<u>ORATORIO</u> again

RTHK Radio 4 10:00 – 11:00 Programme 3 Sunday 21 december 2008

MUSIC: Bach: Christmas Oratorio Pt 2: Sinfonia 92X05 #6

KANE: V.O. @ c. 0:20 keep music under until fade out @ c. 3:30

This is "Oratorio", one in a short season of oratorios I'm introducing for you this month. I'm Ciaran Kane: and the music you're hearing in the background is actually not the work I've chosen and advertised for today's programme. But there is a connection, and a reason I'm starting with the 'Sinfonia' from part two of J.S.Bach's great "Christmas Oratorio", the part written for the second day of Christmas, 26th December. There are six parts to Bach's work, each for a different day of the season from Christmas Day to Epiphany ('little Christmas', the 12th day). I'm afraid there's no way we could fit even an *abridged* version of Bach into this "Oratorio" time-slot. But the work for today's programme, also a Christmas Oratorio (but in French "Oratorio de Noël), is a quite short piece, not even 40 minutes. So I'm filling our 'extra' time with Bach. Besides, the composer of "Oratorio de Noel", Camille Saint-Saëns, deliberately made the "Prelude" to his own work after the style of Bach's 'Sinfonia'. There are other resonances, too, in Saint-Saëns. In fact so much so, that on its first performance it was dismissed as being "mere Bach". In musical circles in the Paris of those days, mid-1800s, Bach was not held in high esteem, except maybe among organists. And Saint-Saëns was one of those. He's better known now as pianist and composer of concertos, symphonies, operas. But he was also a church musician, and was organist for 20 years at the famous Madeleine church in Paris, succeeded there by The "Oratorio de Noël" begins with a prelude which Gabriel Fauré. may remind you of Bach's 'Sinfonia' you've been hearing. This is followed by a recitative and choral presentation of the Christmas story from St Luke's gospel, ch.2, verses 8 - 14. The text is in latin, telling about angels appearing to shepherds, announcing news of the saviour's birth, and the host of angels then singing together "Glory to God in the highest". [328]

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MUSIC: Saint-Saëns: Oratorio de Noël CD 69080 ## 1, 2 7:51 KANE: The Prelude and the Christmas story of the angels appearing to shepherds, from the "Oratorio de Noël" of Camille Saint-Saëns. The rest of the oratorio is simply a series of settings of verses and texts from the bible somehow associated with Christmas. Rather than narrative, they're a kind of commentary on the first, main, text. A number of them appear in the church liturgies of Christmastime as motets or antiphons. And they're arranged in a curious evolvement, the first being a solo aria, then an aria with choir, a duet, choir again, trio, guartet, guintet with choir, and a final chorale-style tutti. The first of these pieces, 'Expectans expectavi Dominum', takes its text from the start of Ps 40: 'Patiently, I waited for the Lord'. The one that follows is based on words from St John's gospel, "Lord, I believe thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God who has come into this world". [155]

MUSIC:a sa b o v e## 3, 46:09KANE:With words from St Matthew's gospel and Ps 118, the following duet
of soprano and tenor accompanied by harp and organ is perhaps the

most lyrical piece in Saint-Saëns' "Oratorio de Noël". "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. The Lord is God; his light shines out to welcome us".

MUSIC: as above	# 5	3:49
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KANE: The most dramatic element in the oratorio comes in the next choral movement, on words from the start of Ps 2: "Why this tumult among the nations ?" The "why" question is hammered out against a background of questioning, in the gliding motif of the instrumental accompaniment. And it melts into the *answering* words of 'Gloria'" glory to Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The *next* text *also* is one of those that feature in the Christmas liturgical anthems, "Tecum principium in die virtutis tuae", words from Ps 110 v.3 'From birth, princely state shall be thine'. This is sung by a trio of tenor, soprano and baritone.

MUSIC:a sa b o v e## 6, 77:23KANE:For the following quartet and quintet in Saint-Saëns' 'Oratorio de
Noël', the texts are from the prophet Isaiah, in chapters 49, 52 and
62. "Ring out, heaven, with praise; let earth keep holiday..... the
Lord brings consolation to his people" "Rise up, daughter of Sion,

alleluia; give praise in the night The just One of Zion is revealed like the dawn." [62]

MUSIC: ## 8.9 a s above 7:27 KANE: "Oratorio de Noël" concludes with a chorale-like hymn, words from Ps 96, "Tollite hostias et adorate Dominum" 'Bring sacrifice, worship the Lord.... Let earth be glad to greet its Lord's coming'. [31] MUSIC: as above 1:46 #10 KANE: We've just heard the "Oratorio de Noël" of Camille Saint-Saëns, written in 1863. It was performed by the Mikaeli Chamber Choir of Stockholm, directed by Anders Eby, with soloists Britt-Marie Aruhn, Anne Sophie von Otter, Ing-Mari Landin, Erland Hagegård and Ulf Lundmark. Because this was such a *short* oratorio, and because of its Bach connections I mentioned at the beginning, I thought to fill out our time with something from Bach's Christmas Oratorio. At the top of the programme, I gave you a little bit of the 'Sinfonia' that opens its part two. To *finish* with today, and from the *same* part two, the chorale "Schaut hin, dort liegt im finstern Stall" 'Behold here: there in a dark stable lies the One who has dominion over all', followed by the lovely alto aria, "Schlafe, mein Liebster" 'Sleep my dearest, enjoy thy rest'. The alto soloist is again Anne Sophie von Otter, with the Monteverdi Choir and English Baroque Soloists, directed by John Eliot Gardiner [164]

MUSIC:J.S.Bach:Christmas Oratorio92X05## 9, 109:57KANE:An aria from J.S.Bach's Christmas Oratorio, to round out this oratorio
programme, which featured "Oratorio de Noël" by Camille Saint-
Saëns This has been one in a short series of oratorios presented by
me Ciaran Kane.[36]

Music timing: 44:43 Wordcount 933