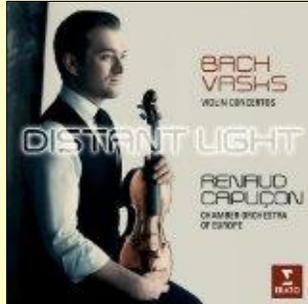


## Phil's Classical Reviews

Audio Video Club of Atlanta

September, 2014



Bach: Violin Concertos 1, 2 + Vasks: Distant Light  
Renaud Capuçon, violin  
Chamber Orchestra of Europe  
Erato

French violinist Renaud Capuçon performs and leads the Chamber Orchestra of Europe in an intriguing program of works by composers born almost three centuries apart but presumably allied in their striving for the beauty of the spirit, Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) and the modern Latvian composer Pēteris Vasks (b. 1946). The resemblance actually ends there, as the great but sometimes painfully intense music of Vasks' *Distant Light* (2003) actually seems to have more in common with his earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century predecessor Jean Sibelius, with a nod to the Adagio for Strings of Samuel Barber.

The two Bach Violin Concertos are executed by Capuçon and the COE with verve and flair, particularly in the very energetic outer movements, though I do find the opening Allegro of Concerto No. 2 in E major to be taken a bit too fast, as if velocity and reckless abandon were all that were required to bring out its character. Capuçon is at his best in the slow movements of both concertos, especially the Adagio of the afore-mentioned E major, in which a gracious, lovely melody weaves its spell. Then, following a pause, the music moves onto an even loftier plane of existence.

Vasks' *Distant Light* aims to provide "food for the soul," reflecting the composer's belief that the spiritual dimension has been neglected in modern times. It embodies distant experiences to be recalled and freedoms to be longed for, both personal and national, in a Latvia that has struggled to overcome foreign domination. It begins and ends with Andante movements in which the music arises from, and finally descends into, inaudibility in the silence of the natural world. In the intervening six movements, there is a definite parallel structure as the violin vies with the string orchestra: Cadenza I, Cantabile, Mosso, Cadenza II, Cantabile, and Cadenza III. The contrasting moods produced by alternating patterns of relaxation and intensification



"The Baroque Virtuoso"  
Jeanne Lamon, violin and director  
Tafelmusik chamber Orcestra  
Tafelmusik Media

"The Baroque Virtuoso" is both an exploration of the myriad ways virtuoso violin technique informs the music of the Baroque Era and a tribute to violinist/founder Jeanne Lamon, the only music director Tafelmusik has known since the group started up in 1981. It is also memorable for its unusual, far-ranging program.

Since this is her valedictory, Lamon is entitled to compile the program, which consists of her favorite recordings released on the Analekta and Sony labels between 1990 and 2011. She leads off with J. S. Bach's Concerto in D minor for Two Violins, BWV 1043, in which violinist Linda Melsted joins her for some spirited music making that includes many points of subtle and expressive relationship between the two soloists. Highly imaginative fugal imitation adds to the excitement in a work that Lamon characterizes as "my favourite piece of music" and "my desert island choice."

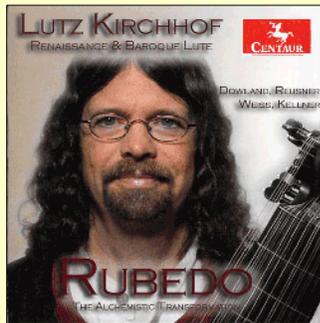
Francesco Geminiani, up next in the program is represented by his ingenious and immediately appealing arrangement as a concerto grosso of Arcangelo Corelli's Violin Sonata No. 3 in C major, Op. 5. Later on, we hear his own Concerto Grosso in D minor, Op. 2, No. 3, a work in which fiery imagination and verve reveal another fascinating side of Geminiani, that of daring risk taker.

In the middle of the program, we have two beautiful works for unaccompanied violin. First, we are given Johann Schmelzer's incredibly lovely Sonata 3 in which polyphonic melody streams seem to flow effortlessly from Lamon's solo violin. Then, we have Heinrich Ignaz Biber's richly textured Partita V for Two Violins, in which Lamon and Melsted discourse eloquently together in music that, quoting Lamon, "grabs you by the heartstrings," especially in the Passacaglia movement.

Vivaldi's "Summer" from *The Four Seasons* is next.

provide much of the drama in a highly organic work.

A good example of this occurs in the Cantabile that follows Cadenza I, in which increasing tension leads to a real mood of distress. That mood is dispelled by the Mosso (with motion) movement in which Capuçon's virtuosity and a lighter touch in the orchestra bring out the flavor of a Latvian folk dance. A later Cantabile is marked by increasing tension as violin and ensemble compete, leading right into Cadenza III in which a *Tempo di valse* breaks forth with uncharacteristic ferocity. It is not a waltz, significantly, but "in the time of a waltz" (Do not attempt to dance to *this* music!) The Andante finale subsides once again into silence, the spent passion of Distant Light itself a distant memory. Is it too early to term this work a "classic"? I don't *think* so!



"Rubedo: The Alchemistic Transformation"  
Lutz Kirchof, Renaissance & Baroque Lute  
Centaur

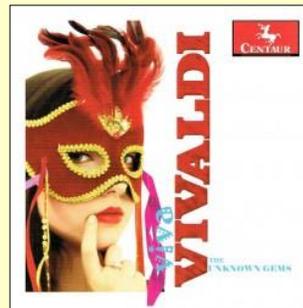
What exactly is "Rubedo"? As German lutenist Lutz Kirchof explains in his program notes to an engaging program of music for lute from John Dowland to David Kellner, it relates to the final stage of a metaphysical transformation known to music theorists and composers of olden times, but to which we must apply some creative imagination if we are to understand what they meant.

The alchemists, it appears, were preoccupied philosophically with the idea of transformation. This applied to the human mind as much as it did the concept of transmuting a base element such as lead into a purer one such as gold, which is the received impression the modern world has of these guys. The spiritual transformation one derived from playing and attending to music was analogous to laws that governed the cosmos. It proceeded in the following sequence: 1) *Nigredo*, the entrance into the dark world of one's own suppressed shadows, 2) *Albedo*, the gradual retiring from earthly existence and awakening of one's "moon nature," a fragile state filled with fantasy, 3) *Citrinitas*, the loss of individuality as one reaches the state of pure enlightened spirit, free from earthly bonds and restraints of time and space, and finally, 4) *Rubedo*, the spiritually cleansed state in which one returns to his previous existence with a new consciousness and sense of purpose.

We gather, even from the necessarily brief and simplified explanation given above, that the people of those times

Lamon admits to a personal preference for this Season, with its imitations of the songs of cuckoo, turtle dove and goldfinch in the opening, its central movement conjuring up the languor of a hot summer afternoon, and the furious depiction of a thunderstorm in its finale. Lots of opportunity for fancy fiddling here!

We conclude with Bach's *Orchestral Suite No. 2 in A minor, BWV 1067*, in the alternative version for violin instead of transverse flute. Some scholars feel that the violin version must have been the original, citing the use of rapidly alternating bariolage between the strings, a technique that is more idiomatic for violin than it is for flute (although generations of flutists have responded to the challenge). A graciously flowing baroque dance suite, it makes for a very satisfying conclusion to this program.



"Vivaldi: The Unknown Gems"  
Viva Vivaldi ensemble  
Centaur

"Unknown Gems"? Can there actually be undiscovered concertos by Antonio Vivaldi this late in the day? The title of this engaging new release by the American baroque ensemble Viva Vivaldi is OK as long as we keep in mind that it refers to *underperformed* rather than previously unknown works in the strict sense of the word. Most of the seven duo concertos and string concertos on this CD do in fact have one or two previous recordings at best. Several have no prior listings in ArkivMusic.com, although they are not listed here as world premieres.

That neglect happily does not apply to the Concerto in B-flat for Violin and cello, RV 547, performed here with style and flair by violinist David Ehrlich and cellist Benjamin Wyatt. The dialog between the two soloists is glorious to hear. Of particular interest is the warmly gracious slow movement, an Andante in which the cello, which does not often bask in the spotlight in Vivaldi, is given a more than usually eloquent discourse. Another beautiful moment occurs in the Largo of the Concerto in B-flat for Two Violins, RV 527, where Ehrlich and Benedict Goodfriend share the honors.

The Concerto in C major for Two Violins, RV 506 is of interest for its nickname, the "Turkey," inspired by the broken third passages that occur throughout the final Allegro movement (and no, they do *not* go "gobble-gobble-gobble"). The two Concertos for Strings, in D major, RV 126 and B-flat major, RV 166 are marked by

expected more from music than we customarily do in the modern world. Amazingly, as Kirchof demonstrates for us with his powerful combination of technical facility and scholarly insight, the lutenist-composers of the 16<sup>th</sup> through the early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries followed through and delivered music corresponding to the alchemistic ideal of spiritual refreshment. We hear it in various ways in the Renaissance dance suites of John Dowland (1563-1626) as we pass from the simple pleasures of country life to the inner darkness of his "Forlorn Hope Fancy." The Suite in G minor by Esaias Reusner (1636-1679) starts us on the journey to the Great Transformation that passes through the wonderfully enlightening experience of the Sonata in F by J.S. Bach's contemporary Leopold Sylvius Weiss (1686-1750) and finally, a healthy return to life in the rhythmically alert measures of Partita in D by David Kellner (1670-1748). A happy journey, traveller!

the high degree of virtuosity required of the entire string orchestra, which is an I Musici-size ensemble of 11 strings plus harpsichord. The hauntingly strange beauty of the Adagio in the latter is of particular interest. The performances throughout the program are exuberant and highly energetic.



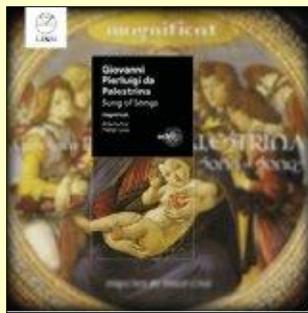
"Sing Ye Birds, A Joyous Song,"  
Music by Tallis, Taverner, Gibbons, Bennett  
Simon Carrington, Yale Schola Cantorum  
(Delos Music)

The Yale Schola Cantorum, under their inspired director Simon Carrington (himself a member for 25 years of The King's Singers) give us a lovely program of Tudor church music and an account of The Glory and the Dream by the late Richard Rodney Bennett (1936-2012), of which I am somewhat less sanguine, for reasons that will follow in due course.

The finest work on the program is the "Western Wind" Mass of John Taverner (1490-1545), so-called because he based the cantus firmus, heard in various ways in every section of this work, on a popular secular song: "Western wind, when will thou blow? / The small rain down doth rain. / Christ, if my love were in my arms, / and I in my bed again!" The tune is heard no fewer than 35 times in the Mass, and in every voice except the alto.

It probably shocked Taverner's contemporaries to hear a popular song with an amorous text used as the basis of a sacred work. No less shocking, to purists at least, were his advanced SATB textures and the florid melismas he used to keep each section of the Mass (*Gloria*, *Sanctus*, *Benedictus*, *Agnus Dei*) appropriately equal in length, a personal obsession. What happened to the *Kyrie*? Taverner did not need to set it to music, as the text was traditionally intoned in plainchant. To modern ears, his music can sound ravishingly beautiful, as it does in this recording.

Orlando Gibbons (1583-1625), better known to history as one of the masters of the English madrigal, is heard from in a stentorian church anthem "Glorious and Powerful God." Which does full credit to its text, and a setting of the Magnificat, in which he uses subtle touches, such as the overlapping voices in the Latin words (translated) "He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts" to do some very effective text painting. The final Gibbons selection, *Nunc dimittis*, the sentence sung at



Palestrina: The Song of Songs  
Magnificat, directed by Philip Cave  
Linn Records

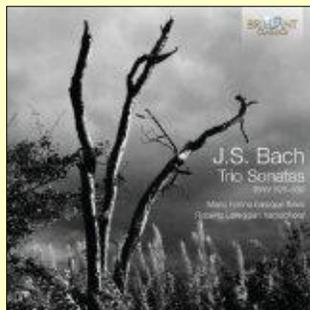
This Echo series re-issue of Linn's original 2001 release of The Song of Songs is welcome indeed as an addition to the discography of Italian composer Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (1525-1594). Palestrina's marvelously expressive settings of the 29 texts receive appropriate treatment by the eight voices that comprise the *a capella* ensemble Magnificat. That is important because Palestrina's one-to-a-part vocal settings require a consistent evenness of approach without the extremes of mood and emotion that characterize so much of 16<sup>th</sup> century polyphony.

Also, they were dedicated to Pope Gregory XIII, who was a very energetic pontiff with a shrews legal mind who was an architect of the Counter Reformation, boldly putting into effect the recommendations of the Council of Trent, giving a boost to the founding of Jesuit colleges for the correct education of priests, reforming the calendar, patronizing the arts, and sending envoys to Japan and the Philippines. (Incidentally, he also commissioned the striking of a medal to commemorate the massacre of the Huguenots on St. Bartholomew's Day, 1572, an act that encouraged many of my own ancestors to get out of France and, ultimately, settle in the New World.)

Well, you get the idea. Gregory was a no-nonsense guy, not the sort you trifled with. Palestrina would hardly have dared to dedicate a setting of poems celebrating the joys

of sexual love to *this* Pontiff were it not for a very long tradition of Christian exegesis going back to the second century, with Jewish antecedents a century earlier, that made the Song of Songs emblematic of Christ's love for the Church. It is not of liturgical significance, being neither a book of wisdom nor a discourse on Law or Covenant. The word "God" does not even occur.

Instead, the Song of Songs That Is Solomon's is a well-integrated series of poems in which two voices clearly emerge, male and female, inviting each other to partake of sexual intimacy, with a chorus of women ("daughters of Jerusalem") to facilitate the reader's involvement. It is couched in metaphor: leaping hinds and roebucks, a dove on the wing, a virile man "bounding over the hills," images of fruitfulness and fragrance, of lovers arising in the morning and descending into a garden, and so forth. As such, Palestrina's musical settings are chastely beautiful and flowing, never static, with few dramatic leaps. A finely balanced work that has its transcendent moments and is never monotonous despite its evenness of tone, it invites the approach it receives here from Philip Cave and Magnificat.



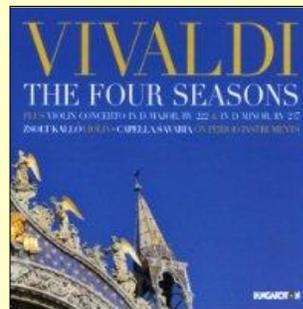
Bach: Trio Sonatas, BWV 525-530  
Roberto Loreggian, harpsichord  
Mario Folena, baroque flutes  
Brilliant Classics

In the world of baroque chamber music, as in modern jazz, the standard ensemble for probing the depths of the music was the trio. Since we're talking about musical *parts*, the number of players could be more or less than simply three. Often, you had two melody instruments, usually violins, playing the two upper voices and two others, most often a double bass, cello, or viola da gamba plus a harpsichord conspiring together to create the bass line, known as the basso continuo. They used a technique called "figured bass" in which numerals and symbols indicated intervals and chords in relation to the bass notes they were placed above or below. Today's jazz artists would certainly know how to dig it.

What J. S. Bach did in his Six Trio Sonatas for Organ, BWV 525-530 was revolutionary in that he combined combine all three parts on one instrument. The right hand, left hand and pedals each take a different part, creating the same texture as in an instrumental trio. These trio sonatas have long been among Bach's most popular organ works with audiences for their persuasive

the end of the service, is charming in its simple dignity. And Thomas Tallis (1505-1585) is represented by the gentle cadences of the Latin hymn *Te lucis ante terminum* (To thee before the close of day / Creator of the World, we pray), which was traditionally sung at the end of Compline, the evening prayers.

Bennett's *The Glory and the Dream* takes its inspiration from the opening verse of William Wordsworth's 1807 *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Reflections of Early Childhood*: "There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream, / The earth and every common sight, / To me did seem / Appareled in celestial light, / The glory and the freshness of a dream," and the album title from the turning in the final section, "Then sing, ye birds, a joyous song!" At the risk of damning with faint praise a major undertaking by a composer recently deceased, Bennett's setting of the Wordsworth ode lacks the full impact it might have had. It is merely pretty, with its vocal textures treading too heavily on the treble end of the choral spectrum, rising, falling and overlapping in predictable ways. To me, it sounded too much like contemporary "choralese" or warmed-over John Rutter. You are, of course, entitled to feel differently about the matter, and comments from readers are always welcome.



Vivaldi: The Four Seasons  
+ Violin Concertos, RV 222 and 237  
Zsolt Kalló, Capella Savaria  
Hungaroton

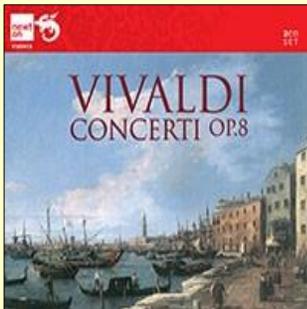
Antonio Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* is one of the touchstones (Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade* is another) by which I take stock of myself from time to time. If ever I should tire of listening to it and reviewing it, I should suspect I'm losing the popular touch as a reviewer and pack it in for a monthly column of this sort. I always try to remember that while I may have heard Vivaldi's masterwork hundreds of times (literally), there are avid audiophiles who may never have played it on their high-end systems. And what a revelation it is when you first hear it! It's like the first time you ever fell in love.

Having said that, I should add that the present release of *The Four Seasons* by Hungarian violinist Zsolt Kalló and his period instrument ensemble Capella Savaria is an excellent choice for getting acquainted with this vibrant, ever-fresh masterpiece. The incisive attack and discrete choice of tempi by soloist and ensemble, their energetic playing and unflinching commitment to bringing out the

colors and textures and with organists for the real work-out they give both performer and instrument, and that goes for the pedals as well as the manuals.

In the present recording, flutist Mario Folena and harpsichordist Roberto Loreggian have taken a step back the other way, redistributing the three parts for two instruments. They also experimented with different types of tuning, in the interest of providing their listeners with “a coherent sensorial experience of timbre and colour.” Depending on the pitch required, Folena uses a *flauto d'amore*, the mezzo soprano member of the flute family, in 1, 2, and 4 and a transverse flute in 3, 5, and 6.

Add the superb musicianship of these fine Italian artists, and it works like a charm. This is exciting music-making at its most zestful. Their execution is breathtaking, both in the bracing *vivace* movements and in quiet moments such as the slow movement, *Adagio e dolce*, of Trio Sonata No. 3 in D minor, BWV 527, in which the melody has an indescribably beautiful bloom. That is one of Bach's best-loved melodies, and is often heard in other transcriptions. But it is far from the only beauty in an exceptionally well-balanced and well-paced recital.



Vivaldi: Concerti, Op. 8, “*il Cimento dell’armonia e dell’inventione*” – Interpreti Veneziani  
Newton Classics (2-CD set)

The subtitle of Vivaldi's Op. 8 means “The Contest between Harmony and Invention,” or rather between compositional technique and creative imagination, which are a perfect match for each other in this opus. This is of course the set of 12 concerti of which 1-4 are usually performed by themselves as “The Four Seasons.” The highest praise I can bestow on the present accounts of these concerti by the “Venetian Interpreters” (*Interpreti Veneziani*) is that their Seasons excited me and fired my imagination more than any others I have heard since the heyday of *I Musici* many years ago, and 5-12 are on the same high level of excellence. To take this music – and particularly the Seasons, of which there are currently 280 listings in [ArkivMusic.com](http://ArkivMusic.com) – and bring them out fresh as new paint, is no small achievement.

A curious thing about the *Interpreti* is their anonymity. Of course they have a website, like everyone else these days, and they are by no means camera-shy, as witnessed by numerous photographs of the musicians posing in front of concert halls, Venetian landmarks, and

glowing beauties of this work, guarantee that there are no dull moments here, even at the expense of a certain harsh brightness in the tutti passages in the opening movement of “Spring” and elsewhere, which are easily forgiven in view of the bold, vibrant sound they cultivate.

Kalló's tone is perfect for the all-important solo role, as it brings out the felicitous touches in Vivaldi's musical pictures: the elation of the country folk, as only those who live so close to nature feel, at the arrival of spring, the dreamy spring nights, punctuated by the zealous barking of a dog, the oppressive heat of a summer afternoon (complete with gnats, flies, and horse-flies to interrupt one's siesta), the sudden onset of a furious thunderstorm, the peasants stamping wine grapes the old-fashioned way in a great wooden vat, the excitement of a hunt in autumn with horn calls resounding in the cool, clear air. Though Winter is accompanied by chilly winds, chattering teeth and shivering limbs, it too has its compensations. The portrait in the Largo movement of a landscape magically transformed by a blanket of new-fallen snow is worth the purchase price of this CD all by itself.

The Seasons clock in at a pulse-quickenning 37:35. That's a bit on the fast side, but there is no impression of undue hast, only vivacity, as the quicker sections are expertly balanced elsewhere by slower tempi, especially when Kalló focuses on the exquisite details in the score. The two other works on the program, Violin Concerti in D major, RV222, and D minor, RV237, are of the same caliber of virtuosity for the soloist as the Seasons. They seem to be remarkably under-performed, probably because they had to be dug out of archives in which they'd been long buried. The quality speaks for itself. Of particular interest in the D minor concerto, in which Kalló makes much of the dotted rhythms and chords formed from scales in the solo part over a steady 16<sup>th</sup>-note pulse in the ensemble.



Alessandro Scarlatti: Alto Cantatas  
Gabiella Martellacci, contralto  
Insieme Strumentale di Roma, Giorgio Sasso  
Brilliant Classics

Alessandro Scarlatti (1660-1725) has a decidedly mixed legacy today. In his heyday, the Neapolitan composer was one the primary style setters among European composers, although his adherence to strict counterpoint marked him as old-fashioned by the end of his career.

even a municipal fire engine. But nowhere do they list the names of their personnel, their leaders, or soloists. They evidently prefer to eschew any “star system” and let their performances speak for themselves (*which they do!*) They give up to 300 concerts annually all over the world, in Venice and in tours of Japan, Canada, the U.S., and Latin America, as well as the major European festivals. How they can perform so often and still allow themselves time for research, practice, and rehearsal is a mystery. My guess is the *Interpreti* must be a consortium of similar-minded musicians who alternate performing with different players and soloists, rather than one discrete ensemble. Otherwise, their accounts of Vivaldi and the other composers in their mostly baroque repertoire would tend to become standardized and predictable: “off the shelf,” I believe, is the expression. And that is certainly *not* how I would describe the vital, living performances I hear in this Newton Classics release.

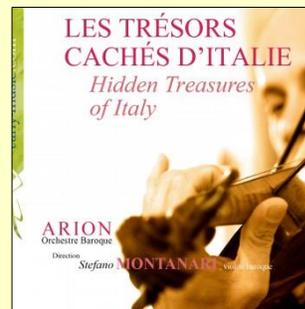
The unidentified violin soloist in the present performances approaches his (or her) task with considerable flair and imagination, interacting beautifully with the ensemble while leading the way into Vivaldi’s world of deft, incisive pictures and moods. As is often the case with music that moves us deeply, the means Vivaldi used to create these effects is amazingly simple: leaving out the body of strings and stripping the music down to just solo violin and the basso continuo in his wonderful adagio movements, for example, thus creating a feeling of intimacy, mystery, and space. Or focusing on the use of only violins in the same moments to create a glassy transparency over which the solo violin can weave its magic. Nothing could be simpler or more effective.

One notices immediately in these accounts of the Opus 8 concerti that the quality is as high in the “no- name” concerti as in those which time and fortune have favored with descriptive nicknames. Number 5, “*La Tempesta di Mare*,” takes its sobriquet from the stormy opening Presto movement, suggesting a tempest at sea, and No. 6, “*il Piacere*” (Peace) from the softly descending expressiveness of its Largo, though there are similar movements in Numbers 7 and 8 that are just as effective. No. 9, described here as RV236 in the Ryom catalog, is actually its alternative version, RV454, with a solo oboe in place of the violin. And beautifully performed it is, too! No. 10, again, has a nickname, “*La Caccia*” (The Chase). It depicts a hunt, mounting in excitement and ending suddenly and dramatically with the death of the prey. No. 11, as intriguing as any in the set, has a fugal ritornello in the opening movement contrasted by a charming rapport of solo violin and strings in its very expressive Largo. No. 12 is also remarkable for its Largo, a Sarabande with the gracious feeling of a dance.

He is remembered today chiefly as having been the father of Domenico Scarlatti. His lovely Christmas Cantata (*Cantata pastorale per la natività di Nostre Signore*) is sometimes heard in holiday programs. As is the case with Handel, Scarlatti’s hundreds of Italian cantatas and operas are rarely revived today, and we are more likely to encounter the purely instrumental works that make up a relatively small portion of his output,

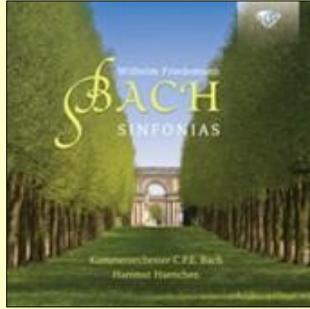
The two alto cantatas heard here provide some clue as to the reason why. “*Perché tacete, regolati concertati?*” (Oh, why be muted, measured harmony? I beseech you to humor the heart in its torment) is a rhetorical dissertation on the affective power of music, hardly something to get excited about outside of academic circles. “*Filen, mio caro bene*” is a monologue by a shepherdess to her beloved, declaring her devotion to him, a familiar rhetorical exercise that was part of an “Arcadian” tradition that has long since vanished. Again we have conventions that would seem stilted to a modern audience. In the present recordings, alto Gabriella Martellacci is adequate, but scarcely sensational.

Of greater interest to the modern listener are Scarlatti’s Concertos in C minor and A minor for flute, two violins and continuo and his *Sonate a Quattro* (quartet sonatas) in G minor and D minor. Alternating fugues and lighter dance-like passages, and featuring gracious writing for the flute, the concertos afford unflinching pleasure, while Scarlatti’s quartet sonatas impress us by their tonal warmth and contrapuntal mastery.



*Les Trésors Cachés d'Italie*  
Hidden Treasures of Italy  
Stefano Montanari, violin, Arion Baroque Orchestra  
Early-music.com

What an unlooked-for delight this one was! The only composer in the lineup who was even known to me was Pietro Nardini (1722-1793), a student of Giuseppe Tartini who continued the trend-setting “school” of violin artistry founded by his master. The others were not even names: Carlo Alessio Razetti (fl. early 18<sup>th</sup> century), Antonio Maria Montanari (1676-1737), Cristiano Giuseppe Lidarti (1730-1795), and the lady violinist Maddalena Lombardini Sirmen (1745-1818). Yet they all played a vital part in the development of the violin Concerto in the decades leading up to Haydn and Mozart, whose own concertos for violin would have been quite different, and



W. F. Bach: Sinfonias  
Hartmut Haenchen, Kammerorchester CPE Bach  
Brilliant Classics

Wilhelm Friedemann Bach (1710-1784) is an enigmatic figure in music history. The eldest son of J. S. Bach, he inherited much of his father's genius and had an undeniably distinctive and personal style as a composer. Yet, whether due to personality issues or changing conditions that made it difficult to earn a living as a *Kapellmeister*, he had a disappointing career and died in poverty. Arkivmusic.com still has only 84 listings of CDs with any music at all by W. F. Bach, as he is usually called. That is miniscule for a composer of his stature.

One of those 84, happily, is the present album of *Sinfonias* recorded by the energetic and innovative German conductor Hartmut Haenchen with the CPE Bach Chamber Orchestra of Berlin. That includes six of the eight existing works in this genre that are known to be by the composer, plus an *Orchestral Suite in G minor* that was formerly attributed to J. S. Bach (and is still listed as BWV 1070) but, as Haenchen makes a persuasive case for it, is actually by the son, not the father.

These *sinfonias* give us a glimpse into the growth of a genre that was in the process of developing from the instrumental prelude of a cantata to a full-blown classical symphony. The manuscripts of three of them, Falck numbers 88, 91, and 92, were found in archives in Berlin and Vienna, often in states of ongoing disintegration, so that Haenchen was obliged to reconstruct and arrange them using intelligent guesswork to provide missing instrumental parts. Stylistically, he drew upon extant comments by the violinist Johann Georg Pisendel, who was then concert master at the royal court of Dresden, concerning the added ornamentation which is applied very effectively in the present performances.

*Continued in the column to the right →*

perhaps poorer, without their Italian roots.

Violinist Stefano Montanari (I have not been able to discover if the 18<sup>th</sup> century composer was his forebear) is currently one of the leading lights in the Baroque revival in Italy. With his formidable technique, instinctive feeling for the beauty in a gracefully formed musical line, and solid scholarship in historical style, he brings a lot to the present recordings. He imparts considerable flair to the fast passages and brings out the glowing beauties in the intimate slow movements.

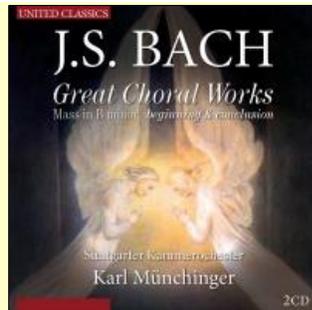
There are a lot of these moments to enjoy in all five concertos heard on this program. The earliest composers partake of the rich Baroque ethos in the world of Corelli and Vivaldi, including contrapuntal intricacies worn lightly, while the latter voices helped to pioneer a melody-and-accompaniment style in which the learned devices were cast overboard like so many sandbags and the imagination soars in a way that contemporary audiences felt uplifted their spirits. The *Grave* movement in Montanari's earlier Baroque-style *Concerto Grosso in A minor* and the *Adagio in Lombardini's later Violin Concerto in A minor* are but two features in a gradually unfolding landscape of seemingly endless delight.

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*Continued from previous column:*

The most immediately attractive work in this program is the *Sinfonia in D minor, Fk65*, consisting of a gorgeous prelude, in which the flute figures prominently, and a full-blown fugue in which the second subject is developed with the greatest freedom and expressive beauty.

Of equal interest is the afore-mentioned *Suite in G minor* with its boldly diverse elements that include a lovely *Adagio* movement in the manner of an *Aria* and a lively *Capriccio* for a conclusion. W. F. Bach's distinctive imprint, including his penchant for placing successive contrapuntal entries a mere quarter-note apart and the way he generates excitement by overlapping phrases and harmonic shifts, imparts a distinctive zest to his music. And Helmut Haenchen has his number.



Bach: Mass in B Minor, BWV 232  
Elly Ameling, soprano I, Yvonne Minton, soprano II  
Helen Watts, contralto, Werner Krenn, tenor, Tom Krause, bass  
Vienna Singacademie Chorus and Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra  
Karl Münchinger, conductor (United Classics 2-CD set)

Karl Münchinger is often cited as if he were a middle-of-the-road figure somewhere between the overblown interpretations of the romantic era and the scaled-down “authentic” versions on period instruments that are now the norm for Bach’s choral works. That is doing Münchinger and his colleagues from Stuttgart and Vienna a grave injustice.

For one thing, the German conductor was a pioneer in restoring baroque traditions to his Bach interpretations, including moderate-sized forces, judicious ornamentation, and a rhythmic alertness that is immediately noticeable upon the most casual listening. Just as important, Münchinger had a vision of the power, the majesty, and the depths of emotion and consolation in the Mass in B Minor, and in this 1971 recording he had just the right combination of chorus, vocalists and top-notch instrumentalists to bring it off. Ameling, Minton, Watts, Krenn, and Krause were all at the peak of their vocal artistry at this time. And the instrumentalists include such luminaries as Helmut Winschermann, oboe; Klaus Thunemann, bassoon, and the incomparable Maurice Andre heading a trio of brilliant trumpets. Has the B minor Mass ever had as auspicious a cast?

Here, great expressive power and the cumulative effect of one high moment after another in an exceptionally well-paced performance pay the greatest dividends, not infinitesimal point making. The opening forte unison on *Kyrie eleison* for five-part chorus is even a little rough, if the truth be known, although the execution settles down to in the largo main section. There are many highlights in this remarkable work, all the more remarkable because Bach put it together from music he had previously used in other contexts, put aside, and later reworked. It all fits together like the most exquisite jewel setting of the lapidary’s art. The beautiful *Laudamus Te* for Soprano II, lightly scored for accompanying violin is just one of these jewels. Another is the bass aria *Quoniam tu solus sanctus*, accompanied by a fluted horn solo that reminds us that Bach must have had incomparable wind soloists available at the electoral court in Dresden, for which the B Minor Mass was intended. Widely spaced harmonies evoking holy mystery in the *Et incarnatus est* section of the Credo and falling lines suggesting sorrow and tragedy in the following *Crucifixus* reveal Bach at his best in using music for evocative, emotionally compelling purposes. The Sanctus for six-part chorus (Soprano I, II, Alto I, II, Tenor, and Bass) is brilliantly executed here.

The beauties never seem to end. They include the bass aria *Benedictus* supported by a transverse flute and the walking bass line that was one of Bach’s signatures as a composer. It should be noted that Münchinger was ahead of his time in opting for the flute instead of the violin specified in the 19<sup>th</sup> century *Bach-Ausgabe* edition. It is an altogether better fit for the text (“Blessed is the man who comes in the name of the Lord”), as Bach often used the transverse flute to express the impression of the holy spirit on the soul of the inner man in meditation. And the almost exact repetition in the concluding *Dona nobis pacem* (Grant us peace) of the music Bach had employed in the *Gratia agimus tibi* (We give thanks to Thee for thy great glory) section of the Gloria was a stroke of genius on his part, rounding off the Mass with music heard earlier in a way that clearly links beginning and end.

Satisfying? I should say so. Many people regard this account of the B Minor Mass as their all-time favorite, and I must confess a particular affection for it that the years have not dimmed.