Kusser - 2 Serenatas for the Dublin Court (2015)



Serenata a 4: Vilmos kiraly emlekunnepere (For a Memorial Celebration of King William III)
1.Overture 2:14 2.Recitativo: No, He's not dead! (Fame) 0:33 3.Aria: I'll blaze abroad her Glory (Fame) 3:07 4.Recitativo: What meant the Fates? (Neptune) 1:10 5.Aria: Still in endless toils… (Neptune) 2:16 6.Recitativo: Almost oppress'd with Romish Superstition (Albania) 0:38 7.Aria: Britons, strow his tomb with flowers (Albania) 2:57 8.Recitativo: His Wisdom, join'd with Courage (Apollo) 0:43 9.Aria: Tho' Envy often baffled (Apollo) 2:33 10.Chorus: While the happy British Nation 1:17 11.Recitativo: His mighty Prowess (Fame) 0:58 12.Aria: Glorious Nassau's lasting Name (Fame) 2:42 13.Recitativo: I saw the Godlike Hero (Neptune) 0:26 14.Aria: Opposition Courage raises (Neptune) 1:44 15.Recitativo: Unluckily deluded… (Albania) 0:32 16.Aria: He the paths of Glory treading (Albania) 2:21 17.Recitativo: His Godlike mind (Apollo) 0:40 18.Aria: Great Queen of Isles (Apollo) 2:26 19.Chorus: None the secret art to reign - Duet: Godlike actions were his aim (Fame, Albania) 2:14
Serenata Theatrale a 5 Az utrechti bekekotes unnepere (For the Celebration of the Treaty of Urtrecht)
20.Overture 4:20 21.Aria: Happy Queen… (Peace) - Recitative: Here barb'rous discord… (Peace) - Aria: Freedom is a Souv'reign Blessing (Peace) 5:20 22.Prelude 0:27 23.Recitativo: Sigh on, Sad Peace… (Discord) 1:15 24.Aria: Conquering Legions… (Discord) 1:10 25.Aria: Grievious Torment… (Peace) 1:14 26.Recitative: Those moans you make are useless (Discord) - Aria: Was I sure to be released… (Peace) 1:06 27.A Noise of Trumpets and Kettle-Drum 0:55 28.Recitativo: This Noise of Vict'ry… (Discord) 0:26 29.Air for Trumpets and Kettle-Drums 0:47 30.Aria: Come, lovely Peace… (Victory) - Recitative: Stern discord (Victory) - Accompagnato: Come, lovely Peace… (Victory) 1:34 31.Recitative: Ah! How my joys are Doubled (Peace, Discord) 0:26 32.Aria: When wars have Raged… (Victory) - Recitative: Thy Cares for that great Queen… (Discord) - Aria: When wars have Raged… (Victory) - Recitative: As soon as the Just ends of war are gained (Victory)1:51 33.Recitative: How cruel, is this Slav'ry… (Discord) 0:16 34.Aria: Sad Despair, for ever Seize me (Discord) 0:38 35.Recitative: How cruel, is this Slav'ry… (Discord, Victory) 0:32 36.Aria: Within their Gloomy Vaults of Hell (Victory) 1:11 37.Recitative: Thou dire abode… (Victory) 0:43 38.Duet: Her glories Increase (Victory, Peace) - Ritornello 1:01 39.March 1:12 40.Aria Duet: While the blind Fury… (Felicity, Plenty) - Aria Duet: In all the Fetters… (Felicity, Plenty) 2:59 41.Chorus: Behold they have laid… 1:40 42.Recitative: These happy Times… (Mercury) 1:09 43.Aria: Unequal'd is Her Story… (Mercury) 0:57 44.Chorus: Blessing so Divine dispensed… 2:22
Susan Hamilton (soprano) Dominik Worner (bass-baritone) (1-19) Andrea Csereklyei (soprano) Jozsef Csapo (tenor) (1-19) Mariam Sarkissian (mezzo-soprano) (20-44) Gabor

Kallay (tenor) (20-44) Eva Lax (contralto) (20-44) Peter Meszaros (counter-tenor) (20-44) Studio chorus Aura Musicale Ensemble Balazs Mate - conductor

Baroque fans who have noticed the recent appearance of some fine discs of orchestral music by Kusser, may well take an interest in this CD. Hungarian by birth, Johann Sigismund Kusser was an eminent and successful opera composer in his day; but sadly nearly all his vocal works have been lost and these two Serenatas, written in the early 1700s for the Dublin Court theatre, are just about all that remains.

The first of these two works is a memorial piece for King William III, and unfortunately the libretto is absolute nonsense, characterised by xenophobia, royalist sycophancy and sectarian bigotry - with, for example, catholicism being compared to a plague of locusts. Not surprisingly, the composer found little inspiration in the words by the anonymous librettist: the work begins with a rather unimpressive overture, followed by a string of largely forgettable arias with just a couple of more attractive numbers to be found. There are also two short choruses, vigorous and dramatic music but sung to entirely unworthy texts.

Things improve somewhat in the second Serenata, a celebration of the Treaty of Utrecht. The poetry is still bad enough to make William McGonagall look like a towering genius but at least the sentiments expressed, in praise of peace and all that sort of thing, are acceptable this time. The overture is a more substantial movement with an interesting, rhythmically complex fast section. Some of the remaining music is tuneful and inventive, with a graceful aria sung by Peace, an arresting outburst by Discord with lively orchestral support, and an attractive duet between Peace and Victory.

The mainly Hungarian musicians of Aura Musicale tackle all this with commendable spirit, although the singers' poor pronunciation of English is very noticeable - except for that of Susan Hamilton, the only native English-speaker present. But the words are so dreadful that it matters little. The support from the period instruments is excellent and Balázs Máté directs with style and enthusiasm. His booklet note also makes extravagant claims for the quality of these works; they are undoubtedly interesting curiosities, but personally I found them disappointing compared to the music of the composer's orchestral suites.

This continues to be an enterprising series from Hungaroton. However, I believe that anyone

wishing to explore the work of this little-known but very talented baroque composer would do better to consider first the several fine CDs available of his orchestral music, including two discs of the "Festin des Muses" overture-suites from the same label and artists as the present disc. Above all I would thoroughly recommend the "Composition de Musique" of 1682 (otherwise titled "Six Ouvertures de théâtre"), beautiful and youthful works showing Kusser at his very finest. ---Stephen Midgley, amazon.com

Though of Hungarian descent, Kusser was primarily active in Germany. He also worked in England and Ireland. He was fortunate enough to have studied with Lully in Paris and by 1682 he was training the violinists at the Ansbach court to play in the French style. As opera Kapellmeister in the Brunswick-Wolfenbuttel court (1690) he probably travelled throughout Germany but left for Hamburg in 1694 after volatile disputes with the court opera manager. Through his operatic association in Hamburg, Kusser founded a travelling opera company eventuating in his becoming the Oberkapellmeister in the Stuttgart court. Again he left his position over disputes (1704) and arrived in London (1705). Much of the rest of his career was spemt in Dublin. He wrote for royal celebrations employing French dance forms as models for most of his music but Kusser excelled in dramatic arias. The majority of his compositional output was devoted to opera but only two of the twenty four he composed have any extant pieces. "Erindo" and "Ariadne" exist only through a set of orchestral suites and two collections of arias respectively. Characteristics of his surviving music demonstrates sensitivity, feeling, charm and elegance, climactic appeal, forceful harmonies and emotive vocal strains. In the arrangement of his arias, Kusser used the syllabic form more than melismatic phrases (minimal) but he would employ the Italian de capo nuance. With the interjection of instrumental passages in the body of his arias Kusser betrayed his musical bias. His compositions did not stimulate the evolution of the Hamburg opera, but, Kusser's demands for exceptional performances and high standards did chang the direction of the opera. ---Keith Johnson, allmusic.com

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