

Early Music Review

BOOKS

RUTH TATLOW: BACH'S NUMBERS

Compositional Proportion and Significance

xviii + 411pp, £84.99

Cambridge University Press, 2015.

ISBN 978-1-107-08860-3

The very subject matter of this book might be enough to send you screaming to the hills. Hand on heart, I am a sceptic. My understanding of proportion in music has been (naively?) based on early musical notions that the circle of perfection represented triple time subdivided into three elements. When I hear music compared to architecture and how the parts must relate proportionally to the whole, I think (again simplistically?) of the folly of having three consecutive phrases of five, seventeen and eleven bars. Surely things that *feel* balanced *are* balanced? The notion that Bach sat down like an architect and spanned out not only movements but also entire works (and then collections of works!) based on the number of bars involved would strike me as preposterous. And yet, when you sit down and draw up tables, as Ruth Tatlow has done by the dozen, the numbers stack up to support the theories she passionately advocates.

This becomes all the more clear when Bach revises his works when he is assembling them into sets. He removes entire movements, re-writes others, all seemingly with the sole aim of making the total bar counts match over huge spans of his output. Suggesting that the numbers at the end of his scores representing the bar count is strong evidence for a pre-occupation with such things simply ignores the fact that other composers do it, too - and more often than not professional copyists do the same - quite simply in order to ensure that each of the separate parts they copy out has the same number of bars! I have some difficulty accepting in larger works that Tatlow's 1:1 and 2:1 proportions are justifiable when the selection of movements that adds up to one or other total is so random within a sequence; make a different selection from the list of movements and the maths does not work. Must we assume that Bach got to the "Dona nobis pacem" of the B minor mass knowing exactly how many bars he had to write? Presumably - since it is a

repeat of an earlier movement - he already knew that, so had to be more self-controlling in composing the "Agnus Dei"?

There is a huge amount of information in these 400+ pages and the book is anything but an easy read. In her Appendix ("A theology of musical proportions and Harmony in Bach's time"), I do not see anything that talks to me of numerical proportion and counting bars; rather it is harmony that is seen as the root of perfection, including reference to numbers (seven is omitted from the sequence of "the whole of Harmony").

There are some slips that copy editors really should have caught ("Leh-rmeister" at a line end on p. 16 is dreadful, for example; there is also a stray dash on p. 17), but on the whole the book is beautifully laid out and printed.

Brian Clark

MUSIC AT GERMAN COURTS, 1715-1760

CHANGING ARTISTIC PRIORITIES

Edited by Samantha Owens, Barbara M. Reul and Janice

Stockigt

xx + 484pp, £19.99

Boydell Press, 2015.

ISBN 978-1-78237-058-3

The hardback original dates from 2011. At fractionally under a third of the price, this is an excellent opportunity for students and researchers to own what remains an excellent guide to music throughout the German world between the dates given, with contributions by leading scholars on music in Berlin, Dresden, Darmstadt, Gotha, Stuttgart, Weissenfels, Zerbst and elsewhere. There is a wealth of primary source detail that is unrivalled in similar volumes which could make the text heavy going, but the writing (and translation into English where this was necessary) ensure that the narrative is always clear. So few books on the music of this period avoid concentrating on the works of a single composer; the broad expanse of musical life throughout Germany at this time is explored in all its guises. The volume also contains a foreword by Michael Talbot, an introductory essay by two of the editors on what constitutes a "hofkapelle" and a concluding article by Steven Zohn on musicians' reflections

on their lives at court in the 18th century. Essential reading for anyone working in this field!

Brian Clark

PAUL F. RICE VENANZIO RAUZZINI IN BRITAIN: CASTRATO, COMPOSER AND CULTURAL LEADER University of Rochester Press, 2015. xii + 402pp. Boydell & Brewer, £65.00.

Rauzzini (1746-1810) was born in Camerino (or Camerano), about 40 miles south of Ancona and roughly west of Assisi, half-way across the peninsula. He accepted castration when eleven. He studied with famous singers and his dramatic career began in Rome in 1764. He was not extremely powerful, but he had subtle skills and he often wrote his own music. He performed in major theatres from 1765 in Rome, Venice, Munich and Vienna and was the leading “man” in Mozart’s *Lucio Silla* (Milan, 1773) and Mozart wrote *Exsultate, jubilate* for him.

Rauzzini arrived in London on 19 September 1774 and his first performance *Armida*, a pasticcio, was first heard on 8 November. He was not well, two performances were cancelled, and his second appearance was on 19 November. He did his best. When cured, his singing was fine, though if he had a high note, he ran up with short notes to the top and descended to a final note. In *Piramo e Tisbe* (1775) he was probably the first castrato to sing in one of his own operas in London: there were also performances in Vienna, Brunswick and Bologna. The information concerning the Overture is confusing, with paragraphs on pp. 37 & 38 and footnotes 40, 42 & 43. The list of operas (Appendix B, pp. 354-6) includes the European ones, but it omits the later *Leroe* (1782), *Creusa* (1783), *Alina* (1784) & *La Vestale* (1787), even if they are pastiches – though they are listed in the index with the other Rauzzini operas; *La sorpresa* (1779) is not on the list and indexed under “vocal music”. It is odd that Rauzzini’s Operatic Roles (Appendix B) omit five titles, even if they are not complete works by him.

Rauzzini settled in London, but made many visits to Bath. Its social and artistic life began with Beau Nash early in the 18th century. At first the regular musicians were natives. Chilcot published *12 English Songs* around 1744 – well worth buying (Kings Music / Early Music Company), and the Linleys – father and six sons. William Herschel was an astronomer and an organist, Henry Harrington was a physician and a glee composer. J. C. Smith Jnr moved to Bath along with Handel’s manuscripts. His concert programmes in Bath from 1786-1810 are listed in Appendix

A, filling pp. 287-353 with the titles grouped compactly in two paragraphs each for the first and second half. I was surprised to see Handel’s *Funeral Anthem*, presumably for Queen Caroline, which was probably performed to mark the 50th anniversary of her death. The Dec.6 1786 performance was performed as at Westminster Abbey “by Desire”. The Bath lists of performers are similar to those in London, and Rauzzini retained his activity there, though his reputation declined, particularly with problems with another singer. I suspect that his performances in Bath were more relaxing.

Rauzzini was happiest in performing and later composing the standard Italian opera practice. He wasn’t full-blooded, and was probably best at more gentle roles, and he managed fairly well in his composition. The chance of operatic revivals are slim – perhaps *Piramo e Tisbe* is the most likely to spread now. It is, though, difficult to value a composer of whom I have never heard a note – and I don’t think that over the 20 years of *Early Music Review* I can remember any reviews, in which I proof-read every note, and my much longer *The Gramophone*, though I don’t have to proof-read it!

The preface is a survey of the social problem for castrati: despite being men in nearly every respect, they can’t mix with men or women without great care.

I’ve taken from Paul Rice the list of instrumental and small-scale vocal music, and it would be well worth making it available. His published music is certainly competent, but I’d rather see the quartets in proper scores. It would be useful if the whole set were published, with separate parts added.

- Rauzzini published 8 sets of instrumental music published by Welcker.
- op.1. *Six favourite Sonatas for the Piano forte or Harpsichord. With an Accompaniment for a Violin* 1777. [The Welcker parts was in score with the piano, but a later French edition had a separate violin part.]
 - op. 2. *Six Quartettos for two Violins, a Tenor and Bass.* 1778.
 - op. 3. *The Favourite songs, Rondeaux, DUETTS & CHORUS, in the OPERA LE ALI D'AMORE* 1778. [Full score]
 - op. 4. *La Partenza: a Cantata composed by Sigr.: Venanzio and Sung by Him and Miss Storace at the Opera House* 1778.
 - op. 5. *Twelve Italian duettinos, for two voices with a thorough bass.* 1778.
 - op. 6. *Six Quartettos for the Piano Forte or Harpsichord with Accompaniments for two Violins and a Bass.* 1781
 - op. 7. *A Second Set of Six Quartettos for two Violins, a Tenor and Bass.* [1780]
 - op. 8. *Six Sonatas for the Piano Forte or harpsichord. With an Accompaniment for a Violin.* [1781]
- Then followed:
- op.9. *Six Favorite Italian Canzonets, with an Accompaniment for the pianoforte.* Blundell [1781]
 - op. 10 & 11 unknown.
 - op. 12. *Three Grand Duets; for two performers.*

Beardmore & Birchall, 1783.
 op. 13. *Four Favourite Italian Duets for a Voice... also, four Easy Airs*. R. Birchall [1784]
 op. 14. *Six Italian Canzonets, with an Accompaniment for the Piano Forte*. J.Bland [1785]
 op. 15. *Three Sonatas and a Duet for the Harpsichord or Piano-Forte with an Accompaniment for the Violin Ad Libitum*. Birchall and Andrews [1786], reissued by Goulding & Co c.1800.

Clifford Bartlett

EDITIONS OF MUSIC

MONTEVERDI: GLORIA A OTTO VOCI, SV 307...
 Edited by Barbara Neumeier. iv + 24pp, €24.50.
 Carus 27.081.

I had long been aware that the *Gloria a8* wasn't of obvious Monteverdian origin. The English text uses the term *autograph*, which in our language usually implies that it was written by the composer, whereas otherwise a term like *copyist* is used. However, the German term is *handschriftlich*, which is wider in meaning. What worries me more, however, is that it doesn't have much relationship with Monteverdi's music, and the *Gloria a8* doesn't come anywhere near the 1610, 1641 and 1650 Masses. The scoring is for two choirs, each C1 C3 C4 and F4, with three continuo bass parts identical apart from copying slips. It might sound better with a different composer's name! I've edited vast amounts of Monteverdi's church music, and if anyone had asked me to publish it, I'd have done so as an unknown composer from Naples. There are already two editions, though in larger volumes, and one version I've had in my computer for some time.

There are sections with fewer parts, the voices of each choir being of the same range, except for a trio of ATB in choir II for "Domine Deus": this should be described as ATB II. The listing of the rest of the index (p. ii) would be clearer as SATB, SATB than SSAATTBB. The continuo part is very simple, and could have been a useful elementary exercise for those wishing to play from the bass, with simple figuring added.

It is significant that the *Kritischer Bericht* has no reference to Monteverdi, whereas the editor mentions Monteverdi in general terms in the first paragraph and specifically in the first sentence of the second, and the publisher went too far on the title: the title should surely have been something like ?Monteverdi?. Apologies to Carus, a publisher for whom I have enormous respect.

Clifford Bartlett

FRESCOBALDI: CANZONAS A4 FOR FOUR-PART INSTRUMENTAL ENSEMBLE... VOL II...

Edited by Friedrich Cerha.
 Diletto Musicale (DM 1452) Doblinger, 2014.
 36pp + five parts, £21.50.

This volume contains nos. V-X. Nos V & VI are Sopra Rugier and Sopra Romanesca, both not strictly ground basses. The other items are merely numbered 7-10. These six items were preceded by a group of 4, due Canti e due Bassi. Frescobaldi took great care as always to produce mostly contrapuntal sections in duple time, but some of the triple sections are chordal. In my earlier days, I enjoyed playing a variety of such pieces on viols in the 1960s, and I probably moved down to continuo playing in the 1970s with violin-family instruments – whichever scoring was played, I enjoyed. My older copies are probably now passed on to Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge, where a lot of my music now resides, though currently they are temporarily in storage. The Bc part is clearly for a chordal realisation, so the score is all that is needed – this isn't music to be conducted, but there would be some benefit if the continuo part had additional figuring.

	Original clefs	Clefs in Edition
V:	G2 C2 C3 F4 (Bc F3/C3)	Tr Tr A B (F4)
VI:	C1 C3 C4 F4 (Bc F4)	Tr Tr A B (F4)
VII:	C1 C3 C4 F4 (Bc F4/C4)	Tr A A B (F4)
VIII:	C1 C3 C4 F4 (Bc F4/C4)	Tr Tr A B (F4)
IX:	C1 C3 C3 F4 (Bc F4)	Tr Tr A B (F4)
X:	C1 C3 C4 F4 (Bc F4)	Tr Tr A B (F4)

No. VII is the only piece demanding two violas. However, the only problem occurs in bars 56-57 and can easily be fixed.

Part 2: change E minim to crotchet, then return to A at the end of bar 57.

Part 3: change from note 2 to two crotchet rests then take the last note from part 2 to part 3; bar 56 notes 1-2 similarly then swap the minims.

Groups using viols will manage without any difficulty.

Clifford Bartlett

FRESCOBALDI: *IL PRIMO LIBRO DI CAPRICCI
FATTI SOPRA DIVERSI SOGGETTI, ET ARIE*
(ROMA, SOLDI, 1624)

Edited by Christopher Stenbridge. (Organ and Keyboard Works II).

Bärenreiter (BA 8413), 2015. xxviii + 90pp, £37.00.

I bought the five volumes edited by Pierre Pidoux and published by Bärenreiter as BA2202 in 1968. Christopher Stenbridge is a meticulous editor, but the bolder print of the Pidoux/Bärenreiter does make it easier to read – and I don't think that a sensible reader will assume that beaming quavers does not imply breaking of phrases. Stenbridge's notation of triple time, however, is worth trying. But neither edition observes the four-stave layout of the original edition. The new edition has useful introductory notes and critical commentary. For study, it is excellent, and I'm glad to have both editions. Academics and serious performers definitely need BA8413, as opposed to BA2202!

Clifford Bartlett

MOZART: PIANO SONATA IN A MAJOR K. 331
(ALLA TURCA)... EDITED BY WOLF-DIETER
SEIFFERT.

G. Henle Verlag, 2015.

iv + 26pp, €7.00

This is not merely an offprint – it is a new edition. Mozart's pages were split, and only the last page survived until a double leaf of the autograph was recently found in the National Széchényi Library in Budapest. Apart from the limited autograph sheets, the editor also found a copyist's MS in Prague – an extensive report can be downloaded at www.henle.com. There are two early editions, in 1784 and what was called a fourth impression, though K331 was reset by three engravers.

I've compared the new edition with the Bärenreiter Collected Works, in this case quite late (1986). There is a difference in the first two bars: Bärenreiter has a slur for the first two of a group of three quavers, whereas Henle (referring to the 2015 edition) slurs all three. (I don't edit Mozart, but the problem of slurring 6/8 or 12/8 rhythms in Handel, whose music I spend a lot of time editing, are often ambiguous.) Comments are helpfully noted on the musical pages as well as in the separate critical notes. The newly discovered four pages cover the end of the first

movement and beginning of the second. (Why are the bar numbers not stated to show the exact beginnings and ends?) Could not the new pages have been printed at half-size on the two blank pages at the end? The Sonata itself is one of Mozart's most popular works, and I expect that rival editions will appear.

Clifford Bartlett

RECORDINGS

15th century

FLOS VIRGINUM: MOTETS OF THE 15TH CENTURY
Stimmwerck

62:10

cpo 777 937-2

In many ways there is no more exposed singing scenario than one-to-a-part fifteenth-century vocal music. It demands a perfect blend and perfect intonation, and that on vocal lines which sometimes seem to defy melodic logic. This CD presents an intriguing selection of 15th-century motets and songs which places the big names – Dufay, Pullois and Brassart – alongside lesser figures such as de Sarto, Martini and Krafft as well as airing several anonymous works from the period. Unfortunately the standard of the singing is variable, often very fine and nicely blended, but just occasionally settling badly on to chords. It would be invidious to highlight particular voices, but bringing guest voices into an established ensemble is always a hazardous business. There is a pleasant come-and-go to the dynamics and a nice sweep to the melodic lines, and articulation is generally effective although just occasionally detail is lost. This CD is well worth the investment for the wealth of relatively unknown material it contains, brought to light as part of a project exploring musical life in Austria in the late middle ages.

D. James Ross

LAUDE, BALLATE, SALTARELLI & VILLANELLE

Aquila Altera Ensemble

59:18

Tactus TC 300004

It is hard to pin down what case this CD is trying to make. The repertoire seems consist of works from written manuscript sources and, if the players are

applying a huge degree of improvisation, this is not really apparent. In the case of the very familiar anonymous 15th-century Saltarello which appears as track 2 on the CD – it was used most notably as dance music in Zeffirelli’s film of *Romeo and Juliet* – it is hard to see what element of the oral culture has been applied to the printed source. The melody is repeated several times with different instrumental textures, but surely this is simply standard modern performance practice for this repertoire? In some of the other pieces, it is possible that there is a greater degree of improvisation, but not enough to establish the CD’s credentials as a discussion document on the subject. The performances are lively and generally engaging, but a rather thin and hissy recorded sound spoils the ambience and I was surprised to note that the recording was only two years old. Some of the of the more intensely-toned tracks such as those for soprano and recorders actually distort rather badly. Amongst the redeeming features is some terrific zampogna playing from Marco Cignitti and some very energetic dance numbers, but perhaps this programme needs to be streamlined and then brought into a studio for a higher-quality recording.

D. James Ross

Renaissance

LASSUS: PROPHETIÆ SIBYLLARUM

Vocalconsort Berlin, Daniel Reuss

49:06

Accent ACC 24307

+ *Angelus ad pastores ait, Ave Maria, Dixit Dominus, Magnificat superaurora lucis rutilat, Quem vidistis pastores & Videntes stellam*

L assus’ extraordinary settings of the thirteen *Prophetiæ Sibyllarum* belong to the same unsettled and unsettling harmonic sound-world as his tortured Tears of St Peter and a handful of his more troubled madrigals, all the close cousins of the music of Gesualdo. No harmonic progression seems to go in the anticipated direction, and occasionally chords spring from roots which neither prepare for nor build towards them. The results are constantly startling and occasionally disorientating, and constantly challenging to sing. The Vocalconsort of Berlin present performances of such assurance and complete security that it is salutary to recall just how hard this mercurial music is to sing. A perfect balance, utterly secure intonation and a constant

inexorable sense of direction make this one of the most impressive recordings I have heard of this repertoire. The *Prophetiæ Sibyllarum* only make up half a programme, and the Consort add on a group of Christmas motets and the sonorous ten-part Magnificat super aurora lucis rutilat. Even with these bonus tracks the recording lasts for under 50 minutes, and some listeners may regard it as poor value, but bearing in mind the harmonic and intellectual density of the *Prophetiæ* I certainly didn’t feel short-changed. Anyone unfamiliar with the *Prophetiæ* has a delight in store, and those already acquainted with some of Lassus’ most outlandish compositions will love the consummate professionalism of these performances.

D. James Ross

RABELAIS: FAY CE QUE VOULDRAS

Sacqueboutiers, Ensemble Clément Janequin, Dominique Visse *director*

68:54

Flora 2410

Music by Attaignant, Bataille, Bertrand, Compère, Costeley, Janequin, Josquin, Lassus, Lejeune & Sermisy

F or those acquainted with their work, it comes as no surprise that the Ensemble Clément Janequin have had a long association with the works of Rabelais. Their 1994 CD *Une fête chez Rabelais* was in itself the result of a successful concert programme, and this present CD was also preceded by a series of live performances. Such is the wealth of surviving Renaissance French chansons that the two CDs only have one chanson in common. The Sacqueboutiers, who nowadays have dropped their regional identifier ‘de Toulouse’, provide a forthright accompaniment for many of the numbers and some impressive instrumental numbers, while the singers, led by their distinctive alto/director Dominique Visse, present splendidly characterised performances of the songs. Over the years the Ensemble have made this area of Renaissance music their specialist realm, and their grainy, robust singing often skirting on the raucous, seems to me just right for the present project. Another major delight of this package is the selection of splendid readings largely from Rabelais’ *Gargantua* performed by the versatile-voiced Vincent Bouchot. It is unfortunate that the reader’s voice is given such an artificial studio acoustic, contrasting uncomfortably with the ‘live’ acoustic of the music, but Mons. Bouchot’s splendid Renaissance pronunciation carries all before it. Anglophone listeners will find the lack

of translations a disadvantage, although the full texts of songs and readings are provided in French. The otherwise lavish accompanying book has excellent programme notes (in French only) and wonderful illustrations, some of the period (including the wonderful crumhorn-nosed figure on the cover), some designed specially for the publication.

D. James Ross

DE RORE: [MISSA] DOULCE MÉMOIRE

Laudantes Consort, Guy Janssens

54:09

sonamusica SONA1504

+ *Agimus tibi gratias, Infelix ego & Parce mihi Domine*

The urbanely elegant polyphony of Cipriano de Rore can sound a little impersonal, but the *Mass Douce Mémoire* (based on the melancholy song of that name by de Rore's French contemporary Pierre Sendrín) shows the suave international master also capable of emotion and passion. A composer whose portraits show an ascetic, gaunt of face and sunken of cheek, and who famously – and perhaps uniquely – failed to be charmed by Venice, is something of an enigma, and his music sometimes seems equally mysterious. The Laudantes Consort under their director Guy Janssens explores this enigma in the *Mass Douce Mémoire* and three of de Rore's most expressive and powerful motets, and generally sympathetic singing and direction provides insights into this intriguing music. If the strong top line masks occasional infelicities in the alto part, resulting perhaps from the mixed sex alto line-up, the overall sound is rich and tuneful. It is nice to see the name of Erik van Nevel, himself a prominent and perceptive conductor of this sort of repertoire, featuring in the bass section of the choir, and a highly readable and informative programme note by the eminent musicologist Ignace Bossuyt ensures that this is a valuable contribution to the enhancement of de Rore's reputation.

D. James Ross

THE LEIDEN CHOIRBOOKS VOL. VI

Egidius Zwartet & College

157:20 (2 CDs)

Ét'cetera KTC1415

Music by Flamingus, Hellinck, de Manchicourt, Mergot de Novo Portu, de Sermisy & anon

The final 2CD volume in this exemplary series of recordings of music from the superb Leiden Choirbooks presents on the first CD two complete Mass settings by Lupus Hellinck and Pierre de Manchicourt respectively with motets by Johannes Flamingus and Franciscus Mergot de Novo Portu, while the second, perhaps more intriguingly, presents the Mass 'Philomena' by Claudin de Sermisy in a liturgical context, which also employs further polyphonic works by Flamingus and Joachimus de Monte from the sixth Leiden Choirbook. Avoiding the frequently recorded works by the established masters which also feature in the choirbooks, the performers have wisely concentrated on music we are unlikely to have heard before by composers whose names are less than household words. What is truly remarkable is the uniformly high quality of the music. The quality of the singing by the Egidius Quartet and College has improved throughout this protracted project, and they present the current programme with considerable authority. The lavish illustrations and the high quality programme notes to which we have become accustomed throughout the series also grace this final volume, leaving listeners with a suitably rich celebration of these remarkable musical volumes.

D. James Ross

MADRIGAL HISTORY TOUR

The King's Singers : The Consort of Musick

105:00 (2 DVDs)

Arthaus Musik 109123

This double DVD set is something of a blast from the past. Deriving from a BBC arts documentary series made in 1984, it does what it says on the tin, taking us on a comprehensive and engaging tour of the history of the madrigal as it spread throughout Europe. The King's Singers in their mid-eighties manifestation are musically at the top of their game, and the members also reveal their latent talents as presenters, at which they are singularly adept. The account of the madrigal's development is liberally interspersed with musical examples sung by the Singers, and played, sung (and acted) by The Consort of Musicke, whose director, a youthful Anthony Rooley, also contributes to the discussion. The scholarship is thorough though not overwhelming, and its generalised nature means that little of it has been superseded, while the performances are generally good if not quite up to 21st-century standards. On my copy the sound quality tended to shrink away in quiet passages, to

return when the volume revived, but the recorded sound is generally good. The visuals by contrast have dated badly. A generally sepia tone pervades all the location filming, which is otherwise informative and atmospheric, while the Singers themselves are captured in embarrassing sixties rock-star leather jackets – ironically the Consort of Musicke’s more traditional suits have better stood the test of time! Overlooking such gratingly dated aspects, this is an engaging and informative programme of the sort which the BBC excelled at, and there is a wealth of vocal music to enjoy here, most of it expertly contextualised and explained: around twenty minutes into the first DVD there is a note-by-note explanation of the Petrarchan madrigal *Valle, che de’ lamenti miei* by Giaches de Wert – first the poem is read and then as the Singers perform it, we see on a moving score what is happening while a voice-over explains how the music is complementing the text. On my copy, and I fear on every other, there is a passage towards the end of the madrigal where a tape malfunction leads to an alarming pitch wobble under one of the spoken explanations – I can’t imagine this was allowed to pass in the original programme so must be a mistake in the transfer process. However, this is a minor blip in a worthwhile project.

D. James Ross

WHAT ARTEMISIA HEARD

Music and Art from the Time of Caravaggio and Gentileschi
El Mundo, Richard Savino

76:26

Sono Luminus DSL-92195

For those, like me, less well versed in the sphere of Renaissance Italian art, the Artemisia of the title is Artemisia Gentileschi, the painter daughter of Orazio Gentileschi, upon whose life the current CD is based. The release of the CD coincides happily with the release of Alexandra Lapierre’s historical novel *Artemisia*, although Savino clearly had cold feet about marketing the CD purely under the name of Artemisia and has rather spuriously bolted on the much more familiar name of Caravaggio. Artemisia’s travels bring her to Rome, Florence, Venice, Naples and London, and Savino has assembled vocal and instrumental music from these five great cultural centres of the Renaissance. This assemblage of music cleverly includes unfamiliar names such as Gagliano, Mazzocchi, Corbetta, Falconieri and Giramo among the more familiar Monteverdi, Caccini, Rossi and Lanier. The performances by the singers and instrumentalists of El

Mundo are lively and heavily characterized, although I felt the group’s female voices occasionally sacrificed intonation in the interests of drama, which would become wearing on repeated listening, but when singing in ensemble this was less intrusive. On the positive side there is some lovely and unobtrusive vocal ornamentation. The enormous continuo department includes Baroque guitars, harps, archlute, theorbos, harpsichord and organ, and as a result there is an engaging variety of instrumental colours on display. This is an enjoyable CD with a pleasing variety of music artfully performed, and from the paintings reproduced in the booklet Artemisia Gentileschi deserves more attention as a member of the small group of genuinely talented woman painters working in what was essentially a man’s world.

D. James Ross

A WONDROUS MYSTERY

Renaissance choral music for Christmas
stile antico

72:57

harmonia mundi HMU 807575

Clemens non Papa: Motet/mass *Pastores quidnam vidistis*
+ Music by Eccard, Handl, Hassler, Hieronymus and Michael Praetorius & Vulpus

Built around Clemens non Papa’s Christmas Mass *Pastores quidnam vidistis*, this collection brings us some of the less familiar Renaissance choral repertoire from the continent. Clemens’ Mass, elegant rather than profound, makes pleasant listening, as does his motet on which it is based, and the exquisitely fluid style of Stilo Antico, perfectly blended, beautifully tuned and phrased, serves perhaps to make adequate music sound special. The same is the case with the rather four-square German settings by Michael Praetorius, Johannes Eccard and Melchior Vulpus of vernacular texts, turned to musical gold by the beautifully expressive and crafted singing of Stilo Antico. The balance of the CD is made up with Latin motets by Handl and Hassler and a *Magnificat* by Hieronymus Praetorius. The daringly chromatic setting of *Mirabile Mysterium* by Handl exhibits the largely unappreciated skills of this lesser known composer, while his more declamatory *Canite tuba* demonstrates his versatility. Hassler’s exuberant *Hodie Christus natus est* is a complete delight, and Praetorius’ *Magnificat* with its very familiar Christmas ‘inserts’ is charming. There is a tiny recording issue in the second track where a background rumble which one could easily ignore turns rapidly on and

off making it more obvious – I can hardly think this is the result of editing as the singing is perfectly continuous and only the rumble pops in and out. This is not enough to put off anybody from buying this superb CD, but a sharp-eared producer might have asked for a retake.

D. James Ross

17th century

BIBER: ROSENKRANZ SONATEN 2

Anne Schumann *violin*, Sebastian Knebel *Rommel organ* (Kaltenlangsfeld)

45:10

Querstand VKJK 1506

Sonatas 6-10, Pachelbel: Ciacona ex d

ROSENKRANZ SONATEN 3

Anne Schumann *violin*, Sebastian Knebel *Trost organ* (Waltershausen)

63:09

Querstand VKJK 1506

Sonatas 11-16, Buxtehude: Ciacona in e, BuxWV160

These two recordings conclude Anne Schumann's exploration of Biber's marvellous sonatas for scordatura violin in which the continuo part is realised solely on church organs of the period. The "direct and almost unrelenting sound" of Kaltenlangsfeld's Rommel organ was thought most suitable for the sorrowful mysteries on disc 2, while the glorious mysteries are accompanied on the Trost organ in Waltershausen. In both cases the recording balance favours the keyboard instrument, but not to the same extent as I experienced with the first release of the set. If Anne Schumann sounds distant in the solo Passaglia, it is because she played it in one of the loftier boxes to tie in with the composer's dedicating it to a guardian angel. This is a performance of real strength and depth: I have never heard the rapid chains of octaves played so clearly – like bells pealing. Elsewhere there were moments of genuine discovery (as I believe there always should be when artists record repertoire that is so well know) - the martial intrada of Sonata XII with its bare harmonies and strident colours raised the hairs on the back of my neck. In the booklet note to volume 3, Anne Schumann reveals that she used three violins for the project to accommodate the testing scordatura settings (especially difficult at high pitch); when she wrote down which ones

she had used for which set of sonatas, she discovered the same pattern in 12321 for the first two sets of mysteries, then a different one for the third (223311) - something for number symbolists to get excited about. Like the first volume, these two discs being with the church bells.

Brian Clark

BIBER: MYSTERY SONATAS

Una Tur Bonet, Musica Alchemica

124:52 (2 CDs)

Pan Classics PC 10329

Unlike Anne Schumann's take on *The Mystery Sonatas*, the present recording sees five continuo players (of ten instruments between them!) accompanying the violinist. Some people may enjoy this approach, and occasionally the reedy sound of the regal and the lush harmonics of the lirone did bring something new to the performances, but actually – as HIPsters – should we be encouraging this approach? Did 17th-century musicians really have the time to sit down and plan out in advance who would accompany which passage, and which not? If so, where are all the surviving parts that contain even the slightest of hints? I know some scores are very clear about characters in musical dramas being shadowed by certain instrumental colours, but I've never seen a continuo part that specifies a constant to-ing and fro-ing of this sort. I think, like every other sort of "representative" music, these sonatas imitate worldly (and other worldly) sounds through very simple means and using this battery of auditory devices is akin to a voice over. Or there is a fear that the ear will get tired hearing the same texture for 15 whole sonatas. Actually, even if each sonata were accompanied consistently by a different combination of instruments, the overall effect would have been less irksome, and – of course – when it comes to the final Passaglia, there is only one option: unaccompanied violin. Here, though, Tur Bonet does confirm her qualities as a Biber fiddler; nicely paced, with lots of space around the notes, no showiness. After her opening "mission statement", the booklet notes contain a sonata by sonata two-page spread sequence of arty photo to the left and discussion of the different scordature on the right, but I found the translations difficult to understand; not that the rather poetic sounding Spanish was easier! I suggest simply listening to the fabulous music and ignoring the booklet.

Brian Clark

BUXTEHUDE: MEMBRA JESU NOSTRI

RossoPorpora, Walter Testolin

65:56

Stradivarius STR 37004

I have known this work since the early 1980s and I have yet to find a recording of it that is utterly satisfying on all levels. This disc, alas, also fails to deliver the perfection which the work that is arguably Buxtehude's *magnum opus* deserves. In fact, it is as if three totally different performances had been combined: the instrumental sonatas are rather understated and rather plain, the tuttis – despite what I have to commend as the best choral singing I have ever heard from Italy with a beautiful balance between the voices – are micro-managed (in my opinion) to a fault, and the solos (though once again well sung by different members of the choir) are overly fussy in their redistribution of continuo instruments. In the “choruses”, it is as if the conductor wants to wring every last drop of passion out of the notes – vast expanses of silence interrupt the flow (this also happens in some of the sonatas, where there is no indication in the score), then powerful forward-driving harmonic passages are drawn out – try “Quid sunt plagæ iste” (Tracks 14 or 18) for size; I've never heard the third word sung with a soft “g” before either... If you are unfamiliar with the music, you may not have the same reaction to these performances as I have – do try it for yourselves!

Brian Clark

M.-A. CHARPENTIER: MOTETS POUR UNE PRINCESSE

Ensemble Marguerite Louise, Gaétan Jarry *organ/director*

67:00

encelade ECL1403

H 163, 186, 196, 232, 329, 330, 523 + organ music by Boyvin

The English translations on the cover and in the booklet are so awful that I had to force myself to listen to the music! The writer seems to have little understanding of either the original or the target language, or the music, come to that. And the cover illustration belongs on a bonkbuster novel. Moving swiftly on, the programme is full of musical interest, offering vocal pieces by M-AC in alternation with organ music by his near-contemporary Jacques Boyvin played on a modern instrument in French Classical style. This is a good and effective programming idea though the solo organ sounds rather distant. On the

other hand the vocal music, while very clear, could perhaps use a little more sense of the space in the sound, which is unusually dead for an ecclesiastical venue.

The performers stand up well to this close scrutiny and their relaxed approach keeps the v-word at bay and allows us to enjoy their excellent tuning of the rich harmony. I just wish that directors of this music could resist the temptation to overscore it. The bassoon sounds a most unlikely bass when there are no reeds on top. But it is good to hear the specified bass recorder in H196.

David Hansell

LULIER: LA GLORIA, ROMA E VALORE

Lia Serafini *soprano*, Chiara Balasso *soprano*, Matteo Pigato *countertenor*, I musicali affetti, Fabio Missaggia

59:00

fra bernardo fb1505643

My only previous experience of Lulier's music was in the days when BBC Radio 3 actively sought out “new” old music; I seem to remember it being a Christmas cantata in which an angel had to sing rather a lot of top Ds, and featuring the concerto grosso line-up of instruments à la Stradella. The present work – apparently recounting the downfall of heathen Rome and its replacement by the centre of the Christian world, and intended as praise both to the host of the original performances (Ottoboni of Handel fame) and his esteemed guest, the new Venetian ambassador – is very similar in feel. Directed by the primo violino, the string band (33211) with harpsichord and theorbo are generally good, though the tuning between the solo and tutti groups in Rome's “Quanto effimero è il contento” (and elsewhere, if I am totally honest) leaves something to be desired.

Most of the arias are tuneful with instrument “ritornelli” to end with; others are better than that – Valore's “Così quel bianco giglio” has the two solo violins duetting over pizzicato accompaniment, and Gloria's “Se d'Eroi bella Madre” features a transverse flute. Of the three singers (sopranos as Rome and Glory, a countertenor as Bravery) only Rome sounds like she is forcing herself into “early music mode”. On this evidence, Lulier would repay closer investigation. Sadly I was unable to locate an English version of the libretto on the record company's website.

Brian Clark

TOBIAS MICHAEL: MUSICALISCHE SEELENLUST
Ensemble Polyharmonique, Alexander Schneider
58:20
edition raumklang

For many years now, I had planned to “re-discover” Tobias Michael’s music; there are two sets of original part-books in The British Library and, although I only managed to transcribe one piece the last time I was there, I did make a listing of the contents of both, and was impressed, not only that he involved different combinations of instruments with the voices, but that he wrote out ornamentation for the singers. Those are, of course, the two volumes of his *Musicalische Seelenlust*, published 20 years into the 30 years war and full of the sort of music you would expect from the generation after Schütz and Schein and before Rosenmüller and Schelle – harmonically pointed, emotive settings of richly poetic texts, full of the imagery of loss, hope, tragedy and faith. Only seven of the 18 pieces on the CD come from the second volume; each of the five singers (SSATB) take one solo each, and there are duets for the two sopranos and tenor/alto. The other works are all for the full ensemble, supported throughout by bass viol, chamber organ and theorbo. The sound is capital “g” gorgeous - the voices individually are beautiful and the balance they achieve in combination is astonishing and ravishing. Time and again I was reminded of anthologies that appeared in the early 17th century that contained German sacred contrafacta of madrigals by composers such as Monteverdi and Rovetta – for emotional power, Michael’s five-part works would not struggle in such esteemed company. As for the more concertato pieces, the five voices of Ensemble Polyharmonique are fairly put through their paces by the technical demands, without ever losing a serene sense of control. It is also unusual to have a CD of 17th-century music where the performers do not feel the need to intersperse the vocal music with instrumental repertoire; I take this to be further endorsement of the quality and variety of these two fine volumes. I hope we will have the remainder of Michael’s output soon!

Brian Clark

PURCELL: TWELVE SONATAS OF THREE PARTS
The King’s Consort
76:59
Vivat 110

I first got to know these pieces intimately at university, where they were a “set work” in my first year at St Andrews University. Latterly I had been re-acquainted with them, often playing them with my much-missed friend, Selene Mills, at her home in Cambridge. I fear we never sounded anything like this! Is there anyone active today more immersed in Purcell’s musical world than Robert King and his King’s Consort colleagues? Two young violinists and an experienced continuo team combine perfectly to produce a CD of rare beauty and endless reward; where some seek to draw attention to the architecture of Purcell’s complex contrapuntal writing or irregular phrases with sharp accents and dramatic changes in dynamic, these performances are more subtle and more relaxed than any I have ever heard. The music unfolds in an organic way, the counterpoint, the rather awkward sounding melodies and harmonic piquancy readily audible but not highlighted artificially. Robert King’s ever thoughtful booklet note not only gives all the background you could ever need to the set’s genesis, he also provides a work-by-work guide in which (thank goodness, for once!) readable English – and presumably French and German, too – rules. Like the diamonds on the packaging, this release is every bit the precious gem. Do not miss it!

Brian Clark

UCCELLINI: SONATE OVER CANZONI [OP. 5]
Arparla (Davide Monti *violin*, Maria Christina Cleary *arpa doppia*)
78:53
Stradivarius STR 37023

To have the complete op. 5 set of 1649 is a bonus for lovers of the violin repertoire of the period. The performers have paired each of the sonatas with one of the rhetorical Affects, e.g. Mirth, Philosophy, Perseverance, etc., although these were not indicated in the composer’s score. The set concludes with a sonata for solo harp, one for two violins, and one for violin in imitation of a trumpet, with added strumming guitar and drums. First impressions from the opening track of any disc are important to the listener. The first sonata, where the harp opened with an unaccompanied passage, struck me immediately – and somewhat irreverently – as more appropriate for “Listen with Mother” than for early 17th-century repertoire. Yet when used as a straightforward accompaniment, the harp continuo was given a much more stylistically apposite realisation. Monti’s playing is here

always polished, with suitable ornamentation. The notes disappointingly concentrate on Cesare Ripa's description of the 'affects' rather than on the music itself.

Ian Graham-Jones

THE BERLIN GAMBA BOOK – CHORALE VARIATIONS

Dietmar Berger *viola da gamba*

114:50 (2 CDs)

Naxos 8.573392-93

The second recording of the 'Berlin Gamba Book' in the same month! I wasn't quite so keen to hear this one, remembering my feelings about this player's recording of the 'Manchester Gamba Book'.

The repertoire is very interesting, and I learn from the booklet notes that some is published by Edition Walhall, so I have immediately ordered a copy.

I'm afraid I feel the same about this recording as I did about his previous one. The playing is technically adequate to the demands, but the articulation so little varied, with so little inflection, that one suspects that the player needs to spend more time with the music. Furthermore, he is not well-served by Naxos engineers. The recording is close-miked, in a dry acoustic, emphasising the overly astringent quality of his top string.

Some of the pieces he plays on a treble, which is a nice variation of tone, but again, the recorded sound emphasises the edginess and brightness.

It is claimed to be a world premiere recording of the music. In fact the recording by the Ensemble Art d'Echo, of music from this manuscript that I reviewed a month ago, and which I enjoyed far more, seems to have been made earlier. However, the Naxos selection is of only the chorale variations, without the additional suites and supporting material that Art d'Echo also includes. There are two discs, which does mean that more, perhaps all, of the chorale variations are included.

The booklet notes are frustratingly brief. There is very little information about the manuscript, and none about the instruments he plays. The only instrument pictured is a carving of a 13th-century vielle – played da gamba, which is indeed interesting for anyone interested in medieval music, because most depictions of bowed string instruments from that period show them played on the shoulder. But its relevance to this repertoire is limited, particularly when more relevant information is lacking.

A disappointing recording of an important repertoire.

Robert Oliver

BOUND TO NOTHING

The German Stylus Fantasticus

Fantasticus (Rie Kimura *violin*, Robert Smith *viola da gamba*, Guillermo Brachetta *harpsichord*)

71:15

resonus RES10156

Buxtehude: Praeludium in g, Sonata in A op. 2 no. 5

Erlebach: Sonatas II in e, III in A

J. P. Krieger: Sonata X in A

Kühnel: Sonata VIII in A

Walther Capriccio [sic] in C

It does not seem so long ago that I was (rightly) praising Fantasticus's recital of sonatas by Tartini and Veracini.

Arguably the repertoire on the present disc – chamber music for violin, gamba and keyboard – is what a group like this "should be playing"; instrumental composers letting their imaginations take flight, even if the Erlebach sonatas are broadly cast as suites of dances with more abstract introductions. The style comes into its own when the harmonic rhythm slows down and tuneful melody gives way to quasi recitative, or to sequential passages that expand exploratively, uncertain of their final destination. This is perhaps nowhere better demonstrated than in the Kühnel sonata for gamba and continuo, where the whole range of the instrument is exploited. If Rie Kimura's violin was in the spotlight last time, here she must share it with both her colleagues and all three (of course!) shine. As I possibly wrote at the end of my previous review of this group, I cannot wait to hear what they turn their hands to next – they make me smile.

Brian Clark

CLAIR OBSCUR - IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF CARAVAGGIO

Light and shade in 17th-century Italian music

Adriana Fernandez *soprano*, Sacqeboutiers

67:00

Flora DDD2009

This is a strong and well recorded programme of early 17th-century Italian music which is let down by the presentation and some questionable performance practice. Lute and sackbut as a continuo team? Should a sackbut play the solo line in a sonata by Castello (described as a canzon in the contents list)? And in Monteverdi's *Zefiro torna* – presented with one singer and cornetto rather than a vocal duet – the soloists change parts at one point, but there's still one section of text that

doesn't get sung. You just can't do this sort of thing, at least on disc. But I must say that Adriana Fernandez is a fine singer of this music and the playing is technically brilliant. The Frescobaldi canzona was the highlight for me. Not only is the performance stylistically strong though unfussy, I suspect I'm not the only inhabitant of EMR-land to have cut at least some of my early music teeth on Bernard Thomas's black books of this repertoire. The booklet is mainly in French with Latin/Italian texts translated into that language. There are a few words explaining the concept of the programme but no detailed list of who is playing/singing what or information about the music and performers. Come on Flora, get a grip.

David Hansell

LE CONCERT ROYAL DE LA NUIT

Ensemble Correspondances, Sébastien Daucé

153:00 (2 CDs)

harmonia mundi HMC 952223.24

If I had to sum up this release in one word that word would be 'lavish'. The two discs lurk in the end papers of a 190-page glossy book that offers multiple colour illustrations and a variety of essays in multiple languages, but, I find myself asking, to what end? At the heart of it all is the famous occasion on which the young Louis XIV appeared as the sun at the climax of the *Ballet Royal de la Nuit*. The music for this has been painstakingly re-composed – often from just a surviving melodic line – for the typical five-part ensemble of the time and 51 of the original 77 dances appear here. They have been 'fleshed out' for modern concert and recording purposes with music from Rossi's *Orfeo* and Cavalli's *Ercole amante* which have plot links with the ballet. In addition, a number of airs popular at the time, especially by Boeset, have been inserted. We are asked to imagine an occasion at which an older Louis was presented with a lavish entertainment which re-visited delights from his youth. Thus, to put it less kindly, we have a speculative re-construction of an event that never took place. The Ballet Royal has become a Concert Royal.

If you can swallow this conceit – which is not too hard – you will then be confronted with Christie-esque performance practice which means added elaborate percussion parts rather too often for my taste and recorders at unlikely pitches (both of these within the first half minute). So, purely musically, I did not enjoy this, though I can still imagine it winning awards. The real star is the

book, which as well as telling you what you need to know in order to understand what's going on also includes a lot of fascinating contextual information. As so often, you pay your money...

David Hansell

DASS SICH WUNDER ALLE WELT

German Advent Songs

Miriam Feuersinger *soprano*, Daniel Schreiber *tenor*, Les Escapades

72:41

Christophorus CHR 77387

For this delightfully refreshing selection, the viol consort Les Escapades and their guests have raided the rich treasury of German music for Advent from the late 15th to the early 18th centuries. The recording features plainchant as well as Advent songs, in which each successive verse appears in settings by different composers, interspersed with instrumental episodes. The singing from soprano Miriam Feuersinger and tenor Daniel Schreiber is beautifully lyrical, and both singers always sound as if they have something urgent to convey to the listener. The viol consort, occasionally supported by guest organist Evelyn Laib, plays impeccably both on its own and as a beautifully effective and sympathetic accompaniment to the singing. The composers range from household names such as Isaac, Praetorius and Lassus to the more obscure figures of the German Renaissance such as Andreas Raselius and Balthasar Resinarius, and herein lies the chief virtue of this programme, which has managed to resurrect music long lost to the mainstream and restore it side by side with the more familiar repertoire – and, as so often with this type of exercise, it is hard to find any reason other than luck why some repertoire should be remembered and some forgotten. This CD is a lovely listen, and I would challenge anybody to differentiate on the basis of quality between the least and the most familiar music here.

D. James Ross

Baroque

AUFSCHNAITER: MEMNON SACER AB ORIENTE
(VESPER OP. 5)

St Florian Sängerknaben, Ars Antiqua Austria, Gunar Letzbor

52:49

Why do musicians have to make outrageous claims for lesser-known composers? Referring to Aufschneider as “the Catholic Bach” is not what I would consider helpful in trying to raise the public profile of a composer whose music need only be given air time to acquire his own fan base. Anyone who goes out and buys this CD, expecting to be amazed by fabulous music they cannot believe they have never heard before is likely to be disappointed; neither by the music, nor the performances, I hasten to add, as both are perfectly enjoyable and uplifting. The programme is built around the first of two sets of Vespers psalms published as his op. 5 of 1709, four years after he succeeded Georg Muffat as Kapellmeister in Passau. I love the sense of big open space and the combination of trumpets and sackbuts with a small vocal group (as is Letzbor’s wont) with a finely balanced string ensemble. I really would prefer just to hear the music on its own merits - it has plenty and they are gloriously realised here!

Brian Clark

BACH: HARPSICHORD CONCERTOS BWV 1052–1058

Andreas Staier, Freiburger Barockorchester

109:07 (2 CDs)

harmonia mundi HMC 902181.82

Andreas Staier plays all seven single harpsichord concerti on these 2 CDs with members of the admirable Freiburger Barockorchester directed by Petra Müllejans, mostly playing 3.3.2.2.1, with two flauti dolci in BWV 1057, the F major transcription of the Fourth Brandenburg (BWV 1049). They are recorded quite close which would show up any slight lapses, so either they play as perfectly as it sounds or the editors have done a splendid job: there is a whole page in the liner notes on exactly how they have achieved the sound. Staier plays an instrument by Sidey and Boi (Paris 2004) after Hieronimus Albrecht Hess, Hamburg 1734 – why can we not have similar details about the string players’ instruments? – and the autograph parts for BWV 1055 – the only ones to survive - provide an additional figured continuo line, and so they perform it here and in the resounding BWV 1058.

There is continuing debate about the sources of these concerti, admirably discussed by Peter Wollny in the liner notes. Two of them exist in versions for solo violin and orchestra. Elsewhere, the first two movements from

BWV 1052 appear in Cantata 146 and the last as a sinfonia in 188, where the organ plays the obbligato part. Two movements of BWV 1053 figure in Cantata 169, the first as the opening sinfonia and the second as an alto aria, and the last movement becomes the opening sinfonia in Cantata 49. At one time it was thought that BWV 1055 might have originated in a concerto for oboe d’amore, though this seems less likely now. What we do have is a complete autograph score of all seven concerti in this form that can be dated to 1738/9.

The playing is bright, crisp and clean and, without feeling in any way mechanical, is less idiorhythmic than Koopman’s 1990 version. The harpsichord never overbalances the instruments, even when they are reduced in numbers for BWV 1053, and when he is playing continuo, Staier is admirably discreet, as he should be. There are no fussy changes of registration, but use is made of the two manuals in, for example, the extended cadenza in BWV 1052/3. In BWV 1053, Peter Wollny comments on ‘the filigree polyphonic technique’ and the intimate interchange between instruments that leads the performers to play this E major concerto with one-to-a-part strings, and hearing it makes me wonder what they would all sound like performed that way – and possibly at 392Hz as well, like John Butt’s persuasively argued Brandenburgs. BWV 1058, a version of the A minor violin concerto is very convincing at its lower G minor pitch, but with its extra continuo keyboard the weight of the full string band certainly feels justified.

CD 2 opens with BWV 1054, a version of the E major violin concerto BWV 1042, which probably dates from Cöthen; again it is transposed down (into D major), and the second manual is used effectively in the opening movement. Staier plays the last movement of the A major concerto (BWV 1055) as a brisk minuet – it’s a wholly delightful performance and like the second movement displays the splendid tuning of the band: this is really classy. Was the F minor concerto (BWV 1056) also a downward transcription of an earlier version in G minor? The slow movement is the opening sinfonia in cantata 156, where the solo part above the strings (here pizzicato until the last bar) is given to the oboe. Some of the right hand figuration in the opening movement reminds me of the oboe d’amore passagework in the opening movement of Cantata 36. BWV 1057 sounds comfortable (as it should) on the recorders, and at times a fourth voice is added to the solo group. I admired this ensemble work greatly, and the fugal final movement is especially exhilarating.

I hope people will enjoy these performances as much as I did – and will continue to. This is as near as it comes to superlative playing from all concerned, and that coupled with exceptional recording and editing makes this a very fine version. I recommend it unreservedly.

David Stancliffe

BACH: A VIOLINO E CEMBALO

Erich Höbarth *violin*, Aapo Häkkinen *harpsichord*

119:35 (2 SACDs)

Aeolus AE10236

BWV 1014–1019, 1021–1023

This is a fabulously recorded set - you can hear every detail of the music without the slightest hint of breathing or other incidental sounds. The balance between violin and harpsichord (huge dynamic range afforded by the variety of sounds available to Häkkinen notwithstanding!) is expertly managed. Bach's lines are crystal clear throughout without the excessive bite that sometimes spoils recordings of Bach's music for this combination. While Aapo Häkkinen explores every facet of his 1970 instrument (after Hass¹), I did not feel that Höbarth was as interested in varying his colour so much. Another difference of approach was evident in the Adagio of BWV1017 where the right hand keyboard part has triplets, the left hand has even quavers and the violin dotted quavers; while Häkkinen smooths these into triplets, Höbarth tucks his semiquavers in after the third of each group. This may be an interesting effect musically, but I fear it was not what Bach intended. While there is no denying that he is master of Bach's notes, I was not entirely convinced by Höbarth's ornamentation either. The thoroughly footnoted booklet essay only lightly touches on the possibility of BWV 1023 having been written for Pisendel, later the Dresden Konzertmeister. In summary, this set has a fine bonus by way of three other sonatas for violin and harpsichord (some may argue that BWV 2012 and 1023 need basso continuo – i. e., a sustaining string bass), and the harpsichord playing is impeccable, but I prefer the sounds made by various other violinists. Try for yourself, though!

Brian Clark

¹ He also uses a 2011 copy of Italian models for BWV 1021, 1022

HANDEL: AGRIPPINA

Ulrike Schneider *Agrippina*, João Fernandes *Claudio*, Christopher Ainslie *Ottone*, Jake Arditti *Nerone*, Ida Falk Winland *Poppea*, Owen Willetts *Narciso*, Ross Ramgobin *Pallante*, Ronaldo Steiner *Lesbo*, FestspielOrchester Göttingen, Laurence Cummings

216:00 (3 CDs)

Accent ACC 26404

An excellent first recording of the new *Hallische Händel-Ausgabe* critical edition, edited by John E. Sawyer. *Agrippina* is in many ways the crowning work of Handel's Italian "finishing school" years, both musically with its refinement and reworking of earlier ideas, and dramatically with its deft handling of Grimani's sparkling libretto. This latter especially comes across with full force under Laurence Cummings' expert baton; the extended and extremely witty recitatives fairly crackle with energy and run directly and naturally into the many arias and ensembles. Try the opening of Act 2, and marvel at the dramatic tension that the seemingly rigid *opera seria* conventions can create. It begins with the whole cast on stage, for the chorus acclaiming the Emperor (shades here of a well-known Coronation anthem yet to come), then each major character in turn denounces Ottone in short, pithy arias, often without opening ritornelli, before going off one by one and leaving him finally alone, to pour out his sorrow in his searing *accompagnato* and extended contrapuntal 'Voi che udite'. (Handel was to return to this structure many years later to conclude Act 2 of *Tamerlano*.) By and large, the singers respond well to Cummings' lively and dramatic direction. Ulrike Schneider is a suitably scheming *Agrippina*; she rises splendidly to her great scena at the end of Act 2, beginning with the tortured 'Pensieri' (note the condensed *da capo*, once she has sorted out her plans) and concluding action and Act with the foot-tapping 'Ogni Vento' (having arranged for the murder of a couple of her enemies!). Ida Falk Winland is fully her match as her rival *Poppea* – she too has a fine moment in Act 2, where she first feigns sleep to find out Ottone's real thoughts, then after further plotting with *Lesbo* and *Nerone*, has her extended and fully accompanied 'Col peso del tuo amor', with its uncanny presaging of *Cleopatra's* 'Tu la mia stella sei'.

Beside these two dramatic dames, the male parts can seem a little colourless. João Fernandes as the pompous Emperor *Claudio* produces fine rich bass tone, but slightly misses the delicacy of his lovesick and exquisite 'Vieni o Cara' in Act 2.

Christopher Ainslie, as the *primo uomo* Ottone again sings beautifully, but doesn't quite plumb the despairing depths of his great 'Voi che udite', also in Act 2. Jake Arditti does better as the young and mother-dominated Nerone (rising well to the semiquaver sequences of 'Come nube' in Act 3). Ross Ramgobin and Owen Willetts, as Pallante and Narciso, respectively, are appropriately sycophantic suitors for Agrippina, and Ronaldo Steiner provides *buffo* relief as the servant Lesbo.

The FestspielOrchester Gottingen play like angels – alert and incisive in the intensely dramatic overture, with its sudden pauses, and providing superb soloists for the many instrumental obbligati of this lovely score.

This is a live recording, and benefits immensely from Laurence Cummings' long experience with Handel in the theatre – applause is reserved mainly for the end of scenes, rather than after every aria, allowing the splendid libretto its full effect.

Alastair Harper

THE POWER OF LOVE: ARIAS FROM HANDEL OPERAS

Amanda Forsythe *soprano*, Apollo's Fire, Jeannette Sorrell
69:20

Avie AV2350

Music from *Alcina*, *Almira*, *Ariodante*, *Giulio Cesare*, *Orlando*, *Partenope*, *Rinaldo*, *Terpsichore*, *Teseo & Xerxes*

This is a thoroughly enjoyable disc. Amanda Forsythe has a bright, agile and flexible soprano, at home equally in the passionate music for *Almira* or *Armida* (*Rinaldo*), the dramatic depths and heights of *Cleopatra* (*Giulio Cesare*) and the teasing cynicism of *Atalanta* (*Serse*). She displays formidable technique, for example in the precise semiquaver runs in the B section of 'Piangerò' and also in the remarkable range of vocal colour she brings to *Agile's* deceptively simple continuo-accompanied 'Amarti si vorrei' which (as so often with Handel) packs an overwhelming emotional punch.

Apollo's Fire, under the able baton of Jeannette Sorrell, provide exquisitely-judged orchestral support; they are allowed to shine in their own right in the rarely-heard ballet music from *Terpsichore*, added as a prologue to the 1734 revival of *Il Pastor Fido*. I particularly enjoyed the luscious orchestration of the Air (track 10), with flutes and pizzicato bass, and the kaleidoscopic Chaconne.

One's only minor caveat, faced with music-making of this superb quality, is that the programme is so wide-ranging- it would have been even more impressive to have

concentrated on the roles for one or two of Handel's top sopranos, or even to have heard *Terpsichore* in full; Handel in context is nearly always even more satisfying than Handel in chunks. And perhaps then one would also have the pleasure of anticipating further similar issues!

Alastair Harper

BENEDETTO MARCELLO : PSALMS

Voces 8 : Les Inventions

59:57

Signum SIG CD 391

I don't normally approve of advancing the reputation of a composer at the expense of one of his contemporaries, but the statement in Patrick Ayrtton's booklet note that we would be more familiar with the name of Marcello if Vivaldi hadn't sprung to prominence at the beginning of the 20th century undoubtedly has some truth to it. Marcello's music has always struck me as having more heart than Vivaldi's, and this is born out by these charming settings of the Psalms. I am not convinced by the wisdom of presenting them here in the 1757 English adaptations by Charles Avison – perhaps these works are so unfamiliar that they deserve to be heard in the original Italian, a form in which they swept Europe and impressed Marcello's musical contemporaries. And perhaps lines such as 'his eyelids try the children of men' and 'my moisture is like the drought in summer' are best left in the relative obscurity of Italian. The performances are generally idiomatic, although I found the rather roomy church acoustic made both voices and instruments sound rather indistinct and distant. Having said that, a nice variety of vocal colours and a lovely blend make for a convincing representation of Marcello's largely unknown masterpiece *Estro poetico-armonico*. Let's have some more please.

D. James Ross

RAMEAU: ANACRÉON (1754)

Matthew Brook *Anacréon*, Anna Dennis *Chloé*, Agustin Prunell-Friend *Batile*, Choir and Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Jonathan Williams

50:19

Signum Records SIGCD 402

With a libretto by Cahusac, this *acte de ballet* is not to be confused with the identically titled 1757 *Anacréon* with libretto by Bernard

(see Graham Sadler's excellent and already indispensable *Rameau Compendium*, pub. Boydell 2014). The score has been reconstructed by the conductor from material prepared for revivals in 1766 and 1771 – a labour of love well worth undertaking. Amazingly, the first (partial) revival in 'modern' times was conducted by Debussy in 1909! Even by Rameau's standards it is a colourful score with braying horns, chirruping piccolos and much variety in the string and oboe writing, conveyed by OAE with their usual attention to detail. The 'plot' is a sweet love story (though not without a few hitches) which must have charmed the first audiences much as it did me. Of the three singers, Matthew Brook in the title role and Anna Dennis have a strong core to their tone which prevents the dreaded v-word from becoming an issue. There are times when this is not so true of Agustin Prunell-Friend, but this is still a very enjoyable and valuable world première recording. The booklet offers the text in French and English, though the various essays are in English only.

David Hansell

VIVALDI: DI TROMBE GUERRIERE

Francesca Cassinara *soprano*, Marta Fumagalli *mezzo*, Roberto Balconi *alto*, Mauro Borgioni *bass*, Gabriele Cassone & Matteo Frigé *natural trumpets*, Antonio Fringé *organ*, Alberto Stevanin *violin*, Marco Testori *cello*, Rei Ishizawa *oboe*, Ugo Galasso *chalmereau*, Ensemble Pian & Forte, Francesco Fanna conductor

59:59

Dynamic CDS7710

RV537, 554A, 779 + arias from various operas

As the booklet notes explain, the trumpet is mostly associated with war and/or royalty in baroque opera. The seven arias from Vivaldi operas confirm the stereotype but also remind the listener of the technical demands the composer put on his singers. Most successful of the four soloists in Francesca Cassinara, whose bright soprano voice is well suited to combination with trumpets and oboes. Marta Fumagalli's fruitier sound distorts some pitches but the bravura in her aria (which is Track 13, not 11 as printed in the booklet and on the record company's website!) is exceptional, though I could have lived without the staccato arpeggios added to the Da Capo! The men are adequate. The instrumental playing is actually very good – the strings phrase nicely and layer dynamics convincingly. There is an elephant in the room, though – why does the disc conclude with a chamber concerto without trumpet?

No matter how nicely it is played, does it actually serve a purpose? Sure one of the bravura soprano arias could have been held in reserve?

Brian Clark

SEASONS

Oliver Davis, Antonio Vivaldi

Kerenza Peacock violin, Grave Davidson soprano, Trafalgar Sinfonia, Ivor Settlefield

62:16

Signum Records SIGCD437

This is an interesting disc, combining Vivaldi's most famous violin concertos with a new orchestral song cycle entitled "Anno" by Oliver Davis (b. 1972) setting the Italian sonnets that were printed in the Op. 8 partbooks in which the "Four Seasons" were published. Grace Davidson's pure voice combines well with the Trafalgar Sinfonia's largely vibrato-less string sound, and the rhythmic vitality and neo-Baroque style of Davis's writing lend the cycle an easy instant accessibility. BBC Radio 3's *CD Review* programme the other day had several versions of the Vivaldi works (including solo organist and gypsy violinist!) and I would say the present recording lies halfway along the spectrum from HIP to wacky (although, to be honest, that doesn't make allowance for several "wacky HIP" crossovers, which I would rather did not exist...) - Kerenza Peacock is an accomplished violinist, and she is mostly very well accompanied; I'm afraid I just did not hear anything new in these performances. Of course, the whole premise of the disc is to contextualize the Davis composition; actually, I think I would have preferred to hear more of his music.

Brian Clark

ARIANE & ORPHÉE

French Baroque Cantatas

Hasnaa Bennani, ensemble Stravaganza

60:26

muso MU009

Music by Courbois, Jacuet de la Guerre, Lambert, Marais & Rameau

The most positive impressions on this CD are made by the instrumental music and its performances. The Sonata in D minor from Jacquet's 1707 collection confirms the impression given by my other

anniversary experiences of her music that she is so much more than the French Baroque's 'token woman' and the lively Marais Chaconne that ends the programme is very fine indeed. The instrumentation need not be so elaborate, but at least is not silly. I found the cantatas harder to enjoy, wonderful though the music is. Hasnaa Bennani's vibrato just doesn't 'go' with the instrumental sounds around her, especially when her line is in close proximity to that of the violin. The essay tries a bit too hard to link the instrumental and vocal music though is essentially sound and informative and the booklet also includes the sung French texts and an English translation thereof. Page 12, however, is just weird and could have been used to tell us something about the performers.

David Hansell

THE BAROQUE LUTE IN VIENNA

Bernhard Hofstötter *baroque lute*

72:20

Brilliant Classics 95087

Bernhard Hofstötter's excellent CD gives us a glimpse of the variety and quality of music for the baroque lute, which would have entertained well-to-do folk in Vienna in the 17th and 18th centuries, well before the time of Mozart and Beethoven. George Muffat's Passacaglia was published in 1682, originally for strings and continuo, and appears here in an arrangement for lute from one of the Kremsmünster manuscripts (A-KR 83a/1v). It is a fine piece, involving a cheerful dialogue between treble and bass, and a constantly changing sequence of interesting harmonies. Also published in 1682, was Jacques Bittner's Tombeau, which creates a melancholic mood through slow descending notes and dissonant harmonies; Hofstötter's source is the manuscript now in Klosterneuberg, close to Vienna. Denis Gaultier was French, but his "Dernière Courente" is followed by a nicely flowing Double by "Bertelli", who is possibly the Viennese composer, Antonio Bertali.

Other tracks include an imaginative anonymous Folies d'Espagne with one section way up the neck, and a guitar-like finish; a short, lively Gigue de Angelis de Rome, possibly by the guitarist Angelo Michele Bartolotti; a suite by Wolff Jacob Lauffensteiner, with a grand Allemande, an invigorating Courante with brief switches from major to minor and back, and a short, cheerful Gigue; an arrangement of a mournful Menuet for flute and strings by C. W. R. von Gluck, where the slow, high melody is

supported by quiet, constantly moving quavers; a virtuosic Sonata by Karl Kohaut exploiting the full range of the lute; and a long (over 10 minutes), dramatic Passacaglia by the violinist Heinrich von Biber, constructed over a slow, four-note descending bass, in a lute arrangement from Kremsmünster.

I very much like Hofstötter's interpretation of this music. He sustains and shapes melodic lines well, and, without resorting to gimmicks, he lets the music speak for itself. This repertoire is not well known – twelve of the 19 tracks contain music which has not been recorded before – but it is well worth exploring further.

Stewart McCoy

GAMBA SONATAS

Steven Isserlis *cello*, Richard Egarr *harpsichord*

Bach, Handel, Scarlatti

59:50

Hyperion CDA68045

I suspect that those looking on this EMR site are more used to performances of the standard Baroque repertoire on the instruments for which they were written. Yes, I know people will argue that Bach's three sonatas for viola da gamba and harpsichord may have been transcriptions from lost works and Handel's one gamba sonata was the composer's own transposition of a lone violin sonata, but is there a need for a new recording on a modern cello? The Domenico Scarlatti sonata in D Minor takes transcription a step further: one of Scarlatti's few harpsichord sonatas with a few figured bass annotations (K. 90) has been recorded as a violin sonata – so why not play it down the octave on cello? Isserlis nods his head towards current performance practice of the period by a somewhat restrained use of vibrato in the slow movements, but he adopts an aggressive approach to the faster sections, which some may not like. The Scarlatti and Handel sonatas (supported by a second continuo cello) struck me as being unashamedly romantic in approach. The disc concludes with an encore of a Bach organ chorale prelude (BWV 639) arranged for cello and harpsichord. The playing from both Isserlis and Egarr – if you can tolerate the style – is, as one would expect, impeccable. If you prefer the dulcet tones of the viola da gamba, then give this a miss. Booklet notes are more Isserlis's personal thoughts on his programme rather than an instructive essay ("1685 – what a year! The storks must have been working overtime ...").

Ian Graham-Jones

MOTETTEN DER HILLER-SAMMLUNG

Motets from the Hiller Collection

Sächsisches Vocalensemble, Matthias Jung

70:25

Carus 83.269

Any recording featuring the Sächsisches Vocalensemble and/or Matthias Jung is always worth hearing. Seven of the 17 tracks on this recording of motets from his printed anthology of a cappella motets are world premiere recordings (three of them by Hiller, including his arrangement of Jacob Handl's famous "Ecce quomodo moritur justus"). Composers represented included such important figures as Homilius, Carl Heinrich Graun and Rolle, but also lesser-known composers as Penzel, Reinhold and Fehre. In truth, in listening I was definitely unaware of any sudden shift in standard! It certainly helps that the singing is exquisite, and Jung ensures that he makes the most he can from the material in front of him. Here I think micro-management pays dividends with absolute unanimity of delivery throughout – a glorious choral sound like this does not come easily. Choirs looking for new repertoire will be glad to hear that the music is available from Carus, too.

Brian Clark

TREASURES OF THE GERMAN BAROQUE

Telemann, Pisendel, Schaffrath, Reichenauer, [Dieupart, Brescianello]

Radio Antiqua

59:28

Ambronay AMY305

Radio Antiqua seem to have created a niche market for themselves. Consisting of violin, bassoon (or recorder/voice flute) and continuo, the five-strong line-up can cover lots of bases. Here they have opted for 18th-century music, including three works for the core line-up, one work each for the two "soloists" (Pisendel's devilish C minor violin sonata and a Dieupart suite in D played on voice flute), and a "concerto" by Antonin Reichenauer in which the cello is liberated from its continuo role. The final work on the disc, another chamber concerto, this time by Giuseppe Antonio Brescianello, is by far the most taxing. It is interesting, though, how complementary the timbres of the violin and bassoon are – the central movement of the Brescianello sees them in close imitative dialogue very much in the style of Zelenka's trios, and is such a delight

I had to listen to it quite a few times! Could this be that elusive "perfect Christmas present" for your early music friend?

Brian Clark

Classical

BECK: SYMPHONIES, OP. 2

Thirteen Strings Chamber Orchestra, Kevin Mallon

69:45

Naxos 8.573323

Naxos have produced the other sets of the Mannheim composer Franz Ignaz Beck's collection of youthful symphonies op. 1, 3 and 4, so this recording I think must complete the major part of his symphonic output. All in three movements, the works are harmonically advanced for their time (published in 1760 after Beck's move to Marseilles) and are well worth exploring – far removed from the mundane work of many of the minor continental figures of the period. Most of the movements are for strings alone, though horns poke their noses in on rare occasions. Kevin Mallon produces some neat, stylish playing from his Canadian chamber band Thirteen Strings. A good, honest performance of some interesting music. Naxos' usual "economy class" booklet contains an informative essay on the music.

Ian Graham-Jones

HAYDN: THE CREATION

Sarah Tynan, Jeremy Ovenden, Matthew Brook *STB-Bar*, Handel and Haydn Society, Harry Christophers *director*

98:15 (2 CDs)

Coro COR16135

In an era when creationism is generally regarded solely as the province of a few eccentrics, Haydn's great oratorio is surely a deeply paradoxical work for both performer and listener. How does one approach it in today's world, not only in the terms of the creation itself but also of a text that has Eve singing to her Adam, "Thy will is law to me"? Feminists shudder! One answer for performers, of course, is to take the work head on, submitting to the blazing genius and deep faith of its composer. That is fundamentally the approach taken in this live Boston performance from May 2015 given by the Handel and Haydn Society (H & H), America's oldest surviving concert giving organization.

Like Christopher Hogwood (a predecessor as artistic director of the H & H) in his splendid L'Oiseau-Lyre recording, Harry Christophers has chosen to give the work in English, perfectly reasonable given that Haydn himself was keen to retain dual language versions of the work. Christophers' decision is also thoroughly vindicated given that one of the major strengths of the performance is the manner in which it communicates the text so strongly. Both soloists and chorus employ excellent diction and a real sense of rhetorical understanding. The male soloists, the Uriel of tenor Jeremy Ovenden and bass Matthew Brook's Raphael, are particularly outstanding in this respect, most especially in the magnificent descriptive accompanied recitatives that account for some of the work's most unforgettable passages. Otherwise the contribution of the soloists is very good, if not perfect. All three voices, especially that of soprano Sarah Tynan (Uriel), employ an excess of vibrato. Christophers' slow tempo for Raphael's opening recitative immediately leads Brook into displaying a wide, continuous vibrato, but thereafter he settles down to keep it under greater control, though his tone has at times a tendency to insecurity. But overall this is a fine interpretation, frequently displaying great authority and considerable nobility in the early numbers of Part 2. Ovenden, too, excels in bringing a strong sense of character to recits, 'In rosy mantle' making an especially striking impression after the exquisitely lovely opening of Part 3, the three flutes evoking the tranquility of bright, Elysian dawn. Tynan copes impressively with fioritura of 'On mighty pens' and generally with embellishments (she even sports a trill), but the voice tends to stridency in the upper register and I suspect she might be happier with later repertoire. The treatment of ornaments is not always convincing and fermatas lack the expected cadential flourishes.

If the choral singing by a sizeable force lacks the ultimate in finish and finesse, it certainly makes up for it in verve and commitment, the climaxes of the big choral numbers often spine-tingling in intensity. But the real hero here is the orchestra, which throughout responds to Christophers' insightful, penetrating and ever sensitively phrased direction with playing of superlative quality in every department. There are really far too many examples to which attention might be drawn, but I will just mention the beautifully judged introduction to 'On mighty pens', the prominent wind parts exquisitely balanced, the strings' dotted quavers and semi-quavers delightfully pointed. Vocal shortcomings perhaps keep this version from the top

of the pile, but there is so much here to enjoy, indeed relish.

Brian Robins

HAYDN: SYMPHONIES

Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Robin Ticciati

77:00

Linn CKD 500

Symphonies 31, 70, 101

HAYDN: SYMPHONIES

Royal Northern Sinfonia, Rebecca Miller

69:54

Signum Classics SIGCD 434

Symphonies 52, 53, 59

Even modest exposure to Haydn's music (and I've also been assessing a new Creation) is liable to recall to mind the old adage that he remains the most neglected of all the great composers. Among the six symphonies on these two CDs, most of them little known, there are constant reminders of his quite astonishing originality, whether it be in the amazing C alto horn parts of Symphony No. 31, 'The Hornsignal', the wit of Symphony No. 70 in D, the passion and drama of No. 52 in C minor or the irresistibly good-humoured maturity of No. 101 in D, 'The Clock'. This is a group of works that spans much of Haydn's creative life, ranging from 1765 (No. 31), four years after he entered the service of the Esterházy court up until 'The Clock' of 1794, a work composed for Haydn's triumphant concert series in London. A couple of textural points: in the finale of No. 70 Ticciati employs the timpani and trumpet parts later added by Haydn and missing from most editions (mine included) until rediscovered by H. C. Robbins Landon, while Miller's performance of No. 59, 'The Imperial' includes both finales, the operatic overture originally used by Haydn and the movement marked Capriccio with which he later replaced it.

The two discs containing these works start with much in common. Both feature highly regarded chamber orchestras playing modern rather than period instruments, though the Scottish Chamber Orchestra does field natural horns and trumpets along with, I suspect, hard-headed timpani sticks. The string forces are identical at 8-6-4-4-2, rather too large for the Esterházy symphonies, but appropriate for 'The Clock'. Both opt for keyboard continuo - still a controversial topic - Ticciati a sometimes hyperactive fortepiano, Miller a barely audible harpsichord. The two sets of performances also have much in common. Repeats

are universally observed, perhaps rather too assiduously for some tastes by Ticciati, who observes not only exposition repeats but all double-bar repeats, even those of the recapitulation of minuets. There is much to commend. Tempos are throughout largely unexceptionable and it is good to find minuets taken at a sensible, forward moving speed and andantes that nowhere drag. Only in the case of the Adagio of No. 31 did I feel a greater sense of forward movement might have been preferable, but that may have as much to do with all those repeats as actual tempo. The playing of both orchestras is exemplary, with fresh, well-balanced woodwinds and splendidly articulated strings; happily gone are the days when modern strings smothered articulation in vibrato, a measure of the influence the HIP movement has had on modern players. Ticciati's natural horns are also expertly played, but that brings me to a major caveat about these discs. It seems to me pointless to have natural horns braying brazenly, only to have their boisterously outdoor effect vitiated by effete-sounding modern strings. Few composers suffer more from the sound of such string playing than Haydn. To remove the greater, more robust and earthier character of period strings is to deprive his music of much of its muscular strength and energy. Or to put more colourfully, it is to brush off the country dust and clean the mud from his boots in favour of polite, inappropriate gentility.

As already noted, there is much to praise here and my major reservation will have varying (or no) significance according to taste, though I suspect most readers of a specialized early music review will understand the point being made.

Brian Robins

MOZART: IL RE PASTORE

John Mark Ainsley *Alessandro*, Sarah Fox *Aminta*, Ailish Tynan *Elisa*, Anna Devin *Tamiri*, Benjamin Hulett *Agenore*, Classical Opera, Ian Page
117:12 (2 CDs)
Signum SIGCD 433

It is fascinating how this early opera from Mozart's Salzburg period already includes many of the elements which would come to full fruition in the later great operatic masterpieces of his maturity. In spite of the stylised context, Mozart makes a real attempt at musical characterisation, and the orchestration is varied with a generous range of instruments made available by the Salzburg Archiepiscopal purse. Ian Page's sizzling account

of the overture prepares for the delights to come as the overture segues flawlessly into the opening aria for Sarah Fox's *Aminta*. The effortless elegance of her singing is perfectly matched by Ailish Tynan's *Elisa*, and indeed the small cast of five principals, including John Mark Ainsley, Benjamin Hulett and Anna Devin are all superb. While the singing, like the playing, sounds absolutely authentic, there is a pleasing sense of freedom and a palpable joy in the music. Hulett's effortlessly lyrical account of *Agenore's* aria "Per me rispondete" is a case in point, where he conveys the character's mixed emotions but at the same time clearly enjoys Mozart's exquisite melodic writing. Listening to this wonderful music so beautifully performed it is amazing to think of Mozart's employers, who repeatedly failed to recognise the unique talent of the man who was supplying them with such sublime fare. The two CDs are accompanied by a packed booklet including the full libretto and English translation as well as a comprehensive programme note, incorporating the latest research on the opera.

D. James Ross

ARIAS FOR BENUCCI

Matthew Rose, Arcangelo, Jonathan Cohen
77:06
Hyperion CDA68078
Music by Martín y Soler, Mozart, Paisiello, Salieri & Sarti

The current enthusiasm among record companies for operatic recitals centred around a famous singer of the past is a welcome development. Not only does it make for greater contrast than the traditional composer recital, but it can also provide excellent clues as to the nature of some of the great voices of the past. Indeed, the examination of the music composed for a particular singer to determine voice type and range, etc., has itself become a musicological study. Here listeners, if so inclined, can play the game for themselves. So what can we learn from this CD about the great buffo bass Francesco Benucci, who was born about 1745 and is today best remembered as the creator of Mozart's Figaro and Guglielmo in *Così fan tutte*? Well, in keeping with the character of buffo roles one might suggest that Benucci's talents lay in characterisation and flexibility rather than overt virtuosity. The obvious need to project text clearly necessarily results in a predominance of syllabic settings that cover no great range – 'Se vuol ballare', for instance covers a range from C to F1; we can gather from the climax of the cabaletta of that aria, too, that Benucci had a powerful voice capable to

bring off an impressive climax, a quality also to be heard here in Guglielmo's splendid showpiece 'Rivolgete a lui', an aria Mozart replaced in *Così fan tutte* because of its length. We cannot of course guess at the quality of Benucci's voice, but it was especially valued in Vienna, where Benucci sang from 1783 until 1795, while a German critic wrote of its 'beautiful, rounded quality' while also praising his acting for its 'propriety' and lack of vulgarity.

In addition to the arias from *Figaro*, *Così* and *Don Giovanni* – in which Benucci sang the first Viennese Leporello in 1788 – we are also given arias from roles created by him in Vienna from Salieri's *La grotta di Trofonio* (1785), *Axur, re d'Ormus* (1788) and Martín y Soler's hugely successful *Una cosa rara* (1786). Giuseppe Sarti's *I contrattempi* (Venice, 1778) is particularly interesting for being the first opera in which Benucci created a role. Here the characterful recitative and aria 'Oime! che innanzi agli occhi – Pensa, che per morire' finds his character Frasca trying Papageno-like to pluck up courage to commit suicide. Also of note are extracts from the two Salieri operas: Trofonio's mock 'ombre' scena 'Ch'ite per l'aere' is clearly a parody on Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*, complete with chorus of spirits, while 'Idol vano' offers a rare opportunity to hear a more serious aria composed for Benucci in the *mezzo caraterre* role of Axur, the greater degree of coloratura strikingly apparent in the context of other arias on the CD.

So how does British bass-baritone Matthew Rose fare with the 'Benucci test'? Rather well, actually. The voice can certainly be described as having a 'beautiful, rounded' quality and it is evenly produced across its range, with an admirable lack of intrusive vibrato. Rose also brings a sense of character to the roles he is portraying (never easy in a recital) - I particularly like the sense of malicious fun intimated in Leporello's 'catalogue' aria (let's not forget there is more than an element of his master in the servant's make-up) - and there is certainly a sense of propriety in not concluding 'Se vuol ballare' an octave higher than written. I feel Benucci would have probably been more precise with his ornaments (the single trill Rose attempts is a half-hearted effort) and would probably have sung more of them. Mention also needs to be made of the admirable cameo appearances of sopranos Katherine Watson (as Dorabella) and Anna Devin (as Zerlina). Rose is admirably supported throughout by a rather larger Arcangelo than we usually hear. The wind and brass departments boast some of London's best period instrument players, who relish the opportunities given them by Mozart's wind writing. Jonathan Cohen's direction is notable not only for

the sympathetic support given to Rose, but the spirited, acutely observed performances of the overtures to *Figaro*, *Don Giovanni* and Paisiello's hugely successful *Il re Teodoro in Venezia* (Vienna, 1784), from which it might have been appropriate to hear an aria. Still, with a playing time of 77 minutes one can hardly complain about what is not on a disc that achieves the rare distinction of being both of great interest and thoroughly entertaining.

Brian Robins

ARIAS FOR LUIGI MARCHESI

The great castrato of the Napoleonic aria

Ann Hallenberg, Stile Galante, Stefano Aresi

71:45

Glossa GCD 923505

Music by Bianchi, Cherubini, Cimarosa, Mayr, Mysliveček, Pugnani, Sarti & Zingarelli

Another winner from the excellent Ann Hallenberg. Luigi Marchesi (1754-1829) was described by contemporaries as "the infinity and personification of the castratos", and "the very best of his kind". (He also achieved fame by refusing to sing before Napoleon, following the latter's victorious entry into Milan in 1796.) Many descriptions of his superb singing survive, along with a number of written-out examples of his astonishing improvised ornamentation; these are the inspiration for this remarkable disc, which sets out to recreate his long-lost art.

Ann Hallenberg already has a number of extremely interesting and thoughtfully planned recordings to her name, and this is no exception. She gives us a breathtaking display of vocal fireworks – long perfectly-even semiquaver runs, spot-on arpeggios, and precisely tuned huge leaps – but with the added scholarly spice of them being either written-out or inspired by Marchesi himself. There is even an example of the once-famed Marchesi "rocket", an exhilarating upward run in semitones over two octaves! Remarkably, despite all the pyrotechnics, the overall impression is of intense dramatic urgency and emotional aptness, as indeed Marchesi's contemporary audiences agreed.

There are many highlights. Try the dazzling Cimarosa 'Superbo di me stesso' (track 9) for a good overall example, or the lovely slow Cherubini 'Quanto e fiero il mio tormento' (track 6) with its many cadenzas and electrifying allegro conclusion. The extended scena from Zingarelli's

'Pirro' (track 11) is especially fine, with the added bonus of Francesca Cassinari's lovely soprano.

Stile Galante supply superbly energetic orchestral support, with some particularly lovely string and woodwind solos (e. g., the glorious bassoon obbligato at the opening of Pugnani's 'Misero pargoletto', track 7). Stefano Aresi, as well as sparkling overall direction, supplies exemplary and scholarly sleeve notes.

Much of the music is, as far as I am aware, new to disc, giving us a fascinating snapshot of operatic music and performance practice in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Alastair Harper

FORGOTTEN VIENNA: DITTERSDORF, WANHAL AND ORDONEZ

George Clifford and Dominika Fehér *violins*, Choir of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, The Amadè Players, Nicholas Newland

71:43

Resonus RES10157

Music history frequently reminds us of the place occupied by Mannheim in the development of the symphony, at the same time overlooking the equally important part played by composers based in Vienna. This appealing CD featuring three composers who made important contributions to the early symphony should help redress the balance. The most senior of the trio is Karl Ordonez, born in Vienna in 1734, whose C major symphony is also the most old-fashioned of the works recorded here. Scored for strings alone and cast in four brief movements, it opens with a serious Adagio that still hints at contrapuntal writing. An Allegro driven by busy passage work is followed by an urbane Andante disrupted by dynamic contrasts, while the concluding Presto has the feel of a country dance. Nicholas Newland's informative notes are a little dismissive, but I find it a rather engaging work.

Less so to my mind is the Concerto for two violins in C by Carl Ditters (von Dittersdorf), also a native of Vienna and today probably best remembered for being one of the famous string quartet that included Haydn and Mozart as well as the Bohemian-born Wanhal (Vaňhal). Dittersdorf was also the author of a charming autobiography, his music always striking me as accurately reflecting his good-natured writing. The present concerto opens with a march-

like Maestoso that adds spice by adding minor inflections, before progressing to an easy going Adagio that intersperses cantabile writing with little passages of dialogue for the soloists. The final Presto is more ambitious in scale, with a long orchestral introduction. Like the concerto as a whole it includes much writing for the solo instruments together, giving more the impression of a concertante than a genuine concerto. Odd moments of suspect intonation aside, it is given a fine performance by George Clifford and Dominika Fehér.

The remaining three pieces are by Johann Baptist Wanhal, born in 1739, the same year as Dittersdorf. Much the finest work on the disc is his Symphony in A minor (Bryan a2). Newland has edited a new version of the symphony which he claims restores two (of four) horn parts and the Minuet. Both however were included on the recording by Concerto Köln, whose performance may be preferred by some for its finish and greater tautness. That said, the Amadè Players well capture the typical minor mode intensity of the opening Allegro Moderato, a movement with an impressive development. Given that it adopts dance rhythms and is predominately chordal, the second movement is rather curiously headed 'Cantabile', while the Minuet reverts to the minor. The final Allegro opens with hushed expectation before its four-chord motif is repeated forte to announce a movement of dynamic drama that enters ever more turbulent territory as it progresses.

The Violin Concerto in B flat (Weinmann IIb:Bb1) opens impressively with a long orchestral statement before the soloist enters with the same material. The central section includes some bravura writing, while the succeeding Adagio introduces attractive cantabile writing and the final Allegro steps out brightly to introduce a movement that develops with considerable inventiveness. Clifford again gives a fine performance, though his cadenza outstays its welcome. Unusually for a programme otherwise devoted to orchestral works the final work is choral, one of two Requiems in E flat Wanhal apparently composed in memory of his parents. This one is much the less ambitious, a brief work without solo contributions and featuring simple homophonic, at times unison, writing for the choir. The mood throughout is one of sweetly expressed tenderness, the effect touching. The Choir of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge would not I imagine consider itself among the elite of Oxbridge choirs, but it copes well enough with the modest demands of the work, some imprecise ensemble notwithstanding. Otherwise the

performances, which feature very good orchestral playing, are directed by Newland with a sure and idiomatic hand.

Brian Robins

Romantic

MENDELSSOHN: STRING SYMPHONIES VOL. I

L'Orfeo Barockorchester, Michi Gaigg

64:37

cpo 777 942-2

One's initial reaction to seeing this CD listed in a catalogue might be, "Why is a self-styled Barockorchester playing Mendelssohn?" In fact, that pedigree is precisely what makes this recording such a success - the fact that Michi Gaigg and company come to the music from the past rather than the future (as it were!) means that the unfathomably young Mendelssohn's take on writing ensemble pieces for four-part strings (which he then accompanied from the keyboard!) makes total sense. Think C. P. E. Bach (though with perhaps displaying a little more of his father's strict contrapuntal control than the original) discovering 19th-century harmony; arguably the only discernible difference is that Mendelssohn already makes clear distinction between the three movements of each symphony. Some may wonder why the six works on this first of two discs were not recorded in numerical order, but it would be difficult to argue that this marvellous ensemble could have chosen a more dramatic opening than Symphony IV! The CD cover shows how children Mendelssohn's age should have been entertaining themselves rather than composing such intense and accomplished music, and makes his prodigious talents all the more remarkable. Buy this and start saving for the next installment!

Brian Clark

19th century

LA COMPLAINTE DE LACENAIRE

Chansons populaires du 19ème siècle

La Clique des Lunaisiens, Arnaud Marzorati

67:03

Paraty 615223

Pierre-François Lacenaire (1803-36) became something of a cult figure when, on trial for multiple crimes, he endeavoured to project himself as a campaigner for social justice. This recording is as much a *Façade/Pierrot Lunaire* style quasi-theatrical entertainment as it is a purely musical experience: I'd love to see it, but it made a rather odd listen. His writings are part sung to popular tunes of the day and part read/declaimed and are placed in the context of other pieces he knew or referred to. It doesn't really fit our usual parameters so I have not awarded any stars, but I'd really recommend it to anyone with even a passing interest in this period of French cultural history.

David Hansell
