Mayr - I Cherusci (2019)

Disc: 1 *1 I Cherusci, Act I: Sinfonia 00:06:10 2 I Cherusci, Act I: Udite - Vinta cadrà Cheruscia 00:04:38 3 I Cherusci, Act I: Che intesi! 00:01:08 4 I Cherusci, Act I: Fra noi ritorni il giubilo - Al 00:07:45 5 I Cherusci, Act I: Sostegni illustri dello stato 00:00:38 6 I Cherusci, Act I: Il Ministro de' Numi s'avanza 00:00:46 7 I Cherusci, Act I: Che ci reca Zarasto? 00:02:02 8 I Cherusci, Act I: Eccomi a voi 00:05:06 9 I Cherusci, Act I: Che si chiede da me? - I Cherus 00:03:13 10 I Cherusci, Act I: La pietade col nemico 00:03:36 11 I Cherusci, Act I: Ecco, ofidi il soggiorno 00:02:04 12 I Cherusci, Act I: Paventi quel tiranno 00:04:52 13 I Cherusci, Act I: E Rendo ancor non torna? - A pa 00:02:47 14 I Cherusci, Act I: Tu sospiri? 00:01:52 15 I Cherusci, Act I: Mia non è! 00:06:23 16 I Cherusci, Act I: Carilo? 00:01:31 17 I Cherusci, Act I: Se pietosi o giusti Numi 00:04:49 18 I Cherusci, Act I: Fida Ercilda - Eccola 00:01:29 19 I Cherusci, Act I: Trema, Tamaro 00:01:09 20 I Cherusci, Act I: Taci... 00:07:20 21 I Cherusci, Act I: Dunque non v'è più speme - Figl 00:02:21*
Disc: 2
1 I Cherusci, Act I: De' sommi Numi al soglio - Che 00:14:52 2 I Cherusci, Act II: Nume della vendetta 00:04:28 3 I Cherusci, Act II: Ho risoluto 00:03:43 4 I Cherusci, Act II: Tronchiamo 00:01:50 5 I Cherusci, Act II: Vanne pur 00:08:39 6 I Cherusci, Act II: Dunque s'ardisce ancora 00:00:55 7 I Cherusci, Act II: Ecco l'ombrifero 00:01:48 8 I Cherusci, Act II: Ove son! 00:02:44 9 I Cherusci, Act II: Ombra dolente e pallida 00:05:38 10 I Cherusci, Act II: Giovine sconsigliato! - Ah Car 00:01:49 11 I Cherusci, Act II: Fosca nube in ciel minaccia 00:04:10 12 I Cherusci, Act II: Ah sì tutto è perduto 00:02:48 13 I Cherusci, Act II: Io non ho pace! 00:01:17 14 I Cherusci, Act II: Qual suono 00:08:59 15 I Cherusci, Act II: Misera dove fuggo! - Ferma, Si 00:04:03 16 I Cherusci, Act II: Che ascoltai! 00:00:34 17 I Cherusci, Act II: Ah qual gioja... 00:06:36 18 I Cherusci, Act II: Padre Mio! 00:01:59 19 I Cherusci, Act II: Eccoli... - Ah padre! 00:01:01 20 I Cherusci, Act II: Ah di quel giubbilo 00:03:32
Yvonne Prentki (Tusnelda) - soprano Andrea Lauren Brown (Tamaro) - soprano Katharina Konradi (Ercilda) - soprano Markus Schäfer (Treuta) - tenor Uwe Gottswinter (Carilo) - tenor Andreas Mattersberger (Zarasto) - bass Harald Thum (Dunclamo) - tenor Markus Zeltler (Un Araldo) - tenor Bavarian State Opera Chorus Simon Mayr Chorus Concerto de Bassus
Franz Hauk - conductor

Composed when Napoleon's armies were striding across Europe, Simon Mayr's highly charged opera I Cherusci is set in ancient Germania in the time of Christ's birth, its narrative focusing on the perils of the captured slave girl Tusnelda who has been chosen for a sacrificial ritual. The universal themes of Freedom and patriotism in this pioneering tale of familial bonds, romance, jealousy and desperate misadventure would later attract the likes of Beethoven and Verdi. This world premiere recording of I Cherusci uses period instruments, presenting it as it would have been heard in 1808. The Simon Mayr Chorus was founded in 2003. The repertoire of the choir includes works from the 16th to the 20th century. A special emphasis is laid on authentic historical performance and on the promotion of music by Simon Mayr at the highest cultural level. Concerto de Bassus is an international ensemble engaging young musicians in historical performances of music from the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. Many members of the ensemble are outstanding students or graduates of the Hochschule fur Musik und Theater, with wind instruments constructed on historical principles. The ensemble takes its name from the fundamental element of Baroque music: the Bassus. ---naxosdirect.com

When Mayr's I Cherusci was premiered at the Teatro Argentina in Rome during the carnival 1808, Napoleon's armies were gushing forth mercilessly through Europe and the libretto of the opera with its setting of merciless warfare between ancient Germanic tribes around the time of the birth of Christ was certainly hot stuff. The situation is as follows: A confederacy led by Treuta, King of the Marcomanni, has defeated the Cherusci after a lengthy series of battles, but the King's only daughter has been caught by the enemy. He is very sad. A Cheruscan slave girl, Tusnelda, who has been captured by the Marcomanni, is to be sacrificed to the god of war, Mars. Treuta doesn't want any more bloodshed, he only wishes peace and freedom and wants so save the girl. Tamaro arrives from the Cherusci camp and asks Treuta to release Tusnelda, who is his beloved. Treuta has in the meantime become fond of the slave girl and hidden her in order to help her flee. Then an emissary from the Cherusci camp with a necklace which proves that Tusnelda is the daughter of Treuta. But the high priest Zarasto is just preparing to carry through the sacrifice of Tusnelda … The finale becomes a thriller!

It is interesting to realise that another humanist and freedom fighter had been working on an opera with the same motto at about the same time – and continued to do so for another half decade: Ludwig van Beethoven. The first version of what is generally known as Leonore, was first seen at the Theater an der Wien in November 1805, but was reworked and foreshortened and finally produced in 1814 as Fidelio in the shape we know it today. Napoleon may not have bothered much about these two operas – if he knew about them at all – but it was still an act of bravery from Beethoven and Mayr to stick out their necks at the time in question.

The opening sinfonia is surprisingly lively and entertaining, considering the serious drama that is to follow. Here the music almost bubbles over with high spirits, and as usual Mayr spices his brew with good helpings of wind solos. When the curtain opens there are fanfares and the chorus enters and now there is martial atmosphere. Zarasto, the high priest, makes his entrance, accompanied by organ, and we hear an impressive basso cantante, Andreas Mattersberger. His aria La pietade col nemico (CD 1 tr. 10), halfway through the first act is warmly sung with healthy tone. He sounds almost too noble for such an evil character. Having attended master classes with Robert Holl and Elisabeth Schwarzkopf and since 2005 being trained by Brigitte Fassbaender his future seems well catered for. The lyric coloratura soprano Yvonne Prentki as Tusnelda is another new acquaintance who impresses in her cavatina Eccomi a voi (CD 1 tr. 8) with brilliant height, and later on in ensembles and duets, not least in the duet Vanne pur (CD 2 tr. 5) with Trauta, with woodwind accompaniment. Katharina Konradi is also a new name in Franz Hauk's stable, and she is excellent in Ercilda's aria Se pietosi o giusti Nume (CD 1 tr. 17), which in effect is a duet with the French horn – one of the finest numbers in this work. Tenor Uwe Gottswinter, who attended master classes with Brigitte Fassbaender and Christoph Prégardien, is an expressive singer but maybe too weak for the martial aria Fosca nube in ciel minaccia (CD 2 tr. 11) with timpani and wind.

Well-known regulars in this Mayr series are tenor Markus Schäfer and soprano Andrea Lauren Brown as Treuta and Tamaro respectively. They are heard together in the duet Mia non è! (CD 1 tr. 15), also one of the highlights. Schäfer makes his first entrance in a long aria with chorus, Fra noi ritorni il giubilo – Sortita: Al valor (CD 1 tr. 5) where he handles the abundant florid singing with elegance. Andrea Lauren Brown on the other hand has two great solos: Ecco, o fidi il soggiotno … Paventi quell tiranno (CD 1 tr. 11-12) in the first act, and Ove son! ... Ombra dolente e pallida (CD 2 tr. 8-9) in the second, the latter aria with harp and woodwind. That instrumental combination is again heard in the very last scene (CD 2 tr. 20). Mayr's orchestration is as always inventive.

Readers who have so far avoided Mayr's operas should perhaps start with Saffo, which my colleague David Chandler made a Recording of the Month, but collectors of this series can invest with confidence in this latest issue. ---Göran Forsling, musicweb-international.com

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