## Johann Wilhelm Hertel - Christmas Oratorio 'Die Geburt Jesu Christi' (2013)

*1 Chor: Ach! Daß die Hülfe aus Zion über Israel käme  2 Rezitativ: Welch eine Nacht, von mehr als Sonnenglanz erhellt!  3 Arie: Wie der Quelle sanftes Rieseln  4 Rezitativ: Seht hier, wie Gott die Welt geliebt  5 Accompagnato: Siehe, ich verkündige euch große Freude  6 Choral: Er kommt! O macht die Tore weit!  7 Accompagnato: Was hör ich? Er geboren, der am Anfang war?  8 Arie: Ich staune! Welch ein Rat der Liebe  9 Choral: Eilt, ihr Völker, Licht zu werden  10 Rezitativ: Mit tief bewegter Seele steh ich da  11 Duett: Da prangt der Sieger ohne Heere!  12 Rezitativ: Du kennst, Allsehender, die Deinen  13 Arie: Wir brünstig sie kommen von Ephratas Auen  14 Choral: Des laßt uns alle fröhlich sein  15 Rezitativ: Denn, Menschen, euer aller  16 Arie: Hieher, wo meine Seele glühet  17 Arioso: Meine Seele erhebet den Herren - Chor: Denn er hat große Dinge an mir getan  18 Choral: Ich steh an deiner Krippe hier  19 Accompagnato: Mit süßem Schaudern falt ich zu ihm die Hände  20 Choral: So gehst Du vor, und wir, die Deinen, folgen dir  21 Rezitativ: O! Möchten aller Herzen brennen  22 Arie: Freuet seiner euch mit Beben  23 Accompagnato: Die Herzen himmelwärts  24 Chor: Uns ist ein Kind geboren*
Berit Solset (soprano I)  Alexandra Rawohl (soprano II)  Marcus Ullmann (tenor)  Wolf Matthias Friedrich (bass)  Kölner Akademie  Michael Alexander Willens - conductor

Johann Wilhelm Hertel is one of the lesser-known German composers from the generation of the Bach sons. He was born in Eisenach. It is likely that he received violin lessons from his father Johann Christian, who was a violinist and Konzertmeister of the court orchestra. He also received keyboard tuition from a pupil of Johann Sebastian Bach.

In 1744 he moved with his family to Neustrelitz where he became a violinist and harpsichordist in the court orchestra and his father was appointed as Konzertmeister. He had close contact with Frederick the Great's court in Berlin and advanced his violin skills with Franz Benda. He also became acquainted with some poets who were exponents of the Enlightenment. For some time he lived in Hamburg where he wrote for a magazine. In the 1760s he moved to the court in Mecklenburg-Schwerin, becoming the secretary to Princess Ulrike Sophie. With the court he moved to Ludwigslust, the new residence of Duke Frederick, in 1767.

Here the Duke built a church in the classical style which became the centre of a busy concert life. The public concerts which took place there twice a week could be attended by "every properly-dressed man or woman irrespective of their social standing". During these concerts chorales, psalms and cantatas were performed. The Christmas cantata which is the subject of this disc was written for such a public performance. It was the first of nine large-scale cantatas which Hertel composed between 1777 and 1783.

It is a typical product of its time. In its moralistic tenor it is comparable with then contemporary Passion oratorios. It is not the story of Jesus' birth which is told as in, for instance, Bach's Christmas Oratorio. Rather it is an observation of and meditation upon what happened and the underlying reasons. There is little room for exalted joy.

The orchestral score includes parts for trumpets, but they only appear twice. The first time is at the end of the accompagnamento "Siehe, ich verkündige euch", a quotation from Luke (ch 2), on the closing words of the angel: "who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David". They return in the closing chorus, "Uns ist ein Kind geboren", again a sequence of quotations from the Bible.

The cantata begins with a quotation from Psalm 14: "Ah, that help from Zion might come to Israel". The first recitative and aria deal with the cause for Jesus' coming, the sins of mankind. In a recitative and an aria the bass expresses his surprise about Jesus' love: he comes down "for whom? for rebels?". This is continued in a soprano recitative and a duet for the two sopranos: "Here the victor triumphs without an army!" The first soprano doesn't forget to mention that "his brothers hardly glance at him" and turn their backs. The tenor then observes how "admirers from a distant east" and shepherds come "to offer their hearts to him at the crib's altar". The soprano urges everyone to kneel for "the God of love". This is followed by three verses from the Magnificat. In an accompanied recitative the tenor then refers to the cross. A chorale and recitative urge the audience to follow Jesus, because God will judge those who don't. We hear this expressed in the longest aria of the cantata, 'Freuet seiner euch mit Beben': "[Tremble], despisers of honour, for even now he holds ready for you an immense storm of his wrath!". The cantata ends with a song of praise to Jesus who sits at the right hand of his Father. The closing chorus comprises quotations from the Bible, the last being from Revelation: "Praise and honour and glory and power be to him who sits on the throne".

The arias were to be taken by singers from the chapel, and the first soprano was an Italian opera singer. This explains the operatic character of what we hear. The bass aria "Ich staune" is a good example; the word "staune" ([I] am amazed) is set to extended coloratura. The soprano

aria 'Freuet seiner euch mit Beben' which I have already referred to and which was to be sung by the Italian prima donna includes staccato passages which were a feature of opera arias of the time. It is also one of the most dramatic parts of this work. There are pastoral elements as well, for instance the wonderful duet of the two sopranos and the aria "Hieher, wo meine Seele glühet", in which the first soprano is accompanied by strings which play con sordino.

If Hertel's music is heard at all it is mostly in the form of his trumpet concertos. In recent years some recordings have been released which reveal that he has more to offer. This cantata is the first vocal composition I have heard, and I have appreciated it very much. There is every reason to hope that more of his vocal oeuvre will be recorded. The interpreters here do a fine job: Berit Solset gives an impressive account of the demanding first soprano part. Alexandra Rawohl's second soprano part is much smaller, but she sings her aria well and the two sopranos blend perfectly in their duet. Marcus Ullmann and Wolf Matthias Friedrich are seasoned interpreters of German vocal music and that shows. They know what it takes to communicate the content to the audience. The soloists also sing the choruses and chorales, together with four ripienists. This is very likely the way this kind of repertoire was performed at most places at the time.

This recording of an unknown Christmas cantata is well worth investigating. ---Johan van Veen, musicweb-international.com

download (mp3 @320 kbs):

yandex mediafire ulozto gett

back