



beginnings and endings of chords and phrases often a little ragged. This unfortunate tendency somewhat mars a particularly beautiful moment in the Adagio of the Partita Op. 78.

Rhythm is occasionally also something of a problem, particularly in the linking passages of the first clarinet, and this is often combined with a somewhat unpolished technique. This is particularly noticeable in the last movement of Op. 78, in which the virtuoso clarinet passages seem just on the edge of Christian Leitherer's technical capabilities. Generally both the oboe and clarinet soloists seem more comfortable in the upper registers, which shine over the top of the ensemble with a pleasant clarity; in lower passages their tone can be a little spread and lacklustre. The slight vibrato occasionally employed in the clarinet line will not be to the taste of all listeners. Intonation is generally stable, but there are some slight problems between the first and second clarinet in octave passages, and some of the ensemble unisons are not quite pure in the upper voices. Intonation is one of the great challenges of playing in an ensemble of this kind, and it is hardly surprising to hear discrepancies even in the very best of ensembles.

There is no doubt that Krommer made the first oboe and first clarinet the leading instruments in these Partitas, but every now and then he gives the bassoon a wonderfully virtuosic solo. When this lies in the upper register of the instrument, it carries through the ensemble well, but it can sometimes become a little lost in the accompanying voices as the line descends. This seems to be a result of the accompanying lines not giving the bassoon soloist enough space rather than the bassoon's failure to project.

At seventy-two minutes, the CD is one of the longer recordings of *Harmoniemusik* currently available. Although the addition of a trumpet in Op. 83 provides some variation in the texture, it does occasionally feel a little long with no variation in texture, colour or repertory. Those interested in organological details will also be disappointed that the liner notes by Bernhard Blattmann (given in French, German and English) do not contain any information on the instruments used for the recording.

For the wind music enthusiast, this will be a welcome addition to a CD collection, as it explores repertory that has not had much exposure and is performed by an ensemble which pursues it with enthusiasm and dedication. For those yet unacquainted with the genre of *Harmoniemusik*, this recording will provide a pleasant introduction.

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GEORG JOSEPH (ABBÉ) VOGLER (1749–1814)
SYMPHONIES, OVERTURES, BALLETS
London Mozart Players / Matthias Bamert
Chandos, CHAN 10504, 2009; one disc, 67 minutes

In the course of a multi-faceted career that stretched from the later decades of the eighteenth century to the early years of the nineteenth, Abbé Vogler enjoyed prominence as one of the more complex and colourful figures in the musical life of his time. He travelled widely, held posts at Mannheim, Munich, Stockholm and Darmstadt, and on various occasions earned either praise or condemnation from contemporaries for his exploits as a virtuoso organist, composer, theorist, teacher, commentator on musical style and technique, and experimenter in the realms of acoustics and organ design.

Vogler's historical importance as the teacher of Giacomo Meyerbeer and Carl Maria von Weber has long been acknowledged; and owing in part to the availability of several important texts in either facsimile or translation, present-day scholars have the opportunity to examine at least some aspects of his theoretical and pedagogical contribution. These include his development of the now standard system of Roman-numeral



harmonic analysis; his musings on the ramifications of harmonic reduction, some of which anticipate the theories of Heinrich Schenker; and his method of ‘Verbesserung’, which featured explicit, detailed commentary on two versions of a given composition: the original on one hand, and Vogler’s modernized, harmonically clarified and often texturally enriched reworking on the other.

For various reasons Vogler’s music has garnered less scholarly attention than his writings, and to this day only a small fraction of his compositional oeuvre is available in modern editions. Given this circumstance, few listeners are likely to have the opportunity to hear his music in live performance, and commercially available recordings are scarce (though an excellent rendition of his Requiem in E Flat appeared in 2000 on the German Arte Nova Classics label (74311 71663 2)).

In recent years Chandos has done a service for eighteenth-century-music enthusiasts by issuing albums devoted to relatively unfamiliar orchestral repertory from the mid- and later eighteenth century (notably in discs devoted to music of Salieri, Cannabich and Leopold Mozart). The present disc, though long overdue, is most welcome for the glimpse it affords into certain of the abbé’s ambitions and accomplishments in the realm of orchestral composition. In putting together this Vogler sampling, Matthias Bamert and the London Mozart Players have chosen to focus primarily on theatre and concert works from the 1770s and 1780s: two overtures that inhabit the realm of tragedy – one for a performance of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1779), the other for Racine’s *Athalie* (1786) – and one in a comic vein, for the singspiel *Erwin und Elmire* (1781, set to Goethe’s text); two symphonies written in close chronological proximity but very different in character (G major, 1779; D minor, 1782); and, to round out the disc, several excerpts that derive from Vogler’s music for a pantomime ballet composed for the Mannheim court in the early 1770s.

What does this miscellaneous selection of works tell us about Vogler’s engagement with musical styles and techniques of his time? The ubiquitous vocal-style gestures, legato fluency of line and strokes of dramatic impact all bespeak familiarity with an Italian operatic language; the long crescendos and fondness for wind colours betray the influence of Mannheim orchestral practice; and the deft handling of a diverse later eighteenth-century harmonic language often points to the progressive voice of Vogler the theorist – not only in the palpable logic of his long-range tonal planning, but also in his telling use of inflected harmonies (for example, Neapolitan sixths, augmented sixths and diminished sevenths) for moments of colour, expressive intensity or surprise.

On the whole, Bamert and his ensemble offer a vigorous, disciplined, generally sympathetic account of this music. Allegros are mostly taken at a suitably fast clip (notwithstanding an occasional sluggish tendency, as in the first movement of the G major symphony); slow movements deliver their impressions of pathos, introspection or pastoral bliss convincingly without either rushing or dragging; and there are some intriguing performance-practice details, for example the enlivening of certain repeated passages with *notes inégales*. Points of contrast in dynamics are generally rendered with satisfying emphasis, and instances of novelty in harmony and orchestration stand out in appropriately bold relief. Yet however effective their impact, the broad strokes sometimes come at the expense of a certain refinement of metrical accent and phrasing, as the listener’s ear is directed more to the succession of beats and bars than to the nuanced projection of a continuous line that the music seems to call for.

To be sure, the performances are not uniformly faulty in this regard, and the interpretation of one especially memorable work, the overture to *Hamlet*, is impressive for its theatrical flair and stylistic conviction as well as its technical assurance. This piece was indeed a felicitous choice, not only for its merits as a model of evocative musical imagery but for its connection with one of Vogler’s greatest pedagogical endeavours, the three-volume *Betrachtungen der Mannheimer Tonschule* (Mannheim, 1778–1781; reprinted Hildesheim: Olms, 1974). Incorporated in the final volume of the *Betrachtungen* is a lengthy discussion of the piece from both technical and expressive points of view. The detailed commentary opens a window onto Vogler’s intentions and thought processes as the composer himself explains the delicate intersections of structural logic and musical narration that govern his thematically diverse portrayal of Hamlet’s sorrow, the appearance of his father’s ghost, Hamlet’s rage and his feigned madness.



The disc's two other featured overtures confine themselves to narrower ranges of colour and expressive contrast and have a less obvious narrative import, yet both are fine examples of their genre. The overture to *Athalie* conveys suitably dark impressions of foreboding and nervous energy, whereas that for *Erwin und Elmire* overflows with melodious high spirits. For sheer dramatic intensity, nothing on this album surpasses the D minor symphony, with its display of relentless *Sturm und Drang* theatrics in both outer movements. The G major symphony, no less effective in its command of an up-to-date symphonic idiom, merits notice for its peculiar design, with three principal sections (fast–slow–fast) played without a break as in a three-part Italian overture. But there is a more explicit model in play here from the realm of the operatic aria, as betrayed by the large-scale tonal and thematic logic involved: specifically, the first part modulates to the dominant, and the complementary final section recalls its material, now tonally adjusted in the manner of a recapitulation; the slow, thematically independent material in between unfolds as an area of central contrast. In all these respects, the work resembles a certain species of abbreviated da capo aria. (Charles Rosen quotes an example of such a form from Mozart's contemporaneous *Zaide* in his *Sonata Forms* (revised edition (New York: Norton, 1988), 59–68.) Curiously, Vogler's piece, written in the late summer of 1779, came just several months after a G major symphony by Mozart (K318) that adopts a closely related variant of this abbreviated da capo format. Perhaps Vogler knew of Mozart's work prior to composing his own, structurally comparable, symphony, though it seems more likely that this is a case of coincidence, both composers responding in similar fashion to certain stylistic cues and models circulating within their neighbouring late-1770s musical environments.

Final mention must be made of the disc's baffling inclusion of two 'ballet suites', one comprising an overture and three dances, the other furnishing three additional dance movements. The liner notes say only that some of this material comes from Vogler's *Rendez-vous de chasse* and that the selections were edited by composer and conductor Eugen Bodart (1905–1981) some time in the 1950s. Actually, the music of both suites is readily traceable to that Mannheim ballet, which dates from 1772. But the numbers included here do not transmit the original version, despite the fact that Vogler's score is readily available in a modern edition (Madison: A-R Editions, 1996). Instead they consist of arrangements twice removed, though nothing of this is explained in the material that accompanies the disc. First, Vogler himself transcribed movements from the ballet for keyboard and violin, often altering them structurally, and included them in the musical supplement to the third volume of his *Betrachtungen*. It was from among these pieces that Bodart prepared his own modern arrangements under the title *Komische Ballette am Churpfälzischen Hofe*, suites 1 and 2 (Munich: Mannheimer Musik-Verlag (no date)). Here the selected movements are turned out in blended orchestral sonorities that differ markedly from Vogler's, where leaner scoring prevails, in keeping with a pointed concern for functional separation of winds and strings. Certainly the ballet suites make pleasant enough listening, given their ingratiating themes, vivid contrasts of mood and tempo, and polished orchestration. But why include the music in an only partially authentic guise? Overall, this album merits the highest praise in celebrating a late eighteenth-century composer whose distinctive, refreshing voice has gone largely unrecognized. Yet in regard to the ballet music, it also represents a squandered opportunity to showcase, in its original form, the *Rendez-vous de chasse* as an early landmark in Vogler's career: his first major artistic accomplishment for the renowned musical establishment at Mannheim.

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