

ORATORIO again

RTHK Radio 4
10:00 – 11:00

Programme 7
Sunday 18 January 2009

MUSIC: John Knowles Paine : St Peter GM2027CD-2 disc 2 # 1

KANE: V.O. at c. 0:15 fade out at 0:25

Welcome to *another* in a short series of 'Oratorio' on Radio 4. I'm your host, Ciaran Kane, and you've just heard the start of Part 2 of an oratorio that's *seldom* been *heard*..... perhaps not even heard *about*, very *much*. It's "St Peter", by the early American composer John Knowles Paine. He was born in 1839 in New England, and proved to be such a *gifted* musician as a teenager that he was sent to *Germany* to study. There he became a virtuoso organist, and when he returned to Boston in 1861 quickly made his name *there* as a leading musical personality. The following year he began *teaching* at Harvard University, and was eventually appointed as the first *chair* in music at Harvard, the first such post in the United States. He organised the music department there and headed it for 35 years until his death in 1906. *His* generation of American composers have largely been eclipsed by those later ones who made their European studies in Paris, Germany being by then out-of-fashion. But it had to take *time* for a distinctive *native* tone to make itself felt in American music. Paine was no doubt *influenced* by the Germans, Beethoven, Bach, Mendelssohn and Schumann, yet he was a musical pioneer in his age. His oratorio "St Peter" was first heard in 1873, and again the following year as a featured work in the Triennial Festival of Boston's 'Handel and Haydn Society' when it was well-received.... But then it disappeared until resurrected in 1989. In its shape, "St Peter" is evidently modelled on Bach's 'Passions', and Mendelssohn's 'Elijah', with their set-piece choruses, chorales, arias, recitatives. Paine himself assembled the *texts* for "St Peter", choosing dramatic incidents of Peter's life from the gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, and interspersing them with reflective pieces from other Biblical sources. Unusually, the part of Jesus is sung by a *tenor*, with Peter as a *bass*; and a *sub*-choir of 12 men's voices represents the apostles. "St Peter" is in two parts, with two sections in each. Part 1

covers the Divine Call and then Peter's Denial and Repentance; part 2, The Ascension of Christ, and Pentecost and its aftermath. We'll hear first about the *calling* of Peter and his brother; and then the *sending* of the 12 disciples to preach. [387]

MUSIC: a s a b o v e disc 1 # 2, # 4 6:20

KANE: The famous Lutheran chorale, 'How lovely shines the Morning Star' follows this. And then there's the incident of Jesus asking 'Who do people say that I am' ?, Peter's reply to Him, and Jesus confirming Peter as the 'rock' on which He'll build His church [45]

MUSIC: a s a b o v e disc 1 # 6 2:29

KANE: Peter's denial of Jesus, and his repentance, is the subject of the *next* section of John Knowles Paine's oratorio "St Peter". After the last supper, when Jesus says Peter will three times deny Him, Peter protests he will *not*, and the others also join in to protest their allegiance. The aria of Jesus that follows is a lovely text from St John's gospel [63]

MUSIC: a s a b o v e disc 1 ##9 – 10 7:20

KANE: Now to the scene in the high-priest's palace when three times Peter is challenged as being one of Jesus' disciples and he denies it; then the cocks crows, Peter remembers the Lord's words, and he goes out and weeps bitterly [40]

MUSIC: a s a b o v e disc 1 ## 14-15 (fade-out at #15 c. 0:55) timing 2:54

KANE: An orchestral 'Lament' portrays Peter's tears of remorse, and then in a plea for pardon, he sings in a lyric aria; "O God, my God, forsake me not" [28]

MUSIC: a s a b o v e disc 1 # 16 4:00

KANE: A chorus of angels next sings "Remember from whence thou art fallen". There's a reflective aria for alto and obbligato *cello* which is broken into by the timpani and bass tremolos that introduce the exciting final chorus of Part 1 of "St Peter", by John Knowles Paine. The first section of Part 2 is titled 'The Ascension'. It begins with a brief summary of Christ's arrest, crucifixion and resurrection, depicted in a choral setting, followed by a straight-forward chorale in Bach-like harmony, "Jesus my Redeemer lives". Then there's the scene by the lakeside when Jesus three times asks Peter if he loves Him, and then gives Peter the commission to "feed my sheep". Only after *that*

comes the description of the Ascension: a soprano recitative tells the story, and there's a choral 'meditation' on this: 'If ye, then, be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above'. [148]

MUSIC: a s a b o v e d i s c 2 # # 4 – 5 3:19

KANE: The second section of part 2 of John Knowles Paine's "St Peter" is titled 'Pentecost', and starts off with a dramatic tenor recitative of that day's events, from the New Testament. The chorus then suitably reflects how 'the voice of the Lord divided the flames of fire'. [47]

MUSIC: a s a b o v e d i s c 2 # # 8 – 9 5:15

KANE: After the coming of the holy Spirit, Peter stands up with the other disciples and speaks boldly to the men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem. His aria is one of the highpoints of the oratorio, as he vigorously urges his listeners to 'see visions and dream dreams', as the prophet Joel had foretold would happen when the Lord would pour out his Spirit. [66]

MUSIC: a s a b o v e d i s c 2 # 11 s t a r t a t 0:17 4:30

KANE: Then, in a recitative addressed to the 'men of Israel', Peter *chides* the people for having crucified Jesus, and the narrator tells how they were pieced to the heart by Peter's words and asked what they should do. Peter tells them 'repent and be baptised', and the other disciples join him in telling the people that the promise is for them and for their children. [65]

MUSIC: a s a b o v e d i s c 2 # # 14 – 15 3:20

KANE: There's another lively chorus of praise to God as the story recounts how many believed and were baptised and the Holy Spirit came upon them too. And here the composer inserts another familiar Lutheran chorale, in his own richly harp-decorated harmonisation, "Praise to the Father" [45]

MUSIC: a s a b o v e d i s c 2 # 18 1:06

KANE: Before the oratorio's conclusion, there's another solo of Peter with the rest of the disciples, and a soprano and tenor duet 'Sing unto God, sing praises to his holy name'. *That* the final *chorus* does in a majestic and, perhaps, *over-grand* conclusion to the work, "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty".. [54]

MUSIC: a s a b o v e d i s c 2 # 21 s t o p a t 3:55 !!

KANE: That was the finale of the oratorio "St Peter", by early American

composer John Knowles Paine. The recording was made at the *revival* of the work after 115 years of oblivion, in May 1989 at the Sanders Theatre, Cambridge, Massachusetts. It was performed by the Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra of Boston, with the Back Bay Chorale under conductor Gunther Schuller. The soprano parts were sung by Jeanne Ommerlé, mezzo by D'Anna Fortunato, tenor (and the words of Jesus) by Paul Austin Kelly, and the bass part, Peter, by David Evitts. This has been "Oratorio", presented by Ciaran Kane.

[98]

Wordcount 1086

Music timing: 44:43