



J. V. Rathgeber: Messe von Muri & Concertos

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Audiophile Audition (Steven Ritter - 2008.02.14)

A fine recording of an esoteric composer, recently unearthed in Switzerland

Johann Valentin Rathgeber (1682-1750) almost parallels the life of Bach. But because of his South German origins (Lower Franconia) he was Roman Catholic, and accordingly his musical emphasis was a little different, religiously speaking, than Bach. In fact, he had entered a Benedictine monastery in 1707, and became active as both composer and preacher. Perhaps the central decision of his life was to enter into disobedience from his abbot over the question of being allowed to make an educational journey through Europe. When this request was refused, the composer-monk bolted, and was not to return to his monastery for nine years. He was accepted back, after being imprisoned (things were tough in those days) for 17 days, and spent the remaining 12 years of his life writing mainly secular music.

His stay at the Closter Muri spawned this lovely mass, and its quirky tunefulness immediately burns its stamp into the mind. Until now, it has been assumed lost since 1841, but a discovery in 2002 in Switzerland allowed Thilo Hirsch to reconstruct the mass with much authority, and now we have this recording in its place of origin, the beautiful baroque Abbey church of Muri. It is well worth hearing.

But there is more. The remaining pieces are all interesting concertos for clarinet, violin, trumpet, and trumpet marine. This last deserves a qualification. Unlike what you might suppose, the "trumpet marine" is in fact a bowed string instrument (and others in the trumpet family are not the brass instrument we normally think of). The "clarino" part could be played by any number of high instruments, like the trumpet, clarinetto, or trumpet marine. The recording of Christian Gottfried Telonius (d. 1750) of his Concerto 12 is the first time this unique (and one must admit, odd-sounding) instrument has even been recorded. The concertos themselves are quite entertaining, short, and in three parts (except for the four-part Telonius), despite the brevity of the total timing.

Audite has given us some very fine sound, open and airy, though it appears that the master was a standard stereo PCM 44.1k/24-bit recording which then underwent conversion to DSD surround. I have not noticed the appellation on other SACD issues (perhaps I have not been paying attention), so perhaps our intrepid editor can enlighten us on this anomaly. Whatever the result, the surround is excellent, the performances matching it. [Yes, a number of two-channel PCM or analog masters have been remastered for multichannel SACD via deriving the surround information from the L-R ambience on the original stereo recording. It's similar to what ProLogic II or Circle Surround accomplish with ordinary stereo sources...Ed.]