

## Giovanni Paisiello – Passio di San Giovanni (Ehrhardt) [2006]



1. *Egressus est cum discipulis suis trans torrentem (Testo)* 00:03:16 2. *Quem quaeritis (Cristo, Testo, Turba)* 00:03:38 3. *Simon ergo Petrus habens (Testo, Cristo)* 00:01:08 4. *Cohors ergo et tribunus et ministri Iudaeorum (Testo)* 00:02:00 5. *Petrus autem stabat ad ostium foris (Testo, Magd)* 00:01:49 6. *Pontifex ergo interrogavit Iesum de discipulis (Testo, Cristo, High Priest)* 00:03:45 7. *Numquid et tu ex discipulis eius es (Turba, Testo, Petrus, High Priest)* 00:01:51 8. *Adducunt ergo Iesum a Caiapha in praetorium (Testo, Pilatus, Chor de Juden)* 00:03:01 9. *Tu es rex Iudaeorum (Pilatus, Testo, Cristo)* 00:04:42 10. *Et cum hoc dixisset iterum (Testo, Pilatus, Chor de Juden)* 00:01:51 11. *Tunc ergo apprehendit Pilatus Iesum et flagellavit (Testo, Kriegsknechte, Pilatus)* 00:03:24 12. *Cum ergo vidissent eum (Testo, Chorus of Priests, Pilatus, Chor de Juden)* 00:03:51 13. *Et exinde quaerebat (Testo, Chor de Juden, Pilatus, Chorus of Priests)* 00:03:20 14. *Tunc ergo tradidit eis illum ut crucifigeretur (Testo, Chorus of Priests, Pilatus)* 00:04:08 15. *Militiae ergo cum crucifixissent eum (Testo, Chor de Kriegsknechte, Cristo)* 00:04:17 16. *Postea sciens Iesus quia (Testo, Cristo)* 00:03:12 17. *Judaei ergo quoniam Parasceve erat (Testo)* 00:03:56 18. *Post haec autem rogavit Pilatum (Testo)* 00:04:56  
Monika Mauch (Soprano) Trine Wilsberg Lund (Soprano) Jörg Schneider (Baritone) Vocalconsort Berlin L'Arte del Mondo Werner Ehrhardt (conductor) Recorded live, April 2006, Trinitatiskirche, Cologne, Germany

Giovanni Paisiello was one of the most admired composers of opera in the second half of the 18th century. His reputation was mainly based on his comic operas which he composed while working in Naples. Although not born in Naples, he considered himself a Neapolitan, having studied at the Conservatorio di S Onofri. Paisiello's career can be divided into three stages. In the first he concentrated on composing comic operas, mainly for Naples. The next stage started when he was invited by the Russian tsarina Catherine II to become her maestro di cappella. There he composed some operas as well, but as Catherine wasn't really interested in music and only kept her chapel as a matter of prestige, he found time to compose other kinds of music as well, in particular keyboard works for his pupils at court. He stayed in St Petersburg until 1783, when he returned to Naples. In the last stage of his career his attention shifted from comic opera to opera seria and to religious music. At this time he also had to deal with the effects of the French Revolution. Twice the king of Naples had to flee because of a French

invasion. On both occasions Paisiello stayed in the city and worked for the new regime. After a while the kingdom was restored but Paisiello got away with his affiliation with the new regime as he took advantage of a general amnesty by King Ferdinando.

The Passion according to St John as recorded here is a rather simple work. The Passions written by Italian composers are in no way comparable to the Passions which were written in Germany. This was the direct result of the reforms of the Council of Trent (1545-1563) which ordered settings of the Passion story to be simple, using only the text of the Gospels without any free poetic addition. So this Passion isn't much different from the Passions written in the renaissance. It is also part of a tradition in Naples, performing the St John Passion on Good Friday. The best-known example is Alessandro Scarlatti's St John Passion, written about 100 years earlier.

The vocal parts are written for sopranos and basses only. One soprano acts as 'Testo' (Evangelist), whereas the second soprano sings the words of Christ. The third main role is that of Pilate which is given to a bass. The turbae are sung by a vocal ensemble, whose members also perform the smaller roles, like that of Peter. The instrumental ensemble is very small as well: just two violins and basso continuo.

The whole text is set in the form of accompanied recitatives, although the music is fluent and often arioso-like. Only sometimes Paisiello turns towards a speech-like secco recitative, in which the singer is either unaccompanied or supported by the basso continuo only. This is one way in which Paisiello differentiates in his treatment of the recitative. Other means are variations in rhythm and speed. The orchestra sometimes gets the role of illustrating the text. A striking example is the moment when Pilate orders Jesus to be scourged. The Testo falls silent and the orchestra vividly depicts the scourging. It is mainly through melody rather than harmony that Paisiello illustrates the events. Only at rare moments does he use dissonance, for instance on 'Barabban'. An intensity of expression is achieved by the slow and steady descending melodic figure when the Testo tells of Jesus bowing his head and giving up the ghost. Remarkable is the way the Passion ends. After the Testo telling how Jesus has been buried a moment of silence follows, and then the Testo sings twice the title at the cross: "Iesus Nazarenus rex Iudaeorum" - Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.

This description may suggest that this work is pretty boring. That is not the case. In fact, its concise character is its main strength. And Paisiello, who was famous for his melodious invention, does not disappoint here. He has very effectively set the text to music, and I find the result quite moving.

The impact of this work is also down to the performance, which is very good. I say this especially considering the fact that this is a live recording. I am very impressed by the artistic and technical results achieved. I noticed some differences between the text that is sung and the text printed in the booklet. In most cases these could be just errors which are probably inevitable in a live performance.

The two sopranos do an excellent job. Trine Wilsberg Lund is very impressive as Testo. Although the role of Christ is also set for a soprano, its tessitura is a little lower, creating a nice contrast between the two soprano parts. Monika Mauch gives a very good account of this part. I am a little less enthusiastic about Jörg Schneider, whose voice I find a little rough, but he sings his part well. The vocal and instrumental ensembles are both first-class too.

I would like to recommend this disc, as it shows an unknown aspect of Paisiello's composing, sheds light on a little-known tradition of Passion writing and - most importantly - because it is just fine music. This St John Passion is an interesting extension of the repertoire for Passiontide. ---Johan van Veen, musicweb-international.com

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