

Early Music Review

THIS IS THE DOWNLOADABLE VERSION of our website, which will be made available on the first day of each month and contain all of the posts that went live on that day. While there will be no editorial, we are open to feedback and suggestions, so, if there is anything you would like to see included, please get in touch using the contact form on the website. Happy reading!

EDITIONS OF MUSIC

Schmelzer: Sonata Cu Cu
Für Violine (Sopranblockflöte) und Basso Continuo, ed. Dagmar Wilgo.
Kölner Reihe Alter Musik, iv + 11pp.
Edition Walhall EW971. ISMN: M-50070-971-8

This edition seems to have been produced with the recorder in mind. The treble line is notated with the octave symbol above the clef and where Schmelzer writes notes below that instrument's range, Dagmar Wilgo provides sensible alternatives.

The bound score includes a fairly minimal introduction (it is a well-known piece, after all) and Daniel Ivo de Oliveira's continuo realization; there are two further copies of the score (one had a loose sheet with p. 1, presumably to avoid the page turn, on one side and p. 6 on the other - I'm not entirely sure why, since that section fits a two-page spread and the treble instrument's first bar is silent, so there is time to turn from 5, whereas from page 3 to 4 is a nightmare, since both hands are needed for the last note of 3 and there is only a quaver rest at the beginning of 4...; the second copy did not have this sheet at all!)

As a violinist who also plays recorder, I have no problem with anyone wanting to play music specifically written for one instrument on the other - as long as it works! Personally, I hear the cuckoo as a mellow instrument, more tenor recorder (which is, in fact, exactly what I used when I played that part in *Hansel und Gretel* many years ago!) than soprano; the very thought of those high Ds and Es chirping away in a confined space made me wince - more songthrush than cuckoo. Personally, I would have opted for alto recorder and reworked the really low music. I also have to say that I don't find the lack of bar lines a great help, either - in this typesetting, normal bar lines have been used and hidden, so the spacing is slightly odd; that technique also produces anomalies like repeated accidentals in the editorial continuo part. Besides, having inferred from the brief notes that the original source consists of a couple of parts, it would be useful to know if the irregular barring was entirely consistent between them, or have they - like time signatures - been rationalised for the edition? [Incidentally, I doubt the two consecutive bars marked 6/4 on page 9 of the bound score are original.] There are a few notational quirks that are visually upsetting: I'm not sure why the third, fourth and fifth groups of quavers of the bass part are in opposition to two even groups of four notes in the continuo's right hand; I am puzzled, too, by the need for the right-hand part to be written as (at least) two voices throughout; in the Bertali-like third section, the lower voice of the violin/recorder part uses semibreve rests when they should be pairs of minim rests. So some minor reservations, but a welcome addition to the catalogue, especially for violinists!

Brian Clark

Johann Pachelbel: *Christ ist erstanden*
Osterkantate für Sopran, Violine und Basso
Continuo, ed. Christoph Egghuber.
“Sacri Conventus Ratisbonenses” XIV, v + 9pp.
Edition Walhall EW962. ISMN: M-50070-962-6

Calling this piece a cantata is stretching things a little – after a 25 bar Sonata for the scordatura violin and continuo, the soprano sings the opening chunk of text, followed by the violin’s musing on the same material. The third portion starts at Bar 75 with chords in the violin and a true dialogue for the first time. A more elaborately imitative “Alleluia” is followed by the final portion of the chorale text, rejoicing in the glory of the risen Christ.

The publication consists of a score with introduction and critical notes, a separate score without a cover but including the editor’s realisation of the continuo part, a violin part in sounding pitch (unplayable without fudging or simplifying the chords), a scordatura violin part (though with extra accidentals for the bottom two strings rather than a complex key signature) and a figured bass part.

The original is available online, so editorial decisions on beaming shorter notes (or not, as the case may be) can be scrutinized by those who are interested in such things. Similarly, where the editor has extrapolated the underlaid text from the symbols used by the copyist. In fact, he has not – as he claims in his introduction – reproduced the source as closely as possible while adhering to modern notational conventions, because he consciously breaks a beam in the violin part after the first notes of Bars 120 and 124 where Bokemeyer does not. In fact, I think a lot of notational decisions were left to Sibelius’s default settings (and the tie symbol was used for several slurs...) I also think Egghuber missed an error in the violin part at Bar 120, where notes 11 and 12 should surely be one step lower. These are however

small details that can easily be fixed in rehearsal or for a second print run.

Brian Clark

Georg Friedrich Handel :*Alexander’s Feast; or, the Power of Musick*, HWV 75, ed. Michael Robertson. Edition Walhall (EW 904), 2015. xvi + 256pp, €88.50
Also: Vocal score (EW910), Parts (EW248)

Bärenreiter published *Das Alexander-Fest* in 1957, with German text placed above the English original. It is among a group of editions which have generally been considered as inadequate. Serie I Band 1, no. 4001, edited by Konrad Ameln, isn’t quite the first, but several early examples could hardly be thought as scholarly. I bought a copy through my subscription in 1960 (30 shillings. i.e. £1.10s), but my first use was at the Dartington Summer School in 1966, with Jennifer Vivyan, Kenneth Bowen and Neil Howlett (STB) with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields directed by Neville Marriner (who is still conducting in his 90s) and conducted by Louis Halsey – a few years later I shared the BBC Music Library canteen with Louis and Basil Lam. The performance failed to include the harp concerto (op. 4/6), though Act II was introduced by “The Celebrated Concerto in Alexander’s Feast”. Over the years, I became more and more annoyed with the score, but the Novello vocal score by Donald Burrows was, as far as it goes, useful. I never acquired the reprint of the work from Chrysander – one of the few copies I don’t have, though it is available on line via IMSLP – HG 14, 1862. From the same source, but more interesting, is the facsimile of the very early printed edition, though with no specific date.

It is virtually impossible to produce an accurate Urtext. Various changes took place between 1736 to March 1739, and it is likely that some of Handel’s performances were given in his absence.

The editor claims that the performing score copied by the elder J. C. Smith (Hamburg Staats- & Universitätsbibliothek, MSM C/263) is the best source in that it clarifies what Handel intended. The most interesting feature of the new edition reviewed here is the inclusion of an independent organ part (British Library R.M. 19.a.1), which was probably written out in Handel's period of bad health. This is valuable information which can guide players in other non-theatrical works. The organ often plays just in octaves at the pitch levels of cello and bass, with the bottom note F. Modern organs can negotiate that by using 16', but that's less plausible for organs of Handel's time, though they have low Gs.

An asset is the *Concerto per la Harpa* (op. 4/6). I'm used to it sounding delicate, but it does seem odd for the harpsichord to be added in brackets as well as having the organ plus the essential harp. The editorial additions are superfluous. The harpsichord disrupts the harp, and the two-stave organ part may well be the scribe copying the harp. Does the octave bass foresee the habits of pianists and play both basses in one hand, in which case the right hand could play the simplified upper parts? On musical grounds, however, there would be more musical sense in using two hands – so does the organist sit opposite the C below middle C! (I've never tried it.) I'm puzzled at an editorial ["play'd an 8. lower"] (bar 41), though the range is more-or-less the same as 25-28 with no indication of lowering the octave.

Another issue that is of interest occurs in *The many rend the skies*, where two oboes and two bassoons swap between one or two individual lines each or, occasionally, two parts for each. This provides an interesting texture, but the bassoons fall back on a single part from bar 19 and stays thus to the end (bar 137). Ameln makes the score seem much more sensible, with the oboes and bassoons each shown on one stave, though the Walhall edition spreads them onto two each,

since it wouldn't have been possible to leave space for two extra staves for the organ part even if the oboes and bassoons had been single-staved. I'm not sure what "Loud: an octave lower" means since after ten bars the notation is basically from the score and may well be played at pitch, especially if there is figuring, but bars 20-24 imply low octaves, irrespective of what is in the treble. An interesting piece of scoring is *Revenge Timotheus cries*, where at bar 49 a bassoon doubles each of the two violas, with a third bassoon on the bass line.

I haven't mentioned Dryden's text. It is good to have it printed in the original English with a translation by Stefan Gericke. I checked the details of the text which was presented in the style of 1736 as given in Robert Manson Myers's *Handel, Dryden, & Milton...* (Bowes & Bowes, 1956). *Cecilia volgi un sguardo* was placed at the beginning of the work, though headed *A Cantata perform'd at the Beginning of the Second Act*. In the current edition, it was excluded. Act the Second opens with a *Concerto for two Violins, Violoncello, &c* (not in the edition, but there is an isolated work in C named "Alexander's Feast") and a further *Concerto per L'organo* before the final chorus: neither of these is added in the edition, and the reference on p. 215 should be referred to p. 236, not 234. I find the 1956 layout of the verse plausible, and retaining capital letters aids singers in the poetic shape. (I periodically complain that the Italian verse of the madrigal period was notated with capitals but is now ignored.) But I suspect that any further 18th-century English is too fussy as underlay.

The price in euros is surprisingly cheap. The English equivalent is around £63.00: I imagine that a new Bärenreiter edition would probably cost something over £200, judging by the larger works running into £400+. The commentary isn't a thorough survey of all the variants, but significant ones are shown, and the introduction is helpful, especially with regard to avoiding the matters of pseudo-authenticity. There are, of course, places

where it is obvious that Handel or his amanuensis start precisely but later simplify the music since the earlier notation will continue. However, that is much more common in opera than oratorio. The opening in the Overture in Donald Burrows' Novello vocal score (1982) was following the editorial practice of its day by adding semiquavers above the quavers to show how they should be played, but there's none of that here.

Another issue is the length of the chords in secco recits. The editor recommends that the harpsichord sustains no longer than a crotchet. But the very first chord (no. 2) begins on the first beat and needs to sustain until the voice enters on the fourth quaver: it makes it sound like making the voice keep quiet until the chord is stopped! In bar 3 the C can end with the voice's "son" but the G sharp in bar 4 needs sustaining until the voice enters. It is probably not necessary now to cue a note a tone or a fourth above the closing note of the phrase. It's up to the harpsichordist to be more flexible. The organ is tacet in secco recits.

Michael Robertson has made an excellent job of this edition: congratulations!

Clifford Bartlett

RECORDINGS

Medieval & chant

I HAVE SET MY HERT SO HY: *Love and devotion in medieval England*

The Dufay Collective & Voice

76:12

Avie AV2286

This delightfully fresh selection of Medieval English music on the theme of love and devotion features the familiar 'naïve' playing style of the Collective matched by beautifully unmannered singing from the three

singers of Voice. Clearly using the latest research into the pronunciation of Medieval English, the singers make this charming repertoire sound well and truly 'lived in', performing the material with an engaging familiarity. The accompaniments are intelligently varied, drawing on the wide range of textures on offer from the instruments of the Collective. These include flute and recorder, expertly played by the group's director William Lyons and Rebecca Austen-Brown while the sounds of harp and gittern are contributed by Jon Banks and Jacob Heringman. These instruments and Lyons' English double pipes provide a surprisingly varied palette of textures and tones, and often the very simplest of accompaniments are the most effective with this beguilingly simple music. The collection of lovesongs and devotional pieces is rounded off with a toe-tapping set of Medieval dance tunes, where the instrumentalists can truly let their hair down – and blow up the double pipes!

D. James Ross

Renaissance

Beauty Farm (Bart Uvyn *countertenor*, Achim Schulz, Adriaan de Koster & Hannes Wagner *tenor*, Joachim Höchbauer & Martin Vögerl *bass*)

2 CDs

fra bernardo FB 1504211

MOTETS A4 *Domine non secundum peccata, O Domina mundi, Sancta Maria mater Dei, Salve regina, Si ignoras te*

MOTETS A5 *Ave mater matris Dei, Emendemus in melius, O beata Maria, O flos campi, Sancta et immaculata, Tribulatio cordis mei, Veni dilecta mea*

MOTETS A6 *Ave salus mundi, Benedicta es, Descendi in hortum meum, O crux splendor, O Jesu Christe succurre miseris, Peccata mea sicut saguttæ, Si bona suscepimus*

The quirkily named Beauty Farm draws its membership from a number of top continental ensembles and sounds

beautifully blended with accurate intonation. If the recorded sound gave an initial impression of claustrophobia, by no means inappropriate for Gombert, I soon warmed to it. What seemed lacking was a wide dynamic range, with long sections delivered at an amiable *mezzo forte* and little attempt at anything atmospherically quiet or dramatically loud. The performances seem to rely on Gombert's often remarkable harmonic progressions, but sometimes these were just not enough to hold the attention, and I could certainly have done with more expressive singing.

The two discs offer a generous cross-section of Gombert's motets in four, five and six parts, and if the performances were a bit unrelenting in large helpings, this may well be a collection best dipped into rather than consumed in its entirety. The notes make extravagant claims for the new editions being performed – 'the new editions... reveal a dark, intricate, rough and vibrant music.' This seems to be attributed to the new application of *musica ficta*. As a performer grown increasingly suspicious of the overenthusiastic application of these chromatic inflections, I would be wary of any suggestion that they reveal anything hidden about a composer's original intentions – the lack any specific examples in the notes leaves the question open.

James Ross

Beauty Farm (why the name??) and especially their editor, Jorge Martin, are to be congratulated on assembling this fine collection of some of Gombert's greatest motets. Particular highlights for me were the opening track of disc 1, *Veni Dilecta Mea*, with its cantus firmus obstinatus 'Sancta Maria, ora pro nobis', the magnificent *Peccata Mea* on the same disc, with its wonderful cadential 'Miserere mei' closing both *prima* and *secunda pars*, and the remarkable polytextual *Salve Regina* on disc 2, with each voice having a different Marian text, all finally

coinciding (to satisfying effect) on the closing 'O Dulcis Maria.'

Performances are one-to-a-part, in the mellow acoustic of Kartause Mauerbach. *Musica ficta* is convincingly and copiously applied, resulting in some absolutely astonishing harmonic clashes. Tone and blend are excellent, although words are often rather indistinct, and there is a certain sameness in the music-making; these wondrous pieces are, however, best listened to and enjoyed in small doses, so the latter need not concern one unduly. Jorge Martin's sleeve notes are good, though one would have liked a little more detailed description of the individual motets.

Alastair Harper

PALESTRINA: *Volume 6*

The Sixteen, Harry Christophers

71:23

Missa L'Homme armé, Song of Songs 16–18

+*De profundis clamavi, Parce mihi Domine, Peccantem me quotidie, Si ambulavero in medio tribulationis, Super flumina Babylonis, Tribularer si nescirem, Tribulationes civitatum*

The Sixteen's representative account of Palestrina's music has reached volume six, and sticking to the tried and true formula of programming a handful of motets, some items from *The Song of Songs* and a Mass setting, they are singing the five-part *Mass L'Homme armé* with penitential and devotional settings. In the past I have felt that this series has sounded rather passionless, recorded as it seems at a reverential distance, and this CD too seems occasionally a little cold and dispassionate. The penitential motets include some of Palestrina's most impassioned writing, and these suave performances seem to lack the edge necessary to bring this out fully. It seems odd to single Palestrina out for this rather bland treatment, possibly due to his retrospective reputation as the archetypal composer of flawless Renaissance church polyphony. In a similar way

The Song of Songs material seems drained of much of the erotic charge it can be given by a smaller ensemble of voices.

Palestrina's masterly five-part contribution to the *L'Homme armé* tradition evokes some attempt at more highly characterized singing from The Sixteen, but again the relatively large forces and the respectfully spacious acoustic take the edge off this account. Don't get me wrong. These are beautifully sung accounts, perfectly blended and without the operatic wobble which threatened at one point to invade The Sixteen's lovely sound, and those who like their polyphony to wash around them like an unthreatening warm bath will love them. I found them just too elegant and a little toothless.

D. James Ross

ALMA, SVEGLIATE ORMAI: *Devotional Contrafacta in Italian music during the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*

Anonimo Frottolisti

72:40

Tactus TC 400006

It may be that I was a little *frottoled*-out when I came to review this CD, but its exploration of Italian popular music refurnished with devotional texts failed to engage me. The rather repetitive music seemed largely unworthy of the religious texts fitted to it, and the performances, adequate but uninspiring, did little to convince me of the virtues of unearthing this material. Recorded in an alarming variety of acoustics from the very dead to the quite resonant, the CD cruelly exposes some of the singing as rather amateurish, although the instrumental contribution is generally more convincing. The combination of generally dodgy singing and seemingly endless repetitions of material which is not terribly inspired to start with certainly failed to convince You will find better performances of most of this material elsewhere.

D. James Ross

FROTTOLE: *Popular Songs of Renaissance Italy*
Ring Around Quartet & Consort

60:06

Naxos 8.573320

Music by Capirola, Cara, Dalza, Festa, da Fogliano, Patavino, Pesenti, Tromboncino, Willaert, Zesso & anon

These performers take a free but ultimately convincing approach to the secular music of Renaissance Italy, singing with relatively 'naïve' vocal production and feeling free to introduce glissandi and other vocal effects. The instrumental playing has an attractive élan to it, nicely offsetting the sometimes rather opaque sound of the voices. Notwithstanding the sterling efforts of the performers there is an undoubted sameness to much of this material, and this is undoubtedly a collection to dip in and out of rather than to consume in its entirety as I have to as a reviewer. By the end I felt as if I had eaten an entire bag of dolly mixtures at one sitting!

I did particularly enjoy Atsufumi Ujii's winsome way with a recorder and Marcello Serafini's idiomatic and imaginative guitar contribution. Many Naxos releases of this sort are recorded accounts of live performances, and very often you can't help feeling that many of them would work better with the theatrical presence of the performers, an element lost in the recorded account. Naxos's *modus operandi* often leads performers to record with them in order to have high-quality CDs to sell at performances, and the present CD may well fall into this category, but is nonetheless enjoyable as an independent recording.

D. James Ross

17th century

BIBER: *Sonatae Tam Aris Quam Aulis Servientes*
Ars Antiqua Austria, Gunar Letzbor

69:08

Challenge Classics CC72676

Just as some people consider Brahms' first symphony as Beethoven's tenth, this set of 12 sonatas by Biber is clearly a follow on from Schmelzer's similarly titled *Sacro-profanus concentus musicus*. Opening and closing with majestic works for pairs of trumpets and violins, four violas and continuo, the set also includes a rich variety of scorings - though the majority of the *sonate a cinque* are for two violins, three violas and continuo, they also include two in which the second violin is replaced by a trumpet (one of them in the unusual key of G minor), and another where pairs of trumpets and violins dialogue over a ground bass. There are also three *sonate a sei* for strings alone. This is yet another recording of the set, though, that does not include the 12 pieces (ten in C, two in G minor) for a pair of trumpets. Some sonatas have harpsichord continuo, while others have organ; I found the latter slightly invasive on occasion, particularly when the lower violas started an imitative section and were obscured by the higher pitched continuo lines. Given that only three of the original part-books have survived, there is not a great deal to be said about these pieces, but Letzbor manages to fill six pages with descriptions of them: "The violins' leap over an octave provides a sweeping gesture - a display of irrepressible vitality. The wildness progresses further into an absurd demisemiquaver motif. A falling triadic tune in triple time has a settling influence in the third part; the violas keep calm, unhurriedly swaying back and forth in longer notes. An echo effect causes the tempo to slow down." Try and match *that* to your listening experience and tell us which sonata it refers to!

Brian Clark

HACQUART: *Suites for Viol* (opus 3, 1686)

Guido Balestracci *gamba*, Nicola Dal Maso *violone*, Rafael Bonavita *archlute*, Massamiliano Raschiatti *harpsichord/organ*

73:38

This is a re-release of a recording originally made in 2003, of six of the suites, re-released with nice timing to go with the publication of the 12 Suites, originally published by Hacquart in 1686 under the title of Chelys, in a modern edition, published by Güntersberg in 2013. I reviewed it in *EMR* issue 161, August 2014, and found the music well worth the attention of good players. In Guido Balestracci it has undoubtedly found such a one.

Predating the Güntersberg edition by 10 years, they have worked out their own bass line for some of the movements, and their solutions are sometimes very imaginative, including leaving out the bass altogether for some bars. He plays with marvellous freedom and virtuosity, always finding ways to bring out the beauty of the music, but without mannerism. That's not to say that he plays entirely literally - he takes liberties with the notated versions, particularly in his tempi, but all is very much at the service of the music - lovely lyricism in the slow movements, and beautifully articulated rapid playing in the fast. A particularly nice touch is in the Sarabande of the C major suite, No 12, where there are divisions or variations following each statement. The lute, accompanied by the organ and 2nd bass viol, plays the 'plain' version beautifully, and the solo bass viol follows with the variations.

The music itself is clearly derived from the French style, the Allemandes and Sarabandes very much influenced by Marais, but, like Schenk, Hacquart was affected by the English and Italian music as well. He may not have the same melodic charm that Schenk has, but he writes so well for the instrument, that the result, in these hands, is very enjoyable listening. The continuo team of lute, 2nd bass viol and harpsichord/organ is marvellous.

The sound is very resonant, recorded in a

favourable acoustic, fairly close-miked. The booklet has excellent notes, supplementing the introduction to the Güntersberg publication. One minor complaint is Nicola dal Maso is listed as playing a violone, when it's clearly a bass viol, but that's not sufficient not to give this one top marks throughout.

Robert Oliver

PRAETORIUS

Balthasar-Neumann-Chor und -Ensemble, Pablo Heras-Casado

Archiv Produktion 479 4522

HIERONYMUS PRAETORIUS *Magnificat quarti toni, O quam pulchra es, Quam pulchra es, Surge propra amica mea, Tota pulchra es, Vulnerasti cor meum*

JACOB PRAETORIUS *Indica mihi, Quam pulchra es, Veni in hortum meum*

MICHAEL PRAETORIUS *Magnificat per omnes versus, Nigra sum sed formosa*

This is a fine recording of some little-known music. The Praetorius of the title is actually the trinity of Michael, of Dresden, and the unrelated Heironymus and his son Jacob, of Hamburg (the latter a first for me.) The programme combines settings of the *Magnificat* (by Heironymus and Michael) with motets with texts from The Song of Songs, many previously unrecorded. The performances are generally superb; the opening Heironymus *Tone IV Magnificat* is wonderfully exciting, with driving 'Dispersits', disappearing 'Dimisit Inanes' and a welter of antiphonal 'Saeculorum Amens'. The second *Magnificat* (Michael this time) is even more interesting, set 'per omnes versus' and utilising the hexachord 'Ut re mi fa sol la' as both *cantus firmus* and as a contrapuntal point. It has a particularly splendid conclusion, with the hexachord up and down in long notes in the bass supporting closely contrapuntal upper parts. Jacob's two wedding motets are gentler; *Indica mihi* has a lovely ending, with upper and lower voices (representing bride

and groom?) echoing each other's 'Ego dilecta mea' / 'Ego dilecto meo'. The Michael motets abound with felicitous word-painting – try the charming wandering flocks ('Ne vagari') of *Nigra sum*, for example. Heironymus is at his best in the richly sonorous *Tota pulchra es*, with its crowding 'Veni, veni, coronaberis' conclusion.

The Balthasar-Neumann-Chor and -Ensemble respond brilliantly to Heras-Casado's sometimes rather over-detailed direction; some of the manipulation of dynamics, for example, seems a little unnecessary. The sleeve notes are not so satisfactory; there is a good deal about Heras-Casado, less about the composers and almost nothing about the individual pieces, a particular omission being details of the vocal and instrumental scorings, which are an essential and integral part of this glorious music.

Alastair Harper

PURCELL: *Dido & Aeneas*

Vivica Genaux *Dido*, Henk Neven *Aeneas*, Ana Quintans *Belinda*, Marc Mauillon *Sorceress/Sailor*, *Le Poème Harmonique*, Chœur Accentus / Opéra de Rouen Haute-Normandie, Vincent Dumestre 80:00 (1 DVD)

Alpha 706

‘Dido-on-Sea’? Or ‘Dido and Aeneas go to the Circus’? Whatever construct is put on this conception it will hardly be sufficient to convey just how bizarre it is. Where to start? Well, as is not uncommon in these benighted days, the stage directions are largely ignored. At no time are we ever in Dido's Palace (act 1), a Cave (act 2/1), or a Grove (act 2/2). Only in act 3 do we have some semblance of place, where we see the prow of a ship. Otherwise we are located on a rocky seashore, which makes something of a nonsense of Belinda's 'Thanks to these lonesome vales', among much else. The dances are largely given over to a troupe of acrobats, whose performances both aerial and

earthbound are described in an astonishingly pretentious - and in places inaccurate - note by Vincent Dumestre as being 'sometimes the protagonist's projections', while at other times 'allegories of the characters described in the songs of the chorus' (which performs throughout off-stage). Most notably, in the Cave scene they are slithery, writhing sea creatures, the accessories of a (male) Sorceress who is ... wait for it ... an octopus with a rather nasty bump protruding from the back of her/his head. Really. Otherwise the costumes in what is a quasi-period production are odd - Dido wears striped pantaloons under her gown, while Aeneas looks like Trapper John, the fur round his neck hardly compatible with his location in North African desert territory.

It would be pleasing to report that it was a relief to turn to the music. But it is no such thing. Dumestre has seen fit not only to flesh out the scoring with an utterly anachronistic continuo group including a harp, guitars, theorbos, but also - and equally anachronistically - an orchestra that includes recorders, oboes and bassoons. The effect of the plucked arpeggiations and pretty ornaments in such numbers as the Ritornelle that opens act 2 is about as inimical to Purcellian style as it is possible to imagine. While there is certainly room for improvisation in the Dido dances, Dumestre's owes far more to his mistaken belief in the influence of Lully on the score. As Richard Luckett pointed out all those years ago in his notes for the famous Andrew Parrott Chandos recording, the musical accent of the opera is - aside from the overture and a few dances - not at all Lullian, but cast in Purcell's wholly distinctive style. It is this aspect of Dido that Dumestre and his performers have fatally missed. Not one of the cast display real comprehension of either the linguistic or musical syntax. Vivica Genaux's Dido is especially disappointing, the voice marred by obtrusive vibrato and even pitch problems, while at times taking on a curiously plummy quality.

Her Dutch Aeneas is better, but ultimately, well, the Aeneas we all love to despise and his inability to articulate ornamental phrases cleanly is another disadvantage he shares with the Belinda.

Vincent Dumestre is a director for whom I have great respect for the many outstanding things he has done on record, not least the marvellous DVDs of *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. But I fear here he is way out of his comfort territory. And I say that not because he is French; it is perfectly possible for non-English musicians to give convincing, moving performances of Purcell's operatic masterpiece, witness that given last year in Bruges by the Italian Fabio Bonizzoni with a Spanish Dido. The film emanates from performances given at the Rouen Opera in 2014.

Brian Robins

BERLINER GAMBENBUCH

Juliane Laake gamba, Ensemble art d'écho

72:30

Capriccio C 5206

This is an exceptionally interesting recording of a 'new' repertoire, still to be made generally available, of the highest quality. The manuscript, currently held in France, possibly originated in north Germany. It appears to have been compiled over several decades, and contains music for solo bass viol, notated entirely in tablature. There are 273 pieces in all, some in variant tunings, some named (Hotman, Dubuisson and Verdussen), most traceable by concordances (Hume, Ford, Jenkins, Stöeffken and others). The manuscript contains dance movements arranged in suites, several incorporating settings of chorales.

The recording presents six of these suites, some with their chorales. These are very beautifully sung by the tenor in a simple and direct manner, some unaccompanied, some with viol, some with theorbo and organ in various combinations. Thus the programme has a pleasing variety, and makes

very enjoyable listening.

I've enjoyed Juliane Laake's superb playing every time I've heard it, and her accompanying artists (Kai Roterberg *voice*, Ophira Zakai *theorbo* and Klaus Eichhorn *organ*) are of the same calibre. She plays with absolute technical mastery, completely without mannerism and with compelling musicianship.

The music itself is captivating. The dance suites are French in form and style, and more than once I was reminded of Sainte Colombe. The chorale tunes are followed by sonorous chordal versions for solo viol, sometimes in standard tuning, sometimes in 'skordatur'. I couldn't pick up all the tunings, but one sounded like a version of the so-called Bandora set, the suite nominally in G but sounding in (modern pitch) F. Its Gavotte is the tune 'When the King enjoys his own again'. She plays a 7-string copy of a late 17th-century Tielke which has a very full bass and a beautifully warm top string.

The recording is closely miked in a favourable acoustic, with a lovely ambience particularly around the top string. It nevertheless sounds quite intimate, in keeping with the music, as the chorales and their versions for solo viol would have been for private devotions.

The notes state that she improvises some divisions, and I can't check what she does with the written source, but whatever she does must be completely appropriate as it was impossible to distinguish what was hers and what was original. I look forward to the time when the facsimile, which Minkoff had planned to publish, eventually becomes available as it is clearly a very important source of 17th-century music for bass viol.

A lot of research has gone into this programme: chorale settings by Praetorius, Walther, Gesius and others have been sought out to go with the versions for viol from the manuscript. The result is a programme of very beautiful music, set into a context, and presented in such a way that the

40 separate tracks make for a very moving whole. Congratulations to all concerned.

Robert Oliver

Louis XIV: Les musiques du roi-soleil

CD1 CHARPENTIER/LULLY - *Te Deum*

Le Poème Harmonique, Capella Cracoviensis, Vincent Dumestre

CD2 DU MONT - *Grands motets for the chapel of Louis XIV*

Ensemble Pierre Robert, Frédéric Desenclos

CD3 VERSAILLE, L'ÎLE ENCHANTÉE

Capriccio Stravagante orchestra, Skip Sempé
195:49 (3 CDs)

Alpha 961

This is a re-packaging of recordings from 2013, 2004 and 2001 respectively. The booklet (Eng/Fre) gives a good general background to the music though says little about specifics and the texts/translations must be downloaded from Alpha. The booklet does, however, include more or less full details of who is singing/playing what.

CD1 is of sacred music – *Te Deum* settings by Lully and Charpentier directed by Vincent Dumestre. I'm sure that many will find these lively and colourful but I'm afraid they just irritate me. The composers knew what they were doing and their scores do not require the addition of recorders at unlikely pitches or the substitution of viols at the wrong octave for violins. And the choir ladies are prone to excess vibrato in moments of high excitement. On its own this would rank 2.5* for performance.

CD2 is quite different, though also of sacred music. Four noble examples of Henry du Mont's motets are performed by Ensemble Pierre Robert with respect, restraint and an exquisite sense of style. When first released this was highly praised and nothing has happened to change this. 5* for performance – it is very fine.

CD3 offers a varied selection of secular music – harpsichord solo and duo, opera extracts and solo songs with Skip Sempé/Capriccio Stravagante. The programme is skilfully arranged to reflect the kind of evening that took place in the Versailles salons. As such it is an excellent French Baroque ‘sampler’ but is also rather good (4*), robbed of a full house by the occasional moments of ‘help yourself’ performance practice.

David Hansell

Late Baroque

BACH: [Keyboard music]

Rémi Geniet *piano*

79:00

English Suite no. 1 BWV806, Partita no. 4 BWV828, Toccata in d BWV911, *Caprice sur le départ de son frère bien-aimé* BWV992

Rémi Geniet is a young French pianist who came second in the 2013 Queen Elizabeth Competition and as a result made this, his first recording, at the age of 21. He possesses a formidable technique with extreme rhythmic precision. He favours a detached style of playing, somewhat in the manner of Glenn Gould, though without the mannerisms. This style can get a bit wearing on a modern Steinway and, while mimicking the plucking of a harpsichord, it can become mechanical. It is exciting playing, though, with great drive in faster movements, the gigue in particular, and Geniet also displays a good sense of what the different dance movements are about. He is best in the pieces composed by the young Bach, the *Caprice sur le départ* and the D minor Toccata, where he conveys the composer’s exploration of the keyboard medium very convincingly. An impressive debut from a young player who still has some distance to travel but from whom we will certainly be hearing more.

Noel O’Regan

HANDEL: *To all lovers of Musick – Sonatas op. 5*

Al Ayre Español, Eduardo López Banzo

76:34

Challenge Classics CC72663

This is an extraordinary disc! Handel’s op. 5 trio sonatas are rarely recorded, and have often been dismissed as mere re-arrangements of existing orchestral and other material, comparing unfavourably with the ‘real’ sonatas of op. 2, etc. In these terrific performances, they come across as rich and amazingly emotionally powerful works, on a level with the almost-contemporary op. 6 Grand Concerti. It is fascinating to hear how Handel develops and modifies his ‘first thoughts’ – try the opening Largo of no. 5, for example, which began life in 1724 as the short *sinfonia* at the start of Act 1 of *Tamerlano*, where Bajazet ‘steps Forth from his Prison’. Here, it is expanded into a full sonata movement, with the arresting thematic tags richly reworked, all held together by Handel’s unerring sense of musical shape.

López Banzo is especially good at capturing the dramatic rhetoric which underlies so much of this music. He is not afraid of sharply contrasted dynamics and tempi, and modifies his continuo team to suit – I especially enjoyed the magically hushed *Musette* (from *Alcina*) in No. 2, with its lively Allegro episodes, and the similarly splendid *Passacaille* of no. 4 (*Radamisto*, this time!). The sheer range of instrumental colour that Al Ayre Español manages to pack in had me reaching for the booklet on more than one occasion to check that there were indeed still only six players! Javier Marin López’s excellent sleeve notes explain the dramatic origins of much of the music and the circumstances around its publishing. Highly recommended!

Alastair Harper

TARTINI & VERACINI: *Violin Sonatas*

Rie Kimura violin, Fantasticus

57:58

Resonus RES10148

TARTINI: Pastorale op 1/13, Sonata "Il trillo del Diavolo"

VERACINI: Sonatas op 2/5 & op 2/12

This is an utterly enchanting recording from beginning to end. The handling of the opening track is highly original and, in stark contrast to the contemporary reports of Tartini and Veracini's performance styles, Rie Kimura draws the listener into her intimate sound world, with gently caressing bow strokes, neatly shaping the most virtuosic passages with effortless ease. There is a real sense of dialogue with Robert Smith on cello, and there is a real sense (and not in a disrespectful way!) that Guillermo Brachetta is filling in the space between, where normally the keyboard player takes on the primary accompaniment role and the string bass emphasises the lowest part of the texture. This is the third CD by Fantasticus and the group goes from strength to strength; whatever they turn their attentions to next, I strongly recommend you look out for it!

Brian Clark

DIVINE NOISE: *Theatrical Music for two harpsichords*

Menno van Delft, Guillermo Brachetta

74:26

Resonus RES10145

F. COUPERIN: Le Pais du Parnasse (1725) LE ROUX: Suite in F (1705) RAMEAU: Suite after Platée (1745) by Brachetta

This is one of two discs this month of which I have to say, "This is the most enormous fun." The instruments (modern copies of Hensch and Blanchet) produce a fine, rich sound (helped by a recording that is a little on the over-resonant side) and under the hands of these uninhibited players give us a thrill-packed journey.

Their arrangements are plausible, if sometimes at the limit of historical likelihood, and the chosen repertoire is mostly of the highest quality. It's not Gaspard le Roux's fault that he wasn't Rameau or Couperin, but his pioneering role in two-harpsichord music compels his inclusion. The booklet essay (English only) is substantial and laced with interesting quotes, though manages to say remarkably little about the specific recorded repertoire.

David Hansell

Classical

C. P. E. BACH: *Sense and sensibility: Sonatas, Fantasias & Rondo*

Riccardo Cecchetti fortepiano

67:51

Challenge Classics CC72666

Wq 55:5, 57:3, 4 & 6, 59:1, 5, & 6

The phrase 'sense and sensibility' in the title is a very appropriate description of the playing here, as well as of the music. Cecchetti performs three mature sonatas, together with two Fantasias and a Rondo, with great sensitivity of feeling and of touch. In the same way as Miklos Spányi exploits the clavichord's resources in his recent recording (see below), Cecchetti exploits the fortepiano's potential to the full as an equally strong instrument of choice for C. P. E. Bach's music. He plays on an anonymous German fortepiano of 1785 from the Edwin Beunk Collection, built in the same year as the clavichord used by Spányi for his recording. There are no common sonatas between the two recordings but comparison is still intriguing, with Cecchetti less percussive and more flexible rhythmically. The sleeve notes here are a bit general and do not provide information on the specific sonatas played. Very fine playing and shows a deep understanding

of C. P. E. Bach's idiom.

Noel O'Regan

C. P. E. BACH: *Zweyte Fortsetzung: Sonatas 4–6*
Miklós Spányi *clavichord*

75:30

BIS-2046 CD

Wq52/4–6, 65/47 & 49 [H37, 163, 129, 248 & 298]

In this, volume 29 of the BIS complete C. P. E. Bach keyboard series, Miklós Spányi makes a strong case for the clavichord, both in his playing and in the useful sleeve notes. He gets a wide range of dynamics and articulation, and the recording quality is excellent, picking up every nuance. The five sonatas in this volume come from a range of periods; there is one early one from the 1740s (Wq 52/4), two from the middle period and two late sonatas. The most impressive is that in E minor, composed in Zerbst in 1758 (Wq 52/6), a classic combination of C. P. E. Bach's control of extended structures with very quirky moments. Spányi plays on a copy by Joris Potvlieghe of a 1785 clavichord by Gottfried Joseph Horn of Dresden, now in the Leipzig Musikinstrumentenmuseum. These are very persuasive accounts and contrast well with similar works recently recorded on the fortepiano by Riccardo Cecchetti.

Noel O'Regan

MÜTHEL: *The Five Keyboard Concertos*

Marcin Świątkiewicz *harpsichord*, Arte dei Suonatori

127:10 (2 CDs)

BIS-2179 CD

I was very impressed by the playing of this young Polish harpsichordist when he recently accompanied Rachel Podger for the Georgian Concert Society in Edinburgh and these two CDs confirm him as a formidable talent. He plays on a copy by Christian Fuchs of a 1624 Johannes Ruckers harpsichord which works well in this

music. Müthel was a German organist and chamber musician who as a young man visited J.S. Bach in the last year of the latter's life, on an educational tour which also saw him visit Telemann and C.P.E. Bach. He moved to Riga where he spent most of his life, earning praise from Herder. His concertos provide some fascinating and very attractive music with a considerable part for the keyboard and lots of dialogue between soloist and ensemble. The ensemble playing by the Polish Arte dei Suonatori ensemble is stylistic and supportive, leading to some exhilarating performances. The recording balance is excellent, allowing the listener to hear every detail of the harpsichord playing. These concertos deserve to be much better known.

Noel O'Regan

VINCI: *Catone in Utica*

Juan Sancho *Catone*, Franco Fagioli *Cesare*, Valer Sabadus *Marzia*, Max Emanuel Cencic *Arbace*, Vince Yi *Emilia*, Martin Mitterrutzner *Fulvio*, Il pomo d'oro, Riccardo Minasi

233:42 (3 CDs)

Decca 478 8194

First given in Rome at the Teatro delle Dame in January 1728, *Catone in Utica* was the first collaboration between Leonardo Vinci and Metastasio. In accordance with the Papal decree forbidding women on the Roman opera stage, it was given with an all-male cast, a format followed in this first recording, with countertenors taking the female parts. To those familiar with Handel's operas, the libretto may seem excessively lengthy, with much longer stretches of *secco recitative* than London audiences were prepared to take. For anyone prepared to remember that in the 17th and for much of the 18th century the librettist took precedence over the composer, a reading of Metastasio's masterly book as literature will prove rewarding. It tells of the power struggle between two giants of the Roman world, the dictator Julius

Caesar (Cesare) and Cato the Younger (Catone), the upholder of traditional republican ideals.

This battle of political wills forms the backdrop to the military action in which Cesare and Catone are engaged. Within this context the love interest for once takes on a background role, though it remains as complex as ever. It involves primarily the love between Catone's daughter Marzia and Cesare, revelation of which not surprisingly leads to rejection by her father, a heroic man whose stubborn pride is his Achilles heel. Catone's ally, the Numidian prince Arbace, also loves Marzia, while a secondary couple is formed by Pompey's widow Emilia and the Roman legate Fulvia, though Emilia is rather more interested in revenge on Cesare than romance. The denouement is unusual, with the defeated Cato dying on stage after stabbing himself and Cesare lamenting the loss of his one-time friend in a final few lines of plain recitative. It was a genuinely tragic denouement that did not go down well with Roman critics; Metastasio, ever sensitive to criticism, subsequently produced a second, less austere ending used by most composers who later set the libretto.

Vinci's score is richly orchestrated for pairs of oboes and horns, trumpet, the usual strings and continuo, here including theorbo and guitar, neither to the best of my knowledge listed in any early 18th-century Italian theatre orchestra. Equally anachronistic are the timpani added – excessively noisily – to the overture and Cesare's 'Se in campo' (act 2); I've become increasingly irritated by so-called HIP conductors (usually Italian) who see fit to add timpani as soon as they catch a whiff of a trumpet part.

While not without weaker moments (mostly in act 2), the arias maintain a high level of interest and variation. Vinci takes particular care to show both sides of Cesare's character, the tenderness he displays toward the grieving Emilia and his love for Marzia in two gracious cantabile arias in act 1 contrasted strongly with the martial coloratura

of 'Se il campo' and the 'simile' aria 'Soffre talor' (both act 2). The role is sung and projected by Franco Fagioli with real distinction, the beauty of his cantabile matched by the accuracy of his divisions, impressive chest notes and accomplished ornamentation, including trills. Even better are the superb arias Vinci provided for the proud Catone, a tenor role here well essayed by Juan Sancho with strongly confident singing and a fine technique tested to his detriment only when he asks too much of himself by over-elaborating *da capo* repeats. Especially memorable is his furious dismissal of the Roman legate Fulvio, 'Va, ritorno' (act 2), the orchestral contrapuntal chromaticism underpinning a magnificent display of defiance. Cato's daughter Marzia also displays distinctively contrasting character traits, haughtily dismissive toward her would-be admirer Arbace while fiercely guarding her love for Caesar and concern for her father. Valer Sadabus' singing of the role is marred only by an occasional lack of control. Max Emanuel Cencic's Arbace, a weak character in the face of Marzia's strong personality, is sung with his customary authority and tonal beauty, the pain of the intensely chromatic act 2 aria 'Che sia la gelosia' touchingly conveyed by Cencic's finely poised singing. Emilia is a less rounded figure, driven by her hatred of Caesar, who she blames for her husband's murder, the story of which she recounts in a dramatic *accompagnato*, one of such passages unexpectedly encountered in an opera of this date. Vince Yi's distinctive – and here at least very feminine sounding – timbre allied to a highly accomplished technique is ideally suited to the role, while her admirer Fulvio is sung with real style by the young German tenor Martin Mitterutzner; his love-sick 'simile' aria 'Piangendo ancora' (act 1) has a text whose beauty is matched by Vinci's exquisite music.

If the vocal contribution maintains a generally high level, Riccardo Minasi's direction begs a number of question marks. While the playing he

draws from his Pomo d'Oro maintains throughout an admirable level of fiery dramatic conviction in allegros and Italianate lyricism in andantes, it is regrettably also prone to the kind of foibles frequently encountered among Italian early music groups. They include eccentric exaggeration of tempo, rhythm, and dynamics, apparent here on rather too many occasions. An especially bizarre example can be heard in the triple chord bass figure in Arbaces' 'È in ogni' (act I). Despite such reservations, there is no doubting this is a highly significant and important release that casts fresh light on Vinci's standing as one of the major figures in earlier 18th-century opera.

Brian Robins

Romantic

SONGS OF LOVE, WAR AND MELANCHOLY
The operatic fantasies of Jacques-François Gallay
 Anneke Scott *natural horn*, Steven Devine *piano*
 [Erard 1851], Lucy Crowe *soprano*
 66:41
 Resonus RES10153

This is one of two discs this month of which I have to say, 'This is the most enormous fun.' It is the third of three recitals of Gallay's music which Anneke Scott has recorded with support from the Gerald Finzi Trust and when I've finished writing this I'm going to order the other two. In the 1830s and 1840s Gallay was essentially Mr Horn in Paris, taking the technique of hand-horn playing to frankly unimaginable and barely practical heights – this repertoire would be still be hard with the full panoply of modern valves on the instrument.

But Anneke Scott is equal to it all – bravura does not even begin to describe her playing. The music is based on material from operas by Bellini and Donizetti which Gallay would have played in

his position as solo horn of the *Théâtre Italien*, and is a mixture of more or less straight transcription and more free treatments. Although her French diction is not of the very best, the three items in which Lucy Crowe joins add another dimension to the listener's pleasure – the soprano/horn duet cadenza on track 3 is delicious. The booklet is excellent but in English only – German and French speakers must download from the Resonus website. And I must not fail to mention Steven Devine's playing (on an 1851 Érard) of the quasi-orchestral piano parts – a masterly blend of *élan* and deference. Time to go shopping. I enjoyed this – a lot.

David Hansell

Miscellaneous

SUGARLOAF MOUNTAIN - *An Appalachian Gathering*
 Apollo's Fire Baroque Orchestra, Jeannette Sorrell
 69:06
 Avie AV2329

The impetus behind this collection goes back to Jeanette Sorrell's experience between 14 and 17 playing piano for the Greenway Southern Baptist Church and accompanying an Appalachian singer, Madeline MacNeil. She then turned primarily into a harpsichordist and conductor. Later, she returned to her interest alongside her serious musical activities – not that it's a helpful distinction. But the music here isn't like the Appalachian music when I have heard it on radio and previous recordings. I expected to find the tunes more rhythmic, and was disappointed. I happened to have a performance of one of Berio's settings of "Black is the colour of my true love's hair", which is of the fuller version – sadly, I've lost the one for Berio's wife and a viola, which somehow makes more of an impression than either of the tunes here. I expected "The Cruel Sister" to

be sung without too much variety – a little gesture is for me more impressive than what is done here. I don't know where my expectation of Appalachian singing comes from, but I suspect that the hymns were strict, and the method here seems to imply musicality of a different nature that has expanded with the "early music" aspects which Jeanette seems happy with.

Clifford Bartlett
