

ORATORIO again

RTHK Radio 4
10:00 – 11:00

Programme 1
Sunday 7 december 2008

MUSIC: Mendelssohn: Paulus CD 4634 disc 1 # 1

[KANE: V.O. at c. 0:28 hold music > fade out on 1:35

Hello again: and welcome to another Oratorio, with me, Ciaran Kane. --- or, not *quite another* one, for coming up is part *two* of Mendelssohn's great "*Paulus*", *St Paul* and we've already had part one. The famous German Lutheran chorale, "Wachet auf" ('wake up!') comes at a pivotal point in part 1 of the Oratorio, and is the *theme* of the Overture to "St Paul" which you're hearing in the background. Part two centres round the *mission* of Paul and Barnabas, sent to preach to the Gentile people, and the conflicts and misunderstandings they met with after a healing miracle in a place called Lystra. "St Paul", first performed in 1836, was young Mendelssohn's first oratorio and an important milestone and link in the story of German choral and vocal musical drama. It was a huge success and remained popular for another sixty years, more so that his "Elijah", of some ten years later, which has now rather eclipsed it in performance frequency. Part two of "St Paul", like part one, begins with a chorus: "The kingdoms of this world are of Our Lord and of His Christ". In a soprano recitative we hear of the *missioning* of Paul and Barnabas, and then, in a short duet, the two men rejoicing in being ambassadors of Christ. The chorus which follows is said to've been a favourite of the young Queen Victoria: "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace", words from ch 52 of the Book of Isaiah. In this recording we hear the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra and radio choir, with Theo Adam (bass) singing the part of St Paul. The conductor is Kurt Masur, and it's sung in the original German.

[287]

MUSIC: a s a b o v e disc 2 ## 1 – 4 10:33

KANE: 'So, sent forth by the Holy Spirit, they departed and preached the

word of God. Let us sing the mercies of the Lord forever'. The soprano's gentle 'arioso' gives way to more forceful commentary as Paul's popularity with the people turn some of them against him, and he's criticised as being the one who wanted to destroy the followers of Christ in Jerusalem. They want him to go. The chorale that follows is a prayer for Christ the true light to enlighten those who donot know Him, to gather those who have strayed. [93]

MUSIC: **a s a b o v e** **disc 2 ## 5 - 7** **8:19**

KANE: The main *event* of part two of Mendelssohn's "St Paul" is what happened at Lystra. There was a disabled *lame* man who came to hear Paul speak. When Paul told him to stand up on his feet, the man leapt up and began to walk, and to praise God. When the people saw what had happened, they thought Paul and Barnabas must be *gods* come among them in human form. So they called Paul Mercury (the messenger) and Barnabas Jupiter (king of the gods). The priest of the *temple* of Jupiter came out to offer sacrifices, and the people called for the favour of the gods. [106]

MUSIC: **a s a b o v e** **disc 2 ## 9, 10** **5:31**

KANE: When the apostles heard of all this, they were furious and ran among the people asking what did they think they were doing. We're just human beings like yourselves, they said, and we want you to turn away from all these vanities and towards the living God who made the heavens and earth. Don't you know you are temples of God, and God's spirit lives in you ? After the tenor-narrator's introduction, the bass-voice Paul declaims in a recitative and aria, and his ending words, "But our God is in the heavens" are taken up by the chorus and transformed into a chorale profession of faith. [106]

MUSIC: **a s a b o v e** **disc 2 ## 11, 12** **6:48**

KANE: But again the people are stirred up in anger against what Paul's been saying and in chorus together insist their temple is God's temple and that Paul and Barnabas are preaching against the Law and this holy place. In an echo of one of the most dramatic choruses in the *first* part of the oratorio, calling for the *stoning* of St Stephen, the same call is now made to stone Paul. A soprano-narrator reflects on the

persecution of Paul; and then there's a tenor cavatina, "Be thou faithful unto death; be not afraid for I am with you". [98]

MUSIC: **a s a b o v e** **## 13, 14** **5:17**

KANE: The next section of Mendelssohn's "St Paul" is about his departure to return to Jerusalem: how he gathered his congregation together to say farewell, and they all wept for him; how he knelt with them in prayer before they accompanied him to the ship, and saw his face no more.. This is one section of the oratorio that I'm having to omit, to fit into our allotted time-slot. And in fact it brings us to the concluding *section* of "St Paul": first, a chorus "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called the sons of God". A recitative follows, based on words from one of Paul's letters, his second letter to his disciple Timothy: 'he has fought the good fight, he has kept the faith... there is laid up for him a crown of righteousness'. And this is taken up by the final chorus. 'And not for him only, but for all those also that love his appearing': Bless the Lord, bless His holy name'. [174]

MUSIC: **a s a b o v e** **## 17 – 19** **7:44**

We've been listening to part two of Mendelssohn's oratorio, '*Paulus*' ('St Paul'). The Leipzig Gewandhaus orchestra and radio choir were directed by Kurt Masur, with bass Theo Adam singing the part of Paul, and sopranos Gundula Janowitz and Rosemarie Lang, tenor Hans Peter Blochwitz and basses Gothart Stier and Hermann Christian Polster. [52]

Music 44:39 (incl. Pre-voice-over intro)

Words: 916