

Bradley Lehman

Death and the *Mayerin*: Germanic harpsichord music

As Wagner pointed out, all music proceeds in *adagio* character at some level. It follows that a contrasting *vivace* is a part of all music too. Musicianship is the ability to balance these characters and motion, gauging the flow from moment to moment. The listener's attention in a good performance is kept moving between foreground, background and middleground, sensing temporal dimension the way an eye is engaged by a painting. Musical notation can scarcely suggest this appropriate balancing of structure and detail. The performers must tease it out and project it, often with more than one character simultaneously. That is a particularly challenging interpretive task with all the composers under review here—Froberger, Buxtehude, and the Bachs—as they all excelled at drawing various bits of the French, Italian and German arts into their own synthesized styles.

The new Froberger discs from Sergio Vartolo, **Froberger: Toccatas and partitas** (Naxos 8.557472–73, *rec* 2003), and Assi Karttunen, **Memento mori Froberger** (Alba Records 196, *rec* 2003), include the affable *Mayerin* variations FbWV606, and three of his four celebrated 'death' pieces: the meditation on Froberger's own future death (with the whole suite in D, FbWV620), the lament for Roman king Ferdinand III (FbWV633), and the Blancrocher tombeau (FbWV632); the fourth piece, for Ferdinand IV (FbWV612 with its suite in C) is on Vartolo's set. All four of these are by far the most-recorded music by Froberger. I have more than a dozen recordings of each, starting with Thurston Dart's 1961 set (L'Oiseau-Lyre 60038). The playing here by Karttunen and Vartolo is fine and worth hearing, to be sure; but why must we have these same pieces yet again, as cornerstones of Froberger recitals? Other parts of the Froberger repertory—widely available in print for at least 100 years—remain largely unexplored on disc, except in the comprehensive sets by Egarr and van Asperen (in progress, including newly discovered music). Especially neglected is Froberger's music in keys of three and four sharps.

Both these new recordings of Froberger's bifurcated-personality music focus especially on his musical views of death. Did Froberger have other personal or musical temperaments, in addition to melancholy? How much range is appropriate within a single performance? How

broadly can his notation 'avec discretion' be extended? With *discretion* is there indulgence of emotion, austerity, or a blending of both levels of involvement for simultaneous dimension?

As the late Howard Schott suggested in the 1990 Montbéliard Froberger colloquium (published as 'Parameters of interpretation in the music of Froberger' in *J. J. Froberger: musician européen*, 1998), the *discretion* in words and notes is an attempt to write out the unique and improvisatory rhythmic features of a style, realizing that it can never be captured fully. Vartolo's thorough booklet notes for Naxos draw out similar points about the complex phrasing and textures. Froberger himself, aware that taste and freedom cannot be taught adequately without direct demonstration, wanted to have his manuscripts destroyed after his death. Fortunately for us, they have not been, and some are still being discovered. (See also Timothy Roberts's review, 'Froberger's secret art', *EM*, xxxiii/2 (May 2005), pp.340–43.)

For a listener new to this composer's work, I would have to choose Enrico Baiano (1997, Symphonia 96152) and David Cates (1997, Wildboar 9701), each for their range of expression. But for balance next to those two intense programmes, as a companion disc for something more relaxing overall, I might well choose the Karttunen. She plays on a German-style double by van Schevikhoven (1997), with an unspecified tuning near Vallotti's. Her performances here are supple, genteel, and moderate: direct and clear with the expression, while also letting it feel like graceful dance. The easy flow reminds me of Ludger Rémy's approach in his Strasbourg Manuscript set of Froberger (2000, CPO 999750): a delivery that illuminates the music without drawing attention to itself.

Karttunen's concerns are equally clear in her playing and her programme notes: '[Froberger's] pieces allow us to share in experiencing his musical world, its playfulness, pain and pleasure, its logicity and surrealist modulations, and the wondrous moments when the music shakes off the constraints of all earthly matter. His compositions carry echoes, as it were, of the metaphysics of music. They are a unique blend of Italian, French and even German traits. The element that makes his music so special is, however, its expressive force.' But only Baiano dares to confront that expressive force more directly, facing its risks. His improvisatory way with the Blancrocher tombeau is both noble and terrifying, challenging existence itself, next to the wistful smile in Karttunen's performance.

In Sergio Vartolo's playing I feel that more *vivace* and impulsive drive would be welcome as part of the picture. His performances capture a despairing melancholy and explore it with intensely slow tempos, always firmly controlled. Compared to Siegbert Rampe's already extraordinary length of 11'03" in the lament for Ferdinand III (1994, Virgin 45259), Vartolo draws it out to 12'44". (Thurston Dart on clavichord, without repeats, dispatched the emperor in only 3'08"!) This protracted approach can make Froberger seem one-dimensional—perhaps diminishing the colourful adventurousness of this first touring virtuoso of Europe. My attention is captured more firmly by the Froberger styles of Baiano, Cates, Verlet, Parmentier, van Asperen and others, where even in the most suspended moments there is more spark of variety, more brinksmanship.

In the first suite/partita on Vartolo's disc 1, tracks 2 and 4, the French harpsichord's 4' stop is intrusively out of tune in several notes of the treble—surely these impurely tuned octaves could have been corrected between session takes, especially if the performances induce us to notice every individual note, as Vartolo's do. The Italian harpsichord (for the six assorted toccatas in this set) is strictly in mean-tone and holds well. The French double is tuned near Werckmeister III, a temperament not designed for harpsichords.

Glen Wilson's new recording **Buxtehude, Harpsichord works** (Naxos 8.557413, *rec* 2004) is bright and capricious. His playing shows mastery of the art of direct persuasion, not merely a text-critical agnosticism: decisions are tipped in favour of musical *joie de vivre*. I have similar praise for his 2002 Breitkopf performance edition and recordings of Louis Couperin's preludes. His Buxtehude is inspiring: it induces me to play more of this music myself, and to go to listen again to Bill Evans. In the G major toccata BUXWV165 Wilson plays with forward-moving verve, and builds up terrific momentum through the fugal section. He relishes the harmonically daring moments where Buxtehude turns to more extreme sharps. I still prefer Edward Parmentier's even more freewheeling performance (1996, Wildboar 9606) with its greater variety of articulations and 'overheld' notes. Both these players have pruned the signed ornamentation that appears thickly in some sources.

La Capricciosa, BUXWV250, and the G minor Praeludium, BUXWV163, are the most recorded pieces in Wilson's set, with strong competition from Meyerson, Alessandrini, Mortensen *et al.* Wilson's *Capricciosa* is characterized by drive and sparkle, plus a judicious

omission of some repeats in the interest of dramatic flow. His booklet notes draw connections with the *Mayerin* variation sets by both Froberger and Reincken and with Bach's Goldberg Variations. Hassler's *Einmal ging ich spazieren* could also have been mentioned in that regard, as another German model. That and the delightful Reincken are under-recorded.

The chorale partita on *Auf meinen lieben Gott*, BUXWV179, starts with a daringly slow Allemande, picking up in its *double*. The less familiar pieces here, at least for me, are the Praeludium, BUXWV162, Air and Variations, BUXWV249, Suite, BUXWV241, and Canzonetta, BUXWV171. All these show the streams of 17th-century traditions flowing through this imaginative composer. Buxtehude's well-known influence on young Bach's stream must of course be mentioned. Wilson notes: 'Harpsichordists generally neglect him. This is a great injustice. Dietrich Buxtehude was one of the greatest of a number of giants upon whose shoulders Bach perched.'

Gerald Hambitzer's disc **Bach & Silbermann** (Christophorus 77274, *rec* 2000) presents J. S. Bach's A minor suite, BWV818a, *Aria variata*, BWV989, and the C minor Fantasia, BWV906 along with its fragmentary fugue. The programme also includes Wilhelm Friedemann's E minor Fantasia, F21, and G major sonata, F7, and Carl Philipp Emanuel's G major sonata, H246, and C major Allegretto with six variations, H65. The instrument is a 1998 copy by Martin-Christian Schmidt, Rostock, of a harpsichord credited to Gottfried Silbermann. The sound is warmly inviting, which is a main point of this project and its booklet notes: to explore Silbermann's non-organ keyboards in the context of the Bachs.

Hambitzer's performances are polished and dramatic, with flair. His fast tempos remain flexible, having the music buoyed from within rather than driven. For the C. P. E. and W. F. Bach pieces I have a comparative recording only of Emanuel's G major sonata: Antalffy (1991, CPO 999100) on an equally-tempered Wittmayer of brittle tone. Hambitzer is both crisper and more lyrical with this music, with a heroic *discretion* that would please Froberger: a sensitive rubato and elegant attention to detail is everywhere. Next to the bravura elsewhere in this programme, Hambitzer sounds oddly cautious in the Fantasia BWV906. His brio returns for the rarely played fugue torso, a piece whose chromatic weirdness is matched only by the second Allemande of the BWV819a suite, the *Musical offering's* two ricercars, and the F minor Sinfonia, BWV795—all tellingly in three or four flats. Hambitzer follows Johannes Schreyer's suggestion to

complete the fugue with bars 1–35 *da capo*, rather than composing additional material. Hambitzer's temperament—sounding like a slightly modified Vallotti—has served well through the recital (save for a few isolated moments in C. P. E.), until BWV906, where the concentration of deep flats is too much for it. But this is only a small blemish in an otherwise excellent programme.

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Geoffrey Baker

18th-century Peru

If all modern performance of early music may be regarded as an 'invention of tradition', this is particularly true of **Son de los Diablos: tonadas afro-hispanas del Perú** (Alpha 507, *rec* 2003), recorded by Diana Baroni and Sapukái. Popular songs collected in the late 18th century by Don Balthasar Jaime Martínez de Compañón, Bishop of Trujillo (on Peru's northern coast), are here refracted through the lens of modern-day Afro-Peruvian music, itself a tradition self-consciously reinvented by Peruvian musicians and intellectuals in the 1950s. It is perhaps precisely because all Afro-Peruvian music has been reconstructed that the musicians on this recording are able to move so seamlessly and convincingly between Compañón's *tonadas* and the modern songs like *No, Valentín* (popularized by Susana Baca) with which they are interspersed on this recording.

In this respect this disc is both hard to categorize, reflecting and connecting past and present practices, and unusual, in that the older tradition is actually better documented—thanks to the Enlightenment zeal of the Peruvian bishop—than the more recent, which had died out long before its mid-20th-century revival. Approaching it as an 'early music' recording, I was somewhat unconvinced by the opening: it has become a cliché to begin programmes with Bocanegra's *Hanacpachap*, and it is not clear that this Andean hymn dating from 1631 has a place in a recording of late 18th-century (and later) coastal popular music. Such a place is sought by erroneously describing the work as a 'traditional Indian melody', when it was probably composed by the Franciscan friar who published it, and certainly has much more in common with Spanish villancicos than Andean songs. But the first bars of the following *Tonada El Congo* swept away my doubts. This simple song,

a mere skeleton on the pages of Compañón's collection, springs to life in the hands of Sapukái, Diana Baroni's sensual voice soaring over the plucked strings and percussion, the interplay between solo and chorus bringing out the African as well as the Hispanic features of the music. The disc never flags from this moment on, unfolding in the diversity of styles and colours so evident in the drawings and song titles of the Peruvian source, yet with the same coherence in overall design. By the late 18th century, after two and a half centuries of cultural mixing, hybrid popular cultures had emerged in Peru, and these are reflected in the dances that Compañón illustrates; similarly, in this recording, Spanish musical influences contrast, overlap and combine with African and indigenous, coastal with Andean. Hispanic harmonic structures, provided by harp and guitar, are fleshed out with the African-derived rhythms of *cajón* and *batá*, and highland influences are pronounced in the pentatonic melodies and Andean instrumentation (panpipes, quena, charango) of the *cachua*, *yaravi* and the *Tonada El Diamante*.

Son de los Diablos sounds like the missing link between Latin American Baroque, Los Kjarkas and Susana Baca. This infectious recording should be heard by anyone with an interest in Latin American music, and should win many new converts: could it be colonial Peru's answer to the Buena Vista Social Club?

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Peter Branscombe

Recent recordings from the Classical period

Few if any periods of music history throw up a comparable quantity, and quality, of recordings to those that continue to proliferate from the second half of the 18th century and first decades of the 19th. It's not only the giants—Haydn, Mozart, and the young Beethoven—who are the object of this near profligacy; innumerable *Kleinmeister* whose very names were a few years back familiar only to the specialist are now quite generously represented on CD, and even on DVD. Long may this pattern continue. A warm welcome, meanwhile, to this interesting and rewarding batch of recent issues.

Over the years there has been no lack of outstanding accounts of **Mozart: Le nozze di Figaro** (Harmonia