

Pervigilium Veneris (The Vigil of Venus)

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Short Description

Carolyn James, Thomas Booth, Welsh National Opera, cond. by George Lloyd

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This disc is *** recommended by the Penguin Guide to Compact Discs.

Reviews:

...This is an absolute delight - a vast, kaleidoscopic choral work that fans of Lloyd will love, and that should win new ones to his cause...the musical style is Lloyd's familiar brand of rich neo-Romanticism but he skillfully weaves in melodic ideas that recall ancient chant...at times the music is sparsely scored; at other times the full richness of possibilities inherent in a modern orchestra and chorus is used...a work ranging through many moods and colours...one is again and again overwhelmed by its fervour, its imagination, and its sheer energy. **Henry Fogel, Fanfare**

... George Lloyd's The Vigil of Venus is a highly exuberant choral piece which has much in common with Orff's Carmina Burana; however, it is solely concerned with the thrusting rebirth of spring and the joys of physical love which take over in nature - and entice human beings too - during that season. The racy and explicit Latin text belongs to the later literature of the Roman Empire. Celebrating the festival of Venus, it is uninhibitedly, pantheistically sensual, and one can feel the composer revelling in the advice of its constantly repeated refrain: "Now learn ye to love who loved never - now ye who have loved, love anew!" The music is as varied as it is potent, and its style is unashamedly eclectic, drawing on all kinds of sources: there are ecstatic Delian choral swathes and a scherzando movement (track 3) that opens in a similar manner to Act II of 'La Boheme', and has similar energy. The performance has great intensity and a bubbling spontaneity, and it is a pity that the choral singing is not better focused even if its moments of wildness are irrepressibly attractive. As for the music, it flows with an unquenchable lyrical impulse and reaches a huge climax in the glorious, extended bacchanalian finale

(with resplendent brass and organ underpinning the singers), where the listener is incited to 'behold the bulls' and of course the songbirds), and to lose no time in responding to the poet's message, for summer is loitering nearby. The recording made in Swansea by Decca's ARGO team, if not ideal, is suitable spacious. **Gramophone**

... The Vigil of Venus was written 1979-1980, and was first performed at the R.F.H. in November 1989 by the chorus and orchestra of the Welsh National Opera conducted by the composer with soloists Carolyn James (soprano) and Thomas Booth (tenor). The same forces recorded it for Decca, and it is this recording which now appears on the Albany Label as a full price CD. The poem, set in eight sections with an orchestral scherzo as an interlude, is a Latin hymn to Venus dating from the Third or Fourth Century A.D. The setting is on a huge scale, taking 78 minutes in performance. It immediately invites comparison with Orff's Carmina Burana, which it easily surpasses by every conceivable yardstick. More searching comparison is provided in Mahler; certainly in the third symphony and perhaps even in parts of Das Lied von der Erde. But there is nothing regretful about the work, and Lloyd stands proud on his own. He claims it to be his most original work. But anyone can be original, and the Vigil offers much more than that. It teems with endless invention and energy, all controlled by a master craftsman, and coloured by orchestration that is continually breathtaking. All Lloyd's operatic frustration seems to have been poured into it. In a vivid performance, blemishes seem few - but it is difficult to judge without a sight of the score. Carolyn James appears for a few moments to lose rhythm in No.3, and to my ear there is occasional muddiness now and then in the chorus inner harmonies. But such lapses are rare in a work of considerable technical challenge. It is generally an inspired presentation, given by dedicated forces. What a work. What a Prom. concert it would make. **Geoffrey Self British Music Society Journal**

... " The world premiere... uncorked so many decent tunes that the piece could be taken up by Cameron Mackintosh and staged at Drury Lane. The over-riding atmosphere of the long, lyrical lines, decorated with some extraordinary orchestral detail, was of exhilarating joie-de-vivre. Elgar, Holst and Delius were still alive when Lloyd wrote his first symphony, and it is to the grandly wrought choral tradition of these gentlemen that Lloyd's 1980 Vigil of Venus belongs, though its modal melodies, its well spiced but tonal harmonies, and its cheerfully extrovert orchestration comes closest to Vaughan Williams. Choral writing that summons up the spirit of the 19th Century Italian masters, and a vivacious neo-classical movement full of trills and runs which evokes Stravinsky's Rake's Progress. A remarkably pictorial essay from a composer who may write in an older style, but who at 76, has something remarkable within himself to express." The Times " The Vigil demonstrates even more strikingly than his symphonies Lloyd's generosity of response, his immediate warmth of communication... The heartwarming response at the Festival Hall reflected a score which pulses with energy, and cocoons the ear in opulent sounds." The Guardian Lush harmonies and sumptuous textures are reflected through a newly fashioned prism; there is a freshness which leads the music on. There is more than a hint of Vaughan Williams, Stravinsky and Walton are not far distant, but with all its resonances, the piece is well made music. The choral writing is ingenious, with an unflinching grasp of what the voice can do, and how melliflously and excitingly vocal and orchestral sonorities can be combined and contrasted. Lloyd uses a large orchestra in an orthodox but sensitive manner... the Vigil of Venus is instantly approachable...Lloyd's skill, exuberance and response to the sounds of the words are indisputable... Daily Telegraph " Lloyd's writing is described as 'conventional' and so it is, but to such a degree that it seems audacious, radical, alternative to the extent of gathering a kind of cult appreciation. The monumental weight of the 80 minute score was itself imbued with a sense of occasion." The Independent ...the Welsh National Opera under his (Lloyd's) own direction were its vibrant champions...an exuberant setting...it calls for generous forces, including soprano and tenor soloists...where it sharply differs from the music of many home-grown "watercress" composers...is in its urgency and the effectiveness of its...scoring...in it Lloyd largely uses poster paint colours, with little light and shade in his effusive, glowing palette...(it) undoubtedly achieved a certain splendour... **Evening Standard**

...greeted with warm enthusiasm...a charismatic work...scored for a large orchestra it makes considerable

demands on the brass and timpani sections... ***The Post***

...it was clear from last night's premiere why Lloyd's music is enjoying a growing audience...while having the vigour and vitality of the new, Lloyd's work is strong in its appeal to traditional musical tastes...it is neither stuffy or radical, but fresh and approachable, beautifully evoking the rebirth of spring...this work is an undoubted success...a powerful performance from the orchestra and chorus... ***Western Mail***

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