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Get your fresh Telemann here

Georg Philipp Telemann (1681–1767) wrote an enormous amount of music for instrumental and vocal ensembles. As shown in the detailed work-list of *New Grove's* article about him, not all of it is catalogued in the Telemann-Werkverzeichnis (TWV), or published. A vast amount of it is not yet recorded, either, despite the work of enterprising performers and record companies in the Telemann revival of the past 65 years. The 13 recent CDs presented here demonstrate the richness of this music.

Let us begin with a terrific disc that has almost all world premiere recordings: **Telemann: Sonaten, trios, concerti** (Oehms Classics OC897, *rec* 2012, 63') played by L'Accademia Giocosa. The ensemble is well named, as the performances sound joyful. The membership has an association with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, along with some freelance players. No one is credited as director. There are four to ten players, playing one-to-a-part in every piece. There are four violinists, but only two of them (at most) play in any piece. There are two pieces for strings alone; two add a flute, and the other two are for a larger ensemble including two oboes and bassoon. The booklet notes do not say much beyond a brief biographical sketch. The instruments are in Baroque style, but there is no information about them. Nevertheless, the performances sparkle with the freshness of discovery and a strong range of *Affekt*; I have found that I wanted to keep replaying this one for sheer enjoyment of Telemann's creative spirit.

I also loved **Telemann: The grand concertos for mixed instruments vol.1** (CPO 777 859-2, *rec* 2013, 62') and **vol.2** (CPO 777 890-2, *issued* 2015, 59'), performed by La Stagione Frankfurt. Conductor Michael Schneider made some recordings of Telemann concertos and suites 20 years ago with Camerata Köln, on the DHM label. Beyond Schneider himself, that older ensemble had some of the same players who are here in Frankfurt: Karl Kaiser, Rainer Zipperling and Sabine Bauer. On the evidence of those old recordings and these new ones, Schneider's interpretation style now is simpler than it was 20 years ago, with fewer surprising changes to tempos or articulations. The concertos here are for various combinations of trumpets, recorders, flutes, oboes, violins, viola, bassoon, viola da gamba, cello and timpani with string orchestra.

Balances are perfect, and the music is so engaging, it makes me want to get this ensemble's eight other volumes dedicated to Telemann's wind concertos as well.

Another impressive one is by Ewald Demeyere and his Bach Concentus: **Telemann: Les Nations—Overtures & oboe concertos** (Challenge Classics CC72669, *rec* 2013, 62'). This hybrid disc has outstandingly present sound, even when played without SACD or surround equipment. The oboe concertos, both in C minor and catalogued within TWV51, are early pieces from before 1713. The first of these concertos (but played second here) opens with a crunching dissonance for the whole ensemble. The three orchestral suites are from TWV55: two familiar ('Ouvverture des Nations anciens et modernes' and 'Völker'), and one less so ('La Gaillarde'). The movements of the suites depict Germans, Swedes, Danes, Turks, Swiss, Muscovites, Portuguese, old women, and lame or running horses. I have heard these pieces played with more emphasis in some other recordings, bringing out the humorous oddities more than is done here, but I have no complaint about this forthright and dignified approach. The oboe concertos have a bit more sparkle to them, with flair from oboist Vinciane Baudhuin. As TWV55 includes more than 100 orchestral suites, the field is wide open for sequels to this album.

While Demeyere's ensemble plays with a moderate two or three players to a part, La Petite Bande and Sigiswald Kuijken play one-to-a-part in **Telemann: Concertos & suites** (Accent ACC24288, *rec* 2013, 80'). This disc has the well-known A minor suite (TWV55:a2) for recorder and strings, the D major suite (TWV55:D6) for viola da gamba, a concerto in A minor (TWV52:a1) for both recorder and viola da gamba, and a concerto in G (TWV43:G6) for recorder, oboe and violin. The programming is almost the same as in the 1992 'Les Plaisirs' album by Huggett/OAE (Harmonia Mundi 907093). Three of the four pieces are the same, but the differences in performance style are startling. Huggett used four players in each of the upper three parts, and had remarkably faster tempos most of the time. Kuijken gives us steady tempos with firmly accented phrasing, projecting a strong sense of dance. He plays the viola da gamba himself; the recorder player is Bart Coen, who ornaments and shapes phrases well. Oboist Baudhuin makes another fine appearance here, too. The concerto TWV52:a1 is also in La Stagione Frankfurt's volume 2 (see above); Kuijken's performance is slower and more nuanced.

We have three more albums for the combination of flute and viola da gamba. Telemann wrote six Quadri (quartets) published 1730 in Hamburg, well received and quickly pirated. In 1737–8 he visited Paris, there obtaining a royal privilege to get his exclusive rights back for 20 years. He used this first to publish six new quartets. He reissued the Hamburg set soon after that, and these two sets taken together are the twelve 'Paris Quartets'. The ensemble Les Ombres, whose core members trained in Basel, gives us four of them in **Telemann: Quatuors Parisiens** (Mirare MIR255, rec 2013, 56'). The programme has the sonatas nos.1 and 2 and concerto no.1 from the Hamburg set and Quatour no.6 in E minor from the Paris set, c.1738. There are five performers here for these quartets, with both cello and harpsichord in the continuo. The playing is brisk, well balanced, in tune and together. Nothing surprising or awkward comes along to create tension or conflict. The tempos are mostly strict, without much extra emphasis from phrase to phrase. The players give the E minor sonata a richer interpretative profile. The album ends quirkily: there is a one-minute piece for two hunting horns thrown in at the end, after 30 seconds of silence. Its provenance is explained in the booklet, but we are not informed who performed this, and it does not get its own track on the CD. I would have rather heard two more quartets. A classic recording of all twelve Paris Quartets by the Kuijken and Leonhardt is available as a complete package, or just the Hamburg six as a single disc included in the budget-priced 'Leonhardt Jubilee Edition'. I like that performance better, and there are at least a dozen other available recordings of Paris Quartet selections played by others. The plain rendition here by Les Ombres might not stand out enough against the competition.

On the same record label, La Reveuse makes a stronger impression with their **Telemann: Trios & Quatuors avec viole de gambe** (Mirare MIR267, rec 2013, 62'), playing two trios and three sonatas. The ensemble has six people, giving the continuo part to harpsichord, theorbo and a second viola da gamba. The G minor sonata no.2 from Hamburg is the same one that Les Ombres played, but it is more graceful here. The group allows an attractive flexibility and disorder within the beats, letting the music speak with plenty of freedom. It makes the compositions sound improvised by alertly listening colleagues. I especially like the contribution of the theorbist, Benjamin Perrot, and there is fine elaboration by everyone in the Adagio of the G minor 'Trio V' from 1718, TWV42:g1. The programme includes an encore of only the Chaconne extracted from the E minor quartet of 1738. It is considerably slower and more sombre than the Les Ombres performance of the same. I wish the whole piece were here, as there is plenty of room for it.

A group known as Bassorilievi gives us eight pieces in **Telemann: Trios & quartets with transverse flute and viola da gamba** (DHM 88875069922, rec 2014, 77'). There are seven players, with no violins or violas. The programme has the complete six sonatas by Telemann for flute, viola da gamba and continuo, plus two concertos that add bassoon for welcome variety. It claims to be the recording premiere of one of the sonatas, TWV42:F5. The continuo team includes theorbo, harpsichord, violoncello and violone, letting the ensemble contribute further variety by having some of these instruments occasionally silent for sections of the music. The performances do not call attention to themselves with eccentricities, but flow gracefully over a firm bass line, with good punctuation from the theorbist. The harpsichord often sounds distant. Despite the persuasive delivery here, this does not strike me as being among Telemann's most interesting music, but it is nice to have all those sonatas together in this well-made package, the ensemble's debut recording.

Telemann's production of vocal music was enormous, too, with 1,700 cantatas among his approximately 3,600 compositions. There are two new discs exploring some of these with recording premieres. The first is **Telemann: Festive cantatas** (Hänssler Classics CD98.047, rec 2014, 58') with Ulrich Stötzel directing the Collegium Vocale Siegen and the Hannoversche Hofkapelle. There are three cantatas of five movements each, all with trumpets and drums, with solos for soprano, male alto and bass. I hear about 20 to 30 singers in the chorus. All three compositions are from Telemann's 'Angel Year' cantata cycle of 1748–9, specifically for Easter Sunday, the feast of St Michael and Whitsunday. The Easter and Whitsunday cantatas both have opening choruses that return as finales. The St Michael's cantata ends with a chorus based on the chorale tune 'Herzlich lieb hab' ich dich, o Herr', and the text of this movement is unfortunately missing from the booklet. The essays have a few other misprints, as well. I like the enthusiastic-sounding performances with their vivid dynamic contrasts and aggressive articulation. Still, the distant miking sometimes makes it difficult to understand some of the choral diction. The only thing that is an interpretative disappointment is the way several of the grand choral movements end. Stötzel tapers the dynamics quietly and gently, despite the trumpets and drums. This undercuts the orchestration, the metre, and the liturgical function for these triumphant holidays, especially Easter.

The music seems more distinctive and memorable in the next album, **Telemann: Luther cantatas** (CPO 777 753-2, rec 2012, 71'), performed by the Bach Consort Leipzig and Sächsisches Barockorchester conducted by Gotthold Schwarz.

This is wonderful. The five cantatas here all come from different cantata cycles: four between 1710 and 1720, and one from 1742–3. With its *cantus firmus* treatment, the instrumental sinfonia of that cantata from the 1740s is kin to the slow movement of Haydn's 'Lamentation' symphony (no.26) of about 25 years later. The cantata I find most attractive is last on the disc, from 1714–15, and includes 'Ein feste Burg', plus a turbulent chorus 'Seid böse, ihr Völker' that sounds difficult to sing. That chorus includes the fast repeated tongue-twister 'und werde nichts draus'. The membership of the chorus is not given, but it sounds like two or three singers to a part. There are five vocal soloists, with both female and male altos. Schwarz sings the bass solos himself with some extra-emphatic downbeats. The playing and singing is beautiful everywhere, though stylistically cautious. Tempos are moderate in these straightforward interpretations, where the shaping of the phrases does not call extra attention to itself. I heard a few spots where the musicians rushed slightly as movements proceeded. The production is from the 2012 Magdeburg Telemann Festival Days: not a live recording, but based on a concert that took place on 16 March of that year.

Coincidentally, the next album was recorded (in part) that same day at the same March 2012 festival, edited together from live performances on the 11th, 16th and 17th. Michi Gaigg conducted L'Orfeo Barockorchester and singers in the three-act opera **Telemann: *Miriways*** (CPO 777 752-2, *rec* 2012, 147'), another recorded premiere. This is the first modern staged production, although the festival had presented a concert version 20 years earlier. The opera is about current events in the 1720s, based around *Miriways*, an Afghani prince who conquered Persia. The music is Italianate in style, but set in German. Telemann enlivened it with orientalisms and some castanets(!). The libretto is a soap-opera plot of suitors and intrigues, more than exploring political angles. There are a few prophetic lines by the ghost of a dead Shah. Baritone Markus Volpert portrayed both *Miriways* and the ghost. Prince Zemir, a dishonest and comic character sung by a mezzo-soprano, gets an 'unwürdige' aria that sounds very difficult, as there is no way to fit all the breaths into convincing places. The soprano aria 'mein widriges Geschicke' and 'Es erzitt're' for bass are further vocal highlights. A baritone aria, 'Wenn du kannst', has especially thrilling orchestral playing. The sound and performance are brilliant throughout the production. It is difficult to tell that this was recorded live, except for some slight stage noise in a few places. The audience is silent throughout, except for some murmuring reactions after the startling 'Feuer, Feuer' chorus in the third act, where the plot requires a staged house fire with people inside.

Finally, we have two programmes of solo violin music. The first is a two-disc set, **The great violins volume 1: Andrea Amati, 1570 · Telemann, 24 Fantasies** (Divine Art ATH23203, *rec* 2013, 127'), performed by Peter Sheppard Skaerved. The selling point here is the historic instrument: the original Amati violin from 1570, with a modern reproduction bow by Airenti in a slightly mismatched 17th-century style. A secondary attraction is that this is the only place to get the twelve unaccompanied flute fantasias in a recording on violin, even though Telemann's title-page recommends that approach. Skaerved is a good generalist, not a Baroque specialist, and he runs into a few technical problems handling this instrument and repertory: he has some trouble playing open 5ths and 4ths in tune, and does not always get the A string to speak cleanly. He makes an attractive sound, but his projection of the music's metre is not always clear. In his adaptation of the flute music, he judiciously adds a few notes for the G string to play, plus a few double stops. I wish he had gone further yet and used a more enterprising variety of bow strokes. I have been happier with Andrew Manze's recording of the twelve violin fantasias, and the flute pieces played by Jed Wentz, Barthold Kuijken and Marion Verbruggen (on recorder).

In the unaccompanied B minor fantasia TWV40:22, the next performer sounds more assured, imaginative and comfortable with his instrument and bow. Boris Begelman plays **Telemann: Violin sonatas** (DHM 88875061582, *rec* 2015, 64') with cellist Ludovico Minasi and harpsichordist Alexandra Koreneva. Collectively, this trio is known as *Arsenale Sonoro*. The continuo playing is brilliantly expressive, a master class in flexible and alert musicianship. In his range of intensity, Begelman reminds me of young Reinhard Goebel. The booklet tags four of the seven continuo sonatas here as world-premiere recordings. It is hard to find enough superlative words for the mercurial 'in-the-moment' musicianship here. This is the kind of album that makes it clear: other people do not improvise enough.

Websites

Accent www.accent-records.com

Challenge Classics www.challenge.nl

CPO www.jpc.de/jpcng/cpo/home

DHM www.sonymusicclassical.de

Divine Art www.divine-art.com

Hänssler Classics www.haenssler-classic.com

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