

and musical nuance are well thought-out every step of the way. My one reservation, as referenced in the liner notes, is in borrowing the following words of Forkel as justification for hesitantly slow tempos across some movements: 'The full tone of the organ is, in its nature, not adapted to rapid passages.' Be that as it may, this is a well-presented recording, which is particularly aided by an intimately captured organ throughout, although—alas—it is not possible to applaud the engineer by name, the liner notes being bereft of any form of acknowledgements for this disc.

Completing a trinity of recordings featuring this Metzler organ is the debut release for US-based organist, Renée Anne Louprette (**Johann Sebastian Bach: The Great Eighteen Chorales** (Acis APL58180, rec 2013, 105')). Louprette has chosen for her first recording on disc a survey of Bach's so-called *Eighteen Chorales*, which in many respects were compiled towards the end of the composer's life from large-scale chorale preludes originally conceived earlier in his career, and perhaps intended for eventual publication as a thematically ordered set.

Regrettably, our introduction to these masterful pieces is a rather staid and pedantic rendition of the *Fantasia Komm, Heiliger Geist*, BWV651, in what should be a dramatic imploration calling the Holy Ghost down to us, but is sadly a damp squib in comparison. Hereon, however, Louprette finds her metier in the richly decorative coloratura and *terce en taille* chorale settings, with sublime registration and technical poise on display, most especially in *An Wasserflüssen Babylon* (BWV653), *Von Gott will ich nicht lassen*, (BWV658), and perhaps Bach's most sublimely ornamented chorale prelude, *Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr* (BWV662). Where Louprette particularly shines, however, is in her performance of the two expansive trios to be found in this set. Her playing in *Herr Jesu Christ, dich zu uns wend*, BWV655, displays a surety of technique whilst imbuing this performance with beautifully crafted and befitting ornamentation, thereby presenting a potentially bland dish with an added dash of unexpected tabasco. Additionally, the same can be said of the formidable trio which concludes the three settings of Bach's examination of the Lutheran Gloria, *Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr*, BWV664. Here the performer's attention to detail in matters of articulation, as well as polished 'bowing' in her pedal technique, make elements of this recording a sublime addition to the library. Organist Renée Anne Louprette demonstrates throughout an inherent intelligence and attention to detail which is admirable, and which lends each of the chorales a welcome new sense of identity. It is therefore regrettable that, for whatever inexplicable reason, the opening

item of this fine recording does not seem to meld with the remaining material presented thereafter. Finally, it is refreshing to see a comprehensive set of grateful thanks and acknowledgements presented in the liner notes, which are stylishly compiled with beautiful imagery of the Trinity College Chapel, including superb perspectives of the historic Father Smith organ casework, originating from 1694.

Websites

Acis acisproductions.com

Metronome www.metronome.co.uk

Opus Arte www.opusarte.com

Resonus www.resonusclassics.com

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Love and death in early modern Italy

A widely circulated fable of the late Renaissance draws parallels between Cupid and Death. In the story, both shoot their victims using arrows, so it is simplicity itself for them to switch places. After spending a night at the same inn, the two unwittingly exchange quivers, causing old men to fall in love and young ones to die. This is telling; during the early modern period, lovesickness, or love melancholy, was considered a genuine illness—one that could burn up the heart and soul, not to mention the liver and entrails. Though the recordings under review here present a wide range of musical responses to secular and sacred love from Italy, c.1500–1700, they share something in common: all but one of the discs warn of the dangers of desire.

We begin in the courts of northern Italy, where frottolas were in vogue from around 1470 to 1530; these amorous polyphonic songs were so popular that Ottaviano Petrucci devoted eleven volumes to them between 1504 and 1514. *Quando cala la notte* (Carpe Diem CD-16308, rec 2015, 66') features many examples from these collections, including a handful by prominent frottolists Marchetto Cara, Bartolomeo Tromboncino and Michele Pesenti; the album also contains intabulations of frottolas, ricercares, pavaues and other keyboard-only pieces, and is supplemented with excellent liner notes. Corina Marti and Enea

Sorini (harpsichord and voice, respectively) perform what is overall a melancholy, introspective programme with effortless grace. Even the most intricate ricercares seem to spring naturally from Marti's fingertips, while Sorini avoids ostentatious ornamentation in favour of a pure, wholesome approach to melody that may recall the frottole's roots in the art of the *improvvisatori*; each one of these strophic songs feels like the extemporized music of a poetry recital. Though some of Sorini's interpretations could have perhaps benefited from greater variation of dynamics, his singing throughout is warm and emotionally forthright. In the subtly resonant acoustic of a German *Schloss*, he and Marti weave an intimate musical atmosphere that eloquently communicates love's sorrow—many of the texts speak of the suffering of unrequited love, a 'harsh and gruesome fate' which makes one 'simultaneously dead and alive'.

Since socializing, cheerful music and dancing were all recommended as cures for melancholy, it would benefit any of the afflicted suitors from the songs of *Quando cala la notte* to seek distraction in the Floating City. By the early 16th century, the allure of Venice's carnival season was such that the faculty of the University of Padua provoked a full-scale riot when they attempted to prevent their students from attending the festivities in January 1507. We have the perfect opportunity to enter into the carnival spirit in **Carnavalesque: sex, lies and ... musical tales in 16th-century Venice** (Micrologus 0027.14.1, issued 2014, 68'). Ensemble Micrologus is a group renowned for its high-calibre musical performances based on meticulous scholarship; this disc does not disappoint. Armed with a range of instruments including pipes, a *buttafoco* (string drum) and a *sordellina* (bagpipe), the 13 singers and players bring to life folk-inspired traditions through frottoles, villottas, Italian-texted *chansons rustiques* and dances by a variety of different composers. While the hazards of erotic desire remain, here the sung texts are often comically carnal, brimming with indiscreet *double-entendres*. Micrologus gives these pieces a gleefully earthy interpretation, as for instance in Bartolomeo Ruffino's *La mi fa solfare*, which features both musical wordplay and lewd textual puns (as explained in the informative booklet, and also in Leofranc Holford-Strevens's chapter in the recent volume *Eroticism in early modern music*, ed. B. J. Blackburn and L. Stras (Farnham, 2015)). In the various different configurations in which they perform, the ensemble's recorded sound is first rate, and their enthusiasm infectious.

The Venice of the 1500s may have been famous for its secular festivities and devotion to worldly *amore*, but it was of course also home to a venerable musical tradition built

around a love of an altogether different kind—the love of God. **La Luchesina: Vocal and instrumental music of Gioseffo Guami (1542–1611)** (SFZ Music SFZM0115, rec 2014, 61') pays tribute to one of Willaert's lesser-known students in a programme of motets and instrumental canzonas. As a young man Guami sang in the *cappella grande* of St Mark's (1561–8), where he would later be appointed organist (1588–91); others may have eclipsed him in the historiography of Italian Renaissance music, but contemporaries such as Zarlino, Vincenzo Galilei and Giovanni Gabrieli considered him one of the best composer-organists of the time. Under the musical direction of Jamie Savan, His Majestys Sagbutts & Cornetts make a fine addition to the slowly growing corpus of Guami recordings with what seems to be the first disc dedicated entirely to the composer. The tuning is $a' = 446\text{Hz}$, $\frac{1}{4}$ -comma mean-tone temperament, with superb results throughout. It is a shame that the acoustic of the church that served as the group's recording venue is a tad too reverberant, as the music loses some clarity as a result. However, Sagbutts & Cornetts consistently demonstrate their refined musicianship and virtuosity; theirs is a glossy, mellow recorded sound that is especially majestic in the sacred works, for which they are joined by singers Nicholas Mulroy and Eamonn Dougan. Especially impressive are the *cori spezzati* effects in the concerted motets, which make palpable God's glory.

The next disc combines sacred and secular love. Ensemble Le Vaghe Ninfe's **Mazzone, Marc'Antonio: Il Primo libro delle canzoni a Quattro voci** (Brilliant Classics 95416, issued 2016, 64') seems to be the first recording of any of the works of Marc'Antonio Mazzone (c.1540–after 1600); it presents the only extant book of the composer's canzonas (Venice: Gardano, 1591). Since Mazzone intended the secular canzonas to tempt singers towards the spiritually edifying sacred canzonas that make up the second half of the book, it is puzzling that the CD does not follow the original ordering of the pieces. Instead, the sacred pieces are interspersed between the secular ones. Perhaps Le Vaghe Ninfe meant to emphasize the easy slippage between love for an earthly woman and love for the Blessed Virgin, which are stylistically identical in Mazzone's text settings. The recorded sound is mostly very good, and different combinations of instruments and voices make for an interesting variety of textures and timbres. Though there are occasional moments of uncertain intonation, the ensemble conveys the beauty of this neglected repertory with sensitivity and passion. The *a cappella* rendition of the dissonance-laden pangs of heartache in *Donna, sei pur crudele* is particularly

moving. As the introductory essay by Maria Antonietta Cancellaro points out, Mazzone was an early proponent of the importance of text expression; seemingly prophetic of the *seconda pratica*, he prefaced his first book of madrigals (Venice: Girolamo Scotto, 1569) with the claim that 'the body of music is the notes, and the words are the soul'.

Another composer from the second half of the 16th century who placed particular emphasis on the text was the better-known Luzzasco Luzzaschi (c.1545–1607)—this Ferrarese organist even made it onto Giulio Cesare Monteverdi's famous list of *seconda pratica* composers in 1607. Under the musical direction of Elam Rotem, Profeti della Quinta present a variety of Luzzaschi's secular and sacred works in **Luzzasco Luzzaschi: Madrigals, motets & instrumental music** (Pan Classics PC10350, issued 2016, 69'). Any such compilation will surely be eagerly anticipated by early music aficionados and specialists alike—precious little of this composer's music has been recorded, even though his complete unaccompanied madrigals are available from A-R Editions, edited (and with generous critical notes) by Anthony Newcomb. Luzzaschi's music is of considerable historical interest—after all, he and Gesualdo spearheaded the developments in madrigal composition at Ferrara in the late 1500s, and he was intimately involved with the court's famed *concerto delle dame* and *musica secreta*—so the immediate drawback of Profeti della Quinta's project is that it is sadly limited to a single disc, where a series of discs would be ideal (more realistically, a two-CD album would at least be a start). Recording label Glossa have recently released CDs of all the Gesualdo madrigal books and sacred music; Luzzaschi would deserve similar treatment.

Brevity aside, though, Elam Rotem and his ensemble deliver a superlative recording. The selection of madrigals, motets and instrumental pieces here well represent the different facets of Luzzaschi's compositional art; the music, soulfully performed, radiates an almost incandescent beauty. The recorded sound of voices, viols, violin, *lirone*, chitarrone, harpsichord and organ alike is sumptuous, though the organ and viols perhaps benefit the most from the acoustic. Especially noteworthy are madrigals chosen from anthologies *Il Lauro verde* (Ferrara: Vittorio Baldini, 1583) and *I lieti amanti* (Venice: Vincenzi & Amadino, 1586), which portray the burning heat of desire and the parting 'death' of lovers whose souls reside in each other's hearts. Luzzaschi's unusual chromatic experiment *Quivi sospiri, ed alti guai* (from his second book of madrigals, Venice: Gardano, 1576) is more remarkable still; this madrigal is a feat of late 16th-century text expression

depicting the horrific sounds of Dante's Hell, and Profeti della Quinta's performance is powerful, chilling.

When it comes to the importance of poetry in music of the early 1600s, the names of Florentine Camerata members Giulio Caccini (1551–1618) and Jacopo Peri (1561–1633) immediately spring to mind. Sibling duo Marc and Angélique Mauillon (voice and *arpa doppia*, respectively) give an inspired performance of monodies by these 'two Orpheuses' in **Li due Orfei: Giulio Caccini & Jacopo Peri** (Arcana A393, rec 2015, 57'). The disc boasts particularly attractive cover art by Agnolo Bronzino (*Portrait of Cosimo I de' Medici as Orpheus*, c.1537–39); it comprises solo songs with continuo from Caccini's *Le nuove musiche* (Florence: Marescotti, 1602), a collection Tim Carter has justly called 'epoch-making' for its contribution to the development of monodic style ('Caccini', *New Grove*). These songs are not the only 'new musics' on the disc—we also hear pieces from Peri's *Le varie musiche* (Florence: Cristofano Marescotti, 1609) and Caccini's sequel *Nuove musiche e nuova maniera di scriverle* (Florence: Zanobi Pignoni & Co., 1614). The CD also includes a small number of instrumental works by Luzzaschi and Alessandro Piccinini. Detailed liner notes by Denis Morrier provide a contextualization of the music, with particular reference to the rivalry between Peri and Caccini and their creation of the first operas. Marc Mauillon sings with a kind of *sprezzatura* that would have doubtless won the approval of the Florentines; his unaffected 'ease and casualness' (as Morrier describes it) disguise his virtuosity, just as Caccini recommended. Mauillon perfectly demonstrates his *bella maniera* in Peri and Caccini's wildly different settings of a single text, *Tutto 'l di piango* (tracks 9 and 17), which describes the constant weeping of a lover who is trapped in a kind of living death. Meanwhile, Angélique Mauillon demonstrates her own scintillating musicianship in the instrumental solos, playing on a double harp with three registers whose recorded sound is resonant yet clear.

Until now, we have only glimpsed the beginnings of the Italian Baroque, but **The secret lover** (Avie AV2326, issued 2016, 65') brings us deeper into the 17th century. The latest release of acclaimed American early music ensemble Tenet, this seductive album takes its name from Barbara Strozzi's *L'Amante segreto*, which is one of the two cantatas by the composer to be featured on the disc (the other is *L'Eraclito amoroso*, also from her *Cantate, ariette e duetti* of 1651). Here, we have the chance to enjoy a melange of vocal and instrumental pieces by composers born in the 1500s and early 1600s. The performances are consistently stylish. Jeffrey Grossman's two harpsichord solos are

particularly delightful, though his instrument's recorded sound seems a bit dry in an acoustic that leaves the group's viola da gamba, theorbo and lute sounding crisp but rounded. Michelangelo Rossi's acclaimed *Toccata settima* is suitably over-the-top as Grossman sucks the marrow out of this outlandish, frenzied invention—this is arguably one of the most wonderfully eccentric, imaginative recordings of a *stylus phantasticus* piece that requires heavy doses of both eccentricity and imagination.

This disc is the only one of the seven reviewed here to feature female composers—Strozzi is a dominant voice in the album, supplemented by two works by Francesca Caccini (1587–after 1641)—daughter of Giulio Caccini—and a work by Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Caroline Shaw (b.1982) that Tenet specially commissioned for this programme. One may have reservations about the inclusion of a modern work on an early music CD, but if any 21st-century piece can be said to mix well with pieces from the 16th and 17th centuries, then Shaw's *Dolce cantavi* does exactly that. Nonetheless, whether new female-composed music is really necessary here seems questionable; Maddalena Casulana (c.1540–c.1590) and Raffaella Aleotti (c.1570–after 1620) would have surely been more appropriate candidates for inclusion. The *prime donne* of this recording, Jolle Greenleaf (soprano and artistic director), Molly Quinn (soprano) and Virginia Warnken-Kelsey (mezzo-soprano), present themselves as the modern counterparts of the Ferrarese *concerto delle dame*; they join together for the performance of one of the most piquant numbers in the album, the *Passacalli della vita*, an anonymous canzonetta from the Oratorian publication *Canzonette Spirituali, e Morali* (Milan: Rolla, 1657). This moralistic piece positively bursts with energy—spine-shiveringly good, our three ladies sing an ominous warning with gusto, abandon, rich-toned yearning. The refrain here is 'Bisogna morire'—we all must die. And indeed, whether we eventually find ourselves struck down by Cupid or by Death ... so we must.

Websites

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Avie www.avierecords.com

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Vocal polyphony from and around Lassus

This selection of CDs brings together secular and sacred vocal polyphony from the 16th century, both *a cappella* and accompanied. The discs are reviewed in chronological order, starting with motets associated with a Ferrarese convent and ending with music found in the library of the Latin School in Freiberg, Saxony. The main body of this newly released repertory consists of sacred and secular music by the pan-European composer Orlande de Lassus, who worked as a composer in Italy, the Low Countries and the German Lands. Lassus is also a historical connecting figure between Italian convent music and Saxon music of Freiberg Cathedral.

We begin with the earliest repertory in this bouquet of motet recordings, a collection of anonymous motets from Italy performed by the ensembles *Musica Secreta* and *Celestial Sirens*, directed by Laurie Stras and Deborah Roberts. In her vivid liner notes to *Lucrezia Borgia's daughter* (Obsidian CD717, issued 2017, 72'), Laurie Stras gives insight into the life and musical production of Borgia's daughter Leonora d'Este (1515–75) who was a Clarissan nun in the convent of Corpus Domini in Ferrara. Stras connects Leonora d'Este and her convent with the 1543 Scotto print of anonymous motets *Musica quinque vocum motteta materna lingua vocata*—the motets that feature on this recording—and even suggests Leonora to be the unidentified composer of the motets. The pieces in *Musica ... materna lingua vocata* are among the most progressive motets of the 1540s and are technically refined: they are written for *voci pari*—a small (in this case, female) voice range of only two octaves—and their initial melodies are often drawn from chant. Most of the motets themselves are freely imitative and not based on a *cantus firmus* or canon. This makes a delightful repertory for the ensembles that recorded the *Musica ... materna lingua vocata*, whose members range from teenagers to women in their sixties—reminiscent of nuns in a convent. The motets emphasize the technical ability of the ensembles' singers. Here, voices blend and complement each other, yet every single voice remains audible as an individual. Some pieces include the organ and bass viol as accompanying instruments in a lower register. This leads to a varied listening experience. The diverse pieces—ranging from Matins settings to responsories, hymns to Vespers settings—illustrate the music of the liturgical