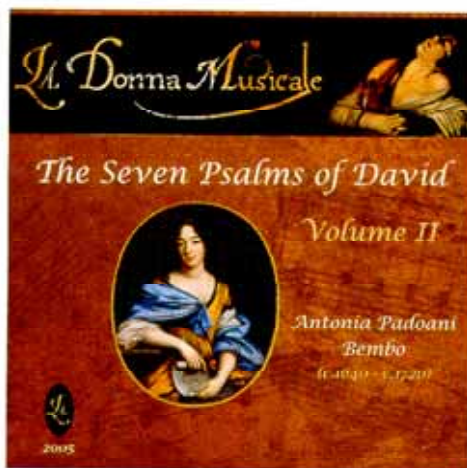


BEMBO

THE SEVEN PSALMS OF DAVID

La Donna Musicale

LA 2006
2005 · 59:15'

This is La Dona Musicale's second album of music by Antonia Padoani Bembo (c. 1640-c. 1720), a singular figure on several counts. She was part of Louis XIV's retinue and was the protégée of the king and his morganatic wife, Madame de Maintenon. Under the influence of the latter, the court underwent a period of severe and rigorous religious devoutness. These tendencies were also found in Elisabeth-Sophie Chéron's poetic paraphrases of the *Psalms of David*, which Bembo set to music (Psalms 31, 50 and 37 are included in this recording). It is interesting to observe how this Italian composer presented herself as more French than the French, curbing every instinct towards melodic effusion in favour of the exigencies of the text, yet subverting this 'Gallicism' with daring harmonies that clearly show their Italian origins. Unexpected rhythmic complexities are also in evidence. La Dona Musicale's reading of Bembo's works seems slightly tame, even taking into account the religious environment in which they were written. A bit more emphasis on the unusual rhythms and more precise diction would have been nice, and would also have helped the musicians to take better advantage of Chéron's texts. The album does contain musical felicities, however: the well-placed soprano voice of Sherezade Panthaki is full of light, and the solid technique of Aaron Sheehan demonstrates once again that English-style high tenors are a valid alternative to French counter-tenors. The highly professional instrumental ensemble is beyond reproach. Potential listeners should not be put off by the caveats; this album presents a fascinating musical universe. **YUTHA TEP**