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Stuart Sillitoe

Recommended

Quattro Violini a Venezia

Clematis / Brice Sailly, Stéphanie de Faily

rec. 2018, Église Notre-Dame de Centeilles, Siran, Occitanie, France

RICERCAR RIC404 [64:35]

I would advocate reading the exemplary booklet essay by Jérôme Lejeune first, as he not only discusses the composers featured on this disc, but also gives us a pertinent history lesson in which he maps the development of the violin and its etymology. He firmly places the composers and their music on the timeline of Venetian musical development during the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth centuries.

The music itself is a wonderful snapshot of the cultural development of the period, with some of the biggest names in the musical world featured here along with lesser known, but equally compelling composers. People like Buonamente, Castello and Fontana, who whilst new names to me, and I dare say to many others, certainly earn their places on this disc with attractive music of real worth. Whilst Giovanni Gabrieli is the real star here - he is certainly the name that most will recognise - this is music is not the usual Gabrieli fare; this Canzon celebrating the sound of the violin is a world away from the glorious celebratory brass and choral works. The Sonata follows on in a similar, if a more subdued, vein. I particularly enjoyed the two Uccellini pieces; the way that he blends the sound of the strings over the bass continuo is superb.

Salomone Rossi was probably the leading Jewish composer of his day; his music evidenced both the Italian and Jewish traditions. It is his vocal music which I know best, so I was eager to hear these instrumental works and I was not disappointed. Here we have two fine examples of Venetian music of the period, this despite Rossi being more associated with Mantua, one of the birthplaces of the Italian violin tradition. Similarly, Biagio Marini was not a native of Venice, but travelled widely through Europe honing his skills, including a time in the group of musicians that Monteverdi drew around himself at St. Mark's Cathedral. He eventually settled in Venice, where he was to die; his music as presented here shows class and originality. Another composer associated with Monteverdi was Francesco Cavalli, who became one of the great man's students. His Canzon a 3, 2 violini e violoncino is quite wonderful and forms a brilliant conclusion to this disc.

This is a wonderfully entertaining disc, depicting the early history of Venetian violin music. As such, it is a most valuable addition to any collection of baroque Italian music. This is especially true when one takes in to account the performance of Clematis under its dual directorship of Brice Sailly and Stéphanie de Faily. Their playing is excellent throughout, something which is aided by a sympathetic acoustic and warm recorded sound. As I have already stated, Jérôme Lejeune's booklet essay is exemplary, making this a most recommendable release.

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Best Quotation-

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QUATTRO VIOLINI - A VENEZIA

Les amoureux du premier baroque connaissent bien l'ensemble de la violoniste Stéphanie de Failly, régulièrement associé aux projets de Leonardo Garcia Alarcon. Clematis a également su nous séduire dans ses propres récitals Monteverdi, Rossi et Legrenzi. C'est dans le sil-lage de ce dernier enregistrement que se situe le nouveau, consacré au répertoire spécifiquement des-tiné au violino (et non plus à l'ancienne dénomination viola da braccio).

Le programme, articulé autour de pièces majoritairement dédiées à quatre violons solistes, convainc à la fois par sa cohérence et par l'ex-cellence de son exécution, même s'il ne présente pas de véritable sur-prise. On y retrouve la célèbre Sonata con tre violini de Gabrieli, l'un des monuments fondateurs de ce réper-toire, ainsi qu'une panoplie d'auteurs ayant œuvré à Mantoue et Venise auprès de Monteverdi. Les suaves Sinfonia et Sonata de Luigi Rossi, le virtuose « hébreu » de la cour des Gonzague, font un heureux contraste avec la Canzon plus exubérante de Marini et la sonate à double chœur en écho de Dario Castello, dont on peut imaginer qu'elles aient retenti sous les voûtes de San Marco.

Les admirables violonistes de l'en-semble sont environnées par pas moins de huit instrumentistes, réa-lisant un continuo aussi coloré qu'ef-ficace et attentif. Stéphanie de Failly se mesure en solo à la redoutable « Sonate IV devant être jouée sur deux cordes » de Marini, dans une lecture exemplaire, toute en raffi-nements de sonorité, articulations et nuances. Elle triomphe également des embûches de l'étonnante Sonata a modo di lira, où Marini évoque l'ancienne lira da braccio par une écriture polyphonique toute en triples cordes. Un magnifique opus, supérieurement exécuté, glorifiant les premiers virtuoses du violon de l'ère baroque.

LE SOIR

Serge Martin

Si on associe régulièrement le violon à la Venise de Vivaldi, on sait moins que tous les virtuoses d'un instrument qui deviennent un vrai soliste instrumental se retrouvent dans la cité des Doges. Et fidèles à l'esprit du lieu, les Marini, Rossi, Fontana et autres Uccellini, s'adonnent à une série de sonate, canzone, et autre sinfonie où ils feront intervenir jusqu'à 3 à 4 instruments, reprenant des effets à double chœur et de réponses en écho, propres à la musique religieuse de la ville. C'est cette musique vivifiante que Stéphanie de Failly ressuscite, non sans panache, avec son Ensemble Clematis.

RONDO

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Michel Wersin

Die Emanzipation der Instrumentalmusik, ausgehend von Norditalien, ist ein ausgesprochen spannendes Kapitel der Musikgeschichte. Mit Gattungsbezeichnungen wie „Canzon“, die unmissverständlich an das vokale Repertoire anknüpfen, wird einerseits noch die Verbindung zum mehrstimmigen Repertoire der Vokal-Capellen verdeutlicht. Andererseits entwickelten die Instrumentalisten, die selbstbewusst die neuen Möglichkeiten nutzten, schon bald ein ganz eigenes, typisches instrumentales Repertoire von teils hochvirtuosen Spieltechniken und Verzierungskünsten, das dieser neuen Musik im Laufe des 17. Jahrhunderts ein ganz eigenes Gepräge verleiht und sie zum Ausgangspunkt der klassischen Instrumentalmusik als solcher werden lässt.

Viel Spezialwissen ist nötig, um die genannten Aspekte möglichst original an den überlieferten Quellen und zudem möglichst wirkungsvoll und klangschön umzusetzen: Immer geht es beim Musizieren auch um den sinnlichen Reiz, der das Publikum unmittelbar begeistern soll. Spielt man allerdings Alte Musik wie das in unserer diesbezüglich museal ausgerichteten Gegenwart fast immer der Fall ist, muss man diese Musik einerseits aus ihrer Zeit heraus (eben basierend auf den Erkenntnissen, die man über diese Zeit hat), andererseits aber auch für unsere heutige Zeit zum Faszinosum werden lassen. Den fantastischen Instrumentalistinnen und Instrumentalisten von „Clematis“ gelingt dies vorzüglich: Sie machen durch ihr Spiel verständlich und erlebbar, dass die Instrumentalmusik des Frühbarock eine besonders intensive und anrührende Expressivität entwickeln musste, um ohne das vormalig omniprésente vokale Element das Publikum nachhaltig anrühren und begeistern zu können.

The names here are the ones that turn up on most anthologies of early 17th-century

Italian string music, but what distinguishes this release is its focus on works for four violins and continuo. It's a nice idea, and since many of these composers lived and worked in Venice and could have known each other – the violinists among them perhaps performing together in some of these very pieces – it presents the pleasing notion of a musical community exploring the possibilities of their relatively new instrument.

Although not all the pieces are actually for four violins – those being by Uccellini, Rossi, Buonamente (beautifully shaped), Castello (full of rhetorical flair and fire, as ever) and Marini – the idea is kept alive by including sonatas for three by Fontana, Gabrieli (his superbly managed Sonata con tre violini), Uccellini (a catchy and dancy sinfonia) and a Marini sonata for one violin with wonderful overlapping echo effects from two more, as well as a couple of his cautious essays in double-stopping. There's also a trio sonata by Cavalli, which seems to have been included purely on the basis of its quality and eloquence – as good a reason as any.

The intelligence of the programming is backed up by the performances, which are stylish and engaging. Short gaps between some of the pieces keep our attention and prevent it all from sounding like a history lesson. No descriptions of the violins are given but they sound like the airy early 17th-century models appropriate to this music, played in a manner befitting their characterisation in Purcell's Hail, bright Cecilia!: 'brisk without lightness, without dullness grave'. The continuo serves shrewd and discreet combinations of bass viol, bassoon, harp, theorbo, guitar, organ and harpsichord.

The booklet states how, while recording, Clematis were reminded of the quality of the three slightly later sonatas for four violins by Legrenzi, which they themselves have recorded (9/16) and which, they say, 'bring this Venetian journey to an end'. Would it have hurt to import one of them to this disc?

Lindsay Kemp