

17th century

BENEVOLI: MISSA "IN ANGSTIA PESTILENTIÆ", 1656
Cappella Musicale Santa Maria in Campitelli, Vincenzo Di Betta
56:21
Tactus TC 600201

Composed during a plague which hit Rome in 1656, and probably performed behind closed doors in St. Peter's Basilica in order to prevent contagion, Benevoli's *Missa In angustia pestilentiae* is typical of the large-scale Roman baroque. It is performed here by the eighteen singers of the Cappella Musicale of S. Maria in Campitelli, one of Rome's larger baroque churches. It currently houses a restored small organ 'ad ala' of 1635, made in Viterbo by Pellegrino Pollicolli in the Roman tradition, used to good advantage here to accompany the choir, as well as in organ pieces by Frescobaldi, Froberger and Tarquinia Merula, played by Franco Vito Gaiezza. Merula's *Intonazione cromatica* with echoes is particularly effective. The disc presents a plausible reconstruction of a festal Mass with plainchant propers and other items, well sung by the church's schola, as well as the organ interludes in appropriate places. The polyphonic singing is enthusiastic – often overly so, without much subtlety and with a couple of voices over-dominant in the full texture. They are accompanied by two trombones and theorbo, as well as the organ, and the resonant acoustic tends to emphasise the lack of contrast. The result is somewhat to trivialise Benevoli's carefully considered antiphonal repetitions, without sufficient separation in the recording to mimic the surround-sound effects and contrasts intended by the composer. The reduced-voice sections like the *Christe* and the middle section of the *Credo* fare better; the latter's seemingly endless 'non erit finis' is particularly effective. This is an enterprising project and it is good to see a contemporary Roman church choir tackling this music.

Noel O'Regan

BIBER: THE ROSARY SONATAS
Hélène Schmitt *violin*, François Guerrier *claviorgan*, Massimo Moscardo *archlute/theorbo*, Francisco Mañalich *viola da gamba*, Jan Krigovsky *violone*
145:38 (2 CDs in a card triptych)
Aeolus AE-10256

Regular readers will know that I am an admirer of Hélène Schmitt's violin playing. Here, using only two violins for the entire cycle of five joyful, sorrowful and glorious mysteries and the peerless final *Passacaglia*, she lives up to everything I expect of her; a ringing clear tone (where the torturous *scordatura* permits), deliberate bow strokes that manage to make the strings sing out without delivering that sharp rasp that can mark some less subtle performances of this repertoire, and above all a great sense of where the music is going. The temptation in recording this set is to over-egg the continuo contribution; why the ever-changing timbre of the violin should not be enough puzzles me. I find this set satisfying in this respect because, although the colour of the accompaniment does change, it does so within distinct sections. It still does not quite accord with the fact that, in all the years I have been editing 17th-century music, I have yet to come upon a set of performing material with four copies of the continuo part. Yet, I do understand performers' concerns that two full CDs of this music may be harder listening if the sound palette is restricted. Personally, I could listen to Hélène Schmitt playing these wonderful pieces even without accompaniment for hours. As well as an excellent essay by Peter Wollny on the historical background to the survival of Biber's masterpiece, the booklet also includes a personal reflection on playing it by Schmitt herself. It is well worth reading.

Brian Clark

CAPRICORNUS: THE JUBILUS BERNHARDI COLLECTION

The Bach Choir of Holy Trinity, Acronym, Donald Meineke
110:05 (2 CDs in a wallet)
Olde Focus RFecordings FCR911

This splendid recording of an unjustly under-recorded collection by first class musicians deserves to be widely known, and I hope that Brian Clark, who writes the brief note that accompanies the two CDs, can advertise the edition he made widely. This is beautiful music, and eminently performable.

The music first: Samuel Capricornus died at the age of 37 in 1665, so is more than a generation younger than Heinrich Schütz, who clearly thought well of him, writing after receiving his *Opus Musicum* "your remarkable works have been passed on to me and they fill me with delight. Go on serving God and his Church in this fashion."

Capricornus was the son of a Lutheran pastor who had sought security for his Lutheran beliefs in what is now the Czech Republic. Having worked at the Imperial Chapel in Vienna under the Italians Giovanni Valentini and Antonio Bertali – rather a different cultural and religious milieu from home – Capricornus was appointed Kapellmeister to the Court in Stuttgart in 1657. These 24 motets from 1660 form a sequence scored for five voices (SSATB), and 5-part viol consort with continuo. In spite of the same scoring for each motet, the *Jubilus Bernhardi* motets have a great variety of expressive content and a rich and characterful style of word setting. For all their underlying motet style – they are genuinely German/Bohemian versions of the *seconda prattica*. They have echoes of Monteverdi's *Selva Morale* as well as links to the emerging German school represented by Tunder and Kuhnau. In some sense, they occupy the same territory as the Gibbons and Tomkins verse anthems in England, alternating passages for one or more voices and instruments with full sections.

That is at any rate how they are performed by the ten singers of the Bach Choir of Holy Trinity, the Evangelical Lutheran church in New York that specialises in Bach and his Lutheran forerunners under the direction of the Cantor, Donald Meineke, with five viol players (and a continuo consisting of theorbo and keyboard) from ACRONYM. The performances are in the same league as those of Vox Luminis, and use the same vocal forces. The Sopranos are excellent: clean, clear and well-blended, and the Hautes-Contres, the Tenors and even the Basses have the same verbal dexterity. Only occasionally was I conscious of a slightly bleating tenor sound, and the bass line is coloured by a real, plummy bass with a wonderful range which is of a distinctively different timbre. But this is a class act by an ensemble of young-sounding voices and they have released recent videos on Youtube which provide the score as the visual accompaniment. From that it becomes clear that they are performing at 440, though no details of this or the temperament at which the keyboard is tuned or the makers or provenance of the instruments is given in the extremely slender notes on the attractive card case; the liner notes themselves have nothing but the text and an English translation of Bernard of Clairvaux's verses.

I find the music captivating in its variety, and exciting for the way in which the rhythms of the texts are captured, not just in the episodes for solo voices but in the more homophonic sections – those that are doubled by ripienists.

I have not heard any Capricornus before, but this is music that ranks in individuality with Monteverdi and

Schütz, providing a fascinating insight into the musical links between Italy and Germany. Some of his works are available in facsimile from IMSLP, and range from sonatas in 8 parts to small-scale motets: *Paratum cor meum* is for two treble and one bass voice, a cornetto and continuo marked for organ. Vocal works and instrumental pieces alike are imaginatively scored, the discs are well-engineered and I urge you to listen to as much as you can as soon as possible, and absorb this fascinating sound-world.

David Stancliffe

CAPRICORNUS: JAUCHZET DEM HERRN ALLE WELT
Capricornus Ensemble Stuttgart, Henning Wiegräbe
57:00
Coviello Classics COV91721

We have a saying in English: “You wait ages for a certain bus and then two come along at once”. That is how fans of Capricornus’ music must feel – it has been many years now since the excellent Parlement de musique recording, and now we have a marvellous account of his *Jubilus Bernardi* AND the present recital of smaller-scale pieces from the Capricornus Ensemble Stuttgart. Where the *Jubilus* is consistently scored for five voices with five-part viols and continuo, the works here are for one or two solo voices and the scoring varies, and always in an interesting way; the composer clearly had an ear for instrumental colour, and enjoying the different combinations. Both Lydia Teuscher (soprano) and Philip Niederberger (bass)’ voices are perfectly suited to this repertoire; intonation is immaculate, both use vibrato as an ornament, and both are adept at stylishly executing filigree decoration. They are matched by the instrumentalists of the Capricornus Ensemble. What we need now is a disc of some of the pieces for four or five voices with a mixture of instruments; Cornetto-Verlag (also in Stuttgart, where Capricornus was Kapellmeister for the latter part of his short life) is producing a complete edition of his music, so there is no shortage of material. On the evidence of this CD, I think these top-class performers are the perfect candidates to bring us more from the master.

Brian Clark

CARDOSO: MAGNIFICATS, MISSA SECUNDI

TONI, MOTETS

The Choir of Girton College Cambridge, Historic Brass of the Royal Academy of Music, Gareth Wilson

77:51

Toccata Classics TOCC 0476

+de Brito, Magalhaes, Morago & anon

This disc represents a fruitful collaboration between the choir of Girton College, directed by Gareth Wilson, and the historic brass players of the Royal Academy of Music under the tutelage of Jeremy West. They show a welcome commitment to the music of Manuel Cardoso and his Portuguese contemporaries, having toured with this programme to Evora and other cathedrals associated with these composers before recording it. Much of the music is recorded here for the first time, particularly Cardoso's *Missa Secundi Toni* and two of his alternatim Magnificats, as well as two anonymous Portuguese organ pieces, played by Lucy Morrell; one is a delightfully sprightly *Passo de Segundo Tom*. The Cardoso Mass displays all the features familiar to us from other works by this fine composer while individual pieces by De Brito, Magalhães and Morago confirm the high standard of Portuguese music in this late Renaissance-early Baroque period. The choir sings with commitment and mostly rises to the challenge, though the vocal sound is perhaps a bit restrained and some more articulation of the words would have been welcome. The balance, when accompanied by the brass, is not always to the choir's advantage – it is, of course, difficult to make this work on a recording when light young voices in groups have to balance with penetrating solo instruments. When playing on their own in three pieces, the instrumentalists show a real flair for *stile antico* polyphony, particularly in Morago's *Commissa mea pavesco* where some very expressive playing brings out the subtleties of the suspensions and other contrapuntal devices. The two Magnificats are particularly effective: they are well orchestrated between voices and instruments, and the verses flow steadily between chant and polyphony. Booklet notes are excellent and the whole enterprise represents a very successful presentation of some beautiful music.

Noel O'Regan

CAZZATI: AMOR PROFANO, AMOR SACRO

Secular and Sacred Vocal Music

Eridanus

115:08 (2 CDs in a single jewel case)

Brilliant Classics 95586

As the informative booklet notes state, Cazzati's is a name that deserves to be better known; he was one of the most prolific composers of the post-Monteverdian generation, and certainly one of the most published. The Eridanus ensemble (voices, recorder, two violins and continuo) have opted to separate the secular and the sacred by devoting one disc to each, interpolating vocal music with instrumental trios (sonatas and dance movements). Alessio Tosi has a pleasant, light voice which he colours according to the drama of some of the texts, and mezzo-soprano Marta Redaelli, who only sings on the second disc, has a clear, even voice. The performers manage the sound world by changing the continuo accompaniment through the sequence of works; although I have complained about that in these pages in the past, it is only a serious concern when the line-up varies throughout a single piece. There is none of that here – each work has a constant accompaniment. Eridanus should be very proud of this fine achievement, not least because 24 of the 31 tracks are world premiere recordings. I hope Brilliant Classics will encourage them to go on and record a similar disc of Cazzati's music for larger forces, so that we have a truly rounded impression of this neglected master.

Brian Clark

CORELLI: VIOLIN SONATAS OP. V

Lina Tur Bonet, Musica Alchemica

133:27 (2 CDs in a wallet)

Pan Classics PC 10375

For her interpretations of Corelli's landmark set of sonatas, Lina Tur Bonet has opted to perform with a large and diverse continuo group (mercifully limited to one combination per sonata!), at A=392Hz ("From this low tuning lacking in tension seem to spring up subdued practices, but not ones devoid of either fantasy profundity, or of the veneer of the Eternal City"...), and to use many of the pre-extant ornamented versions (only sonatas 9 and 10) as well as her own (the cellist is not shy about decorating his line, too). Tur Bonet is a talented violinist with a clear vision, and these accounts reveal a deep affinity with Corelli's output; she breathes real feeling into the

adagios that are such an important feature of this set of 12 sonatas, and I can easily picture her dancing through the livelier movements of *sonate da camera*. She may be “the new kid on the block” but she certainly has something to say.

Brian Clark

CORELLI: SONATE A VIOLINO E VIOLONE O

CIMBALO, OPERA QUINTA

Enrico Gatti *violin*, Gaetano Nasillo *cello*, Guido Morini *harpsichord*

126:30 (2 CDs in cardboard sleeve)

Arcana A 397

Recorded in 2003, Gatti’s performances are less fussy than Tur Bonet’s in the continuo department; in many ways, though, that puts the violin playing under even deeper scrutiny. A violinist of his class (and here he keeps the best of company!) is the complete master of these seminal works and is at liberty to mould them as he wishes. Nasillo shows just how attentive he is by sometimes imitating Gatti’s ornamentation. For those who like to know such things, the sonatas are re-ordered (I: 1, 7, 2, 8, 3 & 9; II: 4, 10, 5, 11, 6 & 12); thus, although the sequence is disturbed, the *da chiesa* and *da camera* pieces are interspersed with one another, while the numerical order within each of the two sets is preserved. (In fact, the key sequence is slightly improved by the change!) Gatti’s introductory essay to the recording makes for interesting reading – especially his rebuke of an English critic who wrote about one of his earlier recordings... (No, it wasn’t me!)

Brian Clark

ORLANDO GIBBONS: FANCIES FOR THE VIOL

L’Acheron (consort of viols)

Ricercar RIC384

74’10

The French consort of viols L’Acheron take their cheerful name from Greek mythology’s Acheron, the river of woe, one of the five rivers of Hades. More prosaically it is a real river that flows into the Ionian Sea. Cheerful or woeful, L’Acheron have produced one of the best discs, that I have ever heard, of music by Gibbons. Although I am a member of the Viola da Gamba Society, I am woefully – definitely not cheerfully - ignorant about the construction of what is probably my favourite instrument to

listen to, but the inspiration for L’Acheron was “to construct a perfectly proportioned Consort of Viols according to the precepts current during the 17th century”. Certainly the sound they produce on their instruments – “manufactured between 2012 and 2017” – as a result of all their research, is most satisfying. Thankfully their interpretations of this selection of Gibbons’s consort music match the quality of their instruments.

They begin with the six-part *Fantasia*, no 39 in MB xlvi, *Orlando Gibbons: consort music* edited by John Harper, which is enigmatic to the volume’s editor. In the absence of any provenance besides its single source, he worries that it might have been some form of vocal work transcribed for the viols, and he settles uneasily on the title given in that source. It is comfortably the longest of Gibbons’s consort pieces, and L’Acheron play it at the speed of the pavan which is implied in its opening bars. This leads to a duration of ten minutes, but whereas in less committed hands this period of time, and length of piece, could drag, the intensity of this superb performance attends to every detail yet maintains a momentum that draws the listener into Gibbons’s narrative. There are two more of Gibbons’s fantasias in six parts; neither of them is anywhere near as long as no 39 and they are more securely instrumental. There are also fantasias in two, three (including a pair “for the Double Base”) and four parts. Variety is provided by other works in forms other than the fancies, or fantasias, given in the disc’s title. Two of Gibbons’s three *In nomine* in five parts are performed. The information about both of them is misprinted in the booklet. The one in “d minor” is no 27 in Harper’s edition, not 25; and the one in “g minor” is not “a 6” as stated. That said, the latter joins the *Fantasia* a6 no 39 as the equally outstanding item on the disc, being a sublime piece of music full of beguiling suspensions and spine-tingling melodies, played at exactly the right tempo to reveal every exquisite harmonic moment, while maintaining a purposeful momentum. Three dances are included: the six-part pavan and galliard pairing, and the galliard in three parts. The disc ends with another classic, the variations in six parts on the song *Go from my window* which is worthy to stand beside Byrd’s setting for keyboard.

Unless, to paraphrase The Rolling Stones, you want or need a complete recording of Gibbons’s consort music (which does exist) there could not be a better selection on a single disc than the recording under review. The booklet’s notes are slightly one-eyed in their view of Gibbons in the continuum of Elizabethan and Jacobean consort composers, mentioning Tye only once, and paying no attention to

his predecessors such as Parsons and Byrd, all three of whom composed outstanding consort music, without which Gibbons could not have achieved what he did in this medium. Otherwise, the combination of Gibbons's matchless consort music, L'Acheron's fine interpretations, and the beautiful sound of their instruments, renders this disc irresistible and incomparable.

Richard Turbet

IN CHAINS OF GOLD: THE ENGLISH PRE-RESTORATION VERSE ANTHEM VOL. I
Orlando Gibbons – Complete Consort Anthems
Fretwork, His Majesty's Sagbutts and Cornetts, Magdalena Consort
Signum Classics, SIGCD 511

This splendid recording of all Orlando Gibbons' Consort Anthems, the brain-child of the knowledgeable and experienced Bill Hunt and the Orlando Gibbons project, is the first in what promises to be a definitive series of this highly English art form that flourished in the increasingly troubled years of the first half of the 17th century, when private chapels hosted much of the quality ecclesiastical music-making.

The collaboration between Fretwork and His Majesty's Sagbutts and Cornetts ensure playing of both wind and viol consort of world class standard, but what is exciting in this first CD is the quality of the singers assembled by Peter Harvey, and their attention to the sound-world of the contrasting groups of instrumentalists, used together only in *Lord, grant grace*. At the forefront of their concerns is the proper rhetorical declamation of the words, so we have a serious demonstration of what would have been called in contemporary Italy the *seconda prattica*. Here this word-based music is inspired by the verbal finesse of the texts, set with due regard for the 1559 Elizabethan injunction "that the same may be as plainly understood as if it were read without singing".

The erudite – and sometimes over-fancifully-expressed – notes by David Pinto, whose 2003 editions for Fretwork are used here, chart the context of these compositions. They centre on the Chapel Royal, and Pinto makes a good case for using both wind and viol consorts. Gibbons worked in the Chapel with Launcelot Andrewes, possibly the Church of England's greatest wordsmith after Cranmer, and we see Gibbons apply a sensitivity to setting the texts that set new standards for declamatory composition that was taken up by his contemporaries like Thomas Tomkins.

The combination of A=466 and the conviction that the basic vocal group should respect the clef and pitch of the composer's intentions give us that essential singing group of Soprano or Mean, Contra or High Tenors, Low Tenor/Baritone and Bass. This vocal consort matches the rich instrumental textures admirably and is provided by Peter Harvey's splendidly balanced Magdalena Consort. Singing groups who overload their top lines in the tradition of cathedral choirs, or who raise the pitch to make room for 18th-century-style falsettists, take note!

The elegant restraint showed by every singer in matching not only their tone but their volume to that of the halo of instruments in the single voice or duet passages only very occasionally, when singers and players are going at full tilt, gives way to the temptation to oversing. Just occasionally – as, for example, in the Gloria of *Blessed are all they that fear the Lord* – this runs the risk of defeating the careful balance between voices and instruments. The desire to sing out – to make sure that your line is clearly audible – is so often just what singers feel is natural to do, and what indeed so many directors encourage them to do. The sense that your singers can notch up a gear without running the risk of vulgar, quasi-operatic distortion is almost too great to resist. But this is just the moment to urge restraint. None is necessary when the limpid Charles Daniels – peerless in this clean and intricate figuration, as in *This is the record of John* – or the two upper voices of Eleanor Minney and Sam Boden in *Lord, grant grace* are singing so perfectly together, but very occasionally I longed to say 'Hold it: if you all sing out like that, the texture is getting too thick, and I can hear less, not more, of the exquisite lines.' I experienced a touch of that over-ripeness from the upper voices of Catherine King and Eleanor Minney in the full sections of *O all true and faithful hearts*. Perhaps when they felt competition from the cornetti?

This elegant restraint is what comes naturally to consort players, who spend their time listening to each other, pulling back from the long, held notes, and waiting for the moment when they lead off in some short note-value thread of imitative writing where the figuration leads to an expressive syllable or word when the line is vocalised.

This – in a fine quotation from Morley's *Plaine and Easie Introduction* – is just what Hunt puts on the title page, and is worth quoting here in full:

“...to return to the expressing of the ditty, the matter is now come to that state that though a song be never so well made and never so aptly applied to

the words yet shall you hardly find singers to express it as it ought to be, for most of our churchmen, so that they can cry louder in their choir than their fellows, care for no more, whereas by the contrary they ought to study how to vowel and sing clean, expressing their words with devotion and passion whereby to draw the hearer, as it were, in chains of gold by the ears to the consideration of holy things.”

This is the finest recording of this quintessentially English music that we are likely to have, and I urge everyone to start collecting these volumes as they appear over the coming years. This is a real treat, and an impressive master-class in how these texts should be declaimed.

David Stancliffe

MONTEVERDI: SELVA MORALE E SPIRITUALE
Balthasar Neumann Choir & Ensemble, Pablo Heras-Casado
58:22
harmonia mundi HMM 902355

The selection from Monteverdi's late collection *Selva morale e spirituali* of 1640 made for this CD is designed to represent the different styles and scale of the works in this late published collection. From the pool of 16 able singers either single voices or sometimes two on a line are joined by doubling instruments for the larger-scaled items. Pairs of violins and cornetti with four trombones, two gambas, a violone and lutes, organ and harpsichord all find a place in the *tuttis*. Cornetti are used in place of the violini in *Laudate pueri Dominum primo* to good effect, but the constant use of a string bass even when there is just a single voice as in *Jubilet tota civitas* often seems too much – this isn't a Baroque basso continuo.

As so often, the male-voice numbers, like the three-voice *Salve Regina*, fare best vocally. Pairs of tenors sing neatly together, but I am less convinced by the pairs of sopranos in (for example) *Laudate Dominum terzo*, where the soprano roulades alternate with the homophonic lower voices. The sopranos are too operatic for my liking, and a sharp tonal contrast to the pair of cornetti, used in place of violins in *Ut queant laxis*. A curious effect is given by adding a dulcian to the bass for the running quavers in just measures 34 to 42, (as was the fashion in the running bass in *Laetatus sum* in the 1610 Vespers in former years), and an over-enthusiastic plucker was intrusive in the ethereal last six measures where the sopranos resolve to a single G. Some of this fine music is over-egged: less is often more,

when it is tempting to use your whole *batterie de cuisine*.

The diction is good, and words are projected well, even when the voices are doubled by trombones as in the 'Crucifixus', and the sopranos fare better in the 'Et resurrexit' with a pair of violins. The CD ends with a vigorous performance of the *Magnificat primo* using (properly) just eight singers but a large complement of doubling instruments, with the much-reinforced bass line. Rhythmically it is exciting and dramatic under their guest conductor, Pablo Heras-Casado, rather than their regular director.

The pitch seems to be around 464, but there is no information on the editions, the instruments or where the recording took place. In many ways, I prefer the old recording of much of this music by Andrew Parrott and the Taverner players from the early 1980s, or the more recent complete one on three CDs by The Sixteen under Harry Christophers.

David Stancliffe

CLORINDA E TANCREDI: CLAUDIO

MONTEVERDI

Francesca Lombardi Mazzulli *soprano*, Luca Dordolo *tenor*,
Cantar Lontano, Marco Mencobani
69:56

Glossa GCD 923512

An unkind review of some years ago referred to the 'tweedledum-tweedledee' style of performance applied sometimes to Monteverdi, and I'm afraid the term sprang to mind when I was listening to this CD of Monteverdi's madrigals. In his programme note, Pierre Mamou seems to suggest that the performers will be seeking the exaggerated and ugly beneath the beauty of Monteverdi's music (I oversimplify), and I'm afraid for my part they succeed only too well. Monteverdi's dramatic dialogues need careful handling to avoid triteness, and I'm afraid if you are going for a comic effect as the singers do here, the result soon becomes tiresome and ridiculous. There is some lovely singing, when the performers temporarily seem to forget their stated mission and engage in lyrical singing and delicate ornamentation, but soon the exaggerated expression returns and the effect is spoiled. The central work, *The Battle of Tancredi and Clorinda*, receives a more measured account, or perhaps the drama inherent in the work makes this mode of performance more acceptable. Luca Dordolo is an animated *testo*, while the instrumental forces are also effectively engaged in this

powerful tale. Due to the enlightened Scottish Exam Board decision to include *Il Combattimento* in the 1970s Higher Music syllabus, it was the first music by Monteverdi I ever came across. As a result, I am very familiar with the multitude of recordings which have been made of it since, and while this is not the best, it stands up rather well by comparison. I should point out there is a bonus track on the CD, a rather 'contemporary' realisation of a song by Giovanni Felice Sances, which would not sound out of place in a New York piano bar – perhaps this is where the performers have been longing to be all along...

D. James Ross

MONTEVERDI: LA DOLCE VITA

Dorothee Miels, Lautten Compagny, Wolfgang Katschner
78:40
deutsche harmonia mundi 88985491572

It is difficult to know quite who this weird and not-at-all-wonderful CD is aimed at. Almost certainly not the kind of listener who takes the trouble to visit EMR's site. Admirers of the singer, maybe? Well, certainly Dorothee Miels is a justly admired soprano with a voice of pure, yet rounded quality and a fine technique that allows her to sing long legato lines with reassuringly secure pitch. Here there are odd moments, particularly in the *Lamento d'Arianna*, where her singing can be admired without too much reservation. But in general, given that she shows only moderate understanding of the stylistic requirements of the music and her Italian diction is poor, she can be heard to much better effect elsewhere.

The programme itself is an extraordinary mishmash, romping across music culled from the madrigal books, the 1610 Vespers and other sacred collections and not excluding a nod in the direction of opera with part of the duet 'Sento un certo non so che' from *L'Incoronazione di Poppea*. A part of? Oh, yes indeed. And the fact that it is a duet and there is only one singer? No problem. Just run Valetto's opening stanza without a break into the response of Damigella (not that you'll know until you read the booklet notes). Then stop. This cavalier approach to the music is the major hallmark of the entire CD. A *capella* madrigals for five voices? Once again, no problem. Just fill in the missing vocal lines with instruments, changing the orchestration every few bars to make sure listeners don't get bored. A ground bass, as in *Lamento della Ninfa*? Ah, that'll sound better with a nice bit of clickitty-clacketty percussion added. As for those boring men who commiserate with the

Nymph? Oh, let's just forget them; no one will notice. And so on.

The most curious thing about the project is the desperately old-fashioned feel it has. It smacks of the kind of thing people used to do to unknown Baroque composers in the early years of the 20th century. Well, we've moved on a hundred years. Monteverdi's music now lies at the heart of standard early music repertoire, leaving this horribly misbegotten and musically sterile conception no place for anyone but the most undemanding of the singer's admirers.

Brian Robins

PEDRO RUIMONTE IN BRUSSELS

Music at the archducal Court of Albert and Isabel Clara Eugenia
La Grande Chapelle, Albert Recasens
114:35 (2 CDs)
Lauda LAU017

This double CD highlights the music of Pedro Ruimonte, a composer new to me, but also very usefully casts an additional spotlight on an unsuspected musical golden age in the early 17th-century Low Countries. Following the popular uprising against Habsburg rule, music was in a parlous state, and it seems to be due almost entirely to the arrival of the new culturally engaged Habsburg rulers – the Albert and Isabel of the CD title – that a spectacular blossoming of the arts ensued. Side by side with the painters Brueghel the Elder and Rubens, the court employed the English composers Peter Philips and John Bull, as well as the Fleming Gery de Ghersem and the Spaniard Pedro Ruimonte. Considerable Habsburg financial resources allowed a great flourishing of music-making, while the renewed urgency of the Counter-Reformation provided impetus. The voices and instruments of La Grande Chapelle provide a rich and varied programme of music by Ruimonte and Philips but also including works by Pieter Cornet, Richard Deering and Frescobaldi. Grafting the Flemish tradition on to the more adventurous Venetian style, this repertoire is on a grand scale and of a very high standard of craftsmanship. Peter Philips' music, so often presented in purely vocal accounts, receives rich and very effective performances here, combining voices with brass and stringed instruments, while there is also a lovely and unexpected motet for two solo voices and continuo. Ruimonte's rich church music stands up very well in comparison with that of his English contemporary, but he is also represented by some attractive

madrigals and *villancicos*, suggesting a composer of considerable versatility. Ruimonte is a fascinating discovery, and fine performances by La Grande Chapelle both of the large-scale works and the more intimate material help to re-establish his reputation, but also help to paint a picture of an obscure musical flourishing and its full artistic context.

D. James Ross

SCHELLE: ACTUS MUSICUS AUF WEYH-
NACHTEN

Kölner Akademie, Michael Alexander Willens

74:34

cpo 555 155-2

This is the first CD devoted solely to Johann Schelle that I am aware of since Robert King's "Contemporaries of Bach" series. In some ways, that is understandable, since Schelle is not always shy in employing all the forces available to him, so performing his music can be expensive. The rewards are, however, commensurate with the outlay and effort, as these fine performances confirm. I wish I had had time to digest it and write about it ahead of Christmas, and I hope that anyone who saw it before the Festive season grabbed it with both hands – there is something about the story of Christmas that really sets composer's imaginations alight, and Schelle is no exception. Any excuse to have glorious trumpets for the herald angels, and recorders for the shepherds; that is not to suggest, at all, that the music is derivative or clichéd... Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the repertoire chosen is the composer's varied handling of the Lutheran chorales that form their backbone; the phrases are broken down into fantasy episodes (much in the way Bach would do in his chorale preludes or the opening movements to his cantatas), but some are not so much treated as thematic material for contrapuntal ingenuity but merely introduced by the first few notes played by instruments (perhaps reflecting contemporary practice in congregational hymn singing?); in other movements, both techniques are used. I confess that I found some of the narrative sections of the *Actus Musicus auf Weyh-Nachten* a little "challenging" (much in the same way I find Schütz's Passion "recitative" – frankly – boring...), but the more I listened, the more I "got it", and it dawned on me that the whole point was that this is not art music, it is real-life liturgical music, speaking from the musical pulpit to the gathered Christian church, relating one of their greatest stories – and they would both know and hang on the Evangelist's every word. So,

an educational experience as well as a valuable musical one. Let's hope more people will explore Schelle's music (and Rosenmüller's and Knüpfer's before him!)

Brian Clark

HEINRICH SCHÜTZ: COMPLETE RECORDING
Box II

Dresdner Kammerchor, Hans-Christoph Rademann

(= vols. 9-14 previously released separately)

Carus 83.042

Why are we so reluctant to accord Schütz his place on Parnassus that his unquestionable stature demands? I'm not the only one to believe he may well qualify as the most neglected of all great composers. It must be confessed that I am not free of guilt myself. Every time I hear his music my reaction is invariably the same: 'Good Lord! Why on earth don't I listen to this man's music more often?' So the arrival of an 8-CD set taken from Carus' award-winning *intégrale* has provided a golden opportunity to atone by doing just that. Not that I've binge listened; rather the reverse in fact – there must have been times when Brian wondered if he was ever going to see this review. But each return to the set has brought renewed admiration and awe at the staggeringly high quality of an output that truly represents a summation of mid-17th-century sacred music. Of course, not everything is a masterpiece, but there is not a work here – large or small – that does not testify to the profound spirituality and level of communication that informs Schütz's settings of sacred texts.

A few general observations before brief notes on individual CDs. The performances under Hans-Christoph Rademann are almost without exception of the highest quality, which is all the more remarkable given the large number of personnel involved in varied works demanding very diverse vocal and instrumental performing forces. My sole major reservation is that I feel that Rademann uses choral forces that are often too large; I feel this applies especially to *Symphoniae Sacrae* III (1650), which surely need only single voices to supplement the *favoriten* (soloists)? This is perhaps also the place to note the splendid sound quality and outstanding documentation that includes copious notes and full texts. There is, however, no English translation, although those sufficiently interested and determined will find many of the texts in the Bible, references always being given.

CD 1. The *Auferstehunghistorie* (Resurrection Story)

is the earliest of Schütz's oratorios, designed for Easter Vespers and first performed in 1623. It shows clear signs of the Venetian influences that played an important role in the composer's development, but – particularly given the subject matter – exercises quiet restraint rather than exuberance. The Evangelist's narrative is largely in the *stile recitativo* and accompanied by a rich tapestry of gambas. The extensive role is superbly taken by tenor Georg Poplutz and all the solo singers are excellent, though the light-weight bass Felix Rumpf might have been a more authoritative Jesus. Among several extra works, the exceptional dialogue duet "Es gingen zweene Menschen" (the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector) vividly illustrates how exceptional an opera composer Schütz might have become. (His sole opera, *Dafne* is among music's most grievous losses).

CD 2. Justifiably one of the composer's most popular works, the *Weihnachtshistorie* (Christmas Story) is probably also the most lovable, its vibrant colour and freshness all the more extraordinary when one recalls Schütz was in his 76th year when the oratorio was composed in 1660. Poplutz is again a supremely expressive Evangelist, while soprano Gerlinde Sämman's charming Angel is another major plus in a vital performance that stands comparison with any of the better versions currently in the catalogue. In addition to the oratorio, there are a number of motets associated with Christmas, among them the exquisitely lovely choral setting "Ach Herr, du Schöpfer aller Ding," SWV450.

CD 3. At the opposite polarity to the brilliant colours of the *Weihnachtshistorie* are three Passion settings made by Schütz at the end of his long, industrious life. Of these the best known is the *Matthäus-Passion* (St Matthew Passion), a work in which everything is pared down to essentials – it consists largely of chant, throwing the crowd interjections into the sharpest relief – that might have produced a forbiddingly austere impression, were it not for an astonishing directness that projects the story with compelling clarity. Poplutz is again a marvellous Evangelist, singing with great subtlety, though the splendid Felix Schwandtke (Caiphas) might have made for a more imposing Jesus than Rumpf.

CDs 4 & 5. Published in 1650 *Symphoniae sacrae* III is a sumptuous collection of concerted works on texts drawn from the Psalms and New Testament. Free from the horrors of the 30 Years War and the consequential emasculation of his performing forces, this magnificently celebratory and variegated collection finds Schütz returning to the brilliance and vitality of his earlier Venetian writing. Starting from the

exquisite setting of "Der Herr ist mein Hirte" (Psalm 23) the collection progresses to the highly dramatic "Saul, Saul, was verfolgst du mich" to the splendour of that ultimate Lutheran hymn of praise, "Nun danket alle Gott". With the exception of the caveat regarding choral forces noted above, the performances are outstanding on all counts.

CD 6. Like the St Matthew Passion, the *Johannespassion* (St John Passion) employs an extreme economy of means, the story compellingly transmitted with a directness in which expressivity is again only enhanced by the apparently austere setting. The climax at "Es ist vollbracht!" (It is finished) is quite as overpowering as anything found in more grandiose settings. The Evangelist here is the excellent Jan Kobow, the weakness the experienced but lugubrious bass Harry van der Kamp. Again the contrapuntal choruses provide stark contrast. The Passion is preceded – as it is in the St Matthew Passion, by the Litany, in this case with singing of angelic purity from sopranos Ulrike Hofbauer and Marie Luise Werneburg.

CDs 7 & 8. Dating from 1629 *Symphoniae sacrae* I predates the third set by more than 20 years, deriving from the musical travels on which he soaked up a variety of influences, in particular in this instance Venetian music. These are small-scale concertos (there is no chorus) for between one and three voices and continuo. Notwithstanding their remarkable variety, in particular a group based on texts from the Song of Solomon Schütz embraces the lascivious texts with a degree of sensuality rivalling Monteverdi in a way that might surprise those who regard him as a stern Lutheran. The thoroughly idiomatic and involving performances are spread between ten singers, all of whom have already distinguished themselves on earlier discs.

Brian Robins

SCHÜTZ: KLEINE GEISTLICHE KONZERTE II

Complete recording vol. 17

Gerlinde Sämman, Isabel Schicketanz, Maria Stosiek, David Erler, Georg Poplutz, Tobias Mähger, Tobias Berndt, Felix Schwandtke, Stefan Maass, Matthias Müller, Ludger Rémy

116:35 (2 CDs in a box)

Carus 83.271

The two collections of *Kleine geistliche Konzerte* published by Schütz in 1636 and 1639 respectively are not only a product of wartime but also productions directly influenced by the exigencies of war.

By the time the second set was published, the Thirty Years War had already been raging for over 20 years, devastating large tracts of Europe and having a disastrous effect on cultural activity. Schütz's Dresden suffered greatly, the Kapellmeister having witnessed a radical reduction in the musical forces at his disposal.

These 'little sacred concertos' therefore ostensibly represent a classic example of the old saying, 'needs must ...'. In practice, despite Schütz's own misgivings about such small-scale works, the 31 works that constitute the second collection represent an astonishingly diverse compendium of Schütz's style as it stood at this point in his career. Consisting of vocal concertos divided between Latin and German texts and scored for anything between one and five parts and continuo, these miniature masterpieces range between solos in the *stile recitativo*, virtuoso writing in the Venetian style of Monteverdi, complex madrigalian pieces for 4 or 5 voices and pieces in the simpler, more homophonic Lutheran tradition, though it is important to observe that Lutheran chorales play no part. Texts also cover a diverse range that naturally includes the Bible, in particular the Psalms, in addition to hymns and other Lutheran texts, and the writings of St Augustine. The last named, which include the 5-part 'Quemadmodum desiderat' and 'O misericordissime Jesu', a tenor solo in *stile rappresentativo*, are among the most striking settings. But everywhere the listener is constantly aware of Schütz's unrivalled ability to colour mimetic text with an unostentatious, yet vividly deployed palette. Take as an example the duet for soprano and bass, 'Wann unsre Augen schlafen ein' (E'en though our weary eye-lids fall), with its falling chromatic line illustrating the gradual descent into sleep contrasted dramatically with the diatonic exhortation of the second half, 'Above us stretch thy sheltering hand ...'. Four lines of text for a setting lasting under three minutes. Yet what a wealth of expression, of meaning is contained within that tiny framework!

The present recording does not present the contents in published order, but perhaps wisely has chosen to group them under topic, thus an opening group devoted to texts associated with Christmas and so on. This provides greater contrast of texture for continuous listening, avoiding the gradual build up of forces from one to five voices, the option chosen by the principal rival, a cpo recording by Weser-Renaissance under Manfred Cordes. Eight singers, mostly little known outside Germany, are used, along with a continuo group of theorbo, gamba and keyboard (organ or virginals). If I may be allowed to introduce a personal note,

I was shocked to learn from an introductory note of the death in June 2017 of the outstanding keyboard player and director of these performances, Ludger Rémy. Some years ago I had a fair amount of contact with him and indeed interviewed him for the now-defunct *Goldberg Early Music Magazine*. Although I believe he suffered from ill health for some years I found Rémy, both in person and in his performances, to be a man of great integrity and modesty. Fortunately he leaves a considerable recorded legacy that testifies to his substantial qualities.

It is the total integrity of these performances that is their greatest merit. All the singers are considerably more than capable, with voices that blend well in the madrigalian concerted pieces. What I would have preferred is a greater sense of the rhetorical qualities inherent in so many of the concertos. This applies especially to the several texts laid out in question and answer format or as dialogues, of which 'Sei gegrüßet, Maria', a dramatisation of the Annunciation, is a particularly beautiful example. In that respect I might perhaps have a leaning to the cpo, with its more familiar and experienced singers. Nonetheless, I would certainly not wish to deter anyone from these rewardingly authentic – in the true sense of the word – performances.

Brian Robins

SPEER: LIEBESABENTEUER

Musicalisch-Türkischer Eulen-Spiegel (1688)

Markus Miesenberger *tenor*, Ars Antiqua Austria, Gunar Letzbor

51:48

Pan Classics PC 10339

This is the second CD devoted to music from Speer's *Eulen-Spiegel*; where previously Letzbor and co. had explored the war stories, this instalment focusses on the "hero's" amorous exploits. Interspersed with instrumental music (none of which quite matches the high-quality sonatas I know by the composer) are what, to all intents and purposes are the German-speaking world's answer to "bawdy ballads", performed (deliberately) in a "folk night at the corner pub"-sort of way. Now, perhaps if I had been in for an hour or so and partaken of some of the local beer, and suddenly found myself understanding the language better (as you will have to, since the booklet notes, informative as they are on other matters, do not include translations of the texts), this might be a fun way to pass an evening; as it is, and even taking into consideration the valid point that we should not restrict our experience

of 17th-century music to the what happened at this or that court, I would struggle to *want* to listen to this again. One, I fear, very much for the domestic market.

Brian Clark

SWEE LINCK: THE COMPLETE KEYBOARD WORKS

Gesualdo Consort Amsterdam, Harry van der Kamp

442:00 (6 CDs in a cardboard box)

Glossa GCD 922410

These six CDs of keyboard music form the fourth part of a monumental undertaking to record all of Sweelinck's surviving works – 23 CDs in all. The whole project, entitled 'The Sweelinck Monument', is organised by Harry van der Kamp whose Gesualdo Consort Amsterdam has already recorded all the vocal music. Four members of that Consort appear on these keyboard music CDs to sing the secular songs and Lutheran chorale melodies before the sets of variations based on them; oddly the same is not done with the Calvinist psalms in Dutch. Apart from one fugal track which goes a bit awry, the singing is good and it is useful to be reminded of the tune before each of the many variation sets.

A total of ten keyboard players are involved – eleven if one counts a couple of tracks recorded by the late Gustav Leonhardt in 1971, added at the end to make up for the fact that his death in 2012 deprived the project of his intended contribution. All of the music, apart from Leonhardt's two tracks, has been recorded on original instruments from Sweelinck's time, a total of seven organs and five string keyboard instruments. These include some of The Netherlands' finest old organs (Amsterdam's Oude Kerk, Alkmaar, Kantens and Leiden) as well as three in Germany (Lemgo, Osteel and Uttum). Harpsichords and Virginals are all by members of the Ruckers family, apart from an Artus Gheerdinck virginal of 1605 and the modern Ruckers copy on which Leonhart plays. All instruments are matched effectively to the repertoire performed on them. The opening *Fantasia* SWWV 273 (coincidentally on the B.A.C.H. theme) played by Bernard Winsemius on the brash swallow-nest organ at Lemgo, is one highlight, as are the challenging *Fantasia Crommatica* SWWV 258 played by Pieter-Jan Belder on a Iohannes Ruckers harpsichord of 1639, and Bob van Asperen's *Toccata* SWWV 282 on the same instrument.

Too much to detail here, all of the playing is of a high standard and is impeccably recorded. There is an inevitable sense of setting down definitive versions of these works,

rather than indulging too much in flights of fancy, though these do at times emerge. The whole project is as much a tribute to the Netherlands modern early music movement which has spawned so many fine keyboard players and sponsored the restoration of old instruments, as it is to Sweelinck. The players include Pieter Dirksen, whose editions of Sweelinck are used, and van Asperen who contributes seven tracks delivered with his customary panache. It is interesting to compare the latter's performance of Sweelinck's version of Dowland's *Pavana Lachrymae* with that recorded over forty years ago by Leonhardt: the latter is much slower (6½ minutes as opposed to van Asperen's 5) and, while typically magisterial, tends to lose connectedness over long-drawn-out phrases. Leonhardt's other contribution, the *Esce Mars* variations, are also recorded here by Marieke Spaans: there is less difference, with Spaans' version slightly faster and a bit less reserved than Leonhardt's. It is certainly good to have two versions of these well-known pieces.

What comes through very clearly is how inventive Sweelinck was. There is a marvellous diversity of imitations and figurations in the many variations on psalm melodies and secular tunes played here. He never continues the same figuration for too long so that player and listener do not get bored. The influence of English virginal music is clear, with the sort of figuration used by John Bull always in the background. A set of variations on *De lustelijcke mey* by Bull is played here by Pieter Dirksen as a substitute for Sweelinck's improvised set which has not survived. There is also a fantasia by Bull on a theme by Sweelinck and various other tributes and re-workings which emphasise the closeness of the circle which included Bull, Dowland and Philips. As well as variation sets there are toccatas in Italian, mainly Venetian, style and a number of very substantial Fantasias which show Sweelinck's, and these organists', ability to spin out material over time-spans up to 12 minutes. There is a very informative booklet, though a double numbering system used for the individual CDs is confusing. Altogether this is a fitting monument to a great composer.

Noel O'Regan

A PLEASING MELANCHOLY

Cheyls Consort of Viols, Emma Kirkby *soprano*, James Akers *lute*

72:13

BIS-2283 SACD

Like Mary Berry or Judi Dench, Emma Kirkby has become something of a national treasure, and it is wonderful to hear her in fine voice for these songs by Dowland, Tobias Hume, Robert Jones, John Danyell, and Anthony Holborne. Soon to be celebrating her 70th birthday, she brings a lifetime of early music performance experience to this haunting music. While youthful freshness has been replaced with a more mature vocal quality, she has chosen her repertoire wisely and these readings are technically sound but – more importantly – resonant with wisdom. Filled with memories of Emma Kirkby's rich and varied career, I found these accounts deeply moving and, indeed, almost unbearably poignant. James Akers provides a beautifully sympathetic lute accompaniment to the voice, while also blending elegantly into the consort. The viols, too, are wonderfully responsive, both as accompanists in the songs and also to one another in the accounts of the *Lachrimae Pavans* and the other consort music. This CD is a must for all the many loyal Kirkby fans.

D. James Ross

ASSASSINI, ASSASSINATI

Works by Pandolfi Mealli, Stradella, Albertini and Castaldi

Repicco 60:43

Ambronay AMY 308

Repicco consists of Baroque violinist Kinga Ujszászi and theorbist Jadran Duncrumb. They have devised the present programme of music from the 17th century by pairing two composers who were murderers with two others who were murdered. At first I thought this was quite a gratuitous way to link these composers, as the two victims were not even the victims of the two murderers, but – on listening to the music and reading the short biographies of the four men – it seemed they had one thing in common, a love of danger, and this character feature comes across in much of the music. Ironically, it is the man who seems from his biographical details to have been the wildest of this musical wild bunch, Bellerofonte Castaldi, who contributes a very mild-mannered short sonata and a tuneful *Furiosa corrente* to proceedings. The fiery and impetuous idiom of the others, by contrast, seems symptomatic of their violent and lawless behaviour. However they may have gathered this repertoire, Repicco play it with great musicality and virtuosity, while the full sound of the theorbo had me constantly having to remind myself that there was just one player and one instrument providing the continuo. In addition to the catalogue of

murderers and the murdered, Biagio Marini earns an honorary place on the CD by virtue of the 'extravagance of his music', while violinist Kinga Ujszászi contributes a perfectly pleasant but rather irrelevant improvisation at one point. If the linking principle is a bit of a gimmick, it is a good excuse for the very effective performance of an unusual selection of excellent 17th-century music.

D. James Ross

CLEAR OR CLOUDY: PURCELL, DOWLAND, HUME
Benno Schachtner, Axel Wolf, Jakob Rattlinger, Andreas Küppers

59:04

Accent ACC24333

This delightful recital CD recorded in the Baroque splendour of the library of Roggenburg Abbey in Bavaria is a showcase for the lovely voice and expressive musicality of male alto Benno Schachtner. Choosing the finest solo songs of the 17th century by the English composers Purcell, Dowland, Croft, Blow, Robert Johnson and token Scotsman Tobias Hume, Schachtner and his virtuoso continuo ensemble give exquisite and dramatic accounts which speak of deep study and considerable familiarity with this fine repertoire. At no point does Schachtner's technique sound remotely stretched; indeed, we are blissfully unaware of technical considerations throughout this recording. More than this, the performers have clearly researched their material closely and alongside two energetic Hume gamba solos, the same composer's *Fain would I change that note* is performed by voice and gamba alone, as if the composer himself were performing it! Further elegant solos on the harpsichord and lute provide variety, but actually I could have listened to Schachtner's expressive voice until the cows came home. Just as the group finish the song which gives the CD its title, Dowland's *Cleare or cloudie*, and significantly just before they start Purcell's *Fly swift ye hours*, the microphones pick up the plaintive call of a great tit in the background – so glad they left that in!

D. James Ross

LE CŒUR & L'OREILLE - MANUSCRIPT BAUYN
Giulia Nuti, Louis Denis harpsichord 1658
74:24
Arcana A 434

The Bauyn Manuscript is a major source of French harpsichord music from the 17th century, containing the music of all the main *clavecinistes* active in and around Paris at the time. Represented on the CD are a couple of big names, Louis Couperin and Johann Jacob Froberger, and many less familiar composers, such as Jacques Champion de Chambonnières, Jacques Hardel, Jean Henry d'Anglebert, René Mesangeau and Germain Pinel. What is remarkable is that the 'lesser' composers sound every bit as talented as the household names, perhaps a function of the fact that a performer would naturally choose 'the best of the rest', or perhaps suggesting that many of them deserve closer scrutiny. The wonderful harpsichord Giulia Nuti plays, 'Le Haneton' by Louis Denis made in Paris in 1658, couldn't be more appropriate; it has a rich and varied selection of tones which are superbly captured by the sound engineers. This venerable instrument is tuned to 1/4-comma meantone $a=392$, which seems perfect for the repertoire, becoming suitably sourer as the composers err into remoter keys and sweetening as they come back home. The virtuosic Ms Nuti clearly has a profound knowledge of ornamentation, and her performances are suitably encrusted with the appropriate decoration. This is a wonderfully evocative CD, redolent of a bygone age of mannered elegance and rhetorical expressiveness.

D. James Ross

COURTIERS AND COSTERMONGERS: CONSORTS
AND BALLADS OF 17TH-CENTURY LONDON
Seven Times Salt
64:50
seventimesalt.com

This CD of popular music of 17th-century London ranges from arrangements of courtly music to accounts of traditional ballads and music from Playford. I found the rather close and dead recording a bit overwhelming, while the overall sound was a little dated, sounding like a worthy effort from the 1960s. When the whole ensemble burst into song in what sounded to me like standard Mummings, the professed link to London seemed to have been forgotten. The format of the product

and the lack of a catalogue number suggest that this CD is primarily designed for sale after concerts by the group, and it would serve this purpose very well, but hard to see it competing with the sparkling releases from the many top-class ensembles which crowd the field these days.

D. James Ross

ODDITIES AND TRIFLES

The Very Peculiar Instrumental Music of Giovanni Valentini
Acronym 68:53
Olde Focus Recordings FCR904

When I tell you that Giovanni Valentini preceded Antonio Bertali as Kapellmeister in Vienna, your reaction probably depends on your familiarity with Acronym's recording entitled *Wunderkammer*, which explores the music of 17th-century Germany, and which places Bertali's music in a wider context. Valentini's quirky compositions provide the musical foundations on which Bertali was building, and – as with Bertali – it is easy to hear the links with the eccentric music of the likes of Heinrich Biber from nearby Salzburg. For a representative sample of Valentini's striking originality, listen to track 3, his Sonata in C (and indeed every other tonality); this was the piece which I heard some time ago on Radio 3, first alerting me to the existence of this unsuspected talent. What is interesting is that Valentini belongs to the generation prior to Biber, and so allows us to trace this eccentric taste in textures and harmonies back to his training in Venice. The loss of his publication *Messa, Magnificat e Jubilate Deo* of 1621, containing polychoral music in the grand Venetian style including parts for trumpets, is a tragic one indeed. Imbued with the tradition of the Gabriellis, he seems to have pre-empted Monteverdi in a number of musical developments traditionally ascribed to the latter composer. Boldly original and harmonically daring, Valentini's music is beautifully played here by the innovative period string ensemble, Acronym, who have uncovered yet another highly distinctive and largely forgotten link in the chain of musical history. For Valentini to dictate musical taste for some 20 years in one of the great musical capitals of Europe, suggests the esteem in which he was held during his own lifetime, and, as we become more familiar with his music, I am sure we will more fully recognize his legacy in the music of the next couple of generations of German composers.

D. James Ross

PASSAGGIO: EINE BAROCKE ALPENÜBERQUERUNG
Georg Kallweit *violin*, Björn Colell *theorbo, chitarrone & baroque guitar*

66:38

Alpha 540

Music by Bartolotti, Biagio Marini, Muffat, Pandolfi Mealli, Piccinini & Schmelzer

Topped and tailed by two of the most fabulous 17th-century violin sonatas (by Schmelzer and Muffat), this CD sets out to trace the dissemination of Italian violin technique into the German-speaking world. The musicians call their duo “Ombra e luce”, which is a clever description of both their quest in exploring this repertoire and their actual sound, which is constantly changing, according to the style of the music they are playing. Colell only uses the guitar to play Bartolotti’s suite “di chitarra Spagnola”, and employs the chitarrone for a piece by Piccinini and then as continuo for an anonymous “musicalisch Uhrwerck”. Biagio Marini’s sonata “per sonar con due corde” will be familiar to anyone interested in early violin repertoire, but they will rarely have heard it played so freshly. Kallweit’s playing is flawless without being soulless; undaunted by any of the technical difficulties, he bows effortlessly, producing an even sound over the range of his instrument, drawing the ear into his world, as all the best performers do. After a long period of discs devoted to complete sets by one composer, or “greatest hits”, it makes such a pleasant change to have a well-balanced recital that (notwithstanding the inclusion of the Marini and Muffat sonatas) shines fresh light on neglected repertoire, especially in such a lively and engaging way.

Brian Clark

SONGS OF ORPHEUS

Karim Sulayman *tenor*, Apollo’s Fire, Jeannette Sorrell (dir)
63:21

Avie AV 2383

This debut CD from the Lebanese-American tenor Karim Sulayman is centred around the solos for Orfeo in Monteverdi’s *Orfeo*, a role he has been taking in a US tour of semi-staged performances with Apollo’s Fire under Jeannette Sorrell during the month in which this review was written (April 2018). They include ‘Rosa del ciel’ and ‘Tu sémorta’ (both from act 1), ‘Vi ricorda’ from act 2, and ‘Qual honor’, the recitative from act 4 that leads into the dramatic climax of the opera, the fatal moment at which Orfeo turns to look at Euridice.

The ostensibly surprising omission of ‘Possente spirito’ can probably be accounted for by the fact that Sorrell uses only a string ensemble for the recording and that virtuoso song of course demands other obbligato instruments.

It would have been interesting to see the live performance, since on the evidence of the present CD Sulayman seems likely to have been a highly personable Orfeo. His tenor is a pleasing lyric instrument, perhaps a little grainy in the lower baritone part of the voice, but capable of a range of colour. His greatest asset is an acute awareness of text, an asset so essential in this music. Sulayman uses this awareness to effect with, fluid musical shaping that obeys the demands of the text, while never being slave to the rigidity of the bar line. He has, too, the technique to open ‘Rosa del ciel’ with a true *mesa di voce* and the intelligence to bring, for example, delicious shaping and a sense of the joy of awakening love at the words ‘Fu ben felice ...’ etc (Happy was the day, my love, when first I saw you). If I have a reservation (and this of course applies equally to other items on the CD) it concerns the singer’s reticence regarding ornamentation, especially at cadences, and a tentative approach to some of the more elaborate *gorgie* that are such a hallmark of the early baroque. This is especially damaging in strophic songs, of which there are a number here, which surely demand subtle variation if they are to maintain the listener’s full attention.

The *Orfeo* extracts, which include several *sinfonias*, are by no means the whole story and in addition to instrumental pieces by Castello and Cima, Sulayman sings an extract from Giulio Caccini’s *Euridice* and songs by Caccini, D’India, Landi, Antonio Brunelli, and the achingly lovely ‘Folle è ben’ by Merula, sung to wonderfully expressive effect.

The dreaded words arr. J. Sorrell (and in a couple of cases R. Schiffer) appended to some items raised alarm bells that were soon stilled, since apart from a couple of questionable moments there is little to upset even the most fastidious of listeners. I do, however, have a problem with the contribution of Jeannette Sorrell’s Apollo’s Fire, not because of the quality of the playing, which is as excellent as ever, but with the resolutely 18th (rather than 17th) century sound of the strings, which – at least in the bass line – tends to sound thick-textured and even at times turgid, possibly at least in part a result of the unsuitable church acoustic. Notwithstanding, the splendid playing of Castello’s Sonata in D minor (from his *Sonate concertate in stil moderno* of 1629) by violinist Julie Andrijeski deserves special mention, not least for its *sprezzatura*.

I've seen only an advance copy, but was sent texts and notes by both the singer and Sorrell, those of the former being interestingly personal, of the latter at times somewhat naïve; do we really need reference in 2018 to 'the great Monteverdi'?

Brian Robins

TAFELMUSIK AM DRESDNER HOF

Tobias Hunger *tenor*, Ensemble Fürsten-Musik

69:53

Querstand VKJK 1626

Huge apologies to all concerned for the tardy review of this recording; it was prematurely transferred to my "definitely keep this CD" pile! Featuring music by two important composers who get precious little exposure, Adam Krieger (1634-66) and Johann Wilhelm Furchheim (c. 1645-82); the former is represented by four arias lasting from two to a little over four minutes, while we hear a trio sonata and the six ensemble sonatas from the latter's *Musicalische Taffel-Bedienung* (literally "musical table service"). Both composers worked in senior positions within the Dresden Hofkapelle and the high level of virtuosity required of the violinists gives some indication of the standard of playing at Johann Georg II's court. On Krieger's premature death, efforts were made to complete a series of arias which he had published in groups of ten; none other than Furchheim composed the five-part *ritornelli*, and three of the four arias which the gifted tenor, Tobias Hunger, sings are from that posthumous set. The texts are given in German only; my favourite is the last one (and was the last of those published in 1657 while the composer was still alive): "Wer froh sein will, liebt Bier und Wein" (He who wants to be happy loves beer and wine)! Ensemble Fürsten-Musik (two violins, two violas, cello, theorbo and keyboards) play neatly and with energy and excitement; there is real fire and a sense of harmless competition between the violinists in the trio sonatas (playing in the way that one might imagine Furchheim and his colleagues Walther and Westhoff doing). Great music, beautifully performed.

Brian Clark

WUNDERKAMMER

Acronym

66:44

Olde Focus Recordings FCR906

The qualifications for admission to Acronym's cabinet of curiosities seems at first a bit vague – all the music here seems to share is obscurity and a degree of eccentricity, the latter very much in the ear of the listener. However, the cabinet turns out to be a wonderful conceit to permit the performance of a delightful range of neglected music for strings from 17th-century Germany. Beautifully and expressively played by the small period string ensemble, it is revealed as indeed a box of unsuspected treasures. When the programme notes for a CD include the phrase 'of the ten composers on this recording, probably the best-known is the violinist Antonio Bertali', you know you are in for a cruise through genuine musical backwaters. Music by Bertali rubs shoulders with works by Samuel Capricornus, Adam Drese, Johann Philipp Krieger, Andreas Oswald, Daniel Eberlin, Philipp Jakob Rittler, Georg Piscator, Alessandro Poglietti and Clemens Thieme, a catalogue of names some of which lurk in the shadows at the edge of my experience but by none of whom could I name a single work. This plethora of unfamiliar composers reflects the political fragmentation of 17th-century Germany which at this time was a patchwork of semi-independent states. Fortunately, many of these were wealthy enough to employ the services of musicians, and the presence of many small ensembles and the competition between these statelets proved fertile ground for an explosion in composition. Furthermore, competition rather than collaboration led to what we would now regard as musical eccentricity and the cultivation of the individual and distinctive. This very informative trawl through 17th-century German repertoire helps to put composers such as the Austrian Heinrich Biber in a more comprehensible context, but most of this music is also extremely enjoyable in its own right, and Acronym are to be congratulated for their intrepid trawl through voluminous archives to find it, and to perform it so convincingly.

D. James Ross

ZUGUAMBÉ: MUSIC FOR LITURGY FROM THE MONASTERY FROM SANTA CRUZ DE COIMBRA

c. 1650

Capella Sanctæ Crucis, Tiago Simas Freire

57:31

harmonia mundi HMN 916107

This third CD from harmonia mundi's Nova series is devoted to music associated with the liturgy performed in the mid-17th century at the

Portuguese Monastery of Coimbra. Most of the music is anonymous and is taken from the Monastery's manuscript collections, which contain a curious mixture of sacred and secular repertoire. Tiago Simas Freire argues that this suggests that these madrigals and *villancicos de Negro* served a liturgical purpose, and they are included here in the general flow of the liturgy. I have my doubts about this – surely it is much more likely that the monks recorded this secular music simply for their own private enjoyment. As none of the texts are supplied, it is impossible to judge the contents of these *villancicos*, but they sound rather saucy for liturgical use. The wide range of instruments are beautifully played and blend very well with the eight voices, while Freire's innovative approach to music which he clearly knows very well is refreshing and thought-provoking. The jazzy rhythms and the insistent percussion recalls the recordings made by various groups a few years back of south American sacred repertoire, and this CD is no less catchy. The HM Nova series has the rather off-putting house style of presenting the young performers staring intensely from the covers of the package, but it does seem to be offering a fresh look at old repertoire and to be providing a platform for these young and very capable musicians. And I'm afraid that even after reading the programme notes, I am still none the wiser as to what Zuguambé is...

D. James Ross

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