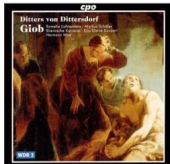


Karl Ditters von Dittersdorf - Giob (2000)



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Markus Schäfer (*Giob*) Romelia Lichtenstein (*Sara*) Jörg Waschinski (*Baldad*) Ekkehard Abele (*Ismaele*) Beat Dudeck (*Elifaz*) Linda Perilo (*Angelo*) Rheinsche Kantorei Das Kleine Konzert Hermann Max - director, 2000

The idea of an Old Testament Biblical oratorio by a second-league eighteenth-century German composer may not send all collectors scurrying to their local record shop, but the more inquisitive will find much to discover and enjoy in this particular case.

Appreciation of Carl Ditters von Dittersdorf's music has been in steady decline since he was an important 'competitor' of Joseph Haydn from the 1760's to about 1790. The oratorio 'Job' was written in 1786 for the Vienna Tonkünstler-Societat (another oratorio, 'Esther', dates from 1773). 'Job' was a success in both the important centres of Berlin and Vienna. It was later also performed in Breslau during the composer's lifetime: the booklet notes to the present issue claim that this was the last performance in Breslau until 1999 when the Rheinische Kantorei performed it in recognition of the 200th anniversary of Dittersdorf's death.

The identity of the librettist of 'Job' is unknown, but it may well have been S. Pintus, a collaborator of Dittersdorf's from 1771 onwards. The libretto presents a dramatisation of the Old Testament story in which Job's faith in God is tested by Satan. Job is stripped of his wealth, offspring, reputation and his own health, but his faith in his deity remains firm and his reward is to gain twice what he had lost. Job's wife, Sara, is given a prominent role and provides the contrasting female voice. The dramatic slant of the oratorio certainly adds interest to the rather rambling original in the Bible.

Dittersdorf balanced the action of the First Part by a shift towards the psychological in the Part Two, with Eliphaz and Bildad returning to try to get Job to admit his sins. Finally, an Angel appears to clear up the argument and to reward Job for his steadfastness.

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'Giob' is not short (about two and a half hours worth of music) and it is a tribute to both the strength of Dittersdorf's invention and Max's well-sprung performance that it is fascinating throughout. Much preparation evidently went in to this recording. Words are consistently clear from both soloists and chorus, recitatives (accompanied by an early piano, not a harpsichord) keep up the dramatic momentum and a fine line-up of soloists brings the various characters to life.

The orchestral Introduction to Part One establishes the orchestra's excellence: tempi are well-chosen and enthusiastically taken up. Das Kleine Konzert, indeed, relish their more challenging moments throughout. The depiction of a storm in the Recitative and Chorus, 'Sommo Dio che sara?' is visceral in effect.

Much of Part One is operatic in essence: the character of Zara (Sara) reveals its close blood relation to Mozart's Queen of the Night in the aria 'Sì, vorrei dall'alma scotere'. Romelia Lichtenstein is a true soprano who refuses to balk at Dittersdorf's demands.

Markus Schäfer takes the demanding title-role. He has all the agility the part requires (try his first aria, 'Tu che la copia versi'). He is frequently expressive, although there is occasionally a tendency towards edginess in the timbre ('Nella polve' from Part 2). The late duet, 'Ah quella man, o sposo', shows how carefully the soloists have been chosen as the voices blend perfectly. This delightful duet between Zara and Giob is one of the highlights of the piece.

Of the remaining soloists, the bass Ekkehard Abele as Ismaele is outstanding. His aria from Part 1, 'Giorno orrendo,' is superbly focussed in all registers; in Part 2, the agility of 'E con novelli modi' is excellently handled.

The alto Beat Duddeck's Elifaz is equally impressive, although he is not given quite so much to do. His high point comes at 'D'un innocente cor' (Part 2), in which he exhibits clean pitching and placing of notes. Jörg Waschinski's Baldad is appropriately agile for his aria, 'Quando ride serena la sorte'; Linda Pedrillo's contribution, as the Angel of God, is clear and musical.

Max's belief in this piece binds the whole together. He also has the ability to make somewhat

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banal musical geatures in some recitatives sound interesting. A superb achievement all round. CPO's engineering is exemplary. --- Colin Clarke, musicweb-international.com

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