

## Phil's Classical Reviews

Audio Video Club of Atlanta

Christmas, 2014



Handel: Messiah (complete)  
Harry Christophers, Handel and Haydn Society  
Coro Records

Another Christmas, another Messiah. The selling points for this new recording are (1) it is the first recording of Messiah by acclaimed English choir director Harry Christophers, founder of The Sixteen, of which Coro is the house label, since he took over the direction of the Handel and Haydn Society in 2009; and (2) this marks the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the H+H Society which performed the "Hallelujah" Chorus at its first concert in Boston in 1815 and first performed a complete Messiah in 1853, both American landmarks.

This particular Messiah goes down very agreeably to most listeners' tastes. There are no great surprises here in the way of changes or deletions in either the sequence of numbers in the Novello Edition or the standard dispersion of the arias among the vocalists. That we have a male countertenor singing the alto role is hardly an eyebrow-raiser this late in the day. Basically, this Messiah continues the trend begun by Sir Colin Davis' 1966 Philips recording of using period instruments and performance styles and smaller choral forces than we were used to hearing before that time.

In the present recording, made before a live audience in Boston's Symphony Hall, the vocalists, in SATB order, are Gillian Keith, Daniel Taylor, Tom Randle, and Sumner Thompson. For the most part, they are sufficient for their roles, though none are exceptional. Keith's soprano is quite lovely in such numbers as "There were shepherds abiding in the fields" and "I know that my Redeemer liveth." Likewise, Taylor in "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd" and "He was despised and rejected of men." Beautiful sounding in both cases, but somewhat lacking in conviction. Both the tenor and the baritone vocalists do well enough with the dramatic intensity in such stirring numbers as "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron" and "Why do the nations so furiously rage together," though Randle's voice could use



"La Veillée de Noël"  
Suzie LeBlanc, soprano  
ATMA Classique

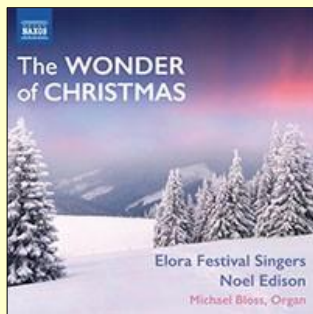
The title of this selection of Christmas songs and festive favorites recalls the tradition of evening gatherings and foot-tapping sing-a-longs that flourished in fondly remembered times among the French Canadians in the region that runs along the St. Lawrence River and the adjacent areas of the Maritime Provinces. It is popularly known as "Acadia" after the idyllically beautiful valley in ancient Greece, and its residents proudly call themselves "Acadians." In their number is soprano Suzie LeBlanc, who has become a national treasure, for reasons that you will hear on this album.

As LeBlanc explains in her booklet notes, the recording project was inspired by a visit by her cousin in Memramcook, New Brunswick with an old illustrated volume of *Rondes et Chansons Populaires* (1890) that he had rescued from the trash pile. Many of the titles of the Christmas songs reflect regional origins in the old country: *Noël Lorrain*, *Noël de Cluny*, *Noël Dijonnais*, *Noël de Paris*. Others celebrate the feeling of awe and wonder in the birth of the holy Child (*Noël Auxois*), commemorate the Adoration of the Magi (*Les Trois Mages*) or recall the bitter travails of the holy family as Joseph trudged wearily though Bethlehem in search of lodgings (*Joseph cherchant un logis*).

Still other songs and instrumentals have no particular Christmas significance at all, but celebrate the joys of life and good company. (Like their American cousins, the "Cajuns" of Louisiana, Acadians don't need much incentive to get festive.) The instrumental number "Up and down the southern shore" and the songs "*La Chandeleur*" and "*Plus on est de fou, plus en rit*" (roughly, "The more the merrier," or more precisely, "The crazier you are, the more you laugh") bear witness to this impulse to merriment, as does "*Escaouette*," a folksong which is also the name of a

a trifle more smoothness and Thompson needs more range in his lower register.

The main attraction in this new 2-CD recording is the chorus. At 30 members strong, it is much smaller than the mammoth forces Sir Malcolm Sargent used to command with the Huddersfield Choral Society back in the bad ole days, and which the Mormon Tabernacle Choir are still accustomed to field for Messiah, but it is more than capable of registering real power and majesty in such choruses such as "For unto us a child is born" and "Glory to God in the highest." And in the really big numbers that conclude Parts II and III, "Hallelujah" and "Worthy is the Lamb," with the rolling and pounding of the tympani and the trumpets rising to action (the only time they occur in the oratorio: canny Mr. Handel knew the virtue of "less is more"), the effect is utterly stunning.



"The Wonder of Christmas"  
Elora Festival Singers, directed by Noel Edison, with Michael Bloss, organ  
MSR Classics

Noel Edison directs the Elora Festival Singers from Canada in a program of traditional Christmas songs, in settings that will recall for many of us the famous chorale recordings that topped the charts this time of year away back in the Fifties. A judicious mixture of adult and children's voices is heard on this CD, with a variety of settings ranging from polyphony to more straightforward treatments of familiar favorites.

Mostly, the style of holiday favorites such as "What Child is This," "Gabriel's Message," and "I Wonder as I Wander" is a lush blend of voices, augmented as is usual in modern chorale singing with wordless syllables as fits the needs of the music. A variety of treatments within this sweet 'n' lovely style keeps the program from becoming too-predictable, including the prevalence of children's treble voices in such songs as "Adam Lay y-bounden" and "There is a Flower." A rich variety of voices suit the famous chorus "O Holy Night" (Cantique de Noël) by French operatic composer Adolphe Adam. The very lush non-traditional setting of "The Holly and the Ivy" for full chorus with a slowly lilting dance-like accompaniment in ¾ time will surprise listeners used to the more staccato voices one usually hears, though other songs such as "Ding! Dong! Merrily on High" will re-assure the purists. There are even two examples of old style polyphony, "*Nesciens mater virgo virum*" (Not

popular summer festival in the months of July and August that also seems to be a peak time to get married.

To that purpose, besides the delightful soprano voice of LeBlanc, who seems to be at home in a very wide repertoire from folk and popular song to Handel, we have flavorful instrumental support from some longtime LeBlanc collaborators: Cape Breton-style violinist David Greenberg, percussionist Nick Halley, and keyboard artist Alexander Weimann, with Danny Parker on bass and Steve Normandin on accordion. It's all captured in natural-sounding perspective in 24 bit / 88 kHz sonics.



"On Christmas Night"  
Armonico Consort, directed by Christopher Monks  
Signum Classics

"On Christmas Night" is a program of carols and traditionals appropriate for the season, concluding with Benjamin Britten's Ceremony of Carols. The Armonico Consort, was founded by Christopher Monks in 2001 and has as its mission "to facilitate access to exceptional and exciting music for as broad an audience as possible." To that end, they also have a program, well-funded throughout the U.K. and in their home in Warwick, dedicated to the proposition "that every child in this country should be entitled to a first-class music education." Whether you're talking about the entire U.K. or merely England, that's an ambitious goal. They *do* reach 15,000 children a year in a program combining music education and performance opportunities up to and including Royal Albert Hall.

The present program combines adult singers and children, with a chaste amount of instrumental support. The children are essential to the ethereal sound of so much of the music. In particular, the descants supplied by youth vocalists in "O Come All Ye Faithful," "Once in Royal David's City," and "God Rest You Merry Gentlemen" are the sort of thing that, in actual live performance, invariably draws first-time listeners' eyes upwards towards the ceiling. The present program also includes such favorites as "Away in a Manger," "*In Dulci Jubilo*," "*Stille Nacht*" (Silent Night), Sussex Carol, "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas," and

knowing a man, the Virgin Mother) and "*Ecce concipies*" (Behold, thou shalt conceive).

Other enjoyable selections for late-hour holiday listening include the Czech traditional "Rocking" ("Little Jesus, sweetly sleep" - done in an appropriately gentle rocking rhythm), "The First Nowell," "Away in a Manger," "There is a Rose e'er Blooming" and others – fourteen songs in all to soothe listeners stressed-out from too much holiday festivity.



"*Machet die Tore Weit*, Christmas with the Boys Choir" Capella Vocalis under Eckhard Weyand Hänssler Classic

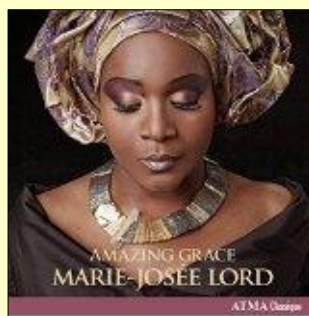
A wonderful, unlooked for surprise by the Capella Vocalis combines German and Polish Christmas carols of timeless beauty. This *knabenchor* (boys' choir) was founded in 1992 in the German Federal state of Baden-Württemberg and is associated with the cities of Holzerlingen, Reutlingen, and Besigheim – all medieval places with histories that go back before recorded time. In a little over 20 years, the Capella has become a treasured institution. And no wonder. With the boys' choir heard in splendid arrangements and supported tastefully by adult male voices and a small number of instrumentalists on violin, viola, cello, and bass, the emphasis is on the clarity and exquisite beauty of the youthful voices. That is as it should be in a program of carols celebrating the purity, innocence and sense of breathless wonder in this special season of the year.

The German carols include such perennial favorites as *Es ist ein Ros' entsprungen* (There is a Rose e'er Blooming), and *Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht* (Silent Night, Holy Night) as well as *Gott sei Dank durch alle Welt*, known in English-speaking countries as the Charles Wesley anthem "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing," which was set to music of Felix Mendelssohn in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and thus qualifies as German for purposes of this program. Other beautiful carols that are less familiar, outside the German-speaking world at least, include *Maria durch ein' Donrwald ging* (Mary went through a Thorny Wood) and *Es sungen drei Engel* (There Sang Three Angels). The adult male voices have it all to themselves in a selection of three carols that include the old Lutheran chorale *Komm nun, der Heiden Heiland* (Come now, Savior of the Nations).

The Polish half of the program features 14 rare and

Morten Lauridsen's incredibly beautiful setting of "O Magnum Mysterium."

The rapturous singing continues in Britten's Ceremony of Carols, based on texts ranging from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> century and requiring the singers to be aware of the nuances in a charming language that is no longer with us today, Middle English. The texts include such as "Wolcum Yole," "There is no rose of such vertu / as is the rose that bare Jesu" and "Adam lay i-bounden." They range emotionally from introspective to passionate, concluding with exclamations of *Alleluia* gradually dying out in the Recessional. This is, on the whole, the most satisfying account I have heard of Britten's evergreen favorite. As a caution, this program, pitched towards the treble voices, will sound best on wide-ranging sound systems.



"Amazing Grace" Marie-Josée Lord, soprano ATMA Classique

Marie Josée Lord, native of Haiti, was orphaned at age six and was brought to Canada by her adoptive parents. She spent her formative years growing up in the picturesque old town of Lévis, Quebec, on the south shore of the St. Lawrence River across from Quebec City. As she developed as a sought-after operatic soprano and vocal soloist, her style reflected both her native land and her adoptive country.

We hear both in "Amazing Grace," a Christmas program that ranges from old-time spirituals and gospel songs like "Couldn't hear nobody pray," "Mary had a baby," "He's Got The Whole World in His Hand," and "Ain't got time to die" to more operatic numbers such as the Bach-Gounod "Ave Maria," Adolphe Adam's "*Minuit, chrétiens*" (known as "O, Holy Night" in English), a setting of "Notre-Père" (Our Father) by Albert Hay Mallotte, and "*Pieta signore*" (Have mercy, Lord) by 17<sup>th</sup> century Neapolitan composer Alessandro Stradella. The twelve selections even include an old American favorite by Irving Berlin, "White Christmas," sung here in French as "*Noël blanc*" and losing none of its traditional charm either through translation or familiarity. (Marie-Josée sees to that!)

In a number of songs, Lord is accompanied with distinction by the Ensemble Vocal Épiphanie, a chorus founded by close friend Frederic Kuku. With warmth

wonderful carols from a country known for the rich heritage of its many Christmas traditions. They are all sung in German, so I cannot attest to the titles of the original songs, which held the special attraction for me of being as beautiful as they were unfamiliar. They begin with three wonderfully evocative songs, *In stiller Mittnacht* (In the quiet Midnight), *Christus ist geboren* (Christ is Born) and *Triumphe aus den Wolken Hallen* (Strains of Triumph Echo from the Clouds), followed by *Gersten Abend, Bruder* (Last Night, Brothers) and ten other carols that include the breathless excitement of the shepherds' song *Lasst uns alle ziehn* (Let Us All Hasten to the Manger) and *Jesus, kleiner Knabe* (Jesus, Little Boy). All are treasures.

May I recommend a webpage that will give you an idea of how rich that heritage of Polish Christmas traditions is? Just visit the following:

<http://easteuropeanfood.about.com/od/christmaseve/a/Polishxmas.htm>



Bach: Musical Offering, BWV 1079  
Jan de Winne, Il Gardellino  
(Paccacaille )

Did Frederick the Great have an ulterior motive in receiving Johann Sebastian Bach on that day, the 7<sup>th</sup> of May, 1747? Certainly, he was eager to meet “the Old Bach of Leipzig,” whose skill in extemporizing canonic variations on a theme was by this time legendary. But the haste with which he had the old fellow ushered into his music chambers in Potsdam, before he had been given the opportunity to change his travelling clothes, may reveal something else. The Prussian autocrat may have intended to show up the legendary musical figure whose music had come to be regarded by this time as hopelessly old-fashioned.

Frederick, you see, was a leading advocate of the new “galante” style of composition, with the emphasis on melody over harmony, as opposed to the venerable older tradition of counterpoint and fugue that Bach represented. Certainly, the theme that he presented to Bach for improvisation was, on the surface, ill-suited to further treatment in canonic variation, being a self-contained melody with several leaps followed by a descending chromatic melody. Bach immediately extemporized a three-part fugue known as a “Ricercar” on the royal theme, but asked the king’s indulgence in

that reflects both Africa and the new world, it compliments Lord’s vocal artistry to perfection. Consider the title song “Amazing Grace.” Lord takes the first stanza by herself, is joined by the chorus in the second, and then the harmony is filled out by organist Jean-willy Kunz and violinist Antoine Bareil in the third. Gradually increasing in harmonic density, it is a very simple and effective way of engaging us in a simple strophic song that wins our affection through its very simplicity and directness. The finale, “*Ma Maria*,” a rousing traditional for solo vocalist and chorus from the Congo, finishes the program in a grand way.

If the CD, recorded in warm 24 bit, 96 kHz sound, seems a little on the short side at 49 minutes, you will probably want to encore every track in a very satisfying program. “May these shared moments,” says Marie-Josée in her booklet preface, “give you a chance to listen to the words of each of the selected songs, to be moved by the tones of the majestic organ, and let delight in the sound of a voice seep down to your innermost depths.”



Bach: Violin Concertos, BWV 1041, 1042, 1052R, 1056R – Szolt Kalló, Capella Savaria  
(Hungaroton)

Four of J.S. Bach’s best-known concertos, two in the familiar settings we know and two in unfamiliar but intelligent arrangements that enhance considerable ear-appeal even further, constitute a zestful program by the Hungarian period instrument ensemble Capella Savaria under its artistic director Szolt Kalló.

The first thing that strikes the listener about these performances is the high-profile rhythms and quick tempi. In fact, the music often sounds more like Vivaldi than it does Bach. That is no mistake, as Vivaldi was a precursor of Bach in the development of the modern concerto for soloist and orchestra, and Bach was quite familiar with his work, even to the extent of transcribing several of the Italian composer’s concertos for his own favorite instrument, the organ. The present album consists of more-or-less standard but definitely *not* “off the shelf” performances of Bach’s two Concertos for Solo Violin, BWV 1041 in A minor and 1042 in E major. It concludes with reconstructed versions for violin of the composer’s best-known Harpsichord Concertos, in D minor, BWV 1052R and F minor/G minor, BWV 1056R.

granting him more time to come up with a 6-part Ricercar on the same theme, a royal request so outrageous that some observers who were present at the time suspected a malicious intent on Frederick's part.

In the event, Bach came up with not only the promised "*Ricercar à 6*", but much else besides, including a number of canons in various intervals between leading and following voices (backwards, in contrary motion, inverted, and augmented) plus a Trio Sonata with a prominent and very demanding role for the flute, which was Frederick's instrument. The manuscripts were all bundled together under the title "A Musical Offering," but with no indication of either order of performance or instrumentation. Bach's flowery dedication read: "May the fortunes of the King increase as the lengths of the notes." Was this Bach's "gotcha" in response to the king's challenge?

One result of all the above is that you will get a different take on each new recorded version of A Musical Offering, depending on the decisions the performers make in terms of sequence, instruments, and performance conventions. While the tendency has been to present this gloriously sprawling opus on a solo keyboard instrument, I have a preference for a diverse ensemble, such as the Brugge, Belgium-based *il Gardellino*, consisting here of flutist Jan de Winne, baroque violinists Sophie Gent and Tuomo Suni, and viola da gambists Vittorio Ghielmi and Rodney Prada, with Lorenzo Ghielmi on fortepiano, harpsichord and organ. That's because the different timbres allow the listener to follow Bach's contrapuntal textures more easily. And on this recording, the flavor of the period instruments is very attractive indeed. The use of fortepiano for the *Ricercar à 3* and harpsichord for the *Ricercar à 6* seems so natural as to be intuitive. And de Winne's flute is positively beautiful in the Trio Sonata. A fine sense of ensemble makes this recording by *il Gardellino* hard to resist.

The performances of the two traditional violin concertos stand out, even considering the fast competition among available recordings, by virtue of the rambunctious pacing and the wizardry of Kalló's well-known prowess on his instrument. In BWV 1041, a true Baroque concerto in ritornello form (*ecco, Vivaldi!*), the attention-getting motifs in the opening Allegro moderato recur in various guises, changed and intensified, throughout the movement. In the Andante, a repeated ostinato pattern in the bass sets the tone. The finale has the metre and rhythm of a Gigue ("Jig" to you), which is accentuated by the (mostly) plucked instruments in the basso continuo – double bass, harpsichord, and archlute, with a bassoon thrown in to brighten the harmony – in a way that may be said to be the hallmark of the entire program. The rhythm created by the continuo continually drives the music merrily along, adding to the appeal of some classy bariolage figurations in the solo violin as it passes the theme back and forth in rapid alternation between open and stopped strings.

Vivaldi would certainly have given this concerto his seal of approval. And the same applies to BWV 1042. With its use of aria da capo and rondo forms in the outer movements, Bach again closely approaches Vivaldi. The highlight is the Adagio, in which an unforgettably lovely melody in gently rocking  $\frac{3}{4}$  time over a ground bass is the main attraction.

The two harpsichord concerto arrangements for violin may be justified, if any alibi be needed in view of the delicious performances they receive here, by the fact that Bach frequently recast his own material. Further, BWV 1052 and 1056 (the latter transposed here from F minor to G minor), have never struck some listeners as the last word on the subject in their familiar settings for harpsichord. In the Baroque era, new music had a short shelf life, and the prudent composer "re-heated" his material as often as necessary to keep it fresh and meet changing situations. The present arrangements, benefitting from the same kind of electricity by Kalló and the Capella Savaria, will make a believer of the most hidebound skeptic. And the Largo of the latter-named BWV 1056, containing one of music's loveliest melodies, does not fail to make a lasting impression in its new setting.



Vivaldi: Violin Sonatas, Op. 2  
Federico Guglielmo, violin; L'Arte dell' Arco (Brilliant)

Violinist and concert master Federico Guglielmo leads the ensemble L'Arte dell' Arco in what is billed as the world premiere recording of Vivaldi's Opus 2 Violin Sonatas in the Critical Edition authorized by the Istituto Italiano Antonio Vivaldi. As Vivaldi was a famous violinist himself, it is an advantage to have a masterful Baroque specialist like Guglielmo doing the honors on violin, allowing the instrument to speak with the eloquence of human emotion in the numerous solo passages as well as in the striking number of duets with other instruments, principally the deep-voiced baroque cello played by Francesco Galligioni.

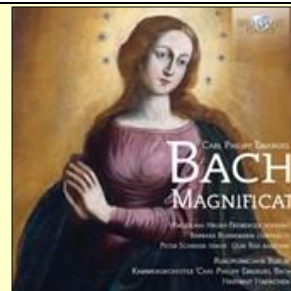
The style of these 12 sonatas published by Vivaldi in 1709 is basically a hybrid of the older *sonata da camera* ("chamber sonata," which permitted the inclusion of dance movements) and the bracing new concerto style that was being pioneered and promoted by Vivaldi himself. With a continuo grouping of guitar/theorbo and harpsichord/ chamber organ in addition to the afore-mentioned cello, we also have something of the intimate feeling of chamber music. With Guglielmo's violin accompanied by plucked instruments (the exact composition depending on the needs of the particular movement), the result can be, and often is, exciting. Particularly when the continuo are challenged to their utmost to keep up with the fast writing for the soloist. It all comes together very nicely, indeed.



Bach: Oboe Concertos – Andrius Puskunigis, oboe; St. Christopher's Chamber Orchestra (Brilliant)

Technically, J. S. Bach wrote only one concerto for solo oboe, BWV 1060 in C minor for Violin and Oboe, which is considered one of his brightest jewels. But he might well have considered transcribing his Concertos for Harpsichord, BWV 1053, 1055, and 1056, especially as they do not sit very idiomatically for that keyboard instrument. With their flowing vocal lines, particularly in the slow movements, these works seem to cry out to be transcribed for a flavorful reed with a singing voice. Or at least it seemed so to Andrius Puskunigis, Lithuanian-born oboist who now resides in France and often, as here, performs with the St. Christopher's Chamber Orchestra of Vilnius in his native country.

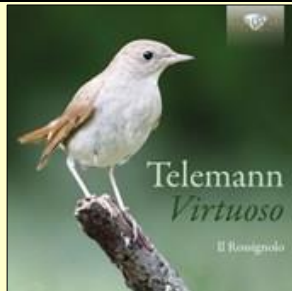
The results are fresh, sparkling, and transparently lovely in the extreme. Particularly beautiful are the Adagio in the double concerto, BWV1060, where Puskunigis' partner is violinist Simona Venslovaite, and the famous Largo from BWV1056, known to Beatles fans as the melody for "Hey Jude, don't let me down." Two of the oboe concertos, BWV1055 in A major and a Concerto in G major specially transcribed from bass and alto arias taken from Cantatas 100, 170, and 30, are arranged for the uniquely rich voice of the oboe d'amore. This was a natural choice because the vocal qualities of the original arias did not have to be altered to fit the range of the oboe. In all these works, beautiful recorded sound accentuates stylish performances.



CPE Bach: Magnificat – Hartmut Haenchen, Chamber Orchestra  
CPE Bach (Brilliant)

Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (1714-1788), second son of Johann Sebastian, came to represent the new emotionally expressive style known as the "*Empfindsamer Stil*" (sensitive style) to his contemporaries. But he also had roots in the Baroque, as is shown most clearly in his setting of the Magnificat, a musical masterwork that rivals that of his father. If that praise seems hyperbole, just give a listen to the Brilliant Classics re-release of the December, 1988 recording by Hartmut Haenchen and the CPE Bach Chamber Orchestra and the Radio Choir of Berlin, commemorating the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the composer's death and re-released now to celebrate his 300<sup>th</sup> birthday.

This is a recording to treasure for the sheer beauty of the singing. The chorus "*Et misericordia eius*" (His mercy is on those that fear Him) is one example. So are the soprano aria "*Quia respexit humilitatem ancillae suae*" (He hath looked upon the lowliness of his handmaiden), exquisitely sung by soprano Venceslava Hrubá-Freiberger, and the alto aria "*Suscepit Israel puerum suum, recordatis misericordiae*" (He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy), rendered with feeling by Barbara Bornemann. These texts are the very heart of the message of God's love for his people. Two fine Symphonies with touching slow movements, H648 and H665, complete the program.



Telemann: "Virtuoso," music for chamber ensemble – Il Rossignolo (Brilliant)

Sometimes, you really *can* tell a book by its cover. In this case, the Italian original instrument ensemble named "Il Rossignolo" (The Nightingale) is epitomized by the sweetly melodious sounds of its baroque performances, and particularly when Martino Noferi (recorder and oboe) and Marica Testi (transverse flute) are involved. The photo of a songbird on the booklet cover is an earnest of what we can expect from the music, in which both flautists are often called upon to "sing like the birds" (which, incidentally, is the derivation of the name "recorder," from a Middle English word that signifies just that sort of mimicry.)

Noferi's recorder is distinguished for the languid beauty with which it unfolds the melody in the Adagio of the Sonata in D minor, TWV42:d10, while in the fast Allegro movements of the same work he articulates a succession of perfectly formed notes as rapidly as is humanly possible without "slurring" any of them – a common practice for the recorder that Telemann inveighs against in moments such as this where "each note is precisely where it should be."

Noferi and Testi sing beautifully together in both the fast and slow movements of the concerto in E minor, TWV52:e1, a melodious blend with which Telemann gave the lie to contemporary authorities who said one shouldn't mix new and "ancient" instruments. In the same concerto, we also hear, in rambunctious playing by a basso continuo of violone and harpsichord, the spirited "Polish Style," of which Telemann was the principal champion in his day.



Vivaldi: Gloria, Magnificat – Hallenser Magrigalisten, Virtuosi Saxoniae, Ludwig Güttler (Brilliant)

Antonio Vivaldi composed the vocal works on this disc expressly for performance by his charges at the Ospedale della Pietà, an orphanage that specialized in musical training for girls. He took his duties as priest and musical director quite seriously, writing some of his loveliest music for La Pietà. The settings of the Gloria and Magnificat heard here are among the precious few choral works by "the Red Priest" to have come down to us.

On this disc, the Gloria is preceded by the soprano motet *Ostro picta*, appropriate for the Feast of the Visitation, immediately after which we are plunged into the sensational opening chorus with trumpets *Gloria in excelsis Deo*. It is followed by the subdued but highly effective emotion of the chorus *Et in terra pax*. The solos by sopranos Andrea Ihle and Elisabeth Wilke *Domine Deus* (Lord God, Lamb of God) with its glorious oboe obbligato and *Quoniam tu solus sanctus* (For only Thou art holy) and their duet *Laudamus te* (We praise thee) are the vocal highlights in a beautifully sung work that concludes with the splendid fugal chorus *Cum Sancto Spiritu*.

Contralto Annette Markert, heard briefly in the Gloria, comes into her own in a great Magnificat that rivals that of J.S. Bach, or so it seems in this performance. Her beautifully modulated voice carries conviction in such an aria as *Quia respexit humilitatem* (who has regarded the lowliness of his handmaiden), one of many eloquent verses attesting to god's love for his chosen people.



Marcello: Oboe Concerto; 6 Concerti, "L Cetra" - Insieme Strumentale di Roma (Brilliant)

Venetian composer Alessandro Marcello (1669-1747) was a younger contemporary of Vivaldi, who influenced his developing style. Indeed, the Six Concertos heard on the present release by the chamber group Insieme Strumentale di Roma under Giorgio Sasso were published by Marcello until the fanciful title "*La Cetra*" (The Harp) perhaps as a tribute to Vivaldi, whose own Opus 9 bore that appellation. Far from mere cookie-cutter concertos for strings, these six superbly crafted works display a remarkable range of expression, atmosphere and timbre, and include solo roles for flutes, oboes, trumpets and cellos, and not just violins.

The "*La Cetra*" concertos are preceded in this program by the Concerto in D minor for Oboe and Strings, which has come down to us as Marcello's best-loved work. As performed by oboist Andrea Mion, the justly-praised Adagio in this work is astonishingly advanced in harmony for its day and stands comparison with the Largo from J.S. Bach's Concerto, BWV 1056 and the famous Adagio by Albinoni. Beautifully recorded, it's also enchanting to listen to.