

EDITIONS

RESTORATION MUSIC FOR THREE VIOLINS, BASS VIOL AND CONTINUO

Musica Britannica CIII

Transcribed and edited by Peter Holman and John
Cunningham

xlviii (incl. six plates) + 134pp

ISMN 979 0 2202 2517 8; ISBN 978 0 85249 953 5;

ISSN 0580-2954; Stainer & Bell Ltd £99.00

As a violinist, there are few things I enjoy more than playing music for three treble parts, so the contents of this volume (much of which I know from recordings by one of the editors and his ground-breaking Parley of Instruments) are a delight.

There are 11 three-movement fantasia-suites by John Jenkins, a ten-movement suite by Thomas Baltzar, grounds by Bartholomew Isaack and Nicola Matteis, and five sonatas by Gottfried Finger (as well as the sole surviving part from a sixth).

After a broad introduction to the repertoire (including a footnote referring readers to a free download site rather than the English publisher, King's Music/The Early Music Company, for early Italian sonatas for three violins, while modern German editions are credited in footnote 11), each of the composers and his output are profiled in greater detail.

The music itself is neatly laid out with repeats and ends of movements at line or page breaks. Editorial additions are printed in smaller type and if something is not clear, there are extensive notes on sources and discrepancies in the 18-page critical notes that complete this very handsome volume.

At under £100, this beautiful book is a bargain. Hopefully its true worth will be shown in renewed interest in the repertoire it contains. Although it states that performing material is published simultaneously, I was unable to find it on www.stainer.co.uk – perhaps they are “in preparation”. Let us hope so!

Brian Clark

.....

RECORDINGS

CHARPENTIER: LEÇONS DE TÉNÈBRES

[Samuel] Boden, [Stéphane] Degout, Arcangelo,
[Jonathan] Cohen

73:31

hyperion CDA68171

Fine performances of fine music are on offer here. The disc's title is justified in the sense that the three *leçons* do take up more than half the programme but the preceding works are far more than mere starters. The *Litanies*, especially, show M-AC at his very best, imaginatively deploying a lush six-part vocal ensemble topped out by two instrumental parts, all under-pinned by continuo, of course. The first and third *Tenebrae* pieces are scored for baritone and small ensemble, the second for haute-contre and continuo, from which the gamba sometimes emerges as a melodic foil to the voice. Samuel Boden's singing of this exquisite music is simply superb – just the right mix of passion and dignity. The booklet essay (Eng/Fre/Ger) tells us what we need to know but the sung Latin texts are translated into English only. This is a notable release.

David Hansell

.....

JENKINS: COMPLETE FOUR-PART CONSORT MUSIC Fretwork

83:02 (2 CDs in a single jewel case)

Signum Records SIGCD528

Britain's premiere viol consort gives wonderfully spirited and expressive accounts of Jenkins' 17 Fantasias and two Pavans for four viols in this comprehensive and thoroughly engaging double CD set. Sometimes complete recordings such as these need to be dipped in and out of, but such is the variety Jenkins builds into his Fantasias, almost as if he anticipated them receiving complete performances, that boredom is never a danger. Compared to the other English masters of the viol consort, it strikes me that Jenkins displays two diagnostic features: his unerring sense of melodic direction which carries his music through every harmonic complexity, and his unfailing musical imagination which evokes constantly stimulating phrases from even a quite limited number of

voice parts. Fretwork's incomparable familiarity with this repertoire makes them the perfect guide through Jenkins' rich collection of works, and just as their interpretations never flag neither does our interest. About halfway through the second CD it struck me that these are in general pretty upbeat readings of works, which could conceivably be played much more slowly, but Fretwork's attention to detail means that we miss nothing in these charming and idiomatic performances.

D. James Ross

.....

LAURENZI: LA FINTA SAVIA – ARIAS

Elena Cecchi Fedi *soprano*, Carlo Vistoli *countertenor*, Ensemble Sezione Aurea

58:13

Brilliant Classics 95685

+Ceresini, D. Ferrabosco, D. Gabrielli, Monteverdi & Uccellini

It is difficult to avoid unusually mixed feelings about this CD. On the one hand the bargain-priced Brilliant Classics deserves plaudits for introducing some intriguing, previously unrecorded music to the catalogue. On the other, given that most of the disc consists of mid-17th century vocal music – a genre that crucially demands an understanding of the text – it is highly regrettable that no texts or translations are either supplied in the booklet or available on-line. Any potential value the CD has as a document is thus seriously compromised.

Little is known about Filiberto Laurenzi, who was born in Bertinoro (northern Italy) around 1620. He was a soprano in Rome, where he may have also begun his career as an opera composer. In 1640 he moved to Venice with his pupil Anna Renzi, generally considered the first diva in opera, a soprano renowned above all for an extraordinary acting ability recorded in detail by Giulio Strozzi. It was for Renzi that Laurenzi wrote the role of Aretusa in *La finta savia*, a pasticcio first given during Carnival 1643 at the Teatro SS Giovanni e Paolo with music principally by Laurenzi, but also including contributions by half a dozen other composers, including Tarquinio Merula and Benedetto Ferrari. Ferrari is today of course considered prime suspect as the composer of the famously lascivious final duet from *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, which received its first performance in that same Carnival season, the role of Ottavia having been created by Monteverdi for Anna Renzi. Given that Laurenzi is also considered the possible composer of 'Pur ti miro', it is included on the present disc in a good but not exceptional performance, marred by the

repeat of the main section being taken so slowly that the singers find it difficult to maintain constant pitch.

But it is the arias from the lost *La finta savia* (Laurenzi's arias were published separately) that form not only the substance of the CD but also its main interest. The convoluted plot bears no relationship to the story of Arethusa and the river god Alpheus as told in Book 5 of Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, being rather the story of how Aretusa (the pretended wise woman of the title), the daughter of Sardanapolis, conceals her sensual nature from her multiple suitors by becoming a pupil of the Cumaean sibyl, a conceit leading to many of the opera's complications. The three arias recorded here not only very evidently bear witness to Renzi's intense dramatic abilities, but also Laurenzi's ability to write flowing cantabile lines. This is especially the case with the long strophic variations that form 'Stolto Melanto'. All three arias are nicely sung by Elena Cecchi Fedi, who probes the text in the way we might have expected Renzi to do but with a rather thin soprano lacking the distinctive features her forebear obviously possessed. The remainder consists of three arias for two different roles, one a comic character of the kind that always feature in 17th-century Venetian opera. They are well by sung by countertenor Carlo Vistoli, who displays a winning musicality in his contributions.

In addition to the *Finta savia* arias, the disc includes three other arias by Laurenzi from a collection published in Venice in 1641, and several instrumental pieces, including arrangements for keyboard of madrigals by Ceresini and Domenico Ferrabosco very well played by Filippo Pantieri on a fine copy of a 17th-century Neapolitan harpsichord. The programme is indeed fascinating throughout. The recording, made in a large salon, is over-resonant.

Brian Robins

.....

MONTEVERDI: SCHERZI MUSICALI (VENEZIA 1607)

L'Esa Ensemble, Baschenis Ensemble, Sergio Chierici

64:02

Tactus TC 561309

World premiere recording

Any first recording of music by such a major figure as Claudio Monteverdi should be celebrated; the fact that his *Scherzi Musicali* (published by his brother, who also contributes two pieces, in 1607) have not previously made it on to disk is that 17 strophic arias sung in three parts but up to six sopranos and a single voice, separated by ritornelli in which the violinists and

recorder player compete to add as many ornaments as they can, accompanied by keyboards, pluckers and a symphonia with drone, might be a challenging experience – and so it turned out. Enthusiastic as the singers are, and sweet as their voices might be, they should not have been persuaded to consent to allowing themselves to be recorded; I gain nothing by being hyper-critical, so will leave the review there. To be fair, though, I don't think I ever want to hear another recording of the set – perhaps one or two pieces in the context of a more varied concert.

Brian Clark

JOHANN ROSENMÜLLER: IN TE DOMINE SPERAVI

Sacred Concertos on Psalm 31

Weser-Renaissance, Manfred Cordes

62:22

cpo 555 165-2

During the baroque period, it was customary for composers to set the same psalm texts many times as demanded by the liturgical requirements of Vespers services. This typically enterprising recording from Weser-Renaissance under Manfred Cordes brings us seven of the surviving settings of “In you, O Lord, I put my trust”, an especially poignant text for Rosenmüller, whose seemingly meteoric career in Leipzig was cut short in the early 1650s by scandal, and he was forced to live for nearly thirty years in exile. There are three solo versions (one each for soprano and tenor with a pair of violins and continuo, and one for alto with an additional pair of violas), two duets (soprano & alto, alto & tenor, each with violins and continuo), one for pairs of sopranos, tenors and violins, and finally a larger setting for five voices with five instruments. As always with this ensemble, the singing and playing are top notch, and the understanding of the architecture of the music, the pacing, the balance of individual voices and instruments is perfect. On the latter point, Cordes opts for violas da gamba for the middle parts with dulcian on the bottom and organ and chitarrone continuo. For all the praise I've lavished on the performances, however, the sources of the music (readily available online) reveal, for example, that the largest setting on the disc should have been much larger – two four-part choruses, one doubled by strings and crowned by a free violin line, the other reinforced by brass with a cornetto on top; perhaps the re-working was necessary on purely financial grounds, but surely it should be mentioned in the booklet notes. Would I rather have this rendition than none? Absolutely!

Brian Clark

SCHEIDT: CANTIONES SACRAE

Athesinus Consort Berlin, Klaus-Martin Bresgott

74:24

Carus 83.488

[+Schwemmer]

There are eleven fabulous two-choir motets by Scheidt on this CD, which were published in 1620; seven are scored for equal SATB groupings, the remainder in what I think of as the Venetian standard, SSAT in one choir and ATBB in the other (the seventh voice in C4 clef but lower than the other two tenors). What I must confess to not expecting was the extraordinary quality of Scheidt's music – if I'm honest, he's always been overshadowed by Schütz (as I suspect he has for many people), and while I'm beating myself up in public, I have to admit to not being a great fan of his either... The handling of the four voices of each grouping, and the juxtaposition or combination of both is expertly done, with echoes and building dynamics (by stacking up the number of voices, not marking the pages with a pencil!) In this respect, too, the Athesinus Consort Berlin is exemplary – no nonsense, just honest, clean singing, serving the music not making it fit anyone's vision for it. If the composer's own choirs were anything like as disciplined (and full of such easily balanced voices!), his sumptuous music must have resounded around the chapel in Halle. These are all premiere recordings, and there are another 15 such works in German and 12 in Latin still to come. The music is also available from Carus Verlag in typically beautiful and practical editions. The other music on the CD (specially composed for the choir by Berlin composer, Frank Schwemmer) is beyond the scope of my review. Let's just say that – although I didn't dislike it to the extent of being forced to reach for the remote control – the following Scheidt came as a balm to my soul.

Brian Clark

CORPUS CHRISTI: COMPLINE AND LITANY
OF THE MOST BLESSED SACRAMENT FOR THE
OCTAVE OF CORPUS CHRISTI

Victoria Musicae, Josep R. Gil-Tarrega

63:48

Brilliant Classics 95263

From the number of world premiere recordings on this CD, we are clearly being given a privileged insight into the relatively unfamiliar world of the early Baroque *Maestros de Capilla* of the Corpus Christi Royal College of Valencia. The music for Compline and the litany for the Octave of the Feast of Corpus Christi is composed by Maximo Rios, Antonio Ortells, Anceto Baylon, Jose Hinojosi, Marcos Perez and Joan Baptista Comes and linked together by plainchant. Given the present obscurity of the composers, the music is remarkably good, inventive and accomplished, while the performances by Victoria Musicae are also generally pleasing, with just occasional lapses in tuning. Dating from the second half of the 17th century, the music is performed by a choir, with five soloists, an organ, theorbo, violon and bajon. This is the best thing about low-cost labels such as Brilliant Classics – for very little outlay of money, you can achieve an unparalleled insight into an unsuspected body of music, which turns out to have its own unique virtues and charms. Fascinatingly, the music which to my ear it most closely resembled was the Spanish music of the New World, recently so in vogue.

D. James Ross

LARMES DE RÉSURRECTION: MUSIC BY SCHÜTZ AND SCHEIN

La Tempête, Simon-Pierre Bestion

77:18

Alpha 394

This account of Schütz's *Historia der Auferstehung Jesu Christi* intercut with items from Johann Hermann Schein's *Israelsbrunnlein* is not without its controversial aspects. Firstly the idea of presenting the music by the two composers in alternating numbers, one piece often emerging seamlessly from the previous one, is a radical idea. I can't think the music would ever have been performed in this form at the time, but to my mind it works very well. Also controversial is the choice of the Lebanese singer Georges Abdallah for the Evangelist in the Schütz. He is described as a 'chantre Byzantin' and decorates Schütz's simple recitative with an encrustation of decorative ornaments in the manner of Byzantine chant. Again, there will be those for whom this crosses a red line, but I have to say I found that Schütz's rather long workaday recits were remarkably animated by this unorthodox (or rather orthodox in its truest sense) approach. The accompanying instruments in both the Schütz and Schein were wonderfully sonorous and expressive, and not backward

in decorating their lines and even graphically evoking the dramatic quakes, storms and other circumstances of the text. This is an account which has been much thought about and meticulously prepared and, while I can see that certain aspects are difficult to justify academically, I found the resulting performance powerful, expressive and musically convincing. The wonderfully warm acoustic of the Chapel Royal at Versailles enhances the sound, and I found myself drawn into a remarkably involving account of this great music. My only two gripes are that the Schütz is not performed in its entirety, and that the programme note is in the annoying form of an interview with the director – I find that the disembodied interviewer never asks the questions I would like to have answered.

D. James Ross

MUSIC IN A COLD CLIMATE: SOUNDS OF HANSA EUROPE

In Echo, Gawain Glenton

67:32

Delphian DCD34206

This selection of music from around the fringes of the North Sea for a mixed consort of wind and stringed instruments includes some good-going dance music by William Brade and Anthony Holborne, as well as fine music by Antonio Bertali, Thomas Baltzar, Melchior Schmidt, Johann Sommer and Johann Schop. The programme emphasizes the musical links promoted by the lively Hanseatic trade network, but at the same time the musical diversity cultivated within the lands of the League. In Echo under the direction of cornettist Gawain Glenton play with tremendous authority and musicality, bringing out the diverse colours of the music they have chosen. To my taste, the inclusion of a contemporary work by Andrew Keeling, Northern Souls, which seems to owe more to Aaron Copland than the music around it, is a bit of self-indulgence, which adds little to the programme. In Echo are a new signing to Delphian Records, and on the basis of this fine CD they are quite an acquisition. We look forward to their exploration of further twilight corners of musical Europe.

D. James Ross

RUZÌR : ARIE E BALLI POPOLARI DEL XVII

SECOLO NELLE TRASCRIZIONI PER STRUMENTI

A TASTIERA

Fabiana Ciampi, Fabio Tricomi
54:51
Stradivarius STR 37084

This CD features music for organ, which takes folk tunes as its inspiration. Each section opens with an account on a selection of wind and stringed folk instruments played by Fabio Tricomi with organ accompaniment played by Fabiana Ciampi of each folk melody, followed by a number of organ pieces based upon it by a variety of 17th-century composers. One of the chief delights of the CD is the featured organs, the famous four historic organs of SS Trinity Bologna, each given detailed coverage in the programme notes. While some of the composers represented and indeed their organ works are familiar, others, such as Giovan Battista Ferrini, are not so well known. At any rate, it is fascinating to listen to the original melody being processed through the minds of such a diverse clutch of composers, and Ciampi's confident organ technique copes very well with the differing characters of the organs she is playing – and there are some splendidly eye-watering moments in the more chromatic corners of Frescobaldi's *Capriccio sopra Ruggiero*. And the title of the CD? Ruzìr is none other than the original name of Ruggiero, one of the folk tunes featured.

D. James Ross

SAN MARCO DI VENEZIA - THE GOLDEN AGE

Les Traversées Baroques, Etienne Meyer

72:28

Accent ACC 24345

Music by G. B. Bassani, A. & G. Gabrieli, C. Merulo

Having had the considerable honour and pleasure of rehearsing the music of Giovanni Gabrieli for days at a stretch, surrounded by the Tintoretts of San Rocco, the common sensibilities of these two contemporary artists become clear. This disc captures these parallels very well. Many of his pieces, and particularly the ones chosen to open this programme, start with low voices laying down the dark ground, the tenebrae, over which, layer by layer, voices of increasingly high tessitura build the mannerist drama of the brighter figures. Much of the energy of paintings at this time is communicated by the brush strokes, sometimes eliding apparently separate objects for the sake of pictorial rhythm, sometimes separating objects to clarify detail, where the story calls for it. There were points in the music where I felt that this

aspect could have been emphasised, recognising Gabrieli's absolutely mannerist use of the tensions between melodic and harmonic rhythm to create drama-in-the-moment. The wind playing is artfully crafted and the voices beautifully integrated. Occasionally the colouration used by the top soprano causes her to step apart from the ensemble, reducing rather than enhancing the dramatic tension. This feature was however turned to advantage in the Bassano divisions on Palestrina's *Veni delicta mi*, where the mobility of the voice in the long notes becomes more of a piece with the divided notes, avoiding the awkward transitions between (too) static and (too) frenetic passages, which undermines many performances of this genre. This performance was a revelation, integrated in this way. Vocal and instrumental pieces are interspersed by organ solos. These had weight and momentum, played on a strong toned organ with needling quints, and the rhythm of the passagework carried very well over the chord changes. It was a nice touch to finish the disc with three large scale pieces by Bassano, the best player-composer in Gabrieli's band at St Mark's. So often eclipsed in modern times by his organ-playing friend, Bassano deserves a wider airing. His famous treatise has given us a window on their performance practices. Listen to this disc to hear them at their best.

Stephen Cassidy

THE VIOLIN'S DELIGHT

A garden of pleasure

Plamena Nikitassova *violin*, Julian Behr *theorbo*, Matthias

Müller *violone*, Jörg-Andreas Bötticher *harpsichord & organ*

67:39

Claves Records 50-1727

Bulgarian violinist Plamena Nikitassova's name has appeared on concert programmes and CD listings that I've seen but this is the first time I have heard her play solo. Hopefully it will not be the last! In a recital ranging from music by Biber, Muffat and Walther to unknowns like Lizkau and Döbel, she dispenses virtuosity with ease (all the more astonishing, given the fact that she plays off the shoulder), making the original Stainer she plays sing sweetly over its entire range – even when it's pretending to be two violins! She is well supported by her colleagues (Bötticher also gives a fine performance of a toccata by Kerll, keeping in with the slightly crazy character of the *stylus phantasticus*). The use of a chromatic harpsichord with extra keys means that the enharmonic shifts in the Muffat violin sonata are not quite that... over

each of the joins there is a “realignment” of the underlying tonality; it is an interesting insight into how 17th-century tuning systems might have worked, but what did musicians without a chromatic harpsichord do? Just play “out of tune”?

Nikitissova’s interpretation of the Passacaglia that brings Biber’s “Mystery Sonatas” to a close is similarly personal; some bars felt so expansive that an extra beat have been added to the music, while some seemed a little short; at one point, she even adds a cadenza. None of this, of course, is beyond what Biber and his contemporaries might have done with the music, and my reaction is perhaps more reflective of the fact that we (dare I single out Anglo-Saxons here?) like our baroque music to be “just so”, and these performances are forcing me out of my comfort zone. And, if they are, is that such a bad thing?

Brian Clark

.....