

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!

BOOKS

ANDREW PARROTT: COMPOSERS' INTENTIONS? LOST TRADITIONS OF MUSICAL PERFORMANCE
The Boydell Press, 2015. xiii + 407pp, £19.99.
ISBN 978 81 78327 032 3

This is essential reading. Few performing directors spend as much time and effort on early Music as Andrew. I've known him since the early 1970s. We first met at Dartington Summer School. Andrew struck me first as a singer, though I soon learnt that he was far more than that. A few years later, I was involved in a student and amateur run on the Monteverdi Vespers, and it was there that the down-a-fourth (D) first appeared, with the two low basses in "Et misericordia" sung by the lute-maker Michael Lowe and myself – and I'm not a competent singer. I had, however, sung earlier music which went down to bottom D and I found that I could hit that pitch and could take it as the landmark – this didn't depend on any perfect pitch.

I suspect – and hope – that most readers will have come across Andrew's powerful imagination in a way that verges on common sense. Nearly 100 pages were devoted to Monteverdi. The size of choirs is crucial in connection with Monteverdi and Bach. Roger Bowers claimed that Monteverdi had ten singers available, so why is it performed by The 18 (i. e., the pseudo-16) or more?

Bach's music, too, seems generally to have been sung by soloists, though Handel in church music and oratorio usually had choruses. There are certainly reasons why people who love singing the music should be able to perform it, but that's not how it should go professionally.

Not all conductors are concerned whether singers should be soloists or chorus: reading chapter 2 will give some advice.

Andrew primarily establishes that falsetto is not relevant to high singing at least until the 16th century, though according to Simon Ravens, what we now call counter-tenor was barely known until well into the 20th. Opera singers have been moving up for several decades to enable falsettists to sing natural high male voices, which at least gives a sort of validity. "Performing Purcell" is a fascinating fifty pages. I was intrigued by his review of six *Dido and Aeneas* recordings in 1978. Of these, Geraint Jones, with Kirsten Flagstad as Dido, was supported by Schwarzkopf as Belinda and two other characters, but she was not in the 1951 Mermaid Theatre stage: I bought the recording in 1960 and it was my favourite version for some 20 years. The other five recordings are Anthony Lewis/Janet Baker, Alfred Deller/Mary Thomas, Raymond Leppard/Tatiana Troyanos, Stuart Bedford/Janet Baker and Barbirolli/Victoria de los Angeles. I also have a 1970 recording by Colin Davis with Josephine Veasey, though I have no recollection of why I have it! My favourite recording, however, is Andrew with Emma Kirkby from 1981 – a new world!

I'm not going to make critical comments. I don't remember all the details, but I do remember their value, and at a price like this, virtually anyone playing, enjoying or studying will find it invaluable.

EDITIONS OF MUSIC

FRANCESCO ANTONIO PISTOCCHI: *SCHERZI MUSICALI [OP. II] AND DUETTI E TERZETTI, OP. III*
Critical edition by Alejandra Béjar Bartolo. Lucca, LIM: 2015. 256pp.
ISBN: 9788870967777 €30

The charming, competent, lyrical qualities of the 24 surviving printed vocal works of Francesco Antonio Pistocchi (1659-1726) are here made available in a well-researched and well-printed modern critical edition. Precocious as a composer, his instrumental

Capricci puerili..., were published in 1667 as Op. I, when he was eight. His actual first opus of cantatas, published in Bologna by Silvani in 1698, and lost, was unknown to Estienne Roger when the latter printed the *Scherzi musicali* as 'Op. I' in the same year, in Amsterdam. So despite the composer's authorisation to call it 'op. I', it is now dubbed '[Op. II]'. In fact his *Duetti e terzetti* was published by Silvani in 1707 as Op. III

Pistocchi, born to a violinist and tenor in Palermo, was in Bologna by the age of two, sang from the age of 11 in S. Petronio (the Bologna cathedral) and had an active operatic career from 1675 to 1695, teaching singing thereafter. This volume gives a detailed biography, only in Italian. He composed operas and oratorios, sacred and instrumental music, and was highly regarded by Torelli, Perti and Tosi.

Op. II contains 12 pieces, all with continuo: three cantatas for soprano, two for contralto, one for bass, two Italian duets (SS and SC), two French solo arias (S and C, emulating Lully), and two German solo arias (C and S, in 'Italian' style). They are above all pleasing, relatively undemanding, and short, with good and sometimes bold harmony. Not only are the *da capos* written out, but Pistocchi tends to repeat phrases and sections as well, which is perhaps more typical on the stage than in cantatas, or perhaps a reason for calling them collectively '*scherzi musicali*'.

The prints can also be consulted instantly online at <http://www.bibliotecamusica.it/cmbm/viewschedatwbca.asp?path=/cmbm/images/ripro/gaspari/BB/BB158/> or replace BB158 with BB159 to see the other.

This permits me to comment on Béjar Bartolo's transcription and critical notes. The source itself is very good, but as inevitable in all prints in movable type, manuscript copies will yield some additional details, different lyrics or underlay, innumerable ties, and may confirm or not other questionable readings. So to that extent, this is not really a complete critical edition. The print requires relatively few things to be noted. I found a manuscript viewable online for the first cantata (F-Pn RES VMC MS-81), which Béjar Bartolo does not list, and this makes me assume that many other manuscripts of these diffusely circulated pieces may not be listed!

I was especially eager to find the first cantata (*In su la piaggia aprica*) because I suspected a mistaken interpretation of the text, a simile that makes no sense as Béjar Bartolo explained it, abetted by an incorrect comma which she inserted. She misinterprets '*veloci piante*', the soles of the feet of the fleeing Mirtillo, as '*pianti*', or sobs (of spurned

Lucinda), thinking that the spelling was compromised to rhyme with *amante*! No, these *piante* are Mirtillo's fleet feet. The point is that Mirtillo wants nothing to do with poor Lucinda, who isn't quite crying yet, though she will be at the end. In the opening narrated recit, Mirtillo, as the mythical Daphne had to, is running away, in this case from the girl who loves him ('*che a fuggir la sua amante,/ al par di Dafne, ebbe veloci piante.*').

To her credit, Béjar Bartolo has carefully aligned the continuo figures from the Amsterdam print with the music, providing where necessary the editorial accidentals without which a continuo player would be apt to err. Since movable type has no beaming and this print does not tie any continuo notes, it might have been nice to follow the beaming and to include or comment on the omnipresent continuo ties from manuscript versions, and, where differing, any alternative lyrics or underlay. The print sometimes uses black notation for hemiolas, which the editor then indicates silently by adding coloration brackets. I found one wrong vocal note in this first cantata (in Aria 1 bar 38, b' instead of a'), and several questionable notes in the others. Players and singers should be suspicious enough to double check with the online original. Pistocchi's audacious chromatic surprises are, however, theoretically acceptable, if at times challenging. His precise tempo indications are also uncommon: *abbastanza adagio*, *adagio assai*, *andante ma non presto*, *più andante*; and almost all of his interesting recits turn into substantial ariosos, longer than the recits themselves.

Op. III includes ten duets (SC), and two trios (STB and SCT). These are also cantatas in form, with solo or dialoguing recits between the arias. It is not mandatory, but the entire sequence could be performed as a unified work, since the soprano and the contralto are figures complementing one another in their contrasting points of view, and the final madrigalistic trios address those who have 'sailed the undulating sea of love' (*Ecco il lido, a terra, a terra*) and remind them with downward arpeggios (*Tramonta il sol e lascia il mondo tutto*) of the sunset of 'beauty which is born and dies in a flash'.

It is slightly inconvenient that the critical apparatus of Op. III was put in the middle of the volume, between the two works, and much more so that a fairly heavy book of 256 pages needs so much manhandling to make it stay open for playing from. The LIM has very moderate prices, and I wonder how much more it would have cost to print Op. II and Op. III in separate bindings, with the critical material, which is not needed when playing and should

have been translated into other languages, in a third. Are we 'supposed' to resort to photocopying in order to be able to use the music we buy?

Barbara Sachs

J. S. BACH: SIX SUITES FOR SOLO VIOLONCELLO transcribed with embellished reprises for keyboard (harpsichord) by Winsome Evans, in three volumes: Suites I & II PRB No. B059, list price US\$30
Suites III & IV PRB No. B060, list price US\$35
Suites V & VI PRB No. B061, list price US\$35

J. S. BACH: PARTITA FOR SOLO FLUTE transcribed with embellished reprises for keyboard (harpsichord) by Winsome Evans PRB No. B062, list price US\$20

As we all know, Bach's music is virtually bomb proof - no matter what you do it to (and let's face it, there have been some arrangements that are wackier than others!) it seems to survive. In this case, Winsome Evans has devoted hours to adapting Bach's six cello suites and solo flute partita to the keyboard. On the page the transcriptions look just like Bach's keyboard music, and for anyone who has played through the extant corpus and is keen for more, Evans has also provided embellished repeats of every movement of every piece. I am in two minds about that approach - while less experienced players might be glad not to have to improvise decorations, others might find (a) that the written-out variants stifle their creativity since one has to concentrate as one plays or risk losing one's place in the music and (b) that the continual page turning that all the extra music requires becomes tiresome; in short, something of an embarrassment of riches that has practical implications. If that were the end of it, then all would be well. Alas, it is not. After a Preface that goes into far greater detail than really it need do about the relationship between Evans's transcriptions and the originals (as if this were an Urtext edition of Bach keyboard music, in fact), vol. 1 of cello music has three pages of Editorial Notes that include no fewer than 16 ossias (Bar 23 of the Gigue of Suite 1 is spectacular in inspiring four ossias!) I am sure many keyboard players will enjoy playing this "new" music, but I sincerely doubt whether any will have the slightest concern for the minutiae of Winsome Evans's clever extrapolations. For those who do, surely it would be better simply to refer them either to a good modern edition, or to the two original sources (both of which are available online!) I recommend

simply enjoying the beautifully idiomatic realisations of these marvellous pieces, beautifully printed as ever by PRB, and ignore the introductory matter.

Brian Clark

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756-1791)
SYMPHONIE G-MOLL... SYMPHONY IN G MINOR,
1ST AND 2ND VERSION, KV 550
Edited by Henrik Wiese
Breitkopf & Härtel (PB 542), 2014. 68pp, €26.90.

The *Neue Ausgabe sämtlicher Werke*, Serie IV, Werkgruppe 11: Sinfonien Band 9, vol. 12 was published in 1957, edited by H. C. Robbins Landon. Editions from the 1950s and 1960s were the result of enthusiasm at discovering MSS that had either been unknown or, in many cases, not fully considered.

The significance of a new No. 40 has changed ideas on the logic of first composing the score without clarinets then later adding them. This is not to say that Mozart started with oboes and clarinets and then removed the clarinets, but Wiese argues that the third version is a return to abandoning the clarinets with minor alterations of flute and of strings in their place. The changes primarily concern with the *Andante*. Page 26 & 34 has two versions, but otherwise the edition is clear and avoids printing two versions throughout. There are two pairs of oboes notated: the first, in smaller print, is for the first version, below that the second version is in standard print. It seems that the editor assumed the normal difference of 1st and 2nd version rather than giving some status to the third version. The small print of the Prefaces (German and English) means two compressed pages, but the musical text is fine. It saves a lot of cross-checking from editions which come in two versions (e. g. Bärenreiter), but it must be confusing for conductors if they are using different versions.

I like to sample a part or two to give some idea of what they look like. In this case, it wasn't particularly helpful - I received a Violin I part where only bars 29 & 100 of the *Andante* have variants. (The oboe and clarinet parts are presumably more complicated.) The publisher is careful to indicate a sensible page-turn in the last movement with a dotted line across the page and a pair of scissors. Squashing 14 lines into a page is a bit tight if the players like thorough pencil marks, but there are advantages in avoiding page-turns. This is a valuable improvement.

Clifford Barlett

RECORDINGS

Medieval & chant

HÖR, KRISTENHAIT!

Sacred Songs by the Last of the Minnesingers

Ensemble Leones, Marc Lewon 79:21

Music by Beheim, Loqueville, Der Mönch von Salzburg, Sicher, Oswald von Wolkenstein & anon

This fascinating and beautifully performed CD presents the sacred music of Oswald von Wolkenstein (the 'last Minnesinger' of the title) in the context of sacred and instrumental music by his Austrian and German contemporaries. Entrepreneur, shameless self-publicist, war hero, poet and musician, Oswald is a colourful figure who stands out from the sometimes rather anonymous musical scene of the late 14th and early 15th centuries. I am more familiar with his self-laudatory but highly engaging secular songs as explored in the 1970s by the Studio der frühen Musik in Munich, but it is unsurprising to find that he is a talented and prolific composer of sacred music, particularly in the case of his considerable masterpiece *Ave Mater, o Maria* which concludes the present CD. His sacred music shares the same forthright character that we hear in the secular music and that we can observe in his arresting one-eyed portrait, and these performances by the three contrasting voices and improvised instrumental drones of the Ensemble Leones are wonderfully evocative. The balance of the CD is made up by the equally characterful music of the Monk of Salzburg (who could clearly have learned a thing or two about self-promotion from Oswald) and some lesser figures of the period, with instrumental interludes from the ubiquitous Buxheimer organ book, also beautifully played. While the excellent programme notes appear in German, English and French, there is sadly only room for the extensive original Middle High German and Latin texts and translations into modern German – non-German speakers are left at a disadvantage in not having the gist of the texts of the sung material. It has to be said that this is a minor blemish in a production which otherwise delights in every respect, perhaps not least in providing the CD with a dignified cover illustrating St Michael from Rogier van Weyden's Beaune Altarpiece rather than the more obvious reproduction of one of the surviving Oswald portraits.

D. James Ross

Renaissance

BYRD: WALSINGHAM

Jean-Luc Ho *organ/harpsichord*

70:00

encelade ECL1401

Clarifica me Pater (III), Fantasias in D, G & A, In Nomine, The Maiden's Song, My Lady Nevell's Ground, Pavan in A, Sir William Petre Pavan & Galliard, The Queen's Alman, Susannah Fair, Ut re mi fa sol la & Walsingham

On this disc the French musician Jean-Luc Ho plays fifteen pieces by Byrd on two modern instruments which are "after" models from the sixteenth century. The organ, by Aurelien Delarge and Guillaume Rebinguet-Sudre (2012), is based on an instrument in Alkmaar which was the work of Hans von Coblentz (1511), while the harpsichord, by Ryo Yoshida (2010), is based on an original by the Venetian maker Alessandro Trasuntino of 1531 which is now at the Royal College of Music in London.

The list of the recording's contents throws up two intriguing items. In 1999 Hyperion released Davitt Moroney's recording of Byrd's *Complete keyboard music* (CDA66551/7). However, Byrd's contemporaries arranged several of his vocal or consort works for keyboard (published in *Musica Britannica* 55 or 66). Given the nature of Moroney's project, he rightly excluded them from his boxed set, apart from *O quam gloriosum* because he agreed with Oliver Neighbour that it is the work of Byrd himself. Of the many recordings of Byrd's keyboard music which have continued to be released since Moroney's magnum opus, Aapo Hakkinen's excellent *William Byrd (1540-1623): music for the virginals* has included the premiere of one such arrangement, the *Lullaby* (Alba ABCD 148, released in 2000). Now two more of these arrangements, both premieres, have been included on the record under review, establishing it as an important contribution to Byrd discography. The arrangements in question are of *Susanna fair* from Byrd's *Psalmes, sonets and songs* of 1588; and of the *Fantasia* in four parts from the *Psalmes, songs, and sonnets* of 1611.

When it comes to the music itself, although the selection of material is interesting and varied, it does not hang together as a coherent programme. The opening track illustrates the problem of the disc in microcosm. *The maiden's song* is an

episodic piece that does not seem to be a natural overture. M. Ho plays it on the organ, and the occasional density of the passage work and chords in the left hand suggests that the piece is better suited to a harpsichord. He begins it stridently, and changes registration for each of the eight variations, but these new registrations do not assist the continuity of Byrd's rhetorical flow, with the result that the interpretation of the piece overall seems choppy and a bit disjointed, and the impression of the programme as a whole reflects these qualities. The problem is not so much in the selection of pieces, though more pavans and galliards would not have gone amiss; nor in the sequence, though there is a central block of variational pieces followed by another block of discursive pieces, and these pieces in the two central blocks could have been shuffled to greater effect. It is in the interpretation of individual pieces where the problem inherent in this recording seems to abide.

The playing of the individual pieces is competent enough, but does not manage to be engaging. *Walsingham* itself, the title track, could be interpreted as expressing internal turmoil, wherein Byrd exploits differences of tempo, texture and figuration in a virtuoso manner: for instance, in one pair of variations 15 and 16, the first of the pair begins in duple time, then changes to triple time halfway through; then the following variation begins with triple time in the right hand and simultaneous duple time in the left. Also, the final three variations 20-22 form one of the most emotional climaxes that Byrd ever wrote for the keyboard. Capably though M. Ho plays the piece, the tensions within the piece are never exploited in his interpretation, which is not bland, but is hardly gripping either. Similarly, M. Ho's *Ut re mi fa sol la* makes far less impact than Moroney's penetrating recording in an ungrateful acoustic. Shorter pieces such as Byrd's own arrangement of Parson's *In nomine* and the far more familiar Queen's alman seem shouty, while the *Fantasia* in A, Byrd's first masterpiece for keyboard and a musical wonderland of opposites magically contrived to dwell in harmony one with another, is also a missed opportunity. The rest of the pieces are all well enough chosen and capably played, but none of the performances catch fire or shine a light on adjacent pieces, so the overall impression is of worthiness rather than inspiration. On a positive note, it was a good decision to commission the notes on the music from Dennis Collins: they are concise and excellent.

Finally, I have issues with all three (sic) transcriptions of pieces by Byrd included on this disc. There is only one source for *Susanna fair* yet in the repeated passage that

concludes the work, M. Ho flattens the E in the "alto" part to create a C minor chord, which contradicts the unique source and also the sharpened Fs at the same point in Byrd's original versions, which are set a tone higher, for five-part choir and for voice and viols. This seems contrary and unnecessary. Similarly in bar 21 of the *Fantasia* he flattens the second E (a minim) in the "treble" part, contrary to the lone original source of the keyboard transcription and the printed version for consort, which leave the note naturalized like the first E (a crotchet). This is regrettable since in the opinion of Oliver Neighbour (supported by Alan Brown) the transcription for keyboard, undoubtedly by Byrd's pupil Thomas Tomkins, is of an early version, c. 1590, of the *Fantasia* subsequently published with a few slight differences (though not in this instance) in 1611, as noted above. The disc concludes with a modern transcription, presumably by M. Ho himself, of Byrd's *Memento salutis auctor* in three parts from his first book of *Gradualia*, 1605. Why? It is certainly a most agreeable piece, and seems to be relatively popular on Continental Europe because the first commercial recording, even before The Cardinall's Musick's Byrd Edition, was by a Spanish choir; but it was neither composed for keyboard by Byrd nor arranged by one of his contemporaries, and with a repertory of a hundred pieces for keyboard by Byrd from which to choose, plus half a dozen contemporary keyboard arrangements of his vocal or consort music still awaiting a commercial recording, one of these, especially from among the latter, would have been preferable to a work with no provenance for keyboard.

Richard Turbet

MUSIC OF THE REALM: TUDOR MUSIC FOR MEN'S VOICES

The Queen's Six

63:56

Resonus RES10146

This is an outstanding recording which merits many sales and wide distribution. While most of the pieces are, in context, relatively familiar fare, one would expect usually to hear them sung by an ensemble containing a top line of trebles (such as a cathedral choir) or sopranos (such as a chamber choir). Such is the expertise of these six male singers – two countertenors, two tenors, a baritone and a bass – that there is no sense of strain at either extremity, and the overall sound is perfectly

balanced, grainy enough to render individual parts audible, but smooth enough for a good blend (with apologies for beginning to resemble an advertisement for coffee, or indeed whiskey – not the worst of analogies, perhaps). As to the musical content, two composers come out of this recording particularly well. Of the three pieces by Byrd, *Attend mine humble prayer* is one of two premieres on this disc – the last of his seven penitential psalms which begin his *Songs of sundrie natures* of 1589. Only two more of these small gems have ever been recorded, so it would be excellent if The Queen's Six were able to incorporate the rest into future programmes; with "compleat" recordings of several sections of his output in recent years, there are ever fewer premieres on disc of pieces by Byrd, but many of his songs still remain to be commercially recorded, as do some of his Anglican works. Morley also features well, also with three recordings including a premiere, though this is somewhat "left field": *Haec dies* is in fact a clever adaptation of an untexted "Aria" a3 from his *A plaine and easie introduction to practicall musicke* of 1597, where it appears on page 68. (Frustratingly this information is not supplied by Peter Phillips in his otherwise adequate notes.) Morley also benefits from the presence of the sublime *Laboravi in gemitu meo*, his apparent steal from Philippe Rogier, though whether Morley was really passing it off as his own is not proven. Like Morley, Tomkins was a pupil of Byrd, and he too has three works here, including the wonderful sacred song *Turn unto the Lord*. Amongst a consistently fine set of interpretations, the Six's version of his profound *Almighty God the fountain of all wisdom* is particularly intense, as is their rendering of his setting of *When David heard*, and the setting by Weelkes is also included, beside his less familiar *O Jonathan* and *O how amiable*. Two well-known pieces each by Gibbons and Tallis, including the latter's substantial *Videte miraculum*, complete a rewarding programme.

Richard Turbet

THE VIRTUOSO ORGANIST: TUDOR & JACOBAN
MASTERWORKS

Stephen Farr

68:35

Resonus RES10143

The music on this disc was recorded on the new Taylor & Boody organ (opus 66) at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge. The Gentlemen of the

College Choir, conducted by David Skinner, provide plainsong in those pieces where its inclusion is appropriate. The instrument in question is comprehensively described by George Taylor in the accompanying booklet. Stephen Farr's playing makes the best possible case for a selection of pieces that, if they are not all actual masterworks, are the works of masters.

He begins and ends appropriately with Byrd: first *A voluntarie for my Ladye Nevell* BK 61 and concluding with the *Fancie* BK 46 which is the penultimate piece in *My Lady Nevells Booke*; the latter contains what seems to be a fairly overt reference to the plainsong *Salve Regina* in the opening "alto" part. The earliest named composer is Tallis, and the alternate verses of his hymn *Ecce tempus idoneum* are chanted by the attendant Gentlemen. The neglected and underrated John Blitheman, one of Bull's teachers, is represented by two of his settings of *Gloria tibi trinitas* (a.k.a. *In nomine I and IV*), while Bull himself provides the second of his several substantial *In nomines* plus the slighter *Coranto joyeuse*.

Indisputably the most monumental work from the Tudor and Jacobean repertory is Tomkins' massive *Offertory*, timed here at 17'30". (Bernhard Klapprott hurtles through it in a mere 16'29" during his recording of Tomkins' complete keyboard music on MDG 607 0706-2 from 1997.) This wonderful and passionate peroration was quite recently found to have been based upon the theme to which Byrd set the words "Let me never be confounded" in the *Te Deum* from his *Great Service*, information that does not appear in Magnus Williamson's fine notes. This is excusable because no mention is made of Stephen Jones' discovery (published in 1993) at the appropriate point in the third revised edition of Tomkins' complete keyboard music (*Musica Britannica V*, 2010), despite the fact that the editor had written an article in 1999, based around this very discovery. Stephen Farr compensates with a riveting interpretation of this masterwork. The youngest of the named composers is Orlando Gibbons, and he contributes one of his many fine fantasias, GK 9.

It remains to mention the two anonymous pieces selected by Stephen Farr. One is a *Magnificat* in which the Gentlemen sing alternate verses (Early English Church Music VI, no 4). This ascetic piece is the second longest on the disc, but such is the creativity (vivacious rhythms, striking themes, varied textures) of the composer (possibly Thomas Preston), and the responsiveness of the organist, that the time passes disappointingly quickly. Preston is also a candidate as composer of the other anonymous work,

Bina caelestis II. This track was the catalyst for my deciding to purchase the disc. In the first edition of his early short study of Byrd written to coincide with his tercentenary in 1923, E. H. Fellowes attributed this and several other such pieces in British Library MS Add. 29996 (not as given in the notes) to Byrd, only to have to return them to anonymity in the seldom noticed second edition of 1928. Beginning with what Tomkins noted as “a good 2 parts”, the piece develops melodically and harmonically, the gifted composer increasing the texture to three parts and finally four in a climax that sounds, in context, little short of a form of ecstasy. As someone with a low tolerance of plainsong, I found that the contribution of the College Gentlemen enhanced the overall structure of the piece – worthy of Byrd, even though not by him.

This is an outstanding recording that surpasses most of those based on this repertory and which have appeared on more prominent labels. The presentation is of a piece with the consistent excellence of the music and of Stephen Farr’s playing: by eschewing interpretational gestures he allows the music to speak through him all the more powerfully. The information about the organ and the music (the lacuna about Tomkins’ *Offertory* not being the fault of the author) is complemented by fine colour photographs. In all, this is the best disc of music from this rich repertory that I have encountered in a long time.

Richard Turbet

17th century

CALDARA: TRIO SONATAS

Amandine Beyer & Leila Schayegh *violin*, Jonathan Pešek *violoncello*, Jörg-Andreas Böttcher *harpsichord/organ* and Matthias Spaeter “*liuto attiorbato*”

72:48

Glossa GCD922514

This fine recording combines four sonatas from Caldara’s op. 1 trios (1693) with five from his op. 2 of six years later. Broadly speaking, each of the four movement works (except op. 2/12 which - in a direct reference to Corelli - is a chaconne) from the first set are cast in the “*da chiesa*” style, while the others consist of a *Preludio* and a sequence of “dances”. He may only have 23 when his name first appeared in print, but he had definitely mastered the Roman trio sonata medium, and indeed was prepared to embellish it by liberating the role

of the violoncello. The performers take this fact and the knowledge that the composer was – amongst other things – a reputed master of the instrument as justification for improvised links between sections by the cellist; while that may or may not actually have been the case, I doubt that 17th-century players spent enough time rehearsing to make decisions about when one musician would take on that responsibility, and when another - here the plucker is, for my tastes at least, a little invasive. In fact, the booklet notes discuss the fact that there are four books for each set, but with slightly different designations of the two bass part; for op. 1 one is for cello, the other for organ (and yet the latter role is played on harpsichord and lute!), while the plucker’s presence is fully justified in op. 2 by the lable “*Tiorba o Violone*”, while the other is “*Basso continuo*”. So much for my gripe about the scoring... The playing is absolutely first rate, and the recorded sound perfect – each of the individual parts can clearly be heard, and the balance between treble and bass is well handled. The violinists, of course, are excellent - they toss Caldara’s melodies back and forth with gusto, and their ornaments flow naturally from the composer’s elegant lines. I doubt my wish would come true, but I would love a companion disc with the missing sonatas!

Brian Clark

FRESCOBALDI: META(M)ORPHEUS

cantoLX, *dir.* Frank Agsterippe, Maurice Clement *organ*

73:01

Et’cetera KTC1510

The ensemble cantoLX follow up the success of their recording of the complete volume I of Girolamo Frescobaldi’s *Arie Musicali* (1630) with this recording of volume II. The group’s six singers, who appear as soloists and equally effectively as an ensemble, are supported by a reduced continuo team of theorbo and harpsichord – dispensing with the harp, organ, guitar and violone which they called on for volume I. It has to be said that this very much throws the spotlight on to the singers, who however exploit this added exposure with some highly dramatic evocations of their texts, employing beautifully expressive singing and neatly applied ornaments. In among the lovely music by Frescobaldi we have some very brief and rather avant garde improvisations on the organ by Maurice Clement, which seem to have filled out the programme in concert performances and have also made it on to the CD. These seem to involve a forensic exploration of the

potential of the 1976 Loncke organ in Sint-Gillis Church in Bruges. To my ear these add nothing to the Frescobaldi, and indeed sound as if they belong on a whole other CD – incidentally not one that I would be buying. The generous 73 minutes of recorded sound suggest that it would have been a better idea just to present the Frescobaldi on its own on a shorter disc. This and the rather arch title and programme notes have lost them a few points in my rating.

D. James Ross

ELISABETH JACQUET DE LA GUERRE:

CHAMBER MUSIC

The French composer Elisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre was recognized early as a child prodigy and was educated and supported throughout her life by a pension from the Sun King. Freed from the need to make a living, she experimented with the musical conventions of her time, producing music which is engaging and daringly original. She composed in a wide variety of musical genres, but her chamber music, represented here by a selection of trio sonatas from collections from 1687, 1695 and 1707, is of a particularly high standard. The ensemble Musica Florita employ baroque violins, flute, oboe, gamba, baroque cello, theorbo, archlute, harpsichord and organ to provide the varied textures necessary to bring her work to life, and their playing is fresh and idiomatic. It is pleasing to hear a substantial collection of music by a composer who is frequently cited but rarely performed, and to find that it is of a consistently high standard of technical excellence and musical inspiration.

D. James Ross

CAROLUS HACQUART - LE MAISTRE DE MUSIQUE
François Fernandez & Luis Otavio Santos *violins*, Laurent Stewart *harpsichord/organ*, Eduardo Egüez *theorbo*, Rainer Zipperling, Kaori Uemura & Philippe Pierlot *bass viol*
Flora 0705

+ two sonatas by Philippus Van Wichel

Unlike other Flora releases, this excellent CD (recorded way back in 2005) comes complete with a booklet note, not only telling us all about the composers (in French, German and English), but also with detailed track and cast lists! Two violins, up to three bass viols, theorbo (who also has one solo) and harpsichord/organ perform a range of works including five trio sonatas and two sonatas a4. They are all in the familiar patchwork style of the late 17th century, with imitative sections

juxtaposed with more chordal passages. On this evidence, both Hacquart and Van Wichel deserve to be better known; if some of the more dance-inspired tracks are a little four square, the freer movements have a breadth and sense of architecture about them that should encourage ensembles to take up the challenge – with a few harmonic surprises to keep them on their toes!

Brian Clark

GEORG ÖSTERREICH: PSALMS, CANTATAS
WESER-RENAISSANCE, MANFRED CORDES

67:04

cpo 777 944-2

Der Gerechten Seelen sind in Gottes Hand, Dixit Dominus, Herr Jesu Christ wahr' Mensch und Gott, Sie ist fest gegründet, Und Jesus ging aus von dannen

This is the third installment of a cpo series devoted to music for the court of Schleswig-Holstein-Gottorf, a small but relatively influential establishment especially in the 17th and 18th centuries. After Augustin Pflieger and Johann Philipp Förtsch (both favourably reviewed in EMR) comes a disc devoted to Georg Österreich, whose “claim to fame” has hitherto been the fact that his vast music collection (or perhaps only half of it, since there is a theory that one part of his legacy followed one of his sons into the Baltic lands...) constitutes a major portion of the famous Bokemeyer Collection in the German State Library in Berlin, through which an extraordinary amount of 17th-century music has survived at all. Weser-Renaissance Bremen, who specialise in this repertoire, present five varying and substantial works, ranging from a funeral cantata at seven and a half minutes to a setting of *Dixit Dominus* that lasts nearer 20! Solo voices (up to five of them) combine with strings and a continuo group of bassoon, chitarrone and organ to produce rather a dark palette, throwing the often angular vocal lines into the limelight. The booklet notes try to disguise Österreich’s pseudo-counterpoint (which falls far short of the sophistication of his contemporaries) as an attempt to give the words more prominence; the fact that this is all very much 17th-century music (he died in 1735, aged over 70) weakens such an argument – perhaps he just was not interested in writing polyphony. This is - as with all of Cordes’s projects - an interesting and well worthwhile recording, with much fine singing and playing to admire. I fear it may not rescue the composer from the footnotes of musicology, though.

Brian Clark

SCHEIN: ICH WILL SCHWEIGEN

Alice Focroulle, Béatrice Mayo-Felip, Reinoud Van Mechelen SST, InAlto, directed by Lambert Colson, Marc Meisel organ

62:42

Ramée 1401

On the whole, I'm more familiar with Scheidt than Schein, though some Scheidt is a bit over-regular. My main criticism here is that Schein deserves a complete disc rather than jumping to the end of the 17th century, and J. S. Bach really is too late! Most of the Schein works come from *Opella nova*, 1617, and very impressive they are, though in "Exaudiet" the tenor texts were more audible than the soprano, and cornett/sackbutts do tend to need more gaps, much as I like them. I reckon that this could be a brilliant CD had it been more thought out, though do buy it. The booklet is excellent, apart from not noting which soprano is which.

Clifford Bartlett

LA CIACCONA

Midori Suzuki *soprano*, Ensemble Anthonello

64:23

Christophorus CHE 0203-2 (© 2002)

Music by Bartolotti, Falconieri, Ferrari, Frescobaldi, d'India, Kapsberger, Merula, Salome Rossi, Selma y Salaverde & Storace

On this CD the Japanese Ensemble Anthonello follow the progress of the chaconne from its inception as the Chacona in South America through Spain to Italy where the Ciacona became all the rage, influencing French composers to compose more sedate Chaconnes. With its insistent rhythms and repeating bassline, the Ciacona gained something of a raunchy reputation, and Ensemble Anthonella provide delightfully spicy renditions of their cross-section of Ciaconas. Their vocalist Midori Suzuki has a beautifully pure voice which blends perfectly with director Yoshimichi Hamada's cornett as well as the group's two recorders. Also among the instruments used are an arpo doppio, beautifully played by Marie Nishiyama, while Rafael Bonavita contributes some fine Baroque guitar sounds. The two recorder players have a delightfully free approach to their lines, using various flutterings and glissandi to bring their parts to life. This is

a lovely CD which brings a wide range of music by familiar but mainly unfamiliar composers vividly to life, and I was surprised to note that the original recording was made in 2000 – I hope that this is a reissue and that it hasn't been languishing in Christophorus's 'to do' tray for fifteen years. The cover depicting dancers at the Dowager of Bilbao's Ball in 1626 is also a delight. A little gem.

D. James Ross

MINORITENKONVENT - MANUSCRIPT XIV 726

Vienna / Praha / Kroměříž, 1700

Aliquando (Stéphanie Paulet *violin*, Elisabeth Geiger organ)

72:32

muso mu-008

Music by Biber, Faber, Teubner, Viviani, Vojta & anon

This is one of the finest recordings I have heard of solo violin music from the 17th century. Paulet and Geiger (who plays one an André Silbermann organ) have selected nearly a dozen extracts from the extensive manuscript which exhibit all the virtuoso techniques of the period, such as scordatura and multiple stops. Four of the works (sonatas 4, 77 and 87 and toccata 94) also appeared on Gunar Letzbor's *Anonymous Habsburg Violin Music* (on Pan Classics). Apart from the outstanding playing from both musicians, the recorded sound really makes this a "must buy" disc - the fuller sound of the "church organ" really fills the space, but is never allowed to dominate. I would love to hear these two in a selection of Schmelzer's solo sonatas, with the same recording engineer, please!

Brian Clark

Late Baroque

J. S. BACH: SIX PARTITAS BWV 825–30

Huguette Dreyfus *harpsichord*

141:01 (2 CDs)

Heritage HTGCD 292/3 © 1983

This is a re-release of a fine recording from the early 80s, when Dreyfus was already in her mid 50s. According to the first portion of the booklet notes (only in English), she spent a month in Japan, giving concerts and lessons and visiting Japanese temples. There is not the slightest hint of such a busy schedule taking its toll on her playing, which is serenely poised, not a note out

of place, not a phrase left unturned to his elegant best. If the harpsichord perhaps sounds a little “two dimensional”, that is more to do perhaps with the recording aesthetics of the day and the limited availability of instruments with greater timbral possibilities. As model performances of this astonishingly varied set of keyboard pieces, this recording takes some beating.

Brian Clark

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BACH: 6 SUITES A VIOLONCELLO SOLO, SONATE À CEMBALO È VIOLA DA GAMBA

Wieland Kuijken *violoncello, violoncello piccolo, basse de viole*, Piet Kuijken *harpsichord*

210:00 (3 CDs)

Arcana A383

Every cellist will have their own view on the interpretation of the six unaccompanied suites. I have my own distinctive ideas, developed over some 50 years since struggling with the first suite – on modern cello, of course – as a schoolboy barely out of short trousers. Kuijken, in this re-issue of the recording made in 2001-02, takes a very personal, relaxed and reflective interpretation of these works. Allemandes and sarabandes are especially unhurried, although courantes and other subsequent movements retain their dance spirit, Kuijken adopting a detached, at times almost spiccato-like bow stroke for many movements. The text of the early ms sources is strictly adhered to, with little if any added ornamentation. Not only that, the chordal passages, as at the end of the Prelude of Suite II, are played as written, without any of the customary elaboration into arpeggio figuration. Perhaps the most difficult suite to interpret convincingly is Suite IV in E flat, a key which gives hardly any opportunity to exploit the natural resonances of the cello’s open strings. Fortunately Kuijken’s Amati instrument, no doubt aided by a good recording acoustic, helps to negate this problem. The sombre quality of Suite V in C Minor, however, is well captured, with the instrument’s resonances enhanced by the required tuning of the top string down to C. In contrast, Kuijken gives Suite VI, for the five-string violoncello piccolo, its bright, airy texture that is needed for this work.

Perhaps because of the very generous tempi of many of the movements, there was not room for more than two suites on disc 2; so Suite V, together with the three gamba sonatas, appears on disc 3 of the set. These sonatas receive a more conventional reading, with Wieland on a 7-string Bertrand instrument with Piet Kuijken playing a

particularly full-sounding copy of a late Baroque German harpsichord. Piet makes his harpsichord (which is well balanced in the recording) sing, and his phrasing carefully matches that of the gamba.

It is difficult to recommend one recording over another, for there are so many HIP versions from which to make a choice, from the sensible to the ridiculous. Both Wispelwey (at Cöthen pitch A=392) and Sigiswald Kuijken (on viola da spalla) are really interesting musical concepts, while this more conventional recording by the latter’s brother (at A=415) I feel ranks highly against many of the others, though not all will appreciate some of his more his leisurely tempi. If you prefer the whacky, there is even Pandolfo on viola da gamba (with suitable transpositions) – or even two recordings on marimba! Certainly Wieland Kuijken is one to consider, even if you have another, though everything he does is not always to my taste.

Ian Graham-Jones

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BACH: SUITES FOR SOLO CELLO

Philip Higham

140:37 (2 CDs)

Delphian DCD34150

When confronted with the opportunity to record what everyone considers to be the epitome of the repertoire for your instrument, performers must inevitably make all sorts of decisions about how their version will be different. By also acting as the producer for the present engrossing recording, Philip Higham has taken even more care that one might expect over the finished sound. That sound is initially created by a combination of gut strings at A=435 (just enough slacking off of the tension to allow the instruments to speak a little differently) and a modern bow. I reckon Higham could just have been handed a twig from a tree and he would have made beautiful music! His performances are clearly indebted to developments in HIP playing without ever “being a slave” to a list of things “not to do” - the fact that he has Anna Magdalena’s score at hand (and sometimes follows her odd seeming phrasing indications) even though he normally plays from memory speaks volumes; as does his correction of what he believes to be an institutionalised error in the final suite (his version is utterly convincing!) He is quick to point out that this is how he feels the suites at the present time; like Pieter Wispelwey before him, he doesn’t rule out revisiting them at some later stage. I will be

impressed if he can better these renditions.

Brian Clark

BINDER: SEI SUONATE PER IL CEMBALO OP. I

Paulina Tkaczyk *harpsichord*

117:24 (2 CDs)

Dux 1153/1154

Christlieb Siegmund Binder (1723-1789) is described by some writers as Dresden's answer to Carl Philipp Emmanuel Bach; if these sonatas, printed in 1759, are typical, then that is an exaggeration. Though tuneful and not without exciting outer movements, they are fairly workaday and rarely deviate from the mid-18th-century norm. Paulina Tkaczyk is a lyrical interpreter and uses the full potential of her instrument (there are no details of the maker in the booklet notes), which means that listening to one CD or the other makes for pleasant background music for a summer's afternoon, reading Jane Austen.

Brian Clark

HEINICHEN: MESSEN

Dresdner Kammerchor, Dresdner Barockorchester, Hans-Christoph Rademann

65:52

Carus 83.272 © 1999, 2000

This is a clever re-packaging of two separate recordings in which the Heinichen masses were coupled with Handel's *Dixit Dominus* and Bach's *Magnificat*. I hope this means that Heinichen's music is now well-enough known that it no longer needs the presence of a "big name" to sell it! In fact, in no way does either of these works pale into insignificance even alongside such accepted masterpieces - Heinichen, after all, held the Dresden job that Bach so coveted, and there is much in his choral music that recalls Handel at his best. There are Italianate arias (the *Quoniam Tu solus* from Missa No. 11 is for tenor, two horns and strings, and the *Christe eleison* from Missa Nr. 12 for soprano, alto, oboes and upper strings would be worthy of a place in any opera of the period!), declamatory choruses, and plenty of catchy fugal choral writing. Indeed, this music is ideally suited to choirs, and with all the D major pomp of horns and trumpets (not to mention flutes, oboes and recorders!), these two masses would make excellent Christmas concert pieces.

Brian Clark

HANDEL: RINALDO

Antonio Giovannini *Rinaldo*, Gesche Geier *Armida*, Marie Friederike Schöder *Almirena*, Florian Götz *Argante*, Yosemite Adjei *Goffredo*, Owen Willetts *Eustazio*, Cornelius Uhle *Mago cristiano*, Compagnia Marionettistica Carlo Colla & Figli, Lautten Compagny Berlin, Wolfgang Katschner

DVD of the puppet action (137'+10')

Audio recording (2 CDs)

Arthaus Musik 102207

A charming and, as far as I am aware, unique recording of Handel's London debut opera with marionettes, and – better still – a real attempt at Baroque staging. As the excellent sleeve notes explain, marionette performances of opera have a long and distinguished history – and with a production as good as this, one can understand their attraction. Visually, it is a delight – the costumes are suitably sumptuous, and the sets absolutely terrific. Armida arrives, as advertised, in her dragon-drawn chariot, and Almirena gets abducted by a deliciously evil-looking spirit. I particularly liked the seascape at the beginning of Act 2, with the seductive sirens swimming to and fro, and the equally charming garden with Almirena and assorted Birds in Act 1. Scene changes are instantaneous, as they should be, so that Handel's dramatic key shifts – e. g., where Rinaldo surprises Armida in Act 2 – have their proper effect. Armida's transformations into Almirena, later in the same act, are beautifully realised – especially when she catches Argante out as he woos the wrong lady! The later scenes of Act 3, with the march-pasts of the rival Christian and Moorish armies, Rinaldo's bravura 'Or La Tromba' and the subsequent 'battaglia' are splendidly dramatic, and Handel's four trumpets and drums make their presence well felt.

Musically, it is a strong performance. Antonio Giovannini is a heroic Rinaldo – his Act 2 'Abbruccio, Avvampo' is especially thrillingly done, and 'Cara Sposa' in Act 1, after Almirena's abduction, is hauntingly lovely. Gesche Geier, as Armida, is fire-spittingly good in her opening 'Furie Terribili', and wrings the heart in her Act 2 'Ah, Crudel', with its plangent oboe and bassoon obbligati. Marie Friederike Schoder's virtuous Almirena is a fine contrast – her Act 2 'Lascia, ch'io pianga' is mesmerising. Florian Gotz as Argante blazes in in Act 1 with 'Sibillar gli angui d'Aletto', and is a fine foil for Armida in their Act 2 duet. Yosemite Adjei (Goffredo) and Owen Willetts (Eustazio) prove musically muscular Christians, and

Cornelius Uhle is a sonorous Mago. Schroder and Geier also double as the Sirens in Act 2 – I don't think I've ever heard their delicious 'Il vostro maggio' better done. Wolfgang Katschner's tempi feel exactly right, and the band follow his energetic conducting with absolute confidence.

There are a few caveats. Most musically serious is the frequent truncation of da capo arias – 'a' section, 'b' section, then merely the ritornello of the 'a' section. The orchestration is tinkered with from time to time, e. g., recorders are used in the guise of the overture, which rather spoils their surprise appearance in 'Augeletti' later on; there is also liberal addition of tambourine and castanets. The filming occasionally feels disjointed – there are frequent shot-shifts between the marionette onstage, the "real" singer backstage and the orchestra or conductor. A couple of times the stage business (eg during the Battle in Act 3) is filmed as if from the puppeteers bridge, which spoils the 'full frontal' Baroque effect.

Overall, however, this is a fine achievement, both musically and visually. It would be fascinating to see further operas done so – imagine 'Orlando' or 'Alcina' with similar staging!

Alastair Harper

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KUHNAU: COMPLETE ORGAN MUSIC

Stefano Molardi (Silbermann organs, Freiberg Cathedral (1714) & Marienkirche in Rötha (1722))

220:10 (3 CDs)

Brilliant Classics 95089

Johann Kuhnau was the revered predecessor of Bach at Leipzig, and Bach reissued his *Clavier-übung* there shortly before he began to publish his own collection. A remarkable polymath, Kuhnau studied and wrote on Hebrew and Greek as well as more modern texts, and is probably best known now for his motets like *Tristis est anima mea*, which Bach incorporated into one of his composite Passions, and the cantatas like *Gott, sei mir gnädig* for four part voices and five-part strings or *Uns ist ein Kind geboren* (formerly attributed to Bach as BWV 142).

But his keyboard works are many and diverse and among them the most distinctive are the six *Sonate Bibliche*, published in 1700 and achieving considerable commercial success. Kuhnau did not specify which type of keyboard might be suitable for which sonata, but here they are all played on the Gottfried Silbermann organ of the Dom in Freiberg which dates from 1714, where

Elias Lindner, Kuhnau's pupil, was the organist. Some of the smaller works included on these three discs together with the seven sonatas of the *Frische Clavier Früchte* are played on the single manual Silbermann organ of 1722 in the Marienkirche at Rötha. These sound more like a set of instrumental sonatas in the style of Corelli, while the larger Biblical Sonatas have a more mixed parentage that combines Buxtehude with a more naturalistic, Italianate, descriptive style.

The subjects of the Biblical Sonatas are all Old Testament in character, revealing Kuhnau's interest in Hebrew, and are I imagine what the composer might have improvised had the great Silbermann organ been set up in the cinema of the day. Lots of flashing D major arpeggios and trumpet calls are the prelude to martial music celebrating David's triumph over Goliath and the Philistines, or Gideon's surprise attack. This is frankly rather predictable extemporisation! Rather more interesting are the sombre scenes – Saul's rage and David's soothing harp-playing; or the Tomb of Jacob, where we hear some of the melodic lines for which Kuhnau was famous, Hezekiah's lament, which has some sustained development of a musical theme rather than a few conventional rhetorical flourishes, and some imaginative use being made of the strings, flutes and reeds for which the organ is renowned. Snatches of Lutheran chorales float over the Hebrew landscape like birds of prey, waiting for the kill. But overall, I found the playing, though worthy and accurate, rather uninspiring. Only Silbermann's *Vox Humana* and a breathtakingly slow-beating tremulant depicting 'The Burial of Israel, and the Sorrowful Lament of Those Present' made me sit up. This is vulgar programme music, and it needs more of an extrovert showman to bring off its rather conventional gestures.

Stefano Molardi has recorded a lot for Brilliant Classics, including the whole of Bach. Those who have no other keyboard music by Kuhnau and are keen to understand the surprisingly broad range of keyboard music being published as J. S. Bach was getting into his stride will be glad to have these CDs, played on this wonderful organ. Those whose interests are less specialised may want to sample them before committing to this substantial listen.

David Stancliffe

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MARCELLO: IL PIANTO E IL RISIO DELLE QUATTRO STAGIONE

Silvia Frigato *Primavera*, Elena Biscuola *Estate*, Raffaele Giordani *Autunno*, Mauro Borgioni *Inverno*, SATB,

Venice Monteverdi Academy, Ensemble Lorenzo da Ponte,
Roberto Zarpellon
122:30 (2 CDs)
fra bernardo FB 1503177

This allegorical oratorio for four soloists (representing the seasons), chorus and orchestra was written for the Jesuits in 1731, and was subsequently performed in Venice. In a tail of everyday allegorical nonsense, Winter returns from the mountains to discover that the Virgin Mary is dead; having expressed all the necessary grief, the four seasons then strive to claim to be the most important season of her life, until they finally resolve that none of them deserves such an accolade and they should instead rejoice in her ascent into Heaven. This is a modest (modern) performance in a large acoustic – the choir (4333) and orchestra (33111 with organ and harpsichord) fill the undisclosed venue. The music is actually very fine, especially some of the arias (the tenor Autumno has two that last over seven minutes and demand real virtuosity), and there is a rich variety of instrumental writing. I cannot help but think, though, that a HIP performance of it is long overdue - for one thing I found the regulation slow down before final cadences rather tiresome. The booklet only has an Italian libretto, so you will have to rely on the synopsis to keep up to date with what is going on.

Brian Clark

VIVALDI: IL FARNACE

Mary-Ellen Nesi *Farnace*, Sonia Prina *Tamiri*, Roberta Mameli *Gilade*, Delphine Galou *Berenice*, Loriana Castellano *Selinda*, Magnus Staveland *Aquilio*, Emanuele D'Aguzzo *Pompeo*, Orchestra of the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, Federico Maria Sardelli
151' (2 DVDs)
Dynamic 37670

Farnace was first performed at the Teatro S Angelo in Venice in February 1727 and frequently thereafter in other cities. The plot of the libretto by A M Luccini is a sequel to the story of the struggle of Mitridate, king of the Hellenic kingdom of Pontus, against Roman occupation. That struggle has now been taken up by Farnace, his elder son, who like his father has problems with an enemy within. Berenice, the mother of his wife Tamiri, is a Roman sympathiser seeking the destruction of Pontus and its rulers as revenge for her husband's earlier

death at the hands of Mitridate. It's a plot that allows not only for political and amorous intrigue, but also sly digs at Roman imperialism, always a popular topic with Venetian audiences.

The present DVDs were filmed at performances at the Teatro del Maggio Musicale in Florence in May 2013. They represent yet another depressing episode in the dismal failure of attempts to mount opera seria on the contemporary stage. The performance employs what is laughingly touted by Dynamic as a 'critical edition' by Bernardo Ticci. Googling 'Farnace Ticci' produces the rather more accurate description 'arr. B Ticci'. Suspicions are immediately aroused by the discovery that Ticci's edition is cast in two, not the standard three acts, a format never used by *drammi per musica* (*opera seria*). Comparison with the original 1727 libretto reveals that not only has there been a reduction from 27 to 23 numbers, but that after the first few numbers of act 1, what is performed bears no relationship to the libretto or indeed to that of the 1737 version recorded by Jordi Savall. Most damaging of all, Ticci contrives a spurious tragic conclusion by having Farnace sing 'Gelido in ogni vena', an aria from later versions of act 2 in which he laments the supposed death of his young son at the hands of Berenice. Since we have no evidence the child is dead (he certainly isn't in the original libretto), the whole farrago of nonsense strikes an utterly false note. I strongly suspect, too, that there has been considerable tampering with the orchestration, though have not been able to find a score on-line to check.

The production is little better, dark and dismal in the literal sense, with stark post-modernist tubular erections at various angles supplemented by various oddities such as what look like upright florescent tubes and, at one point, an array of illuminated doughnuts. An apron, on which a number of arias are sung, is built out from the stage around the orchestra. Most extraordinary of all is that almost all arias are sung at music stands in the fashion of a concert performance. Whether this is supposed to be some kind of observation that the arias in *opera seria* are a static form, I have no idea, but it looks absurd when done in a fully staged production. It does, however, have one advantage, which is that there is therefore mercifully no stage 'business' during arias. Costumes are largely dowdy but serviceable, with the Romans distinguished from the locals by their wearing of breastplates, though to comical effect by the proconsul Pompeo and legionary Aquilio, both of whom for some bizarre reason wear a dinner jacket over their breastplate.

It is sad (and not to his credit) to find one of the finest

of today's Vivaldi conductors involved with such fatuous stuff. Federico Maria Sardelli's direction has all the drive and intensity we have come to expect from him in the composer's music, although even he cannot disguise the patently obvious modern instruments of a large contingent of Maggio Musicale strings. The cast, including some outstanding Baroque singers as it does, deserves better than this miserable effort. I except the tenors who sing the roles of Aquilio and Pompeo; their contribution is best passed over in polite silence. Mary-Ellen Nesi is a strong, incisive Farnace, pursuing the mental cruelty to which he subjects his long-suffering wife with relentless ferocity, though the voice does sound as if it is being pushed at times. Sonia Prina is a splendid Tamiri, resolute in the face of the threat to her young son, deeply affecting when she believes she has lost him. Among the most telling moments are the confrontations with her mother Berenice, superbly sung and acted by the French mezzo Delphine Galou, the only one of the cast who suggests she understands gesture. Loriana Castellano's Selinda, the sister of Farnace, is capably sung, but while Roberta Mameli sings stylishly and winningly, her Gilade is marred by some undisciplined singing in the upper register.

Vivaldi may not be among the best Baroque opera composers – his output is today overrated in my view – but *Farnace* is one of his better operas. It certainly deserves much better than it gets here.

Brian Robins

UN CONCERT POUR MADAME DE SÉVIGNÉ

Marc Hantaï & Georges Barthel *flute*, Eduardo Egüez *theorbo*, Philippe Pierlot *bass viol*

70:10

Flora 2110

Music by Hotteterre, Lully, Marais, de Visée, etc.

We sometimes complain about rambling or pompous programme notes, but no such issue here. In an extraordinarily minimalist production we have no programme note booklet, indeed hardly any information about the music at all. The voluptuous lady of the title, a mistress of the Sun King, is pictured inside the cover, but again there is no information about her career as a dancer, court beauty and royal mistress. Even the printed sequence of music is confused in that while sections are devoted to Hotteterre and Marais the opening sequence is not credited to any composer at all, although it is presumably by Lully. This is a huge pity

as we are denied a full context for the lovely music on the CD, duets and trio sonatas for two flutes and continuo exquisitely played by four of the leading figures in French Baroque performance today. I thoroughly enjoyed their accounts of this engaging repertoire, but did feel a little bit at sea without any background information. When I went on to the listed website to see if they had a set of programme notes there, it proved to be in Japanese! Curiouser and curiouiser.

D. James Ross

EUSKAL ANTIQVA

Legacy of the land of Basque

Euskal Barrokensemble, Enrike Solinis

57:15

Alia Vox AV9910

In a brief introduction to this disc Jordi Savall announces that the Alia Vox label, hitherto devoted to projects associated with his own stable of groups, is to branch out into presenting work by similar groups. This CD presents music of the Basque region performed by the Euskal Barrokensemble and includes a bewildering and fascinating range of music given lively performances. Like many of Savall's own projects on Alia Vox this has its virtues and its vices. Among the virtues are the superbly detailed programme notes – a virtual novel attached to the CD once translations in English, French, German, Catalan, Castilian and of course Basque have been included - the excellent recorded sound, the generally classy presentation, and the fact that little of the music has ever been recorded before. Among the vices are the rather blurred lines around authenticity – some of the improvised numbers here have a distinctly modern blues flavour – resulting often from the traditions of oral transmission, and the desire to contribute to a rather imaginative presentation of the past. Unlike many of Savall's projects focused on one individual musical tradition, this CD has a much greater variety, which prevents a unified impression of 'Basque Music' from emerging, but perhaps suggesting that here is something more genuine, alive and eclectic. The performances are generally convincing (I found the lack of a listing in English of the instruments something of a frustration), although one or two of the readings are given an unfortunately high-tech voice-over immediacy. We look forward to Alia Vox Diversa's future exploration of the music of neglected cultures and regions.

D. James Ross

HARMONISCHE FREUDE: WORKS FOR BAROQUE OBOE, TRUMPET AND CHAMBER ORGAN

Austral Harmony (Jane Downer *oboes*, Simon Desbruslais *trumpets*, Peter Hagen *organ*)

64:28

CHANDOS CHACONNE CHAN0809

Music by J. S. Bach, Homilius, Kauffmann, Krebs and Tag

This is an interesting compendium of some German music by Krebs, Homilius, Tag, and Kauffmann, with a couple of JS Bach pieces thrown in for good measure. Although none of the less well-known works can be consigned to the category of 'best left to rot in the organ loft', some of the works did seem rather insignificant. The disc is based round the organ chorale prelude, most of which were performed with oboe and/or trumpet playing the chorale melody, as was occasionally the custom at the time, according to the useful booklet notes. One can't help feeling, however, that they may have been done in that way when the organist couldn't manage to play everything himself! The players use a variety of instruments – oboe and oboe d'amore, and trumpets of different types – natural, slide and even a modern instrument for one piece – which are detailed in the excellent booklet notes. An oboe sonata by Homilius, known mainly for his sacred cantatas and motets, and the Bach organ trio sonata no. 3 (played on oboe and organ) complete the disc.

Ian Graham-Jones

THE ORIENTAL MISCELLANY: AIRS OF HINDUSTAN

compiled and arranged by William Hamilton Bird

Jane Chapman *harpsichord*, Yu-Wei Hu *flute*

74:14

signum classics SIGCD415

+W. H. Bird: Sonata for harpsichord & flute

This is an intriguing recording, providing insight into Anglo-Indian cultural exchange in the late 18th century but also raising questions about cultural appropriation under colonial rule. The *Miscellany* was published in Calcutta in 1789 (and in Edinburgh in 1805) and dedicated to Warren Hastings, whose own attempts to work with Indian culture led to his impeachment. One of the contributors may have been the harpsichordist Margaret Fowke, long based in Calcutta and quoted as writing patronisingly in a letter: 'I

have often made the musicians tune their instruments to the harpsichord that I might join their little band. They always seemed delighted with the accompaniment of the harpsichord'. This recording uses Vallotti temperament, appropriate for the time; as a result the music doesn't really sound Indian; at times the melodies could almost be Irish or Scottish, harmonised as they are in the basic manner of the early Classical period. It is another example of the 18th-century's ability to absorb music from outside and make it fit for the British drawing room. That said, this is both a fascinating and agreeable collection of short tracks, played on the Horniman Museum's 1722 Kirckman harpsichord. There is also a Sonata composed by Bird, which weaves at least eight Hindu airs into standard galant structures, played with flair and panache by flautist Yu-Wei Hu. Jane Chapman uses the harpsichord's features – swell box, machine stop, lute stop – to full advantage. She improvises short preludes and postludes for a number of these tracks (including the first) which sound more Indian than the original pieces. The recording forms part of a Leverhulme-funded research project, which has compared the tunes with other sources and identified the original Hindu songs. There are very informative liner notes, including two helpful facsimile pages from the collection. It is a welcome project which raises lots of issues and provides answers to some of them.

Noel O'Regan

TIENTOS Y GLOSAS

Iberian Organ & Choral Music from the Golden Age

Martin Neu (organ of San Hipólito, Córdoba), ensemble officium, Wilfried Rombach

54:48

audite 97.713

Music by de Arauzo, Coelho & Zaraba

This CD of freely composed works and diminutions of originals is performed by Martin Neu on the 1735 Corchado organ of the San Hipólito Church in Córdoba. This instrument was recently dismantled and completely rebuilt, restoring its original tuning and temperament but preserving most of the original pipework, so it is able to produce some startlingly original timbres to enhance the music of 17th- and 18th-century Spanish composers Diego Xaraba, Manuel Rodrigues Coelho and Francisco Correa de Arauzo. Drafting in the ensemble officium to provide vocal alternatims allows Neu to present some of the music in a liturgical context, although the CD's

promise of *Organ and Choral Music from the Golden Age* is a little disingenuous as the singers only supply plainchant and two short sections of albeit beautiful polyphony. The highlight for me was Arauxo's Tiento on Morales' *Batalla*, a work which has been unfortunately lost. Neu makes fabulous use of the venerable instrument's trumpet stops to evoke the full excitement of the 17th-century battlefield.

D. James Ross

Classical

HAYDN KLAVIERTRIOS

Boyan Vodenitcharov *fortepiano*, François Fernandez *violin*, Rainer Zipplering *cello*

62:08

Flora 0805

Hob. XV:10, 18, 21 & 23

These delightful performances of four witty works by Haydn were recorded in 2005. The interplay between the three musicians (even though the cellist does little more than reinforce the bass line - and sustain it when necessary, of course) is excellent - listen to the unisono opening to Track 7, and then contrast it with the snippets of melody tossed back and forth between the violin and the right hand of the keyboard part. The recording is lively and captures all the excitement. Like other reviewers, I am slightly frustrated by Flora's minimal notes (here restricted to a lengthy quotation - only in German - from the composer himself) but, as I have written before, sometimes the music (and this line-up's contagious enjoyment of it) should simply speak for itself; if I need more information, I can always read a book!

Brian Clark

MOZART SONATEN

François Fernandez *violin*, Boyan Vodenitcharov *fortepiano*

62:39

Flora 0906

K303, 360, 378 & 454

This is a delightful disc, featuring three beautiful sonatas dating from between 1778 and 1784 and a set of Variations from 1781. The balance between the two instruments is skilfully handled, with the violin rightly slightly subservient to the keyboard, but not necessarily simply by playing quietly, rather by

using different colours for different sections of the music. Fernandez and Vodenitcharov are perfect partners in this repertoire, and I hope that the Flora archives will be found to have recordings of them playing Beethoven and even Mendelssohn, so that we can trace the history of the classical "violin sonata", now that we have these characterful renditions of Mozart's finest works. There is not quite the same sense of spontaneity in the watershed recordings by Rachel Podger and Gary Cooper, but there is definitely poise and pathos (try the *Largo* opening of KV454, for example), and a definite inclination to explore all of the colours of Mozart's darker side.

Brian Clark

Miscellaneous

PURCELL @ BEAUNE FESTIVAL

Now known rather tortuously as the Festival International d'Opera Baroque et Romantique, the Beaune Festival is also showing other signs of following new paths. Although the festival has frequently included large-scale works other than opera, this is the first year in which such pieces have out-numbered stage works. With the exception of Lully's *Armide*, given under Christophe Rousset during the first weekend (on 3 July), the only work with any pretence to be termed an opera was Purcell's *King Arthur*, given by the Gabrieli Consort and Players under Paul McCreesh (18 July).

While much the most enduring of Purcell's stage works after his death, *King Arthur* inevitably presents dramatic problems for modern audiences unlikely to respond to (or understand much of) Dryden's mix of overt patriotism, allegorical magic and irony. Given that *King Arthur* is anyway not an integrated work, how much of the text, if any, do you employ to link the musical passages? It does after all introduce most of the principal protagonists, who have non-singing parts. The usual answer - and the course taken here - is to concentrate solely on Purcell's richly variegated score, leaving the plot of the spoken dialogue to be described in programme notes.

McCreesh has something of a tradition of bringing Purcell's dramatic works to Beaune, most recently *The Fairy Queen* in 2012, when as I reported in these pages he controversially omitted The Plaint 'O let me weep'. Here he contrived a new conclusion to replace the familiar spurious ending, Purcell's original being lost. It worked well enough

while also creating an opportunity for McCreesh to rush amusingly around his nine-voiced choir handing out the new union jack-covered finale. This interaction between the performers was a feature of an evening during which McCreesh again demonstrated that his insight into Purcell is unrivalled today. While not all the singing was out of the top draw, this was essentially an ensemble success, another occasion on which the group of mostly young singers had been blended into an integrated team. Notwithstanding there were also some outstanding individual contributions, including a mellifluously stylish 'How blest are shepherds' from tenor Nicholas Mulroy and an affecting 'Fairest Isle' from soprano Anna Dennis, the exquisitely played accompaniment of which attained a level of distinction replicated throughout by the Gabrieli Players. Their use of 17th-century violin set-up and 'holeless' trumpets was just one more example of the thoroughness with which McCreesh approaches such projects.

Brian Robins

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