

CD REVIEW 103

MARTIN EMSLIE: OMEGA AND ALPHA

Jonathan Ansell (Jesus)

Marta Fontanales-Simmons (Narrator, Mary)

Gerard Delrez (other roles)

The Omega and Alpha Choir and Orchestra, Castle Cary choir, Oakfield choir, All Saints Church Choir, Castle Cary, conducted by the composer.

MNC106 Double CD about 83 minutes.



This work presents many difficulties although it has received some good reviews. Those present in Wells Cathedral will have a different view since they were there.

The notes states that Omega refers to the death of Christ and Alpha refers to the birth of Christianity.

We all know that Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet and that Omega is the final letter of the Greek Alphabet interpreted as the beginning and the final and in that order. In Revelation 22 Jesus says, 'I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last'.

As this is a sacred oratorio, one expects the title to be accurate. Yet the composer indicates it might also be musical theatre. Which is it?

It deals with passion and resurrection of Christ and I hasten to add that the composer and the work are sincere.

But the music is bland and lacks contrast and also lacks drama. Everything is the same whether it is sorrow and pain, or the joy at the resurrection; all 19 sections are the same and it becomes tedious.

Some of the singing is atrocious with poor intonation and painfully shrill high notes. Occasionally the soloists are also remiss and the whole thing sounds amateurish at times. There is no variety and one's attention can wander. There is no pathos in the tragic parts; it is all so up market. It could so easily be a cheap music. There is little melismata but often repetition of words to irritating excess and often the work seems to rush on to the next episode. The work does not breathe. It has the hallmarks of, 'Let's get it over and done with!'

It claims to be a powerful re telling of the passion of Christ and the traumatic events but I hear no trauma in the music. It is said to be melodic and acceptable to audiences. The latter may be true but, therein, lies one of its many weaknesses. It is all too pleasant and superficial.

When you consider a similar work by a great composer such as Golgotha by Frank Martin this new work fails miserably. The scourging of Jesus scene in this oratorio could pass for a picnic. The sleeve notes states that the music reveals the confusions of the time. That is not obvious to me or my fellow professionals who listened to it with me.

The composer is noted as being a FLCM. Is that necessary? There are many composers with degrees awarded after many years of study and hard work.

The work lacks originality and is immature and we are told that the composer only came to music in 2002.

Before I am hung, drawn and quartered I must emphasise that several fellow professional musicians

heard this with me and disliked it intensely. It has no character, no poise, no scope and the performers did not help.

How did it get recorded when there are very many great British choral works which have never been recorded such as Fricker's Vision of Judgement?

I have been a singing master and choral conductor for many years and this experience enables me to make a valid assessment of works such as this.

This is the first CD I have reviewed over decades by which I cannot make any positive comments.

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