in the Baroque style – 33 hymns and psalms set polyphonically. And it was he who first defied the puritanical rabbinical ban on instrumental music in Italian synagogues.

This CD is the recording of a popular stage show by Apollo's Fire, and it follows a convivially theatrical arc. The soloists and instrumentalists are first-class, and Sorrell's arrangements are full of zip and colour. Some of Rossi's instrumental works could have been written by Monteverdi, and one of his Sabbath choral settings has strong affinities with Gabrieli; but the accompaniment on *oud* and dulcimer of other songs – many for feasts and celebrations – is quintessentially Middle-Eastern. *Michael Church*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★