

Early Music Review

EDITIONS OF MUSIC

FROBERGER: NEUE AUSGABE... NEW EDITION OF THE COMPLETE WORKS VII... WORKS FOR ENSEMBLE AND CATALOGUE OF THE COMPLETE WORKS (FBWV)...

Edited by Siegbert Rampe.

Bärenreiter BA 2928. xii + 100pp, £37.00.

This is the conclusion of Bärenreiter's new edition of Froberger's output, and is important primarily for the thematic catalogue, which begins at p. 29. It is preceded by two works for 2 vlms, STB & organ – *Alleluia absorta est mors & Apparuerunt Apostolis*. I do find the asterisks confusing, and it could be helped by notating the parts and score identically: the opening triple time abandons the four-bar patterns for the instruments. They are worth performing. The third piece is a Capriccio a4, probably for SSTB, though there is no need to assume that strings are the only forces available. Attempts to perform it earlier on keyboard were not very satisfactory. The wide gap between the third and fourth parts implies the need for an additional keyboard or plucker. All three pieces are notated in German tablature.

The catalogue is thorough. There may be later or unknown sources, but the editor will make sure that they are circulated to the experts: is there a specific place to find them? There are separate series for Toccatas (101-130), Fantasias (201-214), Canzons (301-308), Ricercars (401-416), Capricci for keyboard (501-525), Partitas, etc., for keyboard (601-659) and music for ensembles (701-707), and finally two pages of appendix; pp. 95-98 list the sources, and there is a list of major editions on p. 99 and a bibliography on p. 100.

I like the idea of a catalogue merged with the complete works. I've missed Vols I & II, but I have the rest and enjoy playing them. I don't have access to the sources, so that limits my abilities. The price is reasonable for Vol. VII, though I'm puzzled by a label at the bottom right of the first page where Bärenreiter refers to "Complete Works Vol VII2".

The complete Froberger edition is available for £295.50.

Clifford Bartlett

KOŽELUCH... COMPLETE SONATAS FOR KEYBOARD IV: SONATAS 38-50...

Edited by Christopher Hogwood.

Bärenreiter (BA 9514), 2015. xxxix + 219pp, £31.00.

[The complete 4 volumes £103.50.]

Koželuch was born in 1747 near Prague and died in Vienna in 1818. This final volume begins with Nos 38-40: Hogwood chose a Viennese publisher in 1810, though earlier prints appeared in 1807 and other issues before the favoured edition. 41-43 were published in London in 1809. The rest were unpublished. "Keyboard" is the best heading for the four volumes, though by the 1800 the casual title of "piano" is appropriate. Dynamics are mostly *f*, *p* & *sf*, with an occasional *dolce*, *cresc.* & *dim.* *Ped* is often used, with * presumably intended to indicate that the pedal be raised just before the next chord.

Christopher Hogwood produced a magnificent edition. This volume appeared after his death, but I assume that it was all finished before then. Any editions by him have always been prepared with great care. The Introduction is substantial in English, Czech and German, though the thorough critical commentaries are only in English. It ends with a list of the 50 sonatas, including the incipit of the openings. Whether the music stands with Haydn and Mozart is another matter.

Clifford Bartlett

RECORDINGS

13th century

MUSIC & POETRY FROM THIRTEENTH CENTURY

FRANCE: CONDUCTUS 3

John Potter, Christopher O'Gorman, Rogers Covey-Crump
Hyperion CDA68115

I spent a lot of time working on this repertoire in the 1960s and 70s, and the editors then assumed that the notation must be according to the six metrical modes. These follow the main four sources, "Notre Dame" sources: W1, W2, F & Madrid (any textbooks will give the

information), but there is no certainty that the *conductus* should use the metrical modes except for short openings. (Other forms in the main sources are also not necessarily metrical.) The short lines of the *conductus* are based on the texts. The number of voices can be one, two, three or (though not on this CD) four. Three of the 11 are vernacular, and of the remaining eight none relate to the Notre-Dame MSS. The flexibility of what is heard here is intensely refreshing.

First time through, concentrate on the words. The stanzas are rhythmically accurate, but the poems avoid normal hymn-style patterns and have mostly short lines: *Vite perditte*, for instance, has syllable-lengths of 5, 3, 4, 5, 3, 4; 7, 6, 7, 6. Rhymes are in use as well: the first section contains 6 lines, in two groups of three different rhymes; the last four lines are simple ABAB. It must be deliberate that the total number of syllables is 50. I haven't seen the source, but each syllable has the same length, with breaks at the end of each line. Short additional notes are sung within the main note. The story relates a man who mostly lived badly, the last line finishing with *Miserere mei*. There are also versions in French and Provençal. But I'm not going to write paragraphs for each of the 11 items in the CD!

The three singers are impressive. All are titled "tenor", but not particularly high. John and Rogers I've known for decades – Rogers goes back to the '60s. I don't know Christopher, but the three singers match well. Mark Everett offers a valuable introduction. It was generally assumed the *conductus* implied a medieval procession, but an alternative is "conduct", as in the ultimate good conduct in *Vite perditte*.

I hope this will be popular!

Clifford Bartlett

15th century

ARNOLD & HUGO DE LANTINS: SECULAR WORKS

Le miroir de musique, Baptiste Romain

67:00

Ricercar RIC365

The brothers (or possibly cousins) de Lantins were born in Liège and sought their fortune in Northern Italy. Their close career connections with each other and with Dufay, a fact confirmed by recent scholarship, suggests that the three were close acquaintances socially and musically. In fact, Arnold and

Hugo's music is a distinctive blend of advanced and archaic features, anticipating the music of the later 15th century, but occasionally recalling that of the *ars subtilior* of the end of the 14th. The present selection of settings by both men of French, Italian and Latin texts is beautifully presented by the singers and instrumentalists of Le Miroir de Musique. They are absolutely at home with this repertoire, and their intelligent and highly musical readings are augmented by a genuine passion for the music. In fact, notwithstanding the title of the CD, three of the works are sacred works, the different musical texture also marking them out from the secular repertoire. The instrumental accompaniment to the voices revolves around a pair of vielles with lute, guittern, recorder and hurdy-gurdy although in a couple of the instrumental pieces the band branches out very effectively on to bagpipes, shawm, slide trumpet and pommer. These are lovely subtle but authoritative performances of little-known repertoire highlighting the strengths of contemporaries of Dufay and augmenting our knowledge of a fascinating period of musical flux.

D. James Ross

Renaissance

HOW FAIR THOU ART : BIBLICAL PASSIONS BY GIOVANNI PIERLUIGI DA PALESTRINA

The King's Singers

54:54

Signum LC 15723

This selection from the Palestrina's settings of *The Song of Songs* is interspersed by four of the composer's Marian antiphons. Once you get used to the close recording and the King's Singers' distinctive 'barbershop' sound, these performances are highly enjoyable, benefiting from the singers' diffident and yet expressive approach. Just occasionally the very close recording shows the alto voices at a disadvantage, but the singing is generally of a very high quality and the readings of these beautiful pieces is intelligent and sensuous. I take a little bit of exception to the title with its presumably intentionally punning use of the phrase 'Biblical Passions' – the Passion has a very specific religious meaning, and its extension to embrace the erotic underpinning of *The Song of Songs* makes something of a nonsense of this. It is not entirely clear what context Palestrina's *Song of Songs* settings were intended for, but if – as seems likely – they were for

private domestic consumption, then I am sure that the earliest performances would have sounded very much like the present recording. It is interesting to hear the Marian antiphons in the same context – almost certainly written for liturgical choral presentation, they work equally well sung by reduced forces and in a smaller acoustic. Indeed without listening closely to the texts, it would be difficult to differentiate the two repertoires from one another.

D. James Ross

ROVIGO: MISSA DOMINICALIS, MOTTETTI,
CANZONI

Cappella Musicale di S. Barbara, Umberto Forni

67:02

Tactus TC 541801

This a live concert recording (complete with audience presence and applause at the end) of a five-part mass by Rovigo, using the composer's complete instrumental canzonas and two motets to create a semblance of a liturgical reconstruction. The live nature of the recording means that there is a fair amount of background and occasionally foreground noise, in the manner of a you-tube video, as well as a couple of fluffed notes, but the structure of the programme and the generally excellent standard of the performance as well as the rarity of the music meant that I found it easy to overlook these shortcomings. As not a single note of Rovigo's organ music has survived, the performance opens with a flamboyant Toccata by Merulo, but after that the music is all Rovigo's, and of a consistently high standard. Regarded in his lifetime as on a par with Monteverdi, while the latter's stock has inexorably risen the former has sunk into obscurity, and this CD is a useful reminder of the 'lesser' composers of the second half of the 16th century. The five-part *Missa Dominicalis* is a work of imagination and considerable musicality, while the lighter canzonas are also delicately inventive. He was employed at the sumptuous court of Mantua, being headhunted temporarily by the Duke of Bavaria, who also supported a musical establishment of considerable prestige. Clearly Rovigo was greatly valued in his own lifetime, and the present engaging cross-section of his work shines a useful spotlight on this forgotten figure. The CD ends with an impressive eight-part polychoral setting of *Laudate Dominum*, suggesting that there may be a further wealth of unexplored material awaiting modern performance.

D. James Ross

THE DEER'S CALL: ARVO PÄRT / WILLIAM BYRD

The Sixteen, Harry Christophers

66:52

CORO COR16140

+ Tallis

Every year The Sixteen sets off on a Choral Pilgrimage around the cathedrals and major churches and chapels of Britain, spread over several months. And every year a compact disc is released which consists of the (predominantly) Renaissance music being performed on the Pilgrimage. My admittedly not comprehensive experience of attending concerts and listening to discs has been that the discs have tended to sound like smoother, even watered down, versions of the concerts. However, the current Choral Pilgrimage disc is such that this is unlikely to be the case in 2016.

Each Pilgrimage is built round a theme, and this year it juxtaposes the music of William Byrd and Arvo Pärt. The best Renaissance choral music lends itself well to being performed beside modern or even avant-garde and although Pärt's music could hardly be described as cutting edge or revolutionary, it has nonetheless a profoundly late 20th-early / 21st century sensibility that, on its own terms, is radical, Pärt having re-thought his musical style from the roots, and in so doing influenced many other gifted composers in different countries, such as Eric Whitacre and Paul Mealor. It is an excellent idea to place him beside Byrd, as the more vertical style of the one sets the more horizontal style of the other in mutually advantageous perspective. That said, the first two tracks are pieces by Byrd that could, in these terms, be described as vertical: the remarkable canonic *Diliges Dominum* the intricacies of which are beautifully described by John Milsom in his fine sleeve notes, and *Christe qui lux*; usually the inclusion of Byrd's almost gimmicky setting of this homophonic hymn is a wasted opportunity when one of his more profound pieces could have been selected, but The Sixteen's version has a claim to be the best on disc, as they sing it with a warmth and engagement absent from the other dozen or more recordings. This warmth and engagement in performance extends to the following track by Byrd, *Emendemus in melius*. Particularly since Joseph Kerman's heralding it as a significant piece in Byrd's oeuvre it seems to have been sung on disc with a degree of inhibited reverence, but The Sixteen respond to the urgency of the text without hamming, and again theirs has a claim to be the best of the dozen commercial recordings of this motet.

On a personal level I am interested that *Miserere nostri*

is being touted as a composition jointly by Tallis (to whom it is usually attributed) and Byrd. Back in the early 1990s when I was coediting *Byrd Studies* (CUP, 1992) I suggested to one of our contributors that his contribution should be a consideration of whether Byrd had a hand in the composition of this work; the contributor went on to submit another proposal which led to a fine and most acceptable essay, so I am intrigued that, in the light of John Milsom's recent edition of the *Cantiones sacrae* of 1575 to which Tallis and Byrd each contributed what boils down to seventeen items, this line of research is seeing the light of day. This and Byrd's own related *Miserere mihi* – both virtuoso canonic works but still delightful music – receive warm (that word again) performances from The Sixteen, and the disc ends with a barnstorming rendition of Byrd's tripartite *Tribue Domine*.

However, the outstanding performance and the dominating piece of music is Byrd's enormous eight-part, ten-minute *Ad Dominum cum tribularer* placed appropriately at the centre of the running order. This version is forty seconds quicker than The Sixteen's previous recording from 1989. Mainly this is explained by Harry Christophers' dramatic acceleration at the words "Sagittae potentis acutae" (Sharp arrows of the mighty). This passage also illustrates in microcosm the wider decorum of the repertory on this disc: a homophonic passage within a predominantly polyphonic structure reflecting what I described above as the more vertical pieces by Pärt set beside the more horizontal works by Byrd. *Ad Dominum* also illustrates the debt which Byrd owes to his Franco-Flemish predecessors, those composers such as Gombert and Clemens from the so-called Lost Generation between Josquin and Palestrina whose works are only now becoming known and appreciated, and whose influence on English composers is only just beginning to be recognised. In the case of Byrd's motet, he seems to have taken his theme for the opening of the second half of the motet, at the words "Heu mihi" (Woe is me), from the same point in the work titled *Quemadmodum* which is attributed to Taverner and survives in sources which would have been known to Byrd. It is an astonishingly progressive piece if it is indeed by Taverner, magnificent in its own right but heavily influenced by the Continentals mentioned above, so much so that an attribution to either Gombert or Clemens might well raise fewer eyebrows than the existing one to Taverner. Also, in the same passage "Heu mihi", Byrd uses a descending melismatic motif repeated in the inner parts which is identical to one used in a very similar

way in the Kyrie of Clemens' *Missa Pastores quidnam vidistis* and to an extent elsewhere in Clemens' mass, which survives in a source also known to Byrd. It is a moot point as to whether the acceleration adds much to an already committed performance. Harry again sticks to the original manuscript source and has his second sopranos sing an E natural in the word "conclamabant" in the concluding bars, where most editors and choirs employ a flat. The natural certainly provides a further flash of exoticism in an already passionate piece of writing by a probably still relatively young Byrd. Possibly the recording by I Fagiolini has the edge over The Sixteen by sounding – no pun intended – edgier, but of the many fine recordings (now up to at least half a dozen) of this remarkable and challenging motet, this version has a claim to be the best of the rest, and is yet another reason for recommending this excellently sung and planned recording.

Richard Turbet

SCATTERED ASHES

Josquin's Miserere and the Savonarolan legacy

magnificat, Philip Cave

84:00 (2 CDs in a plastic case)

Linn Records CKD 517

+Byrd, Clemens non Papa, Gombert, Le Jeune, Lassus, Lhéritier & Palestrina

This pair of discs celebrates the silver jubilee of Magnificat, one of many outstanding early music choirs who have made the world a better place with their recordings and performances of familiar and, particularly, unfamiliar repertory. These are based on research and editions by reliable scholars such as their conductor Philip Cave and regular soprano/mean Sally Dunkley. To celebrate their notable anniversary they have chosen music on a Savonarolan theme composed by eight great composers from the period that began with Josquin and culminated with Byrd. So distinguished is every track on this pair of discs, and so distinguished are the performances of every track, that each item is a good reason by itself for purchasing the album. Adventurous and discerning scholars and performers have now begun to reveal that the hitherto Lost Generation of mainly Franco-Flemish composers possesses greatness to put beside their bookends Josquin and Palestrina. The repertory on this double album – which contains some premiere recordings – amply illustrates the consistent and relentless musical talent of this era.

The disc begins with *Miserere mei, Deus*, at over 17

minutes a work of sustained inspiration, by Josquin. It is surprising to realise that this monumental piece is in only four parts with an extra tenor in the refrains, yet the melodic and consequent harmonic creativity never flags. This is complemented in a performance of sustained clarity and excellence, conveying the meaning of the text – Psalm LI, *Have mercy upon me O God* – and implying the circumstances of Savonarola’s meditation upon it, while never slipping into gratuitous theatricality. There could be a case for suggesting that this is the best performance on disc of a motet by Josquin.

Lheritier, one of the Lost Generation whose work is now being discovered and appreciated, sets part of the same text in six parts. He is thought to have been a pupil of Josquin, and his setting, although referring briefly to Josquin’s, is more luxuriant in its sustained use of all or most of the parts and a more astringent harmonic palate. This is another glorious work and, when the work ends, it comes as a surprise that it is timed at over nine minutes.

Setting *In te, Domine, speravi*, part of Psalm XXX on which Savonarola also meditated, Gombert produces a work of intense and almost driven beauty, a premiere on disc mined from the “Lost” repertory. The thicker textures in no way imply any cloying or lack of momentum. The polyphony is crystal clear. The final cadence brings to mind the one that concludes Byrd’s early masterpiece in eight parts *Quomodo cantabimus*, the only place where Byrd uses it, emphasizing that in neglecting these composers, posterity has also been neglecting the considerable debt owed to them by their illustrious English successors, from Taverner via Tallis to even as late as Byrd.

Clemens is another Lost composer and he seems to have influenced Byrd in the way Gombert influenced Tallis. Here, Clemens also sets part of Psalm XXX in a style similar to his older contemporaries Gombert and Lheritier albeit audibly two or three decades further in time and with, in this work, more flashing dissonances. Again thanks to the intensely beautiful flow of the music facilitated by another wonderful interpretation by Magnificat, the alleged ten minutes are over in what seems the twinkling of an eye.

For those of us easily bored by the upbeat major-key Palestrina, it is a pleasure to encounter one of his works that is so clearly influenced by his Franco-Flemish predecessors. *Tribularer, si nescirem* is audibly in the succession of the three composers just mentioned, yet has all the hallmarks of the “classical” Palestrina in its smoothness of line and absence of discords. None of the latter is to sacrifice the emotional weight of the piece. One can only express regret

that more of this side of the composer is not performed more often instead of the usual sunnier (and frankly sometimes blander) fare.

Something similar could be said about Lassus. Early in the revival of Renaissance music a few of his pieces became embedded in the repertories of sacred and secular choirs, to the detriment of his more interesting output. Where are the recordings of a piece such as his *Ad Dominum cum tribularer*? Rightly there are many versions of Byrd’s huge setting in eight parts, yet the slighter but still impressive setting in six by Lassus is unrepresented in the current catalogue, and is seldom performed (The Cardinall’s Musick sang it last year at the Cadogan Hall in London). However, an early music insider with good contacts to performers recently told me that Lassus is box office poison in Britain when it comes to public performances. One wonders why. For all its rich texture and occasional chromaticisms *Infelix ego* is not the best piece on this disc, possessing neither the contrapuntal flow of *The Lost Boys* nor the more modern narrativity of Palestrina and Byrd; perhaps it is as much about who he is not, as much as who he is.

Le Jeune’s setting of *Tristitia obsedit me* is a bracing piece that hints at the words “non cessat”, and increasingly thereafter, that its composer particularly excelled in secular vocal music. Magnificat give it a deservedly good hearing.

The final piece on the album is also chronologically the latest, Byrd’s *Infelix ego*. Now that the early music movement is hopefully over the stage of stifling any feelings in or for the music (without resorting to histrionics of course) it can be appreciated that Byrd was deeply engaged with the text, and probably with the circumstances in which it was written. The result is precisely what I mentioned above – feelings without histrionics. As ever, Byrd takes the listener on a journey: he has a narrative, he tells a story, he relates a set of circumstances, he expresses a proposition, and the music keeps moving. Polyphony is the vehicle for much of this, getting us from A to Z with occasional climaxes where needed, and homophony plays a part in punctuating the ride, or changing the perspective, and also providing climaxes. No work in Byrd’s canon illustrates this better than *Infelix ego* with incidental details such as where Byrd reduces his textures to draw attention to where Savonarola asks questions, or where towards the end at the critical word “*misericordia*” he introduces the massive and unprecedented A flat chord in a piece “in” B flat major. It is perhaps at this chord where Magnificat score over the many alternative versions. At one extreme *Stile Antico*’s

interpretation is intense and introverted (Harmonia Mundi HMU 807463); at the other, The Cardinal's Musick's version is passionate (Hyperion CDA67779). In Stile's version the A flat chord creeps up on the listener stealthily; in TCM's, everything seems to be heading that way and they throw the kitchen sink at it though not in any tasteless or brash way – this is a brilliant choir putting their collective lungs to a climactic moment. Then among several others of distinction there are outstanding versions by Contrapunctus (Signum SIGCD 338) and Oxford Camerata (Naxos 8.550574) each with their own USP. Yet somehow, Magnificat's magical sounding of this pivotal chord in the context of their beautifully sung mainstream interpretation renders it the most effective and indeed affecting of all the available versions, leastways at this crucial point: a fitting conclusion to a thoroughly distinguished recording.

Richard Turbet

UPHELD BY STILLNESS: RENAISSANCE GEMS
AND THEIR REFLECTION, VOLUME I: BYRD
ORA, Suzi Digby
78:00

HWM 906102

De Monte+ Bray, L'Estrange, Panufnik, Park, Pott & Williams

This is the first in a series of discs which I am told will be released at a rate of two a year for five years. Each will feature a work by a Renaissance master, plus several choral works inspired by the Renaissance work in question and commissioned by ORA, a select choir which could equally be named The Usual Suspects. That flippantly said, the singers combine to create an ensemble which lives up to their reputations. They sensibly launch the series with what it says on the tin, a masterpiece by a master, Byrd's *Mass for Five Voices*. No gems come more sparkling than this. The choir also sings two other works by Byrd: the famous *Ave verum corpus* from his first book of *Gradualia* (1605) and the substantial unpublished *Quomodo cantabimus* paired as is rather boringly usual on disc with Philippe de Monte's companion piece *Super flumina Babylonis*.

The performance of the Mass itself is beautiful. Just occasionally in the longer movements one could perhaps wish for the balance to favour the inner parts a fraction more, and throughout Byrd's contributions there were moments when a bit more pneumatic drill from the basses would have been welcome. Tempi just tip over into the

brisk side. The corollary of this is that the interpretation misses that last elusive pinch of memorability. I should like to think that even if I had not initially known the identity of the performers, the recording of the Mass by The Choir of Westminster Cathedral (Hyperion CDA68038) would still have conveyed to me the profound aura of devotion, derived from their theological and liturgical engagement with the work, which radiates from this recording. From another perspective, the recording by Stile Antico (Harmonia Mundi HMU 807572), although sung by musicians who seem to have been nurtured in the Anglican tradition, is nevertheless a profoundly thoughtful performance as devout in its own way as Westminster Cathedral's. It is a complete pleasure to listen to the recording by ORA, and its beauty impacts powerfully, but is fractionally short of the profundity of those other two. Ever since the pioneering disc by King's College Cambridge under David Willcocks, there have been some wonderful recordings of this work – the Elizabethan Singers on the old Saga label, and St John's College Cambridge originally on the budget Classics for Pleasure to name but two contrasting versions – but as Suzy Digby remarks in her notes for the recording, we are in a glittering age of choral performing, and ORA's version – alongside those other recent versions by Westminster Cathedral and Stile Antico - most effectively illustrate and confirm this with their recordings of Byrd's Mass.

Furthermore, while ORA's performances of Monte's *Super flumina* and Byrd's *Ave verum* are as good as that of the Mass, their version of Byrd's *Quomodo* has a good claim to be among the finest of the eight-and-counting now recorded, all of them by outstanding ensembles at the top of their respective games. Whereas some versions emphasize the massiveness of Byrd's construction, or respond to the tension of the presumed subtext, or to the sheer virtuosity of the writing, ORA's version possesses an airiness that sets it apart from the others, while not defaulting to blandness or mere beauty for its own sake, and is at the opposite pole from the slower, pensive, anxious and almost resigned interpretation which is one of the highlights on The Cardinal's Musick Byrd Edition (disc 3 of 13, ASV CD GAU 179). This deserves to be a deciding factor for purchasers interested in a programme that combines a Renaissance classic with modern commissions which respond to it.

The majority of the half dozen pieces premiered on this disc do the old master proud. The composers were asked to set their own reactions to the individual movements of the Mass. Not all of the composers use the texts in their

responses to Byrd's settings, but Roxanna Panufnik does so in her *Kyrie after Byrd*, and produces a stunning piece that contains echoes of the music and momentum of the original, but which is a strikingly personal reaction to the text, subtly varying Byrd's structure and exploiting the possibilities of a six-part choir (with an extra bass) both vertically and horizontally, in reduced and, especially, full scoring. Francis Pott has already established his Byrdian credentials in his excellent *Mass for Eight Parts* and for his take on Byrd's Gloria he sets *Laudate Dominum*. After an unpromising beginning, when I began to dread some bombastic pastiche, the work develops magnificently into a sustained emulation of Byrd's intense creativity, its five parts sounding like more. Alexander L'Estrange's text employs passages from the Credo beside excerpts from, amongst others, Byrd's will and John Donne's poem *Show me, deare Christ* which gives the work its title. Regrettably this causes the work to lack cohesion and momentum, as does the use of several musical styles (besides bits of Byrd I detected moments of Monteverdi, though I do not know whether the composer intended this) and I am afraid my concentration began to wander before the middle of this piece. The title for the entire disc is provided by Owain Park's *Upheld by stillness*, a setting of Kathleen Raine's poem *The word* responding to Byrd's Sanctus. I really hate saying this about works by young aspiring musicians such as Alexander and Owain, but I feel much the same about the latter's setting as I do about Alexander's, and believe that both men could do with the musical equivalent of a good literary sub-editor to tell them where and how to take out the unnecessary, sluggish and, I am afraid, self-indulgent bits, because there are good passages within both pieces. Unfortunately the downsides are all too readily exposed by their proximity to the preceding pieces by Roxanna and Francis, and by Charlotte Bray's *Agnus Dei* in which the composer fearlessly follows Byrd's structure but sings out with a confident individual voice, again exploiting polyphony and homophony while sustaining the narrative momentum which is always an essential element in Byrd's own music. I do not know any more of Charlotte's music (a situation I intend to rectify soon) but her *curriculum vitae* is evidence of an outstanding talent, a fact that I can well believe on the basis of hearing this beautiful and challenging response to one of Byrd's greatest and most deeply felt pieces.

This level of modern creativity is sustained in the final piece on the disc, *Ave verum corpus* re-imagined by Roderick Williams, which grabs one by the ears and

the throat from the start, and continues with a steady momentum exploiting both massive homophony and ecstatic polyphony. It is a fine and striking work in its own right and, like the other new pieces by Roxanna, Francis and Charlotte, deserves to become a standard repertory item in both sacred and secular musical environments. All four are worthy of their original.

Even if one already possesses one or more versions of Byrd's *Mass for Five Voices* – and it is a work which invites and can bear any number of interpretations – it is well worth owning the disc under review, to hear the Mass in this accomplished performance by ORA in the company of some outstanding modern compositions which respond to it, with the bonus of Byrd's best-known motet, plus one of the finest recordings of his increasingly popular large-scale unpublished masterpiece *Quomodo cantabimus*. Be tempted, give in.

Richard Turbet

17th century

CHARPENTIER: STANCES DU CID AIRS DE COUR

Cyril Auvity *haute-contre*, L'Yriade

59:32

Glossa GCD 923601

+ F. Couperin, Lambert & Morel

This is an attractive programme of comparatively rare vocal repertory. *Airs de cour* by Charpentier (including verses from Corneille's *Le Cid*) and Lambert are interspersed with instrumental movements from Couperin's *Les Nations*. Regular readers will know that I do not enjoy the continuo combination of harpsichord and theorbo but the bowed string playing is consistently very good. Cyril Auvity is an experienced advocate of the *haute-contre* repertory and draws on all that experience to engage fully with the texts of these miniature dramas. His tone in the higher register can verge on the harsh, though this is a rare event. The booklet note is strong on the context of the music but says little about its content. We do, however, get the full French texts with English translations though, strangely, no information about the artists.

David Hansell

GRAZIANI: CANTATAS, OP. 25
Consortium Carissimi, Garrick Comeaux
71:05
Naxos 8.573257

This recording dates from 2014 and was intended to mark the 350th anniversary of the composer's death. The full title of op. 25 is *Musiche sagre e morali composte ad una, due, tre e quattro voci* (published in 1678, 14 years after his death!), and for this project Consortium Carissimi have mustered four sopranos, and one each of mezzo, tenor and bass, as well as an archlute and theorbo (two players), viola da gamba, sackbut, harpsichord and organ (two players). Having been enthusiastic about their latest CD (also of Graziani), I'm afraid I must resort to type here; I simply do not but the idea of an ever-changing continuo soundscape, and I'm afraid the voices (especially – sorry, ladies – the sopranos) do not blend particularly well, especially when a leap from or to a high note is involved, and there are times when tuning becomes a serious concern, which is a pity as some of the music has the potential to be truly beautiful. Hopefully as their exploration of Graziani's music progresses these issues will be addressed.

Brian Clark

MERSENNE'S CLAVICHORD
Keyboard Music in 16th- and 17th-century France
Terence Charlston
68:36
divine art dda 25134

This is not just another recording of French 16th- and 17th-century keyboard music but the result of a fascinating project by Terence Charlton and the maker Peter Bavington to reconstruct the clavichord illustrated in Marin Mersenne's *Harmonie Universelle* published in 1636/7. Since no French clavichord of the period survives, this reconstruction was both challenging and particularly welcome. The result – while much is conjectural – has a plausible sound and works very well in this music. Charlston showcases the instrument with a programme covering the whole range of French keyboard genres and composers from Antoine de Févin (b. 1470) to Nicholas Lebègue (b. c. 1631). He shows the instrument's full compass as well as its ability in imitative, improvisatory and dance music, and particularly effectively in an echo piece. To some extent he is scouring the byways to obtain

repertory, particularly for the 16th century and not all the music is of the highest quality, but all is played with great commitment. The playing is cleanly articulated and allows the instrument to speak clearly, aided by excellent recording quality from the Royal College of Music studio. Charlston and Bavington have written extended liner notes covering the construction of the instrument and the choice of music. This is another highly successful and important project from Charlston who is indefatigable in his championing of early keyboard instruments and their music.

Noel O'Regan

PASQUINI: SUITES AND VARIATIONS
Lydia Maria Blank *harpsichord*
Et'cetera KTC1532

Occupying a chronological and stylistic position between Frescobaldi and Domenico Scarlatti, Pasquini's toccatas owe much to the former while the suites show a more French susceptibility. His variation sets are a particularly successful blend of styles and techniques. All are ably played here by Lydia Maria Blank on a copy of an 18th-century Italian harpsichord by Christian Fuchs with a mellow virginal-like sound which suits this music very well and is well recorded. As well as the five suites and six variation sets of the title there are three toccatas. The suites have varying numbers of movements and have no sarabandes, leaving them a bit lop-sided in contrast to those of French composers or of Froberger. But this is bright sparkling music, played with intelligence and panache and with lots of satisfyingly idiomatic ornaments on repeats. There are also very informative liner notes.

Noel O'Regan

DANIEL SPEER: KRIEGSGESCHICHTEN
Markus Miesenberger, Ars Antiqua Austria, Gunar Letzbor
51:26
Pan Classics PC 10317

This is the first of two planned discs to explore Speer's 1688 "Musicalisch-Türkischer Eulen-Spiegel", a musical settings of stories from a semi-autobiographical novel. In creating two concert programmes, Gunar Letzbor has chosen to combine war stories with sonatas for brass, and love stories with sonatas for strings (to appear in 2017). So there are various elements to the programme: Lompyn (the hero

of the tale) sings songs, sandwiched between two “ballets” (as in dance movements, not the art form) of different national styles (Cossacks, Poles, Muscovites, Greeks, Hungarians, Wallachians); between each set we have the brass sonatas (essentially rather simple, given the limited tonal capabilities of the instruments – 2 trumpets and 3 trombones, here with continuo), the sequence rounded off with three movements for strings. The cartoon illustrations in the booklet suggest that the project was aimed at a younger audience, and the singer’s approach to the texts would tend to support this impression, since at times he is virtually talking the words; if you are not a German speaker, it will be irrelevant anyway, since – as well as omitting the brass players’ names (at least, as far as I can see!), the booklet has no translation of the texts). If the CD was produced purely to be sold at performances (and why should it not? musicians need to make a living from their hard work), I wonder that the record company felt it should do on international release, especially with only minimal attention to what foreign audiences might make of such a peculiarity.

Brian Clark

L'ARPA BARBERINA: MUSIC FOR HARP AND SOPRANO IN EARLY BAROQUE ROME

Margret Köll *baroque harp*, Roberta Invernizzi *soprano*
64:11

Accent ACC 24310

dell'Arpa, Frescobaldi, Kapsberger, Quagliati, Luigi Rossi & anon

Margret Köll plays a modern copy of the Barberini harp, the prized possession of Cardinal Maffeo Barberini, who as Pope Urban VIII presided over the golden age of the Baroque in Rome. Barberini already possessed the harp, built around 1620, when in 1623 he took charge of the Catholic Church and over the ensuing twenty-one years of his pontificate he took time to expand his collection of musical instruments, which were doubtless employed in a flourishing musical establishment associated with his family. Köll presents us with flamboyant performances of toccatas, balletti, canzonas and fantasias for solo harp by Kapsberger, Paolo Quagliati and Frescobaldi, and is joined by the splendidly dramatic soprano Roberta Invernizzi for a range of songs by Luigi Rossi and the appropriately and magnificently named harpist/composer Orazio Michi Dell'Arpa. These performances are beautifully expressive, and the sounds of Baroque harp and voice seem in many ways to encapsulate

the glittering world of the first quarter of the 17th century in Rome. To my ear, the Barberini harp has a slightly lighter and brighter tone than the modern orchestral instrument, while – from the photo in the booklet – it seems to rely on flipping tuning blades to allow it to tackle the chromatic and modulating repertoire of the early Baroque. In Margret Köll’s hands, we are blissfully unaware of any technical challenges she might have faced in producing these sublime performances.

D. James Ross

LETTERE AMOROSE

Magdalena Kožená, Private Musicke, Pierre Pitzl
61:33

Deutsche Grammophon 477 8764

Briçeño, Giulio Caccini, Foscarini, d'India, Kapsberger, Marini, Merula, Monteverdi, de Ribayaz, Sanz & Barbara Strozzi

There are several giveaways that provide a clue as to what to expect here. The recital is a collection of mostly early 17th-century Italian songs interspersed by instrumental pieces, the kind of thing one would expect to appear on Archiv rather than the parent Deutsche Grammophon label. Then there’s the celebrity cover photo, showing Magdalena Kožená, wearing a dramatic ball gown, arms outstretched, apparently tossing around the love letters of the CD’s title. Further investigation reveals that her accompanists Private Musicke are an 8-piece ensemble who bow (occasionally), pluck and hit things much in the manner of L'Arpeggiata. Moreover, the notes are largely a puff for the singer, whose quotes take up much of its space. In short, this is a CD aimed at Kožená fans rather than early music enthusiasts.

The singer is cited as stressing the simplicity of this repertoire, but she and her backing group (the term seems appropriate here) bring to it an artifice that suffocates that very simplicity beneath thick layers of romantic varnish. Kožená’s voice has now assumed a mantle of continuous vibrato, her diction in music where words are of paramount importance is poor and she shows little sense of style or command of appropriate ornamentation. Just occasionally the attention is caught (Marini’s ‘Con le stelle in ciel’, for example, does convey a certain charm), but I’m afraid there is little here to engage either senses or mind, the CD acting more as a kind of musical Ibuprofen. Others will no doubt disagree, but early music enthusiasts who enjoy this repertoire will find it far more satisfying in the hands of a Maria Cristina Kiehr, to name but one singer who excels in it.

Brian Robins

WILD MEN OF THE SEICENTO

17th-century music for recorder and harpsichord

Piers Adam, David Wright

d'Anglebert, Bull, Castello, Corelli, van Eyck, Falconieri, Fontana, Pandolfi Mealli, de Selma y Salaverde & Uccellini

Piers Adams and David Wright are pictured on cover and throughout the booklet of their new CD looking like a couple of slightly dangerous outlaws returning from the California Gold Rush without any gold. It turns out though that the wild men of the title are actually the experimental composers of the seventeenth century whose compositions, full of drama, passion and florid ornamentation, give the players ample scope to display their expected virtuosity and imagination. If anything some of these performances are even more over-the-top than usual, notably in Biber's extraordinary Sonata 3, originally for violin like much of the other music on the CD, which is surely the culmination of the fashion for rapid changes of mood and tempo more usually associated with Castello and his contemporaries.

Piers Adams's bravura playing is what immediately strikes the ear, with his use of a range of modern (and loud) recorders, but it would be a mistake to ignore David Wright's wonderfully varied accompaniment which helps to create every change of mood and achieves a remarkable range of dynamics. His harpsichord solos, by D'Anglebert and John Bull, are less obviously adventurous but are to be enjoyed even if they don't fit in so well with the title of the CD.

Perhaps this is not one for the purists, but as usual with these performers there is plenty of historically informed performance practice underlying the fun and flamboyance.

Victoria Helby

Baroque

BACH: MASS IN B MINOR

Maria Keohane, Joanne Lunn, Alex Potter, Jan Kobow, Peter Harvey SSATB, Concerto Copenhagen, Lars Ulrik Mortensen

103:35 (2 CDs)

cpo 777 851-2

The way in which the first chord in the opening *Kyrie* is placed tells you that this is a performance where each contributor, whether singer or player, listens before they plunge in, breathes as one (even the

strings) and so questions of balance and articulation have been sorted almost by osmosis as it were. This is not to decry the hard work that must have gone into this performance, but it reveals the underlying quality of the string playing, where the players achieve an unusual degree of clarity. No-one who has heard this group's recordings of the Bach violin concertos will be surprised at this: they play with 4.4.2.2.1. The numbers are, I think, reduced in the *Laudamus te* as well as in the *Credo*. Every player as well as singer is (very properly) listed, and although there are no details of pitch and temperament given, nor of the actual instruments used, we get a fair idea of who is playing what, if not always when.

The balance and cohesion of the choral sound is equally impressive: the five concertinists are matched by a similar group of five ripienists, and care is taken in the darker four part concerted numbers to silence the upper sopranos. A careful scheme of where the vocal lines are doubled has been worked out, and is especially effective (and complex!) in the opening of the *Gloria*, the *Cum sancto spiritu* and the *Sanctus*, while the divisions in the opening *Kyrie*, between the *Credo* and the *Patrem omnipotentem*, the *Confiteor* and *Et expecto* are much as you might imagine. They are sometimes hard to spot because, as you would expect from performers of this quality, the vocal sounds are as well matched as the strings. This is rare achievement, as so many singers get used to singing 'solo', even when singing as part of an ensemble. What this means is that the full vocal group has a more solid and sustained sound, while only being marginally 'louder' in the traditional understanding of dynamics, like the difference between an *Oberwerk* and a *Hauptwerk* in a classical German organ. These 'terraced' dynamics balance the instrumental scoring for the most part, and the ten singers allow a OVPP *Hosanna*, which captures the antiphonal feel, if not an entirely doubled *Sanctus*, where a couple more altos would have completed the scheme. If you can manage a third oboe just for this one movement, why not have a couple more altos?

This all makes for a really good performance. Tempi feel unforced, and Mortensen is not trying to prove anything by introducing extreme dynamics or idiosyncratic phrasing. It all sounds natural, and very poised, even when really fast.

It is important to have two such well-matched sopranos in the *Christe*: they are distinct vocally, but beautifully balanced and equally assured in how they shape their phrases, and how get the word 'Christe' to hang in the air rather than being squeezed over the bar-lines. Joanne Lunn is an acknowledged star in this kind of singing, but

the Swedish soprano, Maria Keohane, sings freshly and brightly and is clearly vocally extremely able; she seems to have sung an enormous variety of operatic roles as well as being perfectly at home in this style and repertoire, including having recorded BWV 51 with Mortensen and the EUBO. She has worked a good deal with Philippe Pierlot and Ricercar. All in all, I've never heard such a good performance of the *Christe*.

Joanne Lunn's *Laudamus te* is equally beautifully poised, and I suspect that single strings are being used here to give those accompanimental figures that degree of rhythmic flexibility to partner the voice exactly. The soprano/tenor duet *Domine Deus* has fine flute playing with the semiquavers paired *inégalement* but not over-Lombardised, as in the 1735 version, and the transition to the clear and lucid *Qui tollis* with single voices is managed beautifully. Alex Potter balances his artistry with the *d'amore* in *Qui sedes* – listen to how he shapes his phrases in bars 26 to 29 especially, and it is rare for the same bass singer to sound as convincing singing low in the thickly scored *Quoniam* as in the lyrical *Et in Spiritum sanctum* as Peter Harvey does. But it is not just in their more obviously solo passages that the quality of these singers' phrasing and musicianship shines out. Listen to the way they tackle the *Cum sancto spiritu* fugue: not a detail is lost, their breathing shapes the lines and the players follow them, yet nowhere does the impetus slacken.

The same qualities are apparent in the *Credo* – spun between the five singers and the two – I think – single violins over the bass (but do I detect the 16' before the *Patrem*?) and its junction with the full band and ripienists in the *Patrem omnipotentem*. Mortensen's attention to vocal scoring brings out the chiasmic structure of the *Symbolum* perfectly, and the slackening of the tempo at the end of the *Confiteor* before launching into the *Et expecto* seems near perfect.

There are numerous other recordings of the B minor – why don't we call it the great Mass in D? – available, so why might you choose this one?

First, because although I have long favoured Andrew Parrott's pioneering OVPP recording of 1985 for the absolute clarity of its voice parts, this is even better – especially in the playing. As well as the superb strings, the quality of the wind playing and Bob Farley's trumpeting is matched nowhere. And while there are some things I find captivating about Collegium Vocale 1704 with Vaclav Luks (reviewed in EMR December 2013) – the swing of the *Sanctus* in particular – Luks hasn't got the vocal scoring

as well thought out as Mortensen, nor are his enthusiastic players quite so polished.

Second, while you may instinctively prefer the 'big choir' sound of Gardener's recent Monteverdi Choir version (EMR November 2015) or Suzuki and the Bach Collegium Japan, this performance is hard to beat for clarity, coherence and equal musicianship from every participant, and while the feeble packaging and pretty thin liner notes do not add to what we already know about the history and recension of the B minor text, they do hint at the underlying decisions that make this such a winning performance.

A further comment: with many performances of these frequently recorded works available, I would find it helpful to have a link to a website where some of these issues in performance practice can be discussed, and the director can lay out his critical decisions with more space to give us the details of his scoring, the temperament at which they are performing, the makers of the instruments used, and especially the details of the organ. This might not be what most of the punters need, but in the same way as John Butt is able to fill out a performance (like that of the Dunedin's *Johannespassion* or their recent *Magnificat*) with supplementary material, I would find this degree of detail useful when there are so many unresolved issues and the autograph score is the subject of much critical appraisal, as Uwe Wolf's introduction to the revised NBA (2010) reminds us.

But hear this splendid performance as soon as you can, and keep it on the top of the pile.

David Stancliffe

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BACH: SUITE BWV997, TRIO SONATAS

BWV 525, 526, 529

Lorenzo Cavasanti recorder/transverse flute Sergio Ciomei harpsichord/organ

51:20

Dynamic CDS 7739

Three of the works on this recording are better known as organ trio sonatas; there have been several attempts to "recover lost originals", using all sorts of instrumental combinations, and this is no different, since each of the three uses a different line-up (in BWV525 they use flute and harpsichord, 526 flute and organ, and 529 recorder and harpsichord); the latter instrumentation is also used for the duo's transcription of the lute suite BWV997. Although the pair play most stylishly throughout, I found

the timbre of the flute and treble organ stop too close for comfort; the combination of recorder and harpsichord was far more successful. I love the repertoire and was impressed by these interpretations of it.

Brian Clark

BACH: VIOLIN CONCERTOS

Cecilia Bernardini *violin*, Huw Daniel *violin*, Alfredo Bernardini *oboe*, Dunedin Consort, John Butt

59:00

Linn Records CKD 519

BWV1041-43, 1060R, 21 (sinfonia)

This is a fabulous recording of some of my favourite music; Cecilia and Alfredo Bernardini (daughter and father) duet beautifully in the oboe and violin concerto (though I would have welcomed even more freedom of ornamentation, and not only in the slow movement where they do begin to come out of their shells, albeit in slightly different ways), while Huw Daniel matches Bernardini in every way in the “double concerto” (here again I long for the day when the beautiful theme undergoes more imaginative transformations as the slow movement progresses), and she is absolutely flawless in the two solo concertos, bringing a new clarity to the double-stopping string crossing in the final movement of the E major, and imbuing the long notes in the A minor’s middle movement with varying colours. Every note has clearly been thought out in advance but the trick is keeping everything fresh sounding so that the listener is unaware of all that hard work. I have yet to hear a recording by John Butt that is not utterly convincing; with his 22111 Dunedins, he has struck gold once again – this goes straight to the top of my pile for rainy days when I need cheering up! (As an aside, I noticed the booklet text is only in English; is it unfair of us as reviewers to complain that foreign CDs only come in their native language if domestic companies don’t go that extra mile for their fans overseas?)

Brian Clark

BACH AU MARIMBA

Trio SR9

51:44

naïve V5426

I have written many reviews of music on instruments which Bach might not have expected to hear, but – much as I, of course, recognise the wealth of talent

brought to this project by the three members of Trio SR9 – here, for once, I am obliged to recognize that some of the music (for me at least) just does not work on marimba(s). I suppose it has something to do with reverberation and the “hanging around” of sound which causes overtones to intermingle, especially in what one might call the “tenor register”, and the delay in the bass notes actually speaking adds to an overall sensation of aural confusion. If nothing else, Bach’s music is designed in such a way that the voices are an immediate and direct reaction to one another, and, if the dialogue is disturbed or even diffused, then the fabric will begin to disintegrate. Now, I am not suggesting for a moment that this programme of fine music lacks either form or indeed quality; quite the reverse. However, for me, much as I truly respect the talents of these musicians, much as I love Bach, and much as I love the tone of the marimba in other music, I’m afraid the number of tracks I actually enjoyed was smaller than the numbers where my ears sought in vain for harmonic points of reference, so I am afraid I can only advise readers of this review that they should try to find it on a listening post somewhere and try before they buy.

Brian Clark

RAMEAU: DARDANUS

Bernard Richter, Gaëlle Arquez, Benoît Arnould, João Fernandes, Alain Buet, Sabine Deveille, Emmanuelle de Negri, Romain Champion, Ensemble Pygmalion, Raphaël Pichon

145:13 (2 CDs in a wallet)

Alpha Classics ALPHA 964

Dardanus -first performed 1739 – 26 performances; thoroughly revised and revived 1744 – 22 performances; minor changes and a further revival 1760 – acclaimed a masterpiece and remained in repertoire for 11 years. If at first you don’t succeed . . .

Needless to say, after all that care the music is absolutely brilliant reaching its zenith in the famous opening of Act IV (*Lieux funestes*) where Bernard Richter also gives his expressive all. As is usual with Rameau the orchestral writing is superb throughout - I just wish conductors would realise that their added percussion parts in the dances add nothing (but irritate massively, at least in this household). That aside, Ensemble Pygmalion sound as happy as orchestras usually sound with Rameau on the stands. Sadly, the v-word is, as usual, an issue with the singers and I found some of the ensembles, especially,

difficult listening.

The booklet is definitely in the 'must do better' category. The fancy font that appears from time to time does nothing for legibility; the photographs languish without captions; the main essay is no more than functional; there is no information about the artists; and the translation of the libretto does not always quite achieve English. But what an opera!

David Hansell

ROMAN: THE 12 KEYBOARD SONATAS, NOS.

8-12

Anna Paradiso

76:34

BIS-2135 SACD

+ Sonata in C & Agrell: Sonata II in C

This is the second volume of Anna Paradiso's recording of the complete surviving keyboard works of Johann Helmich Roman, the widely travelled early 18th-century Swedish composer who was fully conversant with prevailing styles, particularly those of Neapolitan composers. It contains the five remaining sonatas from the primary manuscript source, as well as a further (early) work, and a sonata by Roman's possible Swedish pupil, Johan Agrell, who spent his working life in Germany. Paradiso plays on the same three instruments as in Volume 1, again matching the instruments effectively to the style of the particular sonatas: a Guarracino copy by Masao Kimua, a Blanchet copy by Francois Paul Ciocca and a copy by Dan Johansson of a clavichord by the Stockholm-based Philip Jacob Specken. The Swedish-style clavichord is particularly successful in two of the sonatas here. The liner notes are again extensive and highly informative and the recording quality is excellent. It is satisfying music played very idiomatically and makes another very enjoyable recording.

Noel O'Regan

D. SCARLATTI: KEYBOARD SONATAS

Virginia Black *piano*

58:18

CRD 3533

K27, 87, 114, 124, 132, 159, 208, 260, 401, 427, 461 & 492

After recording Scarlatti and Soler on the harpsichord, Virginia Black turns to a modern Yamaha piano for this disc containing 12 of

her favourite sonatas, which cover the full range of the composer's keyboard output. Many are among those most commonly recorded but there are some lesser-known pieces too. Black's piano playing is relatively restrained when compared to some modern pianists' performances of Scarlatti and she retains much of her harpsichordist's sensibility in her approach to the music. She brings great technical control and clearly relishes all the figuration and other challenges. The playing and recording are bright and clear and all this makes the disc an excellent introduction to the composer's music.

Noel O'Regan

VIVALDI: CONCERTI E SINFONIE PER ARCHI E CONTINUO

L'Archicembalo

65:26

Tactus TC 672259

The thirteen works on this recording are organised by key; after four pieces in C (two each in major and minor modes), there are two in D (one each), one in F, five in G (one and four respectively!) and one in B minor. The strings of this small period instrument group (22111) play stylishly, with bouncing basses (perhaps a little too much violone?), and I have to confess that I was only not entirely happy with the slow movements, where the harpsichord has too much time on her hands and starts adding distractive countermelodies (try Track 2, for example); this may, in fact, be how they were performed, but I've always imagined that Vivaldi the supremo violinist would be filling in any gaps, not the continuo player... That reservation aside, this is a fine survey of this part of the composer's output, and the contrapuntal movements are especially worthy of exploration (try Track 7 for a taster).

Brian Clark

VIVALDI: RECORDER CONCERTOS

Dan Laurin, 1B1, Jan Bøjranger

70:03

BIS-2035 SACD

RV92, 108, 441-5

Dan Laurin made two previous recordings of Vivaldi recorder concertos in the 1990s but now rejects these, as well as most other recordings of them, as being insufficiently operatic. Following his recording of *The Four Seasons* (BIS-SACD-1605) he identified similar

dramatic writing in RV441 and in RV 443-5 (the concertos for flautino) and his aim on the present recording is to bring out this operatic quality with the freedom and spontaneity often found in modern recordings of the “Seasons” with solo violin. In this he is greatly aided by the Norwegian ensemble 1B1 (short for Ensemble Bjergsted 1) who play with tremendous verve and precision, driven along by the vigorous continuo playing of Anna Paradiso (harpsichord) and Jonas Nordberg (theorbo and baroque guitar). Dan Laurin has chosen to play two of the flautino concertos (RV443 and 445) down a fourth on the soprano recorder, on the grounds that they are marked ‘alla quarta bassa’ in the original scores, and for the first of these he plays a specially made copy of a descant recorder by Domenico Peroso, one of the few surviving examples of recorders by Venetian makers.

There are many recordings of Vivaldi’s recorder concertos but this is certainly one that stands out, not just for Dan Laurin’s exciting and seemingly effortless recorder playing and his wonderfully imaginative ornamentation of the slow movements, but also for the magnificent ensemble playing of the whole team. Laurin’s interesting and informative booklet notes are the icing on the cake.

Victoria Helby

Classical

RABBIA, FUROR, DISPETTO

Jerónimo Francisco de Lima: Sinfonie ed Arie

Monika Mauch *soprano*, Concentus Peninsulæ, Vasco Negreiros Paraty 715134

A colourful first recording of some fine late 18th-century Portuguese operatic arias and overtures. Jerónimo Francisco de Lima (1741-1822), following studies in Naples, worked for the Patriarchal Seminary in Lisbon and composed operas for the Royal court. Interestingly, he was also employed for a time as private musician to the eccentric English millionaire William Beckford (of Fonthill Abbey fame.)

Concentus Peninsulæ have put together an engaging programme. It opens with the striking overture to *Teseo* (some agile bassoon playing from Jose Gomes), followed by three arias for Medea, one from each act of the same opera. Lima subtly portrays her decline from hope for Theseus’s love at the outset, via burning jealousy, to her ultimate self-destructive revenge at the opera’s denouement, in music of kaleidoscopic colour – her last aria, ‘Dalla

speme, Dall’amore’ (track 9), with its fiendishly difficult horn obbligato (bravo, Paulo Guerreiro!) is a show stopper, literally and actually. Monika Mauch is more than a match for this stirring stuff and sings with fire and accuracy.

The disc is completed by three further Italianate sinfonias; that from *Enea in Tracia* (tracks 10-12) has more fine contrapuntal woodwind writing (and some delicate harpsichord filigree from Fernando Miguel Jaloto), and ends with stirring brass fanfares. *Lo Spirito di Contradizione*, with its rapid interplay of thematic ideas and sentimental Andantino Grazioso, is a fitting opening to the comedy. The final overture, that to *La Vera Costanza*, takes Lima’s ‘sonoplastic art’ to further levels; original instrumentation is taken here to include 18th-century stage effects, with stirring use of genuine wind machines and thunder, from the collection of ‘Antiqua Escena’ in Alcalá de Henares. Vasco Negreiros has cleverly engineered a satisfying musical close for this overture, which originally ran straight into the first scene of the opera.

Ensemble Concentus Peninsulæ play with suitably operatic brio – occasionally one might have wished for a couple more strings to balance the enthusiastic woodwind and brass, but Jerónimo Francisco’s vivid music comes across with full force.

Alastair Harper

IM DIENSTE DES KÖNIGS / THE KING’S MEN

Jermaine Sprosse harpsichord & fortepiano

63:28

klanglogo KL1505

C. P. E. Bach: Sonatas in A Wq55/4 and c Wq65/31, 12 Variationen über die Folie d’Espagne Wq118/9

Carl Fasch: Sonata in F

Nichelmann: Sonata VI in F

The King referred to in the title is Frederick II (the Great) of Prussia, with this disc featuring music by three composers who worked at his court: C. P. E. Bach, Christoph Nichelmann and Carl F. C. Fasch. It is a disc of two halves, with the extended Sonata in A (Wq 55/4) and the Folia Variations by C. P. E. Bach, as well as Nichelmann’s Sonata VI, played on a Ruckers copy (with *ravalement*) by Titus Crijnen, while a second Bach Sonata in C minor (Wq 65/31) and an F major Sonata by Fasch are played on a copy of a Stein Fortepiano by Bernhard Fleig. As a harpsichordist Sprosse is busy, rather too fast and lacking in poise. His playing can be exciting, but without any great subtlety in the two sonatas, even in the slower movements. The *Folia*, however, is less rushed

and more nuanced. On the fortepiano, on the other hand, Sprosse is more measured and plays with more texture and contrast. There is also more resonance on the harpsichord tracks than on those with fortepiano, which tends to compound the busyness of the former. Both Nichelmann's and Fasch's sonatas get their first recorded performances here: they are diverting pieces in the pre-Classical style, not indulging over much in *Empfindsamkeit*, though the Fasch has some nice quirky moments in its finale. These are sparky performances of interesting music, with lots of well-judged ornamentation on repeats, and are certainly worth listening to.

Noel O'Regan
