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Classical

Daniels/Le Point du Jour

★★★★★ Barbican, London

Thursday March 1, 2007

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Singers keen to explore unfamiliar baroque repertoire could devote many years to the music of Alessandro Scarlatti. His son Domenico famously composed more than 500 keyboard sonatas, but Alessandro had already set the family standard with more than 70 operas, and somewhere between 600 and 800 chamber cantatas. David Daniels' outstanding Barbican recital with the ensemble Le Point du Jour ended with one of those cantatas from the early 1690s, *Perchè Tacete*, a sequence of short arias and recitatives, prefaced by an instrumental sinfonia, and pivoted around an exquisite lullaby that Daniels sang with unsullied beauty of tone and purity of line.

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On form like this, Daniels is peerless among countertenors. Almost every item in this programme of 17th-century Italian music was delivered with perfect poise, every detail exactly placed, the sound honeyed and even. There were no vocal fireworks, no virtuoso displays of technique for their own sake; everything was perfectly scaled, except curiously in Ottone's monologue from Monteverdi's L'Incoronazione di Poppea, which Daniels opened with, making it just too intimate for the Barbican Hall. Either he, or our ears, quickly adjusted, though.

On their own exemplary account, Le Point de Jour played instrumental pieces by two of Monteverdi's musicians from St Mark's in Venice, Dario Castello and Biagio Marini, as well as a Scarlatti Concerto Grosso. There were also the inevitable encores, three of them, by Caccini, Lotti and finally an aria from Handel's Orlando that Daniels sang with such heart-stopping simplicity that the audience hardly dared applaud when it came to an end.

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