ORATORIO

RTHK Radio 4 10:00 – 11:00 Programme 7 Sunday 17 june 2007

MUSIC: Brixi -- Judas Iscariot CD 70655 #1 3:05

2 fade out at 5:38

[KANE: v.o. at c.0:27

Hello once more, and welcome to join me Ciaran Kane for another Oratorio. This week's is neither a familiar *topic* nor familiar *composer*. in fact the topic may seem a little odd --- Judas Iscariot, an oratorio written for performance on Good Friday. I'm speaking over the quite cheerful instrumental prelude to it. The composer is Frantisek Xaver Brixi who was born in the same year as Haydn, and seems to've been one of the most significant Czech composers of the 18th century. His works were popular and known throughout Bohemia, Moravia, Hungary, Silesia, Austria and southern Germany. More than 440 survive, mostly settings of liturgical texts, but oratorios too, in which he wasn't so constrained by set texts. It's not known who was the author of the expressive poetic texts for *Judas Iscariot*. Although this oratorio was written some 20 years after Handel's Messiah, it's much more like the *Italian* style oratorios Handel would have known earlier in his career, structured around a series of solo arias.. In this case, there are six recitatives and arias, and a concluding fugal 'coro misto'. The recitatives carry the story, while the poetic arias are spiritual reflections on the situation. Apart from the main character of Judas (sung by tenor), the other voices are allegorical figures in typical Baroque fashion who confront and speak with him, Justice (bass), Death (alto) and Hope (soprano).. Besides the text itself characterising each role, the voice quality and the instrumentation give further identification to each figure. Judas Iscariot is quite long, so I've chosen to omit two of the soprano arias (they're all very beautiful, but the soprano, who plays the role of Hope, has more singing to do than all the others, including Judas). I'm also having to cut short some of the repetitions in the arias or omit their endings. The work is sung in latin: and begins with the anguished despair of

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Judas longing for oblivion and calling for thunderbolts to destroy him without mercy.

voice-over = 333 words

KANE:

The stern voice of Justice now reproaches Judas, calling him the most despicable of men for betraying his master. "For 30 pieces of silver you handed over the Lamb to the most ferocious of torturers...no hope remains for you --- you are deleted from the book of life." In the aria, Justice sings of the desperate fate of 'unhappy Iscariot' who has lost all the excellent gifts he'd received.

MUSIC: Brixi -- Judas Iscariot CD 70655 #3 stop at 7:00 (7:52?)

KANE:

Now comes the figure of Death: "Why are you brooding so long....why hesitate? Take hold of the rope, free yourself of such worries....

Reach the end of such a wretched life and be embraced by me". In the aria she sings: "Since I am similar to sleep I will cause you but brief pain.....distress shall come to an end."

MUSIC: s a m e # 4 stop at 9:43 (10:38?)

KANE:

In a poignant recitative and aria, Judas now bids farewell to the stars, those lights that fill him with sorrowful ideas. "I shall place the rope around my throat, that I might not feel my conscience, that burdensome witness... this rope will set me free."

MUSIC: s a m e #5 fade under/out at 5:50

KANE:

Hope now comes on the scene, in the joyous voice of a coloratura soprano calling: 'Stop, don't despair. Divine retribution is not so harsh and severe.... Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Behold your Master and your God who loves you dies for you: is hope not yet born within your heart? Like an erring sheep to the shepherd, so do you return to the Master....

MUSIC: s a m e #6 stop at 8:33

KANE: But in the following joint recitative, Judas does not listen to Hope "In

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vain you foretell compassion. I do not hear your voice that I may find salvation. I am grasping the rope." Hope responds with a message for everyone: "O mortals, you who are like Iscariot, who accumulate vices and whose hearts have hardened through avarice, look upon the hanged man... and be more prudent. With the hands of the poor build yourselves an eternal abode in heaven." Hope's concluding advice: Instead of God, even you my closest friends blindly worship treasure, gold and silver. O sinners, even were you more criminal than Iscariot, do not despair but invoke God's mercy. Follow Jesus.

MUSIC: s a m e #7 end at 2:18

Cut to #8 stop at 1:27 3;45

KANE: The oratorio ends with a choral finale, 'O Jesus, *help* us, so that love eternal may burn within us'. You've been listening to *Judas Iscariot*, an oratorio by Frantisek Xaver Brixi, with Musica Bohemica and the Chamber Chorus of Prague, and soloists Ludmila Vernerova (soprano), Pavla Ksicova (contralto), Jiri Vinklarek (tenor) and Miloslav Podskalsky (bass), conducted by Jaroslav Krcek.

MUSIC: s a m e #8 start at 1:28 3:40

Music: 47:14 [shorter options] 49:01 [longer options]

Words: 421

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