

Felix Mendelssohn - Paulus (St.Paulus) op.36 [2007]

Written by bluesever

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1. Overture 2. Der du bist der Gott (Chorus) 3. Chorale: Allein Gott in der Hoh' sei Ehr' (Chorus) 4. Recitative and Duet: Die Menge der Glaubigen (Soprano, Bass) 5. Dieser Mensch hort nicht auf (Chorus) 6. Recitative: Und sie sahen auf ihn (Soprano, Tenor, Chorus) 7. Aria: Jerusalem! Die du totest die Propheten (Soprano) 8. Recitative: Sie aber sturmt auf ihn ein (Tenor, Chorus) 9. Recitative: Und sie steinigten ihn (Tenor) - Chorale: Dir, Herr, dir will ich mich ergeben (Chorus) 10. Recitative: Und die Zeugen legten ab ihre Kleider (Soprano) 11. Siehe! Wir preisen selig (Chorus) 12. Recitative: Saulus aber zerstorte die Gemeinde (Tenor) - Aria: Vertilge sie, Herr Zebaoth (Bass) 13. Recitative: Und zog mit einer Schar (Alto) - Arioso: Doch der Herr vergisst der Seinen nicht (Alto) 14. Recitative: Und als er auf dem Wege war (Tenor, Bass, Chorus) 15. Mache dich auf! Werde Licht! (Chorus) 16. Chorale: Wachtet auf! ruft uns die Stimme (Chorus) 17. Recitative: Die Manner aber, die seine Gefahrten waren (Tenor) 18. Aria: Gott, sei mir gnadig (Bass) 19. Recitative: Es war aber ein Junger (Tenor, Soprano) 20. Aria: Ich danke dir, Herr, mein Gott (Bass, Chorus) 21. Recitative: Und Ananias ging hin (Soprano, Tenor) 22. O welch eine Tiefe des Reichtums (Chorus) 23. Fugue: Der Erdkreis ist nun des Herrn (Chorus) 24. Recitative: Und Paulus kam (Soprano) 25. Duet: So sind wir nun Botschafter (Tenor, Bass) 26. Wie lieblich sind die Boten (Chorus) 27. Recitative: Und wie sie ausgesandt von dem Heiligen Geist (Soprano) - Arioso: Lasst uns singen von der Gnade (Soprano) 28. Recitative: Da aber die Juden das Volk sahen (Tenor, Chorus) 29. Ist das nicht (Chorus) - Chorale: O Jesu Christe (Chorus) 30. Recitative: Paulus aber und Barnabas sprachen (Tenor, Bass) 31. Duet: Denn also hat uns der Herr geboten (Bass, Tenor) 32. Recitative: Und es war ein Mann (Soprano) 33. Die Gotter sind den Menschen gleich geworden (Chorus) 34. Recitative: Und nannten Barnabas Jupiter (Soprano) 35. Seid uns gnadig (Chorus) 36. Recitative: Da das die Apostel horten (Tenor) - Aria: Ihr Manner - Wisset ihr nicht (Bass) - Aber unser Gott - Wir glauben (Chorus) 37. Recitative: Da ward das Volk erregt (Soprano) 38. Hier ist des Herren Tempel (Chorus) 39. Recitative: Und sie alle verfolgten Paulus (Soprano) 40. Cavatina: Sei getreu bis in den Tod (Tenor) 41. Recitative: Paulus sandte hin (Soprano, Bass) 42. Schone doch deiner selbst (Chorus) - Recitative: Was machet ihr (Bass, Tenor) 43. Sehet, welch eine Liebe (Chorus) 44. Recitative: Und wenn er gleich geopfert wird (Soprano) 45. Nicht aber ihm allein (Chorus)

Maria Cristina Kiehr, (soprano) (Ananias) Werner Güra, (tenor) (Barnabas) Michael Volle, (bass) (Saul of Tarsus/St. Paul) Patrick Pobeschin, (bass) Adolph Seidel, (bass) Sigrum Maria Borotrager, (alto) Maria Bernius, (soprano) Julian Prégardien, (tenor) Sonntraud Engels-Benz (organ) Kammerchor Stuttgart Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen Frieder Bernius - conductor rec. 16-17, 19 September 2005 at Forum Ludwigsburg, Germany.

Compared to Elijah, Paulus (or St Paul) comes a distant second in recording terms but not musical. It suffered from, amongst others, George Bernard Shaw dismissing the work as "despicable oratorio mongering" with "dreary fugues"! One wouldn't recognise such a description from the performance given under Frieder Bernius' baton and this is one of a projected series of recordings [it is unclear at present whether these will be SACD's as well] to be issued by Carus Verlag in conjunction with their printed edition. An incidental point is that Carus Verlag estimate the performance time to be about 145 minutes; Bernius manages to knock 10 minutes off this duration!

Still, matters of following the text slavishly or otherwise, this is a musical joy. With antiphonal violins, the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen play with vigour, sensitivity, weight and lightness as and when the music demands. The relatively small numbers mean that the textures are naturally clear and bright without any need for spotlighting, even when the full chorus joins them. The chorus is the Kammerchor Stuttgart and like the orchestra, they are small in size but just enough to give enough heft to the weightier numbers. Making up the performers are Maria Cristina Kiehr (who manages to successfully sing both the mezzo and soprano roles without a hint of strain at either end of the registers), Werner Gura (tenor) and Michael Volle (bass).

Carus have managed to fit each part onto a separate disc, so there is no need to break mid-part and each number is allocated its own track - a nice feature that, surprisingly, isn't always followed. One slightly sad aspect to the music is that Mendelssohn did not see fit to write many duets or trios for the soloists - this is an oratorio for the chorus. What choruses and chorales he wrote though - if only the great GBS could have heard such a performance as this and he would have eaten his words! As alluded to earlier, Bernius is no slouch at the helm but he never rushes the music; he brings out the natural joy of the piece while giving the more sombre aspects time to be reflective and gain natural gravitas. The emotions are allowed to build and subside naturally in a way that is never forced whilst retaining the overarching musical threads - never an easy task but Bernius acquits himself admirably.

Despite the many mentions of English language performances under Mendelssohn's baton, it is worth noting that the première took place in Düsseldorf, so the German language version should be considered the Urtext. English translations are provided with a nice touch, they were written by a contemporary of Mendelssohn (presumably for the occasion of the tour that Mendelssohn conducted this work in English speaking countries).

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The recording is fully up to the standard of the rest of the enterprise and allows all the detail to shine through in a most pleasingly natural fashion - I am really taken with this set and hope that the promised Elijah, Lobgesang and 2 volumes of choral cantatas are planned as SACD's - we will find out in 2008. --- Polly Nomial, sa-cd.net

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