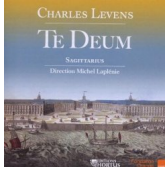


Charles Levens: Te Deum - Deus Noster Refugium (2008)

Written by bluesever

Sunday, 14 December 2014 16:59 -

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1. *Te Deum* 2. *Pleni Sunt Coeli* 3. *Te Gloriosus* 4. *Te Per Orbem* 5. *Tu Rex Gloriam* 6. *Tu Ad Dexteram* 7. *Te Ergo* 8. *Aeterna Fac Sum* 9. *Salvum Fac Populum* 10. *Per Signulos Dies* 11. *Dignare, Domine* 12. *In Te, Domine* 13. *Deus Noster Refugium* 14. *Propterea* 15. *Sonuerunt* 16. *Fluminis Impetus* 17. *Conturbatae Sunt* 18. *Dominus Virtutum* 19. *Vacate, Et Videte* 20. *Dominus Virtutum* Ensemble Sagittarius Ensemble Vocal Arpege Orchestre Baroque Les Passions Michel Laplénie - conductor

At the beginning of the reign of King Louis XV, the French provincial music scene gained more prominence thanks to its bustling theatres, Académies, and regional choir schools.

Compositions by provincial music masters, such as Charles Levens Grands Motets, were included in the repertoire of the Concerts parisiens and the Royal Chapel at Versailles.

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It is very likely that you have never heard of Charles Levens. You are in good company: the editors of New Grove haven't either. And in the about 40 years that I am listening to early music I haven't seen his name appear anywhere. When I received the disc with his *Te Deum* I was convinced it was the first time any music by Levens had been recorded. I was wrong: when my review of the first disc appeared on MusicWeb International, a reader informed me that Michel Laplénie had recorded music by Levens some years ago. It was in 2003, to be precise, on the little-known label Lira d'Arco - which is probably the reason I hadn't noticed it - and was reissued by Et'cetera in 2007. I was able to borrow that disc from the public library in my hometown, and I decided to extend my original review for MusicWeb here.

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One of the reasons this composer is unknown is the fact that he has never worked in Paris or Versailles. Those were the places to be in France in the 17th and 18th century if you wanted to make a good career as a composer. France was different from, for instance, Germany or Italy, in that it was a centralized country and was completely dominated by the capital and the royal court, not only politically, but also culturally. As a result it isn't surprising that the largest part of the French repertoire performed in modern times has been written by composers who were working in Paris or Versailles. Music by composers who worked in other cities and regions is relatively little-known.

Charles Levens was born in Marseille and was a choirboy in several choir schools of the Provence. In 1718 he started working in Vannes (Brittany), in 1723 he moved to Toulouse, and in 1738 he was appointed head of the choir school of Saint André Cathedral in Bordeaux, where he stayed the rest of his life. He may have worked far from the capital most of the time, his works were well known there: his Grands Motets and other works were performed at the Concert Spirituel in Paris and also at the Chapelle Royale in Versailles. Other performances are documented in Monaco, Lyon and Marseille.

Levens almost exclusively wrote religious music, and he felt most at home in the genre of the Motet en symphonie, the motet for voices and instruments. All the works on these two discs belong to this genre.---Johan van Veen, musica-dei-donum.org

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