



fifths. Ariosti's 'accordatura' tuning and notation thus enabled players to perfect the music on the familiar violin, before graduating to its performance on the viola d'amore without having to learn new fingering patterns. As a result, Ariosti's style of performance can be recovered in some detail, including his idiosyncratic penchant for playing in the higher positions, which Georgi preserves in his own performances.

The difference in tone that results from this performance practice is audible in the last two 'Sonatas' on the disc, which contrast Ariosti's high-position fingerings with a more conventional style on the repeats. It is far less obvious, however, than the difference between the instruments Georgi performs on, which is a particularly welcome feature of the recording. Three of the *Lessons* are performed on a 1783 instrument with six playing strings and six sympathetic strings by the Neapolitan maker Thomas Eberle, which Georgi believes is the closest set-up to that used by Ariosti himself on the basis of surviving iconographic evidence (there is a portrait in the British Museum). Two more, however, showcase a Viennese instrument with the six metal playing strings and no sympathetic strings favoured in northern Europe in the early eighteenth century. Despite its probable distinction from Ariosti's favoured model, this instrument is chronologically closer to his solos (it is dated 1721) and is likely to be more similar to the instruments played by Roman's Swedish compatriots. While the difference in timbre caused by the absence of the sympathetic strings is significant, to my ear it is if anything the darker, more resonant tone of this instrument that sets it apart more from the later Eberle. For the two reconstructed 'Sonatas' Georgi reverts to a modern seven-string configuration on a 1772 Eberle with sympathetic strings and a much more rounded, projected timbre. The result is an altogether more flamboyant feel to these performances, enhanced by the substitution of the great bass viol instead of the viola da gamba. The corresponding loss of intimacy is perhaps regrettable, though the additional weight given to the bass line is well judged.

The performances are always polished and engaging, with a superb sense of line from all three players and an enjoyably playful attitude towards the many moments of dialogue between the viola d'amore and bass. On track 14 (the Corrente from *Lezione IV*) I felt that a slightly steadier tempo would have improved the intonation during the long passages of figuration in the first strain, but this was exceptional: in general Georgi is fluent and accurate, allowing him to indulge in quite complex divisions which are conceived with a genuine appreciation of the style and tone of the music, and executed with flair. The elaborations of the numerous *petites reprises* are particularly attractive. The varying of the continuo group, which alternates theorbo and archlute and leaves two tracks with plucked continuo alone, is a welcome source of variety, and the use of strummed guitar for the closing *Giga* of each work adds a pleasing rhythmic and timbral vibrancy to these movements, even if it does become somewhat predictable when listening to the set from beginning to end. Overall, then, a firm recommendation; I will return to Ariosti's solos with great pleasure in the future.

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BALDASSARE GALUPPI (1706–1785)

*LA DIAVOLESSA*

Kremena Dilcheva (Alto), Matthias Viewig (Baritone), Tom Allen (Tenor), Johnny Maldonado (Countertenor), Bettina Pahn (Soprano), Egbert Junghanns (Bass), Doerthe Maria Sandmann (Soprano)/Lautten Compagny Berlin/Wolfgang Katschner

DeutschlandRadio Berlin LC8492, 2004; two discs

This is a valuable new addition to our understanding of eighteenth-century opera and our repertory of available recordings. *La Diavolessa* was composed in 1755 by Carlo Goldoni and Baldassare Galuppi and



was one of their most successful collaborations for the Venetian stage. Although Goldoni and Galuppi both had long-established careers in dramatic theatre and opera, their partnership in works that were a hybrid of opera seria and commedia dell'arte successfully shaped a tradition within the genre we call opera buffa.

Written for the Venetian middle and upper classes frequenting opera houses, *La Diavolessa* is a mixture of comedy and misunderstandings, amorous intrigue, beautiful music and above all social satire and commentary. The action takes place at a Naples hotel where the young, impoverished lovers Dorina (alto) and Giannino (baritone) join the crafty hotelier Falco (tenor) in a scheme to fleece nobleman Don Poppone (bass). Poppone is obsessed with treasure digging, and the young lovers will appear at his house as professional treasure hunters for hire. A second couple, the nobles Count and Countess Natri (alto and soprano), join the action as hotel guests and visitors of Don Poppone. (Un)wittingly, as Dorina and Giannino arrive at Poppone's, they are mistaken for the Natri, and the Natri are thought to be the treasure diggers. The ensuing web of lies thickens further through a series of real and presumed 'amori' (all aimed at beautiful Dorina). The focal point of the treasure hunt is set as a magic scene with spells meted out by Dorina and Giannino disguised as Diavolo and Diavolessa: they not only extract money from Poppone but also beat him up in the process. When the mistaken identities of the two couples are finally discovered, Dorina and Giannino blame each other for their destitute state, but a happy end is secured by the sudden death of Giannino's father and his inheritance that allows them to marry. They resort once again to magic, this time as benevolent spirits, and return the exhorated money to Don Poppone in an ensemble piece that ends the opera.

One of the strengths of Galuppi's music are the duos and trios dispersed throughout and the two magic scenes that end Acts 2 and 3; these are all delightful (for example, the *cavatina a 3*, Act 1 Scene 1, 'Se non fossi maritato'). In the ensemble scenes, Galuppi uses distinctive melodic strands to 'choreograph' musically the energetic interaction between the characters (a great example being the magic scene of Act 2); in this way, Galuppi makes the music a guiding but integrated part of the overall theatrical fabric. The majority of the arias deal with love, marriage, and relations between men and women, underlying the opera's strong social dimension. Many of the texts have snippets of direct speech in the middle where a man speaks to a woman, or a woman to a man; Galuppi draws attention to these with evocative motifs that communicate directly with the audience (for example, Dorina's aria, Act 1 Scene 7, 'Si distingue dal nobil il vile'). Other memorable gestures derive from attractive tunes allied with accompaniment at the unison by an obbligato instrument. Some of the arias are close to the da capo standard of opera seria, providing star singers with an opportunity for virtuosity and vocal display. Examples include the arias for the Count and Countess Natri, 'Tentan in van co' suoi vapori' (Act 1 Scene 13) and 'Chi son io, pensate prima, Traditor della mia pace!' (Act 2 Scene 2); the high social standing and voice types (castrato and soprano) of these characters cast them – even satirize them – as seria characters.

Lautten Compagny's lively and imaginative performance deals very effectively with all of the aforementioned musical elements. Having started life as a lute duo, their music-making reflects a keenness for clarity and intimacy, and now in an expanded ensemble form pays particular attention to the continuo line. One of the great effects of their sound is that the bass line is clearly heard – it is not obfuscated by the other instruments, as often happens in recordings of eighteenth-century music. The lute is used throughout as a continuo instrument in both arias and recitative; although the excellent playing can be highly appreciated in the recording, one wonders whether it would be equally audible in a live performance. Finally, the conductor, Wolfgang Katschner, has a good understanding of the Italian repertory and style, and judges tempos very well.

Opera buffa is a genre steeped in the tradition of spoken comedy with words, and its allied theatrical dimension, features as eagerly appreciated by the audience as the music and singing. Galuppi's idiom operates within this tradition, constantly working with the text and enhancing it with musical gestures. These theatrical roots of opera buffa are nowhere as evident as in recitatives, which are nothing but inflected comedy text and should be performed as such; they should be acted 'vocally' rather than sung according only



to the contour of the written notes. This is a problem not only in the recording under review, but also in our modern understanding of these types of works: our appreciation and sensibility of ‘delivery’ lags far behind our knowledge of performance practice and musical style. There is a whole palette of *commedia dell’arte* nuances of which today’s performers are seemingly unaware, nuances missed when we approach this material according to musical criteria alone. Put simply, most of our artistic effort is anachronistically based on what we understand as musicality – albeit historically informed musicality – when these works require explorations of additional artistic codes. In the present recording this particular problem is exacerbated by the mediocre Italian pronunciation of some of the singers, weaknesses fully exposed in the recitatives. Issues with the quality of the vowels are particularly annoying, and painfully so, at the end of recitative lines, where the longer musical values drag along the quality of the vowels, resulting in unnatural, elongated word-endings that have little to do with proper delivery. Unfortunately, the two people who suffer most from these pronunciation problems are the two protagonists, Dorina and Giannino. The countertenor singing Count Nastri also delivers a quadratic type of recitative contoured by little more than note values. The ‘smell’ of *commedia dell’arte* is missing. The only singer whose Italian accent is good and who is able to act through his voice is the excellent bass Egbert Junghanns (Don Poppone).

Overall, though, this is a good performance of an interesting work and a worthy addition to the repertory of available eighteenth-century operas. The CDs are accompanied by a good booklet with German and English translations and an informative introduction by Sabine Radermacher; regrettably, though, there is no information on the sources of *La Diavolessa* and the way they have been used by the performers.

VASSILIS VAVOULIS