

Early Music Review

EDITIONS OF MUSIC

BOOKS

BEN SHUTE: SEI SOLO: SYMBOLUM?
The Theology of J. S. Bach's solo violin works
Pickwick Publications, Eugene, Oregon
ISBN 978-1-4982-3941-7
xxvii+267pp, \$28.00

This is not the first monograph to employ a variety of disciplines to delve beneath the surface of a group of surviving compositions by Bach in the hope of finding a hidden key to their understanding and interpretation: nor will it be the last. But what is unusual about Benjamin Shute is that he does not go overboard for the one-and-only solution, instead adopting a multi-faceted approach to unearthing the composer's intentions.

For those who are not persuaded that the key to *Sei Solo* is to be found exclusively in just symbolic numbers, or key sequences, or symbolic references, or Biblical typology, studies that acknowledge the complexity of Bach's mind, the diversity of his accomplishments and the range of Biblical, social and cultural influences under which he was formed as a person stand a greater chance of winning my sympathy, and this is certainly one of them.

Benjamin Shute is a violinist and musicologist who has lived with and performed the *Sei Solo* on both modern and period instruments. He has a range of academic studies to his credit and knows the Bach oeuvre inside out – he clearly knows the keyboard works and the cantatas as well as he knows the instrumental music. But, more significantly for the task he has set himself, he has done a substantial amount to penetrate Bach's intellectual and theological mindset. While we know tantalizingly little about Bach's personal beliefs, we know a good deal about that generation's commonplace assumptions about symbolic language and Lutheran typology – two areas in which their basic assumptions are notably different from our own. But more specifically, we also know how Bach marked and underlined his prized copy of Calov's *Die deutsche Bibel*. In these important areas where few musicians are totally at home, Shute seems surefooted. This is a good omen for

a study that is complex, detailed and seems to me to reach pretty plausible insights.

His thesis in brief is 'that the nativity of Christ is represented in the first sonata in G minor while the juxtaposed D minor partita and C major sonata are the locus of passion-resurrection imagery.' He acknowledges that there have been both numerological and emotion-based interpretations in these areas, but none relying on firm musicological bases. These he begins to lay out, undergirding his research with a sketch of the shift from thinking of music as an expression of the divine wisdom, an essentially Aristotelian absolute, towards music as a more subjective expression of human feeling, revealing the drama and rhetoric of the 'seconda prattica.' In Germany these two traditions – *ratio* and *sensus* – remained side by side until the 18th century, and the struggle to balance the two is evident in Bach's work. So stand-alone instrumental music has a theological proclamation in its conviction that the compositional complexity of contrapuntal music reveals the inherent order of the cosmos, while texted music has a more obvious emotive power to communicate the particularity of the Word. It is the activity of the Holy Spirit that animates both the composer's mind and the hearers' ears to receive the divine breath of life.

In instrumental music such as the *Sei Solo*, therefore, we can expect the structure and the relationships of keys for example to carry a symbolic or allegorical significance, without being tied to particular texts. Music does not need a religious or theological text to be a witness to the divine nature of music. Just as Luther saw Josquin's music as a microcosm of grace superseding law, so Bach and his Lutheran forebears understood a whole complex world of sound and notation as embodying the divine harmony of the Trinity: the relationship of key to key, note to note within the traditional solmization overlay a rich and symbolic theological language.

One obvious model for Bach's *Sei Solo* was Heinrich Ignaz Biber's set of 15 sonatas for violin and continuo, where each is preceded by an engraving of one of the fifteen mysteries of the Rosary. The set ends with a monumental Passacaglia for unaccompanied violin 'that is the most striking precursor of Bach's Ciaccona.'

In the Lutheran tradition, Bach's predecessor as Kantor at St Thomas', Johann Kuhnau, had composed a set of

Biblical sonatas for keyboard. Kuhnau and Bach had met in 1716 to examine a new organ in Halle, and his six sonatas of 1700 had been reprinted in 1710. Many of Bach's works are in sets of six: the Brandenburg concertos, the Sonatas for Violoncello solo, the Schübler Chorale Preludes, the French Suites, the Trio Sonatas for organ as well as the *Sei Solo*. The number six reflects the Biblical six days of creation, and came to be viewed as a complete number. But there is no superficial evidence for an obvious programmatic plan behind *Sei Solo*, as there is in the Biber and Kuhnau. Is there any evidence of a hidden schema? To discover one is the underlying purpose of Shute's study.

First he examines the chiasmic structure of the Ciaccona, and notes its parallels in the *Actus Tragicus* and the Credo of the B minor whose central movement, the Crucifixus, has a one sharp (cross) key signature. He only briefly refers to the central chiasmic structure of the *Johannespassion*, though he notices Chafé's J. S. Bach's Johannine Theology, an important study. He sees a likely antecedent in the Ciaccona in the wedding cantata composed by Johann Christoph Bach and preserved by Johann Sebastian in the Altbachisches Archiv, which has a virtuoso violin part over the repeated bass, and sets a text studded with references to *The Song of Songs*, where the lovesick bride longs for her groom – a theme that occurs frequently in the cantatas and in the opening of the *Matthäuspasion*. From this he moves to consider the descent-ascent pattern, related key structures and concludes that the Ciaccona and the C major sonata that follows it represent a strong crucifixion-resurrection motif. I recount this chapter in some detail, as it gives an insight into Shute's detailed working on a number of interlinked fronts.

The following chapter analyses the musical reversal of the descent theme in the D minor Ciaccona in the C major *fuga*, and speculates on the links with the two chorales, *An Wasserflüssen Babylon* and *Komm, heiliger Geist*, both discernable in the subject Mattheson set for the audition in Hamburg where Bach gave such an impressive display. Shute links this to the theme of exile and restoration in Israel's history as a type of Christ's dying and rising, which accomplishes the restoration of the fallen human race, showing how Luther and his successors used Psalm 137 – *An Wasserflüssen Babylon* – as a type of longing for our restoration in Christ to our heavenly home. This is the context in which Shute comments on Bach's words 'al riverso', written just before he presents the subject and countersubject of the fugue exclusively in inversion. 'The exile theme, with its possible secondary association with

the passion, is turned emphatically upside-down as the very material that had previously formed an unequivocal descent . . . is turned on its head to create a similarly unequivocal, glorious ascent.' (p.57)

I find his detailed musical analysis, his knowledge of the wider context of Lutheran theology, and his ability to relate musical structures to the broad sweep of Christian theology very compelling. Of course, there are occasional slips: the wonderful aria at the end of the *Matthäuspasion* "Mache dich" that signals the way in which the dead Christ is wrapped in the warmth of our embrace is accompanied by the warm, rich tones of oboes da caccia, not oboes d'amore. But such slips are very rare, and the wealth of references to musical, theological and historical sources – there are 87 substantial footnotes to this chapter alone – gives me confidence in his modest judgements.

The Chapter 'A Broader Theological Schema in the *Sei Solo*? looks at the whole collection, and explores the key sequence in relation to among other things, the stringing of the violin, the hexachord and the fulfillment of the work of creation, commenting on the emerging associations of both keys and rhythms. Chapter 5 examines number correlations in the Partitas, and the final chapter is entitled 'A Hermeneutic Overview of the *Sei Solo*.' Appendix A examines Helga Thoené's Premise of Symbolism in the *Sei Solo*, and Appendix B looks at two further case studies: the Harpsichord Concerto in D minor, BWV 1052 – does a lost violin concerto with similar references to a chiasmic structure and its Christ-on-the-cross references lie behind the various versions of this material? and then the Adagio in the first Brandenburg, BWV 1046 – do the blank staves for the horns in this movement hint at some hidden theological comment on the strange break harmonically exactly one third of the way through the movement. This reflection introduces novel possibilities: do wind instruments carry overtones of 'spirit'?

Throughout this detailed and imaginative monograph, Shute provides not only tables displaying chiasmic structures and key sequences but a wealth of musical examples: Appendix B alone has 15. This makes it possible to follow the detailed musical arguments without always having to go to the volumes of the NBA. Is the same true for the non-theologically trained reader, who puzzles over the unfamiliar world of Johannine theology or Lutheran exegetical typology? I think so, as although theologically literate, I am not a specialist in Lutheran exegesis. I found the book demanding to read, but raising interesting questions – not all of which I had considered before even

in works which I regularly study and perform like the *Johannespassion*, the B minor Mass or some of the cantatas. The footnotes are full of cross references, the bibliography very thorough and up-to-date and the indices excellent.

So I commend it to anyone who wants to experience a testing, but rewarding series of arguments, and above all to those who know less about Bach as a highly intellectual, organized and reflective Lutheran of his time than they would like.

David Stancliffe

EDITIONS

MOTETTI A VNA, DVE, TRE ET QVATTRO
VOCI COL BASSO CONTINUO PER L'ORGANO
FATTI DA DIUERSI MUSICI SERUTORI DEL
SERENISSIMO SIGNOR DUCA DI MANTOUA E
RACOLTI DA FEDERICO MALGARINI PUR
ANCH'EGLI SERUITORE, E MUSICO DI DETTA
ALTEZZA. IN VENETIA, APPRESSO GIACOMO
VINCENTI. MDCXVIII

edited by Licia Mari, (Gaude Barbara Beata, 2: Music of the Basilica of S. Barbara in Mantua)

LIM, 2016. pp. xxiv + 124 ISBN: 9788870967449 €25

Surprising and useful, this is a modern edition of 32 motets in score, from a 1618 Venetian print in part books, for the court of Mantua, dedicated to Scipione Gonzaga, son of Ferrante Gonzaga (brother of Mons. Francesco Gonzaga, who was still bishop). The collector was the composer and bass singer Federico Malgarini (among the highest paid in S. Barbara, and Rector of S. Salvatore, a church later demolished for the creation of the Jewish ghetto in 1611), and the other composers represented were also active at the Basilica. In Mantua the doctrines of the Council of Trent were followed, but with some independence in style and liturgy. The motets are generally quite short, and the contents include settings from Psalms (6, 8, 84, 98, 113, 137), Song of Songs (2, 4, 5), Old and New Testaments, and liturgical texts.

These composers wrote or sang secular music, too, and their motets are light, often florid, rhythmically interesting and delightful. They were either singers (Cardi, Sacchi, Grandi, Sancì and Rasi) or players, organists or musicians who worked in theatres and for the imperial court in Vienna. The contents are as follows [title, composer,

voices]:

For one voice:

1. *Apparuerunt Apostolis*, Francesco Dognazzi [S]
2. *O Domine Iesu Christe*, Giovanni Battista Sacchi [S]
3. *Audite caeli*, Giulio Cardi [S]
4. *Amo Christum*, Lorenzo Sances (Sanci) [A]
5. *Domine secundum actum meum*, Alessandro Ghivizzani [T]
6. *Cantate Domino*, Federico Malgarini [B]
7. *Quam pulchra es*, Federico Malgarini [B]

For two voices:

8. *Tota pulchra*, Giulio Cardi [SS]
9. *Nigra sum*, Francesco Dognazzi [CT]
10. *Sancta et immaculata virginitas*, Lorenzo Sances [AT]
11. *Benedictus Deus*, Simpliciano Mazzucchi [SS]
12. *Quasi cedrus exaltata sum*, Ottavio Bargnani [ST]
13. *O Maria*, Giulio Cardi [SB]
14. *O Crux benedicta*, Giovanni Battista Rubini [SS]
15. *Laudate pueri*, Federico Malgarini [SB]
16. *Beata es, Virgo Maria*, Giovanni Battista Sacchi [SB]
17. *Vulnerasti cor meum*, Francesco Rasi [SS]
18. *Audi Domina*, Alessandro Ghivizzani [SB]
19. *Adoramus te, Christe*, Pandolfo Grandi [SS]

For three voices:

20. *Domine, ne in furore tuo*, Ottavio Bargnani [SAT]
21. *Aperi oculos tuos*, Anselmo Rossi [SAB]
22. *Laetentur caeli*, Alessandro Ghivizzani [SAB]
23. *Confitebor tibi, Domine*, Simpliciano Mazzucchi [SS T]
24. *O sacrum convivium*, Pandolfo Grandi [SSB]
25. *Anima mea liquefacta est*, Giulio Cardi [SSB]
26. *Cernite mortales*, Orazio Rubini [SAB]
27. *Beatus vir*, Francesco Dognazzi [SST]
28. *Ego dormio*, Simpliciano Mazzucchi [SSB]

For four voices (all SATB):

29. *Domine, Dominus noster*, Ottavio Bargnani
30. *Puer qui natus est*, Francesco Dognazzi
31. *Audi Domine*, Amante Franzoni
32. *Quam dilecta tabernacula tua*, Simpliciano Mazzucchi

It is unfortunate that the Introduction is only in Italian, and that no full pages from the part books are included for comparison with the transcription, which I have to assume is faithful. In the Critical Apparatus there are 15 problematic details shown in facsimile, which are enough to suggest that there may be other solutions for the number

of notes or rhythm of some ornamental passages (such as groups of three or five notes, or ties that weren't respected by the editor as essential for the rhythm or underlay).

Malgorini's collection is remarkable for the number of continuo figures it gives, many of which challenge interpretation. I wonder whether they were decided by Malgorini or perhaps written in by various organists in the manuscripts he used. Maria Licitis adds a few more in parentheses, but she doesn't offer help in the difficult cases, and confirms some pretty obvious ones. In one case a superfluous editorial (a natural) under a bass note *e*, meant to refer to a *g* natural 3rd above that note (and who would play a *g* sharp in the vicinity of five *e* flats?), will be mistaken for an editorial alteration of that bass note to *e* natural. Licitis does not remove the ambiguity by repeating the flat sign. Upon reflection (i.e., is there any reason to change a brief *e* flat to *e* natural, or, indeed, to change the even shorter one in the voice as she suggests?) I decided she was referring to the 3rd above *e* flat. So I must remind performers to question all editorial interventions as well as one's own.

More information or more facsimile examples in the Critical Apparatus would have been useful, too. Another problem may be the existence of wrong notes or missing accidentals in the print itself, unsuspected by the editor. Prints in movable type contain a high number of errors. There are two notes in *Tota pulchra es* which I do not think are correct, because *e*, instead of the continuo's *f* in bar 4 and also instead of its first *c* in bar 5, would not only produce good 6th chords, making sense harmonically and contrapuntally, but even appropriately for the text (*et macula non est in te* – 'There is no blemish in you'). Indeed the third and fourth repeats of "macula non" immediately following in bars 5 and 6 are set over four figured 6s in a row.

Since this music is so good, let me make a few suggestions for continuo players using it: 1) A string of numbers may not refer to chords, as we are apt to think. These single intervals may be a guide to a melodic line for the organ. The bass lines contain passages typical of keyboard toccatas, over which the right hand might only play a sequence of short motives; 2) A strange figure, such as a 2, between two chords on the same bass note may also be melodic, a way to pass from a major 3rd over the first to a minor 3rd over the second, by inserting a neighbouring note in between; 3) On almost every perfect cadence we find the conventional # 4 #, which stands for #3-4 4-3#, or simply figured # 4 -#. This edition never aligns the final sharp correctly, over

the last quarter of the long dominant bass note, unless the vocal notes above clearly show the syncopation, which is usually demanded in the accompaniment anyway. Other misleading original figures could have been clarified, but every editor has to draw a line somewhere, and I'd agree here that we are lucky to have so many figures to consider, even where they are inconsistent. Players have to vet both those of Malgorini and of Licitis, using a fair amount of creative musicianship as well.

Singers will enjoy these motets, technically easy, with plenty to do in not many bars (averaging about 36 bars per motet). Basses, however, be prepared for Malgorini's two octave range, from D to *e* flat! Everyone will enjoy encountering the other lesser known composers.

Barbara Sachs

RECORDINGS

14th century

LLIBRE VERMELL DE MONTSERRAT

La Capella Reial de Catalunya, Hespèrion XXI, Jordi Savall

71:46, DVD 73:45

AliaVox AVSA9919

Jordi Savall's musical forces and the music of the Llibre Vermell seem like a marriage made in heaven, and indeed his 1979 recording of this music with Hesperion XX was a ground-breaking and highly influential contribution to our understanding of the performance possibilities for this repertoire. There was an improvisatory dimension in the EMI Reflexe recording (CDM 763071 2) which was something quite new in the early music revival, and a genuine understanding of the original context of the music which made these recordings unforgettable. Touchingly Savall is revisiting the material as a homage to his late wife, Montserrat Figueras, who featured prominently in the 1979 recording and whose name of course invokes the monastery of Montserrat where the Libre Vermell survived. This recording of the material is of a live performance which takes the form of a continuous sequence of the songs, linked by short instrumental meditations built upon the musical material we have just heard. This is a winning formula, which allows the largely cyclical material to unfold to maximum effect, and with musicians of the standard of Savall and his players, truly

exquisite improvisations can be relied upon. Hesperion XXI are playing a galaxy of wind, stringed and percussion instruments, and if some people might feel this simple, almost folk music has been rather heavily 'orchestrated' by Savall, the effects are generally fascinating, although I did feel that the inclusion of the ravishing sounds of duduk and kanun may have played into Savall's philosophy of a pan-Mediterranean sound rather than having any genuine authenticity. There are problems relating to the live recording, too, some of which are unavoidable, but others of which could have been dealt with. In listening to the CD, I was very aware of intrusive shufflings and clunkings during the instrumental improvisations, and it emerged on watching the DVD that these episodes provided cover for the singers to rearrange themselves on their creaky wooden staging. However, on some occasions the distractions are provided by carelessly noisy page-turning and unnecessary movements, a surprising lapse from musicians who must be used to studio recording etiquette. These were less distracting in the DVD, where at least we could see the source of the noises, although the DVD had its own visual distractions – singers who folded their black covered music over, ruining the visual effect, while the splendidly bearded Pedro Esteban distractingly flapped a single sheet of music in one hand while playing percussion with the other. Stage management is important in concerts, particularly if you are filming them! The sound was being recorded on two centrally placed microphones, capturing the lavish acoustic of Santa Maria del Pi in Barcelona, but making some musicians sound rather distant and sometimes slightly out of touch. So what has Savall learned about this music in the intervening 38 years? Maybe that isn't the point – he is revisiting much-loved material, and the fact that his once so radical approach now seems rather mainstream is due almost entirely to his remarkable career. And if the ravishing *Mariam matrem virginem* misses the idiosyncratic and exquisite voice of Montserrat Figueras at her very best, maybe that makes its own point. It hardly needs said that the overall standard of this lavish *Alia vox* package is superb in every respect, packed with scholarly information with bibliography and pictures, and printed to the very highest standards. A bonus track featuring a Catalan song, which the musicians performed as a concert encore, rounds the programme off to perfection.

D. James Ross

DE GRUDENCZ: FIFTEENTH-CENTURY MUSIC FROM CENTRAL EUROPE

La Morra, Corina Marti & Michael Gondko

64:54

Glossa GCD922515

The rediscovery of an entirely obscure 15th-century composer of the greatest merit is a rare event, but this is undoubtedly what eastern European musicology has achieved in the unearthing of the music of the Pomeranian composer Petrus Wilhelm de Grudenz. A contemporary of Du Fay and associated now with some forty composition, on the evidence of the music recorded here, Grudenz's is a talent to be reckoned with and one which in the fullness of time may prove to deserve the same elevated status as the likes of Du Fay, Binchois and Ockeghem. Belonging very much to the mainstream of 15th-century polyphony, Grudenz seems nonetheless to demonstrate certain individual compositional traits such as a penchant for catchy syncopations and occasionally unconventional harmonic progressions which may be an individual or a regional inflexion. In bringing us a cross-section of Grudenz's music, La Morra, working under the auspices of the Schola Cantrum Basiliensis, have set it in a context of other eastern European music of the period by other unknowns such as Nicolaus de Radom and Othmarus Opilonis de Jawor, while at the same time pointing out that the Eastern European convention at this time of encrypting the composer's name or leaving it out altogether means that the anonymous works on the CD may also be by Grudenz, or may conceal further composers of considerable merit. The performances by the voices and instruments of La Morra are elegantly understated but beautifully poised, allowing this wonderfully crafted music to speak for itself. As Howard Weiner's excellent programme note points out, perhaps the true value of this unexpected discovery is to challenge our perception of musical development as relying on 'centres of excellence' with diminishing peripheries, as opposed to a model encompassing a widely disseminated language with local inflexions and local practitioners with something valuable to add.

D. James Ross

JEAN HANELLE: CYPRIOT VESPERS
Graindelavoix, Björn Schmelzer
76:06
Glossa GCD P32112

I recently struggled to enjoy these performers' account of Machaut's *Messe de Notre Dame*, but I thought they might be back on more fruitful territory here with a speculative liturgical reconstruction of Cypriot Vespers of the 15th century featuring the music of Jean Hanelle, the Flemish composer now credited with the entire contents of Turin manuscript J:II:9. Framed as a service in Cyprus where Hanelle spent most of his creative life, the CD juxtaposes traditional Maronite and Greek- and Arabo-Byzantine chant with Hanelle's polyphony. I tried to just let this *mélange* wash over me, but I found musicological alarms going off left, right and centre. Why do some of Hanelle's motets (such as 9. *O Clavis David*) deserve relatively straight if quirky polyphonic performance while others (such as 8. *O Radix Jesse*) are subjected to an amorphous, floaty rendition which all but destroys all concept of the rhythms and overall structure? Even assuming that 15th-century incomers to Cyprus applied the same performance conventions to their music as present-day 'traditional' singers do (and when you think about it that is quite a conceptual leap), why is there such variation of approach within the way Graindelavoix present this repertoire? And remember the bad old days when the 'living' Solemnes school of plainchant singing dictated the way everybody sang historic chant? This is a CD which is enjoyable in parts, ironically in my opinion at the two extremes of pretty conventional polyphonic singing and 'traditionally' presented eastern chants, where the Byzantine chanter Adrian Sirbu has clearly provided useful advice, but I found the cross-over attempts unconvincing and poorly justified in the notes (another of these pesky mock interviews!). It is impressive to find Björn Schmelzer continuing to plough his distinctive furrow, questioning many of our fundamental assumptions about the performance of early choral repertoire, and his CDs continue to provide food for thought as well as continuing to attract the attention of a loyal following. And perhaps my growing disconnect with them is more a sign of my advancing age and hardening attitudes than his increasing self-indulgence. But I hope not.

D. James Ross

.....

JOSQUIN: MASSES *DI DADI*, *UNE MOUSSE DE BISCAYE*
The Tallis Scholars, Peter Phillips
71:13
Gimell CDGIM 048

Another winner! This latest Josquin offering from the Tallis Scholars brings together two of the early masses. The opening *Missa Di Dadi* is particularly interesting, both for its use of gaming symbols in the notation of the tenor cantus firmus (though, fascinatingly, these disappear after the 'Pleni sunt caeli', possibly reflecting the concomitant Elevation of the Host) and for its echoes of the late, great *Missa Pange Lingua* – for example, at the end of the Gloria, with its typically Josquinian close-wrought driving sequential *ostinati*.

The *Missa 'Une mousse de Biscaye'* (*mousse* being not culinary, but derived from the Castilian 'Moza' for girl) is more loosely structured, but no less musically satisfying.

Performances are, as usual, meticulously crafted. Tempi are relatively relaxed, allowing the music's textural complexities full breathing space. Tuning, ensemble and overall shaping are as good as it gets.

The accompanying notes are models of scholarly precision; a generous bonus is the inclusion of the complete score of the *Missa Di Dadi* as a PDF download, ideal for following and revelling in Josquin's compositional genius.

Highly recommended!

Alastair Harper

.....

ADIEU M'AMOUR : MUSIC FROM THE TIME OF
AGINCOURT
Amici Voices, Terence Charlston
59:51
Amici Sounds ASO 1415

This CD is the musical equivalent of the growing fashion for self-publishing in the book world – a minimally packaged account of what looks like a concert programme, committed to CD primarily for sale at concerts and enabled by financial support, in this case from Agincourt 600. What it contains are pleasantly stylish performances of mainly mainstream sacred and secular choral music from the 15th century as well as contemporary music for keyboard performed on a reconstruction of the earliest surviving harpsichord in the world (c. 1480). The by necessity terse programme notes make at least one rather sweeping claim for the programme, that it 'forms

an unusual and unique response in words and music to this pivotal and controversial historical event' when, in fact, most of the repertoire has absolutely nothing to do with Agincourt. This sounds more like a statement which survived from a grant application than anything of relevance to the actual CD. Having said that, the performances of the albeit very familiar choral music are all engaging and accomplished, and the music for keyboard performed on the reconstructed upright harpsichord is intriguing. I'm not sure that it adds anything to our understanding of the music of this period, but it would serve as an authentic and inexpensive general introduction to those coming afresh to the music of the time of Agincourt.

D. James Ross

16th century

BYRD: PESCODD TIME

Bertrand Cuillier *harpsichord & virginal*

58:58

Alpha 319

This remains one of the finest recordings of keyboard music by Byrd – and his contemporaries – released during the twenty-first century. I owned its first issue from 2005, purchased at a wonderful shop in Carlisle called Bookcase: classical CDs + antiquarian books = perfection. So it was appropriate to have bought there a disc reflective of the shop, which is still trading. The upheaval of a removal from northern Scotland to eastern England meant that M. Cuillier's disc left my possession, but I am delighted, not only to own it again, but to be reviewing it for the final hurrah of this ornament among early music periodicals.

Besides the clean playing, sensitive choice of instrument for each piece, and judicious tempi, another of the fine features of this recording is the excellent selection of repertoire. Weightier pieces alternate with lighter ones, so that after the initial *Fantasia* in d, with its echoes of the *Salve Regina* chant, M. Cuillier moves to *The queen's alman* before involving Bull, the first of the two composers other than Byrd who are each allowed two pieces, and his magnificent *In nomine* MB9 which manages to be both experimental and retrospective. Given a disc of such high quality it is perhaps invidious to select one piece as a highlight, but Byrd's sublime *Pavan and Galliard* BK16/T 511 would be my lone "desert island" choice from the recording – the aching delicacy of the first strain in the

pavan and the ageless theme opening the galliard enhance this or any other repertory. The three catchy *French Corantos* lead us to the monumental solemnity of the *Dolorosa Pavan and Galliard* by Philips, like Bull a pupil of Byrd. Both of the next two pieces, the *Ground* BK9/T 474 and the title track, encapsulate the disc within their own bounds, beginning soberly then accelerating into activity, the latter exhibiting even more variety in alternating animated and calm passages before a dignified close. Like the BK16/T 511 pairing, *Lady Montecagle's Pavan* is one of Byrd's less noticed pieces in the genre, but illustrates that all of Byrd's pavans possess their own unique sound-worlds and individual moments, this one being the third strain, a sudden heart-stopping theme resembling a folksong which nonetheless evolves naturally from what has gone before. Further clever programming brings the *Fantasia* BK62/T 456 based on a theme subsequently used in one of his fantasias by Philips. M. Cuillier is at his best here, bringing out all the melodic, harmonic and temporal variety in Byrd's virtuosic writing wherein, towards the conclusion, ideas positively gush forth and almost fall over one another. Then, after the boisterousness of *The King's Hunt* by John Bull – perhaps the Boris Johnson of the English virginalists – the disc closes with the exquisite *Pavan* BK23a/T 512 in B flat, bringing this classic recording to a calm, dignified, profound and fulfilling close.

To confirm that I have retained the reviewer's critical faculties, I would observe that the booklet could be more informative about the individual pieces. And it is a shame not to have the *Galliard* BK23b/T 512 – perhaps M. Cuillier found in the *Pavan* his ideal conclusion... but wait – there is an uncredited encore! Right at the end, after a prolonged pause, he adds an anonymous *Toy* which is no 268 in the second printed volume of the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book... so no need for a galliard!

Richard Turbett

GIRALAMO CAVAZZONI: COMPLETE ORGAN WORKS

146:38 (2 CDs in a single jewel case)

Tactus TC 510391

This complete account of the organ works of Cavazzoni features the magnificent 1565 organ 'in Cornu Epistolae' by Graziadio Antegnati in the Basilica palatina di Santa Barbara in Mantua expertly played by Ivana Valotti. The instrument is perfect in period for Cavazzoni's music, but also in character and variety of

stops. The mechanism is understandably audible but almost never to the detriment of the music, and the clarity of the various stops attests to diligent upkeep over the centuries. I have been mainly aware of Cavazzoni's keyboard music as providing useful instrumental interludes in programmes of choral music by composers contemporary with the Gabriellis, but hearing this comprehensive collection of a bewildering variety of musical forms so authoritatively played on this magnificent Renaissance instrument made me aware that Cavazzoni's music stands up very well in its own right. More harmonically adventurous than many of the organ music composers in the second half of the sixteenth century, Cavazzoni displays a ready imagination well beyond the technically showy but ultimately rather conservative music of his contemporaries. Where needed plainchant incipits and 'links' are provided by Gianluca Ferrabini, and I felt just occasionally that it might have been worth engaging a small capella for the tutti chant sections. These are CDs to dip into at random to enjoy the wonderful aural palette of the Antegnati organ, the sensitive playing of Ms. Valotti and Cavazzoni's creative response to a delightful range of musical forms.

D. James Ross

PHILIPPE VERDELLOT / SYLVESTRO GANASSI:

MADRIGALI DIMINUITI

Douce Mémoire, Denis Raisin Dadre

67:20

Ricercar RIC371

In my apprenticeship as a recorder player, I invested in a copy of Ganassi's manual on ornamentation, Fontegara, and still remember my astonishment at the diversity and freedom of decorations he suggested including trills on a third and fourth, scalic divisions of startling variety and sheer flights of fancy. I felt then and feel now that early musicians have chosen very selectively from this and other manuals to create an ornamentation orthodoxy, which simply didn't exist in the 16th century. Fascinating then to have this CD presenting vocal accounts by Clara Coutouly of madrigals by Verdelot followed by diminutions after Ganassi, played on the recorder by Denis Raisin Dadre. Sympathetically accompanied by lute, harp and spinet/clavicytherium Coutouly gives markedly straight-laced but beautiful accounts of Verdelot's imaginative music, contrasting effectively with Dadre's technical fireworks. In a couple of the madrigals both soloists perform simultaneously, Coutouly singing 'straight' and Dadre

ornamenting the same line, an approach which sounds as if it may result in chaos but which works surprisingly well. I was disappointed to hear no exotic trills at any point, suggesting a slightly conservative approach even today by the present performers – I can remember as a student raising a few eyebrows at concerts with unorthodox recorder trills 'alla Ganassi', and I made sure to have a page reference at hand for any critics. Notwithstanding this, the present performances are highly engaging and sound very natural and believable.

D. James Ross

L'ARTE DEL MADRIGALE

Voces Suaves

62:36

Ambronay AMY308

Agostini, Gesualdo, Luzzaschi, Monteverdi, de Wert

This comprehensive tour of the Italian madrigal world includes the composers listed in the title as well as several more, including a Gonzaga Duke! The group are well named as they have a delightfully suave tone and blend which are very easy on the ear, and provide delicate accounts of the madrigals. Just occasionally I felt that we lost some of the detail in the more rapidly interactive episodes, but these are performances which are never less than sensitive and expressive, and in their presentation of both familiar and unfamiliar material they provide a very broad introduction to the development of this distinctive and important musical form. In the highly decorated lines of a Luzzaschi madrigal the detail of the articulation is definitely sacrificed for the overall sense of line, but the ensemble has an uncanny ability to spectacularly 'warm up' the tone for appropriate passages while the sound of the full eight-voice texture, as in Gastoldi's *Cantiam lieti*, is magnificent.

D. James Ross

MATER ORA FILIUM – MUSIC FOR EPIPHANY

Choir of Clare College, Cambridge, Graham Ross

72:44

harmonia mundi HMU 907653

Music by Byrd, Clemens, Lassus, Mouton, Palestrina, Sheppard, etc.

This eclectic collection of choral music for Epiphany ranges from the director's own arrangement of traditional material through the music of English and Continental composers to 20th-century

masters. Focusing on the Renaissance music, we have full-blooded accounts of Lassus' eight-part *Omnes de Saba* and Sheppard's six-part *Reges Tharsis*, both beautifully nuanced. Byrd's four-part *Ecce advenit dominator Dominus* and Palestrina's *Tribus miraculis* both exploit the choir's more lyrical side, while Clemens non Papa's *Magi veniunt ab oriente* and Mouton's *Nesciens mater* show this versatile choir's approach to Franco-Flemish polyphony. The performances of what boils down to some twenty minutes of early music are all accomplished, with neat clarity and impeccable intonation throughout. Their selection of more modern music is also discerning, leaving as the only slightly disappointing aspect Graham Ross's own rather hackneyed 'cathedrally' arrangements of tradition melodies. Aimed at the American market, this CD provides a very pleasing overview of the celebration of Epiphany in a modern College Chapel with all the many virtues of an accomplished College Choir fully on display.

D. James Ross

Renaissance

JACQUES LE POLONOIS: PIÈCES DE LUTH

Paul Kieffer

67:13

Ævitas Æ-12157

Jacques le Polonois (c. 1545-55 - c. 1605), otherwise known as Jakub Polak or Jacob Reys, was born in Poland, and moved to Paris probably in 1574, where he became one of the most outstanding lutenists of his generation. According to Henri Sauval in his *Histoire... de Paris*, Jacob Reys attached no importance to money and drank heavily, which apparently helped him play. Interestingly, Sauval describes Jacob's playing technique: "he hardly raised his fingers and seemed to have them glued to the lute." I take this to mean that Jacob probably played with a thumb-outside technique, as does Paul Kieffer for this recording. A modern edition of Jacob's music is available: *Jakub Polak (Jacob Polonois), Utwory Zebrane Oeuvres Collected Works*, ed. Piotr Pozniak (Kraków: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1993). His music is distinctly French in character, and foreshadows the development of lute music in France in the 17th century, in particular the style *brisé*.

The CD gets off to a good start with Prelude Polonois (Pozniak XI) from Lord Herbert of Cherbury's manuscript. Kieffer plays it twice, adding a few graces

here and there, and playing with a delicate touch, which I find subtly expressive. The tonality of Gall[iard] Polonois (track 2) reminds me of the lute music of Robert Ballard (c. 1572-5 – after 1650). I like Kieffer's interpretation, with added graces and his own tasteful divisions for repeats. The similarity with Ballard becomes a reality in track 3, the first half of which is a Courante by Ballard, and the second half by Jacob. In Volte (track 4) Jacob creates contrasts of timbre with a wide range of melodic notes – down to the 6th course in bar 24, and then up to the 8th fret of the 1st course a couple of bars later. In bar 40 he switches octaves after a passage of descending thirds, to have the unexpected bright sound of a high b' natural. The piece ends with a hemiola, a device Jacob often uses. His setting of *Susanne un Jour* (not based on the familiar setting by Lassus) is a nice piece of polyphony, with a section where a slow-moving melody is accompanied by flowing quavers below. One pleasing aspect of Kieffer's playing is not to spread or roll chords excessively. He uses them here and there for a special effect, e.g. in bars 21-4 of a prelude (track 6) for some chords high up the neck, but generally he plucks notes neatly together, which enables polyphonic lines to come through clearly. Puzzlingly he makes what I think are unnecessary changes in the *Fantasia* (track 8) from 21v of Besard's *Thesaurus Harmonicus* (1603), simplifying fast notes at cadences. Jacob's music is more akin to 17th-century French lute music as far as his choice of flat keys is concerned. Prelude Jacob (track 9) is flat enough in A flat major, but *Fantasia Jacob* (track 10) is in the extraordinary key of A flat minor – the transcription has a key signature of seven flats. In contrast to the many preludes and fantasies, there is a lively *Sarabande*, played with panache, and which literally gave my spine a tingle. According to the play list, 18 of the 28 tracks are premiere recordings. Kieffer plays an 8-course lute by Grant Tomlinson, strung in gut, and with the lowest two courses retuned where necessary.

Stewart McCoy

16th century

MAZZONE: IL PRIMO LIBRO DELLE CANZONI

A QUATTRO VOCI

Ensemble le Vaghe Ninfe, Natalie Bonello, Maria Antonietta Cancellaro

64:06

Brilliant Classics 95416

This CD is the result of a very thorough concert engagement with the music of Mazzone, and the performers provide impassioned accounts of the four-part Canzoni in a variety of vocal and instrumental guises. These range from four unaccompanied voices, which employ a little more vibrato than would be ideal, and voices with a variety of instruments including a (perhaps slightly anachronistic?) serpent, to entirely instrumental performances featuring renaissance flutes and organ. These latter interpretations are helpfully preceded by spoken accounts of the missing texts, and tastefully embellished. Marc' Antonio Mazzone's name was known to me, but this account of his four-voice Canzoni gives a clear picture of where he stands in the world of late-Renaissance Italian music. There are a couple of issues with the recording, such as the rather artificial-sounding overall acoustic and the rather startling, amplified sound of the reader's voice. I have reviewed so many studio recorded accounts of concert performances involving readers where this same balance problem arises that I can only conclude that readers need to be present and be recorded in the same acoustic and in the same way as the music.

D. James Ross

17th century

GIOVANNI GIROLAMO KAPSBERGER:

INTAVOLATURA

Stefano Maiorana *chitarrone*

62:45

Fra Bernado FB 1603777

In this interesting CD, Stefano Maiorana shows the wealth and diversity of Kapsberger's music for solo chitarrone. Four collections of Kapsberger's music were published between 1604 and 1640; Book 2 is lost, and the only surviving copy of Book 3 has pages missing, but there is plenty for us to enjoy.

The CD begins with Preludio Primo and Preludio Secondo from Book 4, in character reminiscent of the old early 16th-century *recercari*, which explore musical ideas in an unstructured way. Maiorana has a very free interpretation of the quavers to try to give some sort of shape to what on paper can seem an aimless succession of random notes. Most impressive is his clarity and precision when playing fast notes slurred together, which is a feature of so much music for the chitarrone, particularly Kapsberger's.

In another pair of Preludes – nos 10 and 9 from Book 4 – Maiorana sometimes races on with quavers in an effort to make the music expressive. This can be useful to make the music increase in intensity, but occasionally I would prefer to savour these comparatively slow notes a little more, and leave the fireworks for the semiquavers. Towards the end of Preludio 9 there is a short sequence of quavers each preceded by exciting semiquaver triplets. They are played as *campanellas* across the strings, so the notes can ring on to produce a curiously discordant effect. Many of Kapsberger's chords consist of six or even seven notes, and are marked with two dots separated by a line – diagonal in Books 1 and 3, and more horizontal in Book 4 – similar to % or ÷, requiring them to be arpeggiated. At the end of Preludio 9 he adds some extra notes of his own based on didactic material from Book 3.

Track 2 is an extraordinary piece from Book 3, a florid intabulation – “*Passeggiato*” – of Gesualdo's “*Com' esser può*” from his *Primo Libro* (1616). The original score a5 can be seen on the IMSLP website. Kapsberger first creates a figured bass line derived from the lowest notes of the lowest two voices of the madrigal, often transposed down an octave or two. Beneath this is the tablature for the chitarrone. There are rolled chords with the % sign, *campanellas*, very fast slurred notes, slurred parallel sixths, deep diapasons, and ending with a florid perfect cadence decorated with *campanellas* at the eighth fret. Maiorana gets his hands round it all with suitable panache.

Maiorana's interpretation of the well-known Toccata seconda Arpeggiata in Book 1 is thoughtfully phrased. Occasionally he changes the arpeggio pattern so that the lowest note is played only once per bar, and in bar 15 I think he waits a little too long on the highest note, losing the flow.

The dances offer a welcome contrast to all the free-wheeling preludes and toccatas. The Gagliarda from Book 3 is preceded by Maiorana's own stylish prelude made up from material elsewhere in the book. The dance goes with a swing, but I wonder if he should have chosen a slower tempo, because he fails to keep up the momentum in the second Partita (variation) where the music races along in quavers. Also from Book 3 are two lively Correntes, each followed by an exciting variation consisting of continuous quavers in style *brisé*.

Kapsberger's inventiveness can be seen in the Passacaglia from Book 4, where contrasting variations follow each other over an oft-repeated hypnotic bass. Most entertaining is the Battaglia (nearly nine minutes long) from Book 4.

True, there are occasional successions of tonic chords with different inversions as one would find in other battle pieces of the time, but Kapsberger goes much further, creating a medley of tunes with different time signatures. There are effects typical of Kapsberger, like the sudden appearance of a strangely chromatic harmonic sequence, and Maiorana adds nice touches of his own: a curious tambour effect, and a great crash of diapasons at the end. It would bring the house down.

Stewart McCoy

SISTO REINA: ARMONIA ECCLESIASTICA,
OPERA QUINTA, 1653

Concentus Vocum, Michelangelo Gabrielli

74:55

Tactus TC 621801

Sisto is a composer new to me. He seems to have been one of many ordained composers of church music who moved throughout Italy during the 17th century, visiting important centres such as Modena and Bologna, but also smaller musical establishments. Vital in the dissemination of musical ideas, such composers inhabited the grey area between providing rather mundanely adequate liturgical music and making a genuinely original contribution to musical history. Sisto's music seems better than mundanely adequate, but not much. The performances by Concentus Vocum are variable. The accounts by the full choir struggle with some of the more fleet figures in the writing, while unanimity of attack and intonation are also a problem. In the manner of singers who are 'only just hanging in there', everything is unrelentingly loud and punchy which gets a bit wearing. Some of the motets are sung by solo voices, which addresses the unanimity issues and solves many but not all of the accuracy problems. This CD provides a useful profile of Reina Sisto, but much of the singing is just a little uncomfortable to listen to and I found the limited interest in Sisto's music insufficient to hold my attention.

D. James Ross

SANCES: CAPRICCI POETICI, 1649

Irene Morelli, Beatrice Mercuri *mezzosoprani*, Diego Cantalupi *archlute*, Giuseppe Schinaia *harpsichord*

56:20

Tactus TC 601903

Active at the imperial Hapsburg court in Vienna, Sances wrote a vast body of church music, little of which is performed today. His secular music has enjoyed little more lasting success, and these secular works – arias, cantatas and canzonettas from the first part of his *Capricci Poetici* published in Venice in 1649 – soon fell from favour, as did the by then rather passé dramatic madrigals which made up part two. Indeed Sances' deputy Schmelzer is on record as saying that he had to restrict his own more cutting-edge output so as not to offend 'old Sances'. So poor Sances is something of a victim of changing taste, although of course his compatriot, Salieri, was still holding sway in Vienna fully a century later. Having said that, these rather lacklustre accounts of secular songs in which both singers are inclined to undercut notes and to take a rather cavalier approach to intonation generally will be unlikely to win Sances any more friends. It is hard to gauge how much of the blame for these rather grimly dull performances accrues to the performers or the composer, but this CD has a routine feel to it which does the music few favours.

D. James Ross

SCHÜTZ: WEIHNACHTSHISTORIE

Claire Lefilliâtre S, Hans-Jörg Mammel T, Chœur de Chambre de Namur, La Fenice, Jean Tubéry

60:25

Christophorus CHR 77404

This is a re-issue of a recording made in 2003 and originally available on K617 but long discontinued. It is paired with Schein's *Mach dich auf*, an Advent motet, Weckmann's *Gegrüßet seiest Du, holdselige*, an illustrative dialogue between the Angel and Mary at the Annunciation, Schütz's *Magnificat* swv468 and *Hodie Christus* swv456. It is a Christmastide programme, with the *Weihnachtshistorie* at its heart.

The performance is brightly sung and adequately recorded. The choir of 16 with its hautes-contres is capable of providing the two *capellae* for Schütz's polychoral *Magnificat* alongside the *favoriti*, though they mostly sing as a 'choir' – more than one to a part. The Schein is delightful – a five-part OVPP instrumental *coro*, where two of the lines are vocalised by the soprano and tenor, alternates with a five-voice *capella* before combining as they exchange the text of Isaiah's prophecy "Arise, shine for thy light is come... for behold darkness shall cover the earth", and illuminates the German background of Schütz's writing. Weckmann's Annunciation dialogue between the angel

and the girl uses a pair of violins in close imitation to paint the overshadowing of the angel's wings – though I prefer the Ricercar performance for its cleaner, clearer singing.

Indeed, this is my major reservation: the singing feels slightly dated – rather gushing in places. And there are some curious touches: sometime in the *Weihnachts historie* a trombone is used as a basso continuo instrument. I am not sure that we would use a bass instrument in addition to the organ and theorbo these days, and the sustained foghorn sound feels particularly odd. Occasionally, I think they misjudge the tempo: the *intermedium* for the shepherds with recorders and fagotto needs to be neater if you take it that fast, but I like their version of the opening *Sinfonia* in the *Weihnachts historie*.

The liner-notes are sketchy, but the texts available in German (or Latin), English and French, and all the performers – singers and players – are named.

So I don't rave about this version, but if you would like the Schein – a vastly underrated composer – this may be the only place you'd find it. Whether you choose to buy this re-issue will depend largely I suspect on whether you like this style, or whether you already have enough performances – René Jacobs, Paul McCreech, Paul Hillier, Hans-Christoph Rademann among the more recent ones or Holger Eichorn of 1985 and the unsurpassed Andrew Parrott of 1988, still my personal favourite.

David Stancliffe

VEJVANOVSKY: FESTAL BAROQUE MUSIC FOR TRUMPETS AND STRINGS

Ars Antiqua Austria, Gunar Letzbor

73:01

Pan Classics PC10366

This CD does pretty much what it says on the tin. There are 17 tracks, some with and some without brass (up to four trumpets with trombone – which presumably plays the lowest of the written parts – and timps); the music ranges from under two minutes (the Sonata Scanti Spiritus) to over nine (a five movement "Serenada"), and the performances on this re-release (the original issue of the recording made in Italy was in 1997) are lively and well recorded. Such a pity that they are let down by a particularly poor booklet note translation; "Apart from the technique of concerting in the music of Vejvanovsky there are pulsations and accents deriving from dance style" was my particular favourite line...

Brian Clark

MOLIÈRE À L'OPÉRA

Stage music by Jean-Baptiste Lully

Les Paladins, Jérôme Correas

72:30

Glossa GCD923509

As one might expect, these 'bleeding chunks' are mainly by Lully (extracts from six comédie-ballets), though items from Charpentier's *Le Sicilien* and *Le Mariage forcé* are also included. I must say that the singers show great versatility in their ability to convey the essence of their several roles, though bass Virgile Ancely needs a little more weight in the lower register and, as usual for me, the soprano's vibrato can be disturbing. More disturbing, however, is the use of a questionably disposed chamber ensemble – 2 each of violins and violas with *basse de violon* – rather than Lully's famous orchestra with the three inner parts on assorted violas. I just feel that this rips the guts and/or the grandeur from most of the music: it just isn't the Lully I know and love and I doubt that he'd have thought much of it either. The booklet offers tri-lingual notes (Fre/Eng/Ger) but the sung French texts are translated into English only.

David Hansell

VULPIUS: CANTIONES SACRAE I

VOLUME 1: 6–7 voice motets

Capella Daleminzia, René Michael Röder

133:22 (2 CDs in a card wallet)

VOLUME 2: 9–13 voice motets

Capella Daleminzia, Vocalconsort Waldheim, Singschule Waldheim, René Michael Röder

67:30

You know how it is - you wait years for one Vulpius CD and then three come along at once! Part of the Capella Daleminzia's complete recording of Vulpius' *Cantiones Sacrae* I-III, these CDs suggest that in Vulpius we have a very prolific composer whose compositions are nonetheless worthy of attention. These are fine performances with passionate and musically pleasing singing ably supported by organ, and with cornets and sackbuts in one motet in the first volume. This is a splendid moment after so much music for voices and organ, but I felt that more varied instrumentation throughout the programme might have relieved the threatening onset of

'boxed-set-itis'! The second volume suffers less from this uniformity of sound with a wider range of instruments employed throughout the larger motets. Vulpius' music is pretty standard 17th-century fare – post-Gabrieli polychoral effects grafted to a post-Lassus germanic stock in the manner of Schein and Praetorius, but the fact that he can even be mentioned in the same breath as these latter master polyphonists is a testimony to his skills as a composer. His works seem to grow in status as they accumulate vocal lines in the second volume, and his huge 13-part *Multae filiae congregaverunt divitias* is given an epic Praetorius-style rendition by the augmented Daleminzia forces. In recording all of Vulpius' extant choral works, the performers clearly wish to restore him to his rightful place in the pantheon of prominent 17th-century church composers, and on the evidence of these CDs the mantle more than fits.

D. James Ross

Baroque

BABELL: CONCERTOS OP. 3 FOR VIOLINS

& SMALL FLUTE

Anna Stegmann, Ensemble Odysee

75:02

Pan Classics PC 10348

The six concerto recorded here appeared in an error-ridden Walsh print three years after the composer died. His (seemingly badly extrapolated) ripieno parts have been discarded for the purpose of the performances, as have odd instances of the violins doubling the bass part where this leads to some infelicity. The results are a joy to hear, with Anna Stegmann's small flutes (she plays no fewer than four different instruments) well matched by bright one-to-a-part strings in four of the works; in the fifth she is paired with fellow recorder player Yongcheon Shin in a concerto with two oboes and continuo (transposing the entire concerto up a minor third because it does not fit standard oboes strikes me as an extravagance; surely oboes d'more would have preserved the original pitch?), and in the sixth concerto they are matched by a pair of violins. The final work on the programme is a Sinfonia in A, whose last movement features a virtuosic harpsichord part (presumably for the composer himself, who will be known to most of our readers as the arranger of Handel arias and overtures for keyboard). As a recorder player myself, I very much enjoyed the way Stegmann crafts

each note and phrase beautifully; virtuosity without the eccentricity that can often accompany it... This was among the discs I listened to most often through December and January.

Brian Clark

BACH: CHRISTMAS ORATORIO

Dunedin Consort, John Butt

141:00 (2 CDs in hardback booklet)

Linn Records CKD499

John Butt's *Christmas Oratorio* with the Dunedins is splendid, from the crisp and perfectly tuned opening timpani strokes onward, and I hope it will sweep all before it as this Christmas 'must-have' for all EMR readers.

There are, of course, some things that I would do differently, but the vigour and balance of the ensemble, the quality of the instrumental playing, the perfectly judged tempi, the intelligent singers' splendid phrasing and breath control and the overall sense of line from all the performers combine to make this the best complete *Christmas Oratorio* I know.

In the glossy booklet, and more fully in the digital material on the Linn website, John Butt explains why he uses two four-voice *cori*: in a matter of twelve days, there is too much to prepare and sing for one group. Bach had a minimum of two four-voice groups at his disposal in Leipzig, so this performance uses the two, and for much of the chorus-work of Cantatas 1, 3 and 6 (those with a fuller scoring, including trumpets and drums), he adds four ripienists to the concerted sections at times. (For how this is done, listen to the opening chorus of Cantata 3, *Herrscher des Himmels*.) This is not the only or 'right' solution, as he is at pains to point out, but it is one way of sharing the load – and this would also be true of a modern concert performance when all six cantatas are performed in the same programme.

So what is novel in the Dunedin's recording is the make-up of the *cori*? The first group has many of Butt's regulars; Nicholas Mulroy and Matthew Brook are joined by the incomparable Clare Wilkinson, with Mary Bevan as the soprano. Bevan's duets with Brook are fine, but her style is more operatic than I would like, and even in the chorus work she still uses a good deal of vibrato and pushes on some of the notes. So the change when we move to Cantata 2 and the second quartet takes over is all the more striking. Just listen to the first chorale *Brich an, o schönes Morgenlicht* and notice the clarity of Joanne Lunn's very

first line, a purity of sound that is equally good in her arias and the important ariosos in Cantata 4: I doubt if you will ever hear a better *Flößt, mein Heiland* in that cantata. This is a world-class singer at her best.

She is partnered in that *coro* by Thomas Hobbs – just the right weight and agility for *Frohe Hirten* with Katy Bircher's lovely flute obbligato in Cantata 2 and the busy aria with the two violins *Ich will nur* in Cantata 4. Again, I cannot imagine a better performance, and this leaves Nicholas Mulroy to sing the more heroic numbers in 1, 3 and 6, like *Nun mögt ihr stolzen Feinde schrecken* in 6, that he does so well. I am less convinced by the mezzo Ciara Hendrick: I kept longing for the clarity and phrasing that Clare Wilkinson would bring to that ensemble – she would be such a good partner to Lunn and Hobbs, and I missed her in 5.i, *Ehre sei dir, Gott* which goes at a cracking pace, but perfectly in control with the tricky violin figuration in bar 57 perfectly in tune; but at least we have her in the wonderful performance of 3.viii *Schließe, mein Herze*, where she and Cecilia Bernardini cradle each others lines to perfection.

The bass Konstantin Wolff is new to me, and he does not quite have the warmth needed for the ariosos in 4.iii and 4.v, nor the clarity for the bass line in 2.xii. The bass line is always tricky in Bach: a voice that has enough depth and edge to make a good foundation for a *coro* and to sing the more rumbustious arias like 1.viii *Großer Herr* cannot always manage the more lyrical numbers like 5.v *Erleucht auch meine finstre Sinnen* convincingly. Matthew Brook can do both, and characterfully, but I am less convinced by Konstantin Wolff.

The singers in 1, 3 and 6, even without the ripienists, make a more robust sound, though Clare Wilkinson is always in danger of being shouted down by the higher pitched singers. Butt's attention to and feeling for instrumental balance and blend is so very fine, I just wish he would call his talented singers to order more. When I watched the Windsbacher Knabenchor rehearsing this summer, I was struck by the amount of time they spent in vocal training together each day, matching tone and balance between the parts. While the two types of *cori* are not directly parallel, they are both seeking clarity in Bach's complex music, whether in chorales or polyphonic and fugal writing. And there are some wobbles even in Joanne Lunn's otherwise impeccable line in 2.xii: are they ornaments – on weak notes? When John Butt directs Monteverdi madrigals, better control seems to be in place: what is different here?

There are one or two other minor queries. First about the bass line: does the absence of an independent fagotto part (only in Cantata 1 does a part survive) mean that a fagotto should not play in the remaining cantatas? While I realize that John Butt is following the surviving parts strictly, I missed it for example in 2.ix at the bottom of the oboe band, though I realize that Bach frequently seems not to have followed our convention of using the bassoon as the standard bass line for oboes. And should the violone play everywhere if it is always at 16' pitch? I found it more intrusive than I was expecting in some arias like 2.vi *Frohe Hirten*. Second, as always with John Butt, we have splendid information about the edition, the pitch and temperament, but nothing about the instruments. And third, why is so much booklet space given to the singers and all the operatic roles they have taken when no details at all are given about the splendid players, who are equal partners in this fine music-making, and a photograph on pp 54/55 which does not relate to this recording, showing a recorder and many more string players than took part.

None of this detracts essentially from what is a first rate and wonderfully musical performance. They deserve every plaudit they will get.

David Stancliffe

BACH: ERBARME DICH

Reinoud van Mechelen, A nocte temporis
69:56

Alpha Classics Alpha 252

This CD from A Nocte Temporis directed by Reinoud van Mechelen is built round a selection of arias from Bach cantatas for tenor, flute and continuo. The CD explores the tenor's role as the sinner overwhelmed by the vicissitudes of this world yet joyfully anticipating the life above; the flute is both the harbinger of death and the promise of release – as a bird from the snare of the fowler, as the Psalmist puts it. The notes by Gilles Cantagrel describe the arias as trios, which indeed they are, and the empathy between the performers is disclosed in chamber-music making of a high order. Interspersed with the arias and a couple of recitatives are some pieces for flute played on a Melzer copy of a 1750 Palanca flute; the cellist plays a copy of an Antonio Stradivarius by Gérard Sambot from 2000; but of special interest is the use of the André Silbermann organ of 1718, recently restored in 2015 by Quentin Blumenroeder, in Sainte Aurélie Church, Strasbourg, which is tuned at a=460 Hz.

The basic organ tone is of open principal ranks rather than the stopped flute of the small, portable box organs we are used to hearing in recent recordings, and to which players often have difficulty in tuning. Here, as in Alpha's recent recording of early Bach cantatas with Lionel Meunier and Vox Luminis (reviewed below), there is a new clarity and a more robust sonority even in such small-scale works given by using a more substantial instrument, an approach pioneered by Paul McCreech in the Bach recordings he made with more substantial organs in Saxony and his OVPP St Matthew Passion using the two Marcussen choir organs built together for Roskilde Cathedral in 2000.

The notes give no details of the organ's disposition – the restoration of 2015 has returned it to the Silbermann 1718 specification – but details can be found at <http://decouverte.orgue.free.fr/orgues/staureli.htm>. It would have been good to have inserted this reference into the notes since as well as being of interest in its own right, there is one novel piece of registration. On track 7, the aria in cantata 107 *Wenn auch gleich aus der Höllen* the left hand of the continuo with the cello is marked 'solo' and uses the Voix Humaine (and some mutation ranks?), while the right hand plays more principal-based chords (the Positif de Dos Prestant 4' an octave lower?). This certainly spices up the aria which is in essence a two-part invention depicting how Satan tries his best to overcome the soul with a novel and to me entirely plausible sound where the bass line and the tenor voice are properly equal.

In this kind of programme much will hinge on the vocal quality and interpretive skills of the singer. Reinoud Van Mechelen may not (yet) be a household name like other singers who have made recordings featuring themselves singing Bach, but I rate him highly. His voice is perfectly controlled and very neat, yet he is capable of expressive shading and a degree of emotional intelligence that is rare in singers who get so caught up in the technical challenges of Bach that they sometimes seem too dry and instrumental. But his words are always crystal clear, and the structure of the programme presents a theologically as well as an emotionally crafted structure.

In the new generation of Bach recordings that is emerging, our concerns will not only be with historically informed performance practice in terms of getting the right instruments playing at the right pitches: so much has been achieved here. The focus may now shift to finding the voices who have the emotional sensitivity as well as the vocal ability to match the instrumental sounds they sing with – and that includes the organs. We need to

know more about the Saxon and Thuringian instruments and the pitches at which they played and how complex keyboard transpositions worked with a relatively mean-tone temperament.

But this deceptively modest CD is certainly an eye-opener, and I will listen to it frequently as I try to absorb what it is drawing us towards.

David Stancliffe

SLEEPERS AWAKE! 'WACHET AUF': CANTATAS BY DIETERICH BUXTEHUDE & J. S. BACH BWV140

The Bach Players, Nicolette Moonen

73:22

Hyphen Press Music 010

+ Buxtehude: *Quemadmodum desiderat cervus*, Sonata in C BuxWV266; Erlebach: Sonata in F

As well as the iconic BWV 140, this CD has two cantatas by Buxtehude on the chorale *Wachet auf* (BuxWV 101 and 100), a Ciaccona aria for tenor, two violins and basso continuo (BuxWV 92) and a sonata for two violins, viola da gamba and basso continuo (BuxWV 266) and a remarkably free sonata for violino piccolo, viola da gamba and basso continuo by Phillip Heinrich Erlebach (1657-1714).

As always with Nicolette Moonen's Bach Players, there is splendid playing, especially from the strings. The sonatas – new to me – are captivating in their fluid and lyrical forms, and the playing – the tone so pure as to be almost of a glass harmonica quality, especially of the violino piccolo – clearly a wonderful instrument (by John Barrett after Stainer from 1725 and lent by the Royal Academy of Music) with a whole page of the interesting, informative and well balanced booklet devoted to it – means that I cannot imagine a finer performance of the violino piccolo obbligato in the duet BWV 140.ii *Wenn kömmt du, mein Heil?*

Moonen's comment on lightening the bass line in that aria and the absence of a 16' in the whole CD are fully justified by the variety and clarity, though by the time BWV140 was written (in 1731) Bach seems to have had a 16' violone at his disposal.

But the singers do not fare so well. The bass, Jonathan Gunthorpe, has a rather stodgy voice – perfectly correct, but rather unyielding; nor does he sound like a passionate lover in *Mein Freund ist mein*. The tenor, Samuel Boden, is excellent – neat, perfectly in tune and flexible: I can hear every word. More problematic are the upper parts. Here I am too often aware of that kind of singerly vibrato that so

many singers are encouraged to develop not being used as a means of ornamenting a particular note or phrase so much as a pretty universal part of the sound. Both soprano and alto can sing cleanly – in brisker passages both articulate well – but on longer notes that wobble creeps in. Do they think they sound uninteresting without? For instance, in the opening movement of Bach's *Wachet auf*, the soprano's long notes of the chorale are doubled by the (beautifully played) corno. The horn plays the notes straight but shapes the phrases intelligently. The voice seems less sure of where the phrases are going – is she sometimes short of breath? – and her intermittent vibrato means that voice and instrument are hardly ever perfectly together. When the playing style is so clean, the voices surely need to listen to and match the instruments? The OVPP quartets that impress me attend to this like a *Knabenchor* of those (largely) Lutheran Academies where SATB choirs of boys all between the ages of 9 and 18 make a perfectly blended sound.

As always with this group's performances, the music is interestingly and intelligently presented in a minimalist cardboard packet: good notes and an environmentally friendly package. Hearing the two Buxtehude cantatas on *Wachet auf* as a prelude to BWV140 was highly instructive, and made me appreciate over again just how varied and sensitively employed Bach's response to his texts is. In spite of my reservations about the singers, I can wholeheartedly recommend this disc.

David Stancliffe

L'APCALYPSE SELON JOHANN SEBASTIAN
BACH, DIETRICH BUXTEHUDE, CHRISTIAN
GEIST

Trondheim Barokk, Vox Nidrosiensis (Siri Thornhill & Ingeborg Dalheim, Ebba Rydh, Hugo Hymas, Håvard Stensvold SSATB), Sigiswald Kuijken

48:54

K617Chemins du Baroque CDB-003

Sigiswald Kuijken directed these performers, based notionally in Trondheim, for a festival concert in Sarrebourg in 2015. Like other takes on the great corpus of Bach cantatas by groups who are attempting to show us his works in a wider context, this pair is presented in the wider context of the musical expression of the final conflict between the forces of good and evil in the late 17th century. Buxtehude's cantata *Befiehl dem Engel, dass er komm* (BuxWV10) and Christian Geist's *Quis hostis*

in caelis provide the context for Bach's compositions for Michaelmas in 1724 and 1726.

The CD opens with the vigorous singing of the opening chorus of BWV 19, where the blend and clarity of the vocal ensemble is immediately apparent as there is no instrumental preamble. The trumpets are led by Jean-François Madeuf, so their ringing harmonics are true, and the clean playing of the 2.2.1.1 strings and the four-part oboe band provides an exciting and balanced accompaniment. What is immediately apparent is that in these performances the upper voices do not dominate the four-part singing, as so often happens when four professional singers are pressed into becoming a 'coro', with the soprano and tenor singing as if they were leads in a heroic opera.

The soprano has a young and sparkly voice, blending with the others when required, but never overpowering them, though sometimes I was left wishing for a more instrumental tone and less vibrato. A cleaner, more trumpet-like sound would have helped her in 130.i. She sings fluidly with the oboes d'amore and the fagotto in 19.ii, almost a four voice *intermedium*, but sometimes doesn't know where to breath in the long phrases. It is the tenor who has the gem of the arias in this cantata (19.iv). His singing is both crystal-clear and lyrical, and the long lines of this extended siciliano, over which the trumpet plays the serene chorale *Herzlich lieb hab ich dir*, is a model of sustained, apparently effortless phrasing. His singing in this aria has the balance, clarity and sheer musicality that so often eludes the members of a vocal quartet as they come to terms with the fact that they are equal members of an ensemble that includes both instrumentalists, as in the soprano aria, and other voices as in the soprano/tenor *accompagnato* in 130.iv. The tenor, too, has the charming gavotte of an aria with a traverso in 130.v, *Laß, o Fürst der Cherubinen*. This young English singer has not only a wonderful voice, but also the skill and imagination to use it in an intelligent and beguilingly modest manner.

To the bass falls the battle stuff, and he is at his best in the heroics of 130.iii, an aria in essentially 12/8, *Der alte Drache brennt vor Neid*, where the three trumpets and timpani form the accompanying band. This is great playing – but no wonder Bach got the string band to play the brass parts when the cantata was re-presented in the 1732: this must be about as demanding as it comes! The alto on has one recitative to sing on her own in the Bach, but you hear her rich voice well in the choruses and chorales.

The Buxtehude is more straightforward, with two

violins and basso continuo with four singers; the Geist is more colourful, and has its origin in a cantata to encourage the young king on his accession in 1672 in his struggle to establish his reign amid the forces ranged against him. Here five voices are joined by five-part strings, two trumpets and continuo. Like the Altbachische archiv, these works are valuable for the context they provide for Bach's cantatas as well as frequently being fine music in themselves. The notes help the listener understand the context of both these pieces from the often turbulent years of the 17th century.

This is a bright and exciting live performance that the recording captures well, even if some of the vowel sounds might have been smoothed out in a studio recording. I enjoyed it greatly and it is good to hear the splendid Geist, which I've never met before.

David Stancliffe

BACH: [CANTATAS FOR SOLO ALTO]

Iestyn Davies *countertenor*, Arcangelo, Jonathan Cohen

64:52

Hyperion CDA68111

BWV 52, 54, 82, 170 & 174 (sinfonia)

This CD contains three of the solo Bach cantatas that can be sung by the alto voice, interspersed with a couple of Sinfonias that the composer reworked from the Brandenburg concertos as substitutes for choral opening movements to cantatas 52 and 174. These are beautifully played, and with their horns provide a cheerful counterpart to the main meat of the CD where all three of the cantatas provide a fine showcase for the talents of the countertenor Iestyn Davies. As in previous partnerships between Iestyn Davies and Jonathan Cohen's Archangelo, this is a very polished CD.

Davies' voice is a far cry from the hooty altos of cathedral choirs in the mid twentieth century, but neither is it the voice for which Bach wrote: as the liner notes say, "alto for Bach meant a teenaged boy on the cusp of adolescence" and just occasionally you can hear that virile, sinewy sound in some of the iconic Harnoncourt/Leonhardt recordings from the 1970s, though when Leonhardt recorded 170 and 54 he used Paul Esswood, their regular countertenor soloist.

That apart, these are very compelling performances. The opening aria of 170, with its warm strings and oboe d'amore in 12/8, is a beautifully caressing lullaby. Much more difficult to bring off effectively is the central aria, where over a sighing bass of the unison upper strings,

the organist's two hands play a jagged canon on the two manuals of the organ – here a stopped flute in the right hand and a principal in the left. This is a really awkward aria to perform as its basic pulse moves so slowly, and there is a momentary unsteadiness in the first half of measure 20. But the tuning is excellent with a forest of chromatics with double sharps abounding, and must originally have sounded – and been meant to sound – pretty jangly. The last aria too has a virtuoso organ obbligato, and the opening interval (D to G sharp), the renowned *diabolus in musica*, in the ritornello signals the believer greeting 'death-in-Christ almost jauntily while registering his disgust with this earthly life', says the liner notes.

BWV 54 presents different challenges. Probably originally performed in Weimar on the Third Sunday in Lent in 1715, it was recycled for the Seventh Sunday after Trinity perhaps after 1731 when Bach returned to the material to quarry a parody aria for his St Mark Passion. This brief three-movement work is an exercise in resolving the opening agitated dominant 7th chords over the insistent bass in the first movement by the spirited four-voice fugato in the final aria. Though notated in E flat, when played in Chorton it sounds in F, which makes it not so very low in the alto's tessitura, but it was good to be able to admire Davies' bottom notes, after hearing his upper range in 170. It was also a happy idea to acknowledge the early-feeling five-part string ensemble by using single violins to match to single viola parts, but I do wonder about the use of a theorbo as well as a harpsichord and organ.

BWV 82, probably as well-known as any Bach cantata, has at least three performing versions. Originally for bass in the 1727 version, Bach made a soprano version in 1730/31, transposing it up into E and substituting a transverse flute for the oboe; and then revised it again in 1735 for an alto/mezzo voice and reverting to the original oboe, but with a more articulated organ part, before a final version in 1746/7 which was again for a bass. Like Bach's other Candlemas cantatas, the theme of old Simeon's letting go of this life dominates the libretto, and the surrender of the central lullaby aria has few rivals in the Bach oeuvre. Even Iestyn Davies shows a few moments of strain in some of the higher passages here, when a mezzo might be more comfortable: was this version made for Anna Magdalena? Extracts of it were copied into her second *Clavierbüchlein*. After bidding the world goodnight, the last movement with its concerto-like aria (where the harpsichord continuo seems entirely right) makes a fine conclusion to this CD and reminds the listeners to attend not only to the fine singing, but to enjoy

the excellent playing – Jonathan Cohen has assembled a very spirited as well as harmonious band of players for his Archangelo.

This is a thoroughly accomplished CD, and would grace any collection; and it's a must for aspiring countertenors, who will learn masses from the way Davies articulates and phrases individual notes as well as lines.

David Stancliffe

J. S. BACH: SONATAS BWV 525, 527–530

Jan Van Hoecke *recorders*, Jovanka Marville *harpsichord & fortepiano*

63:10

Alpha 237

There have been various attempts over the years to rediscover the “original” versions of the six sonatas that have come down to us as trios for organ (BWV525–530); these have ranged from relatively simple transcriptions of the three lines for two violins, a bass stringed instrument that can cover the low notes not available to the violins and continuo, to interpretations using a broad palette of instrumental colours and combinations. Personally I favour the former approach, even if every “solution” (which pre-supposes that there ever was a problem) involves a compromise of some sort. So too with this present recording featuring Jan Van Hoecke on no fewer than five instruments (including two in one work!), while the second melodic line and the accompanying bass are covered by Jovanka Marville on copies of a 1726 Zell harpsichord and a 1749 Silbermann fortepiano. Both are clearly relevant to Bach, and it is interesting to hear them in any context. According to the notes, only BWV 527 remains in its original key (D minor); I am puzzled that BWV525 (originally in E flat) was transposed up a tone, but then played on an instrument in the original key, but I expect there was some practical reason for the choices made (and I'm sure that Bach's own musicians would have been faced with making such pragmatic decisions all the time!) The playing is excellent and the recorded sound everything we expect from Alpha; personally, though, I would not wish this to be my only version of the sonatas (there's one missing, for a start) – even with the different makes and pitches of recorders, I'm afraid I need a more varied sound.

Brian Clark

COUPERIN: PIÈCES DE CLAVECIN

Aurélien Delage

68:39

passacaille 1015

One can understand why recitalists and recording artists ‘cherry pick’ from the voluminous repertoire produced by the great clavecinistes. But when they don't I always feel that both the cherries and the surrounding bowl gain even greater lustre. Add a recitalist who is clearly enjoying himself and you have a winning mixture. This is one of those programmes in which everything just feels ‘right’ - programme, tempi, ornaments, sonorities etc.. I especially appreciated the addition of preludes from *L'Art de toucher...* before the first two ordres. The booklet (notes Eng/Fre/Ger, biography Eng/Fre) does the job without fuss or particular glory. It's not exactly seasonal, but this was nevertheless a rewarding listen.

David Hansell

FALCKENHAGEN:

AN EVENING WITH WILHELMINE

Galanterie (John Schneiderman *lute*, Jeffrey Cohan *flute*, William Skeen *cello*)

104:09 (2 CDs in a jewel case)

hänssler 2CD HC15048

Stewart McCoy

FORQUERAY: PIÈCES DE VIOLE MISES EN PIÈCES

DE CLAVECIN

Blandine Rannou *harpsichord*

158:11 (2 CDs in cardboard wrapper)

Alpha 322

Suites in c, d, D, g & G

This is a re-issue of a recording from 2008 packaged in a basic cardboard sleeve, from which the booklet and discs have to be removed with some care. The instrument may well be the same splendid Ruckers/Hensch copy used by Justin Taylor on ALPHA 247 – it is certainly equally rich and threatens to overwhelm the microphones from time to time. In this specific repertoire this may be because so much of it lies in the lower half of the range but also because in these performances Blandine Rannou is inclined to gild the lily with enriched harmony

(as suggested by figures in the bass viol versions of the music) and little continuo-type splashes of counterpoint. Why not just find a friendly bass viol player?

David Hansell

LA FAMILLE FORQUERAY

Justin Taylor *harpsichord*

79:15

Alpha 247

Music by F. Couperin, Duphly and A. & J.-B. Forqueray

This is a very good programme - music by Antoine (including the player's transcription of a suite originally for three viols) and Jean-Baptiste (including tributes to Couperin and Rameau) and tributes from Couperin and Duphly. The instrument is a Ruckers/Hensch (1636/1763) copy and very good it sounds, especially in the lower registers which are always crucial for Forqueray. Justin Taylor is a Bruges laureate and it is easy to see/hear why. Not only is his basic technique rock solid, but the embellishments – when and how fast to spread a chord, for instance – are all unerringly judged. From time to time the sheer resonance of the instrument gets the better of the microphones and the booklet is only just better than basic (we need more specific and detailed information about the instrument, for example), but there's a lot of listening pleasure here.

David Hansell

HANDEL: ALEXANDER'S FEAST

Mariam Feuersinger, Daniel Johannsen, Matthias Helm
STBar, Kammerchor Feldkirch, Concerto Stella matutina,
Benjamin Lack

<TT> (2 CDs in a jewel case)

fra bernardo fb 1615566

A straightforwardly enjoyable live recording of Handel's sparkling setting of Dryden's ode on the Power of Music. The whole of Dryden's poem is given, but unfortunately the integral harp and organ concerti (one apiece for Timotheus and St Cecilia) are omitted, which rather weakens the final recitative's implied competition between the two of them! The original closing duet and chorus (to additional text by Newburgh Hamilton) are also omitted.

No matter – this is a fine achievement.

Daniel Johannsen is a splendidly dramatic narrator. I particularly enjoyed the *accompagnato* which opens Part 2, with its meticulously specified orchestral crescendo, and

the energy of his later 'Give the Vengeance due' recitative and ensuing aria. Matthias Helm is a sonorous Bacchus (with splendidly rasping horns) in Part 1, and an equally sonorous Timotheus (with eerily cavernous multiple bassoons) in Part 2. Miriam Feuersinger produces lovely tone, but sometimes at the expense of verbal clarity.

The chorus respond well to Benjamin Lack's committed direction, bringing out Handel's rich scoring (in up to seven parts) and resourceful counterpoint – try the grand ground bass of 'The Many rend the Skies' in Part 1, or the glorious quadruple fugue at the end of Part 2 (slightly oddly, here, three of the four themes are given out by the soloists, while the fourth is sung by the chorus altos). The many instrumental obbligati are well (though often anonymously) done, with finely poised solo cello in 'Softly sweet in Lydian measure' and rousing trumpet in the A section of 'Revenge Timotheus cries' (dramatically contrasting with the aforementioned multiplicity of bassoons in the B section). Stefan Greussing is suitably energetic in the driving drum ostinato of 'Break the Bands of Sleep asunder'. The magical 'distancing' effect of the cool recorder thirds in 'Thus Long ago' is beautifully captured. The acoustic of the Monforthaus in Feldkirch is slightly dry, but probably not unlike that of the theatres in which Handel first performed the ode.

As I said before, a fine achievement!

Alastair Harper

MOLTER: ORCHESTRAL MUSIC & CANTATAS

Camerata Bachiensis

66:02

Brilliant Classics 95273

MWV 2:25, 26; 3:7, 6:13, 7:24, 9:20

As someone who has been involved with publishing Molter's music, I was very excited when this CD was released, and delighted when the performers offered to send me a copy for review. The programme includes two Italian cantatas (each consisting of a pair of arias framing a central recitative), a sonata à quadro, a flute concerto (played impressively Quantz-like by the oboist in the quartet!) and one of several extant D major symphonies. When you edit and typeset music and listen back to it on Sibelius, you have a real problem in assessing the merit of "new" repertoire; there is something about the lack of human involvement that masks its real quality. I had experienced that before with Graupner's church cantatas; somehow they really only become "musical" in

performance. Camerata Bachiensis have certainly had a similar impact on my appreciation of Molter; whether in the beautifully stylish rendition of the instrumental pieces (the unison playing from the two violins is absolutely the best I have ever heard!), the glorious rich yet perfectly in tune singing of soprano, Julia Kirchner, or just in their audible enjoyment of Molter's not quite baroque, not quite classical music – the cantatas (with their taxing writing for voice and instruments alike) could easily be by Hasse or even his Italian models, while the overture (right down to the part names!) could hardly be more French. The performers (complete including the first harpsichord I've heard in some time who is not desperate to compete with the singer) are uniformly excellent, and I cannot recommend this recording highly enough – even if you have not heard of Molter before (or you've only heard hackneyed old recordings for trumpet and clarinet concertos!), fear not – this is over and over of pure delight!

Brian Clark

MONDONVILLE: TRIO SONATAS OP. 2

Ensemble Diderot, Johannes Pramsohler

67:22

Audax Records ADX13707

When it comes to French baroque chamber music, there is a real paucity of high quality repertoire; or so it has seemed until now! Move over Couperin and Rameau, there's a new kid on the block – in typical style, Johannes Pramsohler has sought now fresh jewels for his stylish Ensemble Diderot, and what a revelation de Mondonville's opus 2 trios have turned out to be. This world premiere recording of the six works (two of them pairing violin with flute as per the composer's alternative versions) reveals not only a composer of great technical skill but also demonstrates that by the time they were originally published, the level of violin playing in France had progressed immensely since Couperin insisted that only professional musicians need even attempt to play his music... Double stops abound, as well as wide leaps and other difficulties, all of them surmounted by Pramsohler and co. But – again as we have come to expect from these musicians – overcoming the challenge of actually playing the notes is merely the beginning; playing them beautifully and in a way that serves the music is key, then add a liberal sprinkling of passion and you begin to understand who they function. With the recent broadcast on Hungarian television of one of his operas, it seems we may be in for a revival of de Mondonville's spectacular output; this

fabulous recording deserves to be recognised as one of the most exciting releases of 2016, and I will be surprised (in fact, I will actually be disappointed!) if it does not win many awards.

Brian Clark

RAMEAU: PIÈCES DE CLAVECIN

Céline Frisch *harpsichord*

76:56

Alpha 324

Suites in a (1706), e (1724-31) and G (1728)

This is a re-issue of a recording from 2007. The instrument is a truly splendid Hensch (1751) which may well have been played by Rameau himself. It is so resonant that the player modified her planned tempi for the recording, meaning that some repeats had to be omitted. (Personally, I'd prefer fewer, but complete, pieces.) This may also be why some of her tempi, particularly those in the moderato/andante zone struck me as a little on the spacious side. The packaging is a basic cardboard sleeve, from which the booklet and disc have to be removed with some care.

David Hansell

ALESSANDRO SCARLATTI: OPERA OMNIA PER TASTIERA VOL. V

Francesco Tasini *organ*

75:37

Tactus TC661915

This Scarlatti's output of keyboard music runs to six volumes in the modern *Opera Omnia* and he can be credited with founding a distinctive Neapolitan school of keyboard composition. This release is all played on the organ (a charming small instrument from 1836/restored 1991), though three pieces are described as *per cembalo*, and consists largely of toccatas though this is a word that meant almost anything at the time. Francesco Tasini is very much a crusader on behalf of this music but his imaginative, though absolutely in style, textural and melodic enhancements cannot convince me that the repertoire is much more than a footnote to the composer's vocal music. I also felt that his flexibility of pulse does not always serve the music well: the phrase 'get on with it' did cross my mind once or twice. In the final analysis I enjoyed the instrument more than the music.

David Hansell

TELEMANN: ADVENT CANTATAS

Gudrun Sidonie Otto *soprano*, GSOConsort (Ingolf Seidel *baritone*, Christine Schwark *cello*, Michael Freimuth *lute/theorbo*, Wolfgang Brunner *harpsichord/organ*)

53:42

cpo 777 955-2

Whenever Christmas approaches I look forward to new releases from cpo; they have a knack of uncovering some excellent repertoire that has lain unknown for centuries and serving up fabulous recordings. When the new lists came out for December 2016 I noticed that – in addition to *Jauchze du Tochter Zion* (reviewed below) – a new Advent disc was on its way, I got very excited; it is a much neglected and (obviously) important part of the church year, but few performers seem to take much interest in the music written for the four Sundays before Christmas. Of course, as well as the great Martin Luther celebration, 2017 is important for Telemanniacs, too, since the great man died 250 years ago, so (like Advent) this disc was a portent of things to come.

In fact, there no cantatas at all; instead, we have extracts from Telemann's *Auszug der derjenigen musicalischen und auf die gewöhnlichen Evangelien gerichteten Arien welche in den Hamburgischen Haupt=Kirchen durchs 1727. Jahr vor der Predigt aufgeführt werden* ("A selection of the musical arias based on the usual Gospel texts which are performed before the sermon in Hamburg's main churches throughout the year 1727"). Their scope is broader than the CD title implies: eight are (as advertised) for Advent, then two each for the traditional three days of Christmas according to the Lutheran calendar, the Sunday after Christmas and the 2nd Sunday after Epiphany.

The performances were recorded live at the regular Sonntagsmusiken held in Magdeburg (where there is an important centre for the study and promotion of the composer's music). They are broadly shared by the brightly voiced Gudrun Sidonie Otto and her youthful sounding baritone companion, Ingolf Seidel. Throughout they are finely accompanied by cello and either one or two "realisers" playing one or other of their designated instruments. These changes of soundscape help to enrich the experience, but even such dramatic openings as that to TVWV 1:114a was not enough to make up for my initial disappointment that these were not full-blown cantatas with orchestra.

Brian Clark

DE VISÉE: INTIMITÉ ET GRANDEUR

Fred Jacobs French *theorbo*

65:50

Metronome MET CD 1090

Pièces de théorbe in C, c, d, e, F, g & A

This is Fred Jacobs' third and last CD of music by Robert de Visée. De Visée's music is quintessentially French baroque, and Jacobs' interpretation is spot on. He plays with a gratifying tone, and with carefully shaped melodic lines constantly supported by the sonorous bass strings. In his booklet notes Jacobs writes that, from about 1690, De Visée seems to have concentrated on the theorbo rather than the guitar, and there are descriptions of him playing to Louis XIV and his family at court. The music comes from two sources: the manuscript of Vaudry de Saizenay (Besançon, Bibliothèque municipale), and Rés. 1106 (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale). There is much variety – ten different keys, contrasting movements and moods, but always with an overriding feeling of gravitas.

The CD begins optimistically with a short Prelude and cheerful Gigue in C major. De Visée uses the long bass strings throughout, but it is far from ponderous. In contrast are the melancholic *Pièces de théorbe* in C minor. They include *La Plainte, ou Tombeau de Mesdemoiselles de Visée, Allemande de Mr. leur père*, written by De Visée on the death of his two daughters. Slow-moving descending notes, a delicate texture interspersed with lush chords, sweet modulations, and bitter dissonance, all combine to create a heartfelt expression of grief.

The *Pièces de théorbe* in D minor include intabulations of works by Jean-Baptiste Lully, and end with variations on the ever-popular tune *La Furstemberg*.

The opening Prelude of the *Pièces de théorbe* in A major firmly establishes the key of A major, beginning with an ear-catching descending scale and insistent diapasens. The restful *Allemande* gently weaves its way along with soothing melodic lines; the *Courante* is quite unhurried, and the *Sarabande* has rich, low-lying, scrunchy chords. An elegant *Gigue* evokes a jolly old man hopping and skipping along, but somehow still maintaining his dignity. The suite is rounded off with a satisfying *Gavotte*, charming but never over-energetic. The mood changes noticeably with two pieces in E minor: a short Prelude, and a sombre *Sarabande*, with unexpected changes of harmonic direction, and anguished dissonance from appoggiaturas. The CD finishes with De Visée's evergreen *Chaconne* in A minor, expressively played at not too slow a tempo.

It is unfortunate that the microphone has picked up

some of Jacobs' breathing in the background; it includes a variety of sniffs, snorts and gasps, which are faintly audible. This would not have been so prominent if the microphone had simply been placed further away. The closeness of the microphone also adds a slightly sharp edge to the sound.

Jacobs' plays a French theorbo made by Michael Lowe in 2004, with string lengths of 83 and 144 cm. Lowe describes the instrument in the CD booklet, and explains how the French theorbo differs from the more commonly heard Italian theorbo. He argues convincingly that the French theorbo should be quite large, and tuned to A.

Stewart McCoy

GALANTERIE: MUSIC FOR LUTE BY SYLVIVS

LEOPOLD WEISS (1687-1750), VOL. 3

Nigel North *lute*

73:58

BGS Records BGS 125

This is Nigel North's third volume of music by Weiss, in which he plays a Parthie in D minor, a Sonata in C minor, and a Sonata in F minor. Weiss's works have been catalogued by Douglas Alton Smith, "The Late Sonatas of Silvius Leopold Weiss", Stanford University, Ph.D. 1977 [SM], and more recently by Tim Crawford and Douglas Alton Smith in *Silvius Leopold Weiss, Sämtliche Werke für Laute in Tabulatur und Übertragung / Complete Works for Lute in Tablature and Transcription* [SC], so it is a pity there are no SM or SC numbers to identify which the pieces are in the present CD. All of them appear in one or both of the two main sources of Weiss's music – London, British Library, *Add. MS 30387* [not 3038 as given incorrectly in the liner notes], and Dresden, Landesbibliothek, *MS Mus. 2841-V-1* – but it is not always clear which of these sources is used for each track of the CD.

The Partie in D minor consists of seven movements: SM 241, 55-60; SC 11.7, 11.1-6. It begins with a prelude-like Fantasia from the Dresden manuscript, followed by an extremely ornate Allemande. North describes the Courante and Gavotte as "the strongest contenders for galanterie." The Sarabande uses almost the whole range of the lute, starting with a top d" at the ninth fret, and a bass line which slowly works its way down to bottom A at the 13th course for the final cadence.

The Sonata in C minor consists of eight movements: SM 173-180; SC 27.1-8. The Sarabande and Angloise (La Belle Tirolaise) are in E flat major. The latter appears in

Track 14 with the Rigaudon, which is played twice, with and without repeats. The music is sprightly, but the range of notes is low-lying and the overall tone is fairly lugubrious.

The Sonata in F minor is easy to track down, since it is the only Sonata by Weiss in that key: SM 128-133; SC 21.1-6. North gives an unhurried performance of the Allemande, allowing time for the music to breathe. There are many appoggiaturas from above and below to which he tastefully adds extra notes of his own on the repeats. A dramatic diminished seventh chord with a low E natural on the 9th course presages the final cadence. The Courante flows along smoothly, although he waits rather a long time on the first quaver of the first full bar of each section. He plays the Bourrée before the Sarabande in the order of the Dresden manuscript. In the Sarabande, after a passage of emphatic thirds, Weiss uses extremes of pitch to heighten the final climax; the melody rises to a high d" flat at the 8th fret of the first course underpinned by a low B flat on the 12th course. That B flat is repeated in the next bar to create an unexpected third inversion of C major, as part of the final cadence leading to F minor. There is an interesting effect in the Tempo di Menuetto – the bass is quite sparse, and drops out completely here and there, leaving the running quavers of the treble unaccompanied. The Gigue has an ear-catching opening theme of repeated notes, which returns for the last few bars. What is so pleasing is North's tone quality – sweet treble notes which sing, and unobtrusive bass notes which do not ring on too long. He creates a variety of tone colour which is consistently pleasant on the ears. He plays a 13-course lute by the Swedish maker, Lars Jönsson, although he is pictured on the cover of the CD holding a seven-course renaissance lute. Weiss's music is always excellent, and North's interpretation is masterful.

Stewart McCoy

ICH RUF ZU DIR

Werke für Laute von Silvius Leopold Weiss, Johann Sebastian Bach, David Kellner

Bernhard Hofstötter

61:43

VKJK 1606

The CD begins with the Ciacona in G minor by Silvius Leopold Weiss (SW14.6) from the Weiss London manuscript (GB-Lbl. *Add. MS 30387*). Hofstötter is aware that the piece is listed in the *Sämtliche Werke* as a duet perhaps to accompany a flute or violin, but instead he chooses to play it as a solo. Although it sounds

very nice, I find it unconvincing as a solo; sections with just chords alternate with sections with melodies at a higher pitch, implying that two instruments are taking it in turns to carry the melody. However, he plays with clean, well-arched phrases, and creates a suitable feeling of grandeur, although there is rather a lot of echo in the overall sound, as if the music were recorded in a very resonant room.

There follow two of Hofstötter's own arrangements for 13-course lute. The first is Johann Sebastian Bach's Cello Suite no. 2 (BWV 1008). In the Prélude he adds extra bass notes sparingly, just enough to underpin the harmonic movement. At bar 48, after a long passage of continuous semiquavers and a repeated dominant pedal in the bass, there is a dramatic pause on a third inversion chord of the dominant with lots of decoration, then silence before carrying on. The movement ends with five bars of improvised arpeggiated chords. More bass notes are added to the Allemande to clarify the harmony, creating a texture reminiscent of Bach's lute music. The bright semiquavers of the Courante flow beautifully with a lightness and pleasing clarity of tone. The added bass notes add sonority to a well-poised Sarabande, and after two brisk Minuets, the Suite ends with a moderately paced Gigue. The second of Hofstötter's lute arrangements is his intabulation of Bach's chorale prelude, "Ich ruf zu Dir, Herr Jesu Christ" ["I call to You, Lord Jesus Christ"] (BWV 639). There are three voices, which fit well on the lute. The slow-moving chorale melody in crotchets is the highest voice; the bass moves in quavers, and the inner voice in semiquavers. Hofstötter has transposed the music down a minor third from F minor to D minor, and chooses a slow speed which helps let the music sing. It is an exquisite piece of music, which actually sent shivers down my spine.

The Sonata in G minor (SW 25) begins with an Allemande marked Andante. It explores the higher reaches of the lute and is highly ornamented. On the repeats Hofstötter adds even more decoration of his own, which I find imaginative and stylish. The fifth movement is called "La Babileuse en Menuet" in the London manuscript, and it paints a picture of a woman who just can't stop talking. Hofstötter's Babileuse is a lively character, and although she keeps repeating herself, she does have some nice things to say. The CD finishes with a Chaconne in A by David Kellner. There are some impressive variations over the descending ground bass requiring some nifty playing from Hofstötter. Towards the end there is some extraordinary chromaticism.

Stewart McCoy

JAUCHZE DU TOCHTER ZION

CHRISTMAS CANTATAS

Hanna Herfurtner, Carola Günther, Georg Poplutz, Raimonds Spogis SATB, Kölner Akademie, Michael Alexander Willens

67:40

cpo 555 052-2

Förster: *Ehre sei Gott in der Höhe*

Homilius: *Erhöhet die Tore der Welt*

J. H. Rolle: *Jauchze du Tochter Zion, Siehe Finsternis bedeckt das Erdenreich*

Stölzel: *Kündlich groß ist das gottselige Geheimnis*

This is just the kind of disc I anticipate from cpo come Christmas time; music by three obscure composers and one not-so-obscure (although the cantata by Stölzel is not, as the booklet notes claim, a premiere recording!), bursting with memorable arias and choruses with flutes, oboes, horns and trumpets. In addition to the four named singers, Willens has four ripienists for choruses (well, five but that is presumably as Georg Poplutz missed one of the recording sessions) and 32221 strings (as far as I can tell from the booklet), producing an excellently balanced tutti sound. The soloists take the challengingly virtuoso lines in their stride and sounds glorious. In common with the other recording of the Stölzel, a violin plays what is quite clearly a keyboard obbligato in one of the arias – a pity the performers didn't take the opportunity to correct the earlier error. Each of the lesser-known composers come out of the project glowing; let's hear more Homilius and Rolle in particular. I would also love to hear these forces in the younger Hertel and Georg Benda!

Brian Clark

SERPENT & FIRE – ARIAS FOR DIDO & CLEOPATRA

Anna Prohaska *soprano*, Il Giardino Armonico, Giovanni Antonini

70:10

Alpha 250

Music by da Castrovillari, Cavalli, Graupner, Handel, Hasse, Locke, Purcell & Sartorio

The idea of devoting opera recitals to characters is fairly recent. It's an excellent one, too, since it encourages us to think more about the person being portrayed and the various aspects of their character. Most notably we've had award-winning recordings devoted to Semiramide by Anna Bonitatibus' and to Agrippina by Ann Hallenberg. Now soprano Anna Prohaska turns her

attention to arguably the two most famous of all operatic heroines, Cleopatra and Dido. Beyond the fact that both are African queens who took their own lives they have little in common: one is fact, the other mythological; one is a *femme fatale*, a byword for her sexual allure and playful approach to love, the other a wife who has remained loyal to her dead husband and also the archetypal abandoned woman.

The present selection concentrates on operas spanning a period from the mid-17th century to the mid-18th century. The earliest comes from Cavalli's *Didone* of 1641, a *scena* addressed not to Aeneas but Iarbas, the would-be lover rejected in Virgil, but who in fact wins Dido's hand in the *lieto fine* of Cavalli's mixed-genre opera. The next *Dido* opera is Purcell's from which there are two extracts ('Ah Belinda' and of course Dido's lament), while the other four extracts from Graupner's first opera, *Dido, Königin von Karthago*, first given in Hamburg in 1707, one an intensely dramatic and trenchant *tempesta* aria in which Dido compares herself with a storm-tossed ship, a favourite conceit. Indeed it is repeated in the coloratura aria for Araspe, the confidant of Iarbas, in his aria from the most famous of all Dido librettos, Metastasio's *Didone abbandonata* (set more than 60 times) in Hasse's version of 1742.

The earliest Cleopatra opera here is a rarity, *La Cleopatra* by Daniele da Castrovillari, a Venetian Franciscan monk and a name new to me. First given in Venice in 1662, it is his sole surviving opera. Not surprisingly, the long *scena* in which Cleopatra prepares for death is suggestive of the music of Cavalli, but the vocal ritornello scheme is interesting, the piece overall compelling. Dating from 15 years later, the two arias from Sartorio's *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* of 1677 show Cleopatra in light-hearted, kittenish mood, in complete contrast to 'Se pietà' from Handel's 1724 setting of the same libretto by Francesco Bussani, the greatest of all Cleopatra operas. Just a year later comes Hasse's serenata *Antonio e Cleopatra*, one of his first dramatic works. 'Morte col fiero' is a fiery show of coloratura defiance in the face of death.

I have mixed feelings about the performances. The German soprano Anna Prohaska sings a wide variety of roles and is not particularly noted as an exponent of early opera, though she has sung Poppea in Handel's *Agrippina*. On the plus side the vocal timbre is lovely – creamy and lustrous without being too fulsome for this repertoire. At their best, as in the central section of 'Se pietà' or, perhaps more surprisingly, the Cavalli, these are most engaging

performances. She copes well with coloratura as well, the showy 'Morte col fiero' in general coming off successfully, though there's a nasty screamed top note in the *da capo* repeat. But what worries me more is a tendency to slide down off the note in slower, more sustained music, often making the music sound lugubrious and heavy. Prohaska's pitch in general is not infallible, while her diction is not all it might be either and although she overall shows a good grasp of ornamentation her attempted trills are apt to sound like bleating.

This being Il Giardino Armonico we expect and indeed get some eccentricities, some not especially helpful to the singer. Antonini also does some tinkering with some of the scores, not being able to resist adding recorder parts (played by himself) to several of the scores. But the actual playing, both accompanying Prohaska and in a number of instrumental interludes, is of the highest quality. Several of these seem to have been chosen arbitrarily, it being difficult, for example, to see the relevance of Matthew Locke's incidental music to *The Tempest* in this context. Still, it does provide an opportunity to hear some ravishingly rapt playing in the Curtain Tune from the Second Musick, an account that comes into the category of 'naughty but (very) nice'. Not perfect, then, but plenty to appeal to anyone interested in Baroque opera.

Brian Robins

SONATES ET SUITES

Dan Laurin *recorder*, Anna Paradiso *harpsichord*, Domen Marinčič *cello*

85:25

BIS-2815 SACD

Music by Blavet, Chédeville, Chéron, Dieupart, Hotteterre, Leclair, Marais & Philidor

The royal monopoly on printing and distributing music produced a distinctive French style of music which was only affected by outside influences with the arrival of the Concert Spirituel in 1725. These public concerts were held in the Tuileries Palace during lent and other religious holidays when the opera houses were closed, and the very first one included Corelli's Christmas concerto as well as two motets by Lalande. Works by other foreign composers such as Telemann and Vivaldi were sometimes included, though for some time the confrontation between the French and Italian styles caused much controversy. By the time the first composer on this disc, Nicolas Chédeville, published his set of sonatas *Il Pastor Fido* in 1737, it was to his advantage to publish

them under Vivaldi's name rather than his own. This piece is one of the few on this disc where the treble recorder is included in the list of suitable instruments, amongst a variety of others including the musette and *viele*. Most of the other music was composed for the transverse flute but Dan Laurin gets over this problem by using the voice flute, or recorder in D, rather than transposing the music up a minor third. This works very well, though occasionally I missed the extra subtlety of expression which a flute can produce, and there are one or two slightly uncomfortable high notes. Laurin's playing is brilliant as always, and it is fascinating to hear how he incorporates into it the essential elements of the French style. So many performers are inhibited by Hotteterre's instructions on how to ornament his music. Not so Laurin, who uses all the flattements, *inégalité*, wide trills and other graces to produce a sparkling performance. His own extraordinary arrangement for solo recorder of the Marais *Folies d'Espagne* for bass viol and continuo is surprisingly effective though I rather missed Anna Paradiso's splendid harpsichord playing which is so essential to creating the mood of all the other music. Slovenian cellist Domen Marinčič is an equal partner in all the pieces with a particularly interesting bass line. I shall certainly be returning to this disc which, with music published between 1701 and 1740, presents a most enjoyable picture of the way musical styles developed in France over these forty years.

Victoria Helby

Classical

C. P. E. BACH: KEYBOARD MUSIC

Giovanni Togni, *Tangentenflügel*

66:44

Dynamic CDS 7762

This recital includes sonatas, rondos and a fantasia all drawn from the composer's anthologies *Für Kenner und Liebhaber*, published between 1779 and 1787. Both music and playing are absolutely first-class and enhanced by the wonderful Tangent Piano - an original from 1797 in excellent condition - used for the recording. (Think piano but one in which the strings are struck by slim and bare wooden 'hammers'). This has all the brilliance and clarity of a harpsichord, but also the expressive potential of the clavichord and piano further enhanced by mechanical devices (three knee levers and three hand stops) which raise the dampers or modify the tone in some way. The

booklet (It/Eng) gives a full account of these, as well the background to the music and the player ('graduated with full marks' - I can believe it) and also includes a number of photographs showing details of the instrument. The music is such that all these 'toys' can be deployed with taste and skill so we have a disc that is exciting, rewarding, instructive and entertaining - sometimes all at once. I don't often give out stars with quite this enthusiasm - I've docked one from the booklet as it is in only two languages and the translation grates once or twice.

David Hansell

BOCCHERINI: STABAT MATER,

STRING QUARTET OP. 41/1

Francesca Boncompagni *soprano*, Ensemble Symposium
57:52

Brilliant Classics 95356

This delightful all-Boccherini CD is a little gem. The Ensemble Symposium give a charming and thoughtful account of the first of Boccherini's opus 41 string quartets before being joined by the sweet-voiced Francesca Boncompagni and the additional cellist Nicola Brovelli for an utterly beguiling account of his G532 *Stabat Mater*. The strings master completely the two very different roles of chamber music ensemble and accompanying mini-orchestra, while Ms. Boncompagni negotiates beautifully the fine line between vocal precision and mere elegance. The addition of a second cello and a slightly bigger acoustic establishes a wider canvas for what is a masterly contribution to the rich and varied world of settings of the *Stabat Mater*. There is beauty and profundity in Ms. Boncompagni's singing, although she never loses sight of Boccherini's delicately engaging idiom. There is also more depth than I remembered in the op 41/1 quartet, a work which shares some material with the *Stabat Mater* and which occasionally skirts the same dark musical world. The recording is crystal clear and the acoustic pleasingly generous without being over-resonant. Having thoroughly enjoyed the wonderfully expressive playing and singing here, I am also grateful to the performers for reminding me that there is more to Boccherini's music than a superficial elegance.

D. James Ross

DUNI: LES DEUX CHASSEURS ET LA LAITIÈRE
Agnieszka Budzinska-Bennett, Maciej Straburzynski,
Lukasz Wilda *SBarT*, Accademia dell'Arcadia, Roberto
Balconi

52:44

Brilliant Classics 95422

+Orlowski Sinfonia in F

I'm sorry, but the quality of the dramatic music on offer here simply doesn't hold the listener's attention, especially wrenched from its context. I can believe that the full *pièce* was indeed a great success in 1760s Paris and might well be so again but, a bit like much G & S, you need the surrounding 'amusing spoken dialogue' to appreciate the 'very light' music to any degree. The performance is good however, with soprano Agnieszka Budzińska-Bennett delivering some very delicious sounds. The filler symphony by Michal Orlowski is really quite tedious. The booklet note (English only) is informative and tries hard: the sung French text is included, but no translation.

David Hansell

THE JOMMELLI ALBUM

Filippo Mineccia, Nereydas, Javier Ulises Illán

61:01

Pan Classics PC10352

Niccolò Jommelli (1714-74) is one of those 'transitional' figures who so easily fall down the hole between the maturities of Bach/Handel and Haydn/Mozart. Just the kind of composer to benefit from an anniversary, then, and this tercentenary tribute (rec. 2014) does the job nicely. Not all the items are operatic; there are two arias from a 1749 Passion and an extract from a set of *Lamentations* (1751). And in the middle of the programme is a short four movement sinfonia. Jommelli speaks the *lingua franca* of his day, but he speaks it very well and with imagination (the opening of *O vos omnes* is spine-tingling and its continuation scarcely less so) and the performers do him proud. Filippo Mineccia is a modern-school operatic falsettist whose tone can incline towards the billowy at times but he certainly has the technique for the virtuosic passage-work. The Spanish orchestra Nereydas give him whole-hearted support (sometimes at the expense of complete unanimity on sudden high violin notes) though I do wonder if continuo plucked strings, especially guitar, really belong in this repertoire. The booklet (Ger/Eng/Spa) includes a good essay, for once in credible English, and

gives the sung texts though with English translations only. However, there is no information about the artists.

David Hansell

PLEYEL: STRING QUARTETS, OP. 41-42, NOS. 1-2

Authentic Quartet

62:04

Hungaroton HCD 32783

Several months ago I gave high praise to a CD of Pleyel's piano trios, part of an extensive series issued under the auspices of the Internationale Ignaz Pleyel Gesellschaft (IPG) (anyone interested will find it in the September 2016 listing). This new disc is not from the same stable, rather presenting four works listed on the disc as string quartets.

As many readers will know, the usual listing for Pleyel's works is under their Ben number (after their cataloguer Rita Benton). I was puzzled by the lack of any such identification on the present CD, leading me to further investigation. That opened up something of a can of worms, for it transpires that these 'quartets' are not in fact quartets at all, but rather keyboard trios whose correct listing should read Ben 443 in A (op. 41/1), Ben 444 in F (op. 41/2), Ben 446 in G (op. 42/1), and Ben 447 in B flat (op. 42/2), almost certainly composed around 1792, the year Pleyel came to London at the invitation of the Professional Concerts. The adaptation was probably made not by Pleyel himself, but the publisher of the quartets, Johann Andre, who issued them in 1793/4. Astonishingly, you will learn nothing of this from Hungaroton's booklet notes and I'm indebted for an extensive anonymous Amazon review and its attendant comment for this information, apparently based on Benton's Thematic Catalogue. There seems no reason to doubt its accuracy.

A notable feature of the 'quartets' is that apart from an opening allegro in standard Classical sonata form, the remaining movements (one in Ben 443 & Ben 446, two in the others) all feature Scottish airs. The original trios are indeed included in books designated as such, being the result of a commission from the Edinburgh publisher George Thompson for Pleyel to produce a series of introductions and arrangements of Scottish melodies for keyboard trio (there appear to be six books in all), a provenance seemingly unknown to either the assiduous Amazon reviewer or the rather less than assiduous Hungaroton note-writer. It will be recalled that both Haydn and Beethoven received similar commissions from Thompson

Having settled the background, what of the music itself? Well, it is characterised by the high level of compositional skill I noted in the earlier CD. Opening allegros are pleasing, well-constructed movements with considerable melodic and contrapuntal interest and some effective modulation in development sections. Although the first violin is given occasional passages of bravura writing, there are no real difficulties for the performers, the works doubtless originally having been intended for the burgeoning dilettante market. The Scottish airs are mostly lively, good-humoured music, although the wistful Andante of the Ben 444 – perhaps the most appealing movement of all – and the central Adagio espressivo of the B-flat quartet introduce a more pensive note. The performances on period instruments by the Hungarian-based Authentic Quartet are very capable, being well tuned and balanced. They manage to capture convincingly the wit and general spirit of conviviality that informs these highly agreeable works.

Brian Robins

Romantic

BEETHOVEN, RIES: CELLO WORKS

Juris Teichmanis *cello*, Hansjacob Staemmler *fortepiano*
67:22

Ars Produktion ARS 38 533

Ries: Sonata op. 20, Trois Aires Russes Variés, op. 72

Beethoven: Sonata op. 5/1

Some comparisons are fairer than others. The coupling of the name of Ferdinand Ries with that of Beethoven is justified on a number of counts: like Beethoven he was born in Bonn (in 1784, 14 years after Beethoven), like Beethoven Ries sought to further his career in Vienna, where their paths crossed. After his arrival in the Austrian capital in 1801 Beethoven behaved with considerable generosity toward him, not only giving the impecunious young man piano lessons but also even financial assistance, in return for which Ries acted as secretary and copyist to Beethoven.

There are links, too, between the two major works on this CD, Beethoven Cello Sonata in F, op. 5, no. 1 and Ries' Cello Sonata in C, op. 20. Both were the work of young men of similar age, the Beethoven dating from 1798, while the Ries was composed during the composer's sojourn in Paris in 1808. Without explaining why or how, the notes claim that Ries modelled his sonata on Beethoven's, although it is

difficult to see the connection. And it's worth mentioning here that the notes are long on the kind of biographical and historical detail you find anywhere, but provide no description or analysis of the works included.

In any event, this is where any valid comparison between the two ends abruptly. Although Ries opens his first movement with strong, Beethovenian gestures, he seems more interested in the gentler arpeggiated passage that follows. The development is also much concerned with strong rhetoric, but to my ears to no great purpose, there being much empty passage work for the cello, whose part (termed as obbligato on the title page) seems less rewarding than that of the pianist. The brief Adagio that follows starts with a vigorous tramping motif that promises more than it delivers, the movement subsequently lapsing into a pleasant Romantic reverie. The final movement is a Polonaise in rondo form with an attractive main theme, but in truth the movement amounts to little more than salon music. That applies even more in the case of the *Trois Aires Russes Variés*, op. 72 of 1818, a *mélange* woven together to create a colourful if inconsequential mosaic of lyrical and vigorous themes. Beethoven's F-major Sonata, cuts a totally different figure, of course, a work bursting with a young man's passion and burgeoning genius. As I said at the outset, some comparisons are fairer than others. And that might equally well be said for the performances. Juris Teichmanis and Hansjacob Staemmler are both fine musicians who bring a vital, energetic approach to the music, though Teichmanis is often more effective in cantabile passages than more dynamic music, where the nervous intensity of his wiry tone is not always pretty. I suspect – despite the use of period instruments – he is probably happier in later music. Likewise Staemmler, whose playing of more lyrical passages has an agreeable fluency, but who has a tendency to be heavy handed in assertive writing. Anyone seeking the Beethoven will want to look elsewhere; this might serve if you have an urge to investigate Ries.

Brian Robins

BERLIOZ: ROMEO ET JULIETTE

Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra & Swedish Radio Choir, Robin Ticciati

94:00 (2 CDs)

Linn CKD 521

Neither on the grounds of period nor performance style does a review of this issue strictly speaking qualify for inclusion in *EMR*. Yet when the editor offered it to me, my reaction was 'why not?'; after all Berlioz has played a major role in my concert experience over many years, having grown up alongside Colin Davis' unforgettable performances of a composer who was to become for me very special. And there is the added interest that the conductor of this set is a protégé of Sir Colin.

Just as Monteverdi stretched the form of the madrigal beyond breaking point, so Berlioz did the same with his three symphonies. In the *Symphonie fantastique*, *Harold en Italie* and *Romeo et Juliette*, Berlioz changed our perception of what a symphony might or could be. That applies particularly to *Romeo* with its seven movements, vocal sections and series of descriptive scenes more akin to an operatic scenario than a symphony. At its best – the *Scène d'Amour* or *Queen Mab Scherzo* – the work contains some of the greatest music Berlioz (or anyone else, for that matter) ever wrote, and even if we Berlioz enthusiasts would find it difficult to argue against a claim that it also has its weak moments (the final *Serment*, for example) it remains overall an extraordinary work.

The recording is taken from live performances given in Stockholm in November 2014, the audience being very well behaved. There is much to commend it. Ticciati's direction is sympathetic, fervent when required and notable for its admirably sensible pacing, observation of Berlioz' meticulous dynamic demands, and orchestral balance, though I do have a problem hearing the string harmonics in the central section of the *Scherzo*. Though not the world's greatest, the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra in general copes well with Berlioz's often-cruel demands, though there are places where string ensemble could ideally be better. The opening fugato is just one case in point among a number that might be cited. But there is some lovely playing in the ravishing *Love Scene*, which builds to a pulsating, tremulous climax. The Swedish Radio Chorus is quite good – more than that in the wonderful *in lontano* exchanges between the revellers that preface the *Love Scene* – but their diction is often poor; they might be singing anything in 'Jetez des fleurs' (Juliet's

funeral procession, no. 5). Of the three soloists tenor Andrew Staples is pointed and characterful in the *Mab* vocal scherzetto, but mezzo Katija Dragojevic's diction is also poor, while I'm sure Berlioz would not have expected so much continuous vibrato. Alastair Miles is a splendidly stentorian and authoritative *Father Laurence*, but the voice sounds rather worn and excessive vibrato is also a problem.

This recording has given me considerable pleasure and if, in the final analysis, it cannot compete with Colin Davis' 1968 Philips version, that may partly be because I've now been wedded to that great recording for so long that I'm past conversion.

Brian Robins

GUITAR WORKS OF VICTOR MAGNIEN

Pascal Valois *guitar*

63:31

Centaur CRC 3469

Opp. 8, 16, 17 & 28

Victor Magnien was born in Épinal (Vosges), but it is not clear from the CD notes exactly when. The title above the list of pieces gives the date 1805, but in his liner notes Pascal Valois says that Magnien was born in 1804. According to Valois, Magnien studied the violin with Rodolphe Kreutzer, and the guitar with Ferdinando Carulli, both in Paris. At least 31 of Magnien's works were published in Paris between 1827 and 1830. The first six tracks of the CD consist of six *Andante* (op. 17). The beginning of *Andante* no. 1 is prelude-like in character, with a clear melody supported by interesting chords within the harmonic palette of the time. The feeling of *andante* comes with the introduction of repeated notes in the bass, and the music gradually becomes more agitated, growing to a climax high up the neck, followed by a descending chromatic scale. The piece ends peacefully with a *da capo* to the prelude-like opening. *Andante* no. 2 explores the full range of the guitar with broken chords, including a passage of triplets. Six pieces with the same title might suggest sameness, but Magnien's music is far from samey. Apart from an overall feeling of serenity to calm the souls of his listeners, there is much variety of mood and style. *Andante* no. 4 begins with the melody in the bass, it becomes a little quicker – *poco Allegretto* – and ends with a fast flourish up the neck and the ping of a high harmonic. There is much to enjoy in Magnien's *Thème original varié pour la guitare* (Op. 28): a mixture of bustling repeated notes and arpeggios, spiced with chromaticism; a gloomy variation in

the minor moves slower with nicely-shaped phrases; the final cadence is preceded by a flurry of diminished chords. It is entertaining stuff, charming, and at times virtuosic. There follow another six Andante (Op. 8) and six Menuets (Op. 16), the music for which may be seen in facsimile online at the IMSLP website.

I like Valois' interpretation. He captures Magnien's contrasting moods with well-shaped phrases and a variety of tone colour, just right for an appreciative salon audience. He plays a guitar by Cabasse-Bernard made in about 1830. It has a clear, bright tone well suited for Magnien's music. It is a pity there are so many squeaks from what I guess to be wound nylon strings. Maybe gut would have been more suitable.

Stewart McCoy

SCHUBERT: SYMPHONY NO. 5; WORKS FOR
VIOLIN & ORCHESTRA
Capella Savaria, Nicholas McGegan
58:19
Hungaroton HCD 32794

A much-loved symphony plus three shorter lesser-known works for violin and orchestra which have in common dating of 1816-17 make for a more than usually interesting Schubert collection.

The Symphony No. 5 in B flat of course needs little introduction, a near-perfect work of Classical poise and elegance that has frequently lead to it being termed the most Mozartian of all Schubert's symphonies. Yet what particularly struck me listening to the present performance is the young Schubert's skill as a contrapuntist, perhaps an aspect of his writing that we don't always sufficiently appreciate. That my attention should be drawn to this aspect of the composer's writing is in itself a tribute to the poised and finely balanced performance Nicholas McGegan draws from Capella Savaria, the Hungarian period instrument orchestra with which he has worked for 30 years. Listen, for example, to the way in which the imitative writing is so clearly yet unobtrusively laid out after the first double bar in the Andante. I like, too, the way in which McGegan gives the cellos and basses real presence. Add to that sensible tempos throughout and a truly affectionate approach to this most lovable of symphonies and the result is a performance that needs no further recommendation.

Of the three works for violin and orchestra the most appealing to my mind is the least known, the *Polonaise* in B flat, D.580, a work of great charm here given with spirit

and elegance by Zsolt Kalló, Capella Savaria's leader, who produces some especially delicious playing in the central trio section of this brief work. Both the other pieces, the *Concert Piece* in D, D.345 and the *Rondo for Violin and Strings*, D.438 are more ambitious, the latter, the only one of the three for which a full manuscript has survived, in particular aiming high. It opens promisingly with a portentous theme that gives way to allow the soloist to steal in with a lovely lyrical melody replete with arabesques and roulades, but once the main dance-like rondo theme is introduced there is insufficient interest to sustain the 14 minutes or so of its duration. That is certainly no fault of Kalló, whose playing both here and in D.345 is exemplary.

Brian Robins

MUSIC FOR A PRUSSIAN SALON
Boxwood & Brass
72:53
Resonus RES10177
Music by Baermann, Crusell, J. Stamitz & Tausch

Comprising two clarinets, bassoon and two horns the period ensemble Boxwood & Brass does very much what it says on the tin. Exploring the music of Franz Tausch is a project which is long overdue. Tausch's frighteningly virtuosic music for his own instrument, the clarinet, was often cited in books on the early clarinet, sometimes with a degree of skepticism as to whether it could ever actually have been played, and his seminal role as the teacher of the next generation of virtuosi: Heinrich Baermann, Bernard Crusell and possibly Spohr's clarinettist, Johann Hermstedt. Taught clarinet by his clarinettist father Jacob at the court of Mannheim, Franz Tausch may have played the clarinet concerti of Johann and Karl Stamitz, and indeed it is chamber music by the former, his attractive *Three Quartets* for clarinets and horns, which provides some of the context in this programme. The exquisite *Adagio* from Heinrich Baermann's clarinet quintet, ingeniously arranged for clarinets and horns, is also given a airing, while Crusell's virtuosic *Concert-Trio* for clarinet, horn and bassoon is also give a welcome performance. Perhaps surprisingly in light of the fiery concertos he has left us, it turns out that Tausch's chamber music is relatively tame, almost conventional, but with occasional unexpected twists of harmony confirming that this is very much 'romantic' music. The performances by Boxwood & Brass of this little-explored repertoire are beautifully prepared and executed, with a polished tone

from both clarinetists and an authoritative and focused contribution from horns and bassoon. Perhaps reflecting their conceit of a salon recital, the acoustic is quite intimate, but undoubtedly highly appropriate for this charming repertoire. While this CD makes a valuable contribution to our wider understanding of an important aspect of the history of the clarinet, it also provides a very entertaining and rewarding listening experience for the general listener.

D. James Ross

Various

WINTER'S DELIGHT

Early Christmas Music and Carols from the British Isles

Quadrige Consort

TT

deutsche harmonia mundi 888750757227

There isn't any information about the Quadrige Consort in the booklet so I looked them up on their web site and was amused when the following popped up: "Quadrige Consort – The Early Music Band. Traditional songs and tunes from the British Isles played on old-ish instruments by young-ish people." Although they started as an early music group in Austria in 2001 they soon expanded their repertoire to include their own arrangements of English folksongs, so now although they still play early instruments (recorder, gamba, basse de violon and harpsichord) it's difficult to call them an early music group anymore. All the carefully thought-out arrangements are by the group's director, harpsichordist Nikolaus Newerkla who also plays the vibrandoneon, a small wind-blown portable keyboard instrument. The singer is South African Elisabeth Kaplan, who has since left the group. She has the sort of appealing voice which is at home in the folk world and this is where I think this CD belongs, though enthusiasts of authentic folk music probably won't approve of it. This is mostly traditional music in modern arrangements and the whole effect is rather soothing. I'm sure there must be plenty of people who will like it but I must admit I'm not one of them. On the positive side, the booklet is quite informative, particularly about the arrangements, and all the words of the songs are provided so you can sing along.

Victoria Helby