



The volume's most obvious strength is its variety, which encompasses the *Gesänge* and *Melodien* culled from Zumsteeg's incidental music for the 1782 second edition of Schiller's *Die Räuber*, Zumsteeg's monologue for Johanna from *Die Jungfrau von Orleans* (one from 1801, a second similar but much longer version from 1803), Zumsteeg's 'Reiterlied' from *Wallensteins Lager*, and no fewer than seventeen different settings of 'An die Freude' (including Reichardt's). Among the latter Günther includes the very first, that by Schiller's friend Christian Gottfried Körner. First issued as a fold-out item before the poem in the poet's literary journal *Thalia* in 1786, this setting was brought out again in 1800 by the Hamburg publisher Johann August Böhme in his *Vierzehn Compositionen zu Schillers Ode An die Freude*. Günther's seventeen include all fourteen from the 1800 publication, as well as two others, both by Zumsteeg. All are strictly strophic in form, except for the seventeenth and last one by Wilhelm Tepper von Ferguson, who in 1797 responded to the 108 lines of the 1786 version of Schiller's poem with an ambitious 453-bar through-composed cantata featuring, in anticipation of Beethoven, four vocal soloists in addition to four-part chorus (though the orchestra is left to Beethoven; Ferguson calls solely for 'cembalo').

Günther's volume is meticulously produced, including copious (though not consistently complete) bibliographic information and reproductions of title pages and other illustrative material (some of it unfortunately too diminutively and dimly reproduced). My one grumble is that Günther's fifty-four-item *Literaturverzeichnis* cites only German titles. Of his 272 footnotes, I spied only one (note 252) that directs the reader to an English-language source. If this were 1811 or 1911 such parochialism would have arched nary an eyebrow. As it is, for more than thirty years a remarkably large number of individuals (including the undersigned) have written on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century lieder. But I do not wish to end sourly. Günther's edition makes it possible for song specialists throughout the world to ponder Friedrich Schiller's extraordinary influence on music. If the most hard-to-pin-down fallout from that stimulus remains the *Schlusschor* of Beethoven's Ninth, endeavouring to sort out that daunting movement remains an engaging and inspiring hurdle for all musicologists. In the meantime, the highest compliment we can pay the editor of *Frühe Schiller-Vertonungen bis 1825* is to take up his volume, sing, listen, learn and sing again.

JAMES PARSONS



RECORDINGS

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CLAUDE BÉNIGNE BALBASTRE (1727–1799)
PIÈCES DE CLAVECIN (1759)

Sophie Yates

Chandos Chaconne, CHAN 0777, 2011; one disc, 76 minutes

Since 1993 Sophie Yates has rolled out a succession of solo harpsichord recordings for Chandos at an average pace of one album per year. Her recorded repertory encompasses a wide range of styles, from the Elizabethan virginals of Giles Farnaby and William Byrd to the high baroque music of Domenico Scarlatti and Jean-Philippe Rameau. The current take on Claude-Bénigne Balbastre's *Pièces de clavecin* (1759), released in 2011, was recorded in 2005. This lapse of some six years bears witness to the major difference between live and recorded performance, and presents an immediate challenge for this album: will the performance sound as fresh as when it was recorded? This concern proves entirely ungrounded. On repeated listening, I was continually enchanted by Yates' performance, and its youthfulness, freshness and exuberance have robustly stood the test of time.



For a book of seventeen pieces, Balbastre's 1759 *Pièces* is not a compendium of contemporary styles covering all major genres for the harpsichord; nor does it represent the composer's crowning lifetime achievement. The book – published nine years after the young Dijonais settled in the French capital – does, however, contain enough works of sufficient variety to make it a significant collection, and by happy coincidence holds just the right amount of music to fit on a conventional CD. The reviewer for *Mercure de France* (1759) opined that Balbastre's *Pièces* had 'varied and pleasing patterns, an agreeable harmony, and a certain something to give the instrument all the charms of which it is capable, without the vain affectation of difficulties from which no pleasure arises' (cited and translated by Alan Curtis in *Claude-Bénigne Balbastre: Pièces de clavecin, d'orgue et de fortepiano* (Paris: Heugel, 1974), x). Such garnished compliments, not unusual for the time, should not be taken literally. Some pieces, such as *La Suzanne* and *La Boullongne*, warrant panache and boldness in execution, as Yates comments in her liner notes. All of the pieces, whether French or Italian in style, bear titles, mostly names of dignitaries and of the composer's patrons and acquaintances. The 1759 *Pièces* were dedicated to Susanne-Félix Lescarmotier de Caze, who was a pupil of Jacques Duphly before switching to Balbastre. Madame de Caze must have been an exceptional patron to Balbastre, as she is honoured twice, first as the dedicatee of the volume and second in the title of the opening overture, which is to be played with much liveliness and flamboyance (marked 'animé, fièrement et marqué'). The interested reader should refer to the introductory materials in editions by Alan Curtis (1974) and Jean Saint-Arroman and Philippe Lescat (Courlay: Éditions J.M. Fuzeau, 1990) for the detailed background to the titles.

In this book pieces of purely French heritage, including overtures, dances and *rondeaux*, are interspersed with pieces that are candidly Italian in character. For the French-styled music, traces of Rameau are clearly audible in such pieces as *La Lamarck*, in which the rapid figurations over the densely spaced chords are highly evocative of Rameau's *La Poule*. The low tessitura of *La d'Héricourt*, in contrast, brings to mind pages from Forqueray and Duphly. By the latter part of the century French composers no longer felt embarrassed about publicly acknowledging their attraction to Italian music, and Balbastre apparently took delight in assimilating the Italian style in pieces such as *La Monmartel ou La Brunoy*, which is marked *Allegro*, and *La Lugeac*, which is both a 'Giga' and an 'Allegro'. Some pieces delight with a certain wit and naiveté. In *La Bellaud*, for example, the music is propelled by Alberti bass, scale patterns, repetitions, sequences and Scarlattian cross-hand effects. By tapping into the wide range of stylistic and technical resources at his disposal, Balbastre carved out his own individual style with an originality that many scholars agree represents the last flowering of clavecin music before the social and musical order underwent a rapid change of fate during the complicated series of events that led up to the French Revolution.

Balbastre's preference of keyboard instrument reflects the prevailing taste of his time. Charles Burney, during his visit to Balbastre's residence in 1770, reported that the composer owned a fine, lightly quilled Ruckers (*The Present State of Music in France and Italy* (London: T. Becket & Co., 1771), 38). However, the various methods that Balbastre used to indicate manual changes ('fort/doux' in *La Berville*; 'fort/gracieux' in *La Courteille*; 'grand/petit clavier' in *La Berville*) expressly call for a double-manual instrument capable of sharp contrasts, with plenty of nuance in between these extremes. In this context the harpsichord by Andrew Garlick (1996), though not a Ruckers, is an excellent choice for this recording. The original, made by Jean-Claude Goujon of Paris in 1748, is now part of the collection of the Musée de la Musique of the Conservatoire de Paris. The tone of Garlick's harpsichord is full and focused, with strong fundamentals but enough partials to give a rich and sophisticated sound. Yates makes resourceful use of the registration possibilities to create a palette of contrasting effects, sometimes helping to bring out the structure, such as in *La d'Héricourt* and *La Genty*. In the latter piece, for instance, the *rondeau* is effectively delineated from the couplets by the distinctive blend of the lute stop with its nasal 8'.

Throughout the eighteenth century French composers and theorists, including Saint Lambert, François Couperin and Jean-Philippe Rameau (to name but a few), frequently referred to the wide gap between notation and performance. This is particularly true of Balbastre's music, the successful rendition of which depends largely on the performer's skill in traversing that gap. Balbastre himself was reported to draw huge



crowds wherever he appeared, so much so that in 1762 the Archbishop banned him from playing during the annual Midnight Mass at St Roch. Yates's competent performance demonstrates that she has all of the qualities essential for casting Balbastre's music in the best light – in particular, a cantabile touch coupled with sensitive timing. The *notes inégales* are elastic, giving shape and conveying a forward movement and a dance-like quality, especially in the gavottes *Le Segur* and *La Berville*. Yates's embellishments are judicious and artful, though only occasionally, such as in *La Lugeac* and *La Genty*, does she sprinkle in flourishes of her own.

Generally speaking, Yates is adept at picking a tempo that best matches the shape and character of the music. Connections between phrases and sections, sometimes punctuated by waits and tiny hesitations, are expertly handled. She is capable of maintaining a flowing movement and a steady tempo over a long period, but with sufficient flexibility to avoid any impression of sameness of expression. She often infuses subtle expression by delicately varying the speed of the ornaments, as in the unusually leisurely *pincé* (mordent) heard in the *louré* (middle section) of *La Castelmore*. *Noblement* is an attribute commonly associated with Balbastre's music (such as in *La Suzanne* and *La Morisseau*), and Yates achieves this largely by choosing the right tempo, often refraining from pushing the music to its extremes. In *La Suzanne*, for example, the balance between virtuousness and virtuosity is precisely managed with poise and authority. In all, she articulates not only the music, but also the emotions and language embedded in the music.

Yates's liner notes cover much ground intelligently, and show a nuanced awareness of recent research on Balbastre. She stresses, as many previous commentators have done, the role of patronage in Balbastre's illustrious career, recounting vividly how Balbastre, following in the footsteps of Jean Henry D'Anglebert and other composers of the ancien régime, made the most of his connections in order to move dramatically up through the ranks of society. In telling the tale of Balbastre's rise and eventual fall after the French Revolution, Yates highlights that historical awareness is key to penetrating the composer's character and his music, which is invaluable if the modern performer is to forge convincing performances and convey a message of profundity rather than frivolity.

Yates's superb performance contributes fresh insight into what makes Balbastre's *Pièces de clavecin* pertinent both to their time and to ours. As Alan Curtis and Mary Cyr remark ('Balbastre, Claude-Bénigne', in *Grove Music Online* <www.oxfordmusiconline.com> (30 March 2011)), Balbastre's music, which captured the mid-eighteenth-century Parisian sensibility, must be understood in the context of its time and culture. To bring out the flavour of his works, we must cultivate a broad grasp of the factors that shape the music. Such an enhanced perspective on the composer's world will assist the performer intuitively to strike the best balance in a range of performance-critical matters, from tempo and *notes inégales* to ornamentation and touch, and to cultivate a compelling interpretation.

DAVID CHUNG



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GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL (1685–1759)

FLAVIO, *RE DE' LONGOBARDI*

Rosemary Joshua (soprano), Iestyn Davies (countertenor), Tim Mead (countertenor), Renata Pokupić (mezzo-soprano), Hilary Summers (contralto), Andrew Foster-Williams (baritone), Thomas Walker (tenor) / Early Opera Company / Christian Curnyn

Chandos Chaconne, CHAN 0773(2), 2010; two discs, 146 minutes

Flavio was one of the 'winners' in Winton Dean's definitive re-evaluation of Handel's operas, first in *Handel and the Opera Seria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969) and then in *Handel's Operas, 1704–1726* (co-authored with John Merrill Knapp (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987; second edition 1995)). Previously