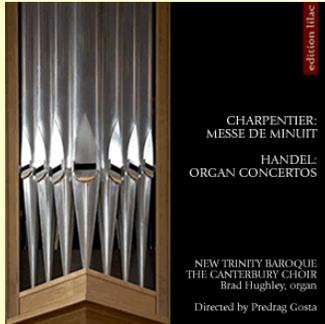


Phil's Classical Reviews

Audio Video Club of Atlanta

December, 2013



Charpentier: Messe de Minuit
Handel: 3 Organ Concertos
Brad Hughley, organ; Canterbury Choir
New Trinity Baroque under Predrag Gosta
Edition Lilac

The Midnight Mass (*Messe de Minuit*) by French composer Marc-Antoine Charpentier (1634-1704) has remained a perennial favorite for the Christmas Season. But I'd tended to take it for granted until I heard this inspired recording on the Atlanta-based Edition Lilac label. Here the ensemble known as New Trinity Baroque under its founder Predrag Gosta meets some ideal collaborators in the person of Brad Hughley, organist and choir director of St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church and the excellent Canterbury Choir under Hughley's direction. In the process, recorded in the intimate venue of "St. Bart's" (as its friends and parishioners call it), glorious music-making was the result.

This Midnight Mass is distinguished by the fact that its composer chose to base it entirely on melodies of Noels, French Christmas carols, thus giving it a popular flavor. There are some 30 of them, in fact, many of which are still current in the French-speaking world. Charpentier adapted them to the Latin text of the Mass, along with original material that he composed in a folk style. The result was not what we'd call "crossover" today, rather popular music taken to the sophistication of high art without losing any of its original vigor or emotion. As performed by the Canterbury Choir and New Trinity Baroque with Elizabeth Packard Arnold, Magdalena Wór, Brent Runnels, and Patrick Newell as SATB soloists, this music comes alive in all its simplicity and splendor.

Charpentier's musical language shows itself highly adaptable to the sense of the texts without overstating the emotions. Thus, the harmonies conveying sorrow descend like diaphanous shades of darkness in the "Crucifixus" from the Credo of the Mass. When the alto-tenor-bass trio turn to thoughts of the Resurrection, succeeded by the chorus "*Et ascendit in caelum,*"



J. S. Bach: Brandenburg Concertos
John Butt conducts the Dunedin Consort
Linn Records (2-Hybrid SACD)

The Dunedin Consort from Scotland here premiere their first purely instrumental SACD for Linn Records. The Brandenburg Concertos make an ideal choice for this bold venture, as they allow the Dunedin players to "take it big" in the more outrageously scored Concertos 1-2, which they invest with considerable verve and vitality, while they possess the musical insight to bring out the more serious, contemplative moments in such slow movements as the Andante in 4 and the Affettuoso in 5.

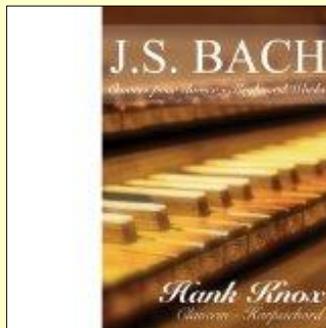
True to their namesake, Edinburgh Castle (*Din Eidyn* in Scots Gaelic) the Consort give solid performances of all these works. They are a trifle rambunctious for my taste in the opening movements of Concertos 1-2, but what the hell, Bach wrote no tempo indications for either, so it is very much a matter of interpretive preference. Also, how many major works of music include a pair of hunting horns (*corni di caccia*) such as Bach unleashes at an opportune moment amid the small forest of woodwinds in Concerto 1? We really can't blame these players for getting in their licks while they have the chance. The pitch chosen for all these concertos ($A^1 = 392$) tends to impart a glowing warmth and solidity to the music.

The earlier numbered concertos on Side 1 tend to clip the concluding movements at the final note, rather than letting the music fade away (which I prefer). And the Polacca in the middle of the Menuet da capo in Concerto 1 is a little slow on the pickup. (I prefer it to follow immediately after the first part of the Menuet, to emphasize the surprise element.) David Blackadder's trumpet achieves its customary brilliance in Concerto 2, and consort director John Butt's harpsichord gives a thoroughly respectable if not altogether virtuosic account of the famous cadenza in Concerto 5. In Concerto 4, primo violinist Cecilia Bernardini plays with eloquence and deep feeling in the outer movements, while she provides a substantial bass when playing together with the duo of flutes in the lovely Andante movement.

proclaiming the good news of the Ascension to Heaven, the music is suffused with a glow of simple warmth and happiness. This is Charpentier speaking, not Mozart or Beethoven. The final section of the Mass, *Agnus Dei*, has a gently swaying rhythm, imparted by its Noel source and appropriate to the pastoral setting of the Nativity.

After each of the three sections of the Kyrie, Hughley plays a brief Noel for organ by André Raison, in keeping with the theme. He makes his presence felt again in the Offertory with music by another contemporary, Francois Couperin that perfectly fits the occasion. New Trinity Baroque follow the Midnight Mass with *Nuit*, a pastoral interlude from a Nativity canticle by Charpentier that expresses the mood of deep peace, stillness, and expectancy represented by that holiest of nights.

Filling out the program are three of George Frideric Handel's ever-popular Organ Concertos with Hughley as the soloist with NTB. They are: Concertos in G minor, Op. 7, No 5; B-flat major, Op. 4, No. 2; and F major, the last-named known as "The cuckoo and the Nightingale" from the delectable discourse between the two voices imitating birdsongs. Hughley gives rhythmically alert performances of all three concertos. He is particularly good in the discretely swaying feeling imparted by the staccato rhythms underlying the flowing melodies in the slow movements of the first two, marked *Andante larghetto e staccato* and *Adagio e staccato*, respectively. These Handel works make a very satisfying conclusion to a deeply satisfying program.



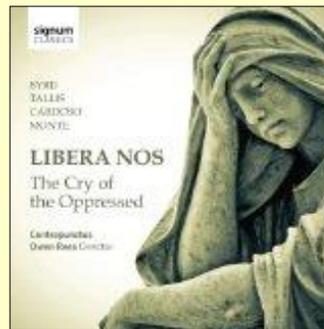
Bach: Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue, French Overture, other works for keyboard
Hank Knox, harpsichord
Early-music.com

On the Early-music.com label from Canada, harpsichordist Hank Knox gives a Bach recital that demonstrates his assured mastery over the salient features in the composer's style. His performances are so engaging, in fact, they might very well make new friends among listeners who don't usually respond to the music of the Baroque or the harpsichord. (There's no "3:00 PM at the boiler factory" sound in this program!)

This program surveys the range of Bach's keyboard art, from the early Toccata in E minor, BWV 914 to the 3-part Ricercar from his Musical Offering, which he composed

Elsewhere, Jonathan Manson's cello makes beautiful music sounding against the archaic timbres of the consort of viols (instruments that had already acquired a venerable "ancient" veneer by Bach's day) in Concerto 6.

The total duration of these Brandenburgs (93 minutes) is on the brisk side, but not unnaturally so, and the Dunedin players know the right places to slow things down for best effect. In Concerto 3, the solo violin plays a short semi-cadenza as a prelude to the two chords that Bach left us in his autograph score. I find this preferable to the modern practice of interpolating the Largo from Bach's accompanied violin sonata, BWV 1021, at this point, though I still prefer having just the two "mystery chords." Positioned where they are, they make a perfectly satisfying mediator between two very active movements.



Libera Nos: The Cry of the Oppressed
Music of Byrd, Tallis, Cardoso, del Cristo, de Monte
Contrapunctus, directed by Owen Rees
Signum Records

"*Libera Nos*", deliver us. "*Parce, Domine, parce populo tuo*," Save, O Lord, save thy people... and bless thine inheritance. "*Miserere mei Deus*," Have mercy on me, o God." The words have resounded through the centuries. And they have never been more relevant than they are today, early in the 21st century, when millions of people worldwide are subject to the evils of war and oppression.

They were also often heard in musical settings in the England of Thomas Tallis (1505-1585) and William Byrd (1540-1623), who as Catholics had to practice their religion covertly for fear of persecution by church and state. We heard it also in the music of Portuguese composers such as Manuel Cardoso (1566-1650) and Pedro de Cristo (1550-1618) at a time when their country was dominated by the Spanish Hapsburgs. Though all these composers happily lived to old age and died peacefully in bed, such was not always the fate of their compatriots and co-religionists. The uneasy mood of people under oppression is reflected in much of their music, and it greatly increased the emotional vocabulary of late 16th century polyphony.

Just what is this strange word "polyphony," anyhow? It signifies a musical texture consisting of two or more simultaneous lines of independent melody. 16th century Polyphony was a very rich concept. It was generally

only three years before his death. Much of this music is virtuosic in character, a fact which fits in very well with Knox' artistic temperament. The final movement of the afore-mentioned Toccata, a piece familiar to Atlanta classical FM listeners as a signature piece in its setting for duo guitars, is one good example. Another is the scintillating chromatic Fantasy & Fugue in D minor, BWV 903, where Knox revels in Bach's brilliantly expressive, florid style in a way that sounds as deceptively natural as if the music had written itself.

The joy of sheer virtuosity continues in the Fantasy in C minor, BWV 906, with its Scarlatti-like hand-crossings, arpeggios, and chromatic scales. The Ricercar à 3 from the Musical Offering, BWV 1079 is a fugue in 3 voices, stunningly realized in this performance.

The Overture in the French Style, BWV 831 represents the summit of Bach's art as far as the keyboard suite is concerned. The opening *Overture* in dotted rhythms is broadly conceived and boldly expressed in this performance. It sets the stage, as was the custom, for the suite of French dances that follow: a Courante, Gavottes I & II, Sarabande, Bourées I & II, and a Gigue. Baroque aficionados will note that Bach gives us optional dance movements both before and after the intimate Sarabande which was traditionally the deep-water mark of a suite (and, as Knox takes it, not as somber as we often hear it played), resulting in the very expansive character of this particular suite. A final curiosity is Bach's inclusion of an "Echo" as an extra movement at the very end for the purpose of exploiting the dynamic fluctuations that were now possible in a two-manual harpsichord. Using a replica by Richard Kingston (1982) after an original by Dulcken, Hank Knox does a good job conveying the excitement Bach's listeners must have experienced at this new innovation in an instrument that was in time to be supplanted by the instrument that does dynamic phrasings *par excellent*, the modern piano.



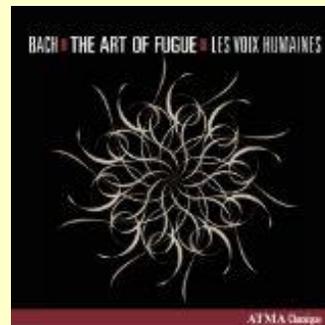
C.P.E. Bach: First Collection for Connoisseurs and Amateurs - Preethi de Silva, keyboards
Centaur Records

Preethi de Silva, Sri Lanka native and founder/music director of the Con Gioia Early Music Ensemble draws upon decades of experience as a harpsichordist and fortepianist in honor of the 300th birthday of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (1714-1788). This was his first volume of

either pitch-against-pitch, point-against-point, or with a sustained pitch in one part against melismas of varying lengths in another. Each new voice enters and takes its place in an existing whole.

To optimally perform polyphonic music requires purity of tone, flawless intonation and breath support, discipline, and a deep understanding of musical values from all the members of an a capella vocal ensemble. Under the leadership of Owen Rees, director of music at The Queen's College, Oxford since 1997, Contrapunctus has repeatedly demonstrated it possesses these qualities. Male and female, treble and bass, the ten voices who makes up this group have the perfect blend and ideal sympathy needed to perform some of the greatest and most emotionally moving music of a great era.

The program includes seamless accounts of such gems of late century polyphony as "*Super flumina Babylonis*" (By the waters of Babylon) by Philippe de Monte, a Flemish composer at the royal court of Spain, and the response by William Byrd, "*Quomodo cantabimus*" (How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?), which continues the verses of Psalm 136 in Monte's 8-voice polyphony almost until the end, when it suddenly falls silent and then switches to antiphony (a call and response style of singing) and a change in harmony on the words "*memor esto Domine filiorum Edom*" (Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom). That striking moment is very effectively captured here. It is just one highlight in an exceptionally rich program.



Bach: The Art of Fugue, BWV 1080
Les Voix Humaines Consort of Viols
ATMA Classique

Rich sound, great music, and an historical mystery make this latest release by the Montreal-based consort of viols Les Voix Humaines irresistible, at least for Baroque connoisseurs. Let's take them in that order.

The viola da gamba, which had begun to go out of style in J. S. Bach's lifetime, was not a single instrument but a family of instruments. Held in the lap or on table top and bowed underhand, they were at a disadvantage in the music of the 18th century when compared with the new family of violins. They flourished during the great age of polyphony in the 16th century and were still admired by diehard aficionados in Bach's day. They are indeed

sonatas, rondos, and fantasies for *kenner und liebhaber*, connoisseurs and amateurs. In this music, Bach made a definitive statement about his life and art.

This collection of six keyboard sonatas reveals the second son of Johann Sebastian Bach, as the key figure in a movement known as *Empfindsamer Stil* (sensitive style) that flourished briefly in the latter 18th century and aimed at natural expressions of feeling and sudden changes of mood. To recreate it today requires an artist whose playing combines radiance and imagination in equal measure. Preethi de Silva has an abundance of both, and these attributes serve her well, whether she performs on harpsichord, as she does in Sonata I, clavichord (Sonata II), or fortepiano (Sonatas III-VI). The greater problem for any performer of C.P.E. Bach is always the interpretive, as this composer tends to keep even the most alert artist or listener deliberately off-balance in terms of expectation.

From the very beginning of the program, we find this element in the opening of Sonata I in C major, a giddy exercise in perpetual motion that begins without preface and takes us on a merry ride reminiscent of what we occasionally encounter in the composer's father. With her crisp attack and her very effective alternation of *forte* and *piano* dynamics, de Silva shows herself to be an ideal harpsichordist for this particular sonata.

The clavichord is de Silva's instrument of choice for the darker moods and frequently changing harmonies of Sonata II in F major. That includes the use of *bebung*, a type of keyboard vibrato that is unique to the instrument. The drawback of the clavichord has always been its very low sound volume, which makes recording it particularly difficult as it is virtually impossible to record it up close without also capturing the sound of its mechanism. This particular instrument is also rather dilapidated-sounding (one hopes it will serve a useful purpose in someone's fireplace on a cold winter evening), so that de Silva has to summon up all of her keyboard prowess to keep us focused on the expressive quality of the music.

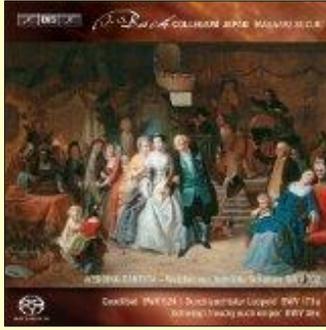
Sonatas III-VI, played on replica of a 1790 fortepiano by Johann Schanz of Vienna, sound to good advantage in de Silva's performances. Syncopations, dotted rhythms, and unexpected changes in mood and texture within a short space of time characterize these gems of Bach's artistic style. One of the most striking moments occurs in the first movement of Sonata IV in A major. After an exuberant opening featuring, among other things, some string-like *bariolage* between the hands, we are surprised at the end with a long note in the treble, f-sharp minor at a point when we expect A major. Not only is this a shocking key change (you don't have to be a musician to gauge that Bach is doing something *really* strange at this point), but it changes the character of the music from ebullience to deep yearning and melancholy. Only when we encounter this same affect in the following movement do we release that C.P.E. has been up to his old tricks, preparing us for a dramatic change in mood.

slower instruments than the strings we are used to hearing, but admirers prize them for their rich, mellow tones and vocal qualities that can make them sound very well in an intimate ensemble, or "consort."

The Art of Fugue was composed in response to a challenge from the contemporary music scholar Johann Mattheson that Bach, the foremost living authority on the subject, publish some fugues in three subjects that could be combined in any permutation. Perhaps Mattheson felt something needed to appear on the subject before the venerable art disappeared forever. He must have known that Bach couldn't refuse a challenge. In the event, Bach outdid himself with a monumental work that could serve as a practical treatise, consisting of 14 fugues and 4 canons, each using some variation of a principal subject and increasing in complexity. In some of the examples, the subject is augmented, diminished, or exposed to stresses as one voice after another enters the picture. There are "mirror" fugues in which the second subject is a complete and exact inversion of the first. In one of the canons (sophisticated cousins of "Row, row, row your boat") the second voice is in contrary motion and moves twice as slowly as the first. The possibilities are endless.

The "mystery" comes at the end of the third section of Contrapunctus XIV, when the music breaks off suddenly. As C.P.E. Bach, son of the composer, explained in a handwritten note in the manuscript, "At the point where the composer introduces the name BACH [German notation for B_b-A-C-B_b] in the countersubject to this fugue, the composer died." There is no shortage of plausible latter-day completions, justified by the fact that Bach obviously intended to insert his personal signature as the fourth subject of a massive quadruple fugue, thus making for a satisfying ending in which this motto, heard at the very beginning, comes around again at the last. Others, including Les Voix Humaines and yours truly, prefer the unfinished fugal ending. Coming where it does, it gives me goose bumps every time I hear it!

One last consideration is the medium through which we experience The Art of Fugue. Bach left no indication of preferred instrument, leading many experts to view it as strictly theoretical and not meant for performance. Glenn Gould gave that theory the lie some 40 years ago by performing it on piano. There is also a good deal to be said for a consort of viols, as the instruments have a vocal quality and blend well as members of a family. Les Voix Humaines Consort of Viols, here consisting of Margaret Little, Susie Napper, Mélisande Corriveau, and Felix Deak, make the learning curve for those unfamiliar with the genre a pleasure by virtue of their rich, golden tones, mutual sympathy, enthusiasm, and sense of rhythm and movement. These qualities are particularly welcome in those fugues that unfold in the manner of dances, where a noticeably lighter feeling is called for.



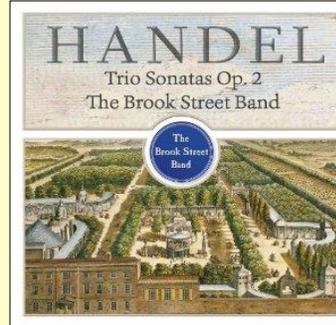
Bach: Secular Cantatas, Vol.3, including "Wedding Cantata" Masaaki Suzuki, Bach Collegium Japan BIS Records (Hybrid SACD)

Nothing epitomizes the dramatic growth of classical music interest beyond the western world than the project to record all of J.S. Bach's 200-plus cantatas by Masaaki Suzuki and the Bach Collegium of Japan. Suzuki, who studied harpsichord and organ under Ton Koopman and Piet Kee in Amsterdam at the Sweelinck Conservatory, shows he really knows his Bach in Vol. 3 of the secular cantatas.

In this program, the Collegium is joined by two Britons singing key roles, soprano Joanne Lunn and baritone Roderick Williams. Suzuki's ability to consistently attract foreign vocal artists is attributable to the fact that he understands a singer's tessitura and how to exploit it for best results, instrumentally supporting the arias and allowing the swelling intensity of the voice to increase gradually and naturally within the line.

Nothing illustrates this better than Lunn's opening aria "*Weichet nur, betrübte Schatten*" (Yield, sorrowful shadows) in the "Wedding" Cantata, BWV 202. Here, Lunn's pure soprano floats with perfect freedom over a florid musical line created by oboist Masamitsu San'nomiya. This air, a crown jewel of Bach's vocal art, is actually almost eclipsed moments later by the soprano's second aria "*Phoebus eilt mit schnellen Pferden*" in which the text imagines the Greek god Phoebus Apollo hastening behind a team of swift horses to behold the happy nuptials, the movement of his chariot depicted by a very active continuo including Suzuki himself on organ.

Though not up to the same height of inspiration as the Wedding Cantata, BWV 173a, "*Durchlauschster Leopold*" (Worthy Leopold) and BWV36c, and "*Schwingt freudig, euch empor*" (Soar joyfully aloft), written for the birthday of the Prince of Anhalt-Cöthen (Bach's employer) and a celebration for a university professor, subscribe to the 18th century idea that good government, wisdom, and just dealing in our private and public lives flow from the heads of society downwards (present-day America could take a lesson). In these works the well-modulated voices of Hiroya Aoki (Countertenor) and Makoto Sakurada (Tenor) make a fine impression beside those of Lunn and Williams.



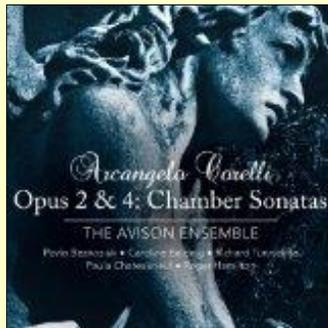
Handel: Trio Sonatas, Opus 2
Brook Street Band
Avie Records

The Brook Street Band, our favorite all-girl ensemble from the United Kingdom, have done it again for George Frideric Handel, with a delight-filled release of his Six Trio sonatas, Opus 2. This always-engaging group, now consisting of Rachel Harris and Farran Scott, violins; Tatty Theo, cello; and Carolyn Gibley, harpsichord, are joined by Lisete da Silva on traverse flute and treble recorder for the choice melodies in the top part in Sonatas 1 and 4, respectively. Elsewhere, the two sparring violins, as in the second movement of No. 6, add to the excitement. As the continuo, Theo and Gibley are not content to just saw a way in the background, but frequently partake of the theme, as they do in the opening of 1, or participate enthusiastically in the fugal passages, as in in the second movement of 2.

Typically of Handel's published works, Opus 2 is a miscellany of styles, textures, and periods, in which the composer frequently "re-heated" material. Considering his borrowings from other compositions, one of the joys of Handel-listening, in fact, is to play a game of "Name That Tune". In her very readable booklet notes, Theo identifies music lifted from the Chandos Anthems, the operas *Agrippina* and *Rinaldo*, the oratorio *Esther*, and several organ concertos. (And is it my imagination, or is there a resemblance between the Largo in Sonata 1 and the aria "Where e'er you walk" from *Semele*?) As Theo observes, music had a short shelf life in those days and what was popular one year might slip from the public memory the next, so that composers were constantly under pressure to refurbish their older material. No matter. Whatever Handel borrowed from himself (and others!) he always made to sound new and fresh.

Generally speaking, these are specimens of the genre *sonata da chiesa* (church sonata), a name which by Handel's day had come to mean nothing more than sonatas without dance movements so-described. That doesn't mean there is no dance-like music in Opus 2, particularly in the Allegro finales of Nos. 4, 5, and 6, in which we are reminded of a Jig, Menuet, and a lusty folk dance, respectively. Only in No. 2, with its noble suspension-laden Largo, are we reminded of the pure Corellian style that Handel heard in his early years in Italy. Sonata No. 6, also revealing Italian influence, is

The program concludes with the Quodlibet (roughly translated from Latin as “Anything Goes”) BWV 524. This musical genre was a mishmash of songs, some sublime-sounding but with nonsense lyrics, others inclining towards ribaldry, that might pass current at a wedding feast. Lurching towards capophony, this absolutely indescribable item makes us think that Spike Jones must have been alive and well in 18th century Leipzig!



Corelli: Chamber Sonatas, Opp. 2 & 4
Pavlo Beznosiuk, Avison Ensemble
Linn Records (2-Hybrid SACD)

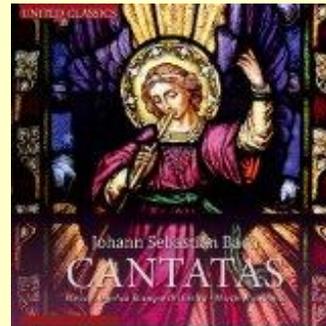
This is the third of four projected releases by Beznosiuk and the Avison ensemble on the 300th anniversary of the death of Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713). The selections for the tribute were easy to determine because Corelli, the most perfectionist of composers, only published six opuses in his lifetime, and there has been absolutely no spate of spurious claims or rediscoveries in the centuries afterwards. What Corelli had to say in music, he said concisely and for all time. In fact, he was recognized as a “classic” in his own time, and his reputation since then has not suffered the usual periods of neglect that plague almost every other composer.

The present release represents Corelli’s chamber sonata (*sonata da camera*) style, Opus numbers 2 and 4. As distinct from the church sonata (*sonata da chiesa*), the chamber sonata incorporated frequent dance-inspired movements that would have been thought inappropriate for a sacred setting. That is not to say that there are no vestiges of Corelli’s *chiesa* style in the 12 sonatas found in this program, particularly in the glorious solemnity of the opening movements, usually a Preludio marked “Adagio” or “Lento.” Even when the opening is an Allemanda, normally an energetic dance of German origin (as the name indicates), it is slow and stately.

Corelli’s chamber sonatas are “trio Sonatas,” typically performed by two violins in the upper parts plus a cello or bass viol and a chordal instrument, usually a harpsichord, organ, or lute, for the purpose of realizing the underlying bass. They are in the pattern of a Preludio, followed by a short suite of two or three dances: Corrente, Gavotta, Sarabanda, Allemanda, or Giga, in various combinations. When the Allemanda is found in the second or a subsequent position, it is much faster than when it functions as a prelude. Even more

most notable for the pining, expressively operatic nature of its Arioso movement, distinguished, but not by far the sole beauty among Handel’s many fine slow movements.

In the finale, all five players join together in a joyous Passacaille, also found in Trio Sonata, Op. 5, No. 4, and added here as a bonus track.



Bach: Sacred Cantatas BWV 49, 51, 82
Musica Angelica Baroque, Martin Haselböck
United Classics

Three prime examples of J. S. Bach’s solo cantata style provide the listening fare in engaging performances by the Santa Monica, CA-based Musica Angelica Baroque Orchestra under Martin Haselböck. They are as follows: Nos. 49, “*Ich geh und suche mit Verlangen*” (I go and search for Thee with longing), 51, “*Jauchzet Gott in Allen Landen*” (Praise God, all ye lands), and 82, “*Ich habe genug*” (It is enough). These are cantatas for solo voices, without choruses or chorales. As they place a premium on excellent voices with little margin for error, it is well for Musica Angelica that they have the services of two fine solo vocalists, soprano Dominique Labelle and baritone Florian Boesch.

Cantata 49 is first in the program, and it has the further attraction for me that I was not previously familiar with it. It features both soloists in radiantly beautiful duets of the “Soul and Savior / Bride and Bridegroom” variety that we have heard elsewhere in Bach, the idea that true beauty and peace can be achieved only through Christ. The soul’s oft-repeated “*Ich bin herrlich, ich bin schön*” (I am glorious, I am fair), sung by the soprano, reinforces this message in the first duet. And the baritone’s reply “*Dich hab ich je und je geliebt*” (Thee have I loved and loved always) in the second provides the comforting answer.

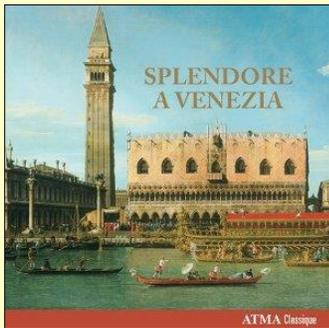
Cantata 51, as stated, begins with the florid aria “*Jauchzet Gott in Allen Landen*.” It requires a first class soprano capable of reaching c⁴ and a virtuoso trumpeter (here, Martin Patscheider) capable of matching the soprano’s brilliant and extraordinarily long melismas. The charming second aria, “*Höchster, mache deine Gute ferner alle Morgen neu*” (All-Highest, make thy goodness henceforth every morning new), to a gently rocking accompaniment in 12/8, is followed, rather hurriedly, by a coloratura “*Alleluia*.” This coda, expressing unrestrained

strikingly, the Sarabanda, normally a slow, often sensual, dance, is often played at a quicker tempo, especially in the Opus 4 set, where Corelli allows himself more freedom in the way he constructs his sonatas. Consequently, his audiences were kept alert, not knowing what to expect next.

The upshot of all this is that Corelli's chamber sonatas are far from cookie-cutter designs, and they require the sort of rhythmically incise attention, with added care as to tempi and style, that the Avison Ensemble give them in these recordings. The performers are Pavlo Beznosiuk and Caroline Balding, violinists; Richard Tunnicliffe, cello; Paula Chateaufneuf, archlute; and Roger Hamilton, harpsichord and organ. The interaction among these musicians is simply breathtaking at times, as in the Allemanda of Opus 2, No. 3 in which the first violin and bass parts descend together in parallel fifths (a type of movement that the bluestockings of Corelli's day considered lascivious. How times have changed!)

joy, is somewhat rushed in the present performance by Labelle and does not achieve as sensational an effect as I have heard elsewhere (see Kathleen Battle or Ruth Ziesak for comparison).

Likewise, Boesch's performance in 82, "*Ich habe genug*," is beautifully stated, reflecting a baritone voice that is particularly smooth and gracious in the upper range, but it doesn't have the bite or the soulful depth of gratitude of the believer that I remembered in accounts by such as Mack Harrell and Max van Egmond. Nevertheless, it is always a pleasure to listen to, particularly in the aria "*Schlummert ein, ihr matten Augen*" (Slumber now, ye weary eyes) with its gently rocking melody heard above the sensuously beautiful foundation provided by the golden sound of Gonzalo Ruiz's oboe d'amore. This is one of the most memorable arias in all of Bach's cantatas, and it comes across beautifully here.



"*Splendore à Venezia*," Music of Venice from Renaissance to Baroque
Artists include Karina Gauvin, Suzy Leblanc, Alexander Weimann, Francis Colpron
Ensembles include Les Boréades, Ensemble Masques, Académie baroque de Montréal, Bande Montréal Baroque, Les Voix Baroques
ATMA Classique

This very attractive program was released in conjunction with the October 12, 2013 opening of an exhibition by the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts titled "*Splendore à Venezia: Art and Music from the Renaissance to the Baroque in the Serenissima*." That's a mouthful to say, but the multi-year recording project takes in a lot of territory, too. It covers a period of three centuries, in the course of which Venice gradually relinquished its ambition as a major player in European power politics, and Venetians settled down to the enjoyment of life and beauty.

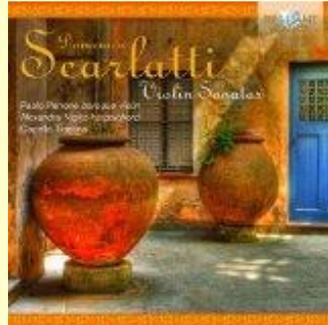
On a grand scale, we might add. The program follows a glorious tradition, from the motets, madrigals, and songs of the Renaissance to the vocally-influenced instrumental music of the early Baroque, and finally a late flowering of greatness under Albinoni, Marcello, and Vivaldi. We begin with the Concerto for Oboe, Bassoon and Strings, RV 545 by Vivaldi, with Washington McClain and Mathieu Lussier, respectfully, sharing the solo honors as they relish the composer's flavorful colors and melodies. Andrea Gabrieli's charming madrigal of young love *Due rose fresche* by Les Voix Baroques is followed by Giovanni Bassano's *Ricercata Quarta*, with Margaret Little discoursing eloquently on viola da gamba. Next, the Studio de musique ancienne de Montréal discover the quiet beauties of Giovanni Gabrieli's motet *O magnum mysterium*, a canticle celebrating the hushed sense of awe attending the Nativity.

Giovanni Picchi's *Canzon decima quinta* for 2 cornetts and 4 sackbuts, Giovanni Girolamo Kapsberger's *Ballo secondo* for chitarrone and double harp, and Giovanni Battista Fontana's *Sonata seconda* for recorder and continuo, all allow us to enjoy ancient instrument timbres so flavorful we can taste them. The program reaches a dizzy height of sublimity in Claudio Monteverdi's motet *Laetatus sum* (I was glad when they said unto me: let us go into the house of the Lord), to the text of Psalm 121 with its soaring praise of the holy city of Jerusalem (sounds like it must've been written by the chamber of commerce), and the madrigal *Zefiro torna*, yet another of music's laments of lovesick youth languishing amid the astonishing beauty of spring. Tragicomedia under Stephen Stubbs, and Les Voix Baroques, with Charles Daniels and Colin Balzer the tenor vocalists, do the honors respectively. Benedetto Marcello's *Intonazione degli Ebrei Tedeschi*, inspired by music the composer heard in Venice's Jewish quarter, features the lovely voice of mezzo-soprano Rinat Shaham with the group Fuoco e Cenere (Fire and Ashes). Salomone Rossi, who was a Jew and wrote a large body of Jewish liturgical music, is represented here by a decidedly secular *Burgamasca* infused with the spirit of the Commedia. Bande Montréal Baroque under Eric Milnes claims the credit. Johann Rosenmüller's *Sonata à 5*, performed by Ensemble Masques, reveals the richness of the composer's advanced string technique.

The program closes with Albinoni's ever-popular Concerto for Oboe in D minor, Op. 9, No. 2, with oboist Matthew Jennejohn essaying the florid melodies and Les Boréades providing the backdrop, a charming operatic aria "*Addio Caro*" by Vivaldi, featuring the exquisite sound of soprano Karina Gauvin and the Arion Baroque Orchestra, and the

up-beat opening movement from J.S. Bach's Concerto in F major for solo organ (Vincent Boucher, organist), a handsome tribute to (and borrowing from) Vivaldi.

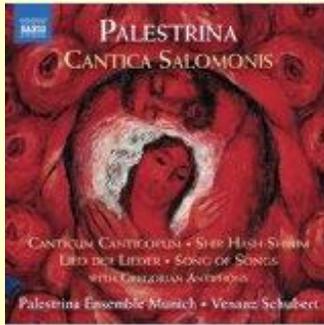
If I've left some talented performers out, blame it on writer's cramp. This is an outstanding compilation involving many of the best period music specialists in a country that is a current hotbed of the baroque/early music revival. Recorded between 2001 and 2013, it still sounds like a cohesive program, thanks to superior mixing and mastering and the fact that the various artists were recorded in the same excellent venue, the Bourgie Concert Hall of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.



Scarlatti: Violin Sonatas
Paolo Perrone, violin; Alexandra Nigito, harpsichord; members of Capella Tiberina
Brilliant Classics

From Italy we have an intriguing new recording of unfamiliar music by Domenico Scarlatti, performed by baroque violinist Paolo Perrone and harpsichordist Alexandra Nigito. The relative lack of familiarity results from the fact that the multi-movement sonatas recorded here, now listed as Kirkpatrick numbers 73, 77, 78, 81, and 88-91, were indistinguishable from the single-movement keyboard sonatas in the first modern edition, that of Alessandro Longo (Milan 1906-1910). More recent scholars have identified these works as intended for violin and harpsichord, as they are basically performed here.

That little word "basically" needs a footnote. In a number of instances, harmonies have been augmented by the presence of instruments such as theorbo and archlute that were already seeming "ancient" by Scarlatti's day. Relics of an earlier era in which they frequently played with a consort of viols, they had noticeably quieter voices than the harpsichord and violin we have here. That creates a problem of balance in the present recording, as when the level drops audibly in the Sonata in C minor, K73 so that the harpsichord does not obscure the softer-voiced

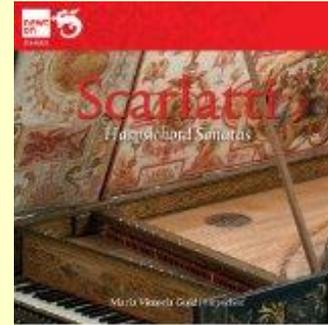


Palestrina: Cantica Salomonis
Venanz Schubert directs Palestrina Ensemble – Munich
Naxos

Venanz Schubert, co-founder of the Palestrina Ensemble of Munich, directs that excellent group of 12 male and female voices in truly superlative accounts of 29 motets that comprise the biblical Song of Solomon, as set by the supreme master of Italian polyphony Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (1525-1594). These accounts of Palestrina's beautifully transparent settings range from merely exalted to simply otherworldly in their effect on the listener.

There is really nothing in music quite like the polyphonic (multi-voiced) acapella motets of Palestrina. As is so often true in art, their beauty is based on a true simplicity of means. The starting point is the musical line. It is continuously flowing, never static or rigid. There are few leaps between notes, and when one occurs, it is immediately countered by stepwise motion in the opposite direction. Such dissonances as Palestrina uses are confined to passing notes and weak beats; if one occurs on a strong beat, it is always resolved.

Sound simple? Well, it was just the medicine that was needed to save polyphonic sacred music from the crisis it faced in Palestrina's day. Polyphony had become increasingly



Scarlatti: Harpsichord Sonatas
Maria Vittoria Guidi, harpsichordist
Newton Classics

Domenico Scarlatti's known authentic keyboard sonatas – to date, 555 and counting – have the distinction of enriching three different repertoires. Thanks to transcription, they now belong as much to the piano and the guitar as they do the harpsichord, for which Scarlatti originally composed them. The product of his exile in Spain the last 40 years of his life, they constitute a wondrously self-contained world in which we come to know intimately the soul of the composer.

Scarlatti, an inveterate gambler in real life, carried over the trait in the calculated risks he took with his sonatas, requiring sensational leaps, hand-crossings, sudden major-minor switches, dynamic harmonies and explosive accompaniments. Like the Commedia illustrations that often decorate the booklets of present-day Scarlatti albums, his music is often highly theatrical, even zany.

On this program, the Sonata in E, K134 evokes the Italian opera in all its brilliance, though it is possible to feel the influence of the popular Spanish music that also inspired the composer. Sonata, K135, also in E, has a pastoral quality plus a gaiety that seems to run awash throughout the whole range of the keyboard.

instruments. Also, these older instruments seem superfluous in such moments as the Allegro finales of the Sonatas, K89 and K91, since the effects they achieve might easily have been encompassed by the violin and harpsichord alone.

Still, there are enough beauties in the present CD offering to justify its inclusion in the library of any baroque enthusiast. Perrone and Nigito make beautiful music when they play together, as in the D minor Sonatas, K77 and K90, the last-named being further distinguished by the inclusion of a hand-struck tamburello, adding a sensational down-to-earth sound to the third movement, a lusty *Tarantella*. And Nigito's performance of the single-movement sonata in C major, K132, marked *Cantabile*, is sublimity itself.

complex in the period leading up to the Council of Trent, so that in many instances the words of the text were unintelligible (witness the fantastic motet *Spem in aulium*, set for eight 5-voice choirs by the English master Thomas Tallis). To the Counter-Reformation Church it was clear that believers needed to hear the words of scripture, and not just be ravished by the music. Palestrina showed in his beautifully transparent style that sound and sense, multiple voices and intelligibility, could co-exist.

Another aspect of Palestrina's music that is conveyed to us in the present performances is its great sensual beauty. That is inherent in the subject, as the Song of Solomon may be appreciated (as it has long been in both Jewish and Catholic traditions) as both secular love lyric and a metaphor for God's abiding love of His chosen people. Witness *Dilectus meus mihi*: "My beloved is mine, and I am his; he feedeth among the lilies until daybreak, and the shadows flee away."

Sonata in D, K490 is rife with emotion struggling to manifest itself in keyboard runs and sensational key modulations, all set against the forbidding sternness of insistent marching rhythms. K492 in D, by contrast, has an exciting fiesta mood.

In these 1986 recordings, Italian harpsichordist Maria Vittoria Guidi performs on a brilliant-sounding Kurt Wittmayer instrument after a 1640 original by Ruckers of Antwerp. I do not know if it has the extended range from 45 to 51 notes that this model was often given in the 18th century, but it is easy to believe that it does, as Scarlatti's more challenging passages would have been virtually impossible without it. Guidi performs all these works with the utmost elegance and style, making this an ideal CD for the first-time Scarlatti listener. At 43:35, the LP-length program (they still had vinyl in '86) need not deter you, as you will probably want to encore this disc right after you've heard it!