

BOOKS

VANIA DAL MASO: *TEORIA E PRATICA DELLA MUSICA ITALIANA DEL RINASCIMENTO*
[Teorie musicali, 3] (LIM, 2017)
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Vania Dal Maso is a harpsichordist, musicologist and professor of musical theory. Her repertory includes rarely performed 14th- and 15th-century music, which she plays on very early instruments (including the clavicymbalum, clavicytherium, clavichord and positive organs). Since the line of transmission from medieval to modern music is not a direct one from teacher to pupil, she has researched, written and lectured on musical treatises and the didactic methods of early theorists. The present book is a distilled synthesis of this knowledge and experience, fitting the needs of her students and others.

It presents the underlying theories and resulting practices of Italian Renaissance music by discussing selected subjects as they were covered by various treatises (from Tinctoris and Gafurius in 1494 and 1496 to Lanfranco and Ganassi; from Aron, Vicentino and Zarlino in the mid 1550s to Dalla Casa, Bassano and Diruta at the end of the century; from Cerreto and Banchieri in 1601 up to the later tracts of Banchieri, Diruta, Zacconi and others). In general, this strategy produces a modern tract that parallels in its own organization the approaches of the authorities discussed. The reader, like a learner of four centuries ago, proceeds from clefs to mensuration, proportions, modality, counterpoint and performance practice. The commentary, however, points out some of the essential ways in which the sources differ, and how the music of the 1500s differs from our mainstream classical music.

A single guide to such a non-homogeneous subject cannot actually give a modern musician the competence to deal in every specific case with solmisation, modal harmony, *musica ficta*, mensuration, Renaissance counterpoint, the controversial concrete calculation of intervals themselves, improvisation and ornamentation. It aims to offer readers as much guidance as they seek, depending on what they already know and need to know. The first thing to be learned is how interconnected these matters were. It provides bibliographical options for how to proceed in

greater depth, where the choices would obviously relate to the music one wants to study.

It is definitely a book for Italian musicians – the curious, serious, or indeed studious. Some of the tables, diagrams and musical examples are helpful in themselves, but still require reading the text. Dal Maso's writing is as clear as can be, while necessarily dense: she doesn't have room to say things more than once! I ignored the author's suggestion that one might read the chapters in any order and even skip some. Everything is integral to the subject. A Renaissance 'post-grad', having learned logic and rhetoric, progressed to the Quadrivium (mathematics, geometry, music and astronomy). Just when the modern reader thinks something is irrelevant he starts to lose the trail.

In fact, 16th-century Italian theory is highly relevant to much of the familiar early music we hear and play, certainly that of the entire 17th century. The note values and proportions of mensural notation constituted a valid system, necessary for the rhythmic complexities of polyphony and the contrasting note-density or meters of various voices, especially before there were scores; the method for naming notes invented by Guido d'Arezzo (991?-1033) persisted in hexachordal solmisation for over half a millennium because the note names (such as *Bemi* and *Befa*, or *Alamire*) told singers where the semitones were (which unfortunately the staff alone does not do) and in which octave; the frequency ratios of notes to each other (intervals), the modes and modal harmony, counterpoint and *musica ficta* all influence each other, and the rules governing them were in flux and often contested. Dal Maso goes far enough into each area to point out the implications. Players are constantly tempted to alter (or not to alter!) notes, when they should do so only after considering the characteristics of the mode of a particular voice, modulation to another, and the applicability of some norms of counterpoint only to those notes which are 'on the beat'. Dal Maso's presentation of counterpoint is excellent: she must have put a great deal of thought into how to illustrate it most meaningfully.

The easiest parts of this book may seem to be those on the improvisation of ornamentation, on turning the bare essential notes into complex virtuosic music. This comes towards the end. Again, if we think whatever we want goes, we actually need to immerse ourselves again and again in the descriptions and definitions collected here, the proportions, affects, and norms. (It would require a second book to include the rhetorical figures which every composer would have studied – probably in childhood;

and yet another to cover the question of tunings.)

Odd as this may sound, we must try to view the norms of medieval and Renaissance music as more highly developed than ours. They produced effects that have disappeared entirely from music. Not everything progresses from the simple to the more complex over time.

I pass on a minor point from Dal Maso which might also amuse Italian readers. We wrongly assume that in terms such as semibreve, semitone or even semicircle, semi-civilized, and semiconscious, etc., that 'semi' means 'half'. Originally it did not, and in early music it certainly did not. A breve could contain various numbers of semibreves, and semitones could be of many different sizes, all smaller than tones (measured by different ratios of the frequencies of the two notes producing variously defined enharmonic, chromatic, and diatonic 'semitones', differing by fractions of smaller intervals according to each theory of tuning). 'Semi', from medieval Latin *semo*, simply means 'lesser', not half. Italian words derived from *semo* are *scemo* [stupid, lacking in brains] and *scemare* [diminishing, falling away].

I have only referred to some of the subjects of Dal Maso's volume because there are too many to name. The table of contents is a detailed outline of the book, 6 pages long. It takes a while to locate a particular topic and it serves as a substitute for a general index to subjects and terminology, which the book does not have. But repeated use of this outline is itself a worthwhile guide to the subject matter as a sum of its parts.

The bibliography of primary sources is not alphabetical, but chronological (from 1494 to 1725); the secondary sources, translations from Latin, articles and site URLs are primarily Italian ones and sources the author herself used. There are two indices of names mentioned in the text – the first is chronological, giving their birth and death dates, from Pythagoras to Fux; the second is alphabetical and gives the pages for all references.

Towards the end of the book Vania Dal Maso writes a thought provoking reflection, which I will try to paraphrase. To communicate verbally one tries to understand a concept, and then to figure out how to transmit it efficaciously, this being automatically an internal to external process (from within to without). The listener (or reader, I assume) does the reverse, receiving the message expressed and recognizing or reconstructing its content. In music, however, these processes cannot possibly be automatic. Her purpose is to underline the need for input from a body of contemporary explicative sources. But I think that the processes are reciprocal and shared. The concept

that the speaker (or writer or composer) will express has to be recognized by himself, so like the final listener, he has to externalize it for himself, or test it on himself, before writing it down or producing the sounds. And in all music played by more than one performer, each player is a listener as well as a transmitter, capturing and expressing simultaneously. (This is indeed an additional challenge to the blithe 'falsism' that music is a universal language!)

Barbara Sachs

JOURNALS

RECERCARE XXVIII/1-2 2016

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The latest issue of *Ricerca* has two studies in English and four in Italian, counting the shorter report by FRANCESCO ZIMEI *Ars nova disvelata. Sulla restituzione digitale del palinsesto San Lorenzo 2211 alla luce di due studi recentemente pubblicati*. At the end there are book reviews of: Raffaele Mellace's *Johann Adolf Hasse* (Simone Caputo), Barbara Sparti's *Dance, dancers and dance masters in Renaissance and Baroque Italy* (Wendy Heller), and Roberto Lasagni's *L'arte tipografica in Parma* (Federica Dallasta).

The principal studies are, as usual, in chronological order by subject matter, this time ranging from the early 1500s to the beginning of the 1700s.

Musica profana a Napoli agli inizi del Cinquecento: i villancicos della Cuestión de amor. ALFONSO COLELLA's study may be a difficult read at first if the historical context is not familiar. During the Aragonese reign Naples Spanish polyphony and secular song thrived. With the fall of the Aragonese in 1502 the music changed. The anonymous Neapolitan poetic chronicle, *La Cuestión de amor* (Valencia, 1513), was probably by Velásquez de Ávila, a poet and musician active in Valencia, Palermo and Naples, and indeed one of the characters in this sentimental historical novel. Parts of the poetic text date back to the 14th century, whereas the descriptions of musical performances, *villancicos* and *canciones* for two and three voices, refer to ones performed in a pastoral play, *Egloga di Torino*, which was public entertainment. The voices alternated in strophes (*coplas*), singing together in

refrains (*estribillos*). The music was not important to the court, with its emphasis on war and chivalrous values, nor to the love story, the events, or the problem it tackled: who suffers more, one who loses a beloved or one whose love is unrequited. Not surprisingly, then, none of the music has survived. But links between the written Italian *frottola* and the less refined unwritten musical tradition of the Spanish villancico are illustrated, and the interest in *la Cuestión* is therefore also musicological.

Worth the price of the Musurgia universalis: Athanasius Kircher on the secret of the 'metabolic style'. JEFFREY LEVENBERG, in the title of his study, is citing Kircher's plug, or teaser, to attract potential buyers of his treatise. Translated from his Latin 'Truly, if I include examples of this secret ... metabolic style... known only to the most skilled ... I will make my book worth its price ...' His study (in English) of Kircher's, is also more than worth the price of *Recercare XXVIII*, long to be remembered, and possibly commented on. Spoiler alert: Levenberg analyzes the accepted and controversial theoretical components of the 'metabolic' style (combining mutations of the modes, transpositions of their finals, and the use of diatonic, chromatic and enharmonic species) and not only compares the exact effects of competing contemporary and modern theories in the notoriously difficult problem of chromatic and enharmonic species, but shows Kircher to emerge on the side of practical musicians playing normal keyboards with mean-tone tunings. Despite the difficulty of interpreting Kircher (whether to defend him or otherwise), this verdict will excite players and encourage the performance of this esoteric repertoire, and of other pieces not as yet considered to belong to it. For the question of tuning, Levenberg's explanations are clarified by several exemplary tables. In one he goes beyond Kircher to compare Mazzocchi's division of the whole tone by chromatic, diatonic, and enharmonic semitones with Kircher's.

JOHN WHENHAM's *The Messa a Quattro voci et salmi* (1650) and Monteverdi's Venetian Church music reveals how Vincenti probably acquired this little-known mass and psalms, considered alongside the *Selva morale* of 1641, which he published shortly after Monteverdi's death. Comparison shows how Monteverdi modified previously published works in order to produce others on commission. As *maestro di cappella* at St. Mark's, he was allowed to accept work for other churches, and also to keep his manuscripts in his personal library, for his personal professional use. Whenham shows how the composer would change their beginnings to hide the borrowing, though of course he also

revised and altered their length. This would not have been discovered were it not for the 1650 edition. In his defence it should be noted that masses and psalms were generally elaborations of 'borrowed' liturgical chants to begin with, and perhaps Monteverdi did precisely what was expected of him. He was also paid significantly, the demand for new polyphonic versions of psalms being high. This glimpse into his compositional process is indeed a rare finding.

Giovanni Rovetta, 'uno spirito quasi divino, [...] tutto lume in nere et acute note espresso'. PAOLO ALBERTO RISMUNDO's study is more about the composer's life (1597?-1668), family relations, background, and especially his career in Venice, than about his compositions. Rismondo includes whatever he could about the figures with whom he interacted, including Monteverdi (who was *maestro di cappella* to the Doge in San Marco when Rovetta was *vicemaestro*), Cavalli, and others. By subtracting Rovetta's stated age from the known date of his death, he opts for 1597 for his date of birth. Lost church registers from June 1596 to May 1599 make it otherwise unascertainable, even though the index to the baptismal records almost certainly identifies Giovanni as "Zuan Alberto de messer Giacomo sonador barbier"; in fact, his father, Giacomo, was a violinist and barber. In the title of the article Rismondo quotes from the dedication to a 1668 collection of music by Bonifacio Graziani written by Graziani's brother, with words of praise for Rovetta expressed by an allusive pun on his name: 'Who doesn't admire in you, Giovanni Rovetta an almost divine spirit, like the famous [burning] bush [*roveto*] of Moses all light expressed in quick and high notes.' The biography continues with Rovetta's nephew, Giovanni Battista Volpe, who became *maestro della cappella ducale* in 1690, and with the considerable diffusion of Rovetta's music outside Italy. The article gives the impression of reporting everything knowable now from documents or reasonable hypotheses.

ELEONORA SIMI BONINI and ARNALDO MORELLI collaborated on the six sections, Appendix, and index of names in *Gli inventari dei 'libri di musica' di Giovan Battista Vulpio* (1705-1706). *Nuova luce sulla 'original Stradella collection'*. G. B. Vulpio (c. 1631-1705) compiled and left an immense collection of more than 200 manuscript compilations, which is shown to include the largest collection of Stradella's works. The article is about Vulpio (a singer in the papal chapel and composer) and his relations with others. The Appendix to the article offers the entire inventory of his collection, as it was organized. It sometimes contains the names of librettists and poets

as well as the composers, and usually a description of the bindings, number of pages, etc. The number of works by Stradella includes cantatas, serenatas, arias, operas, many of which autographs. Equally important are those by Luigi Rossi, Carissimi, and Pasquini. One finds Simonelli, Scarlatti, Mazzocchi, Tenaglia, Cazzati, Melani, Bononcini, Gratiani, Carlo del Violino, Carlo Rossi, and others. Only 13 of these volumes are now known for certain to be conserved in various libraries. The search for a couple of hundred of the other volumes must be accelerated: the inventory lists 387 items.

Barbara Sachs

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RECORDINGS

ARARAT: FRANCE-ARMÉNIE, UN DIALOGUE

MUSICAL

Canticum novum, Emmanuel Bardon

58:00

Ambronay AMY 040

In a fashion which has been growing over recent years, encouraged by the example of Jordi Savall and others, this CD blends an ensemble of traditional Armenian and early instruments with voices in accounts of sacred and secular music associated with Armenia. I have got past grumping about the lack of rigorous scholarship behind such projects and now just enjoy the sounds of melodies, passed down through indeterminate generations, played on evocative instruments which suit them very well. Indeed, it would be a cold listener who is not transported by the plaintive sounds of *duduk* and *kanun*, even though the ancestry of both these instruments in their modern form is doubtful, and the technology of the *kanun* as we know it could hardly predate the 18th century. The pleasing “give and take”, as the traditional melodies are developed and passed around the ensemble, are enhanced by the vocal contributions of Barbara Kusa and Emmanuel Bardon, the former with a hauntingly poignant voice, the latter slightly too operatic for my taste with an indulgent inclination to vibrato and *portamento*. The overall effect is narcotically beautiful and very evocative, although a health warning would need to be attached to any suggestion that this is the authentic sound of ancient Armenia.

D. James Ross

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THE ART OF THE HARPSICHORD: FROM CABEZÓN TO MOZART

Byron Schenkman

BSF171

Byron Schenkman has recorded this significant and highly enjoyable disc on eight instruments from the collection at the National Music Museum in Vermillion, South Dakota. Ranging from a rare anonymous Neapolitan harpsichord of c. 1530 to a 1798 instrument by Joseph Kirckman, the disc covers more than two and a half centuries of the harpsichord’s dominance. Schenkman has made an excellent choice of work to show off each instrument, for the most part eschewing well-known pieces in favour of lesser-known but no less significant ones, which match the chosen instrument extremely well. For example, a Toccata and Passacaglia by the Frescobaldi-influenced Johann Kaspar Kerll, used to illustrate the Giacomo Ridolfi harpsichord of c. 1675, is an inspired choice and Schenkman rises very well to the virtuosic challenges of the extended Passacaglia. The same applies to Gregorio Strozzi’s trill-laden Passacaglia which is played on an octave virginal by Onofrio Guarracino. A spinet by Johann Heinrich Silbermann is put through its paces in a rare piece by Silbermann himself, as well as in a sonata by C.P.E. Bach. It is good to hear three Scarlatti sonatas played on a resonant Portuguese harpsichord by José Callisto, with a particularly exciting rendition of K 427. Schenkman is a versatile player who seems equally at home in this great variety of styles, no small ask in a repertory that ranges from Cabezón to Mozart. Only the Haydn Sonata in D (Hob XVI:24), played on the Kirckman, feels a bit uncomfortable in its overly-fast second and third movements. The disc is accompanied by some excellent notes on the instruments, written by John Koster; there is, however, little information on the actual music which is a pity. In the breadth of its programme, and with some exciting playing, this CD makes an excellent introduction to the harpsichord and its repertory. It also showcases some wonderful historical instruments kept in peak playing condition.

Noel O’Regan

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BIS AN DER WELT IHR ENDE
Deutsche Lieder der Reformationszeit
Ensemble PER-SONAT
68:49

Christophorus CHR 77410

Music by Hassler, Lassus, Lechner, Luther, Neusiedler, Schein, Senfl & anon

This CD of songs from the German Reformation, timed to come out on its 500th anniversary, is a four-part programme charting the early development of Protestant music in Germany. It begins with some disarmingly direct accounts of two songs by Martin Luther himself, followed by music by his contemporary Ludwig Senfl. Here and elsewhere the mezzo-soprano and bass voices are accompanied gamba/lirone, Renaissance violin and lute to produce a wonderfully simple and stable account of this rather plain music. Protestant song acquires a new degree of inventiveness and flair when it passes into the hands of Lassus, while further complexity is introduced by Hans Leo Hassler and Leonhard Lechner. Finally, with Johann Hermann Schein, we have complete confidence with larger textures and, at the same time, the introduction of charmingly folksy elements, preparing the ground perfectly for Michael Praetorius and even Heinrich Schütz. These fresh performances are beautifully blended and balanced, with unobtrusive ornamentation and superlative musicianship, and the chronological approach provides an informative tour this rich period of German musical history, while the alternation and combination of voices and instruments provide delightful variety and illustrates the versatility of approach which would have characterized the original performances.

D. James Ross

DELIGHT IN MUSICKE

English songs and instrumental music of the 16th and 17th century
Klaartje van Veldhoven soprano, Seldome Sene recorder quintet

53:29

Brilliant Classics 95654

Music by Baldwine, Bennet, Byrd, Dowland, Gibbons, att. Nicholson, Purcell, Tye, Weelkes & anon

It's a Beautiful Day ... Soft Machine ... Ten Years After ... Spinal Tap. The 1960s pioneered the creative name among rock groups, and fifty years later Seldom Sene are mining the same vein as an ensemble performing Tudor and Stuart music. So, like their predecessors, do they ... rock?

As on the previous recording that I reviewed recently in EMR (*William Byrd: Consort Music and Songs* performed by B-Five – another edgy name – and Sunhae Im) a soprano is pitted against an accompaniment of recorders on several of the tracks. Of the 21 tracks here, slightly under half are songs. So how, in this instance, does the timbre of the singer fare in consort with the recorders, given the usual expectation that the accompaniment would be for viols? Perhaps a fraction better than Sunhae Im who, for all her impressive vocal accomplishment, cannot subdue vestiges of a vibrato deriving from her specialism in Baroque opera. Klaartje van Veldhoven's timbre has less, indeed scarcely any, obtrusive vibrato and she blends more smoothly with her accompaniment. This is best illustrated in a performance of Purcell's *In nomine* of 6 parts in which she sings the plainsong (to the Latin text) with the quintet. The blend is ideal, while the effect is ethereal, almost (and perhaps actually) revelatory. Throughout the disc, the playing of the quintet is clear and precise while committed, with none of the pyrotechnics of B-Five. Indeed, Seldom Sene provide fresh approaches to pieces such as Byrd's *Browning* and *In nomine of 5 parts no. 5* and Tye's title track (performed twice, at contrasting pitches) plus Purcell's *In nomine* and his *Fantasia 5 parts upon one note* which are well known within their own genre. This provoked me to consider the disc's unique selling point, or USP. Many in the same market are competing with fine music well performed. Why, apart from their luminous performances of the pieces I have just mentioned, should people purchase this disc? Part of the answer lies in the album's margins. Alongside the two instrumental pieces, main man Byrd is represented by two songs. The sublime *Ab silly soul* follows Dowland's *I shame at mine unworthiness* which is impressive enough with its angst and dissonances, yet Byrd's song seems to plumb even greater emotional depths with much less effort. The other song by Byrd is *If women could be fair* which, like *Susanna fair* on B-Five's album, has clanging contemporary resonances to which the female writer of the sleevenotes alludes wryly. But there is a musical issue as well. All the songs in Byrd's *Psalmes, sonets and songs* of 1588 are printed as partsongs. Most have one part labelled as "the first singing part" from their origins as consort songs. This is one of a small number which have no such indication. Nevertheless it is one among three of these unlabelled songs that Joseph Kerman, in his book *The Elizabethan madrigal* suggests, on the basis of its musical structure, was originally a consort song. The putative "first singing part" is obvious and, unlike The

Consort of Musicke in the only previous recording, Seldom Sene and Klaartje van Veldhoven take Kerman at his word, and it comes off splendidly. The entire ensemble also perform two fine songs by the able but neglected Nathaniel Patrick (both already recorded on *Elizabethan Songs and Consort Songs*, Naxos 8554284, by Catherine King with the Rose Consort), the relatively popular *Venus' birds* by John Bennet (not anonymous, pace the sleeve notes) and Weelkes' less recorded *The nightingale*. And if there is a feeling of familiarity in encountering the two anonymous warhorses *Sweet was the song the Virgin sang* and *Farewell the bliss* besides three items from Dowland's *Lachrymae* (all understandable inclusions, after all this is a commercial recording) it is good to welcome two quirky instrumentals in *What strikes the clocke*, complete with concluding chime, by big brother Edward Gibbons, and *Cuckoow as I me walked* by Byrd's scribe and cheerleader John Baldwin.

Before winding up, what would be the name equivalent to rock's satirical Spinal Tap for an early music consort? Spinal Chord?

It remains to say that Seldom Sene perform on the full gamut of recorders, from soprano to sub-contrabass, with judicious scorings in both the consort music and the songs; and that Klaartje van Veldhoven possesses an ideal voice for this repertory. It would be good to hear her on a disc devoted to Byrd, singing a combination of classics and premieres.

Richard Turbet

LUTHER: THE NOBLE ART OF MUSIC
Utopia Belgian handmade polyphony, InAlto
51:23
Et'cetera KT1577

This imaginative CD groups treatments by a number of composers from the period immediately following the Reformation of specific texts which were particularly admired at this time, namely: *Aus tiefer Not*, *Vater unser* and *Christ lag in Todesbanden*. Introducing several of these with settings by Josquin of equivalent pre-Reformation texts, they usefully draw attention to the continuity of the early Reformed tradition rather than its radical differences from the music of the previous generation. Prominent composers such as Eccard, Othmayr, Praetorius and Lassus feature, but perhaps more interesting are the obscure composers such as Mattheus Le Maistre, Arnoldus de Bruck and Johann Walter. The Reformation was a great leveler, and it is interesting that

the rather simple harmonisations which its philosophy encouraged set the great and the frankly mediocre on an equal footing. The alternation of the wind instruments of InAlto with the unaccompanied voices of Utopia, occasionally mixing the two in various combinations, maintains textural interest, but unfortunately I found a lot of the music on this CD just rather dull. This is not helped by the rather unrelentingly close recording of the voices, which cruelly emphasizes slight indecisions in intonation. Having said that, some composers such as Lassus' pupil Balduin Hoyoul vividly stand out from the crowd. Worthwhile alone for the unknown composers represented, this CD does cast an interesting light on the music which flourished in the early days of the Protestant Church in Germany.

D. James Ross

UN OPÉRA POUR TROIS ROIS

A Versailles entertainment for Louis XIV, Louis XV & Louis XVI

Chantal Santon-Jeffrey, Emőke Baráth, Thomas Dolié,
Purcell Choir, Orfeo Orchestra, György Vashegyi

93:46 (2 CDs in a card folder)

Glossa GCD 924002

This is quite the daftest (musical) idea I have come across in quite some time, a pretentious conceit that simply does not work. It is surprising to find the Centre de musique baroque de Versailles cited as co-producers. Its objective can be found in the subtitle: 'A Versailles entertainment for Louis XIV, Louis XV and Louis XVI'. So what we have is a pastiche that amounts to a huge divertissement with music drawn from composers ranging from Lully through to Gluck and Piccinni and arranged in roughly chronological order. Given that the work is stitched together to form a continuous whole divided into two parts, it, of course, makes little musical sense given the considerable stylistic differences to be encountered during a period spanning over 100 years.

Three characters are involved in this 'opera', Apollo (the bass Thomas Dolié), La Renommée (Fame) and La Gloire (Glory), sung by the sopranos Chantal Santon-Jeffrey and Emőke Baráth. The text employed is unchanged from its place in the work from which it has been unceremoniously ripped, there thus being not only no dramatic sense or logical continuity, only confusing references to characters that play no part in the present entertainment. In a desperate search for positives, there is quite a lot of music

that you won't find anywhere else on records. I was, for example, delighted to make the acquaintance of the noble *récitative* and chorus 'La volonté du ciel' from Dauvergne's ballet *Le Retour du printemps* (Versailles, 1765), while, if the chorus from Piccinni's *Atys* (Fontainebleau, 1780) is anything to go by, this *tragédie lyrique* might be well worth an airing. But it has to be admitted that there's some fairly mundane stuff here too, and, by and large, it is the familiar extracts that are the most satisfying. Indeed, in this company, the great opening chorus of lamentation for the dead Castor and aria for Telaire, 'Tristes apprêts', from Rameau's *Castor et Pollux* stand out like a shining beacon, though employing the 'Air sauvage', the hit number from the same composer's *Les Indes galantes*, as the finale smacks of gratuitous opportunism rather than considered judgment.

'Tristes apprêts' is beautifully sung by Baráth, who is by some margin the best of the three soloists. As in the past, I find Santon-Jeffery one of the less appealing of the plethora of sopranos (and mezzos) France seems to produce so readily in the early music field. While the voice is not unattractive, it is not steady enough and she uses too much vibrato. Dolié is a bass I've greatly admired in the past, especially in György Vashegyi's splendid recording of Mondonville's *Isbé*, but he doesn't seem at his best here. Similar reservations might be applied to Vashegyi's direction, which – while never less than idiomatic – is a little earthbound, compared to earlier work in French Baroque repertoire. His period instrument orchestra plays well enough, but without the élan and finish of an ensemble like Les Talens Lyriques, who I've probably heard too much recently to avoid invidious comparisons. The choir, a sizable body, is capable but at times too opaque for this music.

Not then, I think, an essential recording and, having proved himself adept in this repertoire, I hope Vashegyi will another time give us something rather more substantial.

Brian Robins

LA RUTA DE LA SEDA

Capella de Ministrers, Carles Magraner

119:40 (2 CDs)

CdM 1743

This deluxe package from the Capella de Ministrers takes as its leitmotif the silk road and the music heard along its length from the 10th to the 15th century. Each of the five members of the main ensemble plays a bewildering variety of instruments, and

on these CDs they are joined by a further four specialist instrumentalists, three vocal soloists and a further group of singers. In addition to the two CDs, the package includes a lavishly illustrated hardcover book with extensive essays on the Silk Road and its music. In the past I have lamented the low quality of the English translations in CdM productions, but this has been addressed and the essays generally read well in translation. I am also occasionally worried by the fantasy element that can creep into productions of this sort, but the musical content is well grounded musicologically, being drawn from appropriate manuscript collections and clearly labelled as such. The music is without exception beautifully played and sung, and the performance editions imaginatively prepared. It is good to hear an atmospheric evocation of exotic ancient times, which is both believable and supported by convincing research. Unfortunately in this lavishly presented production, the details of the musicians and their instruments are listed only once and that in French, while no attempt is made to identify which instruments/players/singers are performing on individual tracks. This would have been interesting in the case of some of the more obscure instruments, and is particularly disappointing in the case of the three superb ethnic solo singers. Having said that, this is a lovely, evocative package, a feast for the ears and eyes, and a worthily opulent end product of a fascinating and well-executed project.

D. James Ross

THE TOPPING TOOTERS OF THE TOWN

Music of the London Waits 1580-1650

The City Waits, William Lyons

49:32

Avie AV2364

Improbable as it seems, the title of this CD comes from a 1709 description of the London City Waits, and there is indeed some top tooting here. As the original Waits of the 16th and 17th century would have done, The City Waits play attractive medleys of popular and courtly tunes with enormous skill on a variety of wind instruments including recorders, shawms, dulcians, lysard, hoboy, cornett, sackbut and bagpipes. They have carefully chosen some of the more inventive consort music of the period by Holborne, Adson, Peter Philips, as well as songs by Thomas Morley and psalms by Dowland, Richard Allison, Simon Stubbs and Ravenscroft, for which they are joined by a band of voices who 'put out' the psalm tune with period pronunciation before we hear it in harmonised

form with instruments and voices. William Lyons' excellent programme notes paint a vivid picture of the dynamic role played in 16th- and 17th-century musical life by city waits up and down the country, while the CD gives a rich and varied picture of how they might well have sounded in a variety of contexts. My only criticism of this excellent CD is its relative brevity – we could have done with more verses of the psalms, more Valentin Haussman, more Holborne and certainly more of William Lyons' own imaginative full ensemble arrangements of John Playford. More 'top tooting' please!

D. James Ross

VIOLA! D'AMORE, DA BRACCIO, DA SPALLA

Anne Schumann *viola d'amore, viola da braccio*, Klaus Voigt *viola da spalla*, Sebastian Knebel *harpsichord*

66:03

Cornetto COR10047

Always the bridesmaid, never the bride – only rarely does the viola emerge from the orchestra to take centre stage in the 18th century. This CD tries to rectify that situation by presenting obscure repertoire (even by my standards!) and performing it in remarkable spaces on an array of precious instruments. Anne Schumann opens the disc with two lengthy anonymous suites of dances and arias with a mixture of French and Italian titles for *viola d'amore* on an original Bohemian instrument, then switches to a copy of a Wenger from 1718. She then switches to the most enormous viola I think I have ever seen; made by the Amati brothers, it is thought that this very instrument may have come to Dresden as part of an order made by Schütz on one of his Venetian trips for a consort of instruments from Cremona. As Anne Schumann points out, the instrument surely was not designed for virtuoso display (it is better suited to playing the tenor parts in string band music), yet she makes a gallant effort to overcome the technical problems set by the chosen repertoire (including a rather taxing test piece for violists wishing to join the royal band in Lisbon!) The bass line (and in the Trio by Johann Daniel Grimm the added obbligato voice!) is provided by Klaus Voigt on the increasingly popular *viola da spalla*; the notes draw attention to the fact that it is shorter in length than the Amati viola, yet what deep tones it produces – occasionally it buzzed a little like the growl in my childhood teddy, but that rather endeared it to me. Sebastian Knebel accompanies nicely on a Gräbner harpsichord; his instruments were known from Hasse's

time to Mozart's – in fact, he directed the opening night of Don Giovanni from one. The viola and the harpsichord belong to the Museum of Decorative Arts section of the Dresden State Art Collection, so it is a real privilege to have the opportunity to hear them played.

Brian Clark

5[FIVE]

Flanders Recorder Quartet & Saskia Coolen

64:25

Music by J. S. Bach, Boismortier, Lully, Schein, Schein + 20th/21st-century music

This recital CD mixes contemporary and early music, the former written for recorders the latter generally arranged from a variety of sources. From its hip title to its pixilated picture of the players, this CD is almost trying too hard to make recorders cool, but – having said that – there is some truly lovely recorder playing here with warm, exquisitely blended tone, exemplary articulation and a high level of musical intelligence. The modern music often demands a hair-raising level of individual and group virtuosity, and is imaginative, catchy and wonderfully idiomatic for recorders. Unfortunately, by comparison, much of the Renaissance and Baroque music sounds a little staid by comparison, but the playing by the expanded quartet is never less than deeply artful, and the accounts of consort music by Johann Hermann Schein, which could conceivably have been played on recorders at the time, are particularly beautiful. Primarily this type of programme is simply a recital put on disc, and none the worse for that – and they say variety is the spice of life. For stunning unanimity of purpose in a recorder consort listen to track 19, the Allegro of a Boismortier concerto, but who would imagine that even an expanded quartet would need to employ twenty-nine instruments? OK, recorder playing is cool after all, and, from the impressive list of top instrument makers, apparently rather lucrative too.

D. James Ross