

# Early Music Review

## EDITIONS OF MUSIC

J. S. BACH COMPLETE ORGAN WORKS VOL.8:  
ORGAN CHORALES OF THE LEIPZIG MANUSCRIPT  
Edited by Jean-Claude Zehnder.  
Breitkopf & Härtel (EB8808), 2015.  
183pp + CD containing musical texts, commentary &  
synoptical depiction. €26.80.

I bought the Bärenreiter equivalent (vol. 2) back in 1961, three years after it was published. Bach evidently was expecting to produce a larger work than the six Organ Sonatas, assembled around 1730; he then waited a decade before moving on around 1740, using the same paper. He copied 15 pieces, then had a break. BWV 666 and 667 were not copied by Bach. The Leipzig Manuscript is now in the Berlin library, Mus. Ms Bach P 271.

The two editions lay out the music in different ways. Bärenreiter prints the final versions first, then the earlier ones together at the end; Breitkopf places the early versions immediately after each piece. It might, however, have been logical to place the early version first with the final version following, so that the player might think more seriously about the differences. I wonder the extent to which the later versions are always better, or is it an automatic assumption? Bärenreiter is set out more spaciouly with 214pp preceded by xiv prelims which include nine pages of facsimile and no introduction: for that and critical comments, etc., you need to buy the *Kritischer Bericht*, which is in German only. Breitkopf has a single numbering of 183pp, which is cut down by actual pages of music because of 22 opening pages of introduction in German and English and nine facsimiles, leaving a total number of musical pages to 152 – 32 pages fewer than Bärenreiter. I don't, however, have any problems in reading the Breitkopf. There is a German critical commentary at the end of the volume, but much more information (also in English) as well as additional versions are on a CD-ROM. One difference is the Bärenreiter begins each of the later versions with the chorale melody and first verse, whose absence is a pity.

I happen to have read *Bach's Numbers* by Ruth Tatlow (see the November review by Brian Clark). I'm generally suspicious of number symbols, and the older concepts

have been rejected. What Bach is concerned with is the total length, not so much as individual pieces but groups of pieces (e.g. the first 24 preludes and fugues) and the idea is most lengthily shown in the B-minor Mass. The "18" is a dubious choice because nos. 16-18 were written after the composer's death. I wonder whether the first piece in the collection, *Fantasia super Komm, Heiliger Geist*, was expanded from 48 to 105 bars as the quickest way to complete the round number. The total bars of any individual chorale is only relevant to the total, and the only round sum covers BWV 651-665. It does seem an odd concept and I can't take it seriously – the 1200 bars do not help guess how to fit such a length into CD discs. But that Bach wrote "The 15" rather than "The 18" could, even without a total bar count, suggest that BWV 666-668 should be left as an appendix.

I think I would only buy the Breitkopf if I was a scholar or an enthusiast or if my copy was falling apart. I haven't played a church organ for about 50 years, so my copy is used primarily for listening to recordings (though I rarely do that now). The price of the Bärenreiter volume, although older, is roughly the same figure but in sterling, so Breitkopf is somewhat better economy.

Clifford Bartlett

BACH: ORGAN WORKS VOL. 4, THIRD PART OF  
THE CLAVIER-ÜBUNG...

Edited by Manfred Tessmer, updated edition by Christoph Wolff.

Urtext of the New Bach Edition.

Bärenreiter (BA 5264), 2015. xvii + 99pp. £18.50.

This is based on *Neue Bach-Ausgabe* of 1969, Series 4 (organ works), no. 4. The changes are not particularly significant, but there are various improvements or changes. The comparison is with Breitkopf, vol. 6 (EB 8806), which contains *Clavierübung*, the *Schübler Chorales* and the *Canonische Veränderungen*; the edition was published in 2010, so the differences between the two editions are likely to be few. EB has 156 pages including 16 pages of editorial comments priced below £20.00, which is a good value with the other two items.

Bä takes 99 pages of music, with no subsequent editorial commentaries. EB's introduction is more readable and interesting than Bâ. Bâ includes eight chorales on two pages with unreduced notes and text. The musical layout is sometimes confusing. The opening *Praeludium per Organo pleno* is mostly on two staves; if there is third one, it is sometimes in alto clef. Both editors, however, tend to expand to three lines. The titles are less pedantic here than in the 1969 edition. There is some advantage in the two-stave range, in that there is more flexibility when the division of the middle part may well make readers assume that the modern notation is genuine. The main source was produced by two musical engravers. Sadly, Bach's manuscript has vanished and editors have no clear choice of correcting between the sources. Luckily the variants are fairly trivial.

Will Bärenreiter follow Breitkopf's lead and start including additional material in a CD? EB offers far more information but with lower prices.

*Clifford Bartlett*

**ZELENKA: MISSA DEI FILII, ZWV20**

Edited by Wolfgang Horn, continuo realisation by Paul Horn

Breitkopf Urtext PB 5565 – Full score €68.90

**MISSA OMNIUM SANCTORUM, ZWV21**

Edited by Wolfgang Horn, Piano reduction by Matthias Grünert

Breitkopf Urtext EB 8052 – Vocal score €12.90

Both of these masses were issued as part of *Das Erbe deutscher Musik* (volumes 100 and 101 respectively) in editions by two of the experts on the Catholic chapel at the Dresden court during the late 17th and 18th centuries. The *Missa Dei Filii* was the first piece by Zelenka that I heard performed on period instruments (the recording available is on youtube) and it is a most impressive piece with all of the trademarks of the composer's style and equally demanding for chorus and orchestra (strings with woodwinds only). The fact that Breitkopf also sell vocal scores (EB 8050, €19.90 each) and hire performance materials will hopefully encourage choirs to explore the repertoire.

If the vocal score for the *Missa Omnium Sanctorum* (his last, dating from 1741) is anything to go by, choirs can have absolute confidence in buying it – and at least three quarters of the 94 pages are for chorus, so there is a LOT of

singing in the work. The text is (again) based on *Das Erbe deutscher Musik*, though with a new keyboard reduction of the instrumental parts (which possibly even I could play most of!) All four voices have solo movements (the Tenor *Christe eleison* is perhaps the most virtuosic).

Beautifully printed and laid out, these are exemplary editions of music that deserves to be better known.

*Brian Clark*

**NICOLA PORPORA: VESPERS FOR THE FEAST OF THE ASSUMPTION** *A Reconstruction of the 1744 Service at the Ospedaletto in Venice*

Edited by Kurt Markstrom

Collegium Musicum Yale University.

Second Series: Volume 21. Y2-021

Full Score (2015), A-R Editions. xxiv + 300 pp.

ISBN 978-0-89579-818-3

This massive volume contains Kurt Markstrom's conjectural reconstruction of a Vespers service for the Feast of the Assumption – one of the major celebrations of the famous Ospedaletto, where he was *maestro di coro* – and contains all of the required elements: five psalms, a Magnificat and two settings of the appropriate Marian antiphon “*Salve regina*”, as well as plainsong versions of “*Deus in adiutorium*”, the hymn (“*Ave maris stella*”) and all the psalm antiphons. In keeping with the Venetian theme, the choral music is scored for divided sopranos and altos with strings and continuo. Three of the movements are not dated 1744 – “*Laudate pueri*” is from the next year and in the same style so makes an ideal match; the settings of “*Dixit Dominus*” and the Magnificat, however, exist as sets of parts in Naples (the other material is all in the British Library in London) and scored for standard SATB choir. To make them match, Markstrom has simply transposed the male parts up an octave (taking his lead from indications in another Porpora autograph score where the reverse process is indicated) This is all very well, but in his thorough notes, he himself concedes that they are conceived in a slightly different style. More of an issue for me – although the editor does not share my concerns – are the contrasts in key centre; the sequence runs (all major keys) F, A, A, D, D, B flat, or four sharp keys framed by two flat ones.

A further issue for me is that fact that for the two framing movements, Markstrom prints two separate bass parts. More than once, he says this is because the organ part has figures, and that he wants to be able to show

where the keyboard and string parts are at variance. One of his examples is the beginning of movement 11 of “Dixit Dominus”. Since it is impossible to say what actually was in the cello and “contrabassus” parts, it is difficult to be critical but the whole thing is something of an academic exercise anyway – surely, given that the “soprano 2” part is actually the original tenor part transposed up an octave, the continuo part ought to have been altered, too, so the lower part of the “divisi celli” (what?!) should actually be the upper; what the score currently suggests is that the alto 1 part (doubled by violin 2) is in counterpoint with a second voice heard in octaves! It’s called invertible counterpoint for a reason.

Taken as a whole, however, this is a magnificent achievement. Porpora’s music deserves to be better known. This fine edition inspired Martin Gester to perform the Vespers at the Ambronay Festival to great public acclaim, and one hopes that performance materials (choral scores and instrumental parts) being available on request from the publisher will encourage others to seek it out. There is something wonderful about close-harmony female voices doubled at “the real pitch” by instruments that gives this already beautiful music a magical lift.

*Brian Clark*

CHERUBINI: REQUIEM – MISSA PRO DEFUNCTIS...  
IN C MINOR...

Edited by Hans Schellevis.

Score. Bärenreiter (BA 8961), xii + 188pp, £43.50.

[Also available Vsc BA 8961-90, £8.00; wind set £27.50, strings each £5.00.]

**T**hough primarily an operatic composer, Cherubini was fortunate enough to be commissioned for a particularly important event: On 20 January 1817, the remains of the royal Bourbons were moved from previous tombs. On the following day, crowds assembled at the Basilica of St. Denis. The solemn three hours in the morning included Cherubini’s *Requiem* (11.am till 2.p.m) then after an hour, a Mass ran on from 3.00 to 6.00. Composers like Schumann and Brahms continued the enthusiasm of the work, while Berlioz stated “that the Requiem is on the whole, to my mind, the greatest work of its author; no other production of this grand master can bear any comparison with it for the abundance of ideas, fullness of form and sustained sublimity of style”.

The singers of the Royal Chapel from 1816 generally had 3.3.3.3 soloists, while the choir comprised 7 first, 6

second sopranos, 12 tenors and 10 basses. The violins were tacet for the first two movements; Fauré also included sections without violins. There were no altos, whether ladies or falsettists. The orchestra is 0222 2230, timps, tamtam and strings.

Cherubini was a specialist in ending with slow diminuendi. The introit has only pp, apart from a few hairpins, which end back to pp – and that lasts 141 largo-sostenuto bars, with low instruments. Following from the quote above, Berlioz wrote “No one before or after Cherubini has possessed this kind of skill in chiaroscuro, the shades and the progressive deterioration of sound”. In fact, the only dynamics used are pp, p, f and ff, the last rare. I found a recording online which made no serious attempt to follow the dynamics! The opening, for instance, was definitely NOT pp. The soft indications should be clear, but f covers a much wider range of dynamics. I assume that the durations at the end of each movement are editorial.

This isn’t a work that will receive many performances, but it is well worth hearing. It needs a big church but not necessarily a large choir! I wonder if it has been played at St Denis since 1821?

*Clifford Bartlett*

RECORDINGS

*Renaissance*

ISAAC: MISSA MISERICORDIAS DOMINI & MOTETS  
Cantica Symphonia, Giuseppe Maletto

70:04

Glossa GCDP31908

**I**t is indeed remarkable that this present disc is the first complete recording of the Isaac’s *Mass Misericordias Domini*, and several of the motets which accompany it here are also receiving premiere recordings. As one of Josquin’s most accomplished contemporaries, Isaac suffers perhaps from his versatility resulting in several of his minor works becoming very familiar but some of his great masterworks remaining neglected. One such is the Mass recorded here, a work of profound and original genius, and demonstrating the virtues so highly praised by the scholar Glareanus after Isaac’s death. Glareanus admires Isaac’s ability to decorate a cantus while embodying it fully into the polyphonic texture as well as his skill with brief musical motifs, often developed in elaborately extended

sequences. What is perhaps more striking to us is the highly 'modern' sound of this Mass setting, anticipating those concise settings of the French Court some fifty years after his death. Although the Mass is given a purely vocal treatment here, allowing Isaac's magnificent and distinctive counterpoint to shine through, some of the motets are given altogether more lavish performances incorporating organ and stringed and brass instruments. The performers seem utterly at home with Isaac's music and give highly persuasive accounts of all of the music here, making this a very valuable addition to the limited Isaac discography. An informative, intelligent and very readable programme note by Guido Magnano rounds off this impressive and highly enjoyable production.

*D. James Ross*

LUYS MILÁN: EL MAESTRO, LIBRO I (1536)

José Antonio Escobar *vihuela de mano*

66:05

Naxos 8.573305

**L**uys Milán's *El Maestro* (1536) was the first of seven books of vihuela music published in the 16th century. The first nine pieces are fantasias, in modes 1-4, not too hard to play, and graded according to difficulty. There follow nine fantasias with redobles (running passages) exploring all eight modes, four fantasias in modes 5-8, and six pavanas, the last of which is in triple time. José Antonio Escobar plays all the solo music in the order in which it appears in the source, and plans another CD to cover the rest of *El Maestro* (Libro 2). Milán's music has an improvisatory feel, and he seems to enjoy the repetition of little motifs or riffs, which may be heard in more than one piece. In bars 73 and 77 of Fantasia 19, there is an extraordinary throw-back to earlier times with a double-leading note chord. There are some curious changes of harmony, such as the unexpected shift from major to minor in bar 15 of no. 3.

Escobar's playing is clear and expressive, and he creates a variety of moods from the lively to the slow and reflective. He adds his own ornaments sparingly – an upper mordent here and a lower mordant there – and a flourish in the repeat of Pavana 1. He articulates chords to good effect, for example in Fantasia 19. He sounds fine when he keeps the rhythm steady, and he has a nicely paced ending to Fantasia 7, but sometimes he has a jerky way of playing – accelerating through fast passages – which creates a feeling of instability and unease. Milán advises playing fast notes

extra fast, but he doesn't invite a drastic change of speed within each phrase. Dotted minims tied over the barline are clipped in no. 3, also adding to the effect of stumbling forward. Escobar strums a few chords in the final track, but the momentary uplift from that, is spoilt by rushing the fast notes (minims).

Nine bars from the end of the second fantasia there is a serious mistake which has slipped through the editing net: instead of a chord consisting of just two E flats and B flat, Escobar catches the fourth course, adding a minor third, yet if a full triad had been desirable, a major chord would have been appropriate. The same rogue G flat can be heard in bar 83 of no. 3, bar 70 of no. 7, and bars 107, 165, 178 and 191 of no. 19. Rather than risk this happening, one might be tempted to hold down a G at the 2nd fret of the 4th course, so if the wrong string is sounded, at least the resultant major chord wouldn't be so bad. However, the way to avoid G flat sounding at the fourth course, is to stop the second and third courses with the first finger of the left hand as if an open 1st course were needed, rather as a violinist would for stopping a perfect fifth, and not use a full barré across all the strings at the first fret.

For the final cadence of no. 4, I would dampen the open 6th course of the dominant chord before playing the final chord with the open 5th course in the bass. Escobar lets the 6th course ring on, producing a second inversion for the last chord – interesting, because in no. 5 he does dampen the string for a clearly stated final chord.

Escobar's vihuela was made by Julio Castaños from Málaga, and is tuned to G at A=415. It has a clear, bright sound, which suits the music well.

*Stewart McCoy*

THE CHURCH MUSIC OF JOHN SHEPPARD: THE COLLECTED VERNACULAR WORKS – VOLUME II

Academia Musica Choir, conducted by Aryan O. Arji

77:02

Priory PRCD 1108

**T**he Latin church music of Sheppard, who died late in 1558, is finally beginning to receive the recognition it deserves. It suffered a setback nearly a hundred years ago when the Wall Street Crash put paid to a second series of *Tudor Church Music* in which Sheppard's music was going to feature, but a revival begun during the latter half of the twentieth century led to the publication of three volumes containing his Latin music in the series *Early English Church Music*, well before the

notional quincentenary of his birth in 2015. Alongside this slow-burning but effective revival of his music for the Roman Catholic Church there has been parallel interest in his smaller Anglican *oeuvre*, leading to volume I of a pair of discs being released in 2013, with this volume II coming along just in time for the quincentenary.

The Academia Musica Choir is an interesting ensemble, being a combination of choral scholars and musicians in residence at Hereford Sixth Form College. Although this is a mixed choir, with young sopranos on the top line and a combination of males and females making up the altos, they have a sound not unlike a traditional male cathedral choir, and this is probably due to their age range. Volume I (PRCD 1081) included anthems for full choir and for men's voices, the whole of the First Service, and all of Sheppard's minute surviving repertory of music composed (or possibly arranged by contemporaries) for keyboard. This remains a disc to savour. Volume II contains more anthems, some carols, a reconstructed Evening Service, and the whole of the mighty and influential Second Service – another feast of music.

As early as the 1590s John Baldwin had noted that at least one passage in Byrd's Great Service owed something to the setting of the same text in Sheppard's Second Service. Roger Bray developed this line of thought in some sleevenotes about the evening canticles in 1996, and the following year, in an article published in *Musical Times*, I compared both Services in their entirety, noting Byrd's structural and melodic debts to Sheppard – not that one would realise this from listening to Byrd's Great Service, which is typically a work of relentless creativity and supreme confidence. Thanks to the performance on this disc, Sheppard's Second Service emerges as a worthy inspiration and model for Byrd's transcendent masterpiece. The seven movements, including the shortest – the Kyrie – supplied by the obscure John Brimley in the presumable absence of Sheppard's original, are impressive as an entity, while the individual movements are just as impressive as separate pieces. Interestingly the uncredited writer of the sleevenotes seems more taken with the Evening Service for Trebles, which has been reconstructed by David Wulstan from the organ score, but for all that the writer feels that what we have of the Second Service is possibly an unpolished draft, to this reviewer it is the Second Service rather than the admittedly fine Evening Service for Trebles which is Sheppard's Anglican masterpiece. Although necessarily not as expansive as much of his Latin music, there are still many moments of what we have come

to expect of Sheppard: a case in point is the remarkable harmonic change in the Venite at the words "Forty years long". The anthems and carols provide thinner gruel, again by liturgical and theological necessity, but *I give you a new commandment* is one of the finest of all Tudor anthems.

The Academia Musica Choir gives a good account of this music. The singing is not perfect – there is for instance a particularly adolescent tenor entry in the Magnificat at the words "in God my saviour" – but it manages to be idiomatic, and this edginess combined with the accommodating acoustics of Gloucester Cathedral enables one to feel like being as close as possible to a real service without actually being present.

The sleevenotes are a major work of scholarship, and were in fact written by the editor of most of the music, Stefan Scot, who has also edited all of Sheppard's Anglican music for a forthcoming volume in the series *Early English Church Music*. Stefan was responsible for discovering that the Creed from Sheppard's First Service, on volume I, is virtually identical to the Creed in Tallis's Mass for Four Voices; and on this recording he has included a carol with an attribution to Merbecke which he has discovered bears many hallmarks of other works by Sheppard. The project is fortunate to have the cooperation of this leading Sheppard scholar, and it is a mystery as to why his notes and editions are not credited – especially as he is ethical enough to credit Wulstan with editing the Evening Service for Trebles. Incidentally the organist who plays Sheppard's few surviving keyboard pieces on volume I is also uncredited. For the record [sic] he is Michael Blake.

Everyone with any sort of interest in, or penchant for, or even taking a punt on, Sheppard should purchase this disc, at the least for the premiere of the complete Second Service. Although the recordings of its two evening canticles – by Christ Church Cathedral and The Sixteen – are tidier, they do not convey the sprawling magnificence of these movements. Indeed the only recording which is incontrovertibly preferable to one on this CD is Stile Antico's version of *I give you a new commandment* on their disc "Media Vita" (Harmonia Mundi HMU 807509) which is devoted to Sheppard, and which contains some of even their very best singing on record. Obviously all *Sheppardista* should own both recordings.

*Richard Turbet*

LOQUEBANTUR: MUSIC FROM THE BALDWIN  
PARTBOOKS

The Marian Consort, conducted by Rory McCleery,  
The Rose Consort of Viols, led by John Bryan.

66:12

Delphian DCD34160

This superb disc manages to be both rewarding and frustrating: rewarding, because of the fine performances and excellent repertory; frustrating, because so many of the pieces are already available in equally distinguished recent versions, leaving other material from John Baldwin's partbooks awaiting commercial recordings. On the one hand, it can be argued that there cannot be too many recordings of the title track, Tallis's *Loquebantur variis linguis*, the luminous Whitsun Respond in seven parts which survives only in manuscript. On the other hand, the two motets by William Mundy on this disc, *Adolescentulus sum ego* and *Adhaesit pavimento*, are available in equally fine performances by Magnificat on "The Tudors at Prayer" (Linn CKD 447), while *Sive vigilem* by the variously spelt Derrick Gerarde (who with a name like that nowadays would be playing in goal for Tranmere Rovers) is on Signum Classics' first disc of music from the Baldwin Partbooks "In the Midst of Life" sung superbly by Contrapunctus (SIGCD408). It all raises the question as to whether the putative purchaser would wish to own all these recordings, or would stick with just one. The latter would be a serious misjudgement because, despite the overlapping contents, all three consist of wonderful music, at least some of it not duplicated elsewhere; on the disc under review, one such work is the premiere recording of the Canon 6 in 1 by Byrd, played by The Rose Consort. These days Byrd premieres are few and far between, so this item is valuable discographically, but it is also valuable in its own right as an intriguing and delightful piece of music. It is followed appropriately by Byrd's early motet *O salutaris hostia* whose violent discords are triggered by its complicated canonical construction. The Marian Consort's interpretation does not begin as assertively as that of The Cardinal's Musick (ASV CD GAU 178) but by the end is singeing listeners' eardrums. Another premiere recording is Christian Hollander's *Dum transisset Sabbatum* which, despite possible first impressions, should emphatically not be dismissed as mere Franco-Flemish note-spinning. Concluding the disc is a work seldom recorded, but which becomes more remarkable as it proceeds, and which then compounds that remarkableness in subsequent hearings:

this is John Sheppard's *Ave maris stella*, a selection all the more welcome during what is being regarded as his quincentenary. Finally, multiple recordings have helped me out of one particular quandary. Hitherto I have been unable to decide whether I think that Taverner's sublime six-part piece *Quemadmodum*, which survives with the Latin title but no text, was intended by the composer as a work for instruments or voices. Comparing the brisk performance on this disc by The Rose Consort with the more leisurely performances by Contrapunctus and Magnificat on the discs mentioned above, has convinced me that Taverner intended it as a vocal setting of Psalm XLII. For example, the sonority at the first appearance (in the modern edition) of the words "ad te Deus" is far more successful when sung; and the musical phrase accompanying the words (again in the modern edition) "et apparebo" sounds much more like a phrase that would be set to words (even if not these) rather than one composed for instruments. In summary, this is a superb disc, and however many pieces from it one might possess on other recordings, its outstanding performances, wonderful repertory and profound interpretations justify its purchase, without hesitation.

Richard Turbet

17th century

1615 GABRIELI IN VENICE

The Choir of King's College Cambridge, His Majestys  
Sagbutts & Cornetts, Stephen Cleobury

73:10

KGS0012 (SACD + Pure Audio Blu-ray disc)

*Exultavit cor meum, Hodie completi sunt, In ecclesiis, Iubilate  
Deo, Litaniae Beatae Mariae Virginis, Magnificat, Quem  
vidistis pastores, Surrexit Christus & Suscipe clementissime  
Deus*

Canzona Prima, Seconda & Terza

I approached this CD, recorded using the latest recording technology and available on two discs for SACD hybrid and blu-ray respectively, with very high hopes. One of my earliest encounters with the music of this period was precisely with the music of Gabrieli and indeed included much of the music on this disc. My first reaction was to admire the crystal clear sound which captures the spacious ambience of King's College Chapel to perfection and gives the music a splendid grandeur. It was not long however before I was much more bothered than I had anticipated by the fact that the choir with its boy trebles was simply

not the vocal sound for which this music conceived. Worse than that, much of the singing had an English politeness about it which seemed to me to emasculate Gabrieli's highly dramatic idiom. In the couple of pieces where the choir was encouraged to be more flamboyant, such as *Iubilare Deo*, parts of the 14-part Magnificat and Hugh Keyte's magnificent re-realisation of *Quem vidistis*, the singers produce a degree of excitement, but the rather mimsy *In ecclesiis* which opens the disc and the unconvincing *Suscipe clementissime Deus* with its less than magnificent account of the composer's towering setting of 'immensae maiestati' are ultimately disappointing. The solo voices are also patchy, not apparently sharing the same concepts of how Gabrieli should sound, and there were some contrapuntal guddles caused undoubtedly by the spacing of the forces. His Majestys Sagbutts and Cornetts provide fine accounts of Gabrieli's instrumental canzonas and sonatas between the larger choral items, but even they sound cowed in some of the choral works. Any foray into this repertoire invites comparison with the work of specialist period ensembles such as Paul McCreesh's Gabrieli Consort and Players and if, like me, you prefer your Gabrieli to be brash and thrilling you will always go for the sound of soaring falsettists and blaring brass rather than these rather diffident accounts. Although the programme note declares the recording to be 'the culmination of considerable scholarship into the performance practice of Gabrieli's Venice', with the noble exception of Hugh Keyte's cutting-edge and valuable contribution (published 2015 by The Early Music Company), there seems nothing terribly radical here, and indeed ironically many of the editions used date from the 1990s and one indeed is from Denis Arnold's 1962 CMM, the very edition used for the 1967 recording which so inspired me as a child!

*D. James Ross*

**PRAETORIUS: CHRISTMAS VESPERS**

Apollo's Fire | The Cleveland Baroque Orchestra, Jeannette Sorrell

74:40

Avie Records AV2306

**T**his is a bit of a mixture. This "Christmas Vespers" is nothing like the McCreesh "Christmas Mass", which has been used by performers in various parts of the world. It had the benefit of Robin Leaver as distinguished expert – he and I sat at the back row and heard the recording for the BBC before the CD was issued,

but we talked rather too much!\* This Apollo's Fire CD is not one of their best. I won't go into details, but the singing doesn't have the clarity one expects from the period (c.1600-1620) and the rallentandos are particularly out of time: I haven't got my Praetorius writings at hand, since much of my music has gone to a Cambridge library, but my recollection is that there is no change of speed except that the penultimate bar can be slower. I feel that the speed of pieces with high cornetti is just a fraction too quick. The title is misleading: McCreesh produced a full CD of Vespers, but this squashes a Lutheran Advent service and a Vespers for Christmas Day, neither being satisfactory.

Individual pieces don't always work. One of my favourites is *Puer natus: Ein Kind geboren*. There are more dynamics needed: think of quiet, medium and loud sections. The Sinfonia should surely stay at the soft level (mp), without stressing each bar in the triple time. The vocal trio and Bc needs a normal sound, but the ritornelli are short and strong. The final section (from "Mein Herzens kindlein") has full forces but ends quietly – follow the text – and in general, the text needs more variety of the stress of the accents. This sounds as if I'm a modernist, but the tempo is rigid (except as noted above) and it will sound much more Praetorian than anything else on this disc. I'm not convinced that Jeannette Sorrell is adequately aware of early baroque, though she is far better in late baroque. Two specific errors are having a cello (which appeared in the 1640s) and a double bass (which became standard in 1702 in France). The lowest pitch would have been the G or F below the bass sackbut's B flat.

\*The Michael Praetorius Christmas Mass was recorded by The Gabrieli Consort and Players (Archiv 439-250-2). I prepared the musical edition, which is available from The Early Music Company Ltd. The solo organ pieces were contributed by Tim Roberts and are not in the score.

*Clifford Bartlett*

**GRAZIANI: ADAE ORATORIUM, FILII PRODIGI ORATORIUM & FIVE MOTETS**

Consortium Carissimi, Garrick Comeaux

71:20

Naxos 8.573256

**T**he two oratorios on this CD were published in the Garland series of facsimiles. As someone who has championed Graziani (and his Roman colleague, Foggia) for some time, it is always reassuring to hear performances that confirm the quality of this music – as the brief but informative note says, Graziani is "one

of the best kept secrets of the early Italian Baroque". I'm puzzled by the consecutive statements that Italian vocal music was usually performed one step below modern pitch, and that the performers have chosen to use A=415 as their pitch level. I imagine that going that extra semitone lower might have taken the edge (by which I'm being kind) off (especially) the soprano tone – some of their entries in imitative music (of which there is plenty, as Graziani is a skill contrapuntalist) are not the most accurate. That said, I admire the way the voices sing through phrases so that the hemiola cross rhythms are audible without being signposted or micromanaged by a director.

*Brian Clark*

SCHÜTZ: SYMPHONIAE SACRAE I

Weser-Renaissance Bremen, Manfred Cordes  
92:42 (2 CDs)  
cpo 777 929-2

Schütz assembled *Symphoniae Sacrae I* for publication in Venice in 1629, and the music he selected marks the bridge between the earlier *Psalmen Davids* (1619) – large-scale choral works in as many as four choirs – and the later more intimate solo and duet works with continuo that formed *Geistliche Konzerte* from 1636 & 1639. Only in 1650 comes *Symphoniae Sacrae III*, a further group of large-scale works which signals the renewed possibilities brought by the conclusion of the Thirty Years War in 1648.

In *Symphoniae Sacrae I*, Schütz writes sacred music that has a suspended, almost timeless quality. Vocal duets with a pair of violins or cornetti, a soprano and tenor with three fagotti, single voices with pairs of violins or a vocal duet with cornetto and sackbut, and David's lament for Absalom for bass and four sackbuts offer sound pictures far removed from the essentially choral music of the previous generations. Here are highly coloured setting of (for the most part) words from the Psalter or the Song of Songs where vocal parts as well as the instrumental obligati demand a high level of technical virtuosity as well as a developed emotional intelligence from the performers. This isn't your standard church music, and it certainly owes a good deal to the ideals of the 'new music', as well as to rising possibilities occasioned by the development of the newer melodic instruments – violins and fagotti as well as the established cornets and sackbuts.

In this pair of CDs, the performers exhibit a high degree of technical competence married with a desire to let the music speak for itself. The performances are clean

but very slightly underwhelming, although that is better than having to endure singers with too much of a soloistic ego: this group includes the distinguished and experienced Hans Jörg Mammel and Harry van der Kamp. The blend and balance between the voices and instruments is good, and only occasionally did I wonder whether I would have varied the organ, harp and chitarrone of the continuo with a regal – a favourite continuo instrument in Germany with brass at this period. In this music, the words of the Latin texts are all-important and are delivered confidently, audibly and fluently. The instrumentalists sound as if they have listened to the singers' articulation, and make an effort to shape their phrases to it. And it is good to have this marvellous music – so key to Schütz' long and partly hidden development – presented freshly and scored intelligently.

Why then do I not feel more enthusiastic about this production? Partly I suspect because *Symphoniae Sacrae I* is so evidently 'work in progress.' Schütz has come a long way, but there is further to go – and while he has absorbed much of the language of the *seconda prattica*, there has yet to emerge his mature synthesis, his true voice; and this take reflects this to some extent. But partly also because some other performances – I discount the older version by the Leipzig Capella Fidicina under Hans Grub, preferring that of the complete Schütz Edition (Vol I) with Capella Augustana under Matteo Messori (now issued complete by Brilliant Classics) – feel as though they have a more committed approach and are recorded more brightly. The acid test for *Symphonie Sacrae I* is the tripping rhythm of the tenor in *In te Domine speravi* on the word "libera". Cordes' singer doesn't quite have the rhythmic abandon required to convince listeners that it is for freedom that you are praying. So while I am glad to hear this version, it is not automatically my first choice for this enormously attractive and significant music.

*David Stancliffe*

MUSICA ARTIFICIOSA

NeoBarock

73:35

Ambitus amb 96 980

Johann Baal: Sonata in A minor (Möller)

Biber: Partias IV & VI ex Harmonia artificiosa-ariose

Mayr: Trio sonata in D minor, Solo sonata in D (Ries)

Erlebach: Sonata Terza in A

Kerll: Sonata in F

Schmelzer: Sonata in F

When one has seen performers live in concert it impacts on how one listens to and hears a recording. While the concert I heard was of music by Fasch and Stölzel, yet the contagious enthusiasm and excitement they brought to it is clearly audible in this foray into the kaleidoscopic world of the stylus fantasticus. Where recent recordings have focussed on one violin, or a violin in dialogue with gamba, here the repertoire is for two “treble instruments” (I have to tread carefully in case pedants object to me calling a viola treble!) and continuo. Both players (Volker Möller, whose excellent booklet notes include an obituary of the almost unknown Johann Baal, a cleric who unfortunately came to an unsavoury end when he used a door that led to a cliffside..., and Maren Ries) are equally at home on the scordatura version of their instruments; Möller notes how Schmelzer uses such different scordaturas for the two violins that the work sounds like a sonata for viola and violino piccolo. With all the intricacy going on in the melody parts, NeoBarock wisely limit their continuo section to cello and either harpsichord or organ, and their simple accompaniments provide the perfect backdrop. The booklet and casing are decorated by an original artwork by Gerhard Richter, for which the performers express their thanks; I would like to express my thanks to all concerned for a fabulous hour’s entertainment.

Brian Clark

## Baroque

### J. S. BACH: “BIRTHDAY CANTATAS”

Joanne Lunn, Robin Blaze, Makoto Sakurada, Dominik Wörner, Bach Collegium Japan chorus & orchestra,

Masaaki Suzuki

73:17

BIS-2161 SACD

One of the areas in which the high standards set by Suzuki and the Bach Collegium Japan have recently been upgraded is in the brass playing: Jean-François Madeuf has become a wonderfully expert player on both natural trumpet and horn, and on the former without the little vent holes that many players use to ‘correct’ the natural 11th and 13th overtones. The result is an increase in the singing quality of the sound and a richer fundamental tone generated by the natural harmonics.

These incremental improvements – audible too in the balance between voices in the concerted movements

– combined with the dramatic presentations that these secular cantatas draw from the performers, especially in the recitatives, mark a step change in their performances. The secular birthday cantatas are the nearest Bach comes to writing opera, and the singers – Joanne Lunn, Robin Blaze, Makoto Sakurada and Dominik Wörner – respond with freer singing than we heard in the sacred cantatas.

I am most familiar with the majority of the music in these two celebratory birthday cantatas dated to 1733 from its substantial re-use in the *Christmas Oratorio* not much more than a year later, in 1734. As always, there is much to be learned from the way in which Bach altered his material, not just in adapting the music to new texts – he must have worked closely with his librettists – but in altering the pitch and adapting the scoring of many of the arias. For example, the duetto *Ich bin deiner* (BWV 213 xi) for alto and tenor with a pair of violas becomes a duet for soprano and bass with a pair of oboes d’amore in Part III of the *Christmas Oratorio*. It is a delight to hear the original of the echo aria from Part IV of the *Christmas Oratorio*, with an oboe d’amore and an alto singer here, so pitched in A not C. So much of the music in these two cantatas is parodied there, and indeed only one chorus (213.xiii) and one aria (214.iii) have no borrowings, and even that chorus might have become the opening movement of the Fifth part of the *Christmas Oratorio*.

But as well as being of interest to those who are preparing performances of the *Christmas Oratorio* this season, the cantatas – however implausible we may find them as drama – are fine performances in their own right. Not often publically performed in my experience, they are a dramatic and musical delight, and certainly up to Suzuki’s high standards. Only some of the string ensemble playing feels a little routine at times, but that is a very small cavil.

David Stancliffe

### BACH: MAGNIFICAT, CHRISTMAS CANTATA 63

Dunedin Consort, John Butt

78:00

Linn CKD469

+Gabrieli *Hodie Christus natus est*, organ music & congregational chorale

This is a fine presentation in the tradition of John Butt’s ‘liturgical’ performance of the Bach Johannespassion. It is a reconstruction of what Bach is likely to have produced for his first Christmas Vespers in Leipzig in 1723. John Butt uses not only his

fine Dunedin Consort of singers and players, but the Peter Collins organ in Greyfriars, Edinburgh (where the recording was made) for the organ preludes – his performance of the fugue on the Magnificat is particularly fine – using a 16' based manual *organo pleno?* – and a crowd of fifty five singers joining in the congregational chorale singing (from the *Neu Leipziger Gesangbuch* of 1682) sometimes in unison, but sometimes in parts. Some of the preludes, chorales and the liturgical end piece didn't fit on the single CD, so although they figure in the accompanying booklet, they can only be heard as a free download: there is more of interest in John Butt's additional material on the web as well, and it is a pity that only seven pages of his excellent material can be fitted into the 44-page booklet among the pictures and hagiography!

In addition to the chorales and organ music, the CD contains the Christmas Cantata 63, *Christen ätzet diesen Tag* – Bach's only (?surviving) foray into a score with four trumpet parts, originating in a Weimar cantata from 1714 – and the earlier E flat version of the Magnificat with the insertion of the Christmas Laudes – four pieces in a simpler, rather less sophisticated style. Both the cantata and the Magnificat are played for convincing reasons at A=392 in *Werkmeister III* (echoes of the Dunedin's superb *Brandenburgs*), bringing the E flat Magnificat to sound more like its later version in D – did the trumpeters play this version in D anyway? No parts survive.

This low pitch suits all the singers except for Clare Wilkinson, who nonetheless sings most convincingly of all. It is in her duet in 63.vii with Nicholas Mulroy, a longstanding member of the Dunedin Consort, that I became most forcefully aware of how Mulroy is in danger of becoming a member of the 'I can, therefore I may' brigade: he makes little attempt to match her subtle phrasing and delicate tone (though he is much better in the *Et misericordia*) singing mostly at full throttle. Listen to him in Verdi mode in the *Deposuit*, and then to the ravishing Clare Wilkinson in the *Esurientes* with the two recorders, and judge for yourself. A consort of singers implies a group of musicians who listen to one another, to match tone, phrasing and dynamic range. I can not infrequently hear Mulroy loud and clear over everyone else, and think this is unmusical, as well as ungracious. This apart, the singing of Julia Doyle and Joanne Lunn, Clare Wilkinson, Nicholas Mulroy and Matthew Brook is beautifully shaped and balanced and is a delight. For the Magnificat, Butt uses five ripienists with his chosen concertists – four in the cantata – and they manage the difficulties of two to a part

convincingly, as do the violin players. Balance and clarity are equally good, and the Linn production team have delivered their usual excellence – save for one extraordinary blot.

There are two minor criticisms: one is that the digital bleep between tracks 16 and 17, where the end of the soprano aria in the Magnificat *Quia respexit* spills into *omnes generationes*, is audible on two of my CD players, though not all. Of course the scoring and key are different, but surely both parts of this verse could share a single track to avoid this? The other thing I noticed is that, in spite of a credit being given to a language coach, there remain some very audible discrepancies in the Latin pronunciation: Matthew Brook slips a very Italianate pronunciation of 'fecit' in the rumbustious aria *Quia fecit mihi magna*, while in *Fecit potentiam* there is a more audibly schooled German consonant.

But these are small details in what is a very good example of John Butt's marriage between arresting scholarship, enormous musicality – the tempi are so naturally right – and pragmatic skills: conceiving and bringing such a complex production to fruition is a huge task, and the whole disc is so coherently musical from the word go. Give it to all your friends for Christmas: this is contextual Bach at its very best.

*David Stancliffe*

#### BACH: MASS IN B MINOR

Hannah Morrison, Esther Brazil, Meg Bragle, Kate Symonds-Joy, Peter Davoren, Nick Pritchard, Alex Ashworth, David Shipley SSAATTBB, Monteverdi Choir, English Baroque Soloists, John Eliot Gardiner  
105:56 (2 CDs)  
Soli Deo Gloria SDG722

It is thirty years since John Eliot Gardiner recorded the B minor Mass and this version, as his notes – largely material drawn from Chapter 13 of his *Music in the Castle of Heaven* – reveal, is a statement of where he and his players have got to after their immersion in the Cantatas over the millennium year and a host of performances since. The most obvious departure from his previous Bach is that the 'solos' are sung by members of the choir, so for example there is a lovely and intelligent balance between the Soprano and Alto (rather than a second soprano as asked for) in the *Christe*, clearly the fruit of having sung together frequently: this is a huge plus over the recordings which have hired-in soloists for these parts. The same is true of the *Et in unum* of the *Symbolum* too, where we first

hear the admirable Meg Bragle. But Gardiner's new version is still essentially a work sung by a full chorus, the polished and excellently prepared Monteverdi Choir. The attention to phrasing, accentuation and dynamic marks – applied in a somewhat romantic way – are wonderful, yet I couldn't help wondering whether the effect Gardiner is after isn't still in the grand heroic mode, rather than being informed by the latest scholarly discoveries and a fundamental desire to discover the layered nature of the music. He uses the 2010 Bärenreiter edition, but there is no discussion in the booklet of any of the critical issues the autograph score and its corrections raised in the light of the variations discovered in the autograph parts. There is no information either about instruments or temperament, so we are left guessing as to what informs and drives Gardiner's decisions.

For example, all the music, except for the single-voice arias and duets, is sung by the full choir – which is 13.9.7.6, partnered by the band which is 6.6.4.3.2 strings who seem to play tutti throughout as far as I can judge. This tutti makes a splendid sound, but dynamic contrasts on the whole are made by singers and players increasing or diminishing their volume rather than by adding to or diminishing the number of singers or violins. Perhaps this 'modern' view of the orchestra is where Bach had arrived at the end of his life, having witnessed – and helped in – its evolution from those independent *cori* of brass, wind, strings, voices and continuo that he inherited from the scoring of previous generations and which is still apparent in cantatas originating in Weimar, like *Der Himmel lacht!* (BWV31), into a more homogenous whole. Finding the right texture and tessitura seems to inform the choice of which voice sings which solo rather than a principled decision to present the *Missa* with essentially a vocal quintet, and adding the numbers of players and singers as required by the volume and texture of the music and how it is scored. Indeed Gardiner, when ruminating on the structure of the mass in chapter 13 of his *Music in the Castle of Heaven* contrasts (p.491) 'public (choral) with private (solo) utterance'. In his mind and on this recording there is no difference in the choral sound between the 'intonation' to the *Symbolum*, with its fugato on the Gregorian chant with a pair of violins and the full sound of the *Patrem omnipotentem* that follows: both are delivered at full pelt as 'public' choral utterance. But surely a contrast should be made here that reflects the liturgical division between the celebrant's intonation and the assembly's response? Public and private are not categories that I recognize in scoring the vocal parts of a work like the B minor mass, even if you

could make a case for treating the arias in the Passions in this way.

On the plus side, there are quintessential Gardiner moments – the terrific *accelerando* in the last four bars of the ritornello of the *Quoniam* leading to the perilously fast but perfectly controlled *Cum Sancto Spiritu*, which remains clear and in tune and is a tribute to choir's and orchestra's technical accomplishment in delivering just what Gardiner sets them. Not everyone will like the highly mannered phrasing in the first *Kyrie*, or the sharp accents and dynamic changes in the second *Kyrie* – and it feels a bit laboured, as though there are four beats in each bar rather than the two implied by the *alla breve* ♢ time signature. But in the *Missa* as a whole, the dovetailing of the movements is beautifully managed, and the immediate start of the *Qui sedes* as the *Qui tollis* ends works for me. I admired the controlled and pent-up emotional control of the *Incarnatus* and the choppy *Crucifixus* with the darker colour accentuated by using only the 2nd sopranos, but the crescendo of the band in bar 36 before the accented entries in bars 37ff seems wildly anachronistic to me. I like the audible intake of breath before *Et resurrexit*, and if you think that the bass line *et iterum venturus* (bar 74ff) should be sung tutti, you won't hear a neater and more unanimous choral sound. We have a lighter, more lyrical bass (Alex Ashworth) to sing the *Et in Spiritum sanctum*, though the bass line of the chorus as a whole is coloured more by the dark voice of David Shipley who does the *Quoniam* – it's a darker, throatier sound than emerges from any other part. As the *Confiteor* winds down, we step away from the old-style Gregorian cantus firmus into the almost Beethoven-like chromaticisms of the Adagio of the *Et expecto* before subito vivace on the first beat of bar 147. As you would guess, this is managed dramatically in the classical manner. Here is where we see Gardiner at his best: putting into practice the theories he has come to adopt.

The *Sanctus* is pretty steady, and the *Osanna* continues in exactly the same tempo as the *Pleni sunt coeli*. The *Agnus* allows us to hear Meg Bragle again on her own, and the final *Dona nobis* can't resist a pp start with a gradual crescendo in all the parts.

The playing is very fine, but the decision to avoid extreme temperaments and use tuning vents in the trumpets gives the band a modern feel: it's safer, even if less exciting. You don't get those ringing chords re-creating the fundamental so clearly without completely natural harmonics, as Suzuki seems belatedly to have discovered. The trumpets manage well enough – though there are hurried semiquavers in bar

67 of the *Gloria*, and an unhelpful accent (of relief?) on the final note of the run on the first beat of bar 47 of the *Patrem omnipotentem*, when it should just tail away. These are really nit-picking comments, but when so much else is so good, it is a pity for tiny details like this to let the side down.

So should you buy this version? I probably wouldn't, though its technical competence is superb according to its own lights, and I loved hearing the members of the choir sing the solo and duet numbers. The Monteverdi Choir are hugely accomplished, and sing quite wonderfully. But you should certainly listen to it. It's just that I'm not sure I like even my big-scale Bach like that any more. I prefer the excitement of the clean textures of a group like Václav Luks' Collegium Vocale 1704, that I reviewed in the December 2013 EMR. But punters will love it – and it's certainly a winner in the great English choral tradition of which Gardiner and his forces are and have been standard-bearers for so long.

David Stancliffe

### J. S. BACH: ORGAN WORKS VOL. III

Robert Quinney

61:31

Coro COR16132

BWV541, 542, 547, 590, 659-661 & 769a

For this third CD in the CORO series, Robert Quinney again chooses the 1976 Metzler organ in the chapel of Trinity College Cambridge to play a programme that fits the Advent to Christmas period: the G minor Fantasia and Fugue BWV 542, three preludes on *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland* BWV 659-661, the Pastorella in F BWV 590, the Prelude and Fugue in C BWV 547, the Canonic variations on *Vom Himmel hoch* BWV 769 and the Prelude and Fugue in G BWV 541.

Quinney's elegant and supple phrasing and his neat finger-work are everywhere apparent, but perhaps best displayed in the C major 9/8 prelude, where the registration is clear and clean, and would show up the slightest infelicity. The fugue begins with a similar though more forceful registration, but builds continually till the pedal entry. This is as good as it gets, and the playing has that effortless feel about it which is combined with highly suitable instrument and very skilled recording technique to produce a most satisfying CD. The clarity and fluency of the Canonic variations on *Vom Himmel hoch* – not at all an easy piece to think through and present, let alone

play – are registered wonderfully; but while we are given the specification of Trinity's Metzler, I still wish that even a modest booklet of 15 pages could find room for the details of the registration that Quinney uses. This is the best performance of BWV 769 on CD that I know.

A bonus is that Quinney writes engagingly and perceptively about the music he presents, and is able to conjure up verbally the complexity and delight he finds in these masterpieces: the recording was only made this September, and its quick production and release show what can be done when a Christmas market beckons! I think his developing series for Coro is unbeatable – buy them, if you buy no other Bach organ performances. The combination of the player, the instruments he uses and the recording technique is unbeatable.

David Stancliffe

### BACH: ORGAN WORKS

Masaaki Suzuki (Schnitger/Hinz organ in the Martinikerk, Groningen)

79:26

BIS-2111 SACD

BWV535, 548, 565, 572, 590, 767 & 769

This is a brilliant Bach recital by Masaaki Suzuki on a seemingly perfect Ahren restoration of the complex organ in the Martinikerk, Groningen.

To take the instrument first: a gothic organ of 1450 was altered in 1482, and then altered in Renaissance style in 1542, added to in 1564 and 1627-8, altered in 1685-90, then rebuilt and enlarged with enormous 32' Principal pedal towers by Arp Schnitger in 1691-2 after various disasters, given a new Rugpositief by Schnitger's son and Hinz in 1728-30, again repaired and enlarged by Hinz in 1740 after subsidence. Then between 1808 and 1939, when the action was electrified, it was altered and substantially re-voiced, so that the historic origins of the organ became scarcely discernable. A major work of restoration was then executed over more than an eight-year period between 1976 and 1984 by Jürgen Ahrend to bring it back to its supposed 1740 shape and sound. The result is very fine, but it has none of those slight variations between notes that make many organs surviving in more or less their original form so melodically fluent, and is a characteristic of, for example, a careful reproduction of a 1720s Denner oboe.

I have not examined the organ in detail, but the photographs on the website make it clear that the frame and action are entirely new and much of the pipework has

been re-voiced (again). Of the 53 stops, 20 are in origin Schnitger or earlier, 14 are from the 18th or early 19th centuries, and 19 are entirely new. It is indeed now a Rolls Royce of an organ – though once again I am sorry not to have a detailed registration scheme. The sound is splendid, but so well regulated that it seems like a classy reproduction rather than an original instrument.

I make no apology for this fairly detailed comment on the organ, because the new action and even regulation helps explain why Suzuki can play it so fluently. So now to the playing. From his choice of music here – his earlier recordings of Bach's organ music include the *Clavier-übung iii* – I suspect that Suzuki may prefer playing the harpsichord. Certainly the playing of the *manualiter Pastorale* (BWV 590) and the *Partita on O Gott, du frommer Gott* (BWV 767) is lovely, and I particularly like the phrasing and registration of the latter. The bigger pieces – THE *Tocatta and Fugue in D minor* (BWV 565), the *Fantasia in G* (BWV 572) and the 'Wedge' *Prelude and Fugue in E minor* (BWV 548) are played finely, but somehow rather unyieldingly; and the remaining piece on the CD, the *Canonic Variations on Von Himmel hoch* (BWV 769) gets – to my mind – a more mechanical and less revealing performance than Robert Quinney's elegant performance on his *Coro Vol III 16132*, reviewed above.

I am a great enthusiast for Suzuki's Bach with his Collegium Musicum, Japan, and think that he is a fine musician with a sure touch for balance, tempi and colour; but although the performances are faultless, something is missing here – the clattering tremulant in *Partita viii on O Gott, du frommer Gott* (track 14) is an almost welcome relief! – and I suspect that technical brilliance is winning over letting the music sing: the organ and its player ought to be breathing.

David Stancliffe

## BACH 2 HARPSICHORDS

Skip Sempé, Olivier Fortin

63:38

Paradizo PA0014

This 1998 recording was, I think, a missed opportunity. Firstly, none of Bach's works genuinely for two harpsichords is included and secondly there's no really creative engagement with the originals to create music that looks and sounds like something the composer might have written for these forces. In the organ works, for instance, one player plays the manual parts,

the other the pedal. So while, purely as noise, it offers a sumptuous experience, musically this did little for me. Well played, though.

David Hansell

## HANDEL: DUETTI E TERZETTI ITALIANI

Roberta Invernizzi, Silvia Frigato, Krystian Adam, Thomas Bauer *SSTBar*, La Risonanza, Fabio Bonizzoni *dir*

61:44

Glossa GCD 921517

Recent years have produced no greater aural pleasure than La Risonanza's on-going series of Handel's vocal chamber works. Here they turn their attention to one of the most neglected genres in his output, the vocal duets and trios with continuo accompaniment. Checking back, I was amazed to find that it is now 30 years since the delightful Hungarian soprano Mária Zádori and alto Paul Esswood produced a splendid two-CD set including eleven duets. Since that was for a different vocal disposition, there are no duplications with the new disc, the contents of which are two trios and nine duets composed during or (in one case) possibly just before Handel's Italian sojourn (1707-1709).

At the time Handel visited Italy the vocal duet was popular as a sophisticated chamber form cultivated by composers such as Steffani. I find several aspects of the youthful Handel's contribution to it quite remarkable, perhaps above all in his realisation of dramatic possibilities not necessarily inherent in texts largely concerned with the vagaries of love. He achieves this by adopting a flexible approach quite different from the formalism of the chamber cantatas. There are no *da capo* arias, the text being treated in sections in ways that seem to take their cue from the words. Take, for example, 'Va, speme infida' (HWV 199) (Go, treacherous hope, be off), for two sopranos. It opens, as suggested by the text, driven by a strong running bass and rapid imitative *passaggi* between the voices. 'Tu baldanzosa' (You told my heart in a conceited manner) brings a new idea, with a slower dotted rhythm, still with much imitative *passaggi* but now also introducing lovely floated cantabile writing. At the word 'Ma' (but) that starts line 4, the pause after it brings a striking moment of rhetoric, before continuing the fervid sentiment ('if having been a liar to no avail') in more declamatory, increasingly accusatory mode before almost imperceptibly text and music slip back to the opening to create a satisfying and thoroughly logical cyclical form. The whole effect is both musically

and dramatically masterful. I've chosen to discuss this one duet in detail as an illustration of Handel's extraordinarily confident handling of the form, but most of the others could be discussed in similar fashion. The pair of trios add not only an extra voice, but also an extra dimension, demonstrating the composer's mastery of counterpoint in writing of madrigalian complexity and sensitivity. 'Se tu non lasci amore' (HWV 201) ('Too well do I know that if you do not give up love'), for which we have a rare specific date and place of composition (Naples, 12 July 1708), is scored for two sopranos and bass, the contrast of vocal gamut skilfully exploited in intricately interwoven lines. The text, which speaks of the anguish of the separated lover, lends itself to writing that involves such an unusually high degree of chromaticism and dissonant suspensions that it inspires the note writer to the unlikely theory that it was composed in homage to Gesualdo, himself of course Neapolitan.

As might have been predicted, the performances are very much a match for the interest and high quality of the music. Roberta Invernizzi has been one of the mainstays of the series, but her customary musical insight and gloriously free tone is here matched keenly by Silvia Frigato and Thomas Bauer, their performance of the bewitching 'Tacete, ohimè, tacete!' (HWV 196) (Cease, oh, be still), a plea not to disturb the sleeping Amor, bringing some exquisite *mezza voce* singing and forming one of the highlights of the CD. The excellent tenor Krystian Adam gets only one duet with Invernizzi, 'Caro autor di mio doglia' ((HWV 182) (Dearest author of my pain), but that too is exceptional, the one unadulterated love duet. Again the structure is interesting, with a high point of ecstatic fervour at the declamation 'O lumi! O volto! O luci! O labbro! (O enlightenment! O countenance! O eyes! O lips!). It will come as no surprise to those who've followed the series to learn that Bonizzoni's support is as unobtrusively musical as ever. If that sounds like faint praise, it is not meant to be; his refusal to strive for superfluous effect is one of his greatest assets, not to mention a rare one. Reservations? Very few, but critical duty demands mention of Invernizzi's tendency to sing too loudly in her upper register, and I felt the singers were a little parsimonious with ornamentation. But that is Beckmesser-ish carping in the context of what is unquestionably one of the best discs of 2015. A joy of a CD!

*Brian Robins*

VIVALDI: CONCERTI PER FAGOTTO IV  
Sergio Azzolini, L'Onda Armonica

68:40

naïve OP 30551

*Tesori del Piemonte* vol. 59

RV469, 473, 491, 492, 498 & 500

These six bassoon concertos once again contradict the oft-paraphrased oversimplification that the composer wrote "one concerto 600 times". Framed by works in C major, there are two more in A minor (including my favourite of Vivaldi's 39 solo concertos for the instrument, RV498) and one each in F and G major. In live performance, I have previously written in these pages, Sergio Azzolini can be rather distracting in his means of communicating with his audience, but through the medium of digital music I am spared that visuals and can luxuriate in the warmth of his tone, especially in the lyrical central movements. In the faster outer ones, yes, Vivaldi relies on the building blocks of ritornello form, but he had the great advantage over most of his contemporaries of writing really ear-catching melodies in the first place, and when it comes to writing virtuosically for the soloist, he has few – if any – rivals. L'Onda Armonica (44221 strings with plucker – with an array of different instruments at his disposal – and keyboardist) are more than "accompaniment"; just listen to the opening of RV498 (Track 7 - Azzolini imagines it representing a snow-covered Venetian winter!) as a sample of their layered dynamics and careful phrasing. This is a fabulous CD and I shall enjoy returning to it often.

*Brian Clark*

ZANI: DIVERTIMENTI FOR VIOLIN AND CELLO

Lena Neudauer *violin*, Martin Rummel *cello*

117:41 (2 CDs)

Capriccio C5264

For any composer new to me I turn first to my trusty *Grove* before reading the booklet notes. Zani (1696-1767), a contemporary of the Baroque 'greats', was born in Italy but spent much of his time in Vienna. His music, although conventional in style, bears little resemblance to the Italian Vivaldian style. The booklet claims these twelve *Divertimenti* to be the first works for this combination in which the two instruments are treated as equal partners, rather than the cello acting mainly as the bass line. Certainly this is minimal chamber music, and I felt the need for a little continuo at times to fill out the sparse texture – for any double stopping was a rare occurrence in Zani's writing. This is neat playing from these two

accomplished performers, if at times perhaps a little too spiky for my taste. Only the hardy might wish to hear all twelve works at one sitting, but they are nevertheless an interesting addition to the chamber repertoire of the period and would complement Rummel's recent recording of the complete cello concerti of this composer. The booklet notes do not say whether these works correspond to either of the opus numbers given in the Grove works list for the same combination (given there as *Sonate da Camera* or just *Sonate*), or whether these Divertimenti are a newly discovered set. The notes do, however, give helpful stylistic guidance on the music. For those who delight in collecting musical trivia, the notes mention that Zani died as a result of a coach turning over – rivalling Alkan's noted bookcase death some 200 years later.

*Ian Graham-Jones*

## Classical

C. P. E. BACH: EMPSINDSAM

Collegium Musicum Den Haag, Claudio Ribeiro

65:00

C. P. E. Bach: Symphony in D, Concerto Wq, 14, H417,

Sonata in A minor Wq90.01, H522

W. F. Bach: Symphony in F

Barbella: Concerto III

My first reaction to putting this CD in my machine was, "Oh no, not C. P. E. Bach's greatest hit [the D major Symphony] AGAIN!" It didn't take me long, though, to realise that CMDH were not just going through the motions of producing a disc devoted to this music - they had grabbed it by the neck and decided to give it a good shake; these are performances of real vitality and, even if the programme is something of a calling card for the group with a Neapolitan recorder concerto at its heart and a sonata for keyboard with violin and cello accompaniment as another filler, that is insignificant when one is dealing with such stylish and passionate performances. Listening to the adagio of the harpsichord concerto was an emotionally draining experience, but not at all in a bad way – the deepest sentiments of C. P. E. Bach's soul are seemingly laid out for all to feel, and Ribeiro and co. capture all the nuances to perfection. I think my only (slight) complaint about the whole set is the fact it took me so long to identify the outstanding players. To save readers the bother, the talented recorder player is Inês d'Avena – her even and pure

sound reminds me a lot of the legendary Gudrun Heynes. If this group is new to you (as it was to me) do not hesitate to make their acquaintance – they have something to say, no matter what they are playing!

*Brian Clark*

W. F. BACH: CONCERTOS POUR CLAVECIN ET CORDES

Maude Gratton, Il Convito

74:00

Mirare MIR162

Wilhelm Friedemann Bach's is an interesting voice – part baroque, part galant and the occasional touch of *Sturm und Drang*. Here we have three harpsichord concertos, a lively fugue for strings and a four movement sinfonia. It has to be a matter of regret that Il convito have not explored the performance practice options inherent in their chosen repertoire. Single strings (including a rather heavy 16' double bass) are used throughout where just a quartet might have been more appropriate for the concertos and then multiple instruments (with 16') for at least the sinfonia if not necessarily the fugue. The booklet scarcely helps this rarely-recorded composer. Although the concertos receive a full commentary there is no mention of the other pieces, even though there's no lack of space. But whatever the shortcomings of the issue the music is splendid – real virtuosity in the keyboard writing; Maude Gratton (a Bruges prize-winner on organ) delivers it with considerable panache; and against single strings the harpsichord is never overwhelmed though I did feel that it could have been a little more forward in the overall sound. But you should get this, and not just to round out your view of the truly extraordinary Bach family.

*David Hansell*

MOZART: PIANO CONCERTOS

Ronald Brautigam *fortepiano*, Die Kölner Akademie,

Michael Alexander Willens

68:28

BIS-2074 SACD

Concertos 8, 11 & 13 (K246, 413 & 415)

I think the biggest compliment I can pay to these performances is that I didn't really notice them. I was just aware of Mozart's genius in this genre – which the players present admirably with many a subtle nuance and the rich colours of a period orchestra (strings 44222). K413

and 415 are two of the three concertos which the composer said could be played with 'merely a Quattro' though here they get the full treatment. The piano (McNulty 2013 after Walter 1802) can be both lyrical and sparkling under the fingers of this master pianist and avoids the tendency one sometimes hears in fortepianos of sounding out of tune even when it isn't. There's a lot I could say, but just look at the stars – I seldom give 5 for anything.

*David Hansell*

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Received for review next time:

Ockeghem: Missa l'homme armé  
Lassus: Magnificat  
Martin Luther: Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott  
Johann Crüger: Wach auff mein Hertz und singe  
Rosenmüller Marienvesper (2CDs)  
Schein: Cymbalum Sionium  
Bach: Markus Passion (recon. Grychtolik)  
Bach: Duet cantatas  
Bach: Die Kunst der Fuge (Martha Cook)  
Zamboni: Madrigali e Sonate  
Abos: A Maltese Christmas  
CPE Bach: Concertos & Symphonies II  
The Galant Lute (Vinicius Perez)  
Keyboard music by CPE Bach, CFC Fasch, Nichelmann