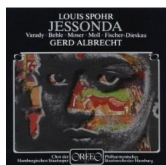


Louis Spohr – Jessonda (1994)

Written by bluesever

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CD I 01. Overture 02. Act One. Intro: 'Kalt Und Starr, Doch Majestatisch' – Chor, Kurt Moll 03. Rezitativ: 'Nadori! Du Hast Dem Opfer Dich Entzogen?' - Kurt Moll, Thomas Moser 04. Rezitativ: 'Was Bringst Du?', 'Der Auf Morgen-, Abendgluthen'- Kurt Moll, Chor 05. Rezitativ: 'O Schwester, Stille Deine Thränen' - Julia Varady, Renate Behle 06. Rezitativ Und Arie: 'Als In Mitternacht'ger Stunde'- 'Die Ihr Fuhlende Betrubet'- Julia Varady 07. Rezitativ: 'Erhaben Ist's, So Still Zu Leiden' - Renate Behle, Julia Varady 08. Finale: 'So Wie Das Rohr Zerbrach' - Thomas Moser, Renate Behle, Julia Varady 09. Finale: 'Reiche, Herrliche Natur' - Julia Varady, Renate Behle, Thomas Moser

CD II 01. Act Two. Intro: 'Kein Sang Und Klang Auf Dieser Welt' – Chor, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Peter Haage 02. Rezitativ: 'Mit Der Fulle Kriegerischer Ehren' - Peter Haage, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau 03. Arie: 'Der Kriegslust Ergeben' - Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau 04. Rezitativ: 'Mein Theurer Freund, Ich Theile Dein Gefuhl' - Peter Haage/Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau 05. Rezitativ: 'Lasst Mich Auf Augenblicke'. Duett: 'Lass Fur Ihn, Den Ich Geliebet' - Julia Varady, Renate Behle 06. Rezitativ Und Rondo: 'Still Lag Auf Meiner Seele'. Rezitativ: 'Was Seh' Ich?' - Thomas Moser 07. Duett: 'Schones Madchen, Wirst Mich Hassen' - Thomas Moser, Renate Behle 08. Rezitativ Und Arie: 'O Neu Gefuhl, Was Mich Beselet' - Renate Behle 09. Finale: 'Aus Der Wellen Heil'gem Schoss' – Chor, Julia Varady, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Thomas Moser 10. Finale: 'Herr, Gebietest Du?' – Chor, Kurt Moll, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Julia Varady 11. Act Three. Rezitativ: 'Mit Schwarzem Fittich Deckt Die Nacht'- Peter Haage, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Thomas Moser 12. Chor Und Solo: 'Wollet, Gotter, Uns Erhoren'. Rezitativ Und Arie... – Chor, Kurt Moll, Julia Varady 13. Rezitativ Und Arie: 'Ich Hatt' Entsagt Der Erde Freuden' - Julia Varady 14. Finale: 'Mein Schritt, Befluegelt Von Entzucken' - Renate Behle, Julia Varady, Kurt Moll Chor

Jessonda, widow of a Rajah (soprano) - Julia Varady Amazili, her sister (soprano) - Renate Behle Nadori, a young Brahmin (tenor) - Thomas Moser Tristan d'Acunha, Portuguese general (baritone) - Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau Dandau, chief Brahmin (bass) - Kurt Moll Pedro Lopez, Portuguese colonel (tenor) - Peter Haage Hamburg State Opera Chorus Hamburg State Philharmonic Orchestra Gerd Albrecht – conductor

It is not particularly surprising that Jessonda should have been popular in its time nor that it should have been subsequently forgotten. In a brainless and genially sanctimonious way the

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scenario offers agreeable situations in which love finds a way, the oriental barbarians are confounded, and everybody else ends up singing to the god of battles. Musically it pleased both traditionalists and reformers for while clearly a product of the schools it also took opera a step closer to music-drama by blurring the distinction between aria and recitative. A later age lost interest partly because the innovative points had been carried, but principally because the passions were learning to speak a much more emphatic musical language and the taste for exoticism and 'local colour' would not be satisfied with such mild and decorous allusions as these.

This mildness is the first thing likely to strike the listener now. Of course Gilbert and Sullivan have come between Spohr and ourselves, so that it is hard to take a 6/8 chorus seriously as part of a hymn of mourning for the late Rajah; similarly when 'the messenger of death' is announced and begins to sing a pretty siciliana type of melody, albeit in the minor key. The so-called War Dances might fitly take place in an eighteenth-century drawing-room. Storm, recognition, confrontation and love duet come and go in the most orderly fashion. Writers on Spohr have detected a connection with the Wagner of *Tristan und Isolde*, but it could not possibly have anything to do with the eroticism of that opera. With one exception all the singers here do their best for the dramatic side of the entertainment. Julia Varady in particular brings such a fine sensitivity to the title-role that for a disconcerting moment one has to suspend disbelief and begin to wonder what it is like to be in danger of serving as a sacrifice to Brahma at the very moment when the gallant Portuguese are about to come to the rescue. They (the gallant Portuguese) are led by Tristan D'Acunha as represented by Fischer-Dieskau, inescapably Germanic in declamation but duly responsive to the rival claims of love and honour. Thomas Moser as the young Brahmin with liberal tendencies fortified by love for Jessonda's sister presents a sympathetic and credible character, and though the sister in question seems to be nothing more nor less than a nice girl she is so well sung by Renate Behle that one takes her on trust. The exception to this general involvement of the cast in their roles is Kurt Moll, who plays the perfidious High Priest with imperturbable sonority and (perhaps taking his cue from the score) mildness.

Albrecht conducts a workmanlike performance, and though the orchestra is a little less forward in the balance than is customary these days one is gratefully aware that the players are kept busy. Gratitude is also due for the chance to hear this opera which has retained its place in the history books if nowhere else. At one point at least, it satisfies more than historical curiosity: that is Jessonda's prayer in Act 3, a most lovely solo and in context almost sublime when sung as beautifully as it is here by Varady.' --- gramophone.co.uk

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Acclaimed by contemporaries, but scarcely noticed by later generations, the opera *Jessonda* and its composer Louis Spohr have shared comparable fates. Yet it is worth rediscovering both: after all, the opera offers a musically exemplary and beautiful story about tolerance and understanding between nations.

An article in the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* in 1825 expressed the opinion that “Next to Weber, Ludwig Spohr [...] has succeeded in achieving attention and acclaim in high degree; indeed, through his opera *Jessonda* he has even competed successfully in northern Germany with the composer of *Freyschütz* for the palms of victory.” In contrast with Weber’s opera, *Jessonda* is seldom performed nowadays. Yet at the beginning of the 19th century, it was quite a different story. Louis Spohr had already made a major contribution to German romantic opera with *Faust*, composed in 1813 in Vienna. With *Jessonda*, completed in 1822, it was his declared intent to push ahead with its development. On a formal level, he made great progress in that he transformed the spoken dialogue into recitative and strove to combine the individual numbers of the opera with each other and to arrange them in larger scenic groupings.

After the Napoleonic occupation of Germany and the awakening feelings of nationhood, there was a corresponding search for “German masterworks” on the operatic stage. These were found above all amongst the works of Spohr, Weber and Marschner. However, Spohr’s operas were scarcely suitable as a foil to a guileless nationalism and, as a result, they fell into increasing obscurity after 1871. With their suppression of *Jessonda*, the Nazis brought about a temporary end to the reception history of Spohr’s operas. Now they more than deserve rediscovery precisely because of their dramaturgical intelligence and fundamental ideological-critical attitude.

Superficially, *Jessonda* presents at first a classic love story which is set in Goa in the 16th century. According to an Indian tradition, *Jessonda*, as the widow of a deceased rajah, is to be burned with the corpse of her husband. At first, she accepts the fate which is announced to her by the young Brahmin Nadori. In the meantime, however, the Portuguese general Tristan d’Acunha has landed on the coast and is approaching the city. In the belief that an innocent religious ceremony is taking place, he agrees to a ceasefire with the Indian high priest Dandau for the duration of the sacrifice. He recognises the true character of the ceremony too late and must also now recognise that the victim is the lost sweetheart of his youth, *Jessonda*. Rescue from the dilemma is brought by Nadori, who reports on a planned break in the ceasefire by Dandau, thus freeing Tristan from his word of honour.

Nadori at the same time embodies Kant’s definition of the enlightenment, for he fulfils the “emergence of man from his self-inflicted immaturity” in the course of the opera in exemplary

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fashion. This is hinted at musically even in his duet with Dandau at the beginning of the first act. In general, the music in this opera is not only extremely beautiful, but it is also highly intelligent. So, for example, although the Indians and the Portuguese are skilfully characterised musically in their respective scenes, when they face each other with drawn swords, the musical device used is a canon. In the clang of the weapons, the cultural differences fade away. The victory of good in this opera is because of a consistent enlightened attitude on both sides. A dramatisation, in other words, from which we can still learn a great deal today. ---Wolfram Boder, takte-online.de

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