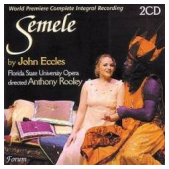
John Eccles – Semele (2003)



CD1 Act 1.Scene 1 *1. Overture 2. Symphony 3. Lucky Omens bless our Rites 4. Ah me! What refuge now is left me 5. See, she blussing turns her eyes 6. Why dost thou thus untimely grieve 7. Avert these omens all ye pow'rs 8. Again auspicious Flashes rise 9. Cease, case your Vews 'tis impious to proceed* Scene 2 *10. Turn, hopeless lover, turn thy eyes 11. Such unavailing Mercy is in Beauty found 12. You,ve undone me*
Scene 3, Scene 4
13. Hail Cadmus, hail 14. Endless pleasure, endless love 15. Haste, haste, haste, to Sacrifice prepare 16. Cease your Mourning
Act 2.Scene 1
17. Iris, impatient of thy Stay 18. There from mortal Cares retiring 19. Thiter Flora the Fair 20. No one of ourst Agenor's Race to spare
Scene 2
21. See, after the Toils of an amorous Figth 22. Come Zephyrs come, while Cupid sings 23. [A dance of Zephyr] 24. O sleep, why dost thou leave me
Scene 3
25. Sleep forsaking 26. Lay your Doubts and Feers aside 27. If cheerful Hopes 28. With my Frailty don't upbraid me
Scene 4
29. Thy needless Fears remove 30. Symphony 31. Jigg 32. Round O
CD2 Act 3. Scene 1
1. Somnus, awake 2. Leave me, loathsome Light 3. Only love on sleep has pow'r 4. More sweet is that Name 5. Away let us haste
Scene 2
6. I love and am lov'd, let more I desire
Scene 3
7. Behold in this Mirror 8. Yet once again let me view me 9. Unknowing your Intent 10. Thus let my Thanks be paid.
Scene 4
11. Come to my Arms my lovely fair 12. Tho 'is easie to please ye 13. I ever am granting 14. Then cast off this human Shape which you wear
Scene 5
15. Ah! Whither is she gone unhappy fair
Scene 6
16. Above measure

Scene 7
17. Ah me ! Too late I now repent
Scene 8
18. [Jupiter is arrived]
Scene 9
19. Apollo comes to relieve your Cave. [exeunt omnes].
Semele - Leslie Mangrum Ino - Lee Taylor Cadmus - Kyle Ferrill Athamus - Kathleen Phipps Jupiter - Mathew Roberson Juno - Brenda Grau Iris - Barbara Clements Cupids - Erica Cochran/Lianne Coble Somnus - Bragi Thor Valsson Apollo - Scott MacLeod Chief Priest - Michael Moreno 2nd Priest / 1st Augur - Christopher Swanson 3nd Priest / 2nd Augur - Jeremy Barber Florida State University Orchestra Anthony Rooley - conductor

Gilbert and Sullivan, Rodgers and Hammerstein, Rice and Lloyd-Webber ... Congreve and Eccles. PARDON ... yes indeed! We are exhorted in one of the booklet essays, by Anthony Rooley himself, to place this team high on the list of musical-dramatic collaborations ... and why not? They had worked together on many projects over a ten year spell. The mere fact that their work is almost entirely unknown and unperformed in quite irrelevant. The pioneering Anthony Rooley is going to remedy that.

This opera pre-dates Handel's 'Semele' by 36 years. Although in its arias and choruses it quite simply lacks the memorable moments found in the Handel work it does have much invention and energy.

The music of English composers c.1700 has been an increasing passion of Anthony Rooley for some years now. This project was a labour of love for him and his passion for the project seems, as time progressed, to have spread to the young performers too. They are from the Florida University Opera School. The background to their involvement and a quick advertising job for the school is given in the booklet notes.

Thinking of the notes there is a very entertaining and chatty essay concerning the opera, the plot and mythology in general and also the music itself by Anthony Rooley. This certainly helped me to grasp what it is all about, even if at the end I still felt a little confused. There is a synopsis and the complete text is given, plus the stage directions and the tracking and timings are clearly placed.

Back in the early 1990s Rooley started his own CD label 'Musica Oscura' which was sadly short-lived. However it achieved some notable successes, especially discs like 'The Mistress' with songs by such notables as William King, William Turner and John Blundeville. These remind us that England was certainly not at this time 'a land without music' if you ever believed the statement.

This new CD confirms that vital, virile and inventive music was being written during the early seventeenth century. If you had heard the superb BBC Prom of a few years ago which consisted of 'The Judgment of Paris' with sparkling music by Daniel Purcell, John Weldon and (again) John Eccles you would not have been in any doubt. Now we can at last savour a full-length baroque English opera on CD in a charming and often spell-binding performance with Rooley as stage director.

You might fear at first. as I did, yards and yards of seco recitative and da capo arias but English opera of this period is just not like that. The action comes thick and fast and progress is rarely held up. The story is carried with a lively recitative verging sometimes on arioso and the conversations are paced so that one's attention is retained.

Attractive highlights include the short but memorable 'Dance of the Zephyrs' - rather Purcellian, and also in Act 2 the orchestral Symphony (rather Corellian), Jigg and Round, the beautifully sombre aria which follows the Zephyrs 'O Sleep, why dost thou leave me' (incidentally, compare this with Handel's superb setting) followed by a lively but minor key aria 'Sleep forsaking' with a delightful obbligato recorder. There is something so English about this little tune, but it is soon over and after a brief recit another aria ensures, this time for a male voice playing Jupiter. This seems to me rather Handelian. I also much enjoyed the Cave's mysterious music for Pizzicato strings, representing dribbles of water; this opens Act 3. Another amusing delight was the opening string music of Act II. The rhythm and mood remind me of G&S; in fact 'With Cat like tread' from 'HMS Pinafore'.

In many ways this is a typical student production, but none the worse for that. The voices are young and fresh. In the case of Kathleen Phipps who performs 'Athamus' the sound quite 'folksy'. There is rarely, in any voice, a problem of tuning. Diction is always excellent. Semele herself is sung by Leslie Mangrum who has a most sophisticated and versatile voice but is never plummy or laden with vibrato. Perhaps the range demanded for Jupiter is a little too much for Matthew Robertson but he has a dramatic sound and is excellent with the text. I was also impressed with Brenda Grau's characterization of Juno.

It is astonishing to think that this music has never been performed until now. Despite the high reputation both of its creators enjoyed in their lifetimes and despite the fact that their other collaborations had obviously been considerably successful, I'm afraid the English preference for things Italian took over. Indigenous artists like Eccles and Congreve were considered less able and less worthy.

Gradually English music of this period is emerging and we should be very grateful to this American project for opening the eyes of us natives onto a period in our history which has remained mothballed for far too long.

Fine recording with the voices well forward but instrumental and continuo work never reduced to background chatter. ---Gary Higginson, musicweb-international.com

download: uploaded 4shared yandex gett anonfiles

back