Luigi Rossi - Oratorio per la Settimana Santa (1989)

Prima Parte *1 Introduzione 0:41 2 Turba: "Baraba A Noi Si Dia!" 2:21 3 Pilato: "E di Gesù Che Fia?" 1:42 4 Pilato: "Di Si Rigida Sentenza" 1:22 5 Pilato: "Troppo I Lumi" 1:26 6 Turba: "Si Gelata Paura Il Cor T'ingombra" 1:21 7 Demonio: "Respirate, Atre Caverne" 2:39 8 Un Demonio: "Il Fatto è di Te Degno" 1:51 9 Coro di Demoni: "O Menzogne Fortunate" 2:19*
Seconda Parte
10 Introduzione 0:51 11 Demonio: "O Del Tartareo Speco" 1:53 12 Demonio: "Quando Mai L'altra Magione" / Vergine: "Cieli, Stelle, Pietà!" 1:08 13 Vergine: "Tormenti Non Più!" 5:15 14 Vergine: "Asprissimi Chiodi" 3:33 15 Demonio: "O Follia di Cieca Fè!" 3:22 16 Coro di Demoni: "Cosi D'empio Dolor" 4:31 17 Madrigale Ultimo: "Piangete Occhi!" 4:10 Un Peccator Pentito 18 "Spargete Sospiri" 7:51
Baritone Vocals – Michel Laplénie Bass Vocals – Antoine Sicot, François Fauché, Philippe Cantor Countertenor Vocals – Dominique Visse, Gérard Lesne, Vincent Darras Soprano Vocals – Agnès Mellon, Jill Feldman, Marie-Claude Vallin, Monique Zanetti Tenor Vocals – Ian Honeyman, Jean-Paul Fouchécourt, Michel Laplénie Les Arts Florissants (Orchestra): Harp – Andrew Lawrence-King (tracks: 18) Harpsichord, Organ – Yvon Repérant Lirone – Erin Headley (tracks: 1 to17) Theorbo – Konrad Junghänel Viol [Basse de Viole] – Elisabeth Matiffa (tracks: 18) Violin – Bernadette Charbonnier (tracks: 1 to 17), Richard Walz (2) (tracks: 1 to 17), Roberto Crisafulli (tracks: 1 to 17), Thérèse Kipfer (tracks: 1 to 17), Véronique Méjean (tracks: 1 to 17) Violin, Concertmaster – Daniel Cuiller (tracks: 1 to 17) Violoncello – Elisabeth Matiffa (tracks: 1 to 17) Violone – Jay Bernfeld (tracks: 1 to 17), Jonathan Cable (tracks: 18)
William Christie - conductor

Rossi's Oratorio per la Settimana Santa is a masterpiece of the period. Its unusual representation of the Crucifixion draws on elements of both the Passion and the Stabat mater traditions. It also includes an almost operatic scene that vividly depicts a descent into Hades. Its moralistic intent was to move the listener through compassion to repentance. This striking recording from William Christie and the ensemble Les Arts Florissants was originally released in 1989, and is now available again at a special low price. ---amazon.com

The oratorio was one of the main genres of religious music of the 17th and 18th centuries. Its name is derived from the Congregazione dell'Oratorio, founded by Filippo Neri in 1575 in Rome. The prayer hall, where the congregation's spiritual exercises took place, was also called oratorio. One of the best-known compositions of a dramatic nature which was performed here, was the Rappresentatione di Anima e di Corpo by Emilio de' Cavalieri in 1600. That is no coincidence: Neri was one of the main supporters of the Counter-Reformation, and Cavalieri's work reflects its ideals as it is about an allegorical character, who has to choose which path in life to follow. The fact that it was in the vernacular attests to its aim of bringing the message of the Church closer to the 'uneducated', meaning those people who didn't understand Latin, the language of the Catholic liturgy.

The oratorio which is the subject of the present disc, is another expression of this ideal. The libretto is also in Italian, and although it deals with the Passion of Christ, it is not the narrative from the Gospels which is in the centre. What we have here is comparable with the way Handel's oratorios deal with biblical stories. Some of the main characters from the Gospels are represented - here Pontius Pilate and Mary, the mother of Christ - but the librettist has added characters which the Evangelists do not mention. In this case these are a chorus of devils, which sing separately and in ensemble.

The oratorio is divided into two parts. It seems likely that during the performance a sermon was held between the two parts. The first opens with a dialogue between the crowds (Turbae) and Pontius Pilate. The latter can't find any reason to punish Jesus, but he can't resist the wishes of the crowd to crucify Jesus and release the criminal Barabbas. If the crowds get what they want, the demons enter, rejoicing the fate of Jesus. In the second part they continue to show their enjoyment about Jesus' upcoming crucifixion. If that has taken place, Mary enters, lamenting the fate of her son and expressing her sorrow. The phrase "give me back my heart" returns a number of times. Again and again her lament is interrupted by the demons, mocking the "madness of blind faith". The oratorio ends with a lament of the chorus: "Weep, you eyes, weep!"

Previously this oratorio has been recorded only once, by Les Arts Florissants, directed by William Christie (Harmonia mundi, 1984; released on CD 1989). That is rather surprising, considering its quality and the fact that it is pre-eminently suited for Passiontide. From that perspective a new recording is most welcome. However, although Christie's performance is not perfect, the present recording is no match. I listened to both recordings back to back, and sometimes I had the impression that I heard two different pieces. The singers in the ensemble

CantoLX are good enough; they have all nice voices, and from a stylistic point of view there is nothing to complain. But this performance suffers from a serious lack of drama. There is little interaction between the various participants, and the singers don't make much effort in portraying their respective roles. The choruses of the demons are much too smooth and harmless; compare that to the way Christie's singers express the rudeness and viciousness of the demons, solo as well as in ensemble. The role of the leader of the gang (Demone) comes much better off in Christie's performance (the name of the soloist is not mentioned) than in the present recording. Jean-Paul Majerus would have been better in the role of Pilate anyway, whereas Sergio Foresti may have given a more convincing account of the role of Demone. As far as the style of singing is concerned, there is little to choose between Véronique Nosbaum and Christie's soloist (probably Agnčs Mellon), but the latter delves much deeper into the emotions of Mary (Vergine), and as a result her performance is more incisive and makes a more lasting impression. It is unfortunate that this new disc is no alternative to Christie's recording. On ArkivMusic I saw another recording, which was released last year, by the Ensemble l'aura soave, directed by Diego Cantalupi, with Nuria Rial as one of the soloists (Mvc, 2017). Obviously I haven't heard that one, but that could well be a good deal better that what we have here.

The oratorio is rather short, so performers have something to find to fill the disc. Christie chose another sacred piece by Rossi, but as the original release was on vinyl, he didn't need much additional music. That is different here. It must not be too hard to find other music for Passiontide by Rossi or some of his contemporaries, but Agsteribbe had made some odd choices. On the one hand an extract from Orfeo dolente, a sequence of five intermedi by Domenico Belli from 1616. He worked for most of his life in Florence. Very little music from his pen has come down to us. Orfeo dolente was written for Carnival 1616. Apart from the fact that Carnival immediately precedes Lent and Passiontide, there is no connection between this piece and Rossi's oratorio. Belli and Rossi are also of different generations. Peter de Laurentiis delivers an expressive performance, but unfortunately his voice consistently wavers around the pitch. The disc ends with three toccatas; again they have no connection to the rest of the programme. They are nicely played, but I find their addition to the programme unfortunate.

To sum up, the main work on this disc receives a stylistically convincing, but dramatically unsatisfying performance. This production as a whole suffers from rather bad programming. The fact that the text of the piece by Belli is omitted in the booklet adds to the impression of sloppiness. There is little reason to recommend this disc. --- Johan van Veen, musica-dei-donum.org

Oratorium o tematyce wielkopostnej włoskiego kompozytora epoki baroku Luigiego Rossi. Wykonawcy to zespół Les Arts Florissants pod dyrekcją Williama Christie. Płyta została wydana z okazji nawiązania ponownej współpracy między artystami a firmą Harmonia Mundi i jest reedycją albumu wydanego w latach 80-tych. ---empik.com

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