

Phil's Classical Reviews

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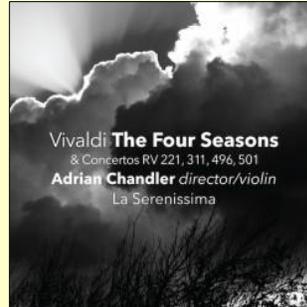
Vivaldi: Complete Concertos for Viola d'Amore
Rachel Barton Pine, violin; Ars Antiqua
(Cedille Records)

Rachel Barton Pine, one of the best violinists this country has ever produced, has remained true to her Chicago roots in the many times she has performed with local artists and orchestras. In the present collaboration with Ars Antiqua, an ensemble of early music veterans here making their first recording for Cedille, she shows the grasp of Baroque style and performance technique that makes her virtually unique among the international headliners. Violinists who gain acclaim for playing the concertos of Brahms, Mendelssohn, Beethoven and Bruch in the world's symphony halls aren't supposed to get involved with "ancient art" (which is what Ars Antiqua means). Apparently, nobody bothered to tell Rachel, who has been imbued in the music of the Baroque from her earliest years.

Here she uses a 1774 Gagliano viola d'amore to recapture the spirit of some neglected concertos by Antonio Vivaldi that deserve wider recognition. This type of instrument is distinct from the modern violin or viola in having 12 strings, six played with the bow and the others vibrating in sympathy to produce a distinctively sweet, silvery tone. There are eight concertos in the present program, and they reveal the viola d'amore in its full range and all its guises.

Normally, the solo string instrument is the center of attention in a Vivaldi concerto, and there are few exceptions here. We hear that afore-mentioned sweet, silvery sound in the opening Allegro and the Largo movements of the Concerto in D minor, RV 395, one of three concertos in the same key in this program that are all marked by a distinctly serious mien. The Largo, in particular, contains many chords that would have been impossible to execute on the violin.

The A minor Concerto, RV 396, on the other hand, is sunny and affirmative, with an appealing clarity and a seemingly endless flow of ideas that would rate it with Vivaldi's most immediately popular concertos. With its flurry of 16th note triplets at the end of the opening



Vivaldi: The Four Seasons + Concertos for Bassoon and Violin *in Tromba Marina* – Adrian Chandler, La Serenissima (Avie Records)

Under violinist and director Adrian Chandler ("Ade" to his friends in the U.K.), La Serenissima has developed its own distinctive sound and performance style that make the baroque chamber ensemble instantly recognizable. It's not just that they have the scrape, chatter, tang, and resonance baroque aficionados have come to love. We heard those sounds in the early days of the period instrument revival in the '60's and '70's, as performers' enthusiasms sometimes outran their grasp of the idiom and period instruments often sounded as attractive as period dentistry. Enough time has passed by now that cutting edge ensembles like La Serenissima not only display a mastery of the various baroque timbres, but they know what to do with them, too.

To begin with, Chandler's violin, designed by Rowland Ross (1981) after an original by Amati, sounds like no one else's. I can't tell if he tunes it a bit on the sharp side, but the incisive sounds he derives from it do have a distinctive bite. His performances in the four concertos that make up The Seasons contain a lot of infectious raw energy, and he communicates it to the ensemble in performances that make Avie's blurb about "brimming with vitality and originality" a real understatement. But Chandler can also be smoothly accomplished in his use of slurred bowings that have a lot of consequence for Vivaldi's use of trills, which typically start from the lower note in defiance of convention. The silvery sounds of pizzicati from the high strings in "Winter," describing icy rain dripping from the eaves, are really beautiful here.

Elsewhere, the barking dog in "Spring" comes across as the lament of a faithful canine left out in the cold, rather than a ferocious beast. The tripping measures of the harvest revelers in "Autumn" are superbly realized, with vitally rhythmic support from a basso continuo (here, double bass, theorbo, guitar and harpsichord) that has a real percussive snap, marking these players as more virtuosic than one customarily expects of their humble function. Quiet moments – the call of the cuckoo's song

Allegro, the lyrical charm of its Andante, and the series of up-bow staccatos in the Allegro finale, this work is both technically challenging and an audience-pleaser. In the Concerto in F major, RV 97, by contrast, the instrument takes a surprisingly subordinate role, supporting the many highly flavored passages for oboe, bassoon and horns in a “chamber concerto” style that is reminiscent of Bach’s First Brandenburg Concerto on a smaller scale. As elsewhere on this stylish 79-minute program, the delights seem to be endless.



Bach: Brandenburg Concertos 1-6
Pinchas Zukerman, Los Angeles Philharmonic members
(PentaTone hybrid SACD)

Having heard Bach’s Brandenburg Concertos as often as I have in original instruments / authentic practices performances by baroque specialists, It can be a refreshing change of pace to hear them played by regular symphonic musicians. That’s what we get in these 1977 accounts by violinist/conductor Pinchas Zukerman and members of the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Originally recorded by Deutsche Grammophon in quadraphonic stereo at a time when few home listeners had quad systems, they sound great in PentaTone’s Remastered Classics series. More than anything, these remasterings capture the robust sound of modern instruments played by symphony musicians who, by occupation, are not used to holding back.

We don’t have a pair of viola da gambas in Brandenburg No. 6, which negates Bach’s purpose of contrasting those “ancient” instruments with modern cellos and basses. And the LAPO musicians do have to exert greater artistry on their instruments to recapture the flavor of mellower-sounding baroque oboes and valveless horns in Brandenburg No.1 and the clarino trumpet in No. 2. But the fire and commitment these orchestral players invest in their accounts of Bach’s best-known masterworks, under Zukerman’s knowledgeable leadership, speak for themselves. Unless my ears deceive me, there appears to be an actual harpsichordist in the vital keyboard role in No. 5, whose opening movement cadenza is brilliantly realized, while the slow movement for flute, violin and keyboard alone, *Affetuoso*, lives up to its name in terms of the beautiful pathos these players derive from it. In the Andante of No. 4, Zukerman assumes a low profile, allowing the flute duet to take the spotlight. In the Adagio of No. 6, his violin is as eloquent and beautiful as I’ve

from the depths of the wood in “Summer,” the sleep that overcomes the revelers in “Autumn,” the reflective mood in “Winter” as the weary traveler rests at home by the fire – take on a gentle melancholy that becomes more pronounced as the year draws to an end. Chandler rejects out of hand the notion that Vivaldi’s allegros ought to have a metronomic regularity, and that makes it easier for him to take the composer’s brilliant rhetorical flourishes into account.

That’s not all. Bassoonist Peter Whelan’s instrument is so flavorful you can taste it in the Concertos in B-flat, “La Notte,” and G minor. The first has a similar programme to the identically nicknamed flute concerto in Vivaldi’s Op. 10, but is musically different. Whelan does a superb job conveying the nightmarish quality of the ghostly visions in the *Fantasm* movement, as well as the troubled slumber in *Il Sonno* and the wonderful feeling of lightness we get from the daybreak in *Sorge l’Aurora*. The G minor concerto may not have the advantage of a catchy nickname, but it features a bassoon solo in the Largo movement that is Vivaldi at his most poignant.

The program also features world premiere recordings of two concertos for an obsolete instrument, the “*violino in Tromba marina*” that was evidently original with Vivaldi. Chandler describes it as “a pimped-up violin with three strings (G, D & A) that was intended to produce a sound not dissimilar to a *tromba marina*.” It was so-called because it reminded people of the speaking trumpet used to communicate between vessels at sea. For lack of space, I recommend the ample Wikipedia article on this weird instrument with a brass-like buzzing sound. And, *no*, it was not meant to be played underwater! The timbre of Chandler’s instrument has a definite burr, but, thanks to his artistry, the musical substance in these two concertos comes through as well as their oddity.



“Festival au Grand-Orgue”
Dom Richard Gagné, Organ of Saint-Benoît-du-Lac
(ATMA Classique)

Dom Richard Gagné, of the order of Benedictines, plays a decidedly popular recital on the Karl Wilhelm organ at the Abbey of Saint-Benoît-du-Lac, Quebec. In a program spanning three centuries, he presents music that is as entertaining as it is elevating, perhaps ever more so, on an instrument well-suited for the purpose. The selections range from Johann Hermann Schein (1609) to Scott Joplin (1911), with lots of variety that allows Gagné to

ever heard him play it.

Elsewhere, the Trio for 2 oboes and bassoon in Minuet II of No. 1 is one of the highlights of this set, and the playing of the string concertino in No. 3 has a Vivaldi-like exuberance. All in all, Pinchas Zukerman's set of the Brandenburgs is recommendable, especially for listeners who have never completely warmed to the "period sound" of the Baroque Revival.



Amaryllis," Music for Recorder and Percussion
Nina Stern, recorder & chalumeau; Glen Velez, frame drum & percussion (MSR Classics)

New York native Nina Stern, playing a variety of tenor, alto, and soprano recorders and an alto chalumeau, a baroque predecessor of the modern clarinet, teams with Glen Velez, known as the "father" of the frame drum movement, in a program of flavorful and often strangely beautiful music from the 12th to the 18th centuries. Many of the pieces heard here are transcriptions of vocal music. That's appropriate, as the recorder takes its name from a Middle English word meaning "to sing like the birds."

Many of the earliest works presented here are Armenian in origin, the works of Arkel Siunetsi (1355-1425), Nerses Shnorhali (12th c.) and Sayat Nova (1712-1795), poet-philosopher, spiritual leader and troubadour, respectively. We find mystery, sadness, and passion in this tradition, beginning with Siunetsi's hauntingly beautiful *Sirt in Sasani* (My Heart Trembles), stunningly realized by Stern's tenor recorder and Velez' sruti box, just two of the 7 end-blown wind and 10 percussion instruments heard in this recital. (Most of the latter are names I never heard of. Happily, Stern's booklet annotation provides a key as to *what* is heard *where*.)

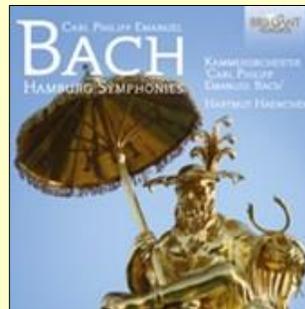
Next, we have the Italian Renaissance, represented by the anonymous *Lamento di Tristano*, much of the sad, slow melody of which was borrowed for La Rotta, the up-tempo "after-dance" that follows it, and the likewise anonymous *Chominciamento di Gioia* (Joy's Beginning), a lively example of a 15th century dance, the *estampie*. Then we have Stern on alto recorder in a transcription of the madrigal *Amarilli mi bella* (Amaryllis, my lovely) by the 17th century Dutch composer Jacob van Eyck, followed by a Prelude, Masque and Courante by the same composer in which she switches to a higher-pitched soprano recorder, with imaginative

show off the organ's range and resources.

Religious pieces are surprisingly in the minority as opposed to those of secular flavor, and include Schein's *Sonne der Gerechtigkeit* (Sun of Righteousness), an Ave Maria attributed to Giulio Caccini, J.S. Bach's chorale from Cantata 147, *Jesus bleibet meine Freude* (Jesus, Joy of Man's Desiring) and Marcel Dupré's *Cortège et Litanie*, inspired by the composer's admiration for the Russian masters of religious music.

The secular side of the program begins with a Galliard of the Prince of Venosa by Carlo Gesualdo (1561-1614), unique among history's most notable composers for having been a murderer. It's followed by Bach's glorious Air on the G-String, a transcription of a baroque concerto by Giuseppe Torelli, and a Rigaudon, a French country dance in the Grand-Siècle style of André Campra. Moving along, we have the Entr'acte and Nocturne from *Shylock* and the Pavane by Gabriel Fauré, Wagner's bombastic Fanfare to Act 3 of *Parzifal* (one of the few moments on the program when the organist is obliged to "let out all the stops"), Alexander Glazounov's charming Petit Adagio from his ballet *The Seasons*, and A.D.1620 from *Sea Pieces* by Edward McDowell, which seems to convey the hope and steady courage required of those who sailed on the voyage of the Mayflower.

Manual de Falla's impetuous Ritual Fire Dance from *El Amor Brujo* (Love the Sorcerer) is the climax of the program, a driving, pounding showstopper that may surprise people who think of the organ as a slow, stately instrument. The program concludes with John Philip Sousa's rousing march Stars and Striped Forever, Camille Saint-Saëns' gracefully gliding *Le Cygne* (The Swan) with its swirling accompaniment, and Scott Joplin's spirited finale from the opera *Treemonisha*.



CPE Bach: Hamburg Symphonies, Wq 182 & 183
Hartmut Haenchen, Kammerorchester CPE Bach
(Brilliant Classics 2-CD set)

Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (1714-1788), second son of Johann Sebastian, remains one of the most intriguing figures in music history. His compositional style was unique and immediately recognizable. In terms of form, he looked beyond his own era to the music of the Viennese Classical Period, particularly that of Haydn. In emotional affect, he went farther still, anticipating the expressive ethos of the Romantic Era. Though he is still

accompaniment by Velez on tambourine and Tar.

The program concludes with a fine account of the ever-popular “Greensleeves,” published in 1706 in The Division Flute (“divisions” were the then-name for variations). Before this we have Georg Philipp Telemann’s Fantasia in E minor, TWV 40:8. This work is somewhat controversial, as it is not quite clear from the title page whether it was intended for violin or flute. This little self-contained gem sounds idiomatic enough in Stern’s G minor transposition for alto recorder, although there are some shrill overtones in the Largo section. They should not deter the avid listener from enjoying a gracious and happily diverse little recital.



Vivaldi: Flute Concertos, Op. 10
Mario Folena, flute; Federico Guglielmo, L'Arte dell 'Arco
(Brilliant Classics)

Latest in an ongoing project in collaboration with the Istituto Italiano Antonio Vivaldi, L'Arte dell' Arco present Vivaldi's Opus 10, his six concertos for the transverse flute. This set is important because Vivaldi was in the forefront of composers quick enough to recognize the instrument's possibilities for expressive cantabile, and also for the fact that it contains three of his most popular concertos for any solo instrument.

Significantly, they all bear descriptive names. Concerto in F major, RV 433, “*La Tempesta di mare*” (The Storm at Sea) is filled with the ceaseless activity appropriate to its subject. The Concerto in G minor, RV 39, “*La Notte*” (The Night) has pictorial effects that suggest the night in all its connotations, from nocturnal gaiety and romance in the fast movements to those suggesting the macabre, inducing nightmares (*Fantasmî* – Spirits) and finally, blessed sleep (*il Sonno*). The Concerto in D major, RV 438, “*Il Gardellino*” (The Goldfinch) imitates the actual sound of the bird's distinctive chirruping song as well as art could ever replicate nature. This concerto is, in fact, often played on the *soprano* recorder, an instrument well-equipped to imitate birdsong. But, as Mario Folena shows us in his sublimely beautiful performance, the transverse flute has its own undeniable claims.

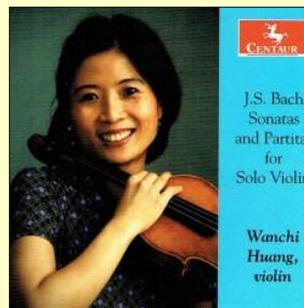
The three “no-name” concertos have abundant charms of their own in the way of engaging Allegro movements and languidly expressive Largos: No. 4 in G, RV 435; No. 5 in F, RV 434; and No. 6 in G, RV 437. The *Largo cantabile* of the F major concerto has a spooky mood

not exactly a household name, his reputation is growing steadily, thanks to the dedication of such organizations as the Berlin-based CPE Bach Chamber Orchestra under its founder Hartmut Haenchen.

The present 2-CD slimline package contains the ten symphonies that CPE Bach composed in Hamburg to commissions from Baron Van Swieten (who was later a patron of Mozart). There were six for string orchestra (Wq 182) and four orchestral symphonies “*mit zwölf obligaten Stimmen*” (with twelve obligato voices). That the latter includes independent parts for woodwinds, which were woven into the score rather than just being added features, took the symphony, still in its infancy as a genre, well on its way to the world of Mozart and Haydn. Bach's style involved through-composed opening movements and dancelike finales; in between, his slow movements are typically stark in their emotional language, in keeping with the *Sturm und Drang* ethos in which they were conceived. In Bach's day the German words implied something aligned with the philosophical theory of the sublime, where beauty might be equated with strangeness and even terror. The implications for the arts were immense, and “the Berlin Bach,” as he was often termed, was right on the cutting edge.

A good example of the composer's love of a vehement change of mood occurs in Symphony No. 3 in F from Wq.183, in which a robust, ebullient opening *Allegro di molto* does not prepare us in any way for the *Larghetto* that follows without a break, a forbidding gulf that opens up under our feet like a yawning grave. It takes less than a minute and a half to perform, but leaves an indelible impression. The mood of stark pathos created by the Adagio of the String Symphony in C major, Wq. 182, affords another example, as it could not contrast more strongly with the scampering Allegretto that follows it.

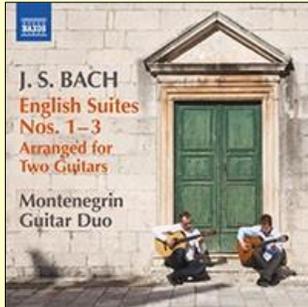
The performances by Haenchen and the CPE Bach Chamber Orchestra are rendered with affection and zeal, just as we might expect of an orchestra and conductor who have made this composer the major focus of their musical art



Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin
Wanchi Huang, violin
(Centaur)

Wanchi Huang, a native of Taiwan who has studied and worked extensively here in the U.S., with degrees from

that would not have been out of place in “*La Notte*.” Considering the bigness of their sound, the ensemble is surprisingly small, consisting of 2 violins, viola, violotto (a small viola da braccio, maybe?), harpsichord/ chamber organ, and theorbo/baroque guitar. Close miking allows us to hear the scraping, strumming and tinkling of the instruments, enhancing their period flavor.



Bach: English Suites 1-3
Montenegrin Guitar Duo
(Naxos)

The Montenegrin Guitar Duo, consisting of Goran Krivokapić and Danijel Cerović, do their native Adriatic state of Montenegro proud in this, the first of two projected CDs premiering J. S. Bach’s English Suites in very attractive arrangements for two guitars. These artists exhibit a strong mutual sympathy in their performances. The sound image of the recordings is exceptionally well balanced and well-defined spatially, with Cerović in the left channel and Krivokapić in the right. The arrangements by these artists continue an ongoing trend of arranging Bach’s keyboard works for other instruments, so that these original harpsichord compositions may be said to belong as much to the repertoire of the piano and the guitar.

The title “English Suites” is misleading, as they were so-called only because Bach composed them at the request of “an Englishman of quality” who has remained anonymous to this day. There is nothing especially English about these suites, which are very much in the prevailing Franco-German style. The English Suites are the first examples of a genre that Bach later followed up in his French Suites and Partitas. Being the earliest, they are also most typical in their form, beginning with a Prelude, a stately German dance with four beats to the measure known as an Allemande, and a French dance known as the Courante, originally quick and flowing (the French name signifies “running”). The centerpiece and emotional heart of the work is the Sarabande, a dance originally of Spanish origin, that was slow, often highly ornamented, and frequently very moving. It was followed by one or more Bourées, lively French country dances in double time in which the phrase usually starts with a quarter-bar anacrusis, or “pick up.” The final dance was always a Gigue (“Jig” to you!) in vigorous, foot-stamping rhythm and often in two-part counterpoint.

So much for the technical details. The scintillating

Curtis, Juilliard, and Indiana University School of Music, and is now associate professor of violin at James Madison University, prepared herself very thoroughly for her artistic career. In retrospect, her training has proven not a bit too much in terms of the demanding repertoire she performs. As in her earlier Centaur recording of solo violin sonatas by Eugene Ysaÿe (*Phil’s Reviews*, January 2013), she shows a definite inclination for the most challenging items in the repertoire. The tougher they come, the better she likes them. She proves it again in this latest release of the complete Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin, BWV 1001-1006 of J.S. Bach.

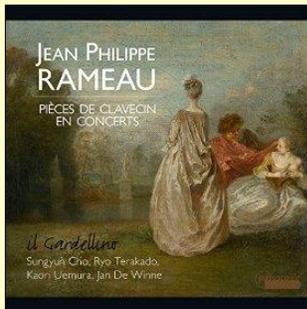
For this daunting task, often described as the “Himalayas for violin,” she comes well prepared with her incisive technique and an exceptionally rich, beautiful tone. She scores impressive points not only in the most appealing moments such as the deeply moving Sarabandes in BWV 1002 and 1004, the furious “Tempo di Borea” in BWV 1002 (a name that alludes playfully both to the lively French country dance known as the Bourée and to Boreas, Greek god of the winds), and the lilting Siciliano in BWV 1001. She is equally adept in the more difficult movements, such as the Fugues in all three of the Sonatas. Technically, it is impossible to perform true counterpoint on a single instrument with four strings. The challenge to the violinist, which Wancho readily accepts, is to create and sustain the illusion of a fugue in two or more voices through a series of deft alternations. The technical challenges don’t end here, but include multiple stops, arpeggios over several strings, opposing tonal ranges, and the slow stacking and accumulation of notes that had been considered impossible before J. S. Bach.

They say you can’t tell a book from its cover. That may be true, but you can tell a lot from the table of contents. In the case of Bach’s Sonatas and Partitas, the formal layout tells us a great deal about a creative mind that was continually exploring new ideas, forms, and modes of expression. Ostensibly, we have three Italian sonatas in the *Sonata da chiesa* (“church sonata”) genre and three French suites in dance-form movements known as Partitas. But a casual glance will reveal that these six masterworks were scarcely stamped out in “cookie-cutter” fashion. Partita No. 1, for instance, substitutes the afore-mentioned “*Tempo di Borea*” in place of the expected Gigue as a spirited sign-off in perpetual motion, and all four movements, including Allemanda, Corrente, and Sarabande, are followed immediately and imaginatively by their “doubles,” or variants. There is no slow Sarabande in Partita No. 3, and in place of a lively Corrente, we have two graceful dances, a Loure and a Gavotte en rondeau that has had a long, happy life in transcriptions for lute and guitar.

Perhaps the most technically demanding movements in all these works are the famous Chaconne, inserted as an extra movement after the Gigue in Partita No. 2, and the very extensive Fugue in Sonata No. 3. More has been written about the Chaconne, perhaps, than any other single piece by Bach. So, perversely, I’m going to focus instead on the Fugue, a movement that begins in

performances by Krivokapić and Cerović put it all into fine focus, capturing the living spirit of Bach's dance-inflected music without any fussiness, so that they seem as vital today as when Bach first wrote them. English Suite No. 1 in A major is the most elaborate, possessing two Courantes instead of one, followed by imaginatively embellished "doubles" (that is, variations) of the same. The Gigue in this suite is zestful to the point of being frenetic. The most striking feature of Suite No. 2 in A minor is the very solemn Sarabande, transfixing the listeners by its very simplicity and plain eloquence.

Suite No. 3 in G minor is perhaps the best-known of the entire set for its striking contrapuntal beauty. The Sarabande was written by Bach in two versions, the first with elaborate embellishments and the latter in a more simplified setting. We hear echoes of both in the present performance. The concluding Gigue is also very striking, having the structure of a true fugue, the voices in which are cleanly defined in the present performance.

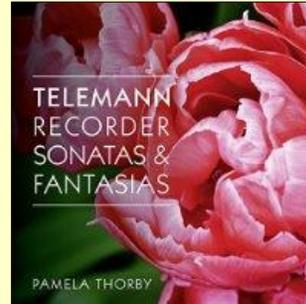


Rameau: Pièces de Clavecin en Concert
Performed by il Gardellino
(Passacaille)

A curious man was Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764). A native of Dijon, France, his personality had more than a little in common with that tart mixture of ingredients in the famous mustard of that region. He was undoubtedly a genius: his grasp of harmony, considered dissonant by his contemporaries, was not fully appreciated until the time of Debussy and Ravel. But he also exhibited the other aspect of genius, being secretive, solitary, miserly, suspicious of others, and quick to anger. Often irascible, he wore out his collaborators to the point where he seldom worked with the same librettist twice. But he so made his mark in opera, ballet, keyboard and chamber music that his reputation is secure.

We hear Rameau at his best in his five "concerts," or suites, of Pièces de Clavecin en Concert (1741). The harpsichord is at the heart of this music, and Rameau even went so far as to suggest that these suites could be performed solely on that instrument, if desired. But, as we hear in the present recordings by the modern-day ensemble il Gardellino, the Pièces work best *en concert*, that is as chamber music. The harpsichord has a fully written-out obbligato throughout the suites, but the accompaniment by violin and viola da gamba, with flute replacing the violin or a second violin the viola, is by no

rather ugly, four-square fashion. But, in the course of its long duration (12:48 in the present recording) it is carefully and meticulously shaped into a thing of beauty by the meticulous artistry of Wanchi Huang. As I've hinted previously, a fugue is not the sort of thing that a violin does best, but Wanchi will make a believer of you!



Telemann: Recorder Sonatas and Fantasias
Pamela Thorby, recorder; with supporting artists
(Linn Records 2-CD)

Pamela Thorby, long anointed by admirers as the "Queen of the Recorder," has never been in better form than she is here in her CD release of the complete Sonatas and Fantasias by Georg Philipp Telemann (1681-1767). In fact, these works, and the 12 fantasias in particular, may be considered a summit of the recorder player's art.

Thorby recorded the 7 sonatas on 29-30 April 2014 at the National Centre for Early Music in York, with the assistance of some distinguished collaborators: Peter Whelan, bassoon; Allison McGillvray, cello; Elizabeth Kenny, archlute and guitar; and Marcin Swiatkiewicz, harpsichord and organ. As we can gather from the glorious sunlight pouring through the windows in the session photos, it must have been lovely spring weather in York. Whether or not that was a factor, the performers seem very happy and relaxed in the photos, and their performances reflect it. That's important because Telemann often comes across as the most natural and spontaneous of composers, one whose melodies flow with an easy grace, radiating beauty and conviviality that belies the composer's pains. We also get the impression of Telemann as a man of endless creative imagination. (That is quite true: of all the composers of the baroque, he was virtually unique in almost never "re-heating" existing material. The way his fertile mind worked, he found it easier to compose entirely new music, the freshness of which speaks for itself.)

The sonatas on CD1 utilize the talents of Thorby's collaborating artists according to what seemed the best requirements of the music. The Sonata in D minor, TWV 41:d4, with its appealing though austere Affetuoso and Grave movements, is given the sparsest setting, with only harpsichord accompanying the recorder's elegantly phrased melodies. On the other hand, the more expansive Sonata in B-flat major, TWV 42:B4, with the easy beauty of its Dolce and Siciliano, utilizes the talents

means perfunctory. They interact with the harpsichord in interesting ways that help expand the harmony and accentuate Rameau's pungent rhythms. Rameau was at pains to make the relationships clear, to the extent that he wrote out the accompaniment in full in the published scores, something that was not usually done in the baroque era.

At times, the writing in these suites virtually takes on the character of orchestral music, as it does in the two rousing Tambourins that conclude the third suite. As they do elsewhere in these recordings, il Gardellino, consisting of Jan de Winne, flute; Ryo Terakado, violin; Kaori Uemura, viola da gamba, and Sungyun Cho, harpsichord, include a graceful "swing" and a nice sense of rhythm in their playing, in beautifully proportioned accounts of which Rameau would surely have approved. They are also adept in the softly expressive moments such as the second movement, *La Livri*, in Concert No. 1, which was evidently written to memorialize the son of a friend and patron. They also observe the suggestions in the composer's "Preface to the Performers" concerning sustained notes (which "must be played in decrescendo rather than in crescendo") and the necessity for smooth, mellow legatos.

In all these observances and more, il Gardellino reflects an ongoing trend in the current baroque revival in taking composers on their own terms. Personally speaking, I was for some years slow to warm up to Rameau and other French composers of the baroque because the available performances made them sound too four-square. How mistaken I was, these musicians, whose name *il Gardellino* (The Goldfinch) is a tribute to a concerto by Vivaldi, have revealed to me. Rameau in particular is coming into clearer focus all the time. His contemporaries often reviled him as either too daring or too conservative. In reality, his art, as these accounts bear out, consisted of filling old bottles with sparkling new wine.

of McGillvray, Kenny and Swiatkiewicz in addition to Thorby, so that it takes on the proportions of an actual trio sonata. (Which brings up the question people always ask: why did it take four musicians to play a trio sonata? You can look that up for yourself!) Whelan's bassoon is heard only in sonatas 3, 4, and 6 in the present program, but it makes an immediate impression, worthy of this performer's well-known warmth and artistry.

Thorby returned to the scene of the crime on 24-25 July of the same year to record the 12 Fantasias for solo flute (12 *Fantaisies à travers sans basse*). Though often performed on the violin or, as indicated, the traverse flute, they sound very idiomatic on the several recorders Thorby uses here. One might be tempted to compare them with J.S. Bach's violin sonatas and partitas, but the analogy soon ends. The recorder, an end-blown wooden instrument with fingered holes, is basically a single-line melody instrument without the advantages the violin possesses in its ability to play alternating bariolage and stops on several strings, giving the impression of multiple voices. In fact, some scholars have been skeptical as to the suitability of the recorder to handle the demands of this music at all.

If that's the case, no one ever bothered to inform Telemann – or Pamela Thorby, for that matter! Playing several different members of the recorder family and utilizing all the resources of her slur chart, she negotiates her way through some of the most technically difficult music you can imagine as if it were (as we Americans say) "a piece of cake." And it all sounds beautiful! Rustic dances and stylized bird calls (of which we have a virtual aviary in the Presto finale of Fantasia No. 12) take full advantage of the sort of things the recorder does best, while the fugues in Fantasias 2 and 6-11 give us the deceptive impression of actual polyphony. Perhaps the point of deepest beauty is the *Affettuoso* in fantasia No. 9, which is simply one of Telemann's most memorable moments. Thorby deftly transposes at sight the signature keys of every one of these 12 fantasies, something she describes as "second nature to a recorder player."



"The Power of Love," Arias from Handel Operas
Amanda Forsythe, soprano
Apollo's Fire Baroque Orchestra directed by Jeannette Sorrell
(Avie Records)

Do we detect a mischievous smile on the face of soprano Amanda Forsythe? If so, it's certainly appropriate, for this choice selection of arias from Handel's Italian operas contains almost more sinful delights than respectable people ought to entertain! Performing as she has so often with Apollo's Fire under Jeannette Sorrell, the New York City-born American soprano reveals an uncommonly wide emotional range, from light frivolity and flirtation to deepest sorrow and tragedy, with everything in between.

That's appropriate because Handel's writing for operatic sopranos was intended to be emotionally affective to the *nth* degree. He was writing his operas for Covent Garden, London audiences who might have been expected to comprehend no more than a smattering of the Italian lyrics, at best. That was no impediment, thanks to Handel's superbly versatile writing for voice, luminous, voluptuous, and accompanied by just the right instrumental support to make an instant impression on the hearer. And it still does today, given an engaging artist of Ms. Forsythe's caliber.

The nicely-balanced program contains arias such as “*Qual farfalla*” (Like a little butterfly) from Partenope and “*Tornami a vagheggiar*” (Look at me again) from Alcina that give us the opportunity to display her lovely coloratura range while tossing off trills and other tasteful (and devilishly tricky) embellishments as if they were mere trifles. She is also adept at portraying moods of jealousy, as in “*Geloso tormento*” (The torments of jealousy) from Almira, or conflict, as in “*Da tempeste*” from Giulio Cesare, in which the text compares the singer’s surging emotions to a storm-tossed ship at sea. The quiet moments can also be very effective, as in the ominous Largo opening for oboe and bassoon that serves as prelude to the furious explosion of coloratura fireworks in “*Ah, crude!*” (Alas, cruel one!) from Rinaldo. The deep-water mark of the program is “*Piangero*” (I will lament my fate) from Giulio Cesare, in which Cleopatra expresses her grief at the loss of Caesar, her lover and the support for her shaky throne. (Now, where *did* I put that asp?)

Spacing the selection of arias are three highlights, including the glorious Chaconne, from Handel’s Terpsichore, the ballet he wrote to “sex-up” (as present day Britons would say) the drooping box office receipts for his 1712 opera *il Pastor Fido*.