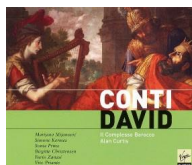


Conti - David (Alan Curtis) (2007)

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David, Sacred Drama 1.1 Sinfonia Part 1. 1.2 Part 1. Recitativo. Micol, diletta sposa 1.3 Part 1. Aria. Al genitor mio re 1.4 Part 1. Recitativo. Né t'inganna il tuo amor 1.5 Part 1. Aria. Quale augellino al monte 1.6 Part 1. Recitativo. Se io t'ami: il sai / Recitativo accompagnato. Eccelso Dio, che scorgi / Recita 1.7 Part 1. Aria. Contra un padre ingiusto e crudo 1.8 Part 1. Recitativo. È sì vile in Saul dunque un comando 1.9 Part 1. Aria. Stringe Iddio l'ultrice spada 1.10 Part 1. Recitativo. Signor, so per lung'uso 1.11 Part 1. Aria. Ah! Mio re, pallida invidia 1.12 Part 1. Recitativo. David è scelta tua 1.13 Part 1. Aria. Perché pecchi ingiustamente 1.14 Part 1. Recitativo. Dunque a David io debbo lo scettro? 1.15 Part 1. Aria. O rendimi pietoso 1.16 Part 1. Recitativo. Non più. Già cedo / Recitativo accompagnato. Tu Dio, in cui man son de' regnant 1.17 Part 1. Aria. Agiterò la face 1.18 Part 1. Recitativo. Tanto si faccia cautamente e presto 1.19 Part 1. Coro. Cor sano è vita delle carni Part 2. 1.20 Part 2. Coro. Le rose di Gerico 1.21 Part 2. Recitativo. O figlie di Sion 2.1 Part 2. Aria. Giusto prezzo a iniquità! 2.2 Part 2. Recitativo. Piaccia al Ciel 2.3 Part 2. Aria. Caro amico, sì, caro mi sei 2.4 Part 2. Recitativo. Quanto ne l'uomo, che invecchiò in mal uso 2.5 Part 2. Aria. Al fianco anzi vorrei 2.6 Part 2. Recitativo. Ite a David in traccia 2.7 Part 2. Aria. Non so, se al sussurrar magiche note 2.8 Part 2. Recitativo. Vecchio costume de l'iniqui è questo 2.9 Part 2. Recitativo accompagnato. Lasciatemi a me stesso 2.10 Part 2. Preludio 2.11 Part 2. Recitativo accompagnato. Questo mirabil si dilata 2.12 Part 2. Aria. Quanto mirabile 2.13 Part 2. Recitativo accompagnato. Più non resisto / Recitativo. O Dio, sempre rifugio mio 2.14 Part 2. Aria. Padre, ascolta 2.15 Part 2. Recitativo. Sopra il mio sposo sta implacabil mostro 2.16 Part 2. Aria. Dì al mio re 2.17 Part 2. Recitativo. Dov'è? Dov'è l'iniquo? 2.18 Part 2. Aria. A passo di gigante 2.19 Part 2. Recitativo. Signor, amico delusi 2.20 Part 2. Recitativo accompagnato. Me lo spirito di Dio visita ancora 2.21 Part 2. Coro finale. Anche Saul è tra' profeti?
Baritone [Falti] – Vito Priante Baritone – Furio Zanasi
Conductor – Alan Curtis Contralto [Abner] – Sonia Prina Contralto [David] – Velja Mijanović
Libretto By – Apostolo Zeno Libretto By [English] – Andrew Huth Orchestra – Il Complesso Barocco Soprano [Gionata] – Birgitte Christensen Soprano [Micol] – Simone Kermes

David by Francesco Bartolomeo Conti (1682-1732) is a spectacular work that has made a spectacular impression (e.g. BBC Music Magazine made it the Disc of the Month in August

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2007) since its release on the Virgin Classics label. It is performed spectacularly well by the venerable Il Complesso Brocco and soloists under Alan Curtis. It's a two-part oratorio in the eighteenth century Viennese tradition, although Conti was born in Florence, almost a century after the earliest operas had been developed there. He left Italy for the Hapsburg emperor's court at barely twenty and had a solid reputation as a theorbo player. Succeeding Johann Joseph Fux as court composer a dozen years later and co-operating with Metastasio and his predecessors for his opera libretti, he remained at Vienna (only returning to Florence for three years from 1729) for the rest of his short life.

It was in 1723 (the year after his singer wife died) to a libretto by di Avanzo that Conti set David, originally *Il David perseguitato di Saul* ('David persecuted by Saul'); eventually, after amendments by Apostolo Zeno (the librettist for Vivaldi's *Atenaide*) and following much reworking by Conti, became just *David... an azione sacra*, 'sacred drama' in two parts, each ending in a large-scale dramatic chorus commenting on the action and indeed the second part beginning with a less intense chorus. The soloist singers were so disposed that they could also make up the chorus if so needed to.

The story of David deals with the reaction of David's family to his exploits – particularly the jealousy of Saul, Michal/Micol's and David's closest friend, Jonathan/Gionata's, father; the treachery of evil advisor Phalti/Falti; and the attempt of the latter to provoke Saul into further turning on David by persuading him to play his harp for him. Somewhat unconvincingly, Saul becomes a prophet and the drama is left effectively suspended.

Essentially David is a vehicle for some rather beautiful solo arias... Micol's (Simone Kermes) '*O rendimi pietoso l'ambile mio sposo*' (tr.1,15), as lovely, gentle and lambent as anything Handel ever wrote, Abner's '*Ah! Mio re*' (tr.1,11) and David's '*Quale augellino*' (tr.1,5). Noteworthy, too are the accompanied recitatives... Saul's '*Lasciatemi a me stesso*' (tr.2,9), for example. The sense of conflict and tension is slacker than in Handel's oratorios, or even his operas. Which is not to say that David lacks drama. There is humor, pacing and structure; some characterization; little visual show but plenty of rhetoric.

The key appeal of David is surely going to be its glorious music... varied, contrapuntal in places (e.g. the '*Cor sano*' chorus at the end of part 1 (tr.1,19); Falti's aria, '*Non so*' (tr.2.7), which anchors David closer to Handel (or even Vivaldi) than Mozart, of whose recitatives David is at times redolent); poignant in others (e.g. Falti's aria, '*Agiter&ocut; la face*', tr.1,17); and always full of momentum and economical in instrumentation and vocal development. As Curtis points out, Conti took particular care with the way he wrote his recitatives. And the singers in this recording (all of them top notch anyway) truly respect and reflect that care. There is a grace, a

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deliberateness and yet a sense of expression that make them every bit as enjoyable as the arias and choruses. The latter are sufficiently few in number as to stand out when they appear. Perhaps this is why Curtis has chosen a separate set of singers for the chorus from the soloists themselves.

In his short but useful liner notes Curtis draws attention to the neglect experienced by Conti and outlines the paucity of performances until René Jacobs, Bernarda Fink and Magdalena Kožená (and indeed Curtis' own performance of David in Italy in 2003) began to champion his cause in the past decade or so.

The playing of Il Complesso Barocco is, as expected, first class. There is a clean sprightliness and attention to detail with appropriate ornamentation; the tone is consistently acute and warm; the tempi are particularly persuasive: the action never lags and the balance between singers and ensemble is excellent. The articulation and enunciation of soloists is good – listen to Sonia Prima (Abner) in her 'Quanto ne l'uomo' recitative (tr.2,4) for clarity! Similarly the string accompaniment in the aria immediately following, 'Al fianco anzi vorrei', for delicacy and delightful support. The recording is a good one, if a tiny bit dry.

Here is a work to be savored, enjoyed, returned to and marveled at for its lyricism, memorable melody and fresh marriage of libretto and some very beautiful music. There's no competitor version (indeed there's only one other CD, Tactus 680301 in the catalog devoted exclusively to Conti) so this can be safely treated as definitive. It's enterprising of Curtis and his forces to pursue what he says has been an interest of his since reading Wolff's assessment of David in the 'New Oxford History of Music' (Vol.V), 1975, as a 'masterpiece of its kind'. Now here's a recording which will allow us to decide. Strongly recommended. ---Mark Sealey, classical.net

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