

M.P. de Montéclair - Cantates (Christie) [2002]

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1. *La Mort de Didon - 6e Cantate, Livre I*) 2. *Il Dispetto in Amore - 7e Cantate, Livre II* 3. *Le Triomphe de l'Amour - 3e Cantate, Livre II* 4. *Morte di Lucretia - 9e Cantate, Livre III* 5. *Pyrame et Thisbé - 6e Cantate, Livre II* Les Arts Florissants William Christie – conductor

The French cantata had a brief, but vibrant life during the first three decades of the 18th century. Beginning with Morin's first book in 1706, there followed dozens of books of cantatas by a number of French composers. Clerambault, Boismortier, Rameau and Montéclair all published cantatas during this period. Montéclair may be relatively unknown, but he was a composer of undoubted talent if judged by the works on this recording.

La Mort de Didon is fantastic. It opens with a piercing *sinfonia* which sets the desperate mood of a bereft Dido, and moves to a turbulent aria that expresses her rage, and ends with an achingly beautiful air full of pathos and despair. Agnes Mellon is up to her usual very high standard and sings gloriously.

Il Dispetto in Amore is more Italianate (hence the language) and talks of the vexation of love. Gerard Lesne is excellent here, especially in the second aria which he sings with tremendous delicacy.

Le Triomphe de L'Amour is much more light-hearted, and features Jean-Paul Fouchecourt, one of the best haute-contre voices ever.

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Morte di Lucretia is a very vivid and engaging telling of the story of Lucretia who committed suicide to preserve her honour after being violated by Tarquin. Monique Zanetti has an edge to her voice that is well-suited to portraying the rage and indignation of Lucretia.

Pyrame et Thisbe is a much larger scale work which includes a narrator along with the two doomed lovers. The story of Pyame and Tisbe is pathetic to the point of comedy, but the music they are given to sing is superb, especially the stunning duet "Que d'alarmes" which is very moving, and exquisately sung by Fouchecourt and Zanetti.

If you like the French baroque, do yourself a favor and try to buy this recording. It is a high point in the art of the cantata, and in the musicianship of William Christie and his colleagues. ---scott, amazon.com

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