

## Telemann - Cantatas from the Harmonischer Gottesdienst (2007)

Written by bluesever

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*Am Feste der Heiligen Dreieinigkeit Am Sonntage Quasimodogeniti Am Sonntage Sexagesima Am Sonntage nach dem Neuen Jah Am 11. Sonntage nach Trinitatis Am 26. Sonntage nach Trinitatis Am zweiten Osterfeiertage Am ersten Osterfeiertage Am Feste der Heil. drei Könige Am zweiten Sonntage nach Trinitatis Am dritten Pfingstfeiertage Am ersten Pfingstfeiertage* Klaus Mertens, baritone Ingrid Schmithüsen, soprano Il Concertino Köln

Originally intended for domestic devotions rather than liturgical use, the cantatas of Harmonischer Gottesdienst call for a solo singer with the accompaniment of a melody instrument and continuo. I felt it a weakness of the Toccata disc that the performances used a recorder throughout, thus ignoring the wide options that Telemann gave. Here that range is recognized, with violin, recorder, flute, and oboe all employed, thus providing a greater range of color and sonority to an obbligato role that varies from simple doubling of the vocal line to elaborately independent concertante writing. The choice of cantatas ranges over the church year, with works extending from Trinity to Pentecost.

Both singers, Klaus Mertens in particular, are experienced practitioners of German Baroque sacred repertoire, and it would have been surprising had they produced less than very good performances. And so it proves, although it is Mertens's disc that is overall the more satisfying, not only because he projects the cantatas more strongly, but also because he has selected a particularly rewarding group of works given livelier, more ambient sound than the rather close recording accorded Schmithüsen's disc. Not that there is much wrong with her bright, well-produced singing other than a tendency to sound tentative in the upper register, and the odd uncomfortable moment such as the final aria of *Auf ehernen Mauern*, with its rapid declamation and awkward rhythm. Despite their modest purpose it would in fact be quite wrong to think that Telemann made concessions to amateur domesticity, since although clarity of text is clearly the principal objective, many arias make considerable demands on their singer. Among those in Schmithüsen's cantatas, the remarkable "Folternde Rache" ("Vengeful torture") (from *Schmeck und sehet*) stands out in this respect, its driving rhythms and tortured

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chromaticism twisted into ever-greater declamatory intensity.

All six of the cantatas sung by Mertens are strongly rhetorical works encompassing the contrasts that are such a feature of both the texts and music of Harmonischer Gottesdienst, and all include at least one memorable aria. In the case of the two Pentecost cantatas, *Ergeuss dich* and *Zischet nur*, Telemann provided music of exceptional quality throughout. The opening aria of the latter, “Zischet nur, stechet, ihr feurigen Zunge” (“Hiss, sting, you fiery tongues”) takes the flickering tongues of fire visited on the disciples as a departure for an agitated aria of fury in which Telemann takes full onomatopoeic advantage of the “hissing” and “stinging,” a conceit splendidly realized by Mertens. The pictorial words of the opening aria of *Ergeuss dich*, which speak of the “languishing soul” are set to a weary, heavily marked melody later borrowed by Handel for his coronation anthem *My heart is inditing*, one of a number of instances where he raided his friend Telemann’s publication. The final aria of the same cantata brings a particularly striking example of the vivid contrasts with which these pieces abound, the slow, sepulchral opening (“Black spirit of darkness”) immediately dispelled by the fleet-footed command, “flee and remove yourself from here!”

As these illustrations show, to appreciate these cantatas fully requires an understanding of the text. The lack here is certainly a deterrent, but given the high quality of the performances and the very low asking price, I hope readers will investigate this set. And even if you don’t understand German, you will get some general idea of the theme of each cantata by going to the appropriate Biblical text for the day, which is cited in the booklet. ---FANFARE: Brian Robins

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