

Baroque

BOOKS

MARTHA COOK: L'ART DE LA FUGUE: UNE MÉDITATION EN MUSIQUE

250pp

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BACH: DIE KUNST DER FUGE

Martha Cook *harpsichord*

73:62 (2 CDs)

Passacaille 1014

The Art of Fugue has long intrigued performers and musicologists alike and much time has been spent seeking to explain its genesis and organization. The question is complicated by differences in layout in the two main sources: Bach's autograph, which originally had twelve fugues and two canons, and a published version, hastily put together by C. P. E. Bach in 1751, which changed the order and added two further fugues and two canons, plus other pieces. Martha Cook has recently written a book, published in French, in which she proposes that Bach built the cycle around eight verses from Luke's Gospel, beginning at Chapter 14, Verse 27. These numbers correspond to the gematrial equivalent of J. S. Bach's name (27+14=41). Cook also noticed that the opening words of Luke 14:27 in German 'Und wer nicht sein Kreuz trägt und mir nach folgt' can be made to fit the Art of Fugue's main theme. Her book expands on all of this and finds rhetorical correspondences between the verses from Luke and successive movements of the Art of Fugue (in its original order) which has led her to accept the plausibility of this theory of origin. While Bach's deep knowledge of the bible and his interest in numerology are well substantiated, the evidence for a biblical genesis of the Art of Fugue is largely circumstantial and, to my mind at least, not ultimately convincing. Another recent theory, propounded by Loïc Sylvestre and Marco Costa (in *Il Saggiatore Musicale* 17 (2010), 175-195) and based on bar numbers, suggests that the whole structure is based on the Fibonacci sequence, an intriguing but again circumstantial explanation.

Ultimately it is the music that counts and, while Cook's theory must have informed her preparation for

this recording, there is nothing about her playing or her interpretation which follows directly on from it. Indeed, while the theory would have suggested recording just the autograph version, Cook (while using its order) incorporates the two extra fugues and canons from the print but omits the two mirror fugues; this presents us with an odd hybrid. It is, of course, very unlikely that the Art of Fugue was intended for public performance in one sitting, and listening to it straight through on a single instrument like this can lessen the experience. That said, Cook presents a straightforward interpretation of what she calls the 'ideal solo harpsichord version'. All the contrapuntal and canonic procedures are very clear in her playing but I find it a bit lacking in expression: the cerebral is emphasised at the expense of the rhetorical or the emotional. She plays a harpsichord by Willem Kroesbergen based on a Johannes Couchet original and uses a temperament reconstituted from an Andreas Silbermann organ of 1719 which works very well. This was clearly a labour of love from Cook and both her book and recording show a deep commitment to the Art of Fugue and its many facets. Both are certainly worth having for their insights into this endlessly fascinating work.

Noel O'Regan

EDITIONS

ALESSANDRO MELANI: MUSIC FOR THE PAULINE CHAPEL OF SANTA MARIA MAGGIORE *Collegium Musicum Yale University, Second Series:*

Volume 22

Edited by Luca Della Libera

A-R Editions, Inc.

XVI, 2, 208pp. \$330

ISBN 978-0-89579-866-4, ISSN 0147-0108

This volume contains nine pieces for a service in the Pauline Chapel in one of Rome's most important chapel which became known as the "Salve" on account of the frequent use of the Marian antiphon, Salve Regina. The most substantial – as much by virtue of the length of the text as anything else – are four settings of the *Litanie per la Beata Vergine*. Three of them use a two-choir format, contrasting one SSATB grouping with a standard SATB line-up; this oversimplifies the scheme, though, as Melani is the master of mix and match, sometimes juxtaposing just the upper voices of both choirs, or just

the top sopranos of each. Two of the Marian antiphons are similarly scored (and equally impressive), while the others contrast a fairly virtuosic solo soprano line with the tutti grouping. Without exception, these well-written pieces are all very worth performing. There is one slight problem with such an endorsement: my jaw literally fell open when I saw the price of the volume. I can only hope that A-R Editions offer off-prints of the separate works at reasonable prices; it would be a tragedy if Della Libera and his colleagues had put so much hard work into the preparation of these beautiful new scores, only for them to be confined to the shelves of the world's elite libraries.

Brian Clark

RECORDINGS

BACH: MASS IN B MINOR

[Katherine Watson, Helen Charlston, Iestyn Davies, Gwilym Bowen, Neal Davies SScTTB], The Choir of Trinity College Cambridge, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Stephen Layton
107:43 (2 CDs in a case)
hyperion CDA68181/2

Stephen Layton is lucky to have inherited the first mixed voice Chapel choir of real distinction in Oxbridge, but he has honed it into a fine and responsive group of singers. Trinity's choir has the great advantage that it never grows old, as the singers change every three or four years. For a bright, clear and clean sound, the combination of the 40 plus present and former members of Trinity's choir with the substantial OAE band (8.6.3.3.2 strings) could hardly be bettered.

This makes it a big performance with the corollary of 'needing' big soloists. But does it? Given the way what we now call the Mass in B minor was assembled over the years, I have never been convinced that the traditional vocal scoring – singing the 'chorus' numbers full throughout while leaving a different group of single voices to sing the 'solos' – is either historically or musically defensible.

Surely the place to start is with a choir of five singers, adding one or more groups of ripienists when the instrumental scoring demands it rather than the romantic division into a choir singing all the 'choruses' *ff* to *pp* in the nineteenth to twentieth century style and getting in – even if a number are Trinity alumni – additional soloists who are not part of the choir to sing the single voice numbers.

That said, the choir is wonderful. Have you ever heard 11 basses sing *Et iterum venturus est* in the *Et resurrexit* with such unanimity of tone and clarity of diction? And which large choir has the agility to sing *Et expecto resurrectionem* so neatly at that cracking pace? This is seriously good choral singing and Stephen Layton an inspiring conductor.

The playing matches the singing. The massed violins play *Et incarnatus est* to perfection as the choir sings a controlled piano, and manage the same velvety tone with the quality performance by Iestyn Davies in the *Agnus Dei*, but the superlative quality of Lisa Beznosiuk's flute playing in the *Benedictus* is not matched by Gwilym Bowen's slightly wayward accentuation. The question mark about the sound/style of the soloists though is not raised by them but by the splendid mezzo Helen Charleston – a choral scholar from 2011-2014 – who can sing as cleanly as the rest, but ups her vibrato to match that of Katherine Watson who was in the choir rather earlier, in the *Christe*. Some phrases by both of them were limpid and lovely, but not a pure as I would have liked. Presumably it was a conscious decision by Layton to use contrasting singing styles to accentuate the distinction between choir and soloists, but this allies his recording firmly with the traditional performance style, as does the very Italianate rather than German pronunciation of the Latin.

So while I think the Layton/Trinity/OAE recording is quite excellent of its kind, it won't displace the recording by Concerto Copenhagen directed by Lars Ulrik Mortensen and his ten singers as my favourite.

David Stancliffe

BACH: WEIHNACHTSORATORIUM, BWV248

Richter, Mühlemann, Lemkuhl, Kohlhepp, Nagy SSATB, Gaechinger Cantorey, Hans-Christoph Rademann
151:43 (2 CDs in a walled jewel box)
Carus 83.312
+*Tönet, ihr Pauken* (ex BWV214)

We were lucky enough to receive two copies of this recording, so I sent both out for review; I always find it interesting to read different people's impressions

With a choir of 8.8.7.7 and strings of 6.5.4.3.2, this is a full-blooded performance in the modern German style, using the new Carus edition and parts, and soloists that are quite distinct from the chorus singers. All the musicians – singers and players alike – are excellent, so what is not to like? Not long ago,

we would have been overjoyed to find such a neat and competent performance, but these days there are other considerations to be taken into account.

Regardless of which side you take in the matter of the size of Bach's chorus, do you want a performance on CD where the sound of the chorus is entirely distinct from the singers who sing the arias? And what about the sound of the trumpets: are finger-holes to assist in correcting the tuning permissible or not? And the size of the organ in relation to the chorus? Here the Gaechinger Cantorey has set up a team of players to work with the singers, and commissioned an organ after Gottfried Silbermann as a basic building block of the sound they are seeking to emulate.

Since we have become used to OVPP performances with small instrumental as well as vocal forces from groups like Dunedin Consort, and singers of the arias being drawn from the ranks of a (much reduced) chorus with John Eliot Gardiner's Monteverdi Choir, the landscape has changed subtly in England and in some respects the traditional divisions in Germany between choir and soloists, and a line-up that places a large choir at the back, with soloists out front rather than as partners in the music-making seems curiously old-fashioned.

Of its style and period, this is an excellent performance; and no chorus singer will readily surrender the pleasure of taking part in performances of Bach – perhaps especially in Germany where there are so many really excellent choirs and baroque instrumentalists around. Nonetheless, there are questions to be asked of a performance practice that assumes biggest is best. For example, you can order Carus parts for Bach Cantatas online only if you buy into the package that offers multiple string parts. Of course, Carus are delighted to sell you single string parts, but the assumption still is that 'the orchestra' will have many desks of violinists as its basic complement.

David Stancliffe

I'm afraid my first reaction to another recording of a very familiar masterpiece such as Bach's Christmas Oratorio is to ask what it has to say that is new about this very familiar music. The wonderfully crisp and punchy opening, taken by Rademann at a daringly brisk tempo, soon established that this was a serious contender. The Gaechinger Cantorey, a choral group which has now acquired a superb period instrumental wing, is attached to the international Bachakademie in Stuttgart, so one would expect both excellence and scholarly rigour, and both

are present aplenty in this recording. Add to that some wonderfully concise and expressive solo and ensemble singing, as well as some beautifully detailed solo and ensemble instrumental playing, and all the elements are in place for a successful recording of Bach's masterpiece. Of particular merit are the contributions of the young soloists, particularly Sebastien Kohlhepp, who is a wonderfully expressive and apparently effortless Evangelist. Also impressive is the expressive ease of the double reed players, who conjure some wonderfully expressive sounds from their various breeds of oboe. Both singers and instrumentalists ornament tastefully, while the trumpeters show no signs that Bach's lines are as challenging as they are, particularly given their conductor's generally upbeat tempi. So this may be a pretty conventional reading of Bach's music, but it is stunningly well executed and always beautifully musical. The recording, a combination of a live recording with subsequent non-live sessions, presumably to replace any sore bits or audience interruptions, is entirely effective, although it produces the curious anomaly that one of the soprano soloists appears live whereas the other doesn't! Incidentally, I was revisiting over the festive season my CD of highlights from one of the first period instrument recordings of the work by the Collegium Aureum dating from 1973 and in which the trumpeters, playing horn-shaped clarini trumpets by Meinel and Lauber, still sound astonishing!

D. James Ross

BACH: EIN FESTE BURG

Wegener, Allsopp, Hobbs, Harvey SATB, Kammerchor Stuttgart, Barockorchester Stuttgart, Frieder Bernius
49:03

Carus 83.282
BWV80, 235

Recorded this June, the CD is among Carus Verlag's celebrations of the Reformation anniversary while promoting its good new edition of Bach's choral works. The excellent soloists and experienced chorus, orchestra and conductor make these reliable performances, and it is good to have the opening page of the full score of the new Carus edition by Klaus Hoffman (2014) reproduced in the liner notes.

Carus – and many German choirs and conductors – are still wedded to performing Bach cantatas with substantial choirs (here 7.5.5.4) and you can only buy instrumental parts for the cantatas online in sets of 4 first and 4 second

violins, 3 violas and 4 bc parts. They also sell a pack of the W. F. Bach additional brass parts that got included in the BG in the 19th century, and are still sometimes passed off as Johann Sebastian's today. This performance is still in this tradition.

That said, the balance between singers and orchestra is good, and between individual singers in the single voice or duet numbers and obbligato instruments. The A/T duet *Wie selig sind doch die* (7 in BWV 80) is beautifully done; and *Und wenn die Welt voll Teufel wär* (5) goes with a great swing. But at a running time of 49:03, would there not have been room for *Gott der Herr ist Sonn und Schild* (BWV79), that other great *Reformationsfest* cantata? Perhaps the reason is that Carus has now produced another CD with BWV 79, that includes the *Missa in G* (BWV 236) and Cantata 126...

David Stancliffe

BACH: ERHALT UNS, HERR

Mields, Schachtner, Kristjánsson, Berndt SATB,
Gaechinger Cantorey, Hans-Christoph Rademann
59:07

Carus 83.311
BWV79, 126, 236

These cantatas and the Mass in G, which parodies several numbers of BWV 79, are given a full-blooded performance with the substantial band of the Gaechinger Cantorey which uses 6.5.4.3.2 strings and 8.7.8.7 voices. They use both harpsichord and a small organ reconstructed for them after one by Gottfried Silbermann recently discovered in Seerhausen, Saxony. Unfortunately, no details are provided of this instrument in spite of their website saying 'The Gaechinger Cantorey is basing its new approach on this kind of sound and orchestral arrangement, starting off with the sound of a replica Silbermann organ.' This is welcome news, as a number of photos on the website show modern orchestral instruments (a bassoon and a horn are visible), and the large numbers in both choir and band make the sound rather solid.

The liner notes in German and English have an abridged (in English) version of the essay on Bach the Reformer, placing the cantatas and the mass in their historical and musical context, which is welcome, but the impression of the performances is that, although the chorus singers and the band are well matched, the substantial forces make the 'solo' singers work hard to be heard instead of achieving that natural balance we might expect. I have yet

to read a scholarly refutation from Germany of Andrew Parrott's *The Essential Bach Choir*, which has so influenced performance practice elsewhere, and this performance from such a prestigious Academy shows little evidence of what is now accepted in many quarters as good practice.

In particular, I feel that the tromba in the opening movement of BWV 126 is overpowered by the strings and choir, and the Tenor in the aria *Sende deine Macht* has to oversing – where is he standing in relation to the oboes? – while the Bass in *Stürze zu Boden* is splendid, singing with both organ and harpsichord, and quite excellent cello and fagotto playing. In BWV 79, the playing of the large band in the open chorus is wonderful in its articulation in the fugato sections, and the horn playing as good as it can be. Here the balance in the aria for Alto and oboe obbligato seems better, though the bass is over weight here as it is in the duet – how many contrabassi are playing here? This all gives the orchestral sound a rather 'modern' feel, and at times – especially in the final chorale, the combined sound with an appropriate predominance of organ hardly lets us hear the horns.

These questions of balance seem to have sorted themselves out better by the Mass, though, when the Bass begins the *Gratias*, I am conscious of a less immediate sound – immediacy is sacrificed to some extent in the recording to the grand effect. The S/A Duetto *Domine Deus* again has a very smooth orchestral sound, and an over-prominent 16' tone.

The contrast here with Carus other CD – *Ein feste Burg* – is instructive; although both use substantial choirs, that one feels more immediate and is recorded closer. If you like a full-blooded choral sound, the well-rehearsed Gaechinger Cantorey could hardly be bettered. But, as a recording, it is less integrated that we might expect these days – it feels more like a choral society accompanied by a first-rate orchestra who are sitting between them and the audience, with very distinctly different solo voices for the arias. It is an excellent recording – in a slightly old-fashioned style.

David Stancliffe

BACH: MAGNIFICAT IN E FLAT | MISSA IN F
Hannah Morrison, Angela Hicks, Charlotte Ashley,
Reginald Mobley, Eleanor Minney, Hugo Hymas, Gianluca
Buratto, Jake Muffett SSSAATBB, monteverdi Choir,
English Baroque Soloists, John Eliot Gardiner
73:53
Soli Deo Gloria SDG728
+BWV151

Recorded in December 2016 in the spacious acoustic of St Jude's, Hampstead Garden Suburb and released for this Christmastide, this elegantly produced CD couples some delightful music with the early version of the Magnificat, that was probably a show-piece for Bach's first Christmas day Vespers in Leipzig in 1723.

From the start, the swirling polyphony of the opening Kyries of the *Missa in F*, where the 'cantus firmus' of *Christe, du Lamm Gottes* on the corni tethers the energetic polyphony in this adaptation of an earlier Weimar Kyrie, introduces the energy and direction of this CD. The following Gloria uses material from (among other sources) Cantata 40, performed on the 2nd day of that Christmas in 1723, and BWV 151 was written for the 3rd day of Christmas in 1725, so all the pieces are appropriate for a Christmas-tide CD of Bach.

The roulades of the corni and the close imitation of the voices in the opening of the Gloria in the *Missa* give an almost hunt-like urgency to the chase, and Gardiner's crisp and energetic delivery is helped by a smaller than usual choir (9.5.4.4) from whose ranks singers step forward to sing the arias and recitatives. Star among them are the more established Hannah Morrison, Reginald Moberly and Hugo Hymas, but a welcome new voice to me was Angela Hicks who sings the long and difficult aria that opens *Süßer Trost* (BWV 151). Here the balance between the singer, the strings topped with an oboe d'amore and the single traverso is captured wonderfully, the voice balancing the tender flute marvellously – yet fully capable of the sudden brightening up in the quick triplets of the central section of the aria before recovering the cradle-like calm of the da capo. Gardiner's use of his chorus singers provides us not only with excellent and stylish performances of the arias, but with consistency of sound throughout the vocal scoring and the consequent easy blend between singers and instruments. He seems increasingly confident not just in his singers' accomplishments – as he properly should – but in creating this newly-minted overall sound, which to me is most welcome. As a result, the cumulative effect of the (individually) quite short movements of the *Magnificat*

has a coherence and momentum that some of his earlier recordings lack.

A dialogue between Gardiner and Jonathan Freeman-Attwood, himself a trumpeter and recording producer as well as Principal of the Royal Academy, forms the bulk of the well-produced booklet. The discussion touches on the question of the performing pitch for the E flat Magnificat, but the central question – is the E flat Magnificat one of those earlier works where the wind parts are in E flat and played at 392, so the sounding pitch holds to 415? – is only tangentially referred to, and Don Smithers' careful arguments in 1996 arguing for the lower pitch are dismissed rather than refuted. E flat is a surprising key for trumpet parts – notated as usual in the score in C – to sound in, so what was the actual pitch at which this Magnificat was first performed? Did a set of parts for strings in E flat ever exist? In the end, you have to make informed choices about these matters, but I am not wholly convinced that the Magnificat ever actually sounded in E flat at 415. And unless and until some parts for the Magnificat performance of 1723 come to light, we will never be sure.

David Stancliffe

BACH MAGNIFICATS

[Joëlle Harvey, Olivia Vermuelen, Iestyn Davies, Thomas Walker, Thomas Bauer *SmScTTBar*], Arcangelo, Jonathan Choan
76:48

Hyperion CDA68157

Magnificats by J. S., J. C. & C. P. E. Bach

If you like your J. S. Bach *Magnificat* performed by a 19-voice chorus, almost any one of whom could have sung the solo numbers in the same musical style, but with five other singers who sing in a more declamatory and operatic style singing the solo numbers, both accompanied by an excellent period band who are clearly regarded as accompanists rather than equal partners, then you may be wooed by this CD. I don't find the JSB part very persuasive. The soloists over-sing – perhaps the result of some live takes at the Tetbury Festival where the recording was made? – and the choir seems to have volume as their chief aim. As a result the substantial band (4.4.3.3.2 strings) of skilled players seem to be also-rans, in a definitely subservient role: for example, the oboes in the *Suscepit Israel* are definitely more distant than the three voices. As far as the solo voices are concerned, the upper voices are too wobbly for me, and the tenor and bass too histrionic. Only Iestyn Davies seems

to be in control of his instrument, and we only hear him once in the CPE Bach *Magnificat* that takes up more than half the disc. Thomas Walker, the tenor, has a noticeable change of gear mid range and while the higher register is attractive and clear the lower range sounds bottled up and makes for an unsettling experience for the listener.

But the JSB *Magnificat* is only a third of the CD, and the other *Magnificats* make an interesting comparison. Both of them are in the new, pre-Classical style, and indeed both soloists and chorus seem more at home here. The choir/soloist division seems to make more sense in this music as do the more operatic voices and the sense of an independent 'orchestra'.

I am left thinking that though it sounds a good idea to unite three *Magnificats* by different members of the Bach family on one CD, to do so in one recording session is a mistake. Johann Sebastian's high Baroque demands such a different style of singing and playing from Johann Christian's and C. P. E.'s pre-Mozartian music of a generation or more later. Perhaps this confusion about where we are, and whether one style fits all is what is signalled by using a Botticelli image on the cover, an artist working more than two centuries earlier than the earliest composer represented here.

This is not a performance of the JSB *Magnificat* to which I shall return, with more stylish performances by Vox Luminis and the Monteverdi Choir under Gardiner recently released. The interest here lies in the other works, well-performed in a more 'modern' style, even if they use exactly the same instruments – and indeed the same style of singing – for both Johann Sebastian and for the later Bachs.

David Stancliffe

BACH: FANTASIAS, PRELUDES & FUGUES

James Johnstone (Raphaëlis Organ, Roskilde)

59:29

Metronome MET CD 1095

BWV 535, 537, 538, 544, 545, 572, 578

When I reviewed the first volume of James Johnstone's complete Bach organ music in June 2016, recorded on the reconstructed Wagner organ in Trondheim Cathedral, I welcomed his stylish and lively playing, saying how important the choice of organ was for such a project. This is the second volume, and shows the same spirited playing, good choice of instrument and fresh approach to colour. He clearly plays from newly

edited scores (listen to the Largo in BWV 545) and there is always the sense that he comes from a world of informed and concerted music-making that is a good way from the presuppositions of the English cathedral organ loft.

For these *Fantasias, Preludes & Fugues*, Johnstone turns to the Raphaëlis organ set near the pulpit in the western half of Roskilde cathedral, where he had recorded (on the Marcussen choir organ) Paul McCreesh's fine *Matthew Passion* in 2004. This organ began its life in 1554-5, and, after modernisation in 1611 and in 1654-5, very little was done till 1833, when the firm of Marcussen did a major rebuild. Further enlargement took place in 1926 and 1950. Marcussen completed a major reconstruction in 1991, refashioning the structure and voicing to its 17th-century form. The results are an instrument that speaks with clarity and zip, whose action must make it a pleasure to play.

The tempi are on the brisk side and Johnstone's registration aids his clean fingerwork. The only fly in the ointment is the sometimes slow-speaking pedal 8' *Trompet*, which he uses a lot to give clarity to the pedal line in preference to the 16'. As with a number of the organs of this period, the only pedal fluework is a Principal chorus based on the 16', with a solitary flute at 8'. 1' *Sedecima* stops on both the Rygpositiv and the Brystværk indicate the instrument's early origins and there is (as far as I can tell) only one Tierce rank.

The cracking pace of the Prelude and Fugue in B minor BWV 544 is exhilarating, and neither here – nor in the Gravement in BWV 572 – is he afraid to use a manual 16'. But, if you want a testimony to his fingerwork, listen to the clarity of the episodes in the Prelude in G minor BWV 535. The disc ends with the Dorian Toccata and Fugue where you can appreciate the balanced flue choruses of the Manualværk and Rygpositiv. For the Fugue he adds the 8' manual *Trompet* for a rich and zesty fullness.

The dancing rhythms and splendid energy of Johnstone's playing are matched by quality recording technique, which makes this a complete Bach organ music to follow with eager anticipation. Collect them all.

David Stancliffe

J. S. BACH: CONCERTI À CEMBALI CONCERTATI
VOL. 3 *Concertos for 2 harpsichords*
Pierre Hantaï, Aapo Häkkinen, Helsinki Baroque Orchestra
62:42
Aeolus AE-10087
+ W. F. Bach: Concerto in F, Fk 10

These are among my favourite pieces of Bach; although I know two of them in their “other” versions (and, if I’m totally honest, prefer them that way...), I have enjoyed previous keyboard performances of them, and this addition to the catalogue is as persuasive as any that has gone before. The two instruments have enough difference of tone (copies by the same maker, Jürgen Ammer – to whose memory the recording is dedicated – of a Harraß from around 1710 and a Hildebrandt of c.1740) to allow their distinct voices to be heard in dialogue. The accompaniment is nicely provided by single strings and the recording has a nice resonance to it. The outstanding soloists particularly enjoy the slow movements, where they have increased freedom to employ rubato. The programme is completed a little-known concerto for two harpsichords without accompaniment by Bach’s oldest son, Wilhelm Friedemann, dating from the early 1730s and was clearly known by Vater Bach, since he wrote out the two keyboard parts; it is clearly in a different style, yet it was clearly written by someone thoroughly schooled in both keyboard technique and counterpoint. In fact, hearing it made me wonder why we hear so little of his music – a quick check revealed an extensive list of works, so there is clearly no shortage of material; but then, he was born into that lost generation between the Class of 1685 and Mozart/Haydn. Surely their time must come soon? And not just their orchestral music, either!

Brian Clark

J. S. BACH: TRIPLE CONCERTO & VIOLIN CONCERTOS
Dutch Baroque Orchestra, Gerard de Wit *harpsichord & conductor*, Ivan Iliev *violin*
67:42
Dutch Baroque Records

For any new recording of the Bach violin concertos to draw attention, it either has to feature some amazing new violinist whose interpretation of the music sets the world alight with excitement, or it has to offer some other novelty. While not wishing to be disrespectful to Ivan Iliev, whose performances are both stylish and accomplished,

it is the inclusion here of the rarely heard concerto in A minor BWV1044 that will draw most attention; its slightly dubious heritage as most likely the work of one of the composer’s many musical sons means that there are few public performances, which is rather a shame as it is a really nice piece (and – one would have thought – an ideal programme partner for the fifth Brandenburg, although how many of that set is every performed alone in concert these days?). The accomplished sounding Dutch Baroque Orchestra plays one to a part, with cello and double bass, and an extra ripieno violin in the “double” concerto (BWV1043) to give balance. Congratulations to the group on their first recording on their own label; but, for their next project, I hope they will select a native speaker to do the English translation of the booklet.

Brian Clark

BACH TRIPLES
Harmony of Nations, Laurence Cummings
75:48
edition raumklang RK3007
BWV1048, 1057, 1063, 1064, 1069

The Harmony of Nations Baroque Orchestra was founded in 2004 by musicians who had met in the European Union Baroque Orchestra as part of a pan-European determination to work across national and historic cultural divides and to share insights.

The music chosen for this CD is from J. S. Bach’s triple concertos of one sort or another, and is introduced by an admirable essay by John Butt. They play the early version of the Overture in D, BWV1069 (without the trumpets and timpani added in about 1730), which enables us to hear the fine playing by the three oboes and the fagotto, otherwise silent in the subsequent pieces. This is followed by the concerto for harpsichord and two recorders in F, BWV1057, a version of the Fourth Brandenburg transposed down a tone into F and with a harpsichord replacing the violin, Brandenburg 3, BWV1048, and two concertos for three violins in what is likely to have been their original form, re-adapted from what survives as concerti for three harpsichords (BWV1063 and 1064). Because 1064’s violin version involves a transposition back up into D, this score merits a distinct version in NBA VII/7, which is denied to 1063 in NBA VII/6 which remains in D minor. Following the harpsichord version of 1063, there was one small detail which would have eased the transcription: in measures 40 and 72 of the third

movement there are three semiquavers in the bass parts of each of the cembalo parts which link the previous figure to the continuing semiquaver passage work in the first/second *concertante* violin part. In the absence of a score of this passage, I wonder if the transcription doesn't need the connecting semiquavers? The 'cello part in 1064 has some fine moments playing independently of the continuo line, and might that be a solution here?

The playing is engaged and exciting, but balanced when it needs to be to enable us to hear the delicate figuration in BWV1057, for example. The technical skills of the principal violinist in the D minor concerto, Huw Daniel, are amazing, and I was conscious all through of the extremely fine viola playing, where I often find this line too weak to sustain the harmonic gap between multiple violin lines and a strong basso continuo section.

I have the greatest respect for Laurence Cummings and the work he does with young musicians. This CD was recorded in 2010, and I would dearly like to hear companion discs exploring some of the other concerto transcriptions using wind like 1044, 1055 and 1060, for example. But I suspect that the players may have dispersed now, and anyway will the United Kingdom still take part in such fine examples of cross-boundary cultural initiatives after next March?

There are not that many recordings of these works available – I only know the one by Rachel Podger and Brecon Baroque, and the version by the Freiburg Orchestra – so I am very glad to have it: get it while you can.

David Stancliffe

J. S. BACH: MUSICALISCHES OPFER

Bach Collegium Japan, Masaaki Suzuki

72:12

BIS-2151 SACD

BWV1079 + Aria from BWV988, BWV1038, BWV1087

This *Musical Offering* is intellectually as well as musically satisfying, with a liner note introducing the reader to the – by 1747 – old-fashioned idea that canons (ten of them, to reflect the Ten Commandments) were the bedrock of a musical style that sought to reflect the majesty and incomprehensible greatness of God, while 'modern' music in the galant style sought primarily to relax and entertain without troubling the intellect or the theologically inspired quest for meaning.

'Old' Bach's visit to Frederick the Great, where his son Carl Philipp Emanuel was keyboard player in residence, was

a widely reported affair. As we know, the ruler of Prussia gave Bach a 'royal theme' and was astonished at Bach's immediate response, and the versatility of his inspirations. Bach promised to work at it, and send the Emperor his considered response, and Suzuki and his companions play the *Canones Diversi*, followed by the *Ricercar à 3*, the *Canon Perpetuus* and the *Ricercar à 6* before the *Canons à 2* and *à 4*, the *Sonata* and finally the *Canon Perpetuus*.

This *tour de force*, in a very satisfying form (pace Silas Wollston's excellent note for Nicolette Moonen's *The Bach Players' Musical Offering* which I reviewed last July), is completed on this CD by the ten *Canons* on the *Goldberg Ground* (BWV 1087) and the *Sonata* in G major (BWV 1038) for flute, violin and basso continuo.

The *Goldberg canons* are written over an eight-note *soggetto* (or theme) used in the bass line of the *Aria* from BWV 988. These fourteen conclude with an astonishing four-fold proportion-canon, the $A \ \& \ \Omega$ of all canons. Fourteen also, as Suzuki points out, spells B A C H in numerical code: 2+1+3+8.

BWV 1038 has an almost identical bass line to a slightly later (and much less 'modern') *sonata* for violin and continuo where the fugal imitations were pruned to suggestions, and a wholly different feel was given to the music. I'm only sorry this could not be included too.

As you would expect, the playing and recording are both of the high standard we have come to expect from Suzuki's forces, and I wholeheartedly commend this extraordinary set of musical puzzles.

David Stancliffe

J. S. BACH: SONATAS FOR VIOLIN AND HARPSICHORD

Guido de Neve, Frank Agsteribbe

(2 CDs in a jewel case)

Écetera KTC 1596

This is a very well-researched project funded by the Royal Conservatoire of Antwerp with the research group on Performance Practice in Perspective.

You may or may not like the violinist's rather rhapsodic style which involves some – to my ears – rather aggressive (and 20th-century feeling) bowing. But de Neve is playing an instrument of 1692 by Hendrik Williams of Ghent and the pair have clearly made a detailed study of the rhetorical expressiveness of 18th-century music. This leads to some pretty slow tempi in some of the slow movements, as in the opening of the A major sonata for example, as well as a breakaway Presto, so fast as to appear almost unsteady.

So expect a degree of engaged commitment to making the music speak as dramatically as a Baroque painting. In the liner-notes each sonata is prefaced by a quotation from Mattheson's *Das Neu-Eröffnete Orchester* of 1713 on the particular key, for example: h-moll: Kombination aus Gefühlen der Unlust und Melancholie. Bizarr – wird deshalb selten gespielt. [*B minor: Combines feelings of unease and melancholy. Slightly odd and therefore rarely performed.*]

They also explain with a welcome degree of clarity why, due to the uneven distribution of the Pythagorean comma across the octave in historic tunings, different keys are sharply different from one another. It is a pity then that the information in the liner notes does not make specific reference to the particular system they use.

I think that the violin is recorded slightly too close, so the harpsichord frequently feels a less than equal partner. But this performance certainly offers an alternative reading to those, for example, by Rachel Podger with which my generation has been brought up.

David Stancliffe

BACH: THE ART OF FUGUE

Brecon Baroque, Rachel Podger

71:08

Channel Classics CCS38316

I haven't heard as persuasive an account of *The Art of Fugue* since Fretwork released their elegant version in 2002. In Brecon Baroque, Rachel Podger has gathered some of her stellar friends and made this fine CD which has clarity and passion, as well as thought-provoking decisions about scoring.

I have listened to a number of performances on the organ, which in some ways seems to be the obvious medium for such intellectually abstract and challenging music; but I find Podger's acute judgment as to what might be the best combination of instruments to shape the character of each piece as sound as her flawless and committed playing. We have the Canons "alla Decima" and "alla Duodecima" played on the harpsichord, which appears in other movements – but not all – as a basso continuo. The string players can appear as two violins, viola and 'cello, or as violin, two violas and 'cello or any combination in trio. The order seems wholly logical, and the importance of this recording is greatly enhanced by a splendid essay by John Butt on the compositional techniques that are demonstrated in this extraordinary compendium of canonic and fugal writing Bach drew together as *Die Kunst der Fuge*. This booklet is

a model for what a booklet should be, and it is a real treat to have such a scholarly but accessible essay.

The playing is wonderful – a viol-like edge and clarity where that is required; a sense of growing intensity through the gathering complexities of the work; and the final *Contrapunctus* left hanging, unfinished in the air with its wistful resolution unfulfilled. I much enjoyed this remarkable display of heartfelt musicianship and hope that the performance will receive the accolades it deserves.

David Stancliffe

BACH: FAMOUS ORGAN WORKS

Joseph Kelemen (Christoph Treutmann organ, Klosterkirche Grauhof)

70:22

BWV534, 546, 562, 575, 582, 595, 664, 717, 736 & 1080

CDs with titles like "Famous Organ Works" can strike chill into a reviewer's heart, but this CD from the reputable OEHMS label is a fine and varied recording, designed to display the qualities of this remarkably well preserved Christoff Treutmann organ in the Klosterkirche Grauhof dating from 1734-7 – his largest and only surviving instrument, relatively recently (1989-1992) conserved by the Hillebrand brothers, who tonally only had to re-make the mixtures.

For the music, the programme centres on major works in minor keys – the Prelude and Fugue in C minor BWV 546 contrasted with BWV 717, 562 and 595; the Prelude and Fugue in F minor BWV 534, *Contrapunctus I* from *Die Kunst der Fuge* accompanied by "Valet will ich dir geben" BWV 736, the trio on "Allein Gott in der Höh' sei Ehr" BWV 664 and the little Fuge BWV 575 before finishing with the *Passacaglia* BWV 582.

Notable in these performances on this instrument is Keleman's ability to produce clarity – even in fugal writing – with a full manual chorus based on a 16' principal and a splendid pedal including 16' & 8' reeds, which are wonderfully prompt-speaking. Astonishingly creative in his performance of the *Passacaglia* and Fugue – played without any change in the registration – are his minute variations of tempo and weight conveyed by very subtle articulation over an unchanging pedal of just the 16' & 8' reeds, with a 4' principal. The smaller scale works allow us the opportunity to hear the well-balanced combinations of ranks, and to assist the listener's appreciation, there is not only a full specification but the detailed registration of each piece. Kelemann's notes (in German and English) on

the organ as well as on his choice of music draw attention to the tierce rank in mixtures on two of the manuals, and prepare us for the major/minor ambivalence when we hear open fifths played – as at the start of the C minor Fantasia in the organ's unequal temperament.

This is a well-produced and valuable CD, giving us insight on how – on an appropriately constructed instrument – well thought-out registrations as well as beautifully prepared playing can bring sensitive variety to works we so often hear with large numbers of fussy changes in registration, presumably designed to divert us from being bored by dull, loud modern organs.

David Stancliffe

BACH: VARIATIONS ON VARIATIONS

concerto italiano, Rinaldo Alessandrini

68:17

naïve OP30575

BWV582, 588, 988, 989

There seems to be no end to the processes of second-guessing the inventiveness of Bach's gift of parodying his own compositions. Re-cycling music too good not to find a continuing life was clearly a temptation to which he frequently yielded. A few years ago a chamber group from Philadelphia, Tempesta di Mare, produced a CD of the Trio Sonatas for organ (BWV 525-530) arranged for a variety of period instruments by Richard Stone¹: some movements already existed as prototypes, parodied by Bach himself as sinfonias in cantatas. I much enjoyed hearing them, and indeed bought the transcriptions and have played a number of them. Now Rinaldo Alessandrini has taken a number of Bach works where Variations are the linking theme, and scored them for a few strings and continuo.

The results are enjoyable, and mostly pretty successful. The Passacaglia in C minor taken from BWV 582 (which Alessandrini outdatedly claims was for the pedal harpsichord originally) sounds well on strings in D minor. The way the melodic material of successive variations frequently grows out of the preceding figurations suits the four-part string instrument texture well, as does the polyphony of the fugue. This is a full-blooded performance, and lets you know what you are in for, in terms of a "no holds barred" style.

A lover of Vivaldi, Alessandrini sees the potential in developing a keyboard work into a rather fuller texture. While the Canzona (BWV 588) is a literal

transcription, and the Italian Aria variations translate pretty straightforwardly into a sonata for violin and basso continuo, it is in the *Goldberg Variations* that we see him working the sketchy counterpoint possible on the keyboard – where there are frequent hints of a third or even fourth part in more polyphonic variations – into new, freely composed parts. Sometimes the result goes with a swing (as in Variation 1) or lets us hear in detail what the keyboard original only suggests. Sometimes it is too far from the original, and sounds almost like Brahms (as in the minor Variation 25). So, while I admire Alessandrini's ingenuity (and his normally pretty minimalist continuo playing), I am not altogether taken with his arrangements here, though his rather spare sounds are certainly an improvement in textural terms on the chamber orchestra version recorded by Bernard Labadie and Les Violons du Roy in 2014.

All this is a long way from Stokowsky's orchestration of the Toccata and Fugue in D minor, and Bach, after all, was known to improvise a third voice when playing continuo, but I am not sure that I'll play these Goldbergs in wakeful hours of the night. Each variation's scoring raises some new hare running in my mind, and I'd be endlessly switching on the light and reaching for the score. I'm more likely to keep it in the car for long journeys.

On the whole, it's a stimulating exercise, and well worth doing, though for my money Tempesta di Mare and Richard Stone do it better, if you want to explore the possibilities of this kind of parody technique.

David Stancliffe

BACH IN BLACK

Violin concertos in minor keys & selected works for alto voice la voce strumentale, Dmitry Sinkovsky violin, countertenor, conductor

61:23

naïve OP 30567

BWV 1041, 1052, 1056, extracts from BWV 232, 244 & 245

There are a number of recordings made as "calling cards", and this seems to be one of them as it features the variety of talents that Dmitry Sinkovsky and his Russian period instrument string ensemble (2.2.2.1.1) can exhibit. But mainly just Dmitry Sinkovsky. Not only does he direct the ensemble and act as the soloist in the three Bach violin concertos – BWV 1052, BWV 1056 and BWV 1041 – all later re-worked for harpsichord; he also sings three well-known alto arias. Presumably he recorded

¹ CHAN0803, 2014

these using a voice-over technique, as I can't imagine he would have let the violin solo in "Erbarme dich" from the Matthew Passion be played by anyone else.

There is some odd phrasing in the arias, but what I dislike most is his tight, narrow vibrato which creates an unsuitable sound for Bach and doesn't match the sinewy strings. Nor do I like his violin playing: it is too aggressive, too controlling and too far from the intertwined spirit of Bach. You sense that this musician is more interested in self-promotion than in serving Bach's music.

This is not a recording that I can recommend to the readers of the EMR.

David Stancliffe

BACH INSPIRATION

Juliette Hurel *flute*, Maïlys de Villoutreys *soprano*, Ensemble Les Surprises, Louis-Noël Bestion de Camboulas
67:31

Alpha Classics Alpha 358

BWV1013, 1038, 1067 + extracts from BWV82A, 211, 244 & 249

I reviewed a CD of keyboard music played on interesting period instruments by Louis-Noël Bestion de Camboulas in May 2017, and admired his elegant playing, but this CD will be somewhat of a disappointment to readers of the EMR, and I doubt if many will wish to buy it.

While the playing is gracious, this assemblage of flute music and soprano arias that contain obbligato flute parts is not what I was expecting. As the photograph of Juliette Hurel at the front of the booklet reveals, she plays a modern ebony flute, and the two oboists brought in for "Aus Liebe" from the *Matthew Passion* play on cors anglais rather than oboi da caccia because this performance is at 440, and was recorded in the Abbaye aux Dames – perhaps in the outskirts of the festival last year? – in Saintes.

The performances are fine, although the singer is not one that I would choose for the three arias (from the *Matthew Passion*, the *Easter Oratorio* and the *Coffee Cantata*) with her full voice and post-baroque style. The choice of music has the feel of a programme put together by a group of friends for a particular concert, and I am not quite sure why Alpha chose to publish it. Read what it says on the tin carefully before you think of buying it.

David Stancliffe

EDINBURGH 1742: BARSANTI AND HANDEL

Ensemble Marsyas, Peter Whelan

68:00

Linn CKD 576

This excellent CD takes advantage of two sets of circumstances nearly three centuries apart: firstly, that in 1742 Edinburgh was a burgeoning centre of the arts and of Baroque music in particular, and, secondly, that nowadays the 'The Athens of the North' is enjoying a second golden age of Baroque performance. In a programme designed to celebrate concerts given by the Edinburgh Musical Society in the mid-18th century, Peter Whelan and his ensemble give us five of Francesco Barsanti's ten op. 3 *Concerti Grossi* along with a set of his charming Scots song settings, together with a march, an aria and a horn concerto by Handel, an arrangement by the composer of two movements from his *Water Music*. The horn was still a relative orchestral novelty, having been first introduced by Handel in his *Water Music* some twenty years earlier, and would have been a considerable attraction in Edinburgh. Whelan's two excellent horn players, Alex Frank-Gemmill and Joseph Walters, also feature prominently in the Barsanti *Concerti*, which turn out to be works of superlative quality, in which the standard high Baroque pomp is regularly shot through with a poignant melancholy or enlivened by quirky folk rhythms in a style which is both masterly and distinctively individual. The crystal-voiced Emilie Renard, whom I heard recently singing Handel to wonderful effect at the Lammermuir Festival, gives a splendidly dramatic account of "Sta nel'Iskana" from Handel's *Alcina*, while violinist Colin Scobie provides infectiously lilting accounts of four of Barsanti's *Old Scots Tunes*. This terrific CD, bustling with energy and creativity, gives a vivid impression of Edinburgh in 1742 and at the same time conveys a marvelously upbeat picture of the current state of early music performance in Scotland.

D. James Ross

BRESCIANELLO: CONCERTI À 3

Der musikalische Garten

67:27

Coviello Classics COV91705

Der musikalische Garten is an exciting young trio sonata line-up consisting of two violins, cello and harpsichord. For this recording, they have chosen

a previously unrecorded set of 12 *Concerti à 3* by Giuseppe Antonio Brescianello, which were perhaps written before he moved to Germany, where he worked for most of his professional career as a virtuoso violinist, composer and Kapellmeister to the court in Stuttgart. While each of the six works on this fine CD (there will be a second volume to complete the set) broadly follow the pattern of the sonata da chiesa, the booklet notes are correct in saying that the technical demands placed on the violinists justify the use of the term “concerti”. The present performers have no problems in producing neat, characterful renditions, and the no-nonsense continuo team provides a modest but stylish foundation for their exploits. Brescianello is equally at home writing tuneful slow movements as he is working out proper counterpoint; these are fine works that deserve to be better known – and the equally fine musicians of Der musikalische Garten are leading the way.

Brian Clark

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CALDARA: MOTETTI A DUE O TRE VOCI OP. 4

Ingeborg Dalheim, Anna Kellnhöfer, Franz Vitzthum, Jan Van Elsacker, Florian Götz *SScTTB*, United Continuo Ensemble

59:06

Pan Classics PC 10362

Best known perhaps for his striking 16-part setting of the “Crucifixus”, this CD illustrates the opposite end of Antonio Caldara’s range as a composer, small-scale miniatures for two and three solo voices with continuo. Several of the works demonstrate his penchant for the tortured suspensions which characterize the “Crucifixus”, but on the whole this is much more light-hearted repertoire. The five soloists, appearing in batches of two or three, have a pleasant uncomplicated way with the music, ornamenting gently and naturally where appropriate, and interacting very effectively, while the continuo group supports them very sensitively and effectively. After training in Venice, Caldara moved first to Mantua and then Rome and it is possible to hear elements of all three musical traditions in his pleasing music. In among the motets, organist Johannes Hämmerle plays contemporary music by Sweelinck, Weckmann and Franz Tunder on the historic organ of Schloss Gottorf in Schleswig, which dates from around 1560 and which has a wonderfully authentic sound for this repertoire.

D. James Ross

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FRANÇOIS CAMPION: MUSIC FOR BAROQUE GUITAR

Bernhard Hofstetter *17th-century guitar*

60:10

Brilliant Classics 95276

The guitar music of François Campion (c. 1685-1747) represented here, comes from the copy of his *Nouvelles découvertes sur la Guitarre* (Paris, 1705), which contains extra pieces copied by hand. In 1748 the book was donated by Campion’s nephew to the Bibliothèque Royale, now the Bibliothèque Nationale, with the shelfmark Vm7 6221. A facsimile was published by Minkoff in 1977. The stringing is typical for French guitar music in the latter part of the 17th century, with a bourdon (low octave string) on the 4th course, but no bourdon on the 5th. This means that both strings of the 5th course are tuned at the higher octave, which is useful for campanellas, but it reduces the overall range of the instrument by a fourth. Campion’s collection is unusual, because there are eight different tunings, including *l'accord ordinaire*, or standard tuning (a a, d' d, g g, b b, e'). Hofstötter uses *l'accord ordinaire* for tracks 10-12 and 15-20, and one other tuning (a a, c' # c#, f# f#, b b, e') for tracks 1-9 and 13-14.

The first track, *Gavotte en Rondeau*, is typical of Campion’s polyphonic style: a clear two-part texture, with strummed chords used sparingly – just three in this piece. The first section is characterised by a descending chromatic scale in the bass, which is very much in evidence in bars 3-5, since the two strings of the fourth course (tuned an octave apart) cause that bass line to sound above and below the other melodic line. Hofstötter plays the notes cleanly, and brings out the interplay between the two voices. In contrast is the *Prelude* (track 2), which consists of nice arpeggiated chord progressions and a few strummed chords. Campion is careful not to lose sight of his melodic lines, so some chords are marked with dots to show which strings should not be struck. Hofstötter’s interpretation involves a certain amount of rhythmic freedom. Where chords are arpeggiated as four quavers, he often clips the fourth quaver, jerking prematurely into the next chord. The intention may be to create a feeling of intensity and forward movement, but for me it creates a feeling of unease and undue haste. *La Montléon* is in the style of a *gavotte*, and has an extraordinary augmented sixth in bar 4. Hofstötter plays the quavers *inégaux*, but often reverts to *égales* for isolated pairs.

The pieces in *accord ordinaire* include three fugues. The first one (track 10) is unusually long, covering five

and a half pages of the manuscript, and lasting close on six minutes. Champion develops the opening theme in a variety of ways, adding interest to the harmony with little chromatic inflections. Hofstötter sustains it well, adding excitement when the music soars up to the 12th fret.

Les Ramages is puzzling. In the first bar, after a strummed chord, the rhythm is shown as crotchet + quaver three times. From bar 3 the rhythm is notated as continual quavers. At the end of the piece, apparently as an afterthought, is written “*Cette pièce doit être harpégée continuellement*”, followed by the first bar re-written to show how chords should be arpeggiated into semiquavers. Hofstötter plays the whole of the first section the first time through with the crotchet + quaver rhythm, and plays arpeggiated semiquavers for the repeat. This seems odd, if only because he plays semiquavers both times through the second section. I think the instruction about arpeggiation is the composer changing his mind, and that one should ignore the crotchet + quaver rhythm signs in the first bar, and play semiquavers “*continuellement*” for the whole piece.

The CD ends with an extraordinary and very beautiful *Passacaille* lasting nearly ten minutes. The 4-bar phrases are numbered in a haphazard order in the manuscript, as if the composer keeps changing his mind over which phrase should come next. Hofstötter varies his interpretation of the rhythm – neat semiquavers played in time, some *inégaux* quavers, and quavers accelerating in an arrhythmic way. Phrase 17 is crossed out in the manuscript, but Hofstötter plays it anyway. The neatly played hemidemisemiquavers in phrase 19 are a spectacular show of Hofstötter’s virtuosity.

Stewart McCoy

CORRETTE: SONATAS FOR HARPSICHORD & VIOLIN, OP. 25

Michael Jarvis *harpsichord*, Paul Luchkow *violin*

73:55

Marquis 774718147523 (MAR 81475)

Corrette was active in many musical fields - a prolific pedagogue as well as composer. *Le Phénix* may still be his best-known piece either in its original form for four *basse de violes* or in one of the many arrangements which circulate (I first heard it on bassoons). However, in recent years a number of his more weighty works have been recorded giving us a rather more rounded view of his output. These sonatas, for the then newly fashionable combination of duetting violin and keyboard were published in 1742, in the wake of Mondonville’s op. 3. Each has three movements

fast-slowish-fast and some programmatic content: this is just an overall title for sonatas I-V but extends to the individual movements in VI – *Les Voyages d’ Ulysse*. The players do a lively, engaging and committed job, taking these indications as a starting point though, given that the keyboard is definitely the musically dominant instrument, it is a shame that it is not a little more forward in the aural image, though I do stress the ‘little’. The booklet notes are sound in content though do incorporate some strange hyphenation and perhaps needed a little more thought about fonts.

David Hansell

COUPERIN: LES MUSES NAISSANTES

Brice Sailly *harpsichord*, Emanuelle De Negri *soprano*, La chambre claire

67:30

Ricercar RIC 387

This is a carefully compiled anthology that draws on Couperin’s keyboard, instrumental chamber and secular vocal music to depict the Arcadian pastoral world of which so much French music is an idealised reflection. As such it also serves as a good introduction to the breadth of the composer’s achievement in this, his anniversary year. I have to say that I particularly enjoyed the singing of Emmauelle De Negri in the various airs. Her vibrato seldom feels intrusive and her ornamentation is neatly sung. Not that there’s anything wrong with the playing of the instrumentalists (viol, flute, oboe, bassoon, violin as well as harpsichord), though as usual I wonder if they really should vary instrumentation within movements. The harpsichord is a copy of a famous Ruckers and does sound really lovely. Supporting the performances is a slightly eccentric essay which if nothing else conveys the emotional commitment of the artists and offers some interesting ideas about the music and composer. Overall this is an unusual release in these days of ‘completist’ projects, and very welcome.

David Hansell

DE CROES: MOTETTEN

Bettina Pahn, Julian Podger, Peter Harvey STB, Cappella Brugensis, Collegium Instrumental Brugense, Patrick Peire
64:00

Et cetera KYC 1605 (© 2003)

The 18th-century Dutch composer Henri-Jacques de Croes served a number of noble households throughout Europe, including the Thurn und Taxis family in Frankfurt and Charles of Lorraine. These motets are essentially cantatas with sections for chorus and solo voices, all with string accompaniment, and stylistically owe a lot to the music of Antonio Vivaldi. We also find him falling under the musical spell of more modern composers such as Handel, but – as he lived until 1786 when he would have been over eighty – his music must have sounded quaintly old-fashioned by the time he retired. Just occasionally, de Croes does something a little more distinctive and idiosyncratic, such as the bagpipe drone effects at the opening of *Confitemini Domine*, but these are fleeting instances of originality in a style which is generally almost entirely conventional and derivative. These performances are attractive, with beautifully measured solo contributions, and fine choral and orchestral performances throughout. Sadly for de Croes, the 18th century was packed with gifted composers, well-known and neglected, who had much more to say musically than he seemed to.

D. James Ross

HANDEL: OCCASIONAL ORATORIO

[Julia Doyle, Ben Johnson, Peter Harvey STB], Chor des Bayerischen Rundfunks, Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin, Howard Arman

138:27 (2 CDs in box with sleeve)

BR Klassik 900520

Written in anticipation of the Hanoverian victory over the Jacobites at Culloden in 1746, Handel's *Occasional Oratorio* had to be written in considerable haste, and, as a result, the aging pragmatist naturally resorted to recycling on an industrial scale. It is entertaining to listen to this piece and to try to place where the reused material came from originally. The composer's own opus 6 *Concerti Grossi* are not for the first time a rich source of raw material, but most powerful is Handel's reuse of the "Zadok the Priest" music conceived for George II's coronation some twenty years earlier to conclude the oratorio with the words "God save the King

long live the King!" The German-born composer knew what side his bread was buttered on, but seems in addition to have felt a considerable personal loyalty to the House of Hanover. As the programme note points out, another snag with a celebratory oratorio written prior to the victory it celebrates is the risk of tempting fate, so Handel and his librettist, Newburgh Hamilton, endeavour to couch any direct hero-worship in general terms, while trusting in the good offices of Jehovah. Truly remarkable, but perhaps unsurprising in a composer with Handel's lifetime of experience, is the way in which every corner of the oratorio is beautifully crafted. This recording benefits from lovely instrumental playing both from orchestral soloists, strings and woodwind, and from the full orchestral body. While Ben Johnson occasionally sounds a little uncomfortable in the generally low tessitura of the tenor part, bass Peter Harvey and soprano Julia Doyle make a tuneful and idiomatic contribution. Sometimes I felt that the Bavarian choral forces were a little on the large scale for some of the detailed music they were given, but they sing with an admirable precision and clarity. This is a live recording made in the rich acoustic of the Munich Residenz Herkulesaal, and apart from one noticeable cough near the beginning it is remarkably distraction-free. Generally speaking this is a committed and effective account of the *Occasional Oratorio* in the new 2009 Halle Händel Edition.

D. James Ross

HANDEL: ODE FOR ST CECILIA'S DAY

Cristina Grifone, Hans Jörg Mammel, Musica Fiorita, Daniela Dolci

59:41

Pan Classics PC10381

Preceded by a stylish account of Handel's *Concerto Grosso* op. 6/4, this is a crisply persuasive account of the same composer's *Ode for St Cecilia's Day*. Composed as an attempt in 1739 to revive the traditionally lavish celebrations for the patron saint of music, Handel's *Ode* was performed alongside his *Alexander's Feast*, some of the Op. 6 *Concerti* and a new organ concerto. As with *Alexander's Feast*, the *Ode* sets a text by Dryden, and Handel is at his most imaginative in animating the various scenarios his librettist conjures up. Daniela Dolci and Musica Fiorita generally employ a light athletic sound, allowing for very expressive singing and playing, and bringing an admirable clarity to Handel's rich and varied score. The playing and singing is consistently of

the highest standard, the one slight fly in the ointment being tenor soloist Hans Jörg Mammel's slightly eccentric vowel sounds – given Handel's characteristic eccentricity in underlaying English text we can perhaps forgive this small failing. In every other respect, this is a thoroughly enjoyable account of the *Ode*, a charming and engaging work, which apart from "The Trumpet's Loud Clangour" occasionally extracted as a concert show-piece, is bafflingly underperformed nowadays. Perhaps, due precisely to finely chiseled authentic performances such as this, we are becoming more aware of the considerable virtues of works by Handel traditionally regarded as 'minor' pieces.

D. James Ross

HANDEL: GERMAN ARIAS & TRIO SONATAS

Gillian Keith *soprano*, Florilegium

78:00

Channel Classics CCS35117

HWV202-210, 386b, 398 + Concerto a Quattro in d

Handel set nine of Brockes's German aria texts to music for soprano, unspecified instrument and continuo; for their recording, Florilegium chose flute (Ashley Solomon) and violin (Bojan Cicic) supported by cello and continuo. They are divided here into three groups of three, each preceded by an instrumental piece (op. 5/3 in E minor, op. 2/1 in B minor and the HWV-less *Concerto a Quattro* in D minor with obbligato cello). I regret to say that, while the instrumental playing is fine and much of the singing similarly pleasant, there are things that I found rather disagreeable, primary amongst them Gillian Keith's tendency (especially in the upper reaches of her voice and even more so in some of the, to my ears at least, unexpectedly awkward decorations and cadenzas) to be rather shrill. I am puzzled why "one of Britain's most outstanding period instrumental ensembles" would seriously suggest that the unspecified obbligato instrument would change for the B section of a Da Capo aria; I had a ridiculous image in my mind of a be-wigged flautist bowing deeply as his violin-playing colleague took over, and then the reverse occurring a few moments later. If there is a technical reason that the middle part of an aria doesn't particularly suit the flute, then the most likely scenario is that Handel didn't ever imagine it being played on that instrument at all. In fact, this resonated with something I've long believed of the many incarnations of Florilegium, namely their apparent lack of curiosity for new repertoire; I understand that attracting a concert audience relies on

strategic planning – far more people will come to a concert of Handel than a hotchpotch of even fabulous pieces by lesser-known composers, but when you have done all the hard work and established an international reputation, CD recordings are surely the way to introduce your loyal fan base to the wealth of first-rate music written for your lineup – how about some Quantz? Or Janitsch – his quartets are increasingly well known, but few people have even looked at his trios...

Brian Clark

CEREMONIAL OXFORD

Music for the Georgian University by William Hayes

The Choir of Keble College, Oxford, Instruments of Time & Truth, Matthew Martin

79:12

crd 3534

Every now and then a CD comes along that makes one wonder why the music on it is not better known. That is precisely what happened here; I have known of William Hayes's music (and that of his son, Philip) for decades (thanks to taking a course on "Handel and his English contemporaries" with David Kimbell), and more recently through an offer to publish editions of some of his instrumental music (including the G major concerto played here on organ), but I had never heard any of it except courtesy of the Sibelius playback feature. With the best will in the world, computers cannot (yet?) compete with human performance, most assuredly not when they are of this calibre – the lively playing of the orchestra (and the soloists) is well suited to accompanying the archetypically (in a good way!) stylish English collegiate choir. Hayes, 23 years Handel's junior, builds solidly on the older man's extension and expansion of choral repertoire, though there is no denying the essential Englishness of it all; there may be counterpoint (in many cases better worked than many of his generation), but his primary concern is to convey the mood (if not the meaning) of the words. The inclusion of an organ voluntary by an even more obscure composer (William Walond, who apparently played in performances of Hayes's works) suggests a commitment to this repertoire that may bear further fruit. If you cannot wait until another CD appears, there will be three performances of Cosimo Stawarski's edition of *The Fall of Jericho* in Utrecht this April.

Brian Clark

JANITSCH: REDISCOVERIES FROM THE SARA
LEVY COLLECTION

Tempesta di Mare Philadelphia Baroque Orchestra &
Chamber Players, Gwyn Roberts, Richard Stone *directors*,
Emlyn Ngai *concertmaster*

67:28

Chandos Chaconne CHAN 0820

Regular readers will know that I am a great fan of Janitsch's chamber music, and as much a Tempesta di Mare groupie; that's hardly surprising, given that they have devoted time, energy and magic into recording three marvellous CDs of Fasch's orchestral music. For this present project, they chose four of Janitsch's "signature dishes" – quartets for a variety of instruments – and then threw in a total gem, an "Overture grosso" for two orchestras! As I've written many times before, Janitsch's quartets are masterclasses in the art of writing for three melody instruments; it doesn't even seem to matter which colour choices he makes, each voice is showcased in its best light, with equal share of the melodic material and clever (and subtle) use of micromanaged rhythmic patterns that can look intimidating on the page (he is not afraid of septuplets... or obscure keys for that matter!) but which are so convincing in performance. The two orchestras in the final work are coloured slightly differently; one has flutes while the other has oboes. I remember being slightly underwhelmed by Janitsch's sinfonias when I heard them for the first time, so I wondered if it was simply a case of not being able to write for orchestras, but that was clearly not the case; this is a wonder, with the material being thrown back and forth between the two lightly scored ensembles (orchestra 1 plays one-to-a-part while the upper strings in orchestra 2 are fuller), with proper counterpoint (complete with pedal points and stretto, for those who like to know such things), and a wealth of ideas that drive the music energetically forwards. I rarely highlight individual performances on this sort of disc, but one very definite stand out feature of this disc was the viola playing – in the G minor quartet, in particular, Karina Schmitz and Daniela Lisa Pierson are outstanding.

Brian Clark

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JOHANN KUHNAU: COMPLETE SACRED WORKS III

Opella Musica, cameratata lipsiensis, Gregor Meyer

74:17

cpo 555 021-2

This third volume with music for Christmastide begins with one of Kuhnau's most frequently performed works, his *Magnificat* – I heard it paired with the Bach *Magnificat* in a concert by Vox Luminis just before Christmas – and it has four *laudes*, like Bach's early E-flat version which intersperse the choruses and arias that make up the fourteen movements of this substantial work. The five-part writing calls for two sopranos and for two viola parts like much string writing in late 17th-century Germany, and indeed like some of Bach's Weimar period writing. Eloquent writing (and playing) for the obbligato oboe signals the relatively late date of composition.

The first setting heard on this CD of *O heilige Zeit* is scored for soprano and bass soli, with strings and oboe, and a chorus. In the bass aria that follows the first of the accompanied recitative for soprano, the substantial organ is heard to fine effect defeating the power of the old serpent, and the soprano solo has a very 'baroque' feel with an obbligato oboe and strings. The second setting of this same text is a longer and earlier work, more through-composed with less breaks between the sections, but with finely crafted almost operatic setting of the words and dramatic accompanied ariosos. Scored for five-part strings and continuo (here including a lute).

Froloket, ihr Völker und jauchzet, ihr Heiden is as substantial a work as the *Magnificat*, and scored for five-part strings, three trumpets and timpani, with an obbligato organ part. The opening chorus is followed by a recitative and then an aria; in the aria, *Kleines Kind*, a tenor solo with very florid writing, the solo violin intertwines with the obbligato organ. Another paired recitative and aria follows, this time for alto with a more conventional string band accompaniment. The writing here anticipates a more melodic and tuneful pre-galant style of writing which was to re-emerge in vocal writing from the mid century onwards, and the cantata ends with a contrapuntally orchestrated chorus.

These are stylish performances with one voice per part both vocally and instrumentally, and the music is freshly edited for this project which it is hoped will be completed in time for the 300th anniversary of Kuhnau's death in 2022. This recording was made in St Georgen, Rotha in June 2016, and there is a useful note on the organ there

rebuilt in 1718 by Gottfried Silbermann and his assistant, Zacharias Hildebrand. The organ carefully conserved in 1980 is tune at A=466 to a meantone temperament. The performances are pitched at A=415.

This CD is a fine example of scholarship paired with musicianship. The project is important not just because it illuminates Bach's antecedents in Leipzig, but because the music is fine in its own right. If we are to understand Bach's cantatas and discover appropriate ways of performing them, we need this kind of research and performance practice. Unusually for Germany, groups like this approaching the music from a historical perspective perform one-to-a-part, whereas the tradition of performing Bach in Germany is still coloured by the 19th-century assumption that the chorus parts are to be sung by choirs with many singers per part. While the male singers of Opella Musica are splendid, I continue to have reservations about the soprano voices, both of which have an over-produced 'modern' singerly quality: it is not needed and can be overcome, as the singers in Vox Luminis make clear.

But this should not deter you from buying this – and the other – CDs of Kuhnau, as wonderful music-making in their own right.

David Stancliffe

MARAIS: PIÈCES DE VIOLE

La Rêveuse (Florence Bolton, Benjamin Perrot, Robin Pharo, Carsten Lohff)

64:00

Mirare MIR 386

There is some marvellously idiomatic playing of marvellously idiomatic music here – the voice of the French Baroque in all its pathos and nobility, though not without lighter moments. The Marais movements are from his last two publications (1717 & 1725). Two skilful arrangements of Couperin for theorbo provide contrast: the *barricades* have seldom sounded so *mystérieuses*, though in an entirely good way, I hasten to add. My one reservation concerns the instrumentation of the continuo. The exquisite delicacy of the viol does not need the competition of two plucked accompanists: just one, preferably the theorbo, would have been fine as those pieces in which this is indeed the case demonstrate. The essay is very informative and interesting, even in this slightly lumpy translation, and the general packaging quite robust.

David Hansell

MARCELLO: ESTRO POETICO-ARMONICO (SALMI)

AND SONATA A TRÉ

Caroline Pelon *soprano*, Mélodie Ruvio *alto*, L'Amoroso, Guido Balestracci

75:22

Arcana A441

This CD of psalm settings by Benedetto Marcello opens with a charming Sonata a tré for gamba, cello and continuo. This elegantly understated music prepares the ground perfectly for the psalms, two for solo soprano, one for alto with a pair of obbligato gambas, and one for soprano and alto duet. Intriguingly Marcello quotes Hebrew chants in these settings, although it seems rather eccentric for the present performers to have monodist Antonio Magarelli sing the relevant chants in the middle of Marcello's settings. Marcello has a wonderful sense of melody and writes beautifully for voices and instruments alike, and the present soloists, soprano Caroline Pelon and contralto Mélodie Ruvio, sing with an effective lyricism and musicality. More famous as an instrumental composer, it is interesting to see that Marcello is just as capable in his compositions for voices, introducing the same effective blend of strong melodic ideas and inventive harmonic and textural concepts. The setting for alto and *violette*, interpreted here as meaning gambas, is particularly striking with some unusual deployment of the obbligato instruments (track 17).

D. James Ross

PORPORA: L'AMATO NOME

Cantatas Opus 1

Stile Galante, Stefano Aresi

148:48 (2 CDs in a card triptych)

Glossa GCD 923513

At the end of a note on performance practice, Stefano Aresi warns that we should not attempt to listen to all twelve of the chamber cantatas that comprise Nicola Porpora's op. 1 in one go. 'Rather,' he winningly continues, 'to enjoy the precious colours and flavours of this music, a slow approach, as to the appreciation of twelve glasses of different fine wines, is recommended. These works give of their best taken one by one, with plenty of time between for discussion, reading, and appreciating the joys of life.' And he is of course quite right, though sadly I doubt many people listen to their CDs in that way. One might also add that such is the diversity of form and style,

and, on this recording the use of four different singers, that it is perfectly possible to listen without musical inebriation to all the cantatas in succession, as I did on one of the occasions I listened to them.

The cantatas were published in 1735, a period when Porpora was working in London at the invitation of Handel's rivals, the Opera of the Nobility. They bear a dedication to Frederick Louis, Prince of Wales and the leading supporter of the Nobility. Work on them possibly started before Porpora arrived in England, but the set was almost certainly largely composed in London, several cello obbligato parts suggesting due attention to Prince Frederick's interest in that instrument. Six of the cantatas are for soprano, six for alto, which originally almost certainly meant male castrati, and all have texts on Arcadian topics by Metastasio. Following publication they became immensely popular, achieving a fame that highly unusually endured well into the following century, as is testified by a pupil of Porpora's, who wrote of them that, 'even nowadays, after 70 or more years [...] they are still sung and admired, and learned masters give them to their pupils to study'. A new edition was published in Paris as late as 1820.

Such rare success is not hard to understand. The settings are notable for the gracious melodic fluency that has become increasingly familiar the more we come to know the composer's operas. There is no formulaic approach, each text bearing evidence of having been carefully considered in the light of its particular poetic qualities. Recitatives, sometimes, as in the highly expressive narrative that lies at the heart of Cantata VII, are not infrequently lengthy. While adhering to the standard alternation of aria and recitative, the changes are constantly rung, opening now with an aria, now with recitative, while cantata VIII starts by reverting to earlier practice by enclosing recitative between a seamless opening and closing arioso. Cantata XII, the most seriously dramatic of the set, includes a striking passage in the style of accompanied recitative. Porpora even varies the style of accompaniment, the marvellous Cantata IX having an obbligato keyboard part rather than continuo.

Although superficially the texts speak of an idealised Arcadian world of nymphs and shepherds, we smile indulgently on them at the risk of self-mockery. A more thoughtful reading reveals that Metastasio is putting into words emotions that speak of a timeless truth: the suspicion of infidelity incorporated in the overwhelming longing for the absent loved one (Cantata III), a light-hearted but nonetheless sincere apology for being unable to

return love (Cantata X), and so forth. It is a measure of the success of the performances that we are constantly drawn into the beauty of the texts as well as that of the music, an achievement almost certainly made possible not only by the use of Italian singers, Francesca Cassinari and Emanuela Galli (sopranos), and Giuseppina Bridelli and Marina De Liso (altos), but the involvement of two(!) language coaches. The technique of all four singers is excellent, displaying a firm command of the demands made by the sometimes florid writing and attempting trills with varying degrees of success (Cassinari is particularly good). But above all it is the intelligent musical approach to these splendid cantatas as refined and sophisticated chamber works rather than some kind of mini-opera that makes these performances such unalloyed pleasure throughout. The singers are given excellent support by cellist Agnieszka Oszańska and Andrea Friggi (harpsichord), and I was grateful to note that Aresi's notes dismiss any other possibility (such as the inclusion of theorbo) as alien to the aesthetic of the music. My only slight criticism of this near-unfailingly rewarding set is the sense that one or two of the slower arias might have been given more forward momentum.

Brian Robins

QUANTZ: CONCERTOS & TRIO SONATAS
WITH RECORDER

Stefano Bagliano *recorder*, Collegium Pro Musica
54:43

Brilliant Classics 95386
QV2: 20, Anh.3; QV5:139; QV6:8a

How is it possible that such an important composer features so rarely on commercial recordings? It weren't for his writings, the HIP movement would struggle to understand 18th-century orchestral performance practice. And yes, ok, we are told he "churned out" concerto after concerto for the novelty-hungry King of Prussia, but how can we possibly know that they are not worth hearing at all without enterprising groups like Collegium Pro Musica and open-minded record companies like Brilliant Classics? Of course, it is just a re-working of the Stravinsky line about Vivaldi recycling the same piece ad nauseam. Bagliano and his friends have selected a concerto for recorder and strings, one with a flute added, a trio sonata for the two woodwinds (now in the appendix to the Quantz catalogue), and a G minor trio for recorder, violin and continuo. They are, without exception, well worth hearing, and very nicely played by one-to-a-part

strings (including double bass) and continuo. It is a pity the programme is so short, in fact – with performances of this quality, I feel sure that most customers would have forgiven the inclusion of a recorder-free work. That said, I would rather have this slightly short recital than not have it, and I hope that I will not be the only enthusiastic critic, and that everyone concerned in this project will look to recording more of Quantz's lovely music!

Brian Clark

A. SCARLATTI: RESPONSORIES FOR HOLY WEEK: HOLY SATURDAY

La Stagione Armonica, Sergio Balestracci

70:20

dhm 1 90758 02412 7

Scarlatti's settings of the nine responsories from the Tenebrae office for Holy Saturday are performed here in their three nocturns, preceded and separated by four Lenten motets and four organ pieces by the same composer. It makes for a satisfying programme which showcases Scarlatti's more restrained side, using the developed *stile antico* idiom commonly found in late 17th-century liturgical music. This refers back to late 16th-century style but uses more advanced harmonic shifts, sometimes becoming quite chromatic in response to the words. The listener can have some fun looking out for influences from earlier composers of responsories like Victoria and Gesualdo. Those recorded here survive in a single source, now in Bologna; although not attributed, they have long been thought to be by the elder Scarlatti – probably composed for the Medici in Florence – and certainly match the style of his more authenticated motets on this disc. The source provides a basso continuo, and organ is used to accompany the set here. The CD opens with an organ toccata and fugue, played by Carlo Rossi, which provides a full-bodied introduction in Italian style; the organ is a copy of a late 17th-century South German portable organ by Zanin of Udine. The sixteen voices of the choir produce a full choral sound, also in a typical Italian manner. Blend is good, even if tuning is not always spot on. The singing does have a strong sense of commitment and brings out the subtleties of the harmony and of Scarlatti's word-painting devices. The final *Miserere* is particularly heartfelt.

Noel O'Regan

NOSTALGIA: GIOVANNI BATTISTA SOMIS

Wolfram Schurig *flauto*, Johannes Hämmerle *cembalo*

55:30

fra bernardo fb 1711192

One of the many Corelli students to grace the first half of the 18th century, Giovanni Battista Somis was a virtuoso violinist and a composer. Much praised for his expressive playing and an influential advocate of the violin, Somis was obviously also an accomplished composer with a distinctive voice. He composed mainly for his own instrument, and the present sonatas are selected from his opp. 3 and 4, published in 1725 and 1726, for violin solo with cello or harpsichord. They are performed here by Wolfram Schurig on a variety of sizes of recorder, and while it seems unlikely that Somis would have too enthusiastic about this liberty taken with his music – he wrote a *Sinfonia for flauto*, and clearly would have written more if he had wanted to – these performances work very well indeed. Schurig's easy virtuosity on the recorder and Hämmerle's wonderfully supportive harpsichord playing are a delight to listen to, and while we miss the double-stopping demanded in some of the pieces (and also the wonderful bow control for which Somis was widely admired), these performances are very persuasive indeed. While Schurig's programme note is mostly devoted to largely spurious arguments for performing Somis' violin music on recorders, it does make the relevant point that, of all the Corelli pupils, Somis is the one who most quickly and completely stepped out of his master's shadow to produce music of genuine individuality and charm. I would have liked to have heard more about Somis' long career, and am frankly baffled by the CD's title and the cover illustration, a 1932 snap of Claudette Colbert!

D. James Ross

TELEMANN: LATIN SACRED WORKS

Allabastrina Choir & Consort, Elena Sartori

58:59

Christophorus CHR 77414

Deus judicium tuum, Laudate Jehovam omnes gentes, Magnificat + two concertos arr. Walther

I quite enjoy inviting people to identify the composer of music I happen to be listening to when they visit; I fear I would not do particularly well if the present CD was randomly played to me. Of course, familiarity with Telemann's vast output has taught me that he is something of a musical chameleon, but here he excels himself – where

director Elena Sartori hears pre-echoes of Mozart in the brief setting of *Laudate Jehovah omnes gentes*, I had gone a generation earlier in Italy... The booklet claims *Deus judicium tuum* is closer to Rameau and Lully than the composer's German cantatas, but – when good quality recordings of the latter are so sparse – I wonder how valid that point is. Similarly, the use of trumpets in the *Magnificat* points to J. S. Bach in Leipzig... Really? Trumpets weren't used throughout Germany on any festive occasion? While there are some interesting moments on the recording (the bass duet with trumpets and drums in the *Magnificat*, for example), I'm afraid there are also weaknesses; the singing is a little fruity in places (and too much thought went into the phrasing of Track 3, for sure!) I sincerely hope that it will persuade others to explore Telemann's larger scale church music (in whatever language).

Brian Clark

A TRIBUTE TO TELEMANN

La Spagna, Alejandro Marías

71:39

Lukos Records 5451CRE80843

TWV51: A5; 52: a1, G1; 55: D6, G10

Entering into the ever-expanding ranks of recordings of these quite familiar, yet discerningly witty and descriptive pieces, we have La Spagna's offerings under a strawberry and vanilla cover now joining the 15+ of TWV55:D6, and approaching 30(!) of the "Burlesque de Quixotte" suite in G major TWV55:G10. The once unfamiliar concerto for gamba and strings, TWV51:A5, has at least four known recordings. Note that the concerto for recorder, gamba and strings is wrongly identified, and should be TWV52:a1! It is widely accepted that Telemann's *concertante* gamba works were conceived with the Darmstadt virtuoso Ernst Christian Hesse in mind; he studied under Marais and Forqueray in Paris. The musicians of the Darmstadt court orchestra worked closely with Telemann during his Frankfurt period (1712-1721), especially during large public performances. In the D major gamba suite here, we encounter within the French framework many keen nods towards the Italianate concerto style; it is a hybrid with added idiomatic effects e.g. *La Trompette*, one of several brass simulation effects found in TWV55... Another example is the 3rd movement from TWV55:B4, *Les cornes de Visbade*. With the present director being a gamba and cello player, the choice of repertoire is hardly surprising; yet one feels a wider

selection could have made for a better tribute during the anniversary year; perhaps a couple of the wonderful violin and gamba sonatas from TWV42 which are played so well online by this very ensemble!

This all said, the director and the musicians give a balanced, unforced account of these familiar works.

David Bellinger

TELEMANN AT CAFÉ ZIMMERMANN

Die Freitagsakademie

72:39

Winter & Winter 910 245-2

TWV42:g5, 43:a5, 51:A2, 55:C6 & g4

On the face of it, this would be a perfect disc for me; sandwiched between two of my favourite overture-suites (with three oboes!) are one of his most beloved trio sonatas (this one for violin and oboe), a nice oboe d'amore concerto, and – by way of a treat – a piece I don't think I've ever heard before, one of his four-part string pieces (this one is labelled "sonata"). That, however, is where the excitement reached its climax. The paltry notes (printed on the inside of the wings of the triptych packaging – German to the left, English to the right) are little more than a potted biography of the composer up to the point he established his Collegium Musicum that Zimmermann's café would later host and then some blurb about that establishment; nothing, in other words, about the music or why it was selected for inclusion. The performances are a mixed bag; while the chamber music (by which I mean everything that is not an overture-suite, even though they, too, are played one-to-a-part) is pleasant enough (the biting string playing in some of the dances are less in evidence, for example), there are two aspects of the suites that I found less attractive; the tinkling of the harpsichord that rather distracted the ear from the actual melodies at several points (and I cannot help wondering if some of the overly mannered slow movements were paced simply to accommodate such indulgence), and the overmiked growly violone – there were times when I had to turn the volume down (on more than one player) to mask the distortion.

Brian Clark

A CONCERT NEAR DARMSTADT

Chamber music by Telemann

The Herschel Trio

75:40

Omnibus Classics CC5013

TWV 42: D6, d3, F4, g7, A3, a7, h4

This is a most beautifully presented CD, with notes by one of the top Telemann experts in the English-speaking world. The Herschel Trio clearly display their alert, intimate and articulate musicianship and the composer's own prowess in the trio genre. These selected works well suit the ensemble's sprightly, agile approach; only occasionally did the flute err on the decent side of stridency during a "deep listen" in the headphones! The trios in F major (TWV42: F5) and G minor (TWV42: g7) have been recorded about five and seven times each, strangely matching their classification numbers! The three works chosen from the *Six Concerts et six suites* (Hamburg 1734) perfectly match the eloquent abilities of the players. The 1734 set offers no less than five variations of instrumentation, which would again seem to espouse the composer's oft cited adage: "Wer vielen nutzen kan, thut besser, als wer nur fuer wenige was schreibet; Nun dient, was leicht gesetzt, durchgehends jedermann" ("He who writes for the many, does a greater service than he who just writes for the few; thus music easier to play pleases one and all", from his 1718 autobiography). I'm convinced there are some vocal lines hiding behind some of the movements of the 1734 set (Tempo giusto?). I'd keenly recommend this recording to all who aren't aware of these works in their flexible musical guises, and others who might collect Telemann trios like rare postage stamps; if nothing else, I'd like to hear the ensemble tackle the remaining suitable works from the 1734 collection... a future project?

David Bellinger

TELEMANN: MELODIOUS CANONS & FANTASIAS

Elysium Ensemble (Greg Dikmans *flute*, Lucinda Moon *violin*)

59:13

resonus RES10207

TWV 40:7, 13, 20, 118-123

The two instruments found on this recording were among those Telemann instinctively took up in his pre-teen days without any formal knowledge of music; what heights he would later reach. After some biographical details, the CD booklet rightly settles on

Quantz, for in this composer's *Solfeggi* over 30 works are found including these "Melodic Canons" (TWV40:118-123) which were published during his sojourn in Paris, also known as his *VI Sonates en Duo*, for Flutes, Violins, or Gambas. Usually, we hear these on two violins, yet they have also previously been recorded on two flutes, and a combination of flute and oboe; here we have violin and flute taking on the canonic lines. With the flute used here, a copy of a Quantz instrument (c.1740) with two keys, we encounter the lower pitch (A= 392/400, so-called *Tief-Kammerton*) which does affect the brightness of these works, and slower tempi than usual are applied, resulting in elegant, measured readings. The chosen Fantasias for flute (Nos. 6 and 12 in D minor and G minor respectively) again expose us to this lower, darker pitch. Perhaps the fine, nimble violinist could have had another Fantasia to close the disc? At just under an hour, the recording offers an alternative route through these neatly crafted pieces. Though not new to our ears, they take a novel approach; a pleasant recap.

David Bellinger

VIVALDI: THE FOLK SEASONS

Barocco Boreale, Kreeta-Maria Kentala (+Siiri Virkkala) *violin*

79:31

Alba ABCD 402

+ RV 114, 511, 522

Well... – where do I begin? I suppose with a positive comment – somewhere under all of this there is probably a rather attractive account of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*. However, in the modern compulsion to 'bring something new' to Vivaldi, we have many of the natural sounds subtly alluded to in the original, 'realized' by bird whistles, regal, psaltery and a host of other inappropriate instruments, while Vivaldi's original score is practically deconstructed in a series of ridiculous exaggerations and distortions. All good fun, you might say, and clearly eminent early harpist and professor Andrew Lawrence King, who plays several of the added instruments, would seem to agree. Well I don't. Having heard Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* horribly mangled by a number of ensembles over the years, I haven't become in any way hardened to it, let alone more sympathetic to such treatments. By all means, write new pieces commenting on Vivaldi, as several composers have done, but don't impose your own eccentric performance ideas which he

would never have countenanced himself and which make a nonsense of his music. Surely the whole point of Vivaldi's allusions to natural/folk sounds is that they are just that – allusions – and the minute you spell them out with literal renditions, shoe-horned into the original score, you have ruined his intentions. I have a secret inkling that all these attempts to 'improve upon' Vivaldi ultimately result from the chronic over-exposure of his music, particularly the *Four Seasons*. The answer is simple – give this played-out repertoire a rest and either turn instead to the other 95 percent of Vivaldi's output that nobody looks near, or devote your time to one of the plethora of excellent and entirely neglected Baroque composers. It would be good to hear this clearly excellent Baroque ensemble turn their attentions to a more worthwhile project – meanwhile, slapped legs all round for this self-indulgent nonsense...

D. James Ross

ZACH: REQUIEM SOLEMNE, VESPERAE DE BEATA VIRGINE

Musica Florea, Marek Štryncl

57:48

Supraphon SU 4209-2

Musica Florea is one of several Czech groups who have done fantastic work in resurrecting important works by their forebears. Here they pair one of Zach's recognised masterpieces, a Requiem in C minor dating from around 1740, with a contemporaneous Marian Vespers set (lacking on psalm and a hymn), the latter as a world premiere recording. Štryncl does an excellent job of pacing this cleverly written music to get the best effect from it. His soloists are not always on top of the music; soprano Michaela Šrůmová has just too much bloom on her voice (especially in ensemble), and the poor tenor, Čeněk Svoboda, has a beautiful voice but he really struggles with some horrendously difficult coloratura in Zach's *Laetatus sum*. That said, there is much to enjoy from both of them and the other soloists, alto Sylva Čmugrová and bass Jaromir Nosek, as well as from the choir (6455) and the excellently balanced orchestra. Even despite these slight blemishes, I found myself returning to this recording many times – Zach combines the harmonic daring of Zelenka with the almost rococo energy of Hasse. And I should have mentioned before that it is a live recording, so allowances must be made. I certainly hope to hear more of Zach's choral music in the future.

Brian Clark

ZELENKA: SONATAS ZWV 181

Collegium 1704

107:21 (2 CDs in a card triptych)

Rarely have I been so excited to receive a recording and equally disappointed by it. Let me state from the outset that this has nothing to do with the quality of the performances; as I have written many times before (as a quotation in the booklet neatly illustrates), Collegium 1704 are among my favourite performers of Zelenka's extraordinary music. There is just one feature of these versions that I found initially distracting, then irksome and finally my ear became so obsessed with it that I had to reject the disc from my player... I have never been a professional continuo player, but I did study the art as part of my degree and I remember quite clearly being told by more than one teacher that I should "stay out of the way" of the more important obbligato lines. Similarly, that part of the function of the realising instrument was to fill out the chords so that the otherwise unheard dissonances and their necessary resolution was a key driving factor behind baroque music. On this recording, neither of these approaches is taken; the registration of the instrument is such that it regularly tinkles around (by which I mean "improvises clever counter-melodies") above or among the oboes, and some of the chords are so lavishly spread (or hidden in a wild flourish of scales and arpeggios) that the third is so delayed that whatever dissonance there might have been has long since evaporated (as is the instrument's wont), and (while I'm on a roll) some of the delay is so noticeable that it actually slows progress rather than the reverse. It may also be the case that the miking and/or balance of the recording just was not right, but I would have expected the musicians to have had something to say about that at the editing stage. There are also odd moments in several movements where it has been decided that the we should freeze as if suddenly caught in the middle of a game of musical statues; quite apart from the fact that there is no explanation for this in either Zelenka's autograph scores or the booklet notes, how could musicians of the time have known from their part when someone else's music dictated such an action? I am all for finding new things to say about familiar music, if as a result we are excited as if hearing it for the first time, but (sorry!) this just annoyed me, too. This is, of course, fabulous music, and these are great musicians; on this occasion, I'm afraid I just didn't like the final result.

Brian Clark

A DUE ALTI

Chamber duets by Bononcini, Steffani, Marcello et al.

Filippo Mineccia, Raffaele Pe, La Venexiana, Claudio Cavina

79:29

Glossa GCD 920942

This interesting CD presents a series of chamber duets for two alto voices from the early 18th century. As the perceptive programme note points out, the chamber duet is a form distinct from any other duet, such as those occurring regularly in cantatas and operas, in that the two parts are not sparring with one another, but are rather two complementary parts of one persona. Many of the composers represented were also writing powerful operatic roles for male altos and sopranos, and so were well acquainted with the technical possibilities as well as possessing a developed sense of drama. Very effectively accompanied by the four continuo instruments of La Venexiana, the two excellent male alto soloists Filippo Mineccia and Raffaele Pe provide something of a masterclass in expressive alto singing, ranging from the powerfully declamatory to the whisperingly intimate. We are currently living in a golden age of male falsetto singing, allowing us once again to appreciate the finest of Baroque music composed for the great castrato singers of the 18th century, and this CD taps into a rich seam of music which reveals a more subtle side of the repertoire than perhaps opera provides. To introduce variety, the performers include two lovely alto solos by Bononcini, while the complex and imaginative duet by the Venetian-born Neapolitan composer Cristofaro Caresana is a revelation, adding to the growing profile of the Neapolitan Baroque scene. As a bonus, the designer of the package, Rosa Tendero, has been allowed to go mad with 'cut and paste' on Baroque prints, to hilarious effect.

D. James Ross

ARIAS FOR SILVIO GARGHETTI: THE HABSBURG STAR TENOR

Markus Miesenberger, Neue Wiener Hofkapelle

Markus Miesenberger (cond)

62:32

Pan Classics PC 10372

This is an interesting but ultimately seriously flawed project that leaves too many unanswered questions. Austrian tenor Markus Miesenberger has delved

into the archives to research a tenor active at the Imperial court in the early years of 18th century, originally identified in the score of an opera by Giovanni Bononcini only by the name Silvio. Further research allowed Miesenberger to establish that this was almost certainly Silvio Garghetti, probably the member of a musical family who in the early years of the new century came to Vienna, where in 1705 he married the daughter of vice-Kapellmeister Marc' Antonio Ziani, whose serenata *La Flora* was given the following year. Interestingly *La Flora* also features an aria by the Emperor Joseph I, a pleasing, light-hearted piece included on the present CD along with the Ziani. No further biographical detail has come to light, it being recorded only that 'Silvio sang in numerous performances of operas and oratorios between 1706 and 1719', making the assertion that he was a 'star' tenor at least questionable.

So far so good. Despite the lack of hard facts the hypothesis is at least tenable. However it is when Miesenberger attempts to tie Garghetti's name to the arias on the disc that everything starts to unravel. Although he calls the source of all the arias recorded here operas, it is impossible to identify a significant number of them as such. I suspect that these pieces are rather dramatic cantatas or the kind of single-act serenata with a *licenza* that were popularly used to celebrate Imperial birthdays and so on. This suspicion is enhanced by the number of arias that have only sparse or continuo accompaniment, several of which also include obbligato parts. Miesenberger's carelessness with nomenclature arouses suspicions about his scholarship that are compounded when one realises that his notes fail to mention that Garghetti was not the only 'star' tenor at the Viennese court during this period. Both Antonio Borosini and his son Francesco, Handel's first Bajazet in *Tamerlano*, were employed there, the former nearing the end of his career, the latter just starting his. It is therefore a near certainty that given the lack of data, at least some of the arias recorded here were written for one or other Borosini. That certainly applies to the somewhat undistinguished 'Di mia glorie' from Francesco Conti's *Alba Cornelia* of 1714, which is a 3-act opera. Both Borosinis sang in it and given the extremely unlikely scenario that the opera included three tenor roles, it cannot have been composed for Garghetti. Indeed on the evidence provided here, it would not be possible to claim indisputably that any of these arias were composed for him.

Leaving aside the suspect research, the operas and other dramatic works of the Imperial court have to date received little attention, with the likes of Fux and Caldara better

known for their sacred works. But the Bononcini brothers, Antonio Maria and particularly his elder brother Giovanni both produced important dramatic works for Joseph I in the first decade of the century. Five arias by them are included. Otherwise an aria by Conti, the court theorbist, from his 3 act opera *Il finto policare* (1716) especially catches the ear by way of gentle descending sequential figures, but truth to tell there is little here that would set the Danube on fire.

That impression may at least in part be conveyed by Miesenberger's performances. Although his lyric tenor is intrinsically quite pleasing he does not display the technique nor the necessary Italianate elegance and fluency for this repertoire. His way with embellishment is frequently perfunctory, with poorly articulated turns and some unstylish ornamentation of repeats; there's a particularly wild example in the *da capo* of Antonio Bononcini's *Arminio* (1706), an opera (?) not listed in the composer's *New Grove* worklist. The Neue Wiener Hofkapelle provide efficient if hardly inspiring support, being in any case far too small an ensemble to do justice to the more fully scored arias that do come from operas that were originally written for an orchestra that employed up to 30 strings. In sum, I fear that this is a well-meaning but unsatisfactory attempt to cast light on a repertoire certainly in need of further investigation.

Brian Robins

CAUGHT IN ITALIAN VIRTUOSITY

4 Times Baroque

60:35

deutsche harmonia mundi 19075818232

Music by Corelli, Handel, Merula, Prowo, Sammartini & Vivaldi

4 Times Baroque are four extremely photogenic young lads with talent oozing from every pore; they are captivating in live performance and I am more than happy to report that their flair and panache carry over into the recording studio. Being one of those recorder, violin, cello and keyboard line-ups, some of the repertoire has had to be arranged to suit, but is none the worse for that. Slightly surprising is the choice to allocate the *Follia* variations from the end of Corelli's op. 5 set of violin sonatas to Jan Nigge on recorder. Yet, as I say, only the most pedantic of dogmatists could fail to be impressed by his engaging performance. They are clearly very familiar with the music; the decorations of the D minor sonata now attributed to Pierre Prowo (though I'm still very convinced that it is Telemann!) could only be pulled off

by an ensemble who has the music flowing through their blood. Elsewhere violinist Jonas Zschenderlein impresses in his Croelli sonata, Karl Simko gets a rare moment in the limelight in the second movement of Vivaldi's RV100, and harpsichordist Alexander von Heißen (who is equally impressive as a soloist) provides an accompaniment that is perfectly judged to provide harmonic support and, where required, rhythmic drive, without ever protruding as seems to be something of a current fad elsewhere. I hope to hear more of these guys soon.

Brian Clark

L'ESTRO VIVALDIANO

Venetian Composers and their mutual influences

Mensa Sonora, Gabriel Grosbard/Matthieu Boutineau

70:35

passacaille 1035

Music by Albinoni, Bicaajo, Gentili, Schreyvogel, Tartini, Vivaldi & Ziani

The premise of this excellent compilation is simple: Vivaldi did not live in a bubble, so let's explore the music that he must have heard in Venice at the time. To most readers that will mean the inclusion of composers who (even with the best will in the world) must be described as obscure: Johann Friedrich Schreyvogel, for example, or Giorgio Gentili. Personally, I had only heard of the latter because I was asked to edit some of his concertos for someone doing concerts in Italy. I am not going to make extravagant claims for the music – nor, indeed, do the musicians; rather, I will suggest that, if you heard any of it on the radio, you would be hard pressed to say whether or not it was Vivaldi (with the possible exception of the sonata by Albinoni which struck my ears instantly, or perhaps the B minor *Sinfonia al Santo Sepolcro* RV167, but then there is another *Sepolcro* sinfonia later in the programme that might fool you...) Mensa Sonora play one to a part and produce a lovely balanced sound with the solo part emerging organically from the texture when required. As obscure composers go, the author of a G minor concerto for violin and organ by the name of "Padre Bicaajo" takes some beating – although Michael Talbot has argued that he may merely have been the owner of the sheet music and the composer was none other than the Red Priest... Whoever wrote it, it merits its place on this thoroughly enjoyable and edifying disc.

Brian Clark

[EX]TRADITION

The Curious Bards

62:47

harmonia mundi HMN 916105

Scottish & Irish airs, reels, jigs, dances and variations with compositions of Carolan

This minimally packaged CD seems to be the first of a new series from harmonia mundi entitled “Harmonia Nova”, designed to bring new artists to a wider audience – it is a mark of the trendy packaging that, until I looked into it, I had transposed the name of the CD with that of the performing group. The recording is devoted to the music of 18th-century Scotland and Ireland, and (with the naivete of youth) Alix Boivert opens his programme note with the extraordinary assertion that the music of eighteenth-century Scotland and Ireland is ‘practically forgotten’ and that it is the mission of the group ‘to bring to light a cultural legacy’. The hazards of bringing to light someone else’s cultural legacy are laid horribly bare in the vocal contributions by guest singer, Ilektra Platiopoulou, who – perhaps understandably – has little concept of any attempt at authentic pronunciation or even an appropriate style of vocal production. Having said that, Boivert has gone to all the right 18th-century sources and he and his players have mastered to a remarkable degree traditional Scottish and Irish playing techniques, and have applied them very convincingly on their period instruments. As a reviewer, it is important just to wait around long enough and you learn that there is truly nothing new under the sun; for me, these well-intentioned performances recalled the work of the Baltimore Consort around twenty years ago. I think those fine players and advocates of the musical legacy of Scotland and Ireland, as well as more recent tireless exponents of precisely the repertoire represented here such as David McGuinness and his superb Concerto Caledonia, might take issue with the idea that this repertoire is ‘practically forgotten’, but the Curious Bards are undoubtedly making a valuable contribution to bringing this attractive music to a still wider audience. Just sit back and get in touch with the curious Celt within.

D. James Ross

FRENCH SONATAS FOR HARPSICHORD AND VIOLIN

Philippe Grisvard, Johannes Pramsohler

110:23 (2 CDs in a hardbacked booklet)

Audax Records ADX13710

Music by Balbastre, Clément, Corrette, Duphly, Guillemain, Marchand & Mondonville

This recital gets off to a absolute flyer with Mondonville’s outstanding op. 3/1 in G minor, with both players comfortably equal to both the technical and musical challenges. And note the overall title: this is a collection of *Pièces de clavecin en sonates avec accompagnement de violon*. Mondonville blazed this trail with his op. 3 (published 1740, though very probably circulating in m/s before that) and his pioneering work was most assiduously developed by Louis-Gabriel Guillemain (1705-70). Three of his op. 13 *sonates* receive world premiere recordings here and the notes rightly draw attention to the virtuosic writing for both instruments and the difficulty of creating a duo performance as opposed to a competition. They succeed with great flair, even though both they and their instruments are on the limit of the period’s demands. Most of these *sonates* speak with an Italianate (if not fully Italian) accent, though Duphly retains his native language in both the music and his movement titles and these subtleties, too, can be heard in the playing. There’s also some thoroughly enjoyable wackiness (Luc Marchand).

The overall presentation is quite lavish, with the two CDs enclosed in the endpapers of a small (jewel-case size) hardback book and notes in five languages. It is a small irritant that these deal with the music in chronological rather than performance order but I will be forgiving as it is such a relief to read English notes from a foreign source that are idiomatic in their expression. Finally, the recording offers as good a balance of the instruments as I have ever heard in this combination.

David Hansell

GYPSY BAROQUE

Il suonar parlante orchestra, Vittorio Ghielmi

58:58

Alpha Classics Alpha 392

Behind the almost film poster of a booklet cover with galloping horse feet across the dusty plains, we encounter an assortment of works, some extracted from their familiar Baroque settings, and re-cast in an arranged gypsy mode, some pieces as arrangements of more traditional themes. It is rather like taking a whistle-

stop tour through Transylvania and beyond whilst looking through a shifting musical kaleidoscope at this earthy, spirited, often rustic, stomping music. There are moments of captivating beauty too; the two guest musicians provide extra colour Dorothee Oberlinger's sopranino recorder in one piece, and Shalev Ad El in the F. Benda work dazzle with their dextrous ease. The great *gusto* and *joie de vivre* of many of the other works shine through with the various soloists and a leader on great form. We pass through the foothills, the taverns, and country dances with the odd traditional song along the way. The front cover might have led to Telemann's "Les courreurs" (TWV55:Es1 or TWV55:B5) or even "Les Scaramouches" (third movement of "La Changeante" TWV55:g2). The second Telemann extraction and arrangement, Track 7 on this CD, has gone for a bagpipe effect on the gamba, when the French clearly implies "Vielle" i.e. "hurdy-gurdy" or Lyra mendicorm, which in the original suite is couched between Menuets I/II and a *Sicilienne avec Cadenze*, and has real rustic impact! Here the drone dominates, and the snappier rustic tempo wanes. This recording offers more of the trend towards "Gypsyfication", taking us from the polite salons of formal Baroque concerts into the middle and Eastern European fields, crossing almost into Istanbul. Some of the violin playing reminded me of the great Stéphane Grappelli with lashings of improvisatory zeal. I wasn't entirely won over by the Vivaldi, a tad more with the Mozart; the Benda was superb! Not to everyone's taste, but a colourful tour nonetheless.

David Bellinger

PORTRAITS & CARACTÈRES

Martin Gester *harpsichord*, Stéphanie Pfister *violin*

Lidi 0301314-17

74:00

Music by Corrette, Duphly & Mondonville

Corrette can rarely have had it so good! Three of the discs in my current heap contain at least one sonata from his op. 25, this one claiming to be a first recording, though as it is duplicated on one of the others I have, I'll leave the artists and/or their recording companies to sort that one out!

This is a very satisfying programme overall, two harpsichord/violin duos (Mondonville as well as the Corrette) being framed and separated by groups of harpsichord 'solos' (some of which have subsidiary violin parts) drawn from Duphly's 2nd and 3rd books. In these

Martin Gester plays with an exemplary blend of control and relaxed authority, making full but sensible use of his fine instrument (a copy of the Russell Collection's remarkable 1769 Taskin). Once or twice I felt he was overstretching the beat, but this is a tiny issue. More of an issue is the balance between violin and harpsichord in the duos. In general, and given that the keyboard is often the primary instrument, I feel that the violin is too forward in the aural picture and that there are also places where its material is "accompanimental" and simply should be played a little more softly. The supporting material (Eng/Fre) is sound though white print on a dark red background doesn't make for the easiest reading.

David Hansell

STOLEN ROSES

Xavier Díaz-Latorre *lute*

63:41

passacaille 1030

Music by Bach, Biber, Telemann, Weiss & Westhoff

This excellent CD of baroque music, most of it "stolen" from violinists, begins with a most extraordinary piece to be played on the lute: The Guardian Angel Passaglia, which completes Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber's Mystery Sonatas. It was composed for solo violin, and it is interesting to see how Díaz-Latorre uses the lute to enhance Biber's original work. The descending bass line – G, F, E flat, D – is heard alone at the beginning, with gravitas, two octaves below the pitch of the violin. Then a slowish melody is heard above for two statements of the ground, while the harmony of Biber's thin two-part texture is enriched by a fuller texture on the lute. Thereafter though, apart from adding numerous ornaments and a run-up to a tasteful cadenza of his own before the notes of the ground return from the top of the texture to the bottom, Díaz-Latorre reproduces Biber's notes for the most part just as they were. It is a fine performance, with impressive technical skill and clarity of tone, from slow, dignified, chordal passages to exciting sequences of sparkling hemidemisemiquavers racing up to the higher reaches of the lute.

There follows J. S. Bach's well-known Suite for the Lute in G minor (BWV 995) – "Pièces pour la Luth à Monsieur Schouster" – composed originally for the cello, but re-arranged by Bach. Díaz-Latorre plays a 13-course lute by Grant Tomlinson, and the low A of the 13th course is effective in the opening Präludium. The long Presto

proceeds apace, but with nicely shaped phrases, unhurried until the last group of descending semiquavers accelerates to the final cadence. After a highly ornamented Allemande, comes a Courante, which doesn't quite flow as it could, because Díaz-Latorre keeps switching between égales and inégales quavers. The Suite ends with a fine Gigue, which hops and skips along energetically with nice interplay between treble and bass.

In contrasting style – with less dissonance and fewer diminished sevenths – is Georg Philipp Telemann's Fantasia 1 in B flat, one of twelve composed for solo violin, and published in Hamburg in 1735. A nicely poised Largo, a super-slick Allegro, a well-sustained Grave, and an exciting Allegro, are most effective in Díaz-Latorre's arrangement for baroque lute.

Johann Paul von Westhoff (1656-1705) was a violinist at the Hofkapelle in Dresden. His Suite in A minor is one of six for unaccompanied violin, and like the other "stolen roses", sounds very well on the lute. (A facsimile of the original may be seen on IMSLP, with its curious stave lines split into groups of 3+2+3, white quavers for the Courante, and a Sarabande with three semibreves per bar.) Westhoff's music has a surprisingly rich texture for an instrument with only four strings – many 3- and 4-note chords and parallel thirds – and Díaz-Latorre tastefully adds extra bass notes and ornaments. The Gigue has a lighter texture, with a chromatic descending opening motif imitated in the bass.

Most impressive is Díaz-Latorre's performance of Bach's Ciaccona from the second Partita for solo violin (BWV 1004). The piece consists of many contrasting sections, which Díaz-Latorre transfers well to the lute. He adds ornaments here and there, and where the violin texture is thin, he adds suitable bass notes discreetly and effectively to underpin the harmony. The speed and clarity of his demisemiquavers is breathtaking, and the first arpeggio passage has all the excitement of a flamenco guitar.

The CD ends with a bonus track: Fantasia in C minor by Sylvius Leopold Weiss, the only piece not stolen from other instruments. With this enthralling collection of "stolen roses" Xaxier is in danger of giving theft a good name.

Stewart McCoy

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