



it as a fugal transition (bars 13–16), as an accompanying figure (bars 34–38) and at the beginning of the development section (bars 93–95). This unifying device helps to hold together a first movement that comprises 227 bars (in Haydn's roughly contemporaneous Op. 50 works, the average is 184 bars).

This recording from Pleyel Quartett Köln is a sequel to their earlier recording of Pleyel's third book of 'Prussian' quartets, numbers 7–9 (cpo 777 315–2, 2008). Overall, the players acquit themselves quite well; they are especially sensitive in their performances of the slow movements, and the work of first violinist Ingeborg Scheerer is particularly noteworthy in the frequent episodes of virtuosic passagework. Considering the quality on display here, one hopes that these players will go on to complete the entire cycle of twelve quartets.

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GEORG PHILIPP TELEMANN (1681–1767)
COMPLETE VIOLIN CONCERTOS, VOLUME 4
Elizabeth Wallfisch (violin, director) / L'Orfeo Barockorchester
cpo 777 242–2, 2012; one disc, 62 minutes

During the 1720s and 1730s a small number of German composers wrote French-inspired overture-suites that featured solo lines in the style of Italian concertos. By combining these national styles in their works (which have been variously termed *Konzertsuite* and *concert en ouverture*), composers created pieces containing striking contrasts. In the first movements, for instance, the familiar opening of the French *ouverture* – with its stately dotted rhythms, tutti textures and slow tempo – frames a faster Italian concerto-ritornello section. Throughout these opening movements and the works as a whole, the juxtaposition of tutti ensemble and soloist also provides contrast, as does the variety of dance types following the first movement. For many modern listeners, the best-known work of this type is Johann Sebastian Bach's Overture for flute, strings and continuo in B minor, BWV1067; however, the most prolific composer of the *concert en ouverture*, and quite possibly the inventor of this generic hybrid, was Georg Philipp Telemann. The genre itself and Telemann's examples in particular were well regarded by his contemporaries, as is evident in Johann Adolph Scheibe's discussion of the 'Concertouverture' in his *Der critische Musikus* (1740). There he writes that 'Among the Germans, Telemann and [Johann Friedrich] Fasch have distinguished themselves most of all in this type of Overture. The first in particular has made such works best known in Germany, and has thereby so distinguished himself that one may rightly say, without being accused of flattery, that as an emulator of the French he has finally surpassed these foreigners in their own national music'. For those interested in trying their hand at composing similar pieces, Scheibe warned that, as regards the writing for the solo instrument, one must 'avoid proceeding in a manner that is as concerto-like, long-winded, and forceful as would be appropriate in a proper concerto. Here there is a certain balance to maintain, so that one does not overshadow the true disposition and nature of the *Ouverture* and lapse from a French style of writing into an Italian one, and consequently render the style of such a piece confused and disorderly' (translations from Steven Zohn, *Music for a Mixed Taste: Style, Genre, and Meaning in Telemann's Instrumental Works* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 43).

Judging from the *concerts en ouverture* already widely available in recordings and familiar to modern-day audiences, including BWV1067 as well as both Telemann's Overture for recorder and strings in A minor, TWV55:a2, and his Overture for viola da gamba and strings in D major, TWV55:D6, one might gather that



composers by and large adhered to Scheibe's advice regarding the style of these works. Indeed, these familiar compositions do not contain much virtuosity for the soloist and the overall French flavour is preserved. But with this new recording of three of Telemann's *concerts en ouverture* performed by violinist and director Elizabeth Wallfisch and L'Orfeo Barockorchester, we might now surmise that Telemann did not always follow these rules proposed by Scheibe. With the works included on this recording, one in G major (TWV55:G6), another in E major (TWV55:E3) and lastly a work in G minor (TWV55:g7), Telemann proves that including Italianate virtuosity does not necessarily lead to a work that is 'confused' or 'disorderly', but can rather exhibit an invigorating blend of diverse national styles. Indeed, sections of these works demand remarkable virtuosity, which Wallfisch effortlessly executes in Telemann's dazzling passagework. The most impressive virtuosity comes in the solo episodes of the concerto-ritornello sections of the opening movements, where fanciful Italian figurations propel modulations and sequences.

Many elegant French-styled movements can be found here, too. The 'Loure' in TWV55:G6, for example, reveals Telemann's ability to create beautiful music through simple means. In this movement Wallfisch plays a lyrical and minimally ornamented melody over a homophonic and repetitive foundation. When the opening section returns at the end, the performers take some liberties with the score: the harpsichord and many of the string players drop out, resulting in a sound that is both intimate and wistful. The elegant ending to this movement could not be more different from the vigorous opening movement or the two dances that bookend the 'Loure', with their flashy soloistic virtuosity.

A most pleasant surprise with two out of the three performances on this recording involves the addition of oboes doubling the violins in the tutti sections of certain movements. None of the surviving sources of these pieces (which are currently housed in libraries in Dresden and Darmstadt) indicate the presence of winds, but this choice further enhances the contrasts already inherent in the works themselves by reinforcing the tutti textures and supplying a greater variety of instrumental colours for the ensemble. From the Prefaces of his published cantatas, for example, we know that Telemann approved of freely adding ripieno parts should extra musicians be available, so it would seem that he would have endorsed this decision.

Another surprise to the unsuspecting listener comes with Telemann's adoption of 'rustic' style in some of the solo episodes in the concerto-ritornello-form movements of TWV55:G6 and TWV55:g7, both of which feature pastoral drones in the ensemble and improvisatory solo lines. Telemann's use of this naive musical style forms a clear contrast to the French order of the *ouverture* and dances and the disciplined technical demands of Italian virtuosity. At one such passage in the G major *Ouverture*, for example, Wallfisch disregards the preceding tempo and even the underlying pulse, and her sudden dynamic contrasts make it sound as if she is making things up on the spot.

I have much praise for the L'Orfeo Barockorchester, Wallfisch's accompanying ensemble on this recording. Their best attribute here is their delicate and nuanced treatment of phrasing and dynamics. In the tutti sections, the specific details of just when to back away or play out have clearly been decided in advance, and the listener is treated to music-making that is expertly executed and yet seemingly spontaneous and even at times raucous.

According to extant sources, Telemann composed a dozen *ouverture-suites* that feature one solo instrument, which is many more than those of other composers. Johann Sebastian Bach's *Ouverture* for flute, strings and continuo is his only true example of the genre, although aspects of the first movement of his *Ouverture* in D major, BWV1068, also possess characteristics of the *ouverture-concerto* hybrid. There are only single surviving examples of such *suites* by Johann Friedrich Fasch, Johann Bernard Bach and Johannes Martin Doemming. Even though a small number of *concerts en ouverture* was composed in the eighteenth century, they were praised by audiences and critics at the time, and these works thus deserve our attention today.

For decades, only two of Telemann's *concerts en ouverture* have been widely available in recordings – the two works mentioned earlier. The A minor suite for recorder and strings is especially well known, while the D major work for viola da gamba and strings has recently been included in concert programmes and on many superb recordings, notably that with soloist Jaap ter Linden accompanied by Musica Antiqua Köln



(ARCHIV 0289 471 4922 4, 2002). Despite the scorings of the well-known examples by J. S. Bach and Telemann, however, the instrument featured most often in these types of pieces was the violin. Thanks in large part to these new and imaginative recordings of Telemann's *concerts en ouverture* with solo violin by Elizabeth Wallfisch, we are now finally in the position to widen our appreciation of Telemann's contributions to this unique genre.

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