

ORATORIO

RTHK Radio 4
10:00 – 11:00

Programme 5
Sunday 3 June 2007

KANE: Hello, and welcome to “Oratorio”, your programme for the next 50 something minutes. I’m Ciaran Kane; and for today I’ve chosen the most *recent* work to be presented in this short programme series. It’s “Voices of Light”, and was first performed in February 1994. Many oratorios are inspired by the lives and deeds of saintly, heroic or famous personalities. *This* one must be the first to be inspired by a *movie*, the 1928 French classic silent film *The Passion of Joan of Arc*. Its heroine of course has inspired many *other* artistic creations; like the George Bernard Shaw play “St Joan”, and the dramatic oratorio on a poem of Paul Claudel, “Joan of Arc at the stake” by Arthur Honegger in the middle of the 20th century. Richard Einhorn, composer of “Voices of Light” has written about his debt to the movie, and calls his oratorio “a meditation on the life and personality of Joan of Arc, scored for soloists, chorus, orchestra and one very special bell”, the bell being a recording he himself made of the church bell in the little village of Domremy in France where Joan was born. The composer himself assembled the work’s libretto, which is a montage of ancient writings, drawn mainly from medieval women mystics, including Joan herself. The *languages* are the original Latin, old French, old Italian. The work begins with two excerpts from the biblical Book of Daniel: in chapter 13, Joan singing *Susanna’s* cry “Everlasting God, who knows things hidden and all things before they happen, you know they have borne false witness against me” ; and then, from chapter 7, the chorus singing part of Daniel’s apocalyptic vision of God: “ten thousand times a hundred thousand stood by. The court sat, and the books were opened”

MUSIC: Einhorn -- **Voices of Light** CD 32147 # 1 **3:04**

KANE: The opening number of Richard Einhorn’s oratorio, “Voices of Light”. The Domremy bell introduces St Joan singing about her victory over

the English army at Orleans. The text is from a letter she dictated; and the composer uses the bell as a symbol of the *voices* that Joan constantly heard, including the voice of God --- the oratorio's *title* also refers. Multiple voices, instead of a single singing voice portray the personality / character of Joan: in this recording, they are the voices of the early music group, Anonymous 4.

MUSIC: s a m e # 2 5:02

KANE: The following sections of the oratorio represent Joan's interrogation and her jailors. She's called "Homasse", 'masculine woman', a medieval slur or term of abuse directed at women, and she's criticised for wearing men's clothes; meanwhile, the sung texts by women like Hildegard of Bingen affirm feminine achievement and power. Then the jailors revert to more medieval misogynist verse.

MUSIC: s a m e ## 3 – 4 9:41

KANE: You're listening to "Voices of Light", an oratorio on the passion of Joan of Arc by Richard Einhorn. The whole piece is too long for our programme time-slot, so I'm having to skip a couple of numbers in the middle. We go now to the torture of Joan, represented by texts of 13th century mystic Blessed Angela of Foligno about the wounds of Christ, interspersed with a refrain about His *glorious* wounds by another medieval woman visionary and poet. Hildegard of Bingen appears again in the following section, titled 'Sacrament'; "O feminine form, O sister of Wisdom, how glorious you are, for in you has arisen the mightiest life that death will never stifle".

MUSIC: s a m e ## 6, 8 10:29

KANE: The English attempt to force Joan to abjure, to retract her claims of divine guidance in her 'voices' is the subject of the next section, expressed in a *variety* of texts, from the gospel verses that were quoted to Joan during her trial, to the French king's plea for her release, and the refrain from the persecutors of the early Christian martyr St Perpetua, "Renounce your purpose"

MUSIC: s a m e # 9 7:36

KANE: From a hymn of Hildegard of Bingen, “Love overflows into all things; from out of the depths to above the highest stars..... Lovehas given to the highest King the Kiss of Peace”. Karitas

MUSIC: s a m e ## 11, 13 5:06

KANE: The concluding texts of “Voices of Light” are again from Hildegard, the final section taking its *title* from a line of hers: “you were greatly blessed when the Word of God steeped you in *the fire of the dove*”. The closing words of the oratorio are from Joan of Arc herself “So God, King of heaven wills it; and so it has been revealed by the Maid”

MUSIC: s a m e ## 14 – 15 6:55

KANE: In that recording of Richard Einhorn’s oratorio, “Voices of Light”, you heard Anonymous 4, the Netherlands Radio Choir and the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, conducted by Steven Mercurio. This has been “Oratorio”, with me Ciaran Kane. Another oratorio next week at the same time.

Music: 47:53

Words: 769