

Agostino Steffani - Tassilone (Tragedia per musica 1709) [1977]

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1. *Tassilone I* 1:16:08 2. *Tassilone II* 1:08:36 3. *Tassilone III* 32:51 Soloists of the Clarion Opera Group of New York: McCoy, Foldi, de Gaetani, von Reichenbach, White, Bonazzi, Williams, Murcell Newell Jenkins - conductor NPR, 13 nov 1973, Alice Tully Hall, New York, live Broadcast transcription with narration, never offered for sale.

Agostino Steffani, a remarkably versatile gentleman who flourished in German courts around the turn of the 18th century, is a name in the history books to listeners today, but he was admired by Handel and—as Tuesday night's performance of his opera “Tassilone” at Alice Tully Hall demonstrated amply—for good reason. Continue reading the main story

“Tassilone,” presented in a semistaged version by Clarion Concerts under Newell Jenkins's baton, was written in 1709 but evidently had never before been performed in this country.

Steffani's opera, consisting predominately of a string of lovely, stirring arias awl duets, proved to be one of the more substantial examples of its bel canto type. The libretto, purest Gilbert and Sullivan in its endless complications, is about the efforts of a duke named Tassilone to escape death for plotting against Charlemagne or Carlo Magno, in this version). Counterplots abound, and so do juicy roles for stylish singers.

To a surprising extent, this performance had the necessary voices. Jan De Gaetani, as the Emperor's daughter Rotrude, gave the kind of performance, at once passionate and precise, that so seldom ennobles our opera houses. Elaine Bonazzi as Gismonda and Susan von Reichenbach as Teodata were satisfactory, if not so gratifying vocally.

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Tenors of real quality filled the parts of Gheroldo (Robert White), Adalgiso (Sidney Johnson), and Tassilone (Seth McCoy), and Mr. White earned the most cheers for his strong, agile singing. Only Mr. McCoy seemed hard pressed at times in the face of Steffani's decorative line, with its swells and trills and sustained tones, while John Williams, a countertenor, was in his element as Sigardo. Andrew Foldi, while not the ideal Carlo Magno, managed the bass coloratura fairly well, and Raymond Murcell was an able Guido.

Despite occasional raggedness in the orchestra, Mr. Jenkins conducted with sympathy for the baroque idiom, and Agostino Steffani owes him a debt for unearthing this 264-year-old work. ---Peter G. Davis, nytimes.com

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