

MUSICA article of 12/10/09 on Bach Choir's CD of Handel's Israel in Egypt.

The title on the cover "The people shall hear" is taken from one of the last choruses of Israel in Egypt, which opens the compilation. And straight away, the strongly rhythmic staccati, that mark the first notes of the chorus of the Jews, scanned, implacable, precise and vigorous (but not heavy), captured my full attention. Into the second half of the Handel oratorio, the so-called "Moses' song": the people of God have just crossed the Red Sea and the power of the divine gesture is exalted with dramatic fervour, yet with agility and flexibility, by the well-trained voices of the Bach Choir. Directed here by David Hill, one of the most accomplished British chorus masters, The English Concert displays the most limpid of sounds and rhythmic precision, whilst allowing its phrasing on occasion to lack variety.

Everything becomes more tranquil in track 2, lightness and transparency take over in "The many rend the skies" (which concludes the first part of Alexander's Feast) rendered with unusual softness. But it is when it sings "a cappella" that the choir is at its absolute best. Thus when we reach Belshazzar's "Recall, o king, thy rash command", the Bach Choir exhibits synchronicity of all the voices and a perfect tone; and despite the absence of instrumental support, the phrasing is spatially focused, and remains admirably homogeneous and taut. The soloists Carolyn Sampson and countertenor Robin Blaze, win our appreciation with their musicality.

To summarise: a very successful CD that concludes with the unmissable fireworks of the "Hallelujah".

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English translation by Ron Sullam