

Colori d'Amore - Simone Kermes (2010)

Written by bluesever

Friday, 22 July 2016 12:06 - Last Updated Friday, 22 July 2016 12:09

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1. *Il mar de le mie pene* 2. *Frondi tenere... Ombra mai fù* 3. *Ondeggiante agitato* 4. *Cara tomba* 5. *Ha vinto Amor... Per combatter con lo sdegno* 6. *Dice Tirsi* 7. *Più che freme il nembo irato* 8. *Canta dolce il rosignolo* 9. *Balletto* 10. *Qui dove... Torbido irato e nero* 11. *Se vedrai avvampar le lucciolette* 12. *Fiamma ignota* 13. *E'deliquio... Sonno se pur s'è sonno* 14. *Chi non sente* Simone Kermes - Soprano (Vocal) Le Musiche Nove (Ensemble) Claudio Osele – Director

Under three Habsburg emperors the taste of the imperial court in Vienna was Italian, and that was reflected by the operas which were performed at the court. Italian composers were especially welcome, and many have worked there for some time. In his liner-notes Claudio Osele makes much about the special character of opera in Vienna. "At court, birthdays, name days and marriages were all solemnized with operatic performances that, unaffected by commercial considerations, turned into a wholly Baroque celebration of dynastic power. This encouraged a different, more attentive form of listening, compared with the lively atmosphere that prevailed in the opera houses of Venice or Rome. This more considered and possibly less spectacular approach, in terms of pleasing an audience, spurred composers to write music that was more refined and innovative, with virtuosity not necessarily the main goal, and more concerned with expressivity and the relationship with the words".

This all sounds plausible, but the fact is that the largest part of this disc consists of music by composers who had no direct relationship - if at all - with the court in Vienna, or of arias from operas which were apparently not performed in Vienna. In most cases the tracklist mentions Rome, Naples and Venice as the cities where the operas were first performed. It was impossible for me to find information about any performances of those operas in Vienna later on. But the fact that most operas figuring in the programme on this disc were written for the places mentioned in the tracklist puts the difference between Vienna and Rome or Venice or Naples in perspective.

Of all the composers represented here Antonio Caldara and Giovanni Bononcini worked for some time in Vienna. The former was vice Kapellmeister and second Court composer since 1716 until his death. His operas Cajo Marzio Coriolano and L'Olimpiade had their premiere in Vienna, but Il nome più glorioso was first performed in Barcelona in 1709. Giovanni Bononcini worked at the court during the reign of Joseph I; he was engaged in 1698 and left for Rome in 1713. Xerse dates from before his time in Vienna, and was first performed in Rome in 1694. In 1706 his Endimione was performed in Vienna. The appreciation of the emperor for Giovanni was profitable for his younger brother Antonio Maria, who for a while also worked at the court. When Giovanni returned to Rome in 1713 Antonio Maria may have accompanied him. On this disc we hear arias from two of his operas, which were first performed in Reggio Emilia in 1717 (La conquista del vello d'oro and in Rome in 1718 (Griselda) respectively.

Alessandro Scarlatti was from Naples and has worked there as well as in Rome and Venice. Il prigioniero fortunato was performed in 1698 in Naples, Mitridate Eupatore in Venice (1707) whereas Telemaco had its premiere in Rome in 1718. This disc also contains arias from serenatas, like La gloria di Primavera (1716) and Erminia (1723), both performed in Naples. The former is the only composition of Alessandro Scarlatti on this disc which can be related to the Habsburg dynasty. It was written to celebrate the birth of a heir to the imperial throne. The disc ends with an aria from Merope by Riccardo Broschi, first performed in Jaromeritz Castle in Bohemia in 1737. Broschi, the brother of Carlo - better known as Farinelli, the famous castrato - was also from Naples and mostly worked there. His aria is a good example of the Neapolitan style which would capture Italy and large parts of Europe.

So, all in all, the connection between the programme on this disc and opera performances at the court in Vienna is rather loose. That doesn't reduce in any way the value of this disc. Generally I am rather sceptical about recitals of opera arias, and I don't see the point of recordings of arias from operas by Handel, for instance. But discs like this make sense in that they shed light on operas which are largely forgotten. Most operas by the composers who are represented on this disc are never performed or recorded. Ideally discs with this kind of repertoire encourage the performance of the complete operas. In this department there is really no lack of repertoire, and instead of recording Handel's Ariodante or Giulio Cesare for the tenth time, recordings of operas by the likes of Caldara, Bononcini and Alessandro Scarlatti are much to be preferred. Even the least-known composer on this disc, Riccardo Broschi, seems to be a pretty good composer, considering the quality of his aria 'Chi non sente', which is by far the longest on this disc.

The subject of all arias is love - what else would one expect? But there are many ways to approach this subject, as this disc shows. The title 'Colori d'amore', "the colours of love",

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expresses that. Alessandro Scarlatti's serenata *La gloria di Primavera* contains the beautiful aria 'Canta dolce il rosignolo', in which the transverse flute represents the nightingale. 'Cara tomba' (Dear tomb) is a highly expressive aria, in which Scarlatti makes abundant use of chromaticism. Scarlatti certainly wasn't averse from virtuosity as 'Ondeggiante agitato' from *Il prigioniero fortunato* shows: the soprano and the trumpet are involved in a brilliant dialogue, and the A section contains a long passage for both, without any accompaniment, in which they swirl around each other in virtuosic coloraturas.

It is not only the vocal part which deserves attention. The instrumental scoring is often remarkable and considerably contributes to the impact of the arias. That is the case, for instance, with 'Se vedrai avvampar le lucciolette' from Caldara's opera *Il nome più glorioso*. In the A section the soprano is accompanied by two oboes, bassoon and bc - the strings only join in the ritornello. In the B section it is the cello which has an obbligato part, supported by strings and bc. In 'Per combattere con lo sdegno' from Caldara's *Cajo Marzio Coriolano* the violin and the cello have an obbligato part. Delightful is the aria 'Più che freme il nembo irato' from *La conquista del vello d'oro* by Antonio Maria Bononcini, which has a solo part for a mandolin - a rarity in baroque operas.

All arias on this disc have at least something which catches the ear, and the programme has been well-chosen in regard to quality of music and variety of character. The features of these arias are fully explored: Simone Kermes makes often much impression with her virtuosic singing, but she also knows how to deal with more introspective and lyrical stuff. Just listen to the refined performance of 'Ombra mai fu', this time from *Xerse* by Giovanni Bononcini, which Handel used as a model for his aria with the same text. Her performances are generally tasteful and stylish. Only now and then she crosses the border of good taste, for instance in the cadenza in the B section of 'Per combattere con lo sdegno'. In Scarlatti's aria 'Torbido, irato e nero' she sings a cadenza in the *dacapo* which crosses the range of the aria. But this is only a little blot considering the impressive ease with which she deals with the coloraturas in this aria which move up and down through the whole range of her voice. *Le Musiche Nove* give excellent support, and the various solo and obbligato parts are nicely executed.

This is a worthy successor to Simone Kermes' previous disc, 'Lava'. It just shows how much great music is in the archives waiting to be discovered. ---Johan van Veen,
musica-dei-donum.org

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