

## Phil's Classical Reviews

Atlanta Audio Club

Baroque Special

Summer, 2018



Bach: English Suites Nos. 4-6, transcribed for guitar  
Montenegrin Guitar Duo  
(Naxos, 2-CD)



Bach: Sonatas for Violin & Harpsichord  
Rachel Barton Pine, Jory Vinikour  
(Cedille, 2-CD)

Having previously reviewed English Suites 1-3 by the Montenegrin Guitar Duo in my November 2015 column, I've been eagerly awaiting this new release with the remaining suites. I was not disappointed. If anything, these duo guitarists from the Republic of Montenegro, Goran Krivokapić and Danijel Cerović, give an even better account of Bach's high rhythms and close polyphony, requiring even more mutual sympathy and precision timing from the performers.

That rapport is all the more important in Suites 4-6 because of Bach's frequent use of fugue in these works. The Gigue in Suite No. 4 in C major opens with a three-part fugal exposition before settling into two-voice counterpoint, and Bach's mastery of fugue is in full force in the first half of the Gigue in No. 6 in A minor where it adds immeasurably to the excitement of this movement. Fugue is more evident still in No. 5 in B minor, where it informs the Prelude, with its restless modulations through a number of keys, and adds an uncommon amount of drama to the otherwise stately Allemande. We also have three-part fugal writing in the finale, a Gigue with two complete expositions separated by a brief episode. As so often in Bach, the use of fugal technique adds muscle and excitement to the music.

Cerović and Krivokapić distinguish themselves further in the way they emphasize the character of the various dance movements that comprise the body of the suite. The perfect balance of voices in the Courante of Suite No. 4 gives the impression of an animated conversation, while the Courante in No. 5 is even livelier, propelled forward by its energetic rhythms. And the corresponding movement in No. 6 has a walking bass underlying the melody. No "cookie-cutters" these Courantes. As always, Bach was experimenting with new ways to add ever more character to the sprightly old French dance.

Two of the most remarkable artists of our time, violinist Rachel Barton Pine and harpsichordist Jory Vinikour, make a fantastic team performing J.S. Bach's 6 Sonatas, BWV 1014-1019. These sonatas require incredible teamwork, necessitating an equal partnership with challenging and rewarding music for both artists. The fact that Rachel and Jory, both native Chicagoans, have known each other from their early years and have often read these sonatas together made the present collaboration a natural. More than that, they perform with such mutual sympathy that this is easily the finest, most convincing performance I have heard of six works I'd previously under-rated.

J. S. Bach was almost unique among the great composers in being a virtuoso performer on both violin and keyboard. Thus, these sonatas are more than simple melody and accompaniment. The violin and the two hands of the harpsichord part are almost constantly employed in three relatively equal polyphonic voices within the framework of the music, a fact that adds considerably to its character. At moments, as in the florid Adagio that opens BWV 1014 when the violin is playing double stops, we actually hear the two instruments in a five-part contrapuntal texture! That may in fact have been unprecedented in music.

Technique aside, there is a great deal of sensuously beautiful music in these works, requiring sensitive applications by both partners. The intimate beauty of the violin part in the Dolce first movement of BWV 1015, heard over elaborate arpeggiated figurations by the harpsichord, is only one case in point. Another is the joyful three-part fugal dialog between the violin and the two hands of the harpsichord that concludes this same work.

In the Allegro finale of BWV 1016, both instruments

The Sarabande, customarily the deep-water mark of a baroque suite, also differs in these three works, and the Montenegrin Guitar Duo are at pains to bring out their individual characters. It is varied in note values and graced with imaginative embellishments in No. 4, distinguished by a free-flowing bass line underneath the poignant melody in No. 5, and possessing a hymn-like grandeur and directness in No. 6, where its emotional range is extended by the presence of a “double,” or variation.

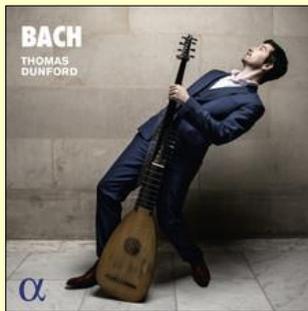
The optional dance movements, or *galentéries*, are also varied and receive imaginative treatment in each of these suites. We have two Minuets in Suite No. 4, each characterized by a driving bass in contrast to their melodic simplicity. We have a pair of contrasted Passepieds in No. 5, Passepiéd II providing a more relaxed tempo and a key change from the minor to the major. The pair of Gavottes in No. 6 are sunny in character, Gavotte II being distinguished by its evocation of rural music making.

Cerović and Krivokapić do some of their best work in the concluding Gigue in No. 6, with sensational trills at strategic points adding to the excitement of the perpetual-motion rhythms. These very attractive arrangements of the English Suites, evidently made by the artists themselves, should be taken up by performing duos everywhere. These are claimed to be world premiere recordings.

exchange notes in fast, swirling 16<sup>th</sup> note figurations, with highly unusual two-against-three rhythms in the central part. (We can sense how it helped that Bach was so conversant on both instruments!) BWV 1017 in C minor opens with a Largo featuring an exquisitely beautiful Siciliano melody in the violin over arpeggiated right-hand figures in the harpsichord, and it concludes with a vigorous fugue for both instruments.

The Largo that opens BWV 1018 in F minor has a solemn, introspective beauty that would not have been out of place in a Passion chorale. With its following fugue, it prepares us for the even more beautiful Adagio movement where the harpsichord spins out an ostinato fabric made of flowing 32<sup>nd</sup> notes over a steady accompaniment of eighth-note double-stops in the violin. It is a moment of fantastic imagination, even by Bach’s standard.

BWV 1019 in G major is the exception, being a work in which Bach made significant changes, including the inclusion of the Corrente and the Tempo di Gavotte from the solo harpsichord Partita, BWV 1030. That fact makes the work play more like a suite than a sonata. Also, Bach removed the most beautiful movement of all, marked *Cantabile, ma un poco adagio*, probably because it unbalanced the work by its great length (8:22 in the present performance). Often performed separately as BWV 1019a, as it is here, it is a hauntingly beautiful piece that will bring tears to your eyes in a sensitive performance. (Take my word for it, *I know!*)



Bach: Cello Suite BWV 1007; Lute Suite, BWV 995; Chaconne from Violin Partita No. 2 – Thomas Dunford, archlute (Alpha Classics)

Thomas Dunford, the remarkable young artist whom BBC Music Magazine once termed “the Eric Clapton of the lute,” shows his skills, and in particular his sensitive evocation of beautiful sounds, in a program of transcriptions from solo violin and cello works by J.S. Bach. This artist puts it all together with plausibility and charm, often touching us deeply. He plays an archlute made by Giuseppe Tumiati (Cremona, 1993), which is presumably the very instrument shown on the jacket cover.

There is still some confusion concerning the terms



Telemann: Fantasias for Solo Violin, TWV 40:14-25 Kinga Augustyn, violin (Centaur)

Kinga Augustyn, Polish-born virtuosa of the violin who currently resides in New York City, gives us a dazzling display of her prowess in these 12 Fantasias for solo Violin by Georg Philipp Telemann (1681-1767). The Hamburg-based Telemann was perhaps history’s most prolific composer with a conservatively estimated 3,000 works to his credit in every genre known to his day. Beside the fantasias he wrote for various instruments including traverse flute, harpsichord, and bass viol, these works for solo violin stand out for their immense variety and endless outpouring of imagination. Telemann’s skill

“archlute” and “theorbo.” The archlute is essentially a tenor lute with 14 courses of strings and a long neck similar to the theorbo. It was developed around 1660 as a compromise between the theorbo, whose great size and need for frequent re-tuning made for difficulties when performing solo music, and the Renaissance tenor lute, which had a lovely tone but lacked the bass range of the theorbo. Though the archlute does not have the power in the tenor and the bass that the theorbo's large body and typically greater string length provide, it more than compensates as a solo instrument by its softer, more gracious tone. Even to first-time listeners, it “sounds more like a lute.” In time, the theorbo came to be relegated to the continuo in ensemble playing, while the archlute had more solo opportunities.

In this program, Dunford plays two of Bach's solo Cello Suites, BWV 1007 in G Major in his own transcription and BWV 1011 in Bach's arrangement as the Lute Suite in G minor, BWV 995. BWV 1007 begins with a jaunty Prelude in arpeggiated chords. The straightforward, semi-improvisational character of this movement carries over to the other movements, and is especially noticeable in the simple happiness of Menuets I and II.

BWV 995 likewise exhibits a carry-over of mood, but this time it is quite different. The Prelude is dark and emotionally charged and sets the tone for the rest of the suite, beginning with a formally constrained Allemande and a Courante that seems more dispirited than a gliding dance in quick triple meter has any right to be. The theme of the slow, intimate Sarabande recalls the *Et incarnatus est* in the Mass in B minor. The dark prevailing mood is only dispelled by the lighter-spirited Gavotte II: *En Rondeau* and the alacrity of the concluding Gigue.

Finally, Dunford gives an exalted performance of the great Chaconne in D minor from Violin Partita No. 2 in his own arrangement. It's a work in which intellectual discipline and deepest passion reach a point where they are indistinguishable. A quiet episode in the minor serves as a tipping-point, a place of rest and contemplation before we push on to the conclusion. In this work, timing is of the essence, not only in the point of relaxation we just mentioned, but in the stunning key change that the artist must be careful not to telegraph. Dunford pulls it all off with perfection.

in contrapuntal voice-leading, often in the manner of a chaconne or passacaglia, gives the listener the impression of hearing multiple violins, if not indeed a whole string ensemble, instead of just a solo violin.

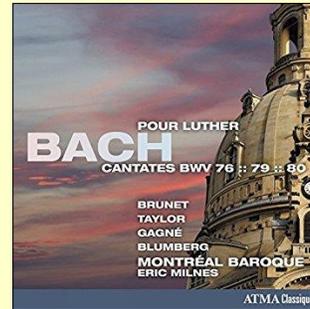
The total duration of the music in the present recording is 71:37. A violinist could play all twelve fantasias in a single evening, assuming his/her stamina did not fail. The variety of moods, emotions, and textures Telemann invests in these highly attractive and zestful works would be the best assurance that would not happen. These fantasias are not cookie-cutters in any sense of the word. With eleven different tone centers and a structural principle that embraced both the four movements of the church sonata and the slow-fast-slow form of its secular counterpart, Telemann never allows the possibility of letting the performer fall into a safe but predictable pattern.

Further, Telemann tends to open each fantasia with a different kind of movement. After Fantasias 1 and 2, both Largos, the openings are marked, in order, *Adagio*, *Vivace*, *Allegro*, *Grave*, *Dolce* (i.e., softly), *Piacevolmente* (peacefully), *Siciliana*, *Presto*, *Un poco vivace*, and *Moderato*. Transitions from slow to fast tempi, as in the E minor Fantasia where we move from a graceful, lilting Siciliana to a very active Allegro finale in the form of a set of variations, pose no hazard for Augustyn, who takes this transition in stride, as she does throughout the set of twelve.

Besides the technical skill required in order to realize all these contrapuntal works, Kinga shows a definite sensitivity to tonal beauty and mood that makes these complete recordings of the solo violin fantasias all the more enjoyable. We will have to go a long way to discover a competitive version as accomplished as this.



Bach: Sonatas, Partitas, & Suites  
Bolette Roed, solo recorder  
(Ondine, 2-CD)



Bach: Cantatas, BWV 78, 79, & 80  
Eric Milnes, Montréal Baroque  
(ATMA Classique)

Denmark native Bolette Roed is a most remarkable woman. Her artistry on the end-blown wooden flute known as the recorder has been recognized in numerous competitions and music festivals in Europe and as far abroad as New York City. She currently teaches her instrument at the Royal Danish Academy of Music and was co-founder of the Danish summer music festival "Midsommerbarok." As if that weren't enough achievement for a young life, she is also a medical doctor from the University of Copenhagen.

The present recording project was conceived as tribute both to Johann Sebastian Bach as composer of the Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin and the Solo Cello Suites and also to the late Dutch recorder player Frans Brüggen (1934-2014) whom she cites as one who was "of the greatest importance to the movement of the historically informed performance practice, not only related to his own instrument and its repertoire, but also to the orchestral masterpieces of that time." On this album, she performs all of Brüggen's Bach arrangements, which include 11 movements from the violin sonatas and partitas plus the complete Cello Suites 1-3.

This was challenging new repertoire for the recorder, in some ways even more so than Bach's original conceptions for violin and cello. Significantly, Brüggen did not attempt to arrange any of the Fugues, which are the second movements of Violin Sonatas 1-3, nor did he arrange the Chaconne from Violin Partita No. 3, long considered the "Mount Everest" of the baroque violinist's art. These are daunting enough for the violinist, whose available technique includes such tools as multiple stopping and bariolage which help create the illusion there is more than one instrument at play. The recorder, on the other hand, is a single-line instrument that cannot harmonize with itself, so the artist can only "slur" or slide into another melody line to create at best the fleeting illusion of multiple voices.

In these performances, Bolette Roed has her finest moments in the dance-inflected movements of the Brüggen arrangements, music that is most

Eric Milnes and Montréal Baroque continue their series of Bach cantatas predicated on the Lutheran church year with three that are appropriate for the Feast of the Reformation. They are Nos. 76, *Die Himmel erzählen die Ehre Gottes* (The Heavens proclaim the Glory of God), 79, *Gott der Herr ist Sonn und Schild* (God the Lord is Sun and Shield), and 80, *Ein feste Berg ist unser Gott* (A Mighty Fortress is Our God).

In keeping with that feast, the texts basically concern Luther's abiding preoccupation with the presence of sin and the intimidating power of Satan as Prince of This World: *Auf Erd ist nicht seines gleichen*, "On earth is not his equal." To Luther, the only refuge of the believer was to adhere devoutly to God as our glorious sun and shield, and to Jesus Christ as our Saviour, without whom we are utterly powerless to resist the temptations of the evil one. Admittedly, this is a thread running through all of Christianity, so that this obsessive preoccupation in the Lutheran texts with the awesome might of sin is, in the last analysis, a matter of degree.

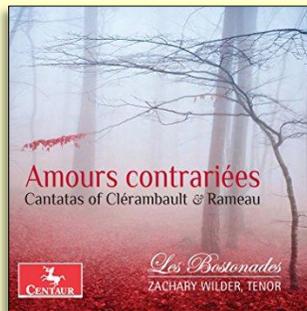
How keenly Bach himself subscribed to this view we can't say, but the texts of the cantatas deal frequently with the immensity of the struggle against hellish powers in vivid language that has a really visceral impact. A bass aria in BWV 76 defiantly proclaims "*Fahr ihn, abgöttische Zunft!*" (Get hence, idolatrous band!) A tenor aria in Part II of the same cantata defies these same powers to do their worst: "*Hasse nur, hasse mich recht, feindlichs Geschlecht!*" (Hate me then, hate me full well, hostile race! [Christ to be embracing, would I all delights relinquish]). In texts such as these, the dire sound of the words underscores their urgent meanings.

As with other recordings that I've heard by Montréal Baroque, they have a passion for the archaic sounds of period instruments. The strings all have the scrape-and-drone of the *vielle* (folk fiddle). And the various oboes played by Matthew Jennejohn have the warmth and acerbity of the baroque instrument, especially the oboe d'amore in the spirited Sinfonia that opens Part II of BWV 76 and

congenial to her instrument. They include the well-loved Gavotte *en rondeau* from Violin Partita No. 3, the stately Allemande from Cello Suite No. 1, and the robust Bourées I and II from Cello suite No. 3. The arrangements are less satisfactory in the Sarabandes that constitute the deep-water marks in both types of suite, as the recorder is limited in its ability to capture the greater depth and compass of this particular genre.

These performances are memorable as superb technical accomplishments, if not always for the tender charm one considers typical of the recorder family. Roed has been at pains to find the right recorder for what she wants to say in each piece, choosing from 8 different instruments. This includes, in the cello suites, the voice flute in d<sup>1</sup> which has 2 notes deeper than the normal f-instrument. That is to say nothing of such matters as the five pages of 16<sup>th</sup> notes at the beginning of the Prelude in Partita 3, creating a dilemma: “when and where and how to breathe?” And the many low E’s in the cello suites require the artist to cover half of the bottom hole to create a tone lower than the instrument’s natural lowest note of F.

Roed found an acoustically perfect venue in the 18<sup>th</sup> century chapel of Augustenborg Castle on the Danish Island of Als, so that the sound in these recordings is always alert, warm, and clear.

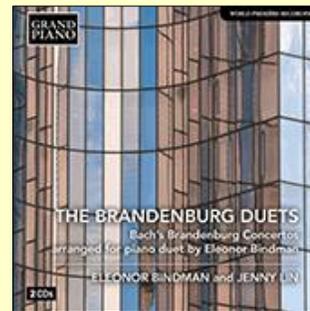


“Amours contrariées,” Cantatas of Clérambault & Rameau – Zachary Wilder, tenor; Les Bostonades (Centaur)

Les Bostonades, as you might have guessed, are a baroque ensemble based in Boston. Founded in 2005, their spirited performance style has made them an increasing favorite with audiences in the area and elsewhere. On the present CD release, we hear from four of the members, Teddie Hwang, traverse flute; Sarah Darling, violin; Emily Walhout, viola da gamba; and Akiko Sato, harpsichord. They do a splendid job adding lightness and litheness in support of tenor Zachary Wilder, whose generous, well-modulated voice and beautifully articulated readings of the French texts brings out the best qualities in the three selected cantatas by Louis Nicolas Clérambault (1676-1749) and Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764).

the Hautbois de chasse (oboe da caccia) in the noble alto/tenor duet that enjoins the faithful to let Jesus into their hearts.

The singers, also, frequently cultivate a period tone, sometimes with an edge that may or may not be appropriate to the emotional sense of the text. We hear this quality in Philippe Gagné’s aforementioned tenor aria in BWV 76, and also in Héléne Brunet’s soprano aria “*Komm in mein Herzenhaus*” (Come into my heart’s abode) in BWV 80, though her earlier aria “*Höre, ihr Volker, Gottes stimme*” (Hear, ye nations, God’s voice calling) in BWV 76 is simpler and more natural-sounding in its directness. Besides the voices we’ve already cited, you can credit baritone Jesse Blumberg, and countertenor Michael Taylor in the alto solos, with yeoman performances. And the glorious sound of the chorus at the opening of BWV 79, replicating the sense of joyousness in the text, speaks for itself.



“The Brandenburg Duets,” arrangements for piano duet performed by Eleonore Bindman and Jenny Lin (Grand Piano)

Duo pianists Eleonore Bindman and Jenny Linn are heard here in strikingly beautiful and revealing performances of Bach’s Brandenburg Concertos, arranged by Bindman for piano duet. In this form, we stand to discover more about the inner strength and litheness of Bach’s masterworks that we would have imagined possible. It is a revelation, like hiking or driving through woodlands on an overcast day when the diminished light allows us to look deeper into the woods and see more than we would on a bright day because we do not have the brilliance of the full sunlight to dazzle our eyes.

“My goal,” says Bindman, “was to create a transcription which highlighted the polyphony,

Clérambault is heard from first in the cantata *Pirame et Tisbé*, based on the old Theban legend of the ill-fated lovers we know from the farcical "Pyramus and Thisbe" interlude in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Here it is played for pathos, not parody. Sound and sense have distinct corollaries in the music Clérambault sets to his text, which includes Tisbé's internal struggle with her fears until she relents and agrees to flee to the woods with Pirame: "Let me", says Pirame, "now steer our fate." There is even a bit of frenzy in the music as the lion frightens Tisbé away and tears her discarded veil. We know from the legend what follows: Pirame, in despair of what he supposes to be the demise of Tisbé, stabs himself fatally with his dagger. Tisbé likewise kills herself when she comes across his body. Melodrama like *that* does not occur in real life, of course, but Clérambault's tasteful and well-proportioned musical setting makes it all plausible.

The text of Rameau's *L'Impatience* (*Impatience*) finds a lover in the woods, awaiting the appearance of his beloved: [translated] "Before rewarding my passion, are you waiting, Love, for me to be more impassioned? Knowing the desire of my soul, can you still withhold the prize?" He envies the innocent happiness of the forest birds for whom loyalty and its reward, love, are simpler matters – a popular conceit in the courtly French poetry of the day.

Clérambault's *Orphée* deals with the poet Orpheus and his descent into Hades to revive the soul of his deceased beloved Eurydice and bring her back to the world of light and love, all through the power of music. He chides the God of the Underworld by recounting the legend of Persephone: "You have felt the flame of my kindred God, the alluring daughter of Ceres, whose divine charms have set your own soul aflame." The plaintive nature of the story is handled with tasteful discretion, and the cantata ends in a note of triumph (*Air gai*), omitting the fatal consequence in the myth when Eurydice looks back towards Hades in spite of her lover's cautionary advice.

Instrumental interludes by Rameau separate the cantatas: first the *Prélude* in A minor from the first book of *Pièces de Clavecin*, and then three pieces dedicated to Rameau's contemporaries – *La Forqueray*, *La Cupis*, and *La Marais* – from the Fifth Concert of *Pièces de Clavecin en Concert*. Here the harpsichord is joined by the other instruments played by Les Bostonades – flute, violin, and viola da gamba – to make music of ineffable, effortless charm and grace. The harpsichord is not relegated to mere accompaniment but plays together (*en concert*) with the other instruments, and the performances are in keeping with Rameau's desire for soft expression and smooth, mellow legatos.

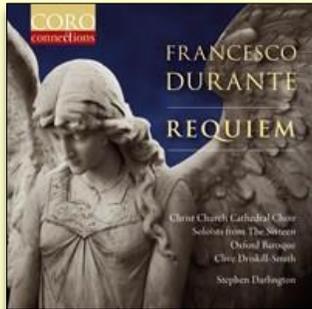
imagining how Bach might have distributed the score if he intended to create four-part inventions for piano duet." She soon abandoned her attempt to revise the only earlier published transcription, that of Max Reger, which cast all the treble parts in the upper, *primo* part and relegated the bass parts to the *secondo*. Reger was a great virtuoso pianist, but his arrangement made the primo part unplayable at any decent tempo and obscured Bach's polyphony in a thicket of too many notes. He also rendered the secondo part bottom-heavy and uninspiring by doubling the cello/bass part in octaves.

Bindman wisely abandoned her initial plan of editing the Reger transcriptions and began anew, aiming at greater clarity in terms of what we now know about baroque polyphony. The more equal balance of parts resulted in greater flexibility both differentiating and blending the voices. The secondo part always has the opportunity to enjoy Bach's gorgeous melody lines, and the frequent hand-crossings that are a feature of four-hands piano music pose a challenge that is not insuperable for artists of the calibre of Bindman and Lin.

The Brandenburgs themselves are distributed in this program, as they might be in an actual concert, with the aim of providing an engaging experience for the listener. The order in the present 2-CD set is as follows: 1-3-5 :: 6-4-2, rather than strictly apple-pie. That works out very well in terms of balance. For different reasons, Brandenburgs 1 and 6 prove very effective openers for the two halves of the program, and the overall pacing works out very nicely.

The really brilliant solo instrumental parts Bach assigned in his original concerti, such as the violin and pair of flutes in 4 and the quartet of voices in 5, in particular the unforgettable clarino trumpet, come across with great definition in these arrangements for piano duet. The sheer thrill as both partners engage in a stretch towards the finish line at the end of the cadenza in the opening Allegro in 5 is matchless in terms of excitement. At this moment, Bindman and Lin seem inspired towards ever-greater heights.

No. 6 calls for special mention. For most listeners, this is the least popular of the Brandenburgs because, as Bindman infers, its overall low register lacks brightness and variety.<sup>1</sup> Her present duet arrangement compensates for this. In fact, it is a revelation. After separating the voices by an octave, she discovered that the outline of the opening theme stood out in greater clarity, even taking on a Brahms-like gravity. Use of the pedal resulted in a gratifying cushion of open chords. Finally, as Bindman observes, the key of B-flat, while "not the best for strings, sounds divine on the piano." The pacing is excellent in the outer movements, and the Adagio takes on a profound seriousness that balances this duet to perfection.



Durante: Requiem Mass, Organ Concerto  
Stephen Darlington, conductor; Christ Church  
Cathedral Choir, Oxford Baroque, vocal soloists  
from The Sixteen (Coro Connections)

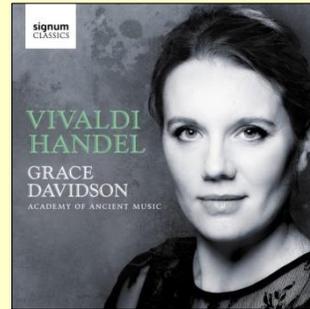
A mystery surrounds the Requiem Mass in C Minor by Francesco Durante (1684-1755). Namely, the fact that a work of such obviously apparent beauty should never have been published during Durante's lifetime but circulated instead in some 50 manuscript copies over the next two centuries, providing abundant evidence of its popularity. Why was it never published?

Durante was born, died, and lived almost his entire life in Naples. Oddly, considering his place of birth and period in history, he did not compose a single opera, though some of his pupils (Paisiello, Pergolesi, Piccini) were very successful in that field. Perhaps the fact that he was head of three separate conservatories between 1728 and 1755 may help account for the fact, as composing for the theatre might have been considered declass   for one in his position. Certainly, he had all the tools for opera, including a richness of harmony and invention and the ability to write striking arias, duets, and ensembles, all of which are evident in the present recording of the C Minor Requiem, the performance edition of which by conductor Stephen Darlington is given its premiere recording under his baton.

The above-mentioned qualities, plus a solid grasp of structure that included skill in combining older contrapuntal devices with an engaging, forward-looking new style, are apparent in this Requiem. Top-class performances by the Choir of Christ Church Cathedral and the instrumentalists of Oxford Baroque put this work across in all its beauty.

We also have distinguished performances by five

Bindman's statement that "most movements are well within the reach of intermediate-advanced students" should be taken with the understanding that artists such as the duo we hear on this album are needed to bring out the finer points in the music. Whatever level of expertise one brings to the Brandenburg Duets, they embody the joy and immense pleasure of sharing great music with a partner. As such, this is a valuable addition to the piano duet repertoire.



Arias by Vivaldi & Handel  
Grace Davidson, soprano  
Academy of Ancient Music  
(Signum Classics)

Grace Davidson, a London native who now resides with her husband and two children in Cambridge, studied singing at the Royal Academy of Music, where she won the Early Music Prize. She was a member and soloist with Harry Christophers' vocal ensemble The Sixteen before she branched out and extended her repertoire in a number of recordings. This soprano has won wide acclaim for her amazing warmth, purity, and clarity of tone, qualities that are requisite for the Baroque in general, and especially the works of Handel and Vivaldi that she sings in the present album.

With the capable assistance of The Academy of Ancient Music and with fine support from producer Nigel Short and his pals in the sound booth, Grace obviously relishes the opportunity to explore choice repertoire by two of the great composers of the baroque. From Handel, we have the motet *Silite Venti*, a setting of the *Gloria* from the Latin Mass, and the hymn *Salve Regina*. All reflect the composer's early sojourn in Italy (1707-1710), during which years he absorbed the Italian style in opera and florid polyphony so perfectly as to be indistinguishable from a native.

*Silite Venti* (Be Silent, ye Winds) opens with high drama in triple meter in the orchestra which mounts to almost unbearable intensity before the tempest is stilled by the sudden outcry of the solo voice. The basic style of the succeeding verses consists of an ongoing dialogue between voice and instruments, to texts equating the quelling of the impassioned winds with the calmness that derives from an awareness of the healing love of the Saviour. A walking bass line

soloists from The Sixteen, including sopranos Alexandra Kidgell and Katy Hill, counter-tenor Willian Purefoy, tenor Mark Dobell, and bass Ben Davies. As so often happens in works of this sort, the treble voices are given the verses expressing pity, supplication, and tenderness, and the bass is given those expressing dramatic conflict and strife. That broad generalization doesn't always hold: witness the lovely way Kidgell, as Soprano I, handles the solemn *Tuba mirum* (A trumpet, spreading a wondrous sound through the graves of all lands, summons all before the throne). Kidgell and Hill, Sopranos I and II, give meltingly lovely accounts as a duet in the *Tactus* (Forgive, O Lord, the souls of all the faithful departed) and the *Mors stupebit* (Death and nature shall be astonished when all Creation rises again).

Durante's skill in polyphony is evident in his stunning settings of *Ingemisco* (I groan like a guilty man) for a quintet of sopranos I & II, tenor, countertenor, and bass, and the deeply-moving *Lacrymosa* (Mournful, that day) for a quartet of all the above minus bass. And the chorus is absolutely superb in its account of the *Domine Jesu Christe* (Lord Jesus Christ) from the Offertorium, providing more reason for us to marvel at the composer's ability to write vocal music in any combination – and also wonder at the late appearance of this work in any recorded media.<sup>ii</sup>

As a delightful filler-up, this CD includes an infectious 10-minute performance of Durante's Organ Concerto in B-flat Major by Clive Driskill-Smith, giving welcome exposure to a work that other organists may soon be including in their repertoires.

plus obbligati from a pair of oboes and a bassoon, add felicity to some of Handel's most graciously decorated arias.

The Gloria has an interesting latter day history. The manuscript was bequeathed to the Royal Academy of Music in 1837, but was unaccountably lost for many years and was only re-discovered and authenticated as recently as 2001.<sup>iii</sup> That such a treasure should have been misshelved is all the more inexcusable when you hear Grace Davidson's exuberant, chastely decorated and flowing account of Handel's languishing, heart-on-sleeve arias over a *secco* accompaniment. The vocal clarity and freshness of her coloratura find ample scope in a text that marvels at the greatness of God.

*Salve Regina* is, traditionally, the final sentence of the Compline chanted by monastic communities before the Great Silence of the night. Consequently, Handel's setting is informed by a sense of calmness, deep peace, and soft radiance. There is a wonderful correlation of sound and sense in Handel's writing, which we can hear in the word *clamamus* (we cry) in the second verse: a setting radiant in its sunny major 4/2 harmony. Grace has some of her best moments here, in music breathless with adoration of the Virgin as our compassionate intercessor.

Vivaldi's *Nulla in mundo pax sincera* (In this world there is no honest peace [free from bitterness, true and pure]) is a motet set to an original and highly intriguing text that allowed the composer much scope in setting its vivid metaphors. One, in particular, is the uncoiling of a treacherous serpent as an emblem of the deceitful wiles of earthly love – for which, of course, the pure love of Jesus is the antidote. The style of the composer's melodic lines, which has been described as "purely violinistic," gives our artist the opportunity to re-assert once again her supremacy in this program.

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<sup>i</sup> Bach wrote Brandenburg Concerto No. 6 partly as a fond tribute to the viola da gamba family that was soon to be extinct, except among die-hard aficionados. He also wanted to show that they could be incorporated into an ensemble of modern string instruments with satisfying results.

<sup>ii</sup> As is the general custom for Masses given in concert, this Requiem ends very satisfactorily with the *Sanctus*, *Benedictus*, and *Agnus Dei*. The present recording includes a *Communio*, *Libera me*, and *Responsorium* on Tracks 16-21. I'm guessing these additional sentences were probably intended to be inserted into the basic Requiem so that it would be liturgically correct when used as an actual Mass for the deceased – including, presumably, Durante himself.

<sup>iii</sup> It is still listed in the AAM catalogue as HWV *deest* (Latin for "doesn't exist"), or as the British would say, "gone missing."