



Johann Valentin Rathgeber: Messe von Muri & Concertos

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Fanfare (J. F. Weber - 01.09.2008)

This program offers many points of interest. The composer Johann Valentin Rathgeber (1682–1750) was a monk in southern Germany from 1707 to 1729, then spent nine years traveling to other monasteries, including Muri in Switzerland. He returned to spend his last 12 years at his original monastery. The Mass that he composed for Muri in 1731 was recently discovered in manuscript and identified with a Mass published in 1733, titled as here. It is quite an impressive work, recorded in the Baroque monastery church of Muri (the original 11th-century church was rebuilt in 1697). The golden age of the monastery spanned the entire 16th to 18th centuries, and it possesses some fine period organs.

The six concertos for various instruments are each only a few minutes long. Three are for violin, one for clarinet, one for trumpet, and one for clarinet and trumpet as performed here. The development of the natural trumpet into the modern instrument was delayed by the invention of such substitutes as the tromba marina and the clarinet, the latter quite unlike the modern instrument. In the last three concertos, written for trumpet, we hear a clarinet in one, a natural trumpet in the next, and both instruments in the last, although the work would probably have been played with two matching instruments.

The concerto by Christian Gottfried Telonius, who lived around 1750, makes use of the tromba marina (unfortunately translated literally in the notes as “trumpet marine,” though admittedly the real origin of the term is unknown). I found one of these pictured in a Hans Memling painting in *Musical Instruments in Art and History*, by Roger Bragard and Ferdinand J. De Hen (New York: Viking, 1968). An instrument almost six feet long, the single string was bowed to produce a sound that substituted for a trumpet, while sympathetic strings within the body vibrated. Not surprisingly, the kettledrum is added to the scoring, and here a single-stringed wooden kettledrum (described by Daniel Speer in 1697) is used. This and the tromba marina are also heard in the Mass.

The Cappella has sung since 2002 at Muri, a former abbey near Zurich that is now a parish church. When the place was secularized in 1845, the monks moved to Bolzano (but the abbot retained the title of Muri). The singers and players are quite satisfactory, though I am not sure why the instrumental ensemble chose a Renaissance painter as its namesake. The Super Audio sound is effective in capturing the ambiance of the place, its Baroque splendor evident in a color photo of the recording session. This is decidedly an offbeat contribution to any Baroque collection, especially for its display of the various instruments, and real enthusiasts will want to hear it.