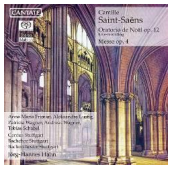
Camille Saint Saens - Oratorio de Noel (Hahn) [2005]



1. Oratorio de Noël, for solo voices, chorus, strings, harp & organ, Op. 12: 1. Prélude 2. Oratorio de Noël, for solo voices, chorus, strings, harp & organ, Op. 12: 2. Récit et choeur 3. Oratorio de Noël, for solo voices, chorus, strings, harp & organ, Op. 12: 3. Air 4. Oratorio de Noël, for solo voices, chorus, strings, harp & organ, Op. 12: 4. Air et choeur 5. Oratorio de Noël, for solo voices, chorus, strings, harp & organ, Op. 12: 5. Duo 6. Oratorio de Noël, for solo voices, chorus, strings, harp & organ, Op. 12: 6. Choeur 7. Oratorio de Noël, for solo voices, chorus, strings, harp & organ, Op. 12: 7. Trio 8. Oratorio de Noël, for solo voices, chorus, strings, harp & organ, Op. 12: 8. Quatuor 9. Oratorio de Noël, for solo voices, chorus, strings, harp & organ, Op. 12: 9. Quintette et choeur 10. Oratorio de Noël, for solo voices, chorus, strings, harp & organ, Op. 12: 10. Choeur 11. Messe solenelle, for voices, chorus, orchestra & organ, Op. 4: 1. Kyrie 12. Messe solenelle, for voices, chorus, orchestra & organ, Op. 4: 2. Gloria 13. Messe solenelle, for voices, chorus, orchestra & organ, Op. 4: 3. Credo 14. Messe solenelle, for voices, chorus, orchestra & organ, Op. 4: 4. Sanctus 15. Messe solenelle, for voices, chorus, orchestra & organ, Op. 4: 5. O salutaris hostia 16. Messe solenelle, for voices, chorus, orchestra & organ, Op. 4: 6. Agnus Dei Anna Maria Friman - Soprano Aleksandra Lustig - Mezzo-Soprano Patricia Wagner – Alto Andreas Wagner – Tenor Tobias Schnabel - Bass Rie Hiroe-Lang - Organ Peter Kranefoed - Organ Cantus Stuttgart Stuttgart Bach Choir Stuttgart Bach Orchestra Jörg-Hannes Hahn – conductor

Although the organ is featured heavily, this disc of Saint-Saëns will probably not appeal to listeners looking for something like his "Organ" Symphony except with a chorus and without an orchestra. For one thing, the Oratorio de Noël and the Messe are early, atypical Saint-Saëns' works. Austerely scored for chorus and organ and severely restricted for the most part to strict counterpoint, the music is nothing like the colorful, tuneful later Saint-Saëns. There are a few lovely melodies for the occasional soloists, but the all-too-frequent fugues more often than not fatally bog down all sense of forward motion. This disc may appeal to fans of nineteenth century French sacred music -- the repertoire is relatively small and neither of these works is frequently performed -- but the weak and watery performances by the Bachchor and Bachorchester of Stuttgart in the Oratorio and the Cantus Stuttgart in the Messe are singularly unpersuasive. Both groups are led by Jörg-Hannes Hahn and, whether he means to or not, these are slow,

tired, and tentative performances. The tempos drag, the textures are thin, and the tone is wavering. To be sure, there are fine moments here -- check out the openings of the Messe's Gloria and Agnus Dei -- but most of the music making is at best tepid. How's the organ playing? Capable but not exciting, present but not commanding, distracting but not in and of itself interesting. The sound, however, is wonderful: rich and real, lush and live, here and now.
---James Leonard, Rovi

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