

# ORATORIO

RTHK Radio 4  
10:00 – 11:00

Programme 8  
Sunday 24 June 2007

**MUSIC: Mendelssohn -- Paulus CD 4634 disc 1 # 1 5:58**

**[KANE: v.o. at c. 0:42**

The famous Lutheran chorale, *Wachet Auf*, (Wake up!) as embedded in the overture to Mendelssohn's oratorio, *Paulus (St Paul)*. You're listening to "Oratorio", on radio 4; I'm Ciaran Kane, and Part 1 of *St Paul* is my choice for this week's programme. Mendelssohn's *other*, later, oratorio *Elijah* is maybe *now* more popular and more often performed, at least in the English-speaking world. But from its first performance in 1836, and in the rest of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Germany and England, *St Paul* was a great success and made a wide impact. Within five months of its premiere, an English version was first heard in Liverpool; it reached Boston the next year, and was soon being sung in German and English provincial towns. It was a milestone in the story of German oratorio: and occasioned a critical musical controversy. But it also won the praise of contemporary composers including Richard Wagner who later was anything *but* an apologist for Mendelssohn.

## **MUSIC UP**

**v.o. at c. 3:10**

Mendelssohn had a biblical collaborator for the *text* of *St Paul*, which is almost entirely from the bible, largely the Acts of the Apostles. He himself, though, was well-versed in scripture and did a lot of research while composing the oratorio. The first part concentrates on the stoning of St Stephen, the first Christian martyr, to which Saul (later named Paul) was a witness; Saul's own fierce persecution of the Christians; and then his sudden conversion on the road to Damascus. The second part, on Paul's subsequent life and work, is far less dramatic and doesn't even *touch* on some of the more famous and dramatic incidents. Indeed, it seems the climax of the work *might* be taken as that chorale, *Wachet Auf*, sung just after Paul's enlightenment, his own "waking up", on the Damascus road, some

three-quarters of the way through Part One. It's also been noted that, in a way, *St Paul* dramatises Mendelssohn's *own* conflicting religious experiences, and his own personal history. [ voice-over: 325 words]

## MUSIC UP

---

**KANE:** This recording of Mendelssohn's *St Paul* you're going to hear is sung in the original German. The oratorio begins with a chorus and chorale: "Lord, Thou art God, who has made heaven, and earth and the sea.... Praise be to God alone on high, and thanks for His mercy"

**MUSIC:** a s a b o v e                      ## 2 – 3                      5:20

**KANE:** The first incident is the story of Stephen : how well he spoke, the miracles he did for people, how false witnesses accused him of blasphemy, and how people were stirred up against him because (they said) the Jesus he preached would change the customs of Moses.

**MUSIC:** a s a b o v e                      ## 4 – 5                      5:09

**KANE:** Stephen speaks in his defence, reminding those listening how God had delivered His people of old, but always the people (and now these his accusers) refused to listen to the Lord, persecuting His prophets instead. *Their* anger is aroused and they call for his death; but Stephen looking up to heaven says he sees the Son of man standing at God's right hand. The crowd call again for Stephen to be stoned to death --- a strong, driving chorus reminiscent of moments in Bach's passions. Then Stephen's prayer for his killers, and his offering of his soul to God; a reflective, devotional chorale. We hear how Saul approved of the killing; the burial of Stephen, and the chorus: "Blessed is the man who endures.... His soul shall receive the crown of life".

**MUSIC;** a s a b o v e                      ## 8 – 11                      9:00

**KANE:** Saul now intensified persecution of the Christians, and in the following aria calls on the Lord to consume them all, as stubble before the fire.

**MUSIC: a s a b o v e**

**# 12**

**2:12**

**KANE:**

Saul and his followers were making their way to Damascus with authorisation to arrest the Christians there. But approaching the city, suddenly a bright light shone around him, he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying: "Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Mendelssohn's use here of a four-part *women's* chorus to represent the voice of Christ from a mystical distance caused controversy at the time, as did his use of chorales in a different way from Bach. The chorus, 'Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee' leads into the thematic 'Wachet auf!' chorale.

**MUSIC: a s a b o v e**

**## 14 – 16**

**8:46**

**KANE:**

Blinded by the light, the stricken Saul is led into the city where a disciple of Christ, named Ananias, has been told to go and find him at his prayers, for he's been chosen by the Lord for great things. I've omitted a long aria of Paul's prayer for mercy and forgiveness, in favour of his prayer of praise as Ananias comes to visit him, lay his hands on him and restore his sight. The first part of Mendelssohn's *St Paul* ends with the chorus: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God".

**MUSIC: a s a b o v e**

**## 20 – 22**

**11:00**

**KANE:**

You've been listening to "Oratorio", with me Ciaran Kane: this week Part One of Mendelssohn's, *St Paul*. It was performed by the Leipzig radio choir and the Gewandhaus orchestra, with soloists Gundula Janowitz, Rosemarie Lang, Hans Peter Blochwitz, Theo Adam (singing the part of Paul), Gothart Stier and Hermann Christian Polster, all conducted by Kurt Masur.

Music: 47:25

Words: 515