

CD REVIEW 35

HASSE

Requiem in C major;

Miserere in E minor.

Greta De Reyghere (soprano).

Susanna Moncayo von Hase (alto)

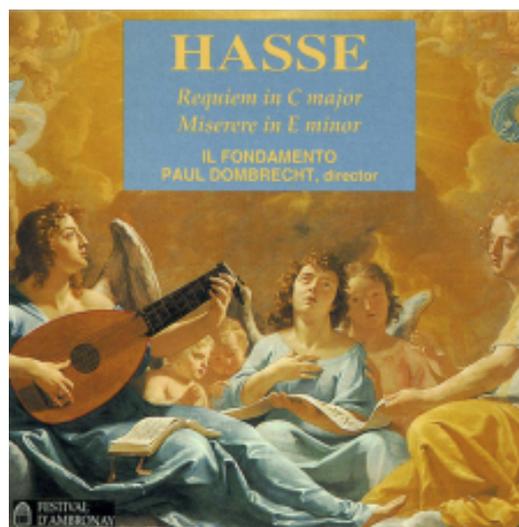
Ian Honeyman (tenor)

Dick Snellings (bass)

Il Fondamento choir and orchestra / Paul Dombrecht.

Opus 111

I do not like to review a CD without the music before me but, in this instance, I have no choice and will have to major on the life of this great composer.



Johann Adolf Hasse was born in Bergedolf, Germany in 1699 being baptised on 25 March of that year. He became a composer, singer and teacher of music and was highly acclaimed in his lifetime. His family were church musicians and in 1718 Johann joined the Hamburg Opera as a tenor. The following year he had a singing post at the Court at Brunswick where, in 1721, his first opera *Antioco* was premiered.

He left Germany in 1722 and settled in Italy mainly in Naples where further operas were successfully performed. The Naples Opera House gave him more commissions. In 1730 he married the soprano Faustina Bordon, born 1700, and also that year, he became Kapellmeister at the Court of Dresden although he did not take the post up until 1731 as his oratorio *Daniello* was being prepared in Vienna.

His opera, *Cleofide*, had a successful premiere with his wife taking part. It is thought that J S Bach may have attended the premiere. Hasse's lavish and ornate opera *Seroc* was triumphantly staged. In February 1733, *Augustus the Strong of Poland and Saxony* was performed.

Frederick the Great, King of Prussia, admired Hasse and his music particularly the music for flute as he was a flautist.

On 9 October 1763, his patron at Dresden, Prince Augustus II died. Hasse began work on a *Requiem in C major* and it was premiered 48 days later. The new Prince, Friedrich Christian, had financial problems and had to dismiss Hasse and his wife.

In 1768, Maria Theresa, who regarded Hasse as her favourite composer, persuaded him to come out of early retirement and so he again used a libretto of the poet laureate Metastasio for his opera *Ruggerio* premiered in 1771.

The coronation of Joseph II in Vienna in 1768 and its festivities included Hasse's opera *Egena* again to a text by Metastasio. Mozart was present at a performance of Hasse's opera *Partenope* in September 1767.

Faustina died in 1781 and Hasse died on 16 December 1783 in Venice. In his lifetime he was known as *Il Caro Sassone* (the dear Saxon). His music is melodious and well structured and often in a florid galant style. There is a serenity in his music and he wrote about 83 operas, oratorios, a cantata which uses a glass harmonica, church music, music for vespers, six sonatas for cembalo, trio sonatas, sonatas for violin, organ concertos, two concertos for flute and a concerto for two flutes, oboe concerto and six sinfonias.

The Requiem in C major falls into eight main sections.. Introit, Kyrie, Sequentia, Offertorium, Sanctus, Benedictus, Agnus Dei and Communion.

The work is not a dreary lament of dark music, but is often confident and sunny. It contains some truly wonderful music and I am pleased to acknowledge That Hasse is never excessive. He is not a show off or a showman. The soloists are exemplary and the orchestra of flutes, oboes, bassoons, trumpet, horns, timpani, strings and harpsichord is on form and how discreetly and effectively the composer uses his orchestra.

The work is not trammelled by irritating ornaments and its simplicity of style makes it so much more attractive than the complexity and cliches in the great works of Bach. In Hasse there is a subtle beauty devoid of all superfluous music.

Mozart's requiem is a glorious work but this Requiem is just as good in different ways. It was hailed as a masterpiece for at least 20 years as was his Miserere in E minor. It is more profound than the Requiem but it is never heavy or claustrophobic. As the writer of the sleeve notes, which contains the full texts, states the music shines with its originality.

In all his works the composer has a plan and a satisfying structure which makes it coherent.

It is good to know that a mini-revival in his work is underway with several recordings. Like the great Telemann, his work needs to be heard.

© COPYRIGHT David C F Wright 2009. This article or any part of it, however small, must not be copied, quoted, reproduced, downloaded or altered in any way whatsoever nor stored in any retrieval system. Failure to comply is in breach of International Copyright Law and will render any offender liable to action at law.