

## RECORDINGS

### CIFRAS IMAGINARIAS

*Música para tañer a dos vihuelas*

Ariel Abramovich, Jacob Heringman

53:21

Arcana A 428

Cabezón, Créquillon, Josquin, da Milano, da Modena, Palero, Vasquez, Verdelot, Willaert & Cancionero de Uppsala

Ariel Abramovich and Jacob Heringman have joined forces to produce an interesting and varied anthology of music from the 15th and 16th centuries arranged by them for two vihuelas. Very little music survives for this combination – a mere 17 pieces arranged by Enríquez de Valderrábano for vihuelas tuned at the unison, or a minor third, a fourth, or a fifth apart – but, as John Griffiths argues in his liner notes, vihuelas were almost certainly played together in a variety of social contexts, and the present CD gives an idea of what this lost repertory may have been like. The players use two vihuelas by Martin Haycock, both tuned to *g'* and they take it in turns to play a bass vihuela in *d'* by Marcus Wesche. The word “Cifras” in the title, literally means “figures”, and refers to the numbers used in tablature, and by association tablature or music notated in tablature.

The first track, Josquin’s *Illibata Dei Virgo nutrix*, shows how the five voices are distributed between the two vihuelas: Abramovich (vihuela in *g'*) plays voices I and IV, while Heringman (vihuela in *d'*) plays voices II, III and V. This is similar to how Valderrábano distributes voices, and it works well here. (Some other intabulators, for example Phalèse, arranging music for two lutes, have each lute doubling the bass, which creates a fuller texture, but loses clarity of line.) The first six bars are played by Abramovich alone, followed by Heringman alone for the next six. In bars 57-65 there is interplay between pairs of voices: short phrases of four, five and six notes for voices II and V on the bass vihuela, are echoed by similar phrases for voices I and IV on the other instrument. Having two vihuelas enables polyphonic lines to be preserved, for example, in bars 13-14, where voices IV and V cross over each other. If this passage were played on a single instrument, the two melodic lines would be reduced to a meaningless repetition of chords. Other pieces by Josquin are *Dulces exuviae*, *Pater Noster*, and *Ave Maria*, all timeless and sublime. I assume the divisions in

these pieces are the players’ own, because they are idiomatic and tasteful, enhance the music, and help maintain forward movement; many 16th-century intabulations have an excess of divisions, which almost become an end in themselves. Although Antonio de Cabezón describes his keyboard music as being “obras de musica para tecla, arpa y vihuela”, it is impossible to play most of it on a single vihuela: the overall range is too wide, and having divisions for both hands on the keyboard creates technical problems for a vihuelist. However, it does fit remarkably well on two vihuelas tuned a fourth apart for Thomas Créquillon’s *Un gay bergier*, a “Pavana Italiana”, and Claudin de Sermisy’s *Dont vient cela*. There are two pieces attributed to Juan Vasquez. The first, *Dizen a mi que los amores he*, is the five-part setting from the Uppsala manuscript. It has quite a few false relations, including a particularly squelchy one at bar 22. The duo have concocted their own ending of fast chords, which I don’t think enhances the overall mood of the piece. The second is the well-known *De los álamos vengo, madre*, played with invigorating gusto. I enjoyed listening to the CD – they play well together, and capture a variety of moods. The only frustrating thing was trying to navigate my way through the CD on my computer – the track numbers and titles are given in some curious eastern alphabet which is totally incomprehensible to me.

Stewart McCoy

### HARVESTED FROM TRADITION

Paul Kibildis, Vincent Kibildis

53:47

www.exquisitenoyse.com LC00863

This recital on Baroque violin and celtic harp features music from the 17th and 18th centuries as well as traditional music and more modern compositions in the same style. As a package, it offers very little background information, opting instead for rather nebulous mission statements such as, ‘Our souls are touched and we find ourselves expanding within, to include much more than we suspected was there’. The ‘celtic harp’ sounds very like a modern-style, gut-strung clarsach, an invention of the 19th century, and many of the harmonies Vincent Kibildis uses on it are also those of the 19th century and inappropriately lush for the period of the music. In my circles, this sort of production is categorized as ‘celty-welty’, and – notwithstanding the use of a Baroque violin – it cannot really be taken seriously as an informed early music performance. I know for a fact that there is

an audience for this kind of recording, but not I suspect among *EMR* readers.

*D. James Ross*

### IN SORROW'S FOOTSTEPS

The Marian Consort, Rory McCleery

63:19

Delphian DCD34215

Music by Allegri, Palestrina, [Jackson & MacMillan]

This CD mixes modern and Renaissance music, which shares a melancholy mood. At the centre stands the ubiquitous Allegri *Miserere*, a work presented in the now fairly thoroughly discredited early 20th-century version. The programme notes rather disingenuously side-step the controversy by asserting that any version of the Allegri is simply one improvisation chosen over another – mmm. The performance, with the semi-chorus hidden somewhere in the bowels of Merton College chapel, is pleasant enough, although as both choirs are singing one to a part, the contrast between the two sections is not as marked as usual. The rest of the ‘early’ music is by Palestrina: his *Super flumina Babylonis*, *Stabat Mater* and *Ave Maria*. The Marian Consort’s singing is never less than polished and beautifully crafted, but the choice of ‘early’ repertoire is entirely conventional bordering on the bland, and is clearly aimed at the easy-listening end of the market. Think of the less familiar but deeply affecting Renaissance music the group could have sung to illustrate *Sorrow’s Footsteps*. James Macmillan’s setting of the *Miserere* makes a nice foil for the Allegri, while the opening account of Gabriel Jackson’s declamatory *Stabat Mater* was enough to make this Renaissance-attuned reviewer spill his coffee. A pity the rest of the CD wasn’t more startling. And how did no-one at Delphian notice the typo on the actual CD? – ‘Sorrow’s Footseps’ sounds like an alarming form of foot fungus...

*D. James Ross*

### HOPKINSON SMITH: MAD DOG

63:52

naïve E 8940

Music by Byrd, Dowland, Holborne, Huwet & Johnson

“Mad Dog” is one of four fanciful titles Hopkinson Smith has made up for lute pieces on the present CD which survive without a title. He is undoubtedly right to say that this will make some people angry, and others

laugh, but he is only following in an old tradition where titles, as well as notes, are changed from one version to the next. Smith does not give specific source references, perhaps because he does not reproduce accurately one particular version of a piece. Instead, he makes his own version, adding or removing ornaments and divisions. His playing is very pleasant to the ear, always thoughtfully expressive, with a delicate, sensitive touch, enhanced by the clear, sweet, mellow sound of his 8-course lute in F built by Joel van Iennep.

The first track, “Johnson’s Jewell”, is taken from folio 21r of Dd.2.11, which is the only source which has that title and written-out divisions for repeats. In making his own interpretation, he rakes back a 6-note chord (bars 4, 20, 24), removes an ornament (bars 11, 16, 32), adds an ornament (bars 34, 35, 42, 43), inserts high notes (bar 18), an extra scale up (bar 26) and down (bar 28), slows right down (bar 32), puts in a run of quavers (bar 40), adds fast off-beat quavers (bars 44, 45), changes a downward scale to an upward one (bar 49), and finishes with a petite reprise of the first eight bars.

Also by John Johnson is the Pavan to Delight. From his liner notes, Smith seems unaware that in 1580 the Earl of Leicester’s company of actors staged a play called *Delight*. The play is now lost, but it is possible that Johnson’s pavan featured in the entertainment. (I am grateful to Ian Harwood for telling me this.) It is certainly a fine piece of music, given a new twist here with Smith’s own florid semiquaver divisions. “Ward’s repose” is the title Smith gives to an untitled pavan by Johnson on folio 44v of Dd.2.11, in honour of his erstwhile tutor and friend, John Ward; it is in the unusual key of F minor, with typical Johnson figurations, and very beautiful.

Anthony Holborne’s “As it fell on a holly eve” and “Heigh ho holiday” [puns on Holborne’s name?] are played very quickly, but (for my taste) with a superfluity of rolled chords.

“Day’s End Pavan” is the title Smith gives to the pavan on folio 46r of Dd.2.11. With music of this quality, one can understand why Johnson was appointed lutenist to Queen Elizabeth. Unhurried, Smith sustains it well with some extra decorative touches of his own.

The “Mad Dog” is Anthony Holborne’s untitled piece on folio 45r of Dd.5.78.3 (no. 49 in the Lute Society’s Holborne edition edited by Rainer aus dem Spring). I am inclined to agree with Smith that the piece is more likely to be an air than a galliard. It hops along nicely as it shifts from 3/2 to 6/4. I think Smith’s speed is a little too fast, if

only because he doesn't always catch the quavers cleanly in bars 21 and 23.

There is much variety, including a fantasy by Holborne, a restful Pavana Bray by William Byrd, and a charming Shoemaker's Wife by John Dowland. Smith attributes Gregorio Huwet's Fantasy in *Varietie* at least in part to Dowland, although there is no evidence for this. Smith's alteration to the harmony in bar 19 and 43 is convincing, but I don't understand why he omits bars 28-34. Smith maintains the theme in diminution at bar 35 as in the source, but it is possible that a minim rhythm sign was omitted here (as suggested to me by Martin Shepherd), which would have maintained the theme in minims. At bar 55 Smith deviates from the original – he writes, "I have taken some liberty with the Fantasy's structure" – adding notes of his own and repeating some bars, but I don't see the need for this. The piece was fine as it was. Smith's expansion of Mr Dowland's Midnight, on the other hand, works extremely well, and turns a 16-bar miniature into something pleasantly more substantial.

The CD ends with the untitled piece on folio 28r of Dd.5.78.3, which Smith names "Fare thee well". Its overall mood is surprisingly melancholic, so Smith chooses not to bring out its distinctive galliard rhythm, treats it as an end-of-the-day air, adds his own divisions for repeats, slows the pace by rolling many of the chords, and, with a petite reprise of the last four bars, lays this thoroughly satisfying CD to rest.

*Stewart McCoy*

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## SI PAR FORTUNE

Les Joueurs de Traverse

56:37

Son an ero 09

Music by Certon, Crécquillon, Gallus, Gombert, Hofhaimer, Le Jeune, Josquin, Lemin, Lupi, de Manchicourt, Ortiz, Passereau, Senfl, de Sermisy, Stoltzer, Susato, Verdelot & Wolff

All too often people imagine that the transverse flute arrived on the scene fully formed towards the end of the 17th century in time to sweep away the recorder and poised ready to play the great flute music of the Baroque, but of course the flute's history goes right back to the middle ages and far beyond. How lovely, then, to hear for a change Renaissance music played on a consort of appropriate flutes. Les Joueurs de Traverse range far and wide through much-loved Renaissance repertoire, and I found myself frequently singing along with a familiar chanson or madrigal. It is remarkable how different the

sound of a flute consort is from a recorder consort, and the players exploit fully the enhanced dynamic range of the flute, which would lead it eventually to be preferred over the recorder. The consort has a fine sense of ensemble and achieves a lovely blended sound, while the unequal temperament produces some wonderfully pure chords. This is a beautiful package, visually and musically, and delightful to see the programme notes in French, English – and Breton.

*D. James Ross*

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