

GERMAN SETTINGS OF OSSIANIC TEXTS, 1770–1815

Edited by Sarah Clemmens Waltz

Recent Researches in the Music of the Classical Era, 100

A-R Editions, Inc.

liv+156pp.

\$260.00

There are thirteen songs in this volume; one by Christian Gottlieb Neefe, two by Karl Siegmund Freiherr von Seckendorff, three each by Johann Rudolf Zumsteeg and Johann Friedrich Reichardt, and one each by Friedrich Ludwig Aemilius Kunzen, Friedrich Götzloff, Friedrich Heinrich Himmel and Carl Friedrich Zelter. There is no cause for alarm if these names mean next to nothing to you; Sarah Clemmens Waltz has done a fabulous job, not only in explaining the phenomenon that was Ossianism and its popularity in Germany, but she discusses each of the composers and their contributions in considerable detail. In short, this volume has everything you could possibly need for an Ossian-themed recital – she even gives the range of the piano parts of each!

The texts inspired a rich variety of response from the composers; von Seckendorff's setting of "Dauras Trauer" is a simple strophic song with a coda that consists of a reprise of the opening eight bars, while Zumsteeg's "Ossians Sonnengesang" has an additional violin part and moves from the opening B flat major through E major (with some challenging looking double stops for the fiddler in bars 61–63!) and F minor before somehow managing to get back to the tonic 270 bars of arietta, recitative and a slow, surprisingly quiet conclusion. The following number, Zumsteeg's "Ossian auf Slimora" is even more extensive - 515 bars, again ending slowly and quietly. Himmel's "Ossian an die untergehende Sonne" also has an independent violin part and is given here with separate voice lines for the German and English version of the text.

Unlike the two other A-R Editions I have reviewed this month, this volume does have to take into consideration that fact that at least some users will want to perform these songs. Thus it strikes me as odd that, for example, the music for song 8 (Reichardt's "Armins Klage um seine Kinder") is not placed on facing pages to avoid page turns. The fact that a third page is used for a further five verses of text makes such a layout even more impractical; surely two verses could have been printed below the notes and the remainder in the space below the final system. Götzloff's "Ossians Klage um Uthal und Ninathona" (the only song in the volume for a bass) is also better suited to a facing

pages layout.

The edition itself is impressive, though I wonder if using "[sim.]" might obviate the need for bar after bar of bracketed editorial accents which, no matter how hard the most professional typesetter in the world might work, also strike my eye as rather ugly.

I don't want to end this review on a negative, though – Clemmens Waltz has done an excellent job in putting together an impressive volume that I sincerely hope will be used as the basis for recitals and recordings!

Brian Clark

RECORDINGS

15th century

FIRMINUS CARON – TWILIGHT OF THE MIDDLE AGES

Huelgas Ensemble, Paul Van Nevel

54:39

deutsche harmonia mundi 88875143472

Movements from five masses + four secular chansons

Of the 15th-century Franco-Flemish composer Firminus Caron practically nothing is known. He may have been a pupil of Dufay and his masses and chansons were widely admired by, among others, Tinctoris and copied throughout Europe during his lifetime. In modern times his work has fared less well, appearing as fillers on several CDs, but not receiving anything like the attention it deserves, so this complete if rather short CD devoted entirely to his sacred and secular music is truly welcome. Rather than record one of his complete settings of the mass, Van Nevel selects consecutive movements from five different settings, giving us a valuable cross-section of the composer's contribution to the genre. The music is indeed distinctive and accomplished with more than a passing similarity to the music of his more famous near-contemporary Josquin – as we have no record of Caron's death he may have continued composing into the 16th century, and much of his sacred polyphony and indeed his chansons sound as if they come from after the turn of the new century. In this respect the title of the CD is slightly misleading in that Caron's idiom looks forward to the Renaissance rather than back to the Middle Ages. The Huelgas Ensemble, highly experienced in the choral music of this period, give musically powerful

and sensitive accounts of Caron's sacred music under the insightful direction of Paul Van Nevel. The second half of the CD is devoted to Caron's secular music, with his famous chanson *Accueillly m'a la belle* providing a nice link, following his own *Agnus Dei* based upon it. The chansons are suitably performed by solo voices, with the exception of the raunchy *Corps contre corps*, and are given beautifully delicate performances – not every vocal ensemble is as versatile as to be able to sing this sort of sacred and secular music equally effectively. The singing on this CD is comprehensively enjoyable, and the performers make a very good case for Caron's re-instatement alongside his contemporaries Busnois, Ockeghem and Josquin.

D. James Ross

Renaissance

THOMAS TALLIS: LAMENTATIONS AND OTHER SACRED MUSIC

The Cardinal's Musick, Andrew Carwood

73:09

Hyperion CDA68121

The Cardinal's Musick's superb Tallis Edition for Hyperion has reached the Lamentations, and this CD opens with a magisterial account of this beguiling music for male voices as intended. My initial surprise at the very measured tempo Carwood chooses was short-lived as the singers found a magnificently measured line through Tallis's score, investing the text with a moving power and drama. I was reminded of my surprise discovery as a child that the finest melismas were reserved for the initial Hebrew letters, the musical equivalent of colourful illuminated initials, and the singers give these too their full expression. The strategy of the projected complete recording is very much to 'mix things up', so we have settings of Latin and English texts from throughout the composer's long career cheek by jowl, which has the advantage of showing the full range of Tallis's compositional styles, although it necessarily involves a bewildering mix of religious contexts. Alongside magnificent readings of early votive antiphons from the reign of Henry VIII, we have simpler Elizabethan Anglican music, including two of the Psalm tunes for Archbishop Parker's Psalter, given terrifically muscular performances. I found myself longing for the further muscularity of Tudor pronunciation – once heard 'authentically' pronounced, I have consistently found

received pronunciation inadequate. These are generally powerful readings of this mainly familiar material, with mercifully only occasional moments of soprano vibrato, which I detected sneaking into previous performances by the Cardinal's Musick, and sustained passages of magnificently sonorous singing.

D. James Ross

17th century

BUXTEHUDE AND HIS CIRCLE

Theatre of Voices, Paul Hiller

75:27

Da Capo 6.220634

This recording owes at least something to a concert I heard in Copenhagen when I was there for the annual Renaissance Festival as the organiser's guest, since I had suggested that they celebrate the 300th anniversary of the death of Christian Geist, who had lived, worked and died in that city. The programme is not quite the same, but there are still two works by Geist on offer: His setting of *Dixit Dominus* (by using the *Erbe Deutscher Musik* edition, they missed out a whole passage of tenor part that had slipped the editor's notice!) and his "affective" *Die mit Tränen säen*. Buxtehude similarly is represented by two works: His *Gott, hilf mir* and *Jesu, meine Freude* are both rightfully well known and their influence on the young J. S. Bach is undeniable! His father-in-law Tunder's *Dominus illuminatio mea* is an impressive piece, indeed, while Bruhns' bass *tour de force*, a virtuoso setting of *De profundis clamavi*, is no less so, and Kaspar Förster (the younger)'s *Confitebor tibi Domini* brings a wonderful survey of music with which Buxtehude was most likely familiar to a rousing close. Throughout the singing and playing are of the highest order, and the solo bass also contributes a fine booklet essay, tying all the composers together in a readable narrative. The sung texts are translated into English only, which I don't suppose will pose much of a problem from the majority of Danes – I wonder how successful it would be the other way around!

Brian Clark