



The Cologne Academy employs twenty-two players, a few more than would have been typical under Mattheson, who probably had fewer strings (except for the Magnificat, which needs two string groups) and perhaps an oboist who doubled on flute. The sound is more intimate than what one usually hears – no wall-to-wall choral masses – and is more nuanced, allowing for clear ornamentation.

The instrumentalists play with real verve, making the most of Mattheson's admittedly conservative material. While these works are not showpieces for virtuosic display, the concertmistress Catherine Manson does get to shine in the lovely duet from the Christmas Oratorio (track 22). The oboist Veit Scholz also gets a brief solo turn and adds tasteful embellishments in the ritornello (track 18) that follows the trio 'Dir, Gott und Mensch, sei ewig Ehr' und Ruhm' (track 17). In the Magnificat, the flautist Martin Sandhoff plays elegantly in the aria 'Ich leide Durst, es hungert meiner Seelen' (track 30).

There really is nothing major in this disc to complain about, just a minor quibble about the Christmas Oratorio. The chorale in track 14 consists of two stanzas of 'Vom Himmel Hoch', which Willens performs back to back. But this is in fact a falsification of how it would have been performed under Mattheson. The autograph notes that the first verse is to be sung before the sermon (end of part 1 of the oratorio) and the second verse after the sermon (beginning of part 2). The liner notes state not quite correctly that the sermon took place after the chorale. The recording of course does not include a Christmas sermon, nor should it, but the division might have been made more clear, if not by a separate track for each verse of the chorale, then perhaps by a more distinct break between the two. The list of movements in the liner notes could also have labelled the two parts of the oratorio so that its liturgical function was made more explicit. Decisions like this are probably unavoidable when the liturgical works of the past are divorced from their original contexts to become the concert works of the present.

With its attention to historical detail and ripping good performances all round, this disc is highly recommended. Mattheson is not only important for his theoretical and critical contributions, but also for his compositional output, which was by no means slight. It is a reminder of the richness and variety of the musical life of Hamburg, not only at the opera but also in its churches, which did enjoy the fruits of the opera and its innovations but also maintained their own more conservative traditions. Mattheson did not just counsel other composers how to write their music, but he put his ideas to practical use in his own accomplished works.

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FERDINAND RIES (1784–1838)

PIANO CONCERTOS, VOLUME 4: PIANO CONCERTO IN C MINOR, CONCERTO PASTORAL, INTRODUCTION ET RONDEAU BRILLANT

Christopher Hinterhuber (piano) / Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra / Uwe Grodd

Naxos 8.572088, 2010; one disc, 71 minutes

The Ries family of musicians has been unduly neglected by posterity until relatively recently, unlike the Bach, Stamitz and Benda families, for example, not least because of the relatively small number of composers amongst their number. A professional pianist and composer and at times a violinist, cellist and music copyist (to Peter Winter and Beethoven in turn), Ferdinand was by far its most important representative, though he was far more renowned historically for his *Biographische Notizen über Ludwig van Beethoven* (1838), co-written with F. G. Wegeler, than for his numerous compositions. He was the grandson of the Bonn court trumpeter and violinist Johann Ries (1723–1784) and the eldest son of the long-lived violinist Franz Anton Ries (1755–1846), a pupil of J. P. Salomon and one of Beethoven's early teachers. Other prominent family members are



accorded entries in *New Grove* (Cecil Hill, 'Ries', in *Grove Music Online* <www.oxfordmusiconline.com> (16 August 2011)), and the Ries dynasty continues to the present day, albeit chiefly in the area of music publishing under the imprint of Ries & Erler in Berlin. Ferdinand's rehabilitation as a relatively minor yet technically assured composer is now firmly established, though much work remains to be undertaken in relation to his compositional style (this is barely mentioned in the *New Grove* article, for example). There is a 'Ferdinand Ries Gesellschaft' in Bonn (<www.ferdinand-ries.de>), and almost fifty CDs of his music are currently available. Notable amongst these are series from Naxos devoted to his complete works for piano and orchestra and to piano sonatas and sonatinas, in addition to several discs devoted to flute music. A substantial number of discs has also been issued by cpo, most significantly of his eight symphonies, five concert overtures and the two remaining concertos (for violin and for two horns), in addition to much chamber music and the oratorio *Die Könige in Israel*.

Ferdinand composed eight piano concertos, confusingly published with the numbers 2–9, since his violin concerto had already been assigned the number 1. He invariably preferred to wait until they had become relatively familiar to audiences before offering them for publication, partly to avoid piracy but also presumably because solo piano versions (with the orchestral ritornello reductions clearly indicated) were also generally printed for domestic performance: unfamiliar works would obviously not be as marketable. Although his performances were accorded a considerable number of reports in the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*, only his final concerto publication, Op. 177, merited a review (in the April 1835 edition), suggesting that by the time they were published the majority of his concertos may have been considered passé. Both concertos on the present disc were published in 1823, though the one in C minor, Op. 115, dates from 1809 and the *Concerto Pastoral* in D major, Op. 120, from around 1815–1817. These were followed in 1824 by the publication of the Concerto in C major, Op. 123, which was written as far back as 1806.

Ries also wrote a number of other sectional works for piano and orchestra: a concertino, three sets of variations on well-known tunes, including 'Rule Britannia' and 'Soldier, Soldier, Will You Marry Me?' (both recorded in volume 3, the latter under the title 'Introduction et Variations Brillantes', Op. 170), two rondos and a polonaise, most preceded by substantial introductions. The *Introduction et Rondeau Brillant*, WoO 54, on the present disc dates from 1835 and is Ries's final work for piano and orchestra. His partiality for popular and folk tunes is represented at an even greater level in his solo piano music, as the worklist in *New Grove* clearly indicates. The sleeve notes by Allan Badley (who is also the editor of the music) accompanying all four concerto volumes (volume 5 will presumably conclude the series) explore the background and musical style of all these works in authoritative detail.

Unlike his older contemporary Joseph Wölfl (1773–1812), whose seven piano concertos date from between around 1801 and the year of his death, the influence of Mozart and Beethoven on Ries's concerted works with piano is highly variable, despite Beethoven's reported comment 'he imitates me too much!' (see Cecil Hill, 'Ries: (4) Ferdinand Ries', in *Grove Music Online* <www.oxfordmusiconline.com> (16 August 2011)). Although he received piano lessons with his father's former pupil in Vienna between 1802 and 1804, he studied composition with Albrechtsberger. His first professional performance in 1804 was of Beethoven's C minor piano concerto, which might appear to be significant in relation to his own Op. 115 in the same key only five years later, though this work looks as much to contemporaneous as to historical models, while Mozart's K466 and K491 have also been cited as inspiring it, the newer styles of Hummel and Moscheles (its dedicatee) are perhaps of greater significance.

What is immediately apparent on first listening to all three works on this CD is a display of artistic temperament in the writing for the piano that clearly places Ries stylistically between the late classical and early romantic periods. The 'romantic wildness' of his playing was noted in a report in the March 1824 edition of *The Harmonicon* (cited in the *Grove* article), and tempo fluctuations indicated at various points within individual movements clearly reflect a far from classical approach in his own performances. There is even at times almost a pre-echo of the two concertos of Chopin (1829–1830), not least in the embellishment of lyrical right-hand melodies and technical passagework with Italianate turns (often five semiquavers in the time of a crotchet) or irregular and sometimes chromatic groupings of notes such as straight semiquavers



freely alternating with triplets, sextuplets and five- and seven-note figurations, with a Chopinesque rapid eighteen-note one in the first movement and fifteen-, sixteen- and twenty-note ones in the slow movement of Op. 115, for example.

Technical figurations between the two hands vary from stepwise movement, typically in parallel octaves, sixths or doubled thirds (as in the slow movement of Op. 115), to arpeggiated flourishes across the keyboard to more traditional alternating-note figurations (in effect updating the traditional Alberti bass) to simple chordal or octave figurations exchanged between the hands, the latter pre-empting Liszt, albeit in a far less demanding fashion. Although all of this may suggest the presence of copious amounts of facile soloistic writing similar to that encountered in such works by many of Ries's contemporaries, this is not the case in these two concertos (though it most certainly is in the third work on the CD). The requisite displays of soloistic passagework are carefully tempered, and there is frequent motivic interplay between the soloist and individual wind instruments or the string orchestra. The conclusion of the 1835 review of Op. 177 from the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* cited above (column 210) applies equally well to the present two concertos: 'the concerto is brilliant but not too demanding. It certainly requires experienced performers but is nevertheless not too difficult' ('Das Concert ist brillant und setzt nicht zu viel voraus. Allerdings verlangt es gewiegte Spieler, ist aber doch nicht zu schwierig'; reviewer's translation).

The concertos share roughly similar proportions at around twenty-six (Op. 115) and twenty-eight (Op. 120) minutes in duration: in each case the first movement occupies almost half of this, with a slow movement of just over five minutes and a finale of more than eight. Several other concertos are similarly proportioned, suggesting a somewhat formulaic approach but with no gradual expansion in the later works as Ries matured as a composer, possibly because he continued to perform his earlier concertos in later years. Of the six issued by Naxos to date, the longest is Op. 132 of 1823, with a duration of thirty-five minutes, of which the first movement is over seventeen minutes in length, the slow movement eight and the finale nine. The *Introduction et Rondeau Brillant* is eighteen minutes long, which is also comparable with the overall performing duration of Ries's other works for piano and orchestra, the shortest of which (Op. 170) is just under fifteen minutes.

There are various noteworthy compositional features in the concertos, not least the statement in the opening orchestral ritornello of the second subject in the same contrasted key in which it will later be heard in the solo exposition rather than the traditional tonic. Oft-cited precedents for this approach include two of Mozart's (K413 and K449) and no fewer than four of Beethoven's piano concertos (including the C minor), but it occurs also in earlier classical concertos for other instruments, as I noted in an article as far back as 1994 ('Franz Anton Pfeiffer (1752–1787) – Bassoonist and Composer', *Journal of the International Double Reed Society* 22 (1994), 19). This trend continued well into the nineteenth century, as Julian Horton's paper 'Beethoven's Error? The Modulating Ritornello and the Post-Classical Piano Concerto', given at the June 2011 annual conference of the Society for Musicology in Ireland, clearly demonstrated. The traditional placing of the solo cadenza within the closing ritornello is also eschewed by Ries: in the first movement of Op. 115, for example, it is both brief and purely motivic and is sited within the second solo episode (development), whilst there are two such cadenzas in the A flat major slow movement. The first of these is in the middle and the second, marked Presto, concludes with a half close that resolves after a brief pause into the finale. This is in the tonic major key, and has several symphonic precedents (for example, most of Haydn's late minor-key symphonies and Beethoven's fifth, whose slow movement is also in A flat). The flamboyant coda of this Allegretto rondo increases the tempo to Allegro.

Among other compositional features worthy of note in these two concertos, it is worth pointing out that the orchestral ritornellos are relatively concise. The orchestration reflects the influences of both Mozart and Beethoven, with some highly effective touches, especially in Op. 120, including various pastoral effects for the two horns and the use of *divisi* violas and a solo cello but no violins in the slow movement, which perhaps foreshadows Brahms. Mozartean interplay between orchestral instruments and the piano has already been noted, and even in the ritornellos the material is often passed around in an imaginative fashion. All three



works bear repeated listening, not least for their orchestration, even though the musical material is not always particularly inspired or memorable.

In addition to this Ries series, German pianist Christopher Hinterhuber has also recorded a CD of concerted works by Hummel for Naxos. His playing is stylish and unmannered, as is also the conducting of Uwe Grodd, who has partnered Hinterhuber throughout the series, albeit with a different accompanying orchestra on each disc. The Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra has made a considerable number of critically acclaimed recordings for Naxos; their playing is generally polished, despite the constraints of a tight recording schedule. Solo instruments are placed firmly to the fore, whether piano or wind: a live performance would sound somewhat different, but the balance does not sound overly artificial.

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