Melpomen - Ancient Greek Music (2006)

1 - Akousate/Argos
2 - Melomai
3 - Sappho
4 - Eros
5 - Mater
6 - Nomos M
7 - Tenge Pleumonas Oino
8 - Dithyrambos
9 - Gaia
10 - Daktylos Amera
11 - Makrotatos play
12 - Anakreon
13 - Perikleitos
14 - Agallis
15 - Dialogos
16 - Mona
17 - Protos play
18 - Ekleipsis
19 - Proteron
20 - Hypne Anax
21 - Kretikos

Ensemble Melpomen:
Conrad Steinmann – aulos, direction
Arianna Savall – soprano, barbitos
Luiz Alves da Silva – altus, kymbala
Massimo Cialfi – tympanon, krotala, salpinx

The Western tendency to place melody at the center of musical experience has meant that the music of ancient Greece, which survives only in a few disjointed fragments of an imperfectly understood notation, has been written off for lost. But of course it's not lost. Greek instruments have come down to museum collections here and there, and many of the missing pieces related to their construction can be filled in by examining the numerous representations of instruments in Greek art. It is known on what occasions the Greeks sang; the works on this album form an imagined entertainment at a symposium, essentially a party with entertainment. It is known that their attitude toward music involved what Bruno Nettl has called the "athletic ideal" -- Greek music was virtuosic, and might have been structured in such a way as to allow players to compete with one another. It is known what the Greeks sang about; love and wine were common themes in song texts as well as in art. And finally there are theoretical texts, giving basic information about melody, scales, and especially rhythm. The task this disc sets itself is to synthesize all this information and come up with a best estimate of what the music may have sounded like.

Specialists will no doubt weigh in on Melpomen, but for the average listener the results are impressive. The instruments constructed by ensemble leader Conrad Steinmann sound sometimes familiar (the aulos, a long tube with two mouthpieces and two reeds, is not so far from the Middle Eastern reed instruments that were the ancestors of the modern orchestral winds) and sometimes like nothing you've ever heard before (check out the rhombus, a sort of wind machine, on the very first track). Soprano Arianna Savall, the only vocalist except for a few responsorial passages, is gorgeous. And the album passes the test generalists will apply: it feels like it belongs in the ancient Greek culture one experiences in plays and prose essays. The Greek worldview revolved around a system of divinities that recognized the power inherent in natural forces. There's a lot of percussion on this disc, and all the selections have the rough intensity one would expect from worshippers of the fox-skin-wearing god Dionysus. This is by nature a speculative piece of music-making, but it is less speculative than some others from many centuries later. ~ James Manheim, All Music Guide

Lyrics and the instruments on this record are authentic. Music is composed by Conrad Steinmann. So it is contemporary "newly imagined" music in Ancient Greek style. His reconstruction based on 2 main sources: 1. careful re-creation of the instruments, which helps to understand playing techinc; 2. Ancient Greek language, because "Ancient Greek is subject to rhythmical rules that regulate the lengh of the syllables...[These rules were] reconciled with tonal order of the respective instrument". The result of this re-construction could be described in one word - beautiful! Arianna Savall (soprano) so beautifully sings well-known lyrics by Sappho ("He Seems to Me Like Unto Gods That Man Who Sits Opposite You", "Eros Shook My Heart") and Anacreon, Alcaios so you could buy this CD only to understand how beautiful and melodic was Ancient Greek language. As example, many sources stated that verses by Sappho were sung and these songs seemed to Ancient Greeks very melodic, delicate and beautiful. And when you are reading modern translation or even original - you have to have great imagination to understand this musical aspect of the poetry. Here you have original

lyrics, English translation and the singing, so this CD could be a kind of the textbook for the student-historian of the Antiquty. This CD-hypothesis could be also viewed not only as academic experiment but also as best CD of New Age World music in Ancient Greek style.

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