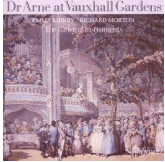


Thomas Arne - Dr Arne at Vauxhall Gardens (1988)

Written by bluesever

Wednesday, 10 August 2016 13:11 - Last Updated Wednesday, 10 August 2016 13:32

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1 - *The Morning* 'The glittering sun begins to rise' [8'01] 2 - *Much Ado About Nothing* - Song: *Sigh no more, ladies* [2'24] 3 - *The Desert Island* - Song: *What tho' his guilt* [2'22] 4 - *Cymon and Iphigenia* 'Near a thick grove, whose deep embow'ring shade' [12'13] 5 - *Frolic and free* [9'15] 6 - *An Ode upon dedicating a building to Shakespeare* - Song: *Thou soft flowing Avon* [4'06] 7 - *Jenny* 'An Agreeable Musical Choice' 'Jenny, bright as the day and as buxom as May' [4'44] 8 - *The lover's recantation* 'The kind appointment Celia made' [9'20] Emma Kirkby (soprano) Richard Morton (tenor) The Parley of Instruments Roy Goodman (violin & conductor) January 1987 St Barnabas's Church, North Finchley, London, United Kingdom

I'm astonished to be the first person to review this recording in the many years that it has been available! It is such a gem. Dr Thomas Arne was a real tunesmith, and this charming collection shows him at his best.

Although Arne was heavily influenced by Handel (what Englishman of his generation could avoid this?) he was his own man, and no slavish plagiarist; something that needs to be said of an era, before binding copyrights, when even the great Handel could stoop to this level! It is known that Arne also admired the music of the Venetian Galuppi who visited London in the 1740s. The enchanting 'the Lover's Recantation', sung here beautifully by Emma Kirkby, will remind anyone familiar with Galuppi's comic operas of that composer's style.

That this music was performed at (if not always specially written for) London's South Bank Vauxhall pleasure gardens, a place frequented by all social classes, imparts to the modern listener the high degree of popular taste in 18th century London. Although these songs have the occasional folky touch, or earthy humour...often rather witty ('Cymon and Iphigenia' possesses both), they also show considerable sophistication. All these songs impress with careful craftsmanship, and varied moods within the same piece; the musical equivalent of finely-turned

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Chippendale furniture. The motive is primarily to please...and Arne succeeds. The English may have resisted Italian opera like no other European country...but they were far from being musical philistines. London audiences were exposed to a wider selection of musical styles than practically any other city (as the Mozarts well knew) and an astute, theatre-savvy businessman like Arne did his best to exploit the latest trends. Arne, being a Catholic, found the career niche of church music closed to him, and so sought more or less successfully over many years to exploit other avenues.

Both Richard Morton and Emma Kirkby are well chosen for this repertoire. I'm not always convinced by Miss Kirkby's style when she performs Italian opera of this period, but here the girlish voice seems to suit the English texts well. She is quite the coquette in 'The Lover's Recantation'!

Morton is perhaps not the surest of tenors on his high notes, but he seems idiomatic enough, and particularly good in the very amusing, and rather rakish, 'Frolic and free' as well as in 'Sigh no more, ladies', both of which could have been written for reformed members of the Hellfire Club! Excellent...buy it (if you can find it!)and you won't be disappointed. ---Duncan R. McKeown, amazon.com

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