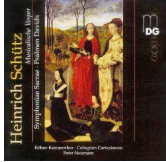


Schutz - Musicalische Vesper (Peter Neumann) [2004]

Written by bluesever

Sunday, 05 February 2017 15:03 -

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01 - Ingressus: Eile mich Gott zu erretten SWV 282 02 - Psalm 110: Der Herr sprach zu meinem Herrn SWV 22 03 - Concert: O Jesu, nomen dulce SWV 308 04 - Psalm 19: Die Himmel erzhlen die Ehre Gottes SWV 386 05 - Concert: Anima mea liquefacta est SWV 263, 264 06 - Psalm 133: Siehe, wie fein und lieblich SVW 412 07 - Concert: Spes mea, Christus Deus SWV 69 08 - Psalm 84: Wie lieblich sind deine Wohnungen SWV 29 09 - Concert: Freuet euch des Herren, ihr Gerechten SWV 367 10 - Psalm 8: Herr, unser Herrscher SWV 27 11 - Responsorium: Saul, Saul, was verfolgst du mich SWV 415 12 - Hymnus: Nun will sich scheiden Nacht und Tag (after SWV 138 and 233) 13 - Concert: Benedicam Dominum SWV 267 14 - Magnificat: Magnificat anima mea Dominum SWV Collegium Cartusianum Kölner Kammerchor Peter Neumann – conductor

The title of this disc suggests it contains a 'liturgical reconstruction'. This kind of recording can be useful to remind a present-day audience of the context in which composers usually wrote their works. It doesn't happen very often that we know exactly what music was performed during a specific liturgical event. Therefore most reconstructions can't pretend more than to present a celebration "as it could have taken place" at a certain time and place. But this recording can't - and apparently doesn't - even pretend that.

In her liner notes Claudia Theis refers to this programme as "a kind of idealized musical vespers". In this respect she compares it with the Vespers of 1610 by Claudio Monteverdi. But that seems incorrect to me. Monteverdi's collection contains the fixed parts of the Vesper liturgy. The antiphons were chosen in connection with the feast at which the Vespers were performed. But in Protestant Germany at the time of Schütz there was no fixed structure of the Vespers. Paul McCreesh and his Gabrieli Consort and Players recorded Christmas Vespers, which included the complete 'Christmas Story' by Schütz. There was no place for such music in the traditional Vespers.

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There is another difference: the pieces in Monteverdi's Vespers were all composed at about the same time. But the compositions chosen here come from very different periods in Schütz's career, from 1619 (Psalmen Davids) to 1650 (Symphoniae Sacrae III). This, and the fact that these 'Vespers' are not connected to any specific feast make this recording lack inner coherence. One even can't be sure the items on this programme could have been part of a Vesper liturgy at all. The liner notes don't explain why these have been selected.

Therefore it is better to take this recording as what it in fact is: a cross-section of the sacred music of Schütz, reflecting the different styles he practised. It brings some works in polychoral style which are influenced by Giovanni Gabrieli, who was his teacher during his first stay in Venice from 1609 to 1617. The smaller-scale works show the influence of the 'seconda prattica'. Schütz himself refers to the 'stylo recitativo' in regard to the performance of these works. In doing so he underlines the importance of a distinct declamation of the text. It is unclear to what extent he has been influenced by Monteverdi here. When Schütz travelled to Venice a second time in 1628/29 he certainly will have met Monteverdi. It is very likely that during his stay he composed the 'Symphoniae Sacrae I', which were published in Venice in 1629, but in the preface he praises his first teacher Giovanni Gabrieli, whereas Monteverdi isn't even mentioned. It was only in 1647, in the preface to his 'Symphoniae Sacrae II', that he refers to Monteverdi.

The fact that Schütz was influenced by the 'seconda prattica' didn't keep him from holding the 'prima prattica' in high esteem. In the preface to his collection 'Geistliche Chormusik' from 1648 he urged young composers not to neglect counterpoint: they should learn "the true foundation of good counterpoint" before getting involved with writing in the concertante style.

Having heard many recordings with music by Schütz it is my experience that performing his music is anything but easy. The main challenge is to find the right way of expressing the words on the one hand and avoid 'extreme word-painting' on the other. Not every collection of music has to be treated the same way, of course. The pieces which are written in the 'stylo recitativo' require a stronger contrast between words and more differentiation within phrases than the polychoral works and motets.

In this recording there is a lot to enjoy. On the whole the singing and playing is pretty good. A positive aspect is the congeniality between the solo voices and the choir. The texts are always understandable, which is one of the most important parts of any performance of Schütz's music.

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At the same time the expression in the concertante works could be stronger. The opening item is sung well by Markus Brutscher, but he should have used more ornamentation and stronger declamation. That is even more the case in 'O Jesu, nomen dulce': a text which so strongly reflects a deep personal piety should be sung with more commitment and feeling than Nele Gramß does. Another example is 'Anima mea liquefacta est' (My soul is melting) on texts from the Song of Songs. The closing phrase: "quia amore languet" (that I languish in my love) reflects a kind of exaltation which contrasts with the too down-to-earth performance. Other pieces are done a lot better, like 'Freuet euch des Herren, ihr Gerechten'.

The larger-scale works are done rather well most of the time. Very impressive is one of Schütz's most dramatic pieces in the programme, 'Saul, Saul, was verfolgst du mich', a setting of the words of Christ who appears to Saul on his way to Damascus which led to his conversion to the Christian faith. The explosive dynamic contrasts Schütz asks for are realised very well here by soloists and choir. In the psalms from the 'Psalmen Davids' I could imagine some stronger differentiation in dynamics and articulation, though.

Of all the items on the programme the only really unknown item is the four-part Psalm setting 'Nun will ich scheiden Tag und Nacht'. It comes from the collection of Psalm settings based on the rhymed version of the Psalms by Cornelius Becker. Hardly any piece of this collection has ever been recorded. The fact that one of them is included here is perhaps meant as compensation for the lack of congregational singing which is an essential part of any service in Protestant Germany.

The programme ends with a setting of the Magnificat for solo voices, double choir and instruments. It is a most impressive piece which contains a great variety of compositional techniques.

If we forget the liturgical aspirations of this release and take it as a cross-section of the musical heritage of Schütz this release is recommendable, even though it doesn't come up to all expectations. One aspect I haven't mentioned yet is the use of the Italian pronunciation of Latin, for which I can't find any excuse.

The review copy which was sent to me was a DVD-Audio/Video. I couldn't play it, so I borrowed a copy from the public library to listen to. That is what this review is based upon. There is one thing that should be noted: the booklet of the CD contains the lyrics, although without an English translation. But the booklet of the DVD-Audio/Video version has no lyrics at all. Instead the

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buyer gets a detailed explanation of the technique of a DVD-Audio/Video. A matter of wrong priorities, I'm afraid. ---Johan van Veen, musicweb-international.com

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