



the composer's early Bayreuth works, strongly influenced by the *empfindsam* style, which contrast with the Divertimento, more galant in its melodic clarity and expression.

Wilke's competent performance shows a preference for a flexible, at times rhapsodic interpretation of tempo and rhythm. This approach serves some movements better than others. For instance, in the opening Fantasia of the Sonata in D minor (Rosani Lute Book), such tempo flexibility strengthens the dramatic effect of the arpeggio pattern, enhancing its expressive characteristics. The same can be said for the first and third movements of the Kleinknecht sonata. In other instances the effect is quite the contrary. In the opening movement from the Hasse sonata, for example, short phrase repetitions indicated in the manuscript as alternating *forte* and *piano* are slowed down for the latter dynamic, resulting in a loss of the rhythmic drive set up by the initial repeated bass-note pattern (which the performer emphasizes by adding an initial bar of the repeating Eb). A similar situation occurs in the second movement of the Kleinknecht sonata, where the character of the piece resembles more a fantasia than the Andante, ma gratiosamente that is indicated. There is also a tendency to bring out melodic lines by separating treble and bass notes indicated as simultaneous, an approach that is reminiscent of twentieth-century classical guitar technique, which emphasizes the treble but often has the adverse effect of obscuring the motion of the bass line. Tasteful cadenzas are added in the Moderato from the Hasse sonata (with the three final bars repeated as a *petite reprise*), in the Fuga from the Durant, in the Divertimento's Finale and in the middle movement of the Kleinknecht sonata. Overall, the performances are effective in transmitting the sense of fancy found in the different compositions.

The brief booklet notes, written by Wilke, touch lightly on several issues key to mid-eighteenth-century lute style – the attempts by composers for the lute to embrace the *empfindsam* style, the inevitable stylistic changes that forced the instrument out of favour – though I am unsure what the author means when he refers to a 'fairly unified style of the baroque'. I found myself wishing that more ground were covered in the notes, and in more detail, given the uniting subject proposed for the album.

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FRANCESCO MANCINI (1672–1737)

SOLOS FOR A FLUTE

Gwyn Roberts (recorder, transverse flute) / Tempesta di Mare Chamber Players

Chandos CHAN 0801, 2014; one disc, 68 minutes

The Neapolitan composer Francesco Mancini is best known as a composer of operas and oratorios; perhaps most famous among some three dozen such works is his dramma per musica *Gli amanti generosi*, which as *L'Idaspe fedele* appears in 1710 to have been the first opera to have been presented entirely in Italian on the London stage (Donald Burrows, *Handel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 64). Resident in Naples throughout his life apart from brief visits to Rome – *Gli amanti generosi* made its way to London in the hands of the castrato Nicolini – Mancini worked for much of his career in the shadow of Alessandro Scarlatti, to whom he was forced to cede his post as maestro di cappella to the viceroy in 1708. From 1720 Mancini was employed as director of the Conservatorio di Santa Maria di Loreto, making him an important figure in the history of the Neapolitan conservatories. Indeed, in revising the entry on Mancini in F. J. Fétis's *Biographie Universelle*, Arthur Pougin became aware of an extensive 160-page manuscript collection of apparently partimento-like 'Regole o vero Toccate di studio' by Mancini in the library of the Paris Conservatoire. Pougin dismissed it as 'simplement une suite de basses chiffrées' ('just a collection of figured basses'), and to my knowledge the manuscript has yet to attract the attention of modern scholars of the partimento



tradition (Fétis, ed. Pougin, *Biographie Universelle de Musiciens . . . Supplément et Complément*, volume 2 (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1881), 154). The manuscript was dated 1695, suggesting that it originated while Mancini was working at the Conservatorio di Santa Maria della Pietà dei Turchini; he had been trained there from 1688, and was employed as organist from 1694.

Mancini's chamber music is unusual in that nearly all of it is associated with the *flauto*. There are twelve sonatas for melody and bass that were first published in London in 1724, from which the selection on the present disc is taken; a further twelve 'sonate' with four-part string accompaniment, meanwhile, are included alongside similar works by Scarlatti and others in a Neapolitan manuscript collection of 'Concerti di Flauto, Violini, Violetta e Basso' dated 1725 (I-Nc MS 34–39). Whether this collection had anything to do with the presence in Naples of Johann Joachim Quantz in the same year is not known, but the young virtuoso was no doubt attracted by the vibrant culture of composition for the transverse flute in Naples as well as the presence of Scarlatti.

The publication of Mancini's solo sonatas by Barrett and Smith in London seems to have come about through the agency of their dedicatee John Fleetwood, British consul in Naples from 1708 to 1722. Fleetwood was a noted patron of the arts: in October 1709 he presented a serenata at his palace to mark the birthday of Charles VI of Austria, while December 1714 saw three days of opulent celebrations for the coronation of George I, including a sumptuous banquet, 'una copiosa fontana di vino esquisito' and an extravagant illumination of the façade of his palace with candles and fires, together with 'Musica, ed altri divertimenti' (see Thomas Griffin, *Musical References in the 'Gazetta di Napoli' 1681–1725* (Berkeley: Fallen Leaf, 1993), 53, 75). Perhaps it was participation in such an event that earned Mancini the approval that Fleetwood showed for his compositions, as mentioned by the composer in the dedication of his sonatas, though the sonatas themselves are altogether more modest. Guido Olivieri's informative liner notes to the present recording suggest that the dedication was designed to test the waters for a possible move to London (9); ultimately, however, Fleetwood died in November 1725, by which time Mancini had in any case been restored to the position of maestro di cappella following Scarlatti's death in October.

The exact instrumentation of Mancini's twelve solo sonatas is far from clear-cut. Although they seem to have been exclusively designated as recorder sonatas in modern editions and recordings, the original London edition described them as 'Solos for a Violin or Flute'. Walsh and Hare's second edition of 1727 even dropped 'Flute' altogether, before a further impression of c1730 settled on 'Solos for a Flute', without mention of violin. Whatever instrument Mancini composed them for, such advertisement of alternative instrumentations was of course a common marketing strategy in the eighteenth century. However, it may be significant that Fleetwood had also been the dedicatee of the Op. 3 recorder sonatas (1711) published by the English virtuoso wind player Robert Valentine, who had made his name in Rome and seems to have moved to Naples at around this time. Martin Medforth describes Valentine and Mancini as friends ('Valentine, Robert', *Grove Music Online* <www.oxfordmusiconline.com> (19 March 2015)), and the Englishman's music from the 1720s certainly suggests that the two were close: Valentine contributed his own concerto to the 1725 collection described above, and in 1730 published a set of six solo sonatas, Op. 12 (dedicated to the Neapolitan Duke dell'Oratino), which are stylistically almost indistinguishable from Mancini's published set of 1724. Just to confuse matters further, Valentine's Op. 12 specifies 'Flauto traversiero' (with alternatives violin, mandola and oboe).

Unlike other recent performers on disc, Gwyn Roberts here opts for different instruments according to convenience of key, employing transverse flute alongside two sizes of recorder (in F and D); this is one of several creative decisions which introduce well-judged variety among what would otherwise be very similar works (compare the selection recorded by Trio Mancini on *Carpe Diem* CD16255 (reissued 2010), and the complete set from Ensemble Tripla Concordia, *Brilliant Classics* 94058 (2010)). Roberts's *Tempesta di Mare* Chamber Players adopt a similar attitude to the continuo part, making varied use of cello, theorbo, arclute and guitar, harpsichord and organ (Trio Mancini use harpsichord and arclute, while Ensemble Tripla Concordia stick to cello and harpsichord). The results here are perhaps more uneven in terms of individual sonatas. In the allegro second movement of Sonata I (track 22) – a fine fugue with a syncopated



countersubject and frequent stretto entries – the lone archlute lacks sufficient melodic weight to support the bass entries against the alto recorder. Conversely, in the second-movement allegro of Sonata II (track 26) the transverse flute struggles to hold its own against the combined weight of cello and harpsichord on the bass; one wonders here whether Mancini's title-page stipulation for the bass ('Harpsichord or Bass Violin' – not 'and') might not have been taken more seriously. Sonata IV (tracks 5–8) works much better, with alto recorder, cello and archlute, and indeed none of these observations outweighs the overall gains in terms of characterization and variety of approach.

The quality of these sonatas by Mancini is uniformly high, and their Neapolitan stylistic origins unmistakable. Indeed, with the character of the fugue subjects in the second movements, many of which resemble rigorously worked two-part inventions, and frequent reliance upon galant schemata and sequential voice-leading patterns, they might almost be realizations of advanced partimento exercises. (The title of both of the first two editions even states explicitly that the works were 'Proper Lessons for the Harpsichord', though given the contemporary English usage of 'lesson' for any keyboard piece it may be that this simply refers to the possibility of solo performance at the harpsichord rather than any notion of their being used in the course of thoroughbass instruction.)

That said, Mancini's predilection for minor keys and richly chromatic harmony lends the set a pleasing individuality. Diminished sevenths and augmented sixths abound; the ubiquity of the Neapolitan sixth towards the end of slow movements would risk cliché were it not for Mancini's unerring sense of when and how to introduce it for maximum expressive effect. A particularly striking instance of the latter can be heard in the first movement of Sonata X in B minor (track 9), immediately after what appears to be a structural cadence towards the end of the movement. A slowly descending tetrachord in the bass quickly dissolves into a pattern of descending first inversions leading to a Neapolitan sixth stretched out over two complete bars; the tritone outlined by the resulting falling scale in the solo part considerably accentuates the 'flatness' of the lowered second degree. Another distinctive element of these works is a certain rhythmic quirkiness which provides intermittent relief from passages of more formulaic counterpoint, as for example in the fugue subject that opens the second movement of Sonata XII (track 14); though the movement is in 2/4 time, the note grouping in the first three bars is more suggestive of 3/4. Roberts could perhaps have made more of this feature, though she and Richard Stone (archlute) do have some fun in the first movement of Sonata I (track 21). Here a brief sequential pattern begins in bar 5, apparently on the wrong beat of the bar; the result, with the help of some calculated *tenuto* to impart weight where the first beat of the bar 'should' be, is that bar four acquires an extra, fourth crotchet beat, and the downbeat only returns to its proper place some six or seven bars later.

Imitative second movements aside, the first movement of each sonata is either slow or, if lively, concludes with a slower section; apart from the conventional tempo markings Mancini deploys the more refined 'Largo Affetuouso' (Sonata III, not on this disc), 'Spiritoso' (Sonata IV, track 5) and even 'Amoroso' (Sonata I, track 21). Fourth movements often resemble jigs or other lighter dances, and are preceded by contrasting slow movements, frequently in related keys, which often end with imperfect cadences.

The performances on this disc are lively and expressive, and almost unfailingly precise in technical terms. (Though given this, it is surprising to find that an obtrusively sour whole-tone trill on the leading note in the third movement of Sonata II (track 27) made it into the final cut.) In keeping with the creative yet informed approach to instrumentation, the playing from all four performers comes across as imaginative and committed, and Roberts's spontaneous-sounding ornamentation is a constant delight. Other characteristics may not be to every listener's taste, especially Roberts's brand of expressive rubato, which sometimes comes across as simple rushing of semiquaver passages. In the Spiritoso opening of Sonata IV (track 5) this is combined with a somewhat mannered, hesitant-sounding approach to the opening repeated-quaver figure and its later repetitions; the ensuing headlong rush through a descending octave scale is not always cleanly executed by either the recorder or Lisa Terry on cello. That said, the result is still more rewarding than the relentless interpretations of this movement by both Trio Mancini and Ensemble Tripla Concordia. Any doubt about the first movement of this sonata, moreover, will be more than offset by the delightful last



movement, in which Roberts mischievously pauses on the quaver anacrusis for at least a bar's worth of $\frac{3}{8}$ time before launching into a jaunty romp accompanied by archlute and – thanks to a liberal interpretation of Mancini's 'spiccato' marking – pizzicato cello. In sum, this is a highly enjoyable disc; for most listeners the main disappointment on reaching the end of track 32 will be solely that the remaining four sonatas could not be included.

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