

Baroque

EDITIONS

FRANCESCO BARSANTI: SECULAR VOCAL MUSIC

Recent Researches in the Music of the Baroque Era, 197

Edited by Michael Talbot

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Perhaps best known for his recorder sonatas and the recently recorded *concerti grossi* he published in Edinburgh, Francesco Barsanti's secular vocal music fills a fairly modest volume. Consisting of five Italian cantatas and six French airs for solo voice and continuo, a four-voice Italian madrigal and two catches in English for four equal voices, it provides another viewpoint from which to consider one of Handel's contemporaries. With typical thoroughness, Talbot gives as lively a portrait of the composer as is possible, and – as well as comprehensive critical notes – idiomatic translations of the non-English texts are provided. All in all, this is an excellent volume which will be partnered in due course by Jasmin M. Cameron's versions of the composer's surviving sacred music. The recitatives are dramatic and the arias tuneful; the three longer French airs might overstay their welcome unless the singer has some impressive ornaments up his or her sleeve; the madrigal might make a welcome and novel addition to an amateur vocal group's repertoire? Either way, Barsanti's music deserves to be more widely known, and one hopes that its availability (even if the cost might mean only libraries can afford to buy it!) will encourage performers to explore it.

Brian Clark

RECORDINGS

BACH: MAGNIFICAT; HANDEL: DIXIT DOMINUS

Vox Luminis, Lionel Meunier

61:22

Alpha Classics Alpha 370

This performance couples two five-voice – but otherwise very different – baroque favourites on Vox Luminis' latest CD. Handel's *Dixit Dominus* was recorded in Begijnhofkerk, Belgium in January 2017 and the Bach *Magnificat* in the Waalse Kerk, Amsterdam in July.

Dixit Dominus dates from 1707, and is performed here with ten singers (two to a part) and five-part strings (3.3.2.2.2.1) with organ at the then Roman pitch of A=392. The photograph of the recording shows the arc of singers facing the strings, with the cellos in the centre in front of the organ and contrabass, and the upper strings to each side. In the *Magnificat*, they use the substantial Christian Müller organ in Waalse Kerk in Amsterdam, but there is no photograph to show how the forces are deployed. In their live performance in St John's Smith Square last December, the organist was hidden behind the centrally placed organ, and the two groups of SSATB singers radiated outwards on a single plinth from the basses in the middle with the flutes and oboes in the centre of the orchestra, surrounded by the 3.3.2.2.1 strings. The trumpets were placed to the treble side of the organ and the timpani to the bass. Even when miked for a recording, how the singers and players stand in relation to each other is clearly important in this attentive and well-rehearsed ensemble, where the only directing is done by Lionel Meunier raising his (full) score as he breathes. If you listen carefully, you can hear the corporate breath taken just before the start of track 12 of the Bach *Magnificat*, the *Gloria Patri*. Even live, the balance seemed fine, and in St John's the Bach was complemented by two earlier *Magnificats* – Pachelbel and Kuhnau.

In this kind of music-making, everyone takes responsibility not just for their own line, but for the ensemble; so singers and players alike breathe as one. The blend and balance are astonishingly good, and even when the whole ensemble is engaged, every stroke from the leader's bow or beat from the timpani is alert to this corporate breath. The singers betray no anxiety about being heard among so many instruments, so there are no nasty pushes on notes tied over to the next bar or wobbles from those voices who suspect that they may not be heard, that disfigure so many performances. The singers' prime task is to deliver the text and articulate it, while the instruments fill out the tone and underline the changes in mood and colour – even the Müller organ, one of whose Principal ranks we hear so effectively in *Quia fecit* in the *Magnificat*.

For an illustration of balance, listen to how the strings and organ let the singer breathe in *Et exultavit* in the *Magnificat* without any sense of artificiality or hold-up in the rhythm, and then note the contrast between Stefanie True in *Et exultavit* and the matchless but quite different Zsuzsi Toth in *Quia respexit* which leads without a break into the five-part *omnes generationes*, the subject of the

sentence coming at the end in the Latin for emphasis: *ecce enim ex hoc beatam me dicent omnes generationes*. In this performance we have no sudden change in the marked tempo Adagio as we are used to, with *omnes generationes* going off at a gallop, divorced from the rest of the sentence as if it were a different number. Perhaps it will surprise you as it did me, but the more I listen to it, the more sense it makes. There are no other surprises, and the singers when performing alone or in duets or trios sing within their comfort zone so there are no overt histrionics from attention-seeking would-be stars.

This balanced elegance is true of the Handel as well, where vocal agility and the ability to blend with your fellow singers is a *sine qua non*. The vocal sound is sharp and incisive and a perfect complement to the five-part strings. The two sopranos in *De torrente in via* and the lead into the *Gloria Patri* are stunning if you want to take a brief snapshot of why this CD is so splendid. As well as enjoying Vox Luminis' wonderful sound, I learn something each time I listen to them. I thoroughly recommend this disc.

David Stancliffe

BACH: SONATAS FOR FLUTE AND HARPSICHORD

Stephen Schultz *baroque flute*, Jory Vinikour *harpsichord*
55:18

Music & Arts CD-1295

BWV1020 (attrib), 1031 (attrib), 1030, 1032

This is another very good recording of the Bach Flute and Harpsichord Sonatas to go alongside the Naxos CD made by the Finnish duo Pauliinia Fred and Aapo Häkkinen that I reviewed in October 2017. Both CDs contain BWV 1030 in B minor and 1032 in A major, the well-authenticated sonatas whose autograph copies can be dated to 1736, and both have 1031, the accomplished and melodious sonata in E-flat that seems to be a reworking of a Dresden trio by Quantz (QV 2:35) by someone in Bach's circle. This CD excludes some of the works for flute and simple continuo (1034 in E minor and 1035 in E Major) from the Naxos CD but adds BWV 1020 in G minor, almost invariably attributed to C. P. E. Bach.

The playing is – again – exceptional. Schultz's tone on his Palanca copy by Martin Wenner is clean and vibrato-free, so his ornaments have all the more force. And the balance of the instruments – with the harpsichordist's right hand never obscured or overshadowed – is excellent. The harpsichord is a 2010 copy by John Phillips of Berkley

CA after an instrument by J. H. Grabner from Dresden in 1722. The give and take is seamless and the tempi never extreme. This is a good advertisement for period instrument performance in the Bay Area of California, even if it needed crowd-funding to make it possible.

David Stancliffe

J. S. BACH: [ORGAN WORKS]

Alexander Kniazev, the organ of Riga Dome Cathedral
71:09

Piano Classics PCL 0121

Bach's organ music can, of course, be played and heard with enjoyment on a huge variety of instruments, and it is good to be able to hear the mammoth Walcker organ in the Dom – 'Dome' in the title betrays how shaky the English in the liner notes is going to be – in Riga, the capital of Latvia, the largest organ in the world (with 124 stops) when it was built.

I have played this organ, and, as you can tell from the specification, helpfully given in the liner notes, it is a fine example of the German firm E. F. Walcker's mature style. Installed in 1884, it was carefully restored to its original form in 1983 by Flentrop, who respected the style and action (the mechanical action assisted by the Barker lever mechanism) of this four manual and pedal giant complete with accessories like a general crescendo pedal. Add a very generous acoustic, and you can see why careful registration is needed to gain any clarity for much of the chosen programme – The Fantasias in G and C minor, three significant chorale preludes, the six Schübler chorale preludes and the Prelude and Fugue in E-flat (BWV 552) – and all this on this organ built for music like Liszt, who composed a piece on *Nun danket* for its inauguration, and Reger.

But it is not just that the English is shaky. Some of the track list is inaccurate: tracks 3, 4 and 5 are not what they say they are. Track 3 is in fact *Am Wasserflüssen Babylon* and it is the *Con Pedale doppio* version BWV 653b that is played, not the simpler 653 that is listed. Track 4 is *Vater unser*, not the plain four-part chorale BWV 416 that is listed, but the highly decorated and rhythmically tricky BWV 682, a completely different kettle of fish. And finally, 5 is the amazing *Con Pedale doppio Aus tiefer not* BWV 686 in which the 8' pedal reed is splendidly displayed in the canon. This level of carelessness – however divorced from the recording the editing was – seems pretty inexcusable to me.

The playing and registration is better than I had feared it would be. The 32' pedal Principal is powerfully evident in the central section of the Fantasia in G. The Schübler preludes are given pretty bright registration, though sometimes the acoustic demands a pretty slow tempo and frequently the pedal seems heavy though never sluggish. The concluding Prelude and Fugue in E-flat (BWV 552) suffers from unclear registration – there are just too many competing sounds – but on this kind of organ that is probably inevitable. That said, any player who can make sense of BWV 653b, 682 and 686 on this organ in this acoustic deserves full credit.

However, I doubt that many *EMR* readers will want to get this disc. Today's standards demand stylish playing, a well-conserved historic organ of the right period or a really good mechanical action instrument that copies the pipe scales and temperaments of the early 18th century as well as care and imagination in the matter of registration before you leave the starting blocks.

This would be an ideal organ on which to record Liszt and Reger, and I have a highly atmospheric recording of the Reubke Sonata for which is ideally suited.

David Stancliffe

SLIXS: QUER BACH 2

47:44

Hey! Classics LC 29640

Fans of The Swingle Singers will not be the only people to enjoy this take on Bach's music; where they incorporated jazzy rhythmic percussion and restricted to their range of syllables to the minimum required to delineate the polyphonic lines, SLIXS (a group of six German singers) provide *all* of the sounds (including some very deep notes and some "beatboxing") and explore different vocalisations to suit the mood and the tempo of the piece being performed. Highly dubious, as you can imagine, I was very pleasantly surprised to discover that the first track (their interpretation of the opening movement of the A minor violin concerto) revealed new possibilities for a work I'd actually played at school and thought I knew! The bulk of the recital is made up of the theme and seven of the Goldbergs, alongside a movement from the Magnificat, the slow movement of the aforementioned violin concerto, the Gavotte from the E major solo violin partita, the slow movement of the D minor concerto for two violins, and two fugues. The group make no claim to be classically trained and some of the sounds are not beautiful, but there is a real

integrity to these renditions and also a real joy in exploring new facets to some truly timeless music – I have no doubt the disc will not be to everyone's taste, but equally I doubt any musician genuinely interested in how to perform music will walk away without learning something new. As far from HIP as it is possible to be, but with a lot to teach us.

Brian Clark

COUPERIN: LEÇONS DE TÉNÈBRES & MOTETS

Chantal Santon Jeffrey, Anne Magouët, Benoit Arnould

SSB, Les Ombres, Margaux Blanchard, Sylvain Sartre

62:00

Mirare MIR 358

I'm not unsympathetic to these singers' desire to explore the drama and passion of Couperin's remarkable *Leçons*, but as soloists they are too heavy in tone with too much vibrato for my taste. In duet they sing more gently but much of the delicate filigree ornamentation is still very laboured. I enjoyed the shorter, much less familiar items that complete the programme rather more (one first recording here) and was rather surprised that they rate scarcely a mention in the notes. And quite what a brief movement from an organ mass is doing in the middle of the programme I have no idea. I'm afraid that on several counts this is a case of 'should have done better', though the singing of bass Benoit Arnould is consistently of a high standard.

David Hansell

WANDERING SHADES - LES OMBRES ERRANTES

The Final Harpsichord Works of François Couperin

Katherine Roberts Perl harpsichord

78:47

Music & Arts CD-1284

Couperin's last four *ordres* are here played almost complete (selections only from no. 24) in a way that to me emphasises the melancholy tinge of this lovely music. Pacing is very deliberate, though not ponderous, the ornaments never sound crammed in and the phrases have time to breathe. The harpsichord (modern, after Dumont 1707) is well recorded and has an even tone with distinct yet blending registers. In this anniversary year especially it is a shame that the booklet (English only) is not a little stronger. The player's note on performance is valuable but the Couperin biographical summary is more about reception history and we are told virtually nothing

about the specific music recorded. Neither is there any attempt to even translate, let alone explain, the pieces' titles. In these days of the download, I think that those who still purchase CDs deserve a bit more.

David Hansell

FACCO: MASTER OF KINGS

Guillermo Turina *cello*, Eugenia Boix *soprano*, Tomoko Matsuoka *harpsichord*

[Cantatas and Sinfonie di violoncello a solo]

71:54

Cobra Records COBRA 0063

Born and raised in Venice, Giacomo Facco took a post with the Spanish Spinola family who rose to power in Sicily before being expelled and returning to Spain, where Facco joined them for the rest of his life. The present CD selects music from his major publications consisting of cantatas for soprano, cello and continuo, interspersed with sinfonias for cello and continuo. While the cantatas he published while working in Italy are a little pedestrian, the later Spanish-period works sound more convincing. However, none of the cantatas sound as interesting as Facco's innovative and engaging sinfonias for cello and harpsichord. This is partly due on the present CD to Guillermo Turina's exciting technique on the Baroque cello, which brings these latter works to life, and contrasts with Eugenia Boix's rather swooping accounts of the cantatas, which I found a little wearing after a while. Frankly, it is hard to account for the enormous enthusiasm shown by Facco's fans, including his first biographer Uberto Zanolli, who entitled his book 'Giacomo Facco : Master of Kings'. To my ear, Facco's idiom is very conventional, and it came as no surprise to read in the notes that he was sidelined from his final post at the Spanish Court in Madrid by the arrival of the great Farinelli.

D. James Ross

ADAM FALCKENHAGEN: AN EVENING WITH

WILHELMINE: OPERA NUOVA (CA.1743)

Galanterie: John Schneiderman *lute*, Jeffrey Cohan *flute*, William Skeen *cello*

104:09 (2 CDs)

Hänssler Classic HC 15048

Adam Falckenhagen (1697-1754) was one of the last important composers of lute music before the instrument went out of fashion. The CD liner notes

written by Peter Danner provide interesting biographical information about Falckenhagen, and put his music into its historical context. In about 1726 Falckenhagen studied the lute with Silvius Leopold Weiss in Dresden, and he spent his life playing for various German aristocrats. From 1726 to 1732 he worked at the court in Weimar, first for Duke Wilhelm, and from 1728 for Duke Ernst August, to whom his *Opera Nuova* are dedicated. From 1732 to 1754 he worked for Princess Wilhelmine (1709-58) at Bayreuth. Wilhelmine was the sister of Frederick the Great. In spite of their militaristic father, they had had a musical childhood: she played the lute, and Frederick played the flute. Wilhelmine was keen to establish music-making at Bayreuth, and Falckenhagen would have often played for her.

Five of the six concertos of Falckenhagen's *Opera Nuova* are in a major key (E, A, D, G, B flat) – just one in G minor – and are cheerful and easy to listen to. The style is galant, with tuneful melodies decorated on the flute with a plethora of appoggiaturas and trills. The harmony is fairly straightforward, with lots of tonic and dominant, and noticeably it lacks the polyphonic and harmonic complexity of Bach's music. There are plenty of contrasts of texture characterising each movement, for example in the Largo of Concerto IV, there are long tonic pedals with repeated notes in the bass, very fast arpeggiated chords on the lute, occasional chirpy triplets on the flute, and passages for lute solo. Each Concerto consists of four movements: slow, fast, a short third movement (Tempo di Polonese), and a Minuetto (which has a long set of variations in Concerto IV).

The E major Concerto begins with an Andante, which is pleasant enough, although the repeated chords on the lute are all played the same, giving a plodding effect. The second movement, Allegretto, starts with a sprightly lute solo, and the other instruments join in later. There are some nice solo lute interludes in the Tempo di Polonese, and attractive countermelodies on the lute in the Minuetto alternativamente. There is a problem getting the right balance for the lute, because some of the time it takes a continuo role filling in chords over the bass, when it shouldn't be too loud, but at other times it plays a countermelody to the flute, creating a texture more akin to a trio sonata, and then it needs to be heard clearly.

John Schneidermann produces some fast, invigorating solo passages in Un poco allegro of the Concerto in A major, with the dexterity and drive of a bluegrass banjo player (which he once was). However, I wonder if his bass

strings are synthetic (rather than gut), because they ring on rather too long, and consequently lose some clarity. Jeffrey Cohan's nimble fingers take their turn on the baroque flute, and with an exciting flurry of triplets towards the end of the movement, his part goes one notch faster than the lute's.

There is a surprise in the Larghetto of Concerto III, where the soothing, soporific melody is interrupted by an unexpected third inversion dominant chord, leading to a kind of recitativo dialogue between the flute and lute. In this section the long bass notes are sustained sensitively by William Skeen on his gut-strung five-string cello. The lute solo of the following Allegro, though played with suitable panache, has a fast-moving bass line where the bass notes merge into an indistinct blur. Thomas Mace describes this effect as "Two [strings] Snarling together" on page 208 of *Musick's Monument*. A practical solution (not Mace's) would be to put some Blu-tack on the bass strings near the bridge, which eliminates excessive sustain. That aside, the movement races along well, with an energetic input from all three players. They seem to be having fun, and it is all very entertaining stuff. Wilhelmine would have loved it.

Stewart McCoy

HANDEL'S FINEST ARIAS FOR BASE VOICE IJ

Christopher Purves, Arcangelo, Jonathan Cohen

77:11

hyperion CDA68152

Such was the success of the first volume of Handel arias made by this line-up that they have released a second, exploring both opera and oratorio and portraying virtually every human emotion. Purves's wide-ranging baritone voice has a real presence to it, and – as Handel requires – he pulls off some seemingly effortless wide leaps, and navigates the coloratura without a hint of the bluster that typically accompanies this repertoire. Arcangelo go from strength to strength – their performance of op. 3 no. 4 bustles with energy and the solos (including the bassoon in an aria by Porpora that featured in Handel's London pasticcio, *Catone*) are all neatly done. The star of the show, though, is that voice; be it angry or sad, happy or regretful, there is a range of colours and an evenness of quality that must be the envy of many singers.

Brian Clark

HASSE: ARIE D'OPERA

Elena De Simone *mezzo-soprano*, Ensemble Il Mosaico
61:17

Tactus TC 690801

There are ten arias from eight different operas on this CD running between four minutes to well over eight, and they amply display Hassé's gifts both in melodic terms but also in knowing the voice for which he was writing. While the objective of the project is noble enough (to bring Hassé's music back to wider notice), the realisation may not have the desired effect. The problem is not with the performers, but rather with their number; with the best will in the world, a string quartet with violone and harpsichord cannot recreate the sound world of an orchestra, and a whole disc of just one singer and a string ensemble would struggle to sustain anyone's imagination beyond a few arias – perhaps a few recitatives, or a couple of sinfonias from the operas with woodwinds and brass might have helped. I mean this not as criticism but as encouragement to continue exploring Hassé's music but with a broader palette!

Brian Clark

MAJESTÉ

De Lalande: Grands motets

[Emmanuelle De Negri *soprano*, Dagmar Šašková *soprano*, Sean Clayton *haute-contre*, Cyril Auvity *tenor*, Andre Morsch *basse*], Ensemble Aedes, Le Poème Harmonique, Vincent Dumestre

74:32

Alpha 968

Few composers of *grands motets* did *grand* with quite the instinct for brilliance of Michel-Richard de Lalande. Even in these relatively early works he displays a sure structural hand as solo *récits*, ensembles and grand choruses succeed each other in subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) praise to and of kings both divine and earthly. The performing forces are large, though not implausibly so, and the orchestral strings correctly distributed across a single violin line above three viola voices and the basses de violon. Splendid though the two shorter pieces are, they are inevitably over-shadowed by the powerhouse that is the *Te Deum* – core repertoire at the Concert Spirituel as well as at court – in which the choral writing reminded me more than once of Handel in ceremonial mode. As usual I wish that the lady soloists

could display a little more care over their use of vibrato but the gentlemen are splendid, especially in ensemble. I have in the past found this director a little free-and-easy in matters of performance practice in earlier music and here, too, this is a bit of an issue. I just don't believe that Lalande ever deployed recorders at the pitch we hear at the opening of the *Te Deum*. They really don't add further lustre to what is already a colourful sound: it's just an annoying squeak to me. But as with pretty much any Lalande programme there is much here that both impresses and gives joy. The booklet offers Fre/Eng/Ger essays but the sung Latin texts are translated into Eng/Fre only.

David Hansell

RAMEAU: COMPLETE SOLO KEYBOARD WORKS

Steven Devine *harpsichord*

219:39 (3 CDs in a card triptych)

resonus RES 10214

The first two discs of this comprehensive survey of Rameau's keyboard oeuvre were released in the anniversary year 2014 to great acclaim. Here they are joined by a volume of transcriptions which, unusually for 'complete Rameau' collections, includes the lengthy suite from *Les Indes Galantes*. These movements have not always been accepted by players as genuine keyboard music, but Devine certainly makes an eloquent case (with help from Robin Bigwood in the three-hand pieces). His general approach inclines towards the thoughtful and restrained which is a welcome contrast to those virtuosos who set out to demonstrate that they are exactly that. Certainly, it seemed very suitable that the final volume ends not with the quite extraordinary *La Dauphine* but with Devine's own transcription of the delicate *Air pour Zéphire*, played on the 4' stop alone to mirror the piccolo of the original. There is a substantial introduction to the music (though in English only). However, the star that might have been withheld for this is re-instated as an acknowledgement of a rare outing for *tempérament ordinaire*!

David Hansell

TELEMANN: ALLER AUGEN WARTEN AUF DICH

Sabine Goetz, Marnix De Cat, Philippe Gagné, Werner Van Mechelen SATB, Es Tempore, Mannheimer Hofkapelle, Florian Heyerick

50:47

cpo 555 083-2

TVWV 1: 66, 816, 929, 1326

The long and productive, artistic and musical working relationship between Telemann and the famous poet, theologian, preacher Erdmann Neumeister (1671-1756) great innovator of the cantata as we know it, probably began sometime before or around 1705 and continued right up to the composer's busy mid Hamburg years. It was to prove extremely fruitful, yielding no less than five major cycles ("Jahrgänge" in German), each with distinctive, defining qualities and artistic parameters.

Before and after these known cycles of cantata, some collaborations were undertaken, like the seven cantatas from Neumeister's early *Geistliche Cantaten* of circa 1705, (Leipzig, Sorau). The works featured on this CD step over the first major cycle of 1710/11 *Geistliches Singen und Spielen*, and the so-called "French" cycle, the *Geistliche Poesien* of 1714/15, and focus on the second Frankfurt cycle from Neumeister, termed "Concertizing" or "Italian" cycle 1716/17, 1720. This double dating is explained by the fact Neumeister wasn't able, due probably to commitments in Hamburg where he worked from 1715 at the famous St Jacobi church, to complete the full year's texts. The 1716/17 texts run from the first Sunday in Advent to the 3rd day of Whitsun (major feasts in the Lutheran calendar had three days of celebrations). The texts for the remainder of the cycle as set by Telemann in 1720 were written by Telemann himself, Gottfried Simonis and the infamous "anon".

My first tiny niggle with this recording, after all this complexity, is why play the works out of liturgical sequence, let alone out of chronological order? Unless they were performed thus, back to front in the live concert? Nevertheless, the recording opens with one of the 1720 cantatas, with the finely articulated and nuanced Dictum, "Aller Augen warten auf dich", tight and concise singing that quickly grabs your attention, underpinned by the alert and nimble Mannheimer Hofkapelle, whose contributions never wane from admirable standards, and their trumpet player Fruzsina Hara in the Easter work TVWV1:816 captures the pervading jubilant tone perfectly. The soprano is lyrical, the tenor excellent, the alto and bass both had moments of finely measured singing, yet just occasionally lacked conviction. All the while, one is aware of the difficult lines woven into these cantatas, just try saying the words they have to sing on track 14! There are some very fine moments, but I await some, broader sweeps through the two sections of this cycle. Some cantatas from it have already been on CD, yet some editions await with latent potential, including the Estomihi work TVWV1:1316

from *Prima la musica!*

Finally, there are some tiny anomalies in the translated text (e. g., *O welches Freudenfest!*, track15) and there are other things I might have rendered differently; but the disc is another welcome addition to cpo's well-laden Telemann flagship. Might there have been room to have one more work aboard?

David Bellinger

BACH / TELEMANN: CANTATAS FOR BARITONE
Christoph Prégardien, Vox Orchester, Lorenzo Ghirlanda
66:51

dhm 1 90758 34122 4

BWV56, TWV 1: 983 & 1510, plus movements from instrumental music by Fasch, Handel & Telemann

Like any good actor at the height of their game, a good singer will inhabit and project their role with an intensity and intuitive understanding. This is what we encounter here, people at the very top of their game! Even before you hear a single note you can feel the care and attention in the overall presentation.

Christoph Prégardien and the incredibly fluent and reactive Vox orchester respond to these chosen works with consummate skill. These specially selected Passiontide cantatas by Telemann exude and suit the pathos and drama of this period. Interestingly, they match the composer's own vocal range around his Frankfurt tenure (1712-1721) – we know this from his letter of application for the Kapellmeister post, where he speaks of his voice being “between a tenor and a bass... normally called a baritone”. If you missed Klaus Mertens on CPO back in 2009, and recently Philippe Jaroussky singing Telemann and Bach on Erato, then this recording will allow a partial revisit. The two disembodied “Overtures” by Fasch and Telemann left me wishing I could hear the whole works, and perhaps a Bach Sinfonia might have replaced the Handel? All in all, though, this is a quite superlative recording that meets the desires and wishes of any Baroquephile on the quest for excellence. The booklet notes by one of the fine oboists reveal how the career paths and musico-aesthetic orbits of these great composers crossed and intersected at given times. The music simply washes over you with a purity and quality many seek to match.

David Bellinger

TELEMANN: THE CONCERTI-EN-SUITE

Tempesta di Mare

62:34

Chandos Chaconne CHAN 0821

TWV 43:g3, 51:F4, 54: F1

In some regards, the accomplished baroque ensemble Tempesta di Mare are emulating the very musicians for whom these two extravagant *concerti grossi* or concertien-suite in F were almost certainly intended, the Dresden court orchestra under J. G. Pisendel. Telemann not only knew this famously skilled concertmaster well, but also the eminent abilities of the musicians active in this well-honed orchestra.

This recording opens with one of my favourite Telemann concertien-suite, TWV 54:F1, which for many years was only to be heard without the pair of Bourees I/II found only in the Schwerin source on an early Berlin Classics CD; and to compound matters further, it was often confusingly catalogued simply as “Suite in F”! Thankfully, Tempesta di Mare take into account both sources of this really vivacious and almost mischievous piece; they spread their musical wings wide and fly; additionally, Richard Stone has astutely filled in the “bridging” trio in the da capo menuet, with an excellent reconstruction after extant horn parts in Schwerin. This is now the fourth recording of a fine work, truly welcome for all the reasons above, and the lively and polished performance. The following *concerto di camera* for recorder and strings now has more than a dozen recordings, and feels like a concession to the ensemble's co-director Gwyn Roberts, who nevertheless exhibits her agility in Telemann's fluent and accommodating music; that said, two other *concertien-suite*, TWV 53:g1, 53:a1, or even the later 50:21, would perhaps have better fitted the “billing”, i.e. main focus of this CD. Finally, we come to an outstanding example of the genre, in scope, instrumentation, style, and forward-looking, almost symphonic textures. TWV 51:F4 was definitely conceived with virtuoso violinist Pisendel in mind, and the seasoned orchestra behind him. The use of the very same paper as for the composer's St. John Passion of 1749 TWV 5:34 gives a rough date of composition. Again Tempesta di Mare capture the ebullient drive and wonderful contours of this grandiose piece, flattering both the talents of the orchestra, and with Polish royal connections through Dresden's Elector of Saxony, King Augustus III of Poland! One begins to sense what a well-aimed and perfectly conceived exposition of music this is. It is worth noting that they eschew Telemann's *alternative* trumpet parts for the penultimate “Pollacca” movement,

before the closing stately minuets; a seven-movement *tour de force* which Tempesta di Mare tackle with typical flourish and flair.

David Bellinger

TELEMANN: WIND OVERTURES VOL. I

L'Orfeo Bläserensemble, Carin van Heerden

61:22

cpo 555 085-2

TWV 44: 2, 8, 10, 14 & 16

And so cpo embark on another exciting journey in the company of *Monsieur* Telemann; this time, the oboe, horn and bassoon players of the excellent baroque orchestra L'Orfeo will explore the repertoire that has survived for Harmonie (or wind band). And what a cracking start we have – three suites in F with “normal” oboes, and one concerto and one overture in D with oboes d'amore. Readers of these pages may recall my delight at a Resonus release called ‘The Saxon alternative’ by a similar group called Syrinx; in fact, the two D major works are on both discs, but I wouldn't want to be without either! The L'Orfeo wind players are outstanding; sprightly, vivacious playing with sprinklings of neat ornaments and a great interaction between the parts, the horns really relishing the escape from their typical harmony-filling role. The one thing that bothered me, and it seems to be something I am writing more and more frequently these days, is the right hand of the continuo harpsichordist – it's not a keyboard concerto; yes, if you're accompanying a solo or a trio sonata, feel free to pick up the tune or improvise some nice counter-melodies but in this sort of repertoire, when the ear is already coping with four or five parts, the last thing the oboes needs is someone cluttering their sound space. While the booklet notes argue that these overtures belong as much in the chamber as in the open (where the sounds of the instruments would surely carry to entertain the hunting or picnicking aristocrats for whom they were written), I find the harpsichord extraneous and I cannot begin to understand the presence of a lute... That said, this is excellent music-making and I look forward to the next release in the series.

Brian Clark

TELEMANN: COMPLETE TRIO SONATAS WITH RECORDER AND VIOL

Da Camera (Emma Murphy *recorders*, Susanna Pell *viols*, Steven Devine *harpsichord*)

77:16

Chandos Chaconne CHAN 0817

Remember LP boxed sets? One of my favourites was and is a collection of Telemann trio sonatas for violin/pardessus, recorder and continuo played by a starry ensemble consisting of Alice Harnoncourt, Kees Boeke, Wouter Möller and Bob van Asperen. Well, Emma Murphy (playing alto recorder and voice flute), Susanna Pell (treble and bass viols) and Steven Devine (harpsichord) are more than worthy neighbours for them on my Telemann shelf, with only a small overlap in the programmes. I do think that the bass line needs the greater definition that a bowed instrument would bring but I'm still going to splash the stars around as everything else is so good. GPT's music is endlessly inventive and attractive and the players relish the opportunities he gives them. The varied sonorities (when did you last hear voice flute and bass viol in conversation?) are a bonus and the excellent playing is supported by a lively note (Eng/Fre/Ger) and full details of the music and instruments. Go on, treat yourselves.

David Hansell

TELEMANN: SIX OVERTURES

Gaku Nakagawa *harpsichord*

64:20

Naxos 8.573819

TWV 32:5-10

Behind the unforgettable front cover image of a sad-looking lion door knocker from Leipzig's Thomaskirche lurk two very fine talents; one the often underrated keyboard composer, Telemann, and the other a wonderfully gifted 24-year-old Japanese harpsichordist who, without a single lesson on period instruments, won the 27th Yamanashi international competition for Early Music. He now studies under Prof. Glen Wilson at the Musikhochschule Würzburg. For his debut CD recording, he has selected these fascinating pieces which were published in Nürnberg between 1745 and 1749 and display a fusion of national styles in condensed form. These interesting works both highlight and reflect Telemann's own musical spectrum, offering

us some conventional Overtures with their fugato workings as well as more sonata-like movements; the second of these with hints of the Polish mode in the final *Scherzando* sections. Overture V (Track 13) has a much more Italianate feel, and that of Overture III (Track 7) is a freestyle French Gigue in 6/4. These works do not follow the conventional choices of dances following after the opening Overture; further examples of this form may be found in TWV32:13-18. But let's not stray from the remarkable musicianship of this gifted young man, who brings out the various elements of these blended pieces with a skill beyond his age. The future is bright and will give Gaku Nakagawa the opportunity to plunder the riches of the harpsichord repertoire of these nations in evidence and much more for years to come. Would have been nice to know what the instrument used was?

David Bellinger

TELEMANN: FANTASIAS FOR VIOLA DA GAMBA

Robert Smith

79:15

resonus RES10195

The discovery of Telemann's long-lost fantasias for viola da gamba is one of the great musicological events of recent times. But this music brings joy not just to scholars and players: it is also most attractive for those of us who 'only' listen. As always, Telemann writes with idiomatic flair for the instrument, making use of chords and changes of register to enrich what is, inevitably and for the most part, single-line music. And in Robert Smith he has an eloquent advocate – even in tone, sure in the judgment of pace and space, and technically adroit in music that is not without technical challenges, even if was written for the amateur market of the day. The recording venue (a small church) gives the sound just the right amount of bloom and the player's note (in English only) neatly summarise both the music's content and context. A release both welcome and exciting.

David Hansell

TELEMANN: SOLO FANTASIAS

Richard Boothby *viola da gamba*

79:09

Signum Classics SIGCD544

It was back in the year 2000, when the paper trail started that was to lead to the unearthing of these long-deemed "lost" fantasias for gamba of 1735, the very same year of publication for the splendid violin fantasias. Amongst the donated material from Schloss Ledeburg near Osnabrück, handed over to the State Library, these intimate and tastefully wrought pieces were hiding. They were premiered by Thomas Fritzsich on two wonderfully resonant gambas in 2016 on the Coviello Label. Now we have a pleasant half a dozen recordings which explore these elegant and befittingly conceived works. Richard Boothby (of Purcell Quartet and Fretwork fame) comes to the fore, with a well-measured and sensitive reading on an "un-named" gamba. These Fantasias were almost certainly released at the rate of two pieces a fortnight from August to October 1735. They are dedicated to the Hamburg merchant and music lover, Pierre Chaunell, who already features in the lists of subscribers to *Musique de Table* 1733, and *Nouveaux Quatuors* of 1738; whether he was a competent "dilettante" gambist is not known, but it must have been a thrill to have seen this published dedication, possibly awarded for services rendered as a promoter or distributor. The set opens in the elegiac key of C minor with an aria-like phrase; indeed, many rhetorical effects and devices surface as the music proceeds to give the impression of a gambist exploring free-flowing, musical ideas that arise during the course of intimate solo sessions; the overall intention! Perhaps not as immediately engaging as the flute or violin sets of fantasias, the material seems perfectly suited to proficient middle-class amateurs and gifted gambists to both be able to tackle and delight in these well-tailored pieces for the instrument, that find a player's path to their personal interpretation and own level of virtuosity. Another perfect example of Telemann's shrewd business and musical acumen. With regards to new "explorers", one has to say the more the merrier, as these various qualities and elements cited are drawn out by more players and instruments displaying their wares and wiles. It would have been interesting to note the details of Mr Boothby's gamba of choice... However, this is a very smooth and elegant reading which might have enjoyed just a touch more dancing *élan* in well-chosen places, but he does embrace the fantasias with individual flair and charm.

David Bellinger

XXIV FANTASIE PER IL FLAUTO

Tabea Debus recorder

79:51

TYXart TXA 18105

Telemann+modern composers

Only very rarely do we get the chance to encounter musicians in full artistic control and bestowed with a technical ability that makes you sit and listen in awe. With these clever juxtapositions of Telemann's original Fantasias for Flute, alongside these specially commissioned pieces by London's City Music Foundation for this highly gifted recorder player in the composer's anniversary year 2017, we have in effect, 12 new "Fantasias on Fantasias"! The notes in German on Fumiko Miyachi's Air, described as "keck" bold/daring and "nachdenklich" pensive/thoughtful, exploring the musical transition from Presto to Largo (after TWV40:6) could easily be two extremely apt headings for most of the newly conceived, commissioned works. This is a top-draw exposition of recorder playing that straddles not only the centuries, but has the clarity of tone of a Frans Brüggen, and the technical wizardry of a Piers Adams! The first encounter with these newly spawned "Fantasias" is a bit of a slap in the face, or hot coffee in the lap whilst on a comfortable train ride through the Baroque modes and "gouts réunis", yet one does soon acclimatize to these departures which often still have a toe-hold in the original music. This is musical deconstruction at the highest level, and Tabea Debus matches her admirable skills with these new pieces, completely recognizable from their sources, like emergent Promethean offspring given new life! The return to Telemann often feels somehow spruced-up and informed by these new departures which hold you in their thrall. This well-conceived project lifts this recording above the many others that simply reproduce the neat formality and known qualities of the original set of Fantasias, with perhaps occasional flourishes, and takes it to a very impressive and imaginative level! On nine different recorders, too!! We are both enriched and informed by such an encounter.

David Bellinger

DE VISÉE: LA MUSIQUE DE LA CHAMBRE DU ROY [COMPLETE]

Manuel Staropoli recorders & Baroque flute, Massimo Marchese theorbo

228:18 (4 CDs in a case)

Brilliant Classics 95595

In this four-CD account of the complete works of Robert de Visée, the performers have taken creative though entirely justifiable liberties with the instrumentation to involve instruments such as the recorder and Baroque flute known to have been in vogue in Versailles at the time and to give the music the genuine sound of chamber music. The resulting performances are pleasing and reveal in exhaustive detail de Visée's talents as a composer. With very little known about him as an individual, we rely on the music to characterize both the period and its composer, and this it does very well. If perhaps four CDs of this music could be regarded as 'peak de Visée', we should remember that it would never have been performed *en masse* like this, rather whiling away Royal *ennuies* interspersed with other solo, chamber and larger-scale music. Given the limitations of the music and the ensemble, the performers do a fine job alternating the instruments and bringing the music charmingly to life. Just kick off your dancing pumps, hang up your wig, channel your inner *Roi Soleil* and sit back and enjoy this never less than elegant *Musique de la Chambre du Roi*. For more active listeners, the brief programme notes find room to list the instruments used as well as the few facts that are known about de Visée.

D. James Ross

VIVALDI: GLORIA

[Julia] Lezhneva soprano, [Franco] Fagioli countertenor, [Diego] Fasolis, I Barocchisti, Coro della Radiotelevisione svizzera

59:16

Decca 00289 483 3874

+Nisi Dominus, Nulla in mundo

There is much to enjoy here; the choral singing is excellent, the instrumental playing first rate, and – be you a fan of the two super-star singers or not – amazing singing. There is a problem, though; 'Two soloists in Vivaldi's *Gloria*? I hear you ask... Well yes – why hire a second soprano for the duets if you have the "distinctive and almost feminine sound" of Franco Fagioli in the room? It seems to me a cruel irony that these words were chosen from the reams of critical acclaim the man has had to tag on the back of a CD of music that was written for a woman. In these days of rows over non-Latino singers taking the lead role in *West Side Story* and cultural misappropriation when an American high school girl wears a Chinese dress to her prom, countertenors need to watch their step. His performance of *Nisi Dominus* is very convincing though,

even if his box of tricks does not include a convincing trill. Julia Lezhneva's contributions are almost flawless as usual, even taking time to subtly colour repeats of phrases (without OTT ornamentation or ostentation!) and the final Alleluia of her motet is the perfect close to a fine CD, even if there was plenty room for another contribution from the choir.

Brian Clark

VIVALDI UNDERCOVER

Passacaglia Baroque ensemble

70:08

Barn Cottage Records bcr017

Transcriptions of Vivaldi by Bach, Chédeville & Passacaglia

Passacaglia are renowned for their wonderfully passionate and detailed playing, and for their custom of arranging Baroque music to suit their instrumental ensemble. This CD illustrates both these characteristics. It features arrangements by later composers – J. S. Bach and Nicolas Chédeville – of Vivaldi's music, which then undergoes a further transformation at the hands of Passacaglia, who re-instrument it all over again. While I love their lively playing, I find that some of their arrangements have something of a 'mock-Baroque' feeling to them, with some of the instruments, particularly the recorders, being asked to do rather unidiomatic things in rather unidiomatic keys. Of course, in the hands of the wonderfully virtuosic Annabel Knight and Louise Bradbury, the playing is never less than superbly accomplished, but sometimes it all sounds a little contrived. The group's rearrangements of Chédeville's transcriptions for musette or hurdy-gurdy of two of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, where a hurdy-gurdy is 'enhanced' by recorders and a violin along with continuo instruments, seems to me to be neither one thing or another – or rather a whole new thing conjured up by Passacaglia. We have all heard the Vivaldi original and I have heard Chédeville's transcription on a hurdy-gurdy, both of which are very effective, but what is this? I am always puzzled by Baroque ensembles who feel bound to create their own versions of Baroque music, given that there is such a treasury of music from the period out there which has never seen the light of day. You will enjoy the wonderfully fresh playing on this CD, but I must say I prefer my Baroque music less comprehensively 'under cover'.

D. James Ross

DIRECTED BY HANDEL

Music from Handel's London Theatre Orchestra

Olwen Foulkes *recorder*, Nathaniel Mander *harpsichord*, Carina Drury *cello*, Toby Carr *theorbo*, Tabea Debus *bass recorder*

64:04

Barn Cottage Records bcr019

Music by Blow, Castrucci, Corelli, Geminiani, Handel, Giuseppe Sammartini & anon

This intriguing and imaginative programme takes as its starting point concerts given by recorder players prior to and after the arrival in London of Handel. Jacques Paisible had popularized the instrument towards the end of the 17th century, and Olwen Foulkes makes the reasonable assumption that instrumental concerts from then onwards would have featured popular works transcribed for recorder and continuo. Assuming that many of these transcriptions would have remained in repertoire, it is not inconceivable that Handel could indeed have directed such diverse programmes. Olwen Foulkes is a lovely recorder player, with a fulsome tone and very musical approach on a range of recorders including descants, treble and voice flute. Her phrasing and effortless decoration are exemplary and extremely persuasive, and she is ably supported by a range of other fine musicians. This barn-storming performance will delight recorder players everywhere, but is also of much wider interest as a window on a period when musicians happily 'borrowed' extensively from each other to satisfy public demand.

D. James Ross

MANDOLINO E VIOLINO IN ITALIA

Anna Torge *mandolin*, Mayumi Hirasaki *violin*, Il cantino

61:34

cpo 555 050-2

Music by Arrigoni, Capponi, Hasse & Vivaldi

This delightful collection of concertos, sonatas and trios by Vivaldi and his contemporaries Carlo Arrigoni, Abbate Ranieri Capponi and Johann Adolf Hasse features the mandolin skills of Anna Torge. With superb musicianship, her simple little instrument brings this music wonderfully to life, ably supported by violinist Mayumi Hirasaki and the small instrumental ensemble, Il cantino. The most famous Vivaldi mandolin concerto is in C major, but the present performers offer a delightful B-flat major concerto as well as a delicate trio in G minor and a sunny C major trio. It is fascinating to hear the equivalent compositions by Vivaldi's largely

unknown contemporaries, which include an atmospheric trio by Arrigoni and a charming sonata for mandolin, cello and lute by Capponi. Johann Adolf Hasse's concerto, which concludes the CD, introduces a further level of sophistication, with a wider expressive range than the Vivaldi concerti. There is a painting of Hasse's wife, the singer Faustina Bordoni, one of Handel's star sopranos in London, playing the mandolin, and Hasse may well have composed his handful of mandolin works for her to play. In any event, it seems likely that her expertise allowed her husband to compose with authority for the instrument. These performances bring out the subtle side of this lovely mandolin and violin repertoire, avoiding the brash approach often heard in other recordings of Vivaldi. A warning for those who buy their CDs based on the cover picture – notwithstanding the prominent appearance of a recorder, no recorders feature on this CD!

D. James Ross

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THE PIPER AND THE FAIRY QUEEN

Exploring the common heritage of traditional Irish tunes and Baroque dances

Camerata Kilkenny

2:53

RTElyric fm CD156

It is a good concept to place side by side aspects of traditional Irish music and representations of Baroque rusticity for effect and artistic juxtaposition. After the opening piece by Turlough O'Carolan, the famed, blind Irish harpist, comes the first Baroque encounter, Telemann's G minor Suite, "La Musette" (TWV55:g1), for a long time thought to be the only extant work of the 1736 Set of Suites (now known not to be the case, thanks to Pratum Integrum's fabulous recording). The "musette" or Bagpipe imitation comes in the seventh movement, followed by the exuberant "Harlequinade" finale. This work and later Telemann's ingenious "Gulliver Suite" (Tracks 12-16) are played with adequate impetus and attention to details, yet we have heard larger ensembles adding dazzling *élan* and giddy contours to the music. The other Baroque works are equally tackled with a much "leaner" overall sound than many might have encountered before, but it must be said when the Uilleann Pipe comes to the fore, on its own, it is an acquired taste, and might induce the "Marmite effect"!?

When it is accompanied by the rest of the ensemble, some of this instrument's forthright qualities are melded and mitigated, less exposed in its earthy "gurgle". Again,

how do you like your Marmite spread?? Thickly or a subtle smearing? This could also have an effect on how you listen to this recording, all the way through, or with a selective spread-out approach? The programme may well work within a concert setting, even a pub atmosphere. If you can take the hefty Irish Folk brew alongside delicate, nuanced *Baroquery* you might find a home for this recording.

David Bellinger

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