

Benedetto Marcello - Joaz (2008)

Wpisany przez bluesever

Poniedziałek, 21 Listopad 2011 19:44 - Zmieniony Niedziela, 09 Luty 2014 15:16

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CD1 01. Sinfonia 02. Al mio zelo (Recitativo MATHAN) 03. Dalla faccia della terra (Aria di MATHAN) 04. Che a me venga (Recitativo ATHALIA, MATHAN) 05. Sta languendo (Aria di ATHALIA) 06. Ul sogno (Recitativo ATHALIA, MATHAN, AZARIA) 07. Lo so (Aria di AZARIA) 08. Non e tempo (Recitativo ATHALIA, AZARIA, MATHAN) 09. Dio, che mentir non puoi (Aria di JOSABET) 10. Ministri del Signor (Recitativo JOSABET, ATHALIA, JOAZ) 11. Agli augelli (Aria di JOAZ) 12. Qual mi sento candigar (Recitativo JOSABET, ATHALIA, JOAZ) 13. Di mie ricchezze (Aria diATHALIA) 14. Che dici (Recitativo JOSABET, ATHALIA, JOAZ, JOIADA) 15. Piu che (Aria di JOIADA) 16. Padre, quanto ((Recitativo JOAZ, JOIADA, JOSABET E CORO) 17. Le tue parole (Finale I CORO DI LEVITI) CD2 01. Ossequioso e chino (Recitativo JOSABET, JOAZ, JOIADA) 02. Giuriam, si, si, si (AZARIA E CORO DI LEVITI) 03. Quanto t'imposi (RECITATIVO JOIADA, JOAZ) 04. Sento ch'il gran contento (Aria di JOSABET) 05. Io non intendo ancor (Recitativo JOAZ, JOIADA, AZARIA) 06. Così a fiume (Aria di JOIADA) 07. Deh! Sian lungu (Recitativo JOAZ, JOIADA) 08. Si perde in bosco (Aria di JOAZ) 09. Mathan ver noi s'invia (Recitativo JOSABET, JOIADA, MATHAM, AZARIA) 10. L'idolatra misleale (Aria di AZARIA) 11. Ah! Purtroppo egli a ver! (Recitativo MATHAN) 12. Qual cignal ferito in selva (Aria di MATHAN) 13. Qui ancor trovo Mathan (Recitativo JOSABET, MATHAN, JOIADA) 14. Per mille ferite (Aria di JOIADA) 15. Oggi ancora (Recitativo JOIADA, MATHAM, JOSABET, ATHALIA) 16. Men si tema il velen (Aria di ATHALIA) 17. Che si tarda, o Joiada (Recitativo ATHALIA, LOIADA, JOSABER, CORO DI LEVITI) 18. In quei ferii (Aria di ATHALIA) 19. Fuor del sacro (Recitativo JOIADA, JOAZ) 20. Raggio di luce scenda (Aria di JOAZ) 21. Re, che in terra (Finale II CORO DI LEVITI)

Athalia -Maria Erlacher (soprano) Joaz - Markus Forster (alto) Josabet - Ulrike Hofbauer (soprano) Joiada - Dominik Wörner (bass) Mathan - Daniel Johannsen (tenor) Azaria - Martin Bruns (baritone) Neue Hofkapelle München Christoph Hammer (conductor)

In the 17th and 18th centuries the social ranks were clearly separated. Composers who were employed by royals or aristocrats often moved in their circles, but were never part of them. The prefaces of their publications dedicated to their employers, are clear evidence of that. At the same time aristocrats who were able to play a musical instrument at a high level or even to compose just could never make a business of that as this was just not done in their ranks. This

explains why the Dutch count Unico Wilhelm van Wassenaer published his *Concerti Armonici* anonymously. Benedetto Marcello is one of the very few aristocrats who published music under his own name, although he wasn't a composer by profession.

Marcello was born in Venice as son of a nobleman and followed a career in public service as all men in his circles did. It is hard to follow his activities outside public service, as there are considerable gaps in his biography. For example, he was exiled for three years, but the reason is not known. One may assume he was a rather individual character: he wasn't only acting as a composer but he also married a woman from outside his own ranks.

He never had a position as musician or composer, and most of his compositions are undated. This makes it difficult to outline his development as a composer. It is mainly vocal music which was the focus of his attention. Although some collections with instrumental music - concertos and sonatas - and some harpsichord works were printed, it was through his chamber duets and his collection of Psalms that he became famous. His fame held well into the 20th century, but nowadays his music isn't that often performed.

Marcello can be seen as an advocate of naturalness in music. His treatise *Il teatro alla moda* which was first published anonymously in 1720 deals with the bad habits in the theatre of his time. He wanted to reform the style of singing and clear away exaggerated ornamentation. Therefore it can't be surprising that he wrote his oratorio *Joaz* on a libretto of Apostolo Zeno who aimed at reforming the librettos of operas and oratorios. His ideal was the classical principle of unity of time, place and action, which was made rather difficult to practice because of the expectations of the audiences.

But in *Joaz* he goes a long way in this direction. The result is a libretto which is lucid and avoids exaggerations and unrealistic events. It is based on the 11th chapter of the second book of Kings in the Old Testament, and the sequence of events is largely the same as in Handel's oratorio *Athalia*. This oratorio is more concise, for instance in that it has only choruses of Levites; the people of Israel - which play a prominent role in Handel's oratorio - are absent here. We meet the same characters: queen Athalia, the high priest Joad (Joiada), his wife Josabeth, the king-to-be Joas - here sung by an alto, whereas Handel has a treble (boy soprano) - and Mathan, the priest of Baal. The only character which is different from Handel is Azaria: he is another Levite who organises the defence of the temple against Athalia. Handel has a military figure in the person of Abner.

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The recitatives in Marcello's oratorio have a very natural flow, and although there are 17 da capo arias they are much more part of the sequence of events than in many contemporary operas or oratorios. There are many passages where the text is expressed in the music, in particular through the instrumental parts. The first scene takes place in Athalia's palace who in her dreams has seen a boy she is afraid could threaten her position. Her fear is already announced through the chromatic figures in the last section of the overture. When in the first aria of the oratorio Mathan sings about the power of Baal: "From the face of the earth your greatness he'll wipe like dust in the wind", the strings give a very vivid depiction of the dust being blown away. When Athalia sings that "royal beauty and freshness" are destroyed by an evil worm "from within" Marcello again makes use of chromaticism. And when Josabeth prays to God to save the young Joaz her aria is full of suspiratio figures. Athalia has a meeting with Joas and tries to seduce him to live with her in the palace: "All my riches, all my glories, treasures plenty, highest honours, shall be yours just like a son". The music doesn't really fit the enjoyments she exposes. I assume Marcello here wants to show these enjoyments are false, or, to quote Joas: "The pleasures of the wicked are more fleeting than the most rapid torrent". When Joas is finally told that he is the heir of the throne he expresses fear that he will fail ("Ah, high priests, ah, father, I'll fail should you abandon me"), which is expressed by the repeated tremolo-like figures in the strings.

It is a great delight that this fine oratorio has been recorded by Christoph Hammer. It is a live performance which results in some slight technical imperfections. Sometimes singer and ensemble are a bit out of sync and somewhere I noticed a slip of the tongue from one of the singers. If this was a studio recording I probably had preferred a slightly drier acoustics as well. But on the whole I am impressed by the level of performance. The cast is well-chosen: Daniel Johannsen is particularly impressive in his recitatives which are delivered in truly declamatory fashion. Dominik Werner gives a very good account of the role of Joas. He creates a good amount of tension when he, in the presence of Mathan, reveals that Joas is the new king. Josabeth is well portrayed by Ulrike Hofbauer as the protective mother. As Joas Markus Forster must express a child, and he does so quite convincingly. Equally well cast is the role of Azaria with Martin Bruns. My only slight reservation is Maria Erlacher as Athalia: she has a beautiful voice and sings well, but sometimes I had liked her to be a bit more bitchy, in particular in her aria 'Men si tema il velen': "Poison taken from a snake is far less dangerous than the wrath of an offended king".

The ensemble realises the instrumental effects Marcello has used to express the content very well. The basso continuo section is giving excellent support, and the inclusion of a harp adds some colour to it. But I think the frequent change in the scoring of the basso continuo is a bit exaggerated: why should every character have its own combination of instruments?

The booklet contains a good synopsis as well as historical background of the story. There is

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very little information about the composer and the musical characteristics of this oratorio, though. As Marcello is not that well-known a bit more information had been welcome. The German translation is alongside the Italian text, whereas the English translation of the libretto is printed separately at the end of the booklet which is a bit inconvenient for those who don't understand either Italian or German.

I strongly recommend this disc which shows that Marcello was an excellent composer of vocal music. This production whets the appetite for his operas and other vocal works. ---Johan van Veen, musica-dei-donum.net

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