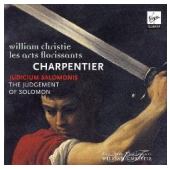
Charpentier - Judicium Salomonis (2006)



Judicium Salomonis, H. 422 *1 Simphonie* Prima Pars *2 Récit: Confortatum Est Regnum Israel 3 Chœur: Tunc Lætata Est Omnis Ecclesia 4 Trio: Et Rex Similiter Valde Lætatus Est 5 Récit: Benedictus Es Domine Deus Israel 6 Chœur Ideo Cunctis Unanimiter Lætantibus* Secunda Pars - Songe de Salomon *7 Simphonie 8 Récit: Nocte Autem Sequenti 9 Grand Récit: Quia Non Petisti Tibi Dies Multos 10 Chœur: Et Facto Mane Evigilavit Salomon*
Dispute Des Deux Mères
11 Récit: Obsecro Mi Domine 12 Chœur: Audivit Omnis Israel
Motet Pour Une Longue Offrande H. 434
13 Prélude 14 Paravit Dominus In Judicio Thronum Suum 15 Prélude 16 Chœur: Pluet Super Peccatores Laqueos 17 Simphonie 18 Simphonie
Judicium Salomonis soloists: Paul Agnew - tenor [haute-contre] (Salomon) Neal Davies - bass (Deus) Ana Quintans - soprano (Vera Mater) Marc Molomot - tenor [haute-contre] (Falsa Mater) Marc Mauillon - baritone (Historicus Primus, Historicus Secundus, Populus) Joao Fernandes - bass (Populus) Leif Aruhn-Solen - tenor [haute-contre] (Populus) Motet Pour Une Longue Offrande solooists: Ana Quintans - Maud Gnidzaz, sopranos Marc Molomot - Leif Aruhn-Solen, tenors [hautes-contre] Paul Agnew - Carl Ghazarossian, tenors [tailles] Joao Fernandes - Neal Davies, basses Les Arts Florissants William Christie - conductor

This Virgin Classics release reunites William Christie and Les Arts Florissants with the music of Marc-Antoine Charpentier, a composer for whom it can be said Christie has done more to expose than any other he has taken on. This is saying a lot, as Christie has also made extensive recorded forays into the works of Campra, Lully, Montéclair, Monteverdi, Purcell, and in particular, Handel. However, Charpentier remains a special case to Christie, and there is still a monumental amount of unrecorded music by this composer to exploit. The two works on Virgin Classics' Charpentier: Judicium Salomonis actually have been recorded before, though not often and not by well-known groups like Christie's -- the Motet pour une longue Offrande has been recorded by Philippe Herreweghe and that's about it in terms of the competition.

Virgin's recording, made in the Théâtre de Poissy, is very excellent -- warm, clear, and full bodied. Christie's soloists -- countertenors Paul Agnew and Marc Molomot, bass João Fernandes, alto Ana Quintans, and the others -- all turn in splendid performances, as does the band under Christie's direction. As in Charpentier's opera, Médée, which Christie recorded in a definitive reading on Erato some years back, Charpentier's music is lush, languid, and sometimes makes use of surprisingly advanced-sounding harmonies. But neither the dramatic motet Judicium Salomonis or the Motet pour une longue Offrande are as captivating as Médée; listen as one might through these long-seeming works and to the generally lovely sound made by Les Arts Florissants, the whole thing sounds musically dead and is rather dull overall. Long stretches of densely polyphonic writing work toward a big climax that sits there for a second, and then picks up with another dense, polyphonic passage. This same formal strategy is repeated several times; it is as though the busier and more florid the texture is, the more Charpentier likes it, and he doesn't know when to quit, to provide something more direct, if nothing more than just to rest one's ears for a bit. While one may complain about the lengthiness of some of the arias in Johann Sebastian Bach's cantatas, at least they serve the purpose of making the choruses more interesting. Charpentier: Judicium Salomonis just wears you out, and long before one gets to its conclusion.

Concerning William Christie and Les Arts Florissants, they are as fine here as they've always been, and Charpentier: Judicium Salomonis is probably the most deluxe package that these works will ever enjoy. Whether these particular pieces are worthy of such deluxe treatment is another matter. If one is a die-hard Charpentier enthusiast, this might be the best thing since sliced bread, but "heavy" and "ponderous" are both very good words to describe the effect of Virgin Classics' Charpentier: Judicium Salomonis. ---Uncle Dave Lewis, AllMusic Review

These grand motets are both late works, written between 1688 and 1699 and 1702. The earlier of the two, Motet pour une Longue Offrande H434, was written for an annual meeting of the Parlement and embodied the savoury moral that judgement rests with God. The characteristic Charpentier traits of almost visual-theatrical drama are here, though perhaps to a lesser degree than before. Fortunately Neal Davis is the quintessence of sonorousness in his role, singing Paravit Dominus in judicio with sweep and clarity. The choir also sings with considerable vivacity and engagement though it’s noticeable that individual strands do obtrude from time to time. It’s certainly not the neatest or most tightly drilled performance on disc from them.

Compensation comes from the eloquent winds of Les Arts Florissants, always one of this band's strongest features, and from the solo singing. Davis we've already mentioned but the duet between Ana Quintans and Maud Gnidzaz is also worthy of note and admiration for its pliancy and plangency. Note too the characteristically high tenor – a somewhat loose translation into English – in the Trio finale.

Juducium Salomonis is the bigger work and the ostensible disc favourite – see the booklet cover which features a detail from a painting by Guido Reni, though it happens to be his c1606/07 Martyrdom of St Catherine of Alexandria. Here the band scores by virtue of its powerful accents and rhythmic charge in Part One and in the sheer expressive warmth of the opening simphonie of Part Two. Paul Agnew, a regular in this kind of French repertoire no less than in, say, Dowland proves eloquence itself in his recitatives and pronouncements. Note in particular how malleable, how potently gentle, and how supple he is in the First Part's recitative Benedictus es Domine Deus Israel. And the special intimacy of Et facto mane is conveyed with real conviction. Still, there again, the chorus rather lets things down in Et facto – though I should add that this is only a marginal matter and won't necessarily spoil ones enjoyment of these otherwise warmly sung and played motets.

The recording is a touch on the chilly side. The Latin texts are translated into French, English and German. ---Jonathan Woolf, musicweb-international.com

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