

Malgoire used the kind of procedure which Vivaldi himself used often enough (including probably in the 1714 *Orlando*), borrowing arias from the composer's other operas, linked by new recitatives to create what is effectively a *pasticcio*. A different approach again is taken by Alessandro Ciccolini in his reconstruction for the recent recording of **Antonio Vivaldi: *Catone in Utica*** (naïve OP30545, rec 2012, 160') with Il Complesso Barocco directed by Alan Curtis. Instead of borrowing arias from other operas, Ciccolini has followed another of Vivaldi's own procedures by composing new ones based mostly on musical materials from the composer's instrumental compositions. While both of these approaches to reconstruction may seem invasive (after all, don't we all just want to hear 'real' Vivaldi?), to paraphrase Pierpaolo Polzonetti, constructing a complete and living drama by either method is arguably a more authentically 18th-century way of producing an opera than is performing an orphaned *Urtext* fragment.

Particularly effective in Ciccolini's version is his setting of Cesare's pleading 'Apri le luci e mira'. The newly composed recitatives are also convincingly Vivaldian and convey the drama without becoming either formulaic or overripe. On the other hand, I am less convinced by Ciccolini's decision to compose all of the cadenzas and ornamented *da capos* himself. As Pierfrancesco Tosi made clear in 1723, the creative input of singers was an expected part of the performative process and their variety of taste and expression made a decisive contribution to the effect of the performance. With a cast of this experience and expertise, taking away that creative input, in favour of imposing a single taste in a way that Vivaldi himself did not see the need to do, seems like holding onto the composer's prerogative a little too tightly.

Amongst an outstanding cast, Roberta Mameli is again in scintillating form in the castrato role of Cesare. Her finely controlled, agile delivery projects just the right hard edge to make Vivaldi's high soprano Caesar believable. As Emilia, Ann Hallenberg also performs astonishing pyrotechnics over a two-and-a-half-octave range in 'Come invano il mare irato' and 'Nella foresta' without ever losing a sense of expressing the drama, and Topi Lehtipuu carries off the title-role with aplomb. One small disappointment is that in my copy, the otherwise handsomely produced liner notes were missing their first 24 pages, including the cast and track lists, all of the French version of the notes and the first two pages of the English version; however as a whole, this recording, like the other new additions to the Vivaldi Edition set, is a splendid achievement.

## Websites

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### Two dozen Bach concertos

Johann Sebastian Bach left us many concertos for various instruments, along with fewer orchestral pieces without soloists. Some of the music was arranged from now-lost originals for other instruments. Following Bach's example, there has been a long history of making further Bach concerto arrangements and reconstructions from precious scraps and clues, renewing the music for different instrumentation. In this review, we examine some of the newest projects along those lines, all recorded on period instruments or reproductions.

Aapo Häkkinen and the Helsinki Baroque Orchestra have produced two outstanding discs of six of the Bach harpsichord concertos BWV1052–7 on **Concerti à Cembalo Concertato: Harpsichord concertos vol.1** (Aeolus AE-10057, rec 2012, 65') and **Concerti à Cembalo Concertato: Harpsichord concertos vol.2** (Aeolus AE-10067, rec 2013, 62'). The orchestra plays with single strings, a nearly inaudible organ continuo, and two recorders (in BWV1057, Bach's harpsichord arrangement of the fourth Brandenburg Concerto). A big draw is Häkkinen's harpsichord: a very large one with two soundboards, built in 1970 by Rutkowski and Robinette for Igor Kipnis, who named it 'Big Red'. It sounds magnificent here, with its strong bass giving a driving impulse to the whole ensemble. One uncommon thing about Häkkinen's delivery is his tendency to play many single-note melodic ornaments in the right hand before the beat, rather than starting on the beat; he makes it sound convincing, and arguably more French.

A rarity here is that the F minor concerto, BWV1056, is transposed to G minor. Häkkinen explains in his thorough documentation that the G minor version is Bach's later one, but that the *Neue Bach-Ausgabe* has given it a

questionable transposition back into F minor. It sounds less lugubrious than usual here, and easier on the string players. After three concertos on each disc, Häkkinen fills the remaining space with harpsichord solos. Volume 1 includes the Italian Concerto, BWV971, and Volume 2 has the C minor Fantasia, BWV906, plus a G major solo harpsichord concerto by Wilhelm Friedemann Bach. These serve as further vehicles for Big Red's thunderous 16' stop. The performances are all suitably dramatic and flexible. May we hope for a third volume from this terrific team? It could include the G minor concerto BWV1058 (the harpsichord version of the A minor violin concerto), a reconstruction of the D minor concerto fragment BWV1059, the Triple Concerto BWV1044, the grand Prelude and Fugue in A minor (BWV894) on which it was based, and possibly Brandenburg Concerto 5, or more by Friedemann.

BWV1058 is available from Matthew Halls and the Retrospect Ensemble on **Harpichord concertos** (Linn Records CKD410, *rec* 2011, 64'). The disc also includes BWV1052, 1055 and 1057. As with the Helsinki ensemble, there are only single strings here. The harpsichord is a Ruckers/Hensch copy by Ian Tucker. The performances have brilliance, alertness and drive, plus a fine balance of dynamics. Tempos are on the fast side, flowing easily with straightforward elegance. Halls occasionally adds further ornamentation into the melodic line. All of that is to say: this is reliable Apollonian musicianship, strongly proficient, and a middle-of-the-road interpretation with no surprises to it. Halls and company breeze through this music as if there were no technical or interpretative challenges. I appreciate and enjoy this CD, but it has not captivated my attention on repeated listening as firmly as some competing versions have. It delivers unruffled perfection where I would prefer more brinkmanship.

Next, we have **Double & triple concertos** (Channel Classics CCS SA34113, *rec* 2012, 65'), played by Rachel Podger and Brecon Baroque. This is another one-to-a-part ensemble. Podger includes the D minor concerto for two violins (BWV1043, with Bojan Čičić), the A minor Triple Concerto for harpsichord, flute and violin (BWV1044), and two transcriptions from Bach's concertos for multiple harpsichords: BWV1060R is in its C minor version for violin and oboe, and BWV1064R is a D major reconstruction for three violins, from the C major concerto for three harpsichords. It is useful to draw some comparisons with Podger's 1996 recording, where she played the second part to leader Andrew Manze. In the early recording, with a bigger orchestra, Podger and Manze improvised extensive divisions into the melodies and passagework; she and Čičić are much less effusive here, but they still

make it sound spontaneous in the places where they do add some new bits. The *Largo ma non tanto* is considerably faster in the new version, flowing like a courtly dance. BWV1060 is also on the Manze/Podger disc, but in a two-violin version in D minor. Once again, Podger and oboist Alexandra Bellamy are more straightforward in the new one. In BWV1044, harpsichordist Marcin Świątkiewicz is spectacular in the heroic outer movements, and the *galant* middle movement has more for flautist Katy Bircher to do. This performance strikes me as ideal, in all matters of phrasing, tempo, intonation, and has enough nuance to keep it consistently interesting. The gentle finesse of various spots in the slow movement gave me goosebumps several times, just because all was so beautiful. In the reconstructed three-violin concerto BWV1064R, I compared the Brecon performance with three older ones led by Christopher Hogwood (in a different arrangement), Thomas Hengelbrock and Elizabeth Wallfisch. Podger's team of violinists (Podger, Johannes Pramsohler and Čičić) deliver a remarkably pure and understated sound, often sounding almost like treble viols. They often recede casually into the rest of the texture, letting other more interesting parts come out, instead of trying to 'project' their parts like star soloists. This is so different from the percussive and continuous clarity of the three-harpichord version, and such a contrast with those other three-violin recordings, it sounds like a separate and slower-moving piece. I find it compelling. This great recording inspired me to buy Podger's companion CD of solo concertos, as well.

BWV1064R and 1043 are also found on the next disc, **Violin concertos, BWV1041–1043** (Harmonia Mundi HMC902145, *rec* 2012, 62') by the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra, who also include the solo violin concertos BWV1041–2. The soloists in the three-violin concerto are co-directors Petra Müllejans and Gottfried von der Goltz, plus Anne Katharina Schreiber. The orchestra has two to four players per part, and the soloists sound as if they are out front, to stand out more conventionally like a *concertino* versus *ripieno*. The whole orchestra produces more localized nuances than Podger's, with greater variation of articulation and volume within each phrase. Dynamics are rising or falling all the time, continually renewing interest, reminiscent of some older German and Dutch groups since the 1970s. So it goes, also, with the two-violin BWV1043, the A minor BWV1041 (Müllejans) and E major BWV1042 (von der Goltz). In these three concertos, the two soloists ornament freely, although never as extensively as Manze did. The music sounds energetic and virtuosic, in a showy way. The orchestra bends the tempo alertly with the soloists, speeding up or slowing down subtly to bring out

different sections of the compositions. I especially like the way this group and their leaders land on the first note of a bar, finishing a phrase, let it settle as 'old', and then start the fresh phrase after a minuscule pause to set it apart. It makes the music seem to be evolving organically, and it probably arose from careful analysis and extensive marking of the parts before rehearsal. After they have established that precedent of style in the first movement, the slow movement of the double concerto BWV1043 is a surprise: much slower than Podger's or Manze's, steadier than I expected, understated, and delivered in a way that makes it seem timeless. Between the Freiburg group, Podger, Manze (1996), and the 1981 recording by Kuijken and La Petite Bande, I now have four favourite 'desert-island' recordings of the Bach violin concertos on period instruments.

The Freiburg Baroque Orchestra's set of **Brandenburg Concertos** (Harmonia Mundi HMC902176.77, issued 2014, 90') is very fine, for the most part. No one is credited as director. They play one-per-part in concertos 3, 5 and 6, and with bigger *ripieno* in the other three. Their musicianship is, again, reliably outstanding. Concertos 3 and 6 have vigorous string-playing, and plenty of nuance within basically steady tempos. Concerto 2 gets one of the best performances I have ever heard, with impeccable balance and grace. Concertos 1 and 5 are well phrased, but seem overall more ordinary. A disappointing surprise happens in concerto 4: apparently, someone has decided that Bach's marking of 'Flauti d'echo' for the two recorders is a literal instruction to place them very far off-microphone, along with the violin soloist, for the slow movement. The resulting sound is indistinct and poorly balanced. These three players magically get back to their positions for the third movement, which is suitably lively and impressive. The set's two discs contain only 45 minutes of music each; I wish that the ensemble had provided another more conventional performance of the 'echo' movement as an appendix, or included more concertos.

The next set of these works is **Brandenburg Concertos** (ABC Classics 476 1923, issued 2011, 122') by the Orchestra of the Antipodes. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation recorded this as far back as 2003, in Sydney, but did not issue it until 2011. The ensemble credits three directors, each taking two concertos: Antony Walker (1 and 2), Anna McDonald (3 and 4) and Erin Helyard (5 and 6). The album includes 30' of music beyond the Brandenburg Concertos: familiar instrumental movements from eight of Bach's cantatas. Neal Peres Da Costa directs six of those, and Walker the other two. All four directors bring a consistent approach: lively tempos and straightforward interpretation, with almost nothing calling attention to itself as eccentric. I sense what seems to be a

hearty joy in making music. Phrases rise and fall naturally, the dynamic variation arising from the shapes of the lines. For sheer enjoyment and nothing self-consciously academic, this set joins my two older favourites on period instruments, by Jordi Savall and Gustav Leonhardt. I would quarrel with only one small thing: the way Helyard handles the harpsichord cadenza in concerto 5. He pulls the figuration into multiple contrasting tempos, including several full stops and some sudden gear changes, going far beyond what I would consider normal nuanced playing. It is exciting, but it also discards the momentum that was built up by the rest of the movement, which is very fast. Pierre Hantaï (on the Savall set) and Leonhardt manage to make this cadenza expressive while staying very nearly in tempo throughout, right on through Bach's fastest notes in bar 202. Granted, those notes are scarcely possible to play if one would sustain Helyard's opening tempo for the movement; but, shouldn't the presence of those notes tell us that the whole thing ought to have been slower? Again, though, this Antipodes set as a whole is marvellous, and one that I have been recommending to friends since receiving it. A special treat here, among the fillers, is hearing such a fine performance of the *sinfonia* from Cantata 174: Bach's reorchestration of the first movement of Brandenburg Concerto 3, adding hunting horns and oboes.

Helyard's interpretation in Concerto 5's first movement has evolved to be yet more disjointed and extreme within the 2012 set of **Brandenburg Concertos** (Analekta AN2 9996-7, rec 2011, 93') by Ensemble Caprice, directed by recorder player Matthias Maute. The tempo is faster still, bringing in the entire movement under 9', despite the full stops. Similarly, the ensemble launches the finale of Concerto 4 too fast for their violin soloist, who must slow everyone down drastically for the section from bar 87 to 120. In almost every movement throughout the concertos, they beat the lightning-fast Reinhard Goebel Archiv set to the finish line. It is not a headlong rush, however. Maute and team have filled up the music with startling dynamic nuances, tempo shifts and attention-grabbing articulation choices, as if they were not content with merely playing very well what Bach wrote. The oboists add *flattements* to Concerto 1, and someone has written out divisions and reorchestrations for the whole ensemble in the repetitions of that concerto's *Menuetto*. Many movements end brusquely, with a surprising staccato downbeat. All of this capricious delivery by Ensemble Caprice is imaginative, fluent and certainly well rehearsed. Making things yet more unusual, Maute has arranged for his Baroque ensemble some movements from Dmitri Shostakovich's piano preludes and fugues, op.87, and inserted them before each concerto as an *apéritif*. Then, there is one

more Shostakovich *digestif* at the end. It makes me feel prudish to prefer something plainer and more subtle than this wild adventure, but I had to drink cold water, and go listen to recordings by Collegium Aureum, Benjamin Britten and Otto Klemperer as antidotes. Listeners seeking extreme thrills in Bach interpretation might fancy this stimulating set more than I do.

The next one is odder still. From producer Stefan Winter comes **The Brandenburg Concertos: The celebration** (Winter & Winter 910 194-2, *rec* 2012, 103'), performed by the Swiss ensemble Die Freitagsakademie. Winter calls this an 'AudioFilm, cinema for closed eyes'. It re-creates a fictitious performance for midsummer, Saturday 21 June 1721, in Cöthen. The performance is adept and seems enthusiastic, but the muddled audio production ruins this venture. We hear first a carriage ride, with neighing horses. We arrive at the hall, where the music has already started without us, and we have missed the beginning of the first concerto. As the performance proceeds through all six concertos, the sound is opaque, and we hear mixed over the music some intrusive effects of a gong, church bells, fireworks, crowd noise, a crackling bonfire and distant cheering. The booklet notes are nothing but a handful of fictitious and mostly trivial diary entries from Bach's life, 1717–23, written by Winter. Perhaps Winter could have produced a serious clean version to sell as the CD set, and made his pretentious 'AudioFilm' a free download for the curious? As it stands, we are left with a party-record gimmick that does not even include all of the music. My children thought the sound effects were silly, too. I would enjoy hearing this conductorless ensemble again, under more musical circumstances.

Now, we come to something considerably more attractive, with flawless sound and elegant performances. The late oboist and musicologist Bruce Haynes (1942–2011) mined Bach's cantatas and several other pieces to cobble together **Nouveaux «Brandebourgeois»** (Atma ACD2 2565, *rec* 2011, 63'). Haynes left it unfinished, next to another bigger project, and never got to hear these arrangements in performance. Susie Napper, his wife, did some of the selection and most of the (uncredited) orchestration. Napper, Eric Milnes and the Montreal Baroque Festival orchestra recorded these in June 2011, a month after Haynes's death, and it is issued here as a single CD. In his brief notes drafted for the booklet, Haynes remarked that this is a 'tongue-in-cheek' arrangement for fun, rather than any serious reconstruction, and that 'the most valid criterion is whether the pieces give pleasure to the ear when played on the instruments of Bach's time'. The ensemble has no singers, and only one each of trumpet, oboe, flute, horn and bassoon, plus strings, harpsichord,

timpani and four recorders. The selection of material, and general effect of the instrumentation, is obviously patterned on the six authentic Brandenburg Concertos: no.7 features oboe, trumpet and horn (plus timpani); no.8 has a mixed quartet of four wind soloists; no.9 is all strings and continuo; no.10 has all the recorders; no.11 is for harpsichord and a wind instrument (oboe); no.12 is all low strings. Half of the movements are transposed from different original keys, and this compelled a bit of tasteful rewriting when the parts went too low or too high. Concerto no.9 has the most extreme changes of orchestration, where nine wind parts and chorus of the original are all reduced to zero, and parts redistributed to strings. Concertos nos.10–12 are all in the same key, D minor, and no.12's transposition from E minor was a last-minute performance decision that escaped the booklet's editor. Overall, most of the album works very well, although a few spots seem thin where not all the original parts were covered. I have confirmed privately with Susie Napper that she and Haynes would have continued to refine many details further, had he lived to supervise the rehearsals and production. But what is here is delightful. The ensemble of Haynes's friends, students, wife and colleagues is expert, and it sounds as if they thoroughly enjoyed making all this superb music. The point is to rescue all these relatively obscure pieces by Bach, and give them a brilliant outing, for fun. The album is a fine posthumous tribute to Haynes.

In a similar concept, violinist Jürgen Groß and the Elbipolis Baroque Orchestra of Hamburg have produced **Undercover Bach: Orchestral suites and concertos** (Challenge Classics CC72625, *rec* 2013, 71'), creating an album of new suites and concertos, mostly by orchestrating keyboard pieces. Two of the pieces are from the 'doubtful authenticity' section of the Bach catalogue. Two others, BWV820 and 822, are more firmly authenticated among Bach's harpsichord music, but not very often played; arguably, this may be because they are thematically not very distinctive, and because the movements are remarkably short-winded. BWV822 appears to be young Bach's keyboard reduction of someone else's composition. Amid all this relatively unfamiliar music, we get two war-horses, but both in odd arrangements. The first one is the E major violin partita, BWV1006, recast as sort of a harpsichord concerto in D, stemming from Bach's organ arrangement of the opening movement in Cantata 29. In the rest of this partita, the arranger appears to have disregarded Bach's own version for lute or solo harpsichord, BWV1006a, and invented his own questionable harmonies at various spots. It is a grab bag, as the harpsichord does not play solo very much here after the first movement, and in the parts where



it does, it is not tuned well to handle the prominent A#s and D#s in the piece. All of the arrangements are by Jörg Jacobi, except for BWV1067a (the B minor orchestral suite), where Groß follows Werner Breig's Breitkopf edition, but adds unexplained improvised percussion to many of the movements. Furthermore, in the Badinerie of that suite, the percussion causes the accentuation of the music to go contrary to the metre. Based on research by Joshua Rifkin (uncredited here), Breig and others, BWV1067a is transposed from B minor to A minor, the flute part is given to violin, and the Double of the Polonaise is missing, without comment here (although Breig explains it in his edition). For a more mainstream rendition of 1067a, including all the movements and without percussion, I like Jeanne Lamon's 2011 recording with Tafelmusik. Elbipolis play cleanly enough, but some of Groß's interpretative choices and vehement emphases make the music sound muscular where I would rather hear more grace.

Finally, we come to a disc that is a paragon of excellence, from veteran musicians. Sigiswald Kuijken and La Petite Bande have produced a wondrous remake of the four orchestral suites, BWV1066–9, on **The Orchestral Suites** (Accent ACC24279, *rec* 2012, 79'). In Kuijken's 1982 recording, the strings were three or four to a part, for a big-section sound. In the new one, the strings are down to one or two players per part, as Kuijken has changed his mind: 'There is no longer any justification—neither historical nor musical—for such a large number of players. The advantage of the present recording with a smaller ensemble especially lies in the transparency of the texture.' Furthermore, he now has natural-trumpet players (an ensemble led by Jean-François Madeuf, of the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis) who play without tuning/vent holes, which were developed in the 1960s by Otto Steinkopf, Edward Tarr, Michael Laird and others. As in the earlier recording, Barthold Kuijken plays the *traverso* solo in the second suite. Throughout the suites, there is a gentle French-styled inequality in many of the rhythms, lending further grace and poise to the dance movements. The concluding movements of suites 2, 3 and 4 have remarkably slow tempos (rivalling Otto Klemperer's), which I find satisfying. Everything fits onto a single CD, as repeats are omitted from the opening movements. This is sublime music from a versatile composer.

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## Exploring Bach's contemporaries: Fasch and Graupner

The music of Johann Friedrich Fasch (1688–1758) and Christoph Graupner (1683–1760) has continued to attract a great deal of attention in the studio, allowing for a broader, more balanced appraisal of their various achievements. Aside from their music, both composers have a special place in music history because of their applications in 1722 for the Leipzig Thomaskantorat, to which Bach was eventually appointed. Fasch was unsuccessful and resigned himself to occupying the post of Kapellmeister at Zerbst, where he remained for the rest of his life. Graupner was chosen for Leipzig after Georg Philipp Telemann's withdrawal, but his resignation was refused by his Darmstadt employer; so third choice for the position was J. S. Bach. Fasch studied in Leipzig (where he became a friend of Telemann) and was for a time one of Graupner's composition pupils. The orchestral music of both Fasch and Graupner displays progressive stylistic features, and each was occupied with the production of church cantatas as a major part of their respective employment.

Fasch came into early contact with the music of Antonio Vivaldi, adopting many aspects of the Italian concerto style. At Zerbst the pressure of work was substantial; in addition to a great deal of church music Fasch was required to produce music for all kinds of festive occasions and to undertake a host of time-consuming administrative tasks. But he was not in complete musical isolation, retaining close contacts and exchanging scores with Graupner in Darmstadt, with Telemann in Hamburg, and with Heinichen and Pisendel in Dresden. The six concertos presented by the Belgian group Il Gardellino on **Fasch: Concertos for various instruments** (Accent ACC 24252, *rec* 2011, 58') display a high level of technical accomplishment, albeit within rather earnest, slightly