

Early Music Review

EDITIONS OF MUSIC

HANDEL: NEUN DEUTSCHE ARIEN... NINE GERMAN ARIAS FOR SOPRANO, SOLO INSTRUMENT AND BASSO CONTINUO... Edited by Ullrich Scheideler G. Henle Verlag (968). ix + 42pp + parts for solo instrument, basso and continuo €16.00

The 'German Arias' were intended to be published in vol. 49 of Chrysander's complete edition in the 1890s. Henle has now produced a cheap but thoroughly edited version. Normally Handel wrote quickly then got his amanuensis to make a clear version, which was then reproduced several times and sometimes he had it printed. In this case, it seems that Handel sent his only copy to Germany.

The Henle edition certainly looks better than the ones I have (or rather, used to have). It consists of a score and separate booklets for the solo instrument (not specified, though ad lib for violin, recorder or oboe) with smaller-stave for voice, basso (single stave), and continuo with the upper two staves in smaller print and sometimes pages spread out in three. The score has a realisation. The nine arias can be sung in sequence, though I'd favour more variety – alternative pieces could also be interspersed.

This is an excellent edition, and good value.

Clifford Bartlett

MOZART: PIANO CONCERTO IN C MINOR, K. 491 Piano reduction Edited by Ernst Hettrick Piano reduction, fingering, cadenzas and lead-ins by András Schiff G. Henle Verlag (HN 78787) vi + 61pp, €18.50.

Mozart was particularly under pressure in March 1786. One or the other of the two concertos (K 488 then K491 three weeks later on 24 March) was performed on 8 April. The autograph was not the most accurate: Londoners can see it in the Royal College

of Music. André published parts in 1800 in Offenbach and two years later Breitkopf produced a set in Leipzig. As usual, it seems pointless to add fingering, since anyone reaching the ability of playing it ought to know how his/her fingers work – and if you are sight-reading it for fun, fingering is a superfluous requirement. The score and parts are available from Breitkopf – not the 1802 version but the new edition (EB 10787).

Clifford Bartlett

EMANUEL ALOYS FÖRSTER: SIX STRING QUARTETS. OP. 7 Edited by Nancy November Recent Researches in Music of the Classical Era, 99 A-R Editions, Inc. xx+226pp \$240.00

These six four-movement works (in A, F, D, B flat, G and E flat major respectively) were dedicated to Friedrich Wilhelm, the cello-playing Prussian king who had inspired Mozart and Haydn to write music for him. Förster (eight years Mozart's senior) was a multi-talented musician, teaching keyboard and musical theory in 1780s Vienna, while playing violin and viola in chamber music ensembles (having been an oboist in the Prussian army earlier in his life!)

After a quick opening movement, the tempo lessens for the second, then a menuetto-trio pairing leads into a lively finale. In fact, these are essentially what by that date had become standard Viennese string quartets. For much of the time the 1st violin dominates, though the cello (as mentioned at the beginning of the review) does regularly take the limelight, and the middle parts – though largely harmonic in function, with some neat figuration – are occasionally also allowed to join in (or even lead) the conversation.

The scores are elegant and spacious without being dominated by white space. As there is no need to worry about page turns, some of the layout seems a little random to someone (i. e., me) who spends his life typesetting music (such as turning a page for a single system of a trio, which then requires a turn back of two pages), but since these

scores are for study and not conductors or players, such considerations (and observations) are perhaps irrelevant?

The Authentic Quartet have recorded Förster's three quartets, op. 21, for the Hungaroton label but I have not been able to locate a version of these six works – now that they have been neatly edited (and A-R Editions do sell performing materials for the set) someone can rectify that situation.

Brian Clark

VANHAL: DOUBLE BASS CONCERTO

Piano reduction

Edited by Tobias Glickler

Piano reduction in C and D major by Christoph Sobanski

Double bass parts for solo, orchestra [on two staves] and "Vienese tuning" with cadenzas, fingering and bowing by Tobias Glickler

Additional cadenzas by Johannes Sperger

G. Henle Verlag (HN 979)

viii + 39pp + separate bass parts in C and D.

The double-bass concerto was composed around 1786 & 1789. The complications are many and the player requires much thought, some of which is explicit in this edition.

The C version has few interferences, but the D version has more editorial additions. There is also another version in C (p. 14), with even more additions. The player, however, is offered the strings as A-d-f#-a – do they transpose from the C part?

The score is published by Breitkopf (PB 15143, €21.29, + parts separately).

Clifford Bartlett

TWO OPERAS FROM THE SERIES *DIE ZWEEEN ANTON*, PART 2: *DIE VERDECKTEN SACHEN* (VIENNA, 1789)

Edited by David J. Buch

Recent Researches in the Music of the Classical Era, 98
A-R Editions, Inc.

lxvi+336pp.

\$360.00

As the editor's enlightening essay informs us, *Die verdeckten Sachen* (which he translates as "The concealed things") was the second in a very successful series of operas by Emanuel Schikaneder. The

huge volume contains a wealth of information as well as a full libretto of the piece (spoken dialogue *and* concerted music, with parallel English translation), six pages of critical notes and an appendix with three piano scores of arias that only survive in a piano-vocal score of the piece in the Florence Conservatorio library.

There is no certainty about the identity of the composer of the music; most likely, according to Buch, it was a collaboration between some of the singers in the original cast. That consisted of three sopranos, five tenors and three basses. The orchestra has pairs of flutes, clarinets, bassoons, horns and trumpets as well as strings (including a solo violin that heads for the stratosphere in at least one of the arias) and timpani.

The music is tuneful (the singing voices doubled for much of the time by instrumental lines) and, I imagine, effective in telling the story. I should like to see a production some time – the work's original success (it was in the repertoire for two decades, and was even translated into Czech!) suggests that it is a good evening's entertainment.

This is the latest in a sequence of editions of this sort of repertoire from A-R Editions and David J. Buch – fabulous work without which it would be impossible to put Mozart's music into context. Congratulations to all concerned.

Brian Clark

BEETHOVEN: PARTHIA, OPUS 103, RONDO
WOO 25... FOR WIND OCTET

Edited by Egon Voss

G. Henle Verlag (1254) 8 parts, €30.00

Study score (7254) viii + 67pp, €12.00.

Beethoven moved from Bonn to Vienna in November 1792 and the Parthia dates from around that time. Haydn wrote about it. It wasn't published until 1830. The work is in E flat but the two horns are in C or F, and the two clarinets in F; there are also two oboes and two bassoons. The editor ignores the 1830 edition, since the autograph is the only acceptable source. The movements are Allegro, Andante, Allegro, Minuetto. The Rondo started life as the Parthia's finale but it soon became an independent item – I wonder why?

Clifford Bartlett

GERMAN SETTINGS OF OSSIANIC TEXTS, 1770–1815

Edited by Sarah Clemmens Waltz

Recent Researches in the Music of the Classical Era, 100

A-R Editions, Inc.

liv+156pp.

\$260.00

There are thirteen songs in this volume; one by Christian Gottlieb Neefe, two by Karl Siegmund Freiherr von Seckendorff, three each by Johann Rudolf Zumsteeg and Johann Friedrich Reichardt, and one each by Friedrich Ludwig Aemilius Kunzen, Friedrich Götzloff, Friedrich Heinrich Himmel and Carl Friedrich Zelter. There is no cause for alarm if these names mean next to nothing to you; Sarah Clemmens Waltz has done a fabulous job, not only in explaining the phenomenon that was Ossianism and its popularity in Germany, but she discusses each of the composers and their contributions in considerable detail. In short, this volume has everything you could possibly need for an Ossian-themed recital – she even gives the range of the piano parts of each!

The texts inspired a rich variety of response from the composers; von Seckendorff's setting of "Dauras Trauer" is a simple strophic song with a coda that consists of a reprise of the opening eight bars, while Zumsteeg's "Ossians Sonnengesang" has an additional violin part and moves from the opening B flat major through E major (with some challenging looking double stops for the fiddler in bars 61–63!) and F minor before somehow managing to get back to the tonic 270 bars of arietta, recitative and a slow, surprisingly quiet conclusion. The following number, Zumsteeg's "Ossian auf Slimora" is even more extensive - 515 bars, again ending slowly and quietly. Himmel's "Ossian an die untergehende Sonne" also has an independent violin part and is given here with separate voice lines for the German and English version of the text.

Unlike the two other A-R Editions I have reviewed this month, this volume does have to take into consideration that fact that at least some users will want to perform these songs. Thus it strikes me as odd that, for example, the music for song 8 (Reichardt's "Armins Klage um seine Kinder") is not placed on facing pages to avoid page turns. The fact that a third page is used for a further five verses of text makes such a layout even more impractical; surely two verses could have been printed below the notes and the remainder in the space below the final system. Götzloff's "Ossians Klage um Uthal und Ninathona" (the only song in the volume for a bass) is also better suited to a facing

pages layout.

The edition itself is impressive, though I wonder if using "[sim.]" might obviate the need for bar after bar of bracketed editorial accents which, no matter how hard the most professional typesetter in the world might work, also strike my eye as rather ugly.

I don't want to end this review on a negative, though – Clemmens Waltz has done an excellent job in putting together an impressive volume that I sincerely hope will be used as the basis for recitals and recordings!

Brian Clark

RECORDINGS

15th century

FIRMINUS CARON – TWILIGHT OF THE MIDDLE AGES

Huelgas Ensemble, Paul Van Nevel

54:39

deutsche harmonia mundi 88875143472

Movements from five masses + four secular chansons

Of the 15th-century Franco-Flemish composer Firminius Caron practically nothing is known. He may have been a pupil of Dufay and his masses and chansons were widely admired by, among others, Tinctoris and copied throughout Europe during his lifetime. In modern times his work has fared less well, appearing as fillers on several CDs, but not receiving anything like the attention it deserves, so this complete if rather short CD devoted entirely to his sacred and secular music is truly welcome. Rather than record one of his complete settings of the mass, Van Nevel selects consecutive movements from five different settings, giving us a valuable cross-section of the composer's contribution to the genre. The music is indeed distinctive and accomplished with more than a passing similarity to the music of his more famous near-contemporary Josquin – as we have no record of Caron's death he may have continued composing into the 16th century, and much of his sacred polyphony and indeed his chansons sound as if they come from after the turn of the new century. In this respect the title of the CD is slightly misleading in that Caron's idiom looks forward to the Renaissance rather than back to the Middle Ages. The Huelgas Ensemble, highly experienced in the choral music of this period, give musically powerful

and sensitive accounts of Caron's sacred music under the insightful direction of Paul Van Nevel. The second half of the CD is devoted to Caron's secular music, with his famous chanson *Accueillly m'a la belle* providing a nice link, following his own *Agnus Dei* based upon it. The chansons are suitably performed by solo voices, with the exception of the raunchy *Corps contre corps*, and are given beautifully delicate performances – not every vocal ensemble is as versatile as to be able to sing this sort of sacred and secular music equally effectively. The singing on this CD is comprehensively enjoyable, and the performers make a very good case for Caron's re-instatement alongside his contemporaries Busnois, Ockeghem and Josquin.

D. James Ross

Renaissance

THOMAS TALLIS: LAMENTATIONS AND OTHER SACRED MUSIC

The Cardinal's Musick, Andrew Carwood

73:09

Hyperion CDA68121

The Cardinal's Musick's superb Tallis Edition for Hyperion has reached the Lamentations, and this CD opens with a magisterial account of this beguiling music for male voices as intended. My initial surprise at the very measured tempo Carwood chooses was short-lived as the singers found a magnificently measured line through Tallis's score, investing the text with a moving power and drama. I was reminded of my surprise discovery as a child that the finest melismas were reserved for the initial Hebrew letters, the musical equivalent of colourful illuminated initials, and the singers give these too their full expression. The strategy of the projected complete recording is very much to 'mix things up', so we have settings of Latin and English texts from throughout the composer's long career cheek by jowl, which has the advantage of showing the full range of Tallis's compositional styles, although it necessarily involves a bewildering mix of religious contexts. Alongside magnificent readings of early votive antiphons from the reign of Henry VIII, we have simpler Elizabethan Anglican music, including two of the Psalm tunes for Archbishop Parker's Psalter, given terrifically muscular performances. I found myself longing for the further muscularity of Tudor pronunciation – once heard 'authentically' pronounced, I have consistently found

received pronunciation inadequate. These are generally powerful readings of this mainly familiar material, with mercifully only occasional moments of soprano vibrato, which I detected sneaking into previous performances by the Cardinal's Musick, and sustained passages of magnificently sonorous singing.

D. James Ross

17th century

BUXTEHUDE AND HIS CIRCLE

Theatre of Voices, Paul Hiller

75:27

Da Capo 6.220634

This recording owes at least something to a concert I heard in Copenhagen when I was there for the annual Renaissance Festival as the organiser's guest, since I had suggested that they celebrate the 300th anniversary of the death of Christian Geist, who had lived, worked and died in that city. The programme is not quite the same, but there are still two works by Geist on offer: His setting of *Dixit Dominus* (by using the *Erbe Deutscher Musik* edition, they missed out a whole passage of tenor part that had slipped the editor's notice!) and his "affective" *Die mit Tränen säen*. Buxtehude similarly is represented by two works: His *Gott, hilf mir* and *Jesu, meine Freude* are both rightfully well known and their influence on the young J. S. Bach is undeniable! His father-in-law Tunder's *Dominus illuminatio mea* is an impressive piece, indeed, while Bruhns' bass *tour de force*, a virtuoso setting of *De profundis clamavi*, is no less so, and Kaspar Förster (the younger)'s *Confitebor tibi Domini* brings a wonderful survey of music with which Buxtehude was most likely familiar to a rousing close. Throughout the singing and playing are of the highest order, and the solo bass also contributes a fine booklet essay, tying all the composers together in a readable narrative. The sung texts are translated into English only, which I don't suppose will pose much of a problem from the majority of Danes – I wonder how successful it would be the other way around!

Brian Clark

CORELLI BOLOGNESE - TRIO SONATAS BY
CORELLI AND HIS SUCCESSORS

Musica Antiqua Latina
52:11

deutsche harmonia mundi 88875174822

Music by G. B. Bassani, G. M. Bononcini, Cazzati, Corelli, D. Gabrielli, Torelli, Vitali
& anonymous

Corelli tends to be filed under “Roman” composers; this CD sets out to balance that assumption by contrasting three of his trios (including the Ciaccona that ends his op. 2 set) with music of contemporaries. While I enjoyed a lot of what Musica Antiqua Latina do here, several things irked me, too; the strumming guitar for one, the disconnect with the booklet note for another (lots about Corelli in Bologna, almost nothing about the music we hear), the programme’s sub-title (how can people who lived before or at the same time as Corelli be described as his successors?), the portrait of Sammartini purporting to be Bassani (OK, they have the same Christian names, but that wig is way too modern!), and – to crown it all, at least for me – a Balletto by Vitali in which the three voices play in different meters, except because of the “arty arrangement” (ironic use of language) we never hear it as it was printed in the composer’s op. 13 (*Artificii musicali*) so we don’t really get the point... This sort of thing might work very successfully in live performance, so I could perhaps understand its inclusion if this were a DVD release; here it is plain daft. Like a rush of Red Priest to the head. When a group plays so beautifully together (as they do on the majority of this disc), why resort to gimmickery of any sort?

Brian Clark

PURCELL: THEATRE MUSIC · 2 – THE MARRIED
BEAU, THE OLD BACHELOR, SIR ANTHONY

LOVE, THE SPANISH FRIAR, AURENG-ZEBE

Johane Ansell *soprano*, Jason Nedecky *baritone*, Aradia Ensemble, Kevin Mallon

63:01

Naxos 8.573280

Three years after it was recorded and eight years after the release of Volume 1 comes another Purcell anthology from Naxos. At this rate a complete survey will take almost fifty years! Much as Hogwood’s pioneering exploration of this music reflected both his and the time’s preference for near non-interpretation, this recording is rather more gutsy in its approach as is the trend

now, and this will appeal to many. But I’m not sure that other aspects of the performance practice have quite the same allure, for me at least. The size of the string band at 3311 (no 16’, mercifully) is within the range of possibilities for theatre bands at the time but I’m less convinced by the churchy bloom to the sound. And I’m not remotely convinced by the frequent addition of assorted percussion bangs and tinkles and the assigning of various passages to solo woodwind (especially 4’ pitch recorder). Perhaps there is something to be said for ‘non-interpretation’ after all. I did, however, enjoy Johane Ansell’s (and no, she’s not a relative of mine with an alternative spelling) soprano contributions though again the addition of a cello to the keyboard accompaniment felt not quite right in HIP terms. So very much a curate’s egg, though more Purcell is never a bad idea. The essay (Eng/Ger) does well to cover the music’s context in less than two pages and the texts of the songs are also included in the booklet, but not translated.

David Hansell

LOVE

Simone Kermes, La Magnifica Comunità, Enrico Casazza
65:25

Sony Classical 888751113824

Music by Boësset, de Briçeno, Cesti, Dowland, J. Eccles, Lambert, Legrenzi, Manelli, Merula, Monteverdi, Purcell & B. Strozzi

This bears a resemblance to Magdalena Kožená’s ‘Lettere Amoroſe’, which I reviewed in these pages several months back. Both feature artist-driven choices of 17th-century songs and operatic excerpts, one common to both CDs, given with instrumental arrangements that are often none to fussy about appropriate style. Both are personality productions featuring a glamour cover, Simone Kermes’ showing her lying arranged in an alluring pose wearing a long white satin (I think) dress.

If I express a marginal preference for the Kermes there are two reasons. Firstly, it seems rather more structured as a programme, creating the impression that it was intended to build to a climax on the final item, an unfussy if not entirely idiomatic version of ‘Dido’s Lament’. It is a feeling enhanced by an interesting reminder of just how many of love’s complaints were voiced over an ostinato bass in the 17th century. More importantly, there is Kermes’ never less than whole-hearted commitment and that richly lustrous soprano, here at its best when keeping things simple, as in the intimacy of Antoine Boësset’s heartbroken ‘Frescos ayres del prado’ or Merula’s ‘Chi vuol ch’io m’innamori’, where Kermes floats her voice to magical effect.

The downside is accompanying arrangements that range from the innocent to the horrible. One or two tracks sound as if a particularly manic Leonardo García Alarcón has been let loose on them and if you've ever felt a desire to hear Dowland's 'If love's a sweet passion' with a counter melody played on the cornett, well, this is your chance. There is also the air of pretension that hangs over the whole project, best exemplified by the superfluous additional verses quoted in the singer's introductions, many of them by Shakespeare or John Donne. Like Kožená's CD, this is one for fans of the singer rather than the general EMR reader.

Brian Robins

Baroque

BACH: BRANDENBURG CONCERTOS

Capella Savaria, Zsolt Kalló

88:01

Hungaroton HCD32706-07

Much as I enjoyed the version of the Brandeburgs I reviewed last month, I must confess that this new set from Capella Savaria has outshone it.

Just out of interest, I started with the third concerto and, just as I had expected from this group, the "slow movement" grows organically out of the final cadence of the preceding one, courtesy of an improvisation from leader, Zsolt Kalló. No harpsichord imposters here!

Elsewhere things are much as one would expect, which is not to say that there are not occasional moments that caused a raised eyebrow or two; the raucous horns in the Menuetto of Concerto 1, the slower (and gradually settled into...) tempo of the following trio and the fluid tempo changes of the ensuing Polonaise all fall into that category. Yet they eyebrows quickly gave way to smiles as one realised just how comfortable they must all be with one another to accommodate such seemingly idiosyncratic ideas without allowing them to disrupt the flow or feel somehow imposed on Bach's music.

I repeatedly write in these pages that one should always have something fresh to say if one plans to re-record something that is already available in dozens of other versions; Capella Savaria will not shock, but they will make you feel like you are hearing these pieces for the first time, which is no mean feat.

Brian Clark

BACH: HARPSICHORD CONCERTOS VOL. 3

Trevor Pinnock, Marieke Spaans, Marcus Mohlin *harpsichords*, Katy Bircher *flute*, Manfredo Kraemer *violin*, Concerto Copenhagen, Lars Ulrik Mortensen *harpsichord/director*

106:20 (2 CDs in a single jewel case)

cpo 777 681-2

BWV 1044, 1060-65

This 2-CD set completes the recordings by Concerto Copenhagen and Lars Ulrik Mortensen of the Bach Concerti, where Mortensen is partnered by Trevor Pinnock in the two harpsichord concerti, and by others in the three and four harpsichord ones. The triple concerto for flute, violin and harpsichord makes up the set.

No-one who has heard the other volumes or the recently released violin concerti by Concerto Copenhagen will want to miss these. This group plays stylishly, rhythmically and with a sense of delight in the intricate filigree music that these multiple instrument recordings offer. This suits the impish *joie de vivre* that Trevor Pinnock, having relinquished his long and creative association with the English Concert, brings to his music-making these days, and he makes a splendid partner to Mortensen. It was a young Mortensen whom Pinnock got to join them in the English Concert's 1981 recording of the three and four harpsichord concerti, so here, thirty years on, we have a return match.

The booklet, though slender, is full of useful information – just who is playing in which concerti, and which are done one-to-a-part – the C minor version of the double violin concerto BWV 1062 being one; who made the harpsichords, and what instruments they are based on – those played by Pinnock and Mortensen are copies by John Phillips of a 1722 Dresden Johann Heinrich Gräbner, together with the pitch and 'an unequal temperament'. It sets out the complexities of dating the concerti, and recognises the critical questions around the different scorings – or supposed scorings in the case of the putative oboe d'amore concerto – of which versions are provided in the NBA volumes that contain the versions for harpsichord. It used to be thought that all these concerti dated from Bach's time at Köthen between 1717 and 1723. More recent analysis and dating of sets of surviving MSS parts make it seem more likely that, as with the parodied birthday cantatas of the Köthen period, much of the instrumental music was reused later, probably when Bach became leader of the Leipzig Collegium Musicum in the 1730s. Were the instrumental parts that accompany the C major BWV

1061 – and a version exists without any strings at all – added by Bach or someone else, for example?

Whatever the complexities, these performances – recorded in 2011 and 2013 in the bell-like acoustics of the Garrison church in Copenhagen – are excellent, to my mind the only other group offering performances of a comparable standard at the moment being John Butt’s Dunedin Consort.

It is good to have the triple concerto, an expanded version of the Prelude and Fugue in A minor for harpsichord BWV 892, as part of the set. The playing here is of the same exemplary standard – crisp rhythms, crystal-clear strings and sensitive balance. Katy Bircher and Manfred Kraemer are faultless, and provide a matching tone to this work, which has so many echoes of Brandenburg 5, with their fluent passagework and only occasional predominance of the violin, which makes me think that the engineers haven’t messed about with the balance too much. The slow movement in particular with just the three solo instruments illustrates a wonderful relaxed and generous rhythmic interplay. This is chamber music at its very best.

David Stancliffe

BACH: TESTAMENT – COMPLETE SONATAS
AND PARTITAS FOR SOLO VIOLIN

Rachel Barton-Pine
125:33 (2 CDs in a jewel case)
Avie SV2360

In her accompanying essay, Barton-Pine relates how she has played Bach all her life and it shows! She is a technical giant of the instrument – and she’s not afraid to ornament music that terrifies many a lesser mortal... If there is an area in which I feel she particularly excels, it is in the monumental fugues from the three sonatas; no matter how long they go on, or how complex the texture becomes (or, conversely, how sparse!) she always finds a way to keep the music interesting, without ever sounding contrived. I was genuinely moved by her reading of the Largo after the C major fugue, in which every note was caressed with a warmth that I don’t think I had heard anywhere before. At times it did feature her “signature special effect”, a barely audible yet arresting pianissimo. The moto perpetuo-style *Allegro assai* that follows flew off like a whirling dervish... a breathtaking demonstration of faultless – not to say truly awesome – technique both in the left hand and in the right arm. Although the recording was made in a huge space, and there is reverb, the sound is remarkably

focussed, which makes the lack of any ambient noise all the more remarkable. The lack of any audible effort is also astonishing – I am surely not the only fiddler who will be humbled by these wonderful recordings.

Brian Clark

HANDEL AT VAUXHALL VOL. I

London Early Opera, Bridget Cunningham
48:18
Signum Classics SIGCD428

An enjoyable and well-thought-out idea for a disc, though despite the sleeve’s capital letters, the most interesting (i. e. unusual) music is by Thomas Arne and John Hebden – a charming and quintessentially English pastoral duet by the former, and an equally charming and tuneful string concerto by the latter, (with a foot-tapping triple-time conclusion.) It is also good to hear two of Handel’s rarely-performed English songs, *The Advice* and *The Melancholy Nymph*, especially when as well and gracefully performed as here, by Sophie Bevan and Charles MacDougall, respectively.

The lion’s share of the recital is devoted to Handel – the merry *sinfonia* from *Acis and Galatea* is an appropriately pastoral opening to our evening under the trees, with a cleverly improvised organ link from its interrupted cadence to the Organ Concerto op. 4 no. 2, deliciously played by Daniel Moulton and springily accompanied by London Early Opera’s fine band, under the expert baton of Bridget Cunningham. Kirsty Hopkins is a suitably lovelorn Galatea, next, with a bird-call supplying warbling gilt to Handel’s orchestral lily. Following the Arne pastoral mentioned above, is the solemn and sublime *Dead March from Saul* (which is definitely known to have been performed regularly at the Gardens), then, after the two Handel continuo songs, the Hebden concerto. Our evening’s recital is (somewhat meagrely, at 48:18) concluded by the lovely ‘As steals the morn’ duet from *L’Allegro*, engagingly sung by Eleanor Dennis and Greg Tassel, who shone previously in the Arne *Pastoral*.

In some ways the real highlight of this issue is David Coke’s extended and scholarly history of the Gardens themselves, putting the music into its remarkable social context, worlds away from Handel’s usual opera house and church surroundings. I look forward to hearing more from this interesting project.

Alastair Harper

This is the first of two CDs, with the second to follow fairly soon. The repertoire comes mostly from Handel, plus one Arne piece (*Colin and Phoebe* for STB) which sounds a bit hefty for a pastoral and the first of John Hebden's only set of string concertos, which is well worth hearing.

The booklet (36 pages full of information, all in English) gives a thorough account of the musical aspect of Vauxhall. It began as The New Spring Gardens around 1660; the addition of music appeared through Jonathan Tyers, who took over the Gardens around 1730 and was very involved in the music until his death in 1767. The music organisation was primarily through Handel and Arne: perhaps a third volume could be Arne at Vauxhall. On the whole, the music is easy-going, but Handel knew well how to balance it. One item seemed odd – 'The Dead March' from *Saul*. The oratorio was first performed on 16 January 1739 and appeared in the Vauxhall Gardens four months later, and was regularly played. I wonder when it was first performed at a funeral. The list of players does not specify large kettle drums, but I was surprised by the variety of sounds, which seem odd to me. I was disappointed by "As steals the morn": parts I & II have *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* in alternation, but part 3 is entirely *Il Moderato* – a bit of a cheek from Jennens, whose literary skill is way below Milton, but there is some mitigation in elements of Act V of *The Tempest*. In most respects, this is an excellent programme – short, but I prefer that to running on for too long! The singers and players are fine, though I'd favour the violins as either one or three for the first and second groups. As a whole, the items are suitably varied, and the music is mixed between the familiar and the less so.

Clifford Bartlett

LOTTI: CRUCIFIXUS

The Syred Consort, Orchestra of St Paul's, Ben Palmer
79:28

Delphian DCD34182

Credo in g, Dixit Dominus in g, Miserere in c, Missa Sancti Christophori

Lotti is best known for the three Crucifixes a6, 8 & 10 (though there are more), extracted from Masses in the 19th century. He was born in 1667 and studied with Legrenzi from 1683. He joined the musical fraternity of St Cecilia at the basilica of St Mark and worked from 17 till his death in 1740. There is one tiny slip in the second column: "Claudio Monteverdi, Lotti's predecessor..." could appear to have placed Lotti immediately after Monteverdi, who died in 1643! Lotti began his work at San Marco as

an alto in 1689, then 2nd organist (1692), first organist (1704) and *maestro di cappella* from 1736. He also wrote operas (1692-1719), seven oratorios, only two of which survived, and a large number of secular cantatas.

The title is somewhat confusing: but it should just be ignored. The disc includes four substantial liturgical works, as listed above. The booklet is extremely informative. The performances are vigorous and bold for much of the time, with some slower sections that contrast well. This disc is a revelation, in terms of the composer and also of the ability of the performers – full marks!

Clifford Bartlett

ARIAS FOR DOMENICO ANNIBALI - THE DRESDEN STAR CASTRATO

Flavio Ferri-Benedetti, Il Basilico
65:17

Pan Classics PC10341

Music by Feo, Handel, Hasse, Latilla, Porpora, Ristori & Zelenka

Domenico Annibali was one of the leading castrati at the Dresden court in the mid 18th century, creating many 'primo uomo' roles for Hasse, the distinguished Kapellmeister, and performing also in works by Zelenka, Ristori and Porpora, amongst others. Additionally, he obtained leave of absence for a season in 1736/7 to come to London to sing for Handel at Covent Garden. He was clearly a formidably accomplished performer; the arias recorded here cover a wide dramatic range, from poised and affective *bel canto* to dazzling coloratura drama.

Flavio Ferri-Benedetti gives us a good taste of Annibali's great artistry. He is at his mellifluous best in the slower pieces – try the opening Ristori 'Belleze Adorate', or Handel's stately 'Vado ad Morire' (track 4) with its continuo-accompanied opening, the band being held back until the music moves to the dominant, creating a remarkable sense of spaciousness. He is joined in further Handel (from *Berenice*) by Carla Nahadi Babelegoto's graceful soprano. In the faster and especially the more dramatically urgent pieces, he displays remarkable agility, though his tone becomes a little harder; from time to time his breathing between phrases has also been rather closely miked for comfort. For me, the most enjoyable track was the last one, from G. A. Ristori's *Componiment per musica*, with its extended *accompagnato* (note the lovely pastoral drones) and firecracker of an aria.

Throughout, Il Basilico play like angels – there is a

jaw-dropping display of solo horn (Olivier Picon) and solo theorbo (Ori Hannelin) in Hasse's 'Cervo al Bosco' from *Cleofide*, and the strings produce tremendous dash and attack under Eva Saladin's excellent leadership.

Silvano Monti's sleeve notes are a worthy complement to this fine disc.

Alastair Harper

BAROQUE ORGAN CONCERTOS

Kei Koito (1702 Arp Schnitger organ, Der Aa-kerk, Groningen)

72:54

deutsche harmonia mundi 888751636224

Music by Albinoni, Handel, Telemann, Torelli & Vivaldi

This programme consists of concertos by Vivaldi, Albinoni, Torelli, Telemann and Handel arranged for organ by Walther, Bach and John Walsh, complemented by more modern arrangements of Handel and Vivaldi designed to show off the organ sounds that are not otherwise used. You do have to study the booklet (Ger/Eng/Fre) quite closely to all find this out but the information's there somewhere. And the organ (Schnitger or older at its core) is the star. A rich plenum, wonderful reeds and colourful solo combinations all get a thorough airing. As a player I've always found it quite hard to relate to even Bach's transcriptions – they never feel really idiomatic – and after listening to this I'm still not convinced, but Kei Koto certainly sets about her task with every conviction. Some of the articulation sounds a bit forced and the registration in the Handel/Walsh F major concerto (the one that's also a recorder sonata) doesn't quite work for me; but if you want to hear a fine instrument being put through its paces this is for you.

David Hansell

CONVERSED MONOLOGUE – CONCERTI BY J. G.

GRAUN, J.-M. LECLAIR & W. F. BACH

Fantasticus XL

70:08

resonus RES10166

Regular readers will know that I am a fully paid-up member of the Fantasticus fan club, so it will come as no surprise that in their latest venture – which sees the three regular members (Rie Kimura on violin, gambist Robert Smith and harpsichordist Guillermo Brachetta) take centre stage as soloist in a concerto, accompanied

by a slightly enlarged group (two more violins along with viola, cello, bass and theorbo, as required for a one-per-part ensemble in each piece).

As with all their previous discs, the playing is accomplished and virtuosic, but without letting the difficulty ever take centre stage – demanding the three works may be, but each of the three stars still manage to produce ravishing sounds from their instruments.

Robert Smith is outstanding in Johann Gottlieb Graun's Concerto in C; his gamba music seems to be drawing ever-wider attention from virtuosos on the instrument, and this captivating performance will surely only enhance both composer and performer's reputations. Rie Kimura opts for one of the less well-known concertos by Jean-Marie Leclair (op. 10/6 in G minor) and, having previously demonstrated what a natural she is in German and Italian repertoire, she now shows that she is equally at home in the world of the French baroque. Wilhelm Friedemann Bach is surely the least heard of the junior Bachs and Guillermo Brachetta's rendition of his Concerto in F (BR C13/Falck44) makes me wonder why; here is everything one expects from C. P. E. Bach and more besides...

This is yet another rewarding and entertaining release from Resonus; I hope there are many more to come!

Brian Clark

DRESDEN TREASURES – ANONYMOUS: SIX CONCERTOS

Les Amis de Philippe, Ludger Rémy

59:38

cpo 777 780-2

As the exploration of the contents of the so-called Schranck II collection at the Sächsische Landesbibliothek – Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Dresden continues, the focus shifts to the wealth of anonymous material there. A convolute labelled Mus. 2-Q-21 contains a trio sonata attributed to Telemann and a "set" of seven quartets for flute, violin, bass and continuo. Their uniformity suggests that they were all written by the same composer, and some have suggested that the only likely candidate to have produced such a set is Telemann. In his booklet note, Rémy insists that the identity of the composer is not as important as its quality, but there is no explanation why the fourth of the set is not included; since Radio Bremen is credited as a production partner, perhaps the programme was tailored to fit a particular slot in their broadcasting schedule, but

surely time could have been found to record the missing work. I have similar reservations about the choice to record the seventh piece in an arrangement (albeit “after Dresden models”) by Rémy for two harpsichords (in which he is partnered by Ketil Haugsand); I would far rather have a separate disc of such duets from the same collection. The cello is only sometimes independent of the bass (I’m not sure quite why two are played on viola da spalla and three on violoncello, and I’m not entirely convinced that a violone is required in addition to the other two...) Whether it is by Telemann or not, the music is enjoyable and I hope someone will produce editions of it so others can explore it.

Brian Clark

Classical

C. P. E. BACH VOL. 2

Ophélie Gaillard, Pulcinella Orchestra

82:00

Aparté AP118

Sinfonias in C (Wq. 182/3, H. 659) and e (Wq. 178, H. 653), Concertos in B flat (cello, Wq. 171, H. 436) and d (harpsichord, Wq. 17, H. 420), and Piccolo cello sonata in D (Wq. 137, H. 559)

“First you must feel the emotion that you will then arouse in the listener” is printed under the composer’s name on the reverse of the packaging for this excellent CD. It quotes the composer himself, and is Ophélie Gaillard’s starting point for performing his music, which I must confess she – and her colleagues – does very, very well. She is the star turn in the B flat major concerto and a D major sonata, in which she is partnered on harpsichord by the soloist in the other concerto on the disc, Francesco Corti. He also plays fortepiano continuo in the sinfonias, and I wish he had been allowed to emerge from the texture even more than he does. Nonetheless these are possibly the best performances I have heard of both of those works.

Gaillard and co. clearly get C. P. E. Bach – the fiery lines of the last movement of the C major sinfonia are electrifying. All the more so because the recorded sound is immediate without being narrow; there is plenty of space for the sound to expand into, and when the whole ensemble plays in octaves (as they do quite often!), the effect is simply wonderful.

The cello concerto is something of a masterclass in how to play this repertoire; Gaillard is majestic, Corti and the continuo cellist dialogue beautifully with her in extended solo passages, the upper strings provide equally sympathetic accompaniment when the composer opts for a

change of texture, and the tutti passages are dramatic and neatly delivered. More, please!

Brian Clark

HOMILIUS: DER MESSIAS

Maike Leluschka, Friederike Beykirch, Annekathrin Laabs, Patrick Grahl, Tobias Berndt, Sebastian Wartig SSmSTBB, Sächsisches Vokalensemble, Batzdorfer Hofkapelle, Matthias Jung

96:13 (2 CDs in a single jewel case)

cpo 777 947-2

This is a first rate performance of one of Homilius’ Passion Oratorios, as the genre of free text works designed for performance in Passiontide came to be called, and received what was probably its first performance in the Frauenkirche in Dresden on Good Friday 1776. So popular was Homilius as a composer in the latter part of the eighteenth and the early part of the nineteenth centuries that copies of his works have survived in a wide variety of places, but this one is found exclusively in Schwerin in Mecklenberg, north-east of Berlin, where the pietist Duke Friedrich maintained a musical ensemble; the same library also has materials for the earliest German performance of Handel’s Messiah there in 1780.

The two works could not be more different. While Jennens’ libretto for Handel was compiled as an exclusively Biblical *catena* of texts, the Homilius libretto is an imaginative reflection, introducing for example a meditation on Christ’s Transfiguration, inserted into the farewell discourses between the Last Supper and the garden of Gethsemene. Nor are the similarities between Homilius and a Bach Passion any greater, textually or musically.

Most obvious is the entirely different style of harmonizing the chorales. While, for all their chromaticisms and passing notes, Bach’s chorale settings relate harmonically to their sixteenth and seventeenth century origins, Homilius’ are entirely of their time, and offer a fascinating comparison. So too does the scoring: we are now into a ‘modern’ orchestra: a basic string band (here 4.4.3.2.1) and an organ, and then the ‘*harmonie*’, pairs of flutes, oboes, bassoons and horns, with timpani used to great effect for dramatic highlight. The whole sound of the classical period band and choir is inescapably modern. You have to listen no further than the first chorale, which is followed by an opening chorus to pick up the style.

I found the whole experience intriguing, but somewhat saccharine. The arias, even commenting on the death of

Jesus, lack the austerity of the arias in the Bach Passions; and I miss the foundational thread of the stark Passion Narratives from the Gospels. The narrative momentum, such as it is, is largely given to the tenor whose text is delivered traditionally in a secco recitative with cello and organ, but frequently breaks into a kind of accompagnato style with illustrative string figuration. The first bass, who takes the part of Jesus, introduces the struggle of Gethemene in the same mode, complete with foreboding timpani, while the reflective prayer in Gethsemene [7] is a duet for alto (the soul) and bass (Jesus) with an illustrative obligato flute and bassoon. The comment on Jesus' arrest is a duet [9] meditating on the last judgement, with oboes prominent in the score, while the chorale that follows is set for solo soprano voice and organ, with a lute-like figuration of plucked strings trailing the warbling voice.

We hear the agile second soprano in [12] whose true voice I like better; the whole of the dramatic scene before Pilate is narrated by the tenor [13] while the choir ponders the fate of the people of Israel [14]. The first soprano takes up the narrative of the weight of the cross before the choir sing three verses of a chorale to conclude the first part.

Part II follows the same pattern: an opening chorale is followed by a slow-moving chorus setting Isaiah 53 – He was wounded for our transgressions – and Handelian like breaks into a chromatic fugue [1-2]. The tenor takes up the narrative of the crucifixion, which is followed by an enormously jolly duet for the sopranos on *Es ist vollbracht*, [4] and the first soprano and alto are entrusted with the drama of the earthquake and the prefiguring of the victory of the resurrection, with the alto having the following aria. Finally, after another recitative the tenor gets an aria in F major reflecting on the joy of suffering and eternal word in which the horns are prominent [9], and a soprano recitative introduces a concluding chorale and chorus [10 & 11] in which the soprano and chorus alternate. After which comfortable edification the listeners can presumably all go home to coffee and cake.

I have given readers a fairly exhaustive idea of the feel of this music so that they are in no doubt as to what they will find if they purchase it. Even allowing for my own prejudices in musical taste, the Pietist text would be worth scrutinising to assess what an immense gulf separates this work from a Bach Passion or a Handel Oratorio. Bach was indeed the last of the line. But I cannot imagine a better prepared and performed version of the Homilius *Messias* than this. The six soloists have gracious voices, and both choir and band are enormously convincing. I

can see how German society, as the eighteenth century developed into the 'Age of Enlightenment', developed a set of bourgeois personal values that affected artistic and musical possibilities profoundly, and there are few religious works from this period that I find deeply challenging. But this is a splendid example of its genre – as far as my limited knowledge allows: I do not have a score of this music – and I commend the performance warmly.

David Stancliffe

MOZART: PIANO CONCERTOS KV482 & 491

Arthur Schoonderwoerd, Cristofori

65:52

Accent ACC24313

This series is growing on me more and more; the intimacy of playing these gorgeous pieces one to a part is pleasure enough of itself – the horns and bassoon in the opening of the E flat major concerto (KV 482) are fabulous! There is just enough hint of improvisation in Schoonderwoerd's playing to make it seem as if he is making it up as he goes along, thereby communicating some of the excitement of hearing the music for the first time. As with previous releases, there is no hint on the front cover of one of the disc's other principle attractions, namely a concert aria with piano obbligato, in this case Vanessa Garcia Simón's ravishing account of "Non temer, amato bene"; hers is a full voice, and boy can she project it – all the more impressively because she manages that while maintaining absolute purity of pitch; the chromatic scale passages are exceptional! The slight harpsichord soundlike nature of Schoonderwoerd's Walther copy allows it to cut through the texture without every dominating the sound picture. All in all, this is a delightful disc and I have enjoyed listening to it several times.

Brian Clark

MOZART: GRAN PARTITA

Royal Academy of Music Soloists Ensemble, Trevor Pinnock

60:00

Linn Records CKD516

+ Haydn: Notturmo no. 8, Ho. II:27

Notwithstanding Trevor Pinnock's appearance as director on this disc, it really is not one for our readership; the recorded sound is typical of Linn's outstanding team and the performances are excellent, but

by eschewing period instruments they lose – for me, at least – an essential part of the charm of this music, which depends on their rustic and natural timbre for its full effect. It is astonishing to think that the performers are still students and they clearly all have wonderful careers ahead of them. Hopefully some of them will become HIPsters!

Brian Clark

THE GALANT LUTE

Vinicius Perez

62:14

klanglogo KL1515

Haydn: Sonata in C, Hob XVI:10

Kohaut: Sonata in D

Mozart: Divertimento KV 439b/II

Scheidler: Thème de Mozart varié

In this very enjoyable CD, Vinicius Perez explores music which is not usually heard on the lute. He begins with his own arrangement of Joseph Haydn's Sonata in C (Divertimento Hob XVI:10), composed before 1767. The score for piano may be found on the IMSLP site. This is distinctly more classical in style than the Galant of the CD's title; it has well-balanced phrases and a clear structure. Perez transposes some of the bass notes down an octave to exploit the low diapasons of his 13-course lute, and he adds ornaments where appropriate. In the first movement (Moderato) he plays his own ear-catching cadenza before the initial melody returns, and puts in attractive little flourishes and fast descending scales to enhance the final statement of the theme. A much decorated Menuetto in C major with triplets (effectively 9/8) contrasts with the Trio in C minor without triplets. His embellishment of the Menuetto on its return, is stylish and pleasing. The Finale is marked presto, and Perez bustles along at an exciting speed, stopping for an occasional dramatic pause. A passage of slurred quavers modulating through various keys contrasts with the slick ornamental triplets of the last lap. Perez produces a good sound, dampening notes where necessary to stop excessive resonance, particularly in the bass. This allows him to produce clear, lyrical lines without the underlying muddiness one sometimes hears with baroque lutenists, when diapasons are allowed to ring on too long and jar against each other.

Lesser known today is Karl Kohaut (1726-84), a diplomat, violinist, lutenist and quite prolific composer who lived in Vienna. Perez plays Kohaut's only surviving Sonata for solo lute. The Adagio is a beautiful piece of music, expressively performed with well-shaped melodic

lines, and a spine-tingling passage of high notes towards the end. It is followed by a brisk, yet not rushed Allegro with broken chords and surprising appoggiaturas a semitone below the main note. The Sonata ends with a highly ornamented Menuetto and Trio, where Perez skilfully takes us through a variety of contrasting moods. It is quite delightful.

One does not normally associate Mozart with the lute, but according to the liner notes, a cadenza survives which he wrote for the lute. Certainly Perez' arrangement of Mozart's Divertimenti for three basset horns (KV 439b) works extremely well on the lute, and captures the delicacy and finesse one associates with the great composer. I enjoyed the Menuetto and Trio (Track 8), since it was rewritten by one of Mozart's contemporaries in *Die Wiener Sonatinen*, which I played as a child on the piano.

The CD ends with Christian Gottlieb Scheidler's Variations on Mozart's Champagne Aria from *Don Giovanni*. The second half of the theme is the same as the well-known folk tune "The Keel Row", a simple tune over just tonic and dominant, but the extravagant variations are far from simple.

Stewart McCoy

Romantic

BEETHOVEN: SONATAS FOR FORTEPIANO AND VIOLIN, VOLUME 2

Ian Watson and Susanna Ogata

50:37

CORO connections COR16143

This is the second volume in a projected complete recording of Beethoven's sonatas for fortepiano and violin. It was recorded in a marvellously open and bright acoustic by engineers who clearly know how to set up their equipment to get the very best sound from both instruments – the sound quality is ravishing!

That said, so are the performances. I've known these works for many years and yet somehow they both sounded so fresh here. The photographs in the excellent booklet show the lefthand edge of Susanna Ogata's stand placed just above the extreme of the fortepiano's treble register; in other words, she can (if she wants to) watch Ian Watson's hands on the keyboard and he can sense her breathing, which must go some way to explaining the wonderful sense of togetherness.

I shall now have to go out and buy volume 1 – this is definitely a complete set worth having!

Brian Clark

SCHUMANN / MENDELSSOHN: PIANO

CONCERTOS

Ingrid Fliter, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Antonio Méndez

61:00

Linn Records CKD 555

Like the Mozart reviewed above, this is a very fine recording of excellent performances. Rising star pianist, Argentine Ingrid Fliter, and Spanish conductor, Antonio Méndez, join the Scottish Chamber Orchestra (an orchestra enjoying a real purple patch) for the two piano concertos; the programme is completed by a not very well-known overture by Mendelssohn (“The Fair Melusina”, 1835). In an age when several recordings of the Schumann are available on a period piano, is it not time for someone to do the same for Mendelssohn?

Brian Clark

A BASSOON IN STOCKHOLM...

Chamber works associated with the bassoon virtuoso Frans Preumayr

Donna Agrell *bassoon*, Lorenzo Coppola *clarinet*, Teunis van der Zwart *horn*, Marc Destrubé & Franc Polman *violins*, Yoshiko Morita *viola*, Albert Brüggen *cello*, Robert Franenberg *double bass*, Ronald Brautigam *fortepiano*

68:53

BIS 2141 SACD

This remarkable recording owes its existence to the fine detective work of the solo bassoonist, Donna Agrell. She plays a Grenser & Wiesner instrument which she bought some thirty years ago and whose case had a Swedish address label on it; the connection led her to Frans Preumayr who moved there with two of his brothers at the beginning of the 19th century to join the Royal Orchestra. The clarinettist in that ensemble was none other than Bernhard Henrik Crusell, who as well as composing several pieces for him later became his father-in-law. The works on this CD are by another member of the orchestra, Franz Berwald, and its director, Edouard Du Puy (though its third movement – which requires the bassoonist to cover three and a half octaves! – was actually added later by one of the court oboists, Carl Anton Philipp

Braun).

Agrell is joined by colleagues from the Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century and a fortepianist who needs no introduction. Together they make fabulous music, with the bassoon really only prominent in the Du Puy quintet. In Berwald’s Septet (clarinet, horn, bassoon, violin, viola, cello and bass) and quartet with piano, clarinet and horn, it is just one voice – albeit an eloquent and stylish one! – among many.

The recorded sound is first rate, as we expect from BIS.

I cannot imagine this recital being an “easy sell” for the company, given that the title is not exactly going to grab the attention of prospective buyers in shops (if such things even exist any more!) or online, but I sincerely hope that it gets decent air time and sells well – it is rare for such obscure repertoire to be given such fine performances, and the tale behind the whole project is enchanting!

Brian Clark

Various

GREENSLEEVES: FOLK MUSIC OF THE BRITISH ISLES

Armonico Consort, Christopher Monk dir.

52:17

Signum Classics SIGCD447

This is hardly folk-music – for instance, three items (Morley, Pearsall and Stanford) have nothing to do with folk, and much of the rest have irrelevant backing. The best is Holst’s version of *I love my love*, which develops from simplicity gradually into more elaboration that works. The original *Greensleeves* from c.1580 is dubious as a folk song; the tune first appeared as a standard bass pattern, which has the first chord on B flat rather than G minor (in the usual pitch). Most of the rest are messed up by over-elaborate backing and prettiness. The title gives nothing to imply that this isn’t a recording of folk music: more plausible would be single voice or with a simple instrument. I initially wrote a more positive version of this review, but by the next day I felt more critical. The longer I live, the more I prefer unaccompanied or simple backing. There’s nothing on the cover that fits with genuine or imitated folk-song. There is some virtue, however, in the booklet.

Clifford Bartlett

MARIA WEISS: FAVOLA IN MUSICA – NEW OLD MUSIC

51:16

1607 RECORDS RC171114

Music by Bach, Caldara, Durón, Handel, Kapsberger, Machaut, Mitterer, Monteverdi, Purcell & Vivaldi

One outcome of the fragmentation of the Classical record industry has been the rise of artist-driven recording projects. Often highly personal, sometimes crowd-funded, I suppose they are the equivalent of so-called ‘vanity publishing’. Yet at their best such recordings can provide thought-provoking new insights into the music we listen to. This CD from the Austrian mezzo and actress Maria Weiss certainly falls into that category. To start with, it looks good, being superbly presented in a 216-page hardcover book that includes German and English texts in addition to dozens of sumptuous colour photographs of the singer’s native Carinthia and the artists. EMR readers will recognise the title of the CD as the subtitle of Monteverdi’s *Orfeo*, ‘a fable (or as Weiss prefers, ‘fairy tale’) in music, and this is indeed Maria Weiss’ own story in music.

Her voice is distinctive, a beautifully burnished and rounded mezzo that at the same time remains fundamentally pure in tone, vibrato being sparingly used for expressive purpose. All this can be heard on the opening track Machaut’s famous unaccompanied virelai ‘Foy porter’, which is perfectly pitched throughout and sung with arresting attention to the sense of the words. This close attention to text, doubtless a spin off from the singer’s other career as an actress, is a feature of the whole disc, on which Weiss sings in no fewer than six languages. Given that, it is hardly surprising that diction is not always perfectly clear.

Much of the repertoire is familiar, in this category tracks that deserve special mention including a well projected and appropriately ornamented account of La Musica’s Prologue to *Orfeo* and an elegantly shaped ‘Qui d’Amor’ from Handel’s *Ariodante* (though both here and certainly in the *da capo* of ‘Cara speme’ (*Giulio Cesare*) I’d ideally have liked a few more ornaments and sadly Weiss does not appear to own to a trill.) The ‘Qui d’Amor’, by the way, is also included on an evocatively filmed video bonus, though I had problems finding it on my PC. There is also a touching account of Bach’s ‘Bist du bei mir’.

‘New old music’ is represented by premiere recordings of three extracts from Sebastian Durón’s Italianate zarzuela *El imposible mayor en amor, le vence Amor* (1710), Jupiter’s arietta ‘Otro adora’ being a real charmer, especially when

sung in such beguiling fashion as it is here. Finally there are two items by the contemporary composer Wolfgang Mitterer that take their inspiration from early music and Maria Weiss’ voice. The first, ‘Remember Me’ is a take on Dido’s Lament (which Weiss also sings in Purcell’s version), uses a range of instrumental and electronic devices against the voice singing (largely) the original vocal line to create an impression of ever-growing melancholy and fragmentation. The effect is curiously compelling. But the second, ‘Niemand falle’ - which takes text from act 2 of *Orfeo* rendered by Weiss in what I in my old-fashioned innocence would call Sprechgesang, but which I gather from the notes is an example of hip hop – left me struggling, I fear.

Adept accompaniments are provided by the rather tortuously named Milleseicentasette, from among whom theorbist Rasario Conte emerges to give intimate and technically proficient performances of two Kapsberger pieces. The whole CD is somehow immensely compelling in an at times ethereal way, drawing the listener into a sense of the other-worldly only enhanced by the church acoustic. It is certainly different and despite the rather short playing time I urge readers to hear it.

Brian Robins

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