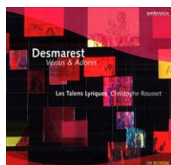


Desmarest - Venus et Adonis (2006)

Written by bluesever

Tuesday, 23 December 2014 18:05 -

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1. Act I 2. Act II 3. Act III 4. Act IV 5. Act V Karine Deshayes : Vénus Sébastien Droy : Adonis Anna-Maria Panzarella : Cidippe Henk Neven : Mars Ingrid Perruche : Bellone Laure Baert : Une habitante de Chypre, une voix Yu Ree Jang : Une habitante de Chypre, une nymphe Ryland Angel : Un suivant de Mars Anders Dahlin : Un habitant, un Plaisir Jean Teitgen : La Jalousie, un habitant Choeur de l'Opéra de Nancy et de Lorraine Les Talens Lyriques Direction : Christophe Rousset Opéra de Nancy, 28 avril 2006

Christophe Rousset and Les Talens Lyriques have done an immeasurable service to the revival of Baroque opera in modern times; of their superb 1996 set of Niccolò Jommelli's *Armida Abbondata* for FNAC it can be said that its entry into the recorded repertoire raised the bar on historically informed performances of this kind of material. Now *Ambrosie*, the label that raised *Armida Abbondata* itself after a long period of unavailability, has brought us a performance of Rousset and his group in *Venus & Adonis*, Henry Desmarest's 1697 opera, in a performance from spring 2006, recorded concurrently with the work's revival at the Opéra Nationale du Lorraine. One might well ask how does it stack up to the Jommelli?

Venus & Adonis is a work born in scandal; as the recently widowed Desmarest (or, as Grove has it, "Desmarets") was in preparation of this opera he became involved in a torrid love affair with an 18-year-old singing student who just happened to be the daughter of the principal tax assessor of the region in which he lived. Although the opera was premiered sometime in spring 1697 and duly revived in Paris in 1705, by 1699, Desmarest and his bride were forced to flee to the Low Countries; back in Paris, the composer was hanged in effigy. This story could easily be the stuff of a major motion picture costume drama, and perhaps inspiring such a project is what Rousset has in mind in recording *Venus & Adonis*, because the work itself is incredibly uneven and overall, not great. Instrumental sections of the opera, brief as they tend to be, are engagingly realized by Rousset and Les Talens Lyriques, and the middle of the first act moves at a brisk pace. Elsewhere, the piece falls flat through long stretches of unrelieved recitative; although by the clock the first scene only runs for four minutes it seems to last an eternity. This

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is not helped by soprano Anna-Maria Panzarella's rather strident rendering of the critical role of Cidippe; she pushes out notes in a rather loud and unattractive way at various spots.

Certainly there is plenty of good French Baroque opera that awaits revival, perhaps even among the remaining operatic works of Desmarest, though sadly there is little else left of it to choose from. Desmarest's strongest contribution, though, seems to have been in sacred music, specifically in the form of the grand motet and in works mostly written after his forced departure from Paris. Those strongly devoted to Desmarest's might not be disappointed by Venus & Adonis, but others considering it based on qualities exhibited by Armida Abbondata might safely pass. However, one is inclined to encourage the research departments of the major movie studios to obtain it -- we might get that costume drama just yet. --- Uncle Dave Lewis, Rovi

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