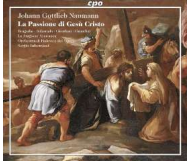


Naumann - La Passione di Gesù Cristo (2008)

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Disc 1 1 *Sinfonia (1. Teil)* 2 *Recitativo accompagnato: Dove son? Dove corro?* 3 *Arie: Già ché mi tremi in seno* 4 *Recitativo accompagnato: Ma qual dolente stuolo* 5 *Chor: Quanto costa il tuo diletto* 6 *Rezitativ: Maddalena, Giovanni, Giuseppe* 7 *Arie: Vorrei dirti il mio dolore* 8 *Rezitativ: Oh più di noi felice* 9 *Arie: Torbido mar che freme* 10 *Rezitativ: Oh barbari! Oh crudeli!* 11 *Arie: Come a vista di pene sì fiere* 12 *Rezitativ: E la madre fra tanto* 13 *Arie: Potea quel pianto* 14 *Rezitativ: Come inventar potea* 15 *Arie: Tu nel duol felice sei* 16 *Rezitativ: Dopo un pegno sì grande* 17 *Duett: Vi sento, oh Dio, vi sento* 18 *Chor: Di quel sangue, o mortale*

Disc 2 1 *Rezitativ: Ed insepolto ancora* 2 *Arie: Ritornerà fra voi* 3 *Rezitativ: Qual terribil vendetta sovrasta a te* 4 *Arie: All'idea de' tuoi perigli* 5 *Rezitativ: Le minacce non teme il popolo infedel* 6 *Arie: Se la pupilla inferma* 7 *Rezitativ: Pur dovrebbe in tal giorno* 8 *Arie: Dovunque il guardo giro* 9 *Rezitativ: Giovanni, anch'io lo so, per tutto è Dio* 10 *Arie: Ai passi erranti dubbio è il sentiero* 11 *Rezitativ: Non senza guida, o Maddalena* 12 *Arie: Se a librarsi in mezzo all'onde* 13 *Rezitativ: Ah dal felice marmo* 14 *Chor: Santa speme*

Monica Bragadin - Mezzo-Soprano Makoto Sakurada - Tenor Raffaele Giordani - Tenor
Alfredo Grandini - Bass Coro La Stagione Armonica Orchestra di Padova e del Veneto Sergio Balestracci – Conductor

There are interesting musicological developments highlighted by the music on this CD – specifically those of the growth of the oratorio with its Italian roots and German flowering. What began as a musical form for choral and vocal worship during Holy Week became slowly secularized and more dramatic. Johann Gottlieb Naumann, a contemporary of Joseph Haydn, was associated with Dresden, worked in Sweden and travelled in Italy. In his *Passione di Gesù Cristo* he concentrates on smaller scale emotions and conflicts – albeit in the context of the (conventional) Passion story. It was written, probably, in 1767. That's quite an undertaking for a twenty-six year old, although Naumann already had several other vocal and choral successes to his name.

It's performed crisply and with feeling by the musicians on these two CDs; they clearly have an

affinity with the music, the style and the genre – and make the most of it. This oratorio may remind listeners new to Naumann's music of a rather dour and straight-laced Haydn. It's varied and serious without every touching the intensity of other, more familiar, such pieces by Naumann's contemporaries and immediate predecessors. There are moments of jollity, penetrating insight into suffering as an experience, relief and release. The contrasts between the immediate and the wider context are explored. The human element is more important in Naumann's conception of the Passion than the heavenly.

The two-hour long work was the response to a commission in Padua, in which city Naumann had numerous contacts, having become the pupil there of Giuseppe Tartini eight years earlier. There is some doubt about the exact date and circumstances of the composition and performance of *La Passione di Gesù Cristo*; what's more, in 1787 another Passion by Naumann on the same theme and with the same name was performed.

Naumann followed the style current in Northern Italy... increasingly independent of operatic conventions, although with greater characterisation of the four principal figures, Peter, John, Mary Magdalene and Joseph of Arimathea; and a mixture of narrative reportage (of events) and reflective aria. Also of interest is the extent to which wider matters of faith and doctrine are explored... Peter's aria, *Se la pupilla inferma* [CD2 tr.6], for example, laments humankind's ability to know God because of the weight of its sin. This reflection is extended in John's *Dovunque il guardo giro* [CD2 tr.8]. There is more of Mozart than Bach in this oratorio: the first line alone of Mary Magdalene's *Vorrei dirti il mio dolore* 'Let me tell you of my sorrow' [CD1 tr.7] makes that plain!

But this is not a lightweight piece. Although it has none of the heart-wrenching choral highpoints of the Bach Passions, and few of the penetrating arias that we expect from even a Bach cantata, *La Passione di Gesù Cristo* is nevertheless satisfying. It's its own work, written, one suspects, by a confident and accomplished composer who had thoroughly absorbed the many styles of the late Baroque which he had sought out and to which he had been exposed.

Of the singers Monica Bragadin (Mary Magdalene) is almost Ferrier-like in a low steely register, which conveys more authority than pain. Makoto Sakurada (Peter) is just the opposite – airy, full of pace and a little withdrawn. Raffaele Giordani (John) emphasises sensitivity, a studied detachment; he sings with great tenderness and sensitivity. Alfredo Grandini's (Joseph) bass is perhaps the most fluid voice on this set. He wraps it around everything he comes across and uses its rich and resonant register to great effect – listen to *All'idea de' tuoi perigli* [CD2 tr.4], for example; there is enough detachment to balance the commitment.

The Orchestra di Padova e del Veneto has an excellent sense of both tempo and dynamic, underlining the drama at both its quiet and its more animated moments, though they never really propel the action forward in a way that might have lent tension and contrast. There are times too when the strings are a little watery, a trifle strained. There are, on the other hand, some superbly played intricate numbers where quiet intimacy appropriately and consistently re-inforces the sense of humanity. Peter's *Se a librarsi in mezzo all'onde* with the bassoon solo [CD2 tr.2] is a good example. La Stagione Armonica has a small role; it tends to come across as more a selection of soloists than even the most tamed Bachian chorus.

Sergio Balestracci has a retiring, almost hands-off role, which makes for a pure and transparent experience – Mozartian again. But it robs the music of some of its passion.

Few listeners unfamiliar with Naumann are likely to come away from this performance jettisoning the desire to look any further for profound oratorio. There are few melodies which stay with one after the experience – except perhaps the final chorus, unusually contrapuntal; and few touching harmonic high points. Yet these forces have managed to convey what's best in a work of simple appeal and which stands at a historically fascinating juncture.

This is late Baroque oratorio blending Italian and German styles. Not an earth-shattering Passion then but one whose nods in the direction of both Opera Seria and religious declamation with a human touch make pleasing listening – especially with such competent and committed performers.

The recording is ample and well produced, the booklet carries good background information, although the translation of the essay into English is somewhat overworked. The text of the oratorio is set in Italian, English and German. If you enjoy late Baroque sacred choral music and want to explore a less well-known corner, Naumann's *La Passione di Gesù Cristo* is well worth investigating.--- Mark Sealey, MusicWeb International

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