



Reinhard Keiser (1674-1739): *Brockes-Passion*
(Copenhagen version)



Meister Francke, *Vir dolorum* (c. 1435)
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When the geniuses of two great artists combine in one single work, the result usually fails not to be anything less than spectacular. And when, by a strange quirk of history, a musical masterwork of that kind and level appears to have largely remained unperformed and unrecorded in modern times, then the approaching tercentenary of its creation definitely warrants a belated, but nonetheless fulsome tribute.

This is exactly what the instrumentalists of LES MUFFATTI and the singers of VOX LUMINIS have in mind with their planned performances and CD recording of *Der für die Sünde der Welt gemarterte und sterbende Jesus*, a Passion oratorio libretto by **Barthold Heinrich BROCKES** (1680-1747), set to music by **Reinhard KEISER** (1674-1739). It was written, composed and first performed in Hamburg in 1712.

In German literary history Brockes is primarily remembered for his innovating role during the second quarter of the 18th century in the transition from traditional Baroque to more modern, 'Enlightened' esthetical ideals. It was his first major poetical text though, a highly expressive and dramatic libretto on the Passion of Christ, that also granted him a prominent place in music history. The so-called *Brockes-Passion* enjoyed an unremitting popularity throughout the 18th century; no less than eleven German

composers, including Handel and Telemann, set it to music. With its admixture of poetic paraphrase of the Biblical account compiled from all four gospels and newly written contemplative texts representing the personal emotional involvement of the faithful, the *Brockes-Passion* can be considered the archetype of the German 18th century Passion oratorio. As such, it served as a model and a source of inspiration for later famous masterworks, such as the great passions of Bach and even the English oratorios of Handel. Among all of the musical settings, Keiser's version of the *Brockes-Passion* is not only the very first one, but also the one that follows the great rhetorical power and the rich shifts in affections of the poet's text most closely. It also includes the full array of no less than twenty-two dramatic characters called for in the libretto. By 1712, with roughly forty stage-works behind his name, Keiser, a slightly older fellow-townsmen of Brockes, was already generally acknowledged as Germany's, and for some, even Europe's leading opera composer. The deep, dramatic impact of his recitatives, the seemingly inexhaustible wealth of melodic ideas in his arias, his extensive mastery of orchestral colour, and his averseness toward learned counterpoint are the hallmarks and signature characteristics of Keiser's art. All of this, in addition to some splendid choral writing, is abundantly displayed in his superb setting of the *Brockes-Passion*. The available sources do not allow for an accurate reconstruction of the original version that was performed at Brockes's house on March 27, 1712. In 2010 however, the German publishing company Edition Musica Poetica published a modern edition that is primarily based on a manuscript source preserved at the library of Copenhagen University. The manuscript is probably related to a performance of Keiser's *Brockes-Passion* in Copenhagen in 1721 and it is this version that LES MUFFATTI and VOX LUMINIS are proud to present.

Duration of the programme

ca. 2 hours

Ensemble (33)

Les Muffatti and Vox Luminis under the direction of Peter Van Heyghen

Core: Vox Luminis: 3 sopranos, 2 altos, 3 tenors, 3 basses
 Les Muffatti: 2 oboes, bassoon
 6 violins, 2 violas, 2 cellos, violone
 cembalo, archlute

Extras: transverse flute, 2 recorders, 2 bassoons



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