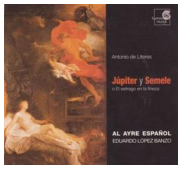
Literes – Jupiter y Semele (2003)



Disc: 1 *1. Sinfonia 2. Venid moradores de Thebas, venid! 3. Fuego, fuego repita en todo el Orizonte 4. Y tu imagen fementida 5. Y pues ya de tu ultrage, y tu tormento 6. Valedme Cielos! 7. Vago escandalo del ayre 8. Divina Juno hermosa 9. A mi me violenta 10. Ay, Cupido! pluviera al alto cielo 11. A mi me han dado los Cielos 12. Que puede hazer quien sabe adorar? 13. El Cielo, La tierra 14. Pues siendo de esta suerte 15. Ha, de los concavos senos del mar! 16. Y a fin de que logre Thebas tanta dicha 17. Pesadote, majadero 18. Quiere un dueno essta cara 19. Arroyuelo puro 20. Mas, o se abulta el deseo 21. Amada prima 22. Miente, Semele bella 23. No, no te possea 24. Como accion tan grosera...? 25. Teme, teme el oraculo 26. Alienta, Desconfia 27. Jupiter, de ti animada 28. Para quando se hizieron los rayos vengativos? 29. En venganza, y en furor*
Disc: 2
1. Temblante Estilo Italiano 2. Fugitivo arroyuelo 3. Esfinge de estos jardines 4. Haziendo, que pida su dano 5. Pues, penetrando el jardin 6. Fugitivo arroyuelo 7. Ya que estamos a solas 8. Selva amena, jardin fertil 9. Mas no teneys que dezirme 10. No disperteys a quien duerme 11. Por mas que me persuadas 12. Numenes inmortales! 13. Que hare quanto me pidiere 14. Pues ya, Jove, que has jurado 15. No he de enmudecer, llorar? 16. Adios, dueno hermoso 17. Oye, aguarda, escucha, espera! 18. Soldados, a tierra! 19. Lleve el Demonio la artesa! 20. Llevad 'marido', la artesa 21. Guapo de la artesilla 22. Batalla 23. Astrea, no sabes quanto me he holgado 24. Ven dulcissimo bien 25. Valgame el Cielo, los orbes se estremecen! 26. O, Cielos ingratos! 27. Semele! Mas ya murio 28. Llora, Jupiter, Llora 29. Juno fingida 30. Moradores de estas selvas!
Marta Almajano – Jupiter (soprano) Soledad Cardoso – Juno (soprano) Lola Casariego – Cupido (mezzo-soprano) Marina Pardo – Enarreta (mezzo-soprano) José Hernandez – Ydaspes (countertenor) Jordi Ricart – Cadmo, Satiro (baritone) Virginia Ardid –Semele (actress) Al Ayre Español Eduardo Lopez Banzo (conductor) [recorded live, Teatro Municipal de Artà, Mallorca, February 2003]

Those familiar with Handel's Semele will be familiar with this 1718 zarzuela's plot: Jupiter is in love with Semele; Juno, Jupiter's wife, enlists Cupid (who is furious with the god for burning down his temple) and plots revenge. The end comes when Semele is convinced by Juno in

disguise to experience Jupiter in all his glory; the god's flames destroy her. In this work, there is a comic sub-plot involving the amours of a satyr, and another concerning Cadmus and Hydaspes. Since depth of involvement in plot isn't really an issue here, the diversions are charming rather than problematic; the music for the minor characters clearly is more "popular" than that for the gods and Semele, whose music is Baroquely operatic and requires a certain virtuosity. (Well, actually, Semele is a speaking role, but the others have fine operatic turns.) There is spoken dialog from all the characters at one point or another, but never so much as to make the musical episodes seem disconnected.

This performance was taped live in Mallorca, and, some stage noises and not-always-perfect singing aside, it's a pleasure from start to finish. In addition to the usual strings, there are prominent recorders, an oboe, a guitar, and castanets. Virginia Ardi acts well as Semele, perky and impetuous at first, very moving in her death scene. Marta Almajano, a soprano Jupiter, is excellent throughout, but she sings with particlar beauty and fine legato in her lament after Semele's death. Both Lola Casariego and Soledad Cardoso, as Cupid and Juno, sing and act maliciously well and their many duets are high points. The others in the cast, including the one low voice, baritone Jordi Ricart as Cadmus and the Satyr, are fine.

Conductor Eduardo López Banzo adds the occasional piece of instrumental music by contemporary composers (two anonymous and one by Domenico Scarlatti) and Al Ayre Español plays gloriously, with verve, accuracy, and rhythmic punch. Antonio de Literes, previously unknown to me, is a fine composer, writing for instruments and voices with sophistication and an ear for sheer entertainment. This work is unique and recommended. --- Robert Levine, classicstoday.com

Antonio de Literes (1673-1747) is perhaps the most distinctive voice of the Spanish Baroque; and although this impressive zarzuela is only attributed to him, all internal evidence points to it being his work. Written like Acis y Galatea and Los Elementos to a text by José de Cañizares, Júpiter y Semele had the first of several productions on May 9, 1718 at Madrid's Teatro de la Cruz, predating Handel's English opera Semele (never, pace Cristina Diego Pacheco's otherwise impeccable notes, thought of as an oratorio) by twenty-six years.

Júpiter y Semele may not rival what is after all one of Handel's supreme masterpieces, but then it does not aim at the same mark. Where Handel, greatest of Enlightenment music-dramatists,

presents an operatic range of situations and raw emotions triggered by love and desire, Literes is more distanced, fashioning a sophisticated mix of high allegory and low comedy. Spoken dialogue alternates with sung numbers, ranging from operatic recits and da capo arias down to comedy dúos al español in the fast-moving manner of the baroque zarzuela. The score's variety is a delight, not least for the energised choral epigrams which frame several of the scenes.

Character and psychology are not Literes' prime concerns; but Semele herself - unusually - is a speaking role, and in this atmospheric and urgent live concert recording (made this February in Literes' native Mallorca) Virginia Ardid is able to bring an actor's subtlety and power to her scenes with Jupiter. This makes for some unusual effects - notably at the catastrophe, where Semele is incinerated by embracing (as she herself has demanded) the God in his true fiery form. The alternation of sung and spoken strophes for the two protagonists makes for gripping drama. Rarely can even Marta Almajano have given such a towering performance as she does here, and Jupiter's poised lament after Semele's death is, fittingly, the musical highpoint of the performance.

The villains of the piece, Cupid and Juno, are played with spiteful verve if less vocal distinction by Lola Casariego and Soledad Cardoso, contrasted in timbre and working well in tandem. The supporting singers are generally excellent, though the minor subplot of King Cadmus' war with Ydaspes suffers from the latter's limitation as a speaking actor. Eduardo López Banzo and Al Ayre Español have always played Spanish baroque as if to the manner born, but there's an unbuttoned urgency here which makes this their most rewarding zarzuela performance yet.

It's tricked out with instrumental additions from contemporary sources, and suitable helpings of dialogue. There are good notes as well as Cañizares' elegant Spanish original text, usefully translated into French and German as well as ... though I'm not sure English is quite the right word for Mark Owen's rendition, which makes very little sense and contains a host of howlers. It's time he upgraded his translation software or monitored the results more carefully. The whole is most attractively packaged by Harmonia Mundi, and altogether Júpiter y Semele is easily the most vivid recording to date of any baroque zarzuela. ---Christopher Webber, zarzuela.net

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