



wind players who do not take part in these performances); on the other hand, the title page of the booklet names just two violinists, a violist and a cellist in addition to the two flautists and the harpsichord player. When I first read this I was delighted, thinking that the concertos would – as I am sure was the composer’s intention – be accompanied by a string quartet (or sometimes a string trio, without a viola) and a harpsichord. But this is not so, for although it is difficult to be certain, there must be at least two violins to a part in the *tutti*s, and there is definitely a double bass as well as a cello. But solo sections appear to be accompanied by single strings, usually just violins 1 and 2.

It is hard to see any justification for this decision, unless perhaps the performers are trying to reproduce the practice of the Dresden *Hofkapelle* under Pisendel, where concertos were often (but by no means always) played by a larger string group that included up to eight violins. Anyone who quotes Dresden numbers in defence of multiple strings in concertos by Vivaldi and others should remember, however, that Pisendel did not simply increase the string section but would rescore pieces more radically, writing parts for oboes and bassoons as well. Nevertheless, the band plays very well indeed, and I particularly like the way they give a shape to repeated quavers, which in less sensitive hands are apt to plod. A good mark, too, for the excellent if redundant bass player, who accompanies with such gentlemanly restraint that it is sometimes hard to tell where he joins in.

In spite of this recording’s title, the programme also includes a solo flute sonata, a rather Telemann-like trio sonata and a ‘Sinfonia’ (a sort of updated French suite for two flutes and strings) alongside the four concertos. Rather oddly, an organ rather than a harpsichord is used for the continuo in the solo sonata, and also in the ‘Sinfonia’, where the violins sound (for once) as if they are single. The dance movements are very nicely phrased, with great attention paid to the correct accentuation of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ notes. In all, this is a most interesting and enjoyable disc.

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GEORG CHRISTOPH WAGENSEIL (1715–1777)

CONCERTS CHOISIS

Echo du Danube/Alexander Weimann

Accent ACC 24186, 2008; one disc, 69 minutes

If a single composer could be said to have founded the Viennese Classical School, that man is undoubtedly Georg Christoph Wagenseil. A native of Vienna and a composition pupil of court Kapellmeister Johann Joseph Fux (1660–1741), he was appointed *Kammerkompositor* to the Imperial Court in 1738. Fux’s opinion in his enthusiastic letter of support for his protégé was that Wagenseil was the man to maintain the ‘correct’ style of composition in the face of the new galant manner, but it quickly became clear that his confidence was misplaced. Although Wagenseil wrote a little church music, his interests soon turned to opera, and his growing reputation in composing for the stage earned him commissions from Venice (*Ariodante*, 1745) and Florence (*Demetrio*, 1746), as well as several more for the Viennese court in the years 1746–1750. However, these works did not meet with universal approval. No less a figure than Metastasio complained that Wagenseil wrote in a manner that was too idiomatically instrumental (a familiar criticism of opera composers, and one that was also levelled at Mozart some decades later).

It was perhaps a result of this censure and a consequence of his appointment as court *Klaviermeister* in 1749 that Wagenseil’s output in the 1750s consisted almost exclusively of keyboard music, symphonies and concertos. His keyboard *Divertimenti*, the first volume of which was advertised in the *Wienerisches Diarium* on 1 August 1753, are obviously the models for Haydn’s early keyboard sonatas, and his symphonies and



concertos were circulated widely in Europe. Wagenseil's many keyboard concertos, in particular, were a major influence on other composers in this increasingly popular genre, including his pupils Joseph Anton Steffan (1726–1797) and Leopold Hofmann (1738–1793). Their publication in cities as far away as Paris and London made them a paradigm for the likes of J. C. Bach and, through him, Mozart. They were highly praised, too, by the Viennese press, especially for the composer's ability to make a naturally inexpressive instrument 'sing':

His way of playing the harpsichord, and the solos in his concertos for that instrument, have something overpowering and captivating about them, which will ensure his fame for many years to come. This instrument is so little capable of singing, since it seems designed almost exclusively for accompaniment, and concertos for it are usually so poor that one cannot bear them for long. But Wagenseil's art of giving the harpsichord a kind of cantilena, with the help of the accompanying violins, was his particular specialty. His delicacy, neat passagework and the strange yet unforced modulations with which he passes through all the keys in his individual way reveal the discernment of a great master. (*Wienerisches Diarium*, 18 October 1766 (my translation); the anonymous author may have been Dittersdorf.)

Possibly the first of Wagenseil's concertos is one for cello, the autograph score of which is dated 1752. Its up-to-date galant style is in complete contrast to the rather severe 'C. P. E. Bach' manner of a slightly earlier Viennese cello concerto by Matthias Georg Monn (1717–1750), but we need look no further for an explanation than Wagenseil's Italian operatic experience. It is not merely the idiom that has been modernized, for unlike Monn's rather Vivaldian first movement, Wagenseil had already adopted the 'concerto-sonata' form familiar to us from Mozart's concertos, with a nineteen-bar opening tutti, a solo exposition that modulates to the dominant, a development section, and a thoroughly recomposed recapitulation leading to a pause on a $\frac{6}{4}$ for a cadenza.

The first concerto on this recording is of the type that is often called *sinfonia concertante*, though with little historical justification. It could well be the work described as a 'Concert a plusieurs Instrumens seul' performed at the Burgtheater on 26 February 1758. In the same spirit as several other such pieces of the time, notably J. C. Bach's 'Concerto à più Stromenti obligati' (Warburton C40), almost everyone – horns and trumpets as well as woodwind and strings – steps to the fore now and again. The various soloists are combined in many different ways, and even the viola has a little duet with the bassoon at one point. In common with the vast majority of eighteenth-century concertos, the original set of parts contains only one of each: does this mean that each part is for a single player, chamber-music fashion, or were any of the parts expected to be shared, as in a modern orchestra? There can be little doubt that this particular concerto was intended to be played one-to-a-part: to be sure, whenever anyone has a solo passage it is marked *S[olo]*, but only as a warning ('here you are exposed'), since there is never a cancelling *T[utti]* to tell a hypothetical partner where to come in again.

I am delighted to report that Echo du Danube uses single players – except for the 'Basso' part, which is assigned to cello, violone, theorbo and harpsichord, with a bassoon doubling them in most of the tuttis. On the whole the balance is excellent, although the bass – unsurprisingly – is rather heavy and the repeated quavers in particular tend to sound a bit relentless. There is surely no case for a theorbo in Viennese instrumental music of c1760: the instrument is not mentioned in Forkel's list of the 'Kaiserl. Königliche Hof- und Kammermusik zu Wien' (in his *Musikalischer Almanach* of 1782, but which refers to a few years earlier, since it still includes Wagenseil as *Compositor*). It is probable, too, that Wagenseil expected only a violone and no cello, this being a scoring that was common in Austrian concertos of the period. In manuscript sets for three of Haydn's violin concertos (H VIIa:1, 3 and 4), for example, the single bass part is unequivocally labelled 'Violone'. (It might seem strange to us to use only a sixteen-foot stringed instrument on the bass line, but the Austrian five-string violone has a smoother, more cello-like sound than a modern double bass.) Everyone plays with plenty of spirit, although some over-exuberant brass playing in the outer



movements makes for a certain lack of subtlety. But the beautifully elegiac slow movement, in which two flutes replace the brass, has a more polished sound.

The second concerto played here is No. 1 of a pair 'pour le Clavecin qui sont très bien sur la Harpe', published in Paris in 1761 (rather oddly, the liner booklet makes much of the search for No. 2, although the facsimile of a page from the Paris print makes clear that No. 1 is the concerto recorded here). It does indeed go very well on the harp, and it is a rare treat to hear a genuine Cousineau instrument of c1770, delightfully played by Johanna Seitz. The accompaniment, described on the title-page as 'deux violons et basse', is well balanced and refined, although French (and English) musicians who bought the original edition would almost certainly have used only a cello with the two violins, not a violone as well.

Double concertos for violin and keyboard seem to have been quite popular in the third quarter of the eighteenth century. Joseph Haydn wrote one for violin and organ (H XVIII:6), probably in 1756 (and brother Michael, one for viola and organ a few years later), and Vanhal's fine concerto for violin and harpsichord probably dates from c1770; it is a pity that Mozart never completed K315f. The double concerto by Wagenseil that is recorded here is preserved in two manuscript sources at Kroměříž (not as difficult of access as the liner booklet suggests): the earlier of the two calls it 'Concert Pour le Clavecin [et] Violino Principale' and the later, 'Concerto per il Fortepiano con Violino obbligato'. The piece appears to date from the early 1760s, so the intended instrument must be the harpsichord: contrary to popular myth, there is no evidence that fortepianos were made in Vienna before about 1780. The copy of a c1805 fortepiano by 'Anton Walther and Sons' (*sic*) used here is therefore something of an anachronism, even though it is a beautiful instrument in its own right. Despite this solecism, however, the performance (again with single strings except that the solo violin very properly doubles violin 1 in the tutti) is first-rate, and the two cadenzas are from the original sources.

Wagenseil's flute concerto of c1760 completes this fascinating selection. Like his other concertos, it is in a thoroughly modern taste, and the central Largo is a particularly fine example of the composer's beautiful and elaborately decorated slow movements. There are many inventive touches, such as the flute's cheeky solo interjections in the opening tutti, and the way in which the sprightly theme of the finale seems unable to make up its mind whether to be three, five or even seven bars in length. The solo part, neatly and tastefully dispatched by Martin Sandhoff, is very well written for the instrument, being by turns perky and tender. Once again, the band use single strings except for the bass line, where I suspect Wagenseil may as usual have expected an (Austrian) violone and no cello.

The liner booklet includes an essay by the leading Wagenseil scholar Helga Scholz-Michelitsch, but the translator of the English version should have known better than to render 'Clavier' as 'piano' throughout the text. It gives quite the wrong impression, for I cannot believe that Wagenseil can be credited with any 'piano compositions', or that Empress Maria Theresa was his 'first piano pupil'. But in spite of this blunder, and a few quibbles about matters of performance practice, this is a highly enjoyable recording of some little known but important and interesting music by a much underrated composer.

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