

Harpsichord & *fortepiano*

Vol. 21, No. 1 Autumn, 2016

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Musical Instrument Research Catalog
(MIRCat)

REVIEWS

BOOKS

Joan Benson, *Clavichord for Beginners*. (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2014). pp. xiv + 126 + CD + DVD. Reviewed by Richard Troeger

This publication is offered as an introduction to the clavichord for those unfamiliar with it, but who have some accomplishment on other keyboard instruments. It does not introduce an absolute beginner to keyboard playing generally.

The volume is in large, workbook-like format (8 x 13 inches) with ample margins and space following sub-sections, allowing for annotations by the reader. After a basic definition of “clavichord” and a few comments on its relevance to players of the piano, organ, and harpsichord, the book settles into its main business. Chapters 2-4 offer a succession of procedures and exercises, mainly in two series of “lessons,” intended to prepare the newcomer for the clavichord’s simple, subtle, and often difficult action. (These lessons are largely paralleled in the studio-lit masterclass that is the main fare on the accompanying DVD.)

The procedures move from arm shaking (also demonstrated on the DVD) to simple table-top exercises intended to develop awareness of the individual fingers. The two series of lessons then take the reader to the instrument itself for “getting acquainted” motions (e.g., pressing a key down silently), then playing isolated notes, pairs of notes, and larger groups. J.N. Forkel’s famous account of what he describes as J.S. Bach’s keyboard technique makes up Lesson 5 (Series 1).

From this text stems a central point of the overall presentation, stressed repeatedly

throughout the exercises and in the masterclass, that the basic clavichord touch requires the curved fingertip to press the key and then slide along the key’s surface, pulling toward the player and the front edge of the key. “By pressing and pulling forward [sic] on the key with your curled fingertip, you can hold the tangent evenly on the strings for a longer time” (page 20). The thumb is included, making a lateral slide motion: “it strokes the key sideways” (p. 22). The rule is applied also to notes reached by leap (p. 42). Forkel’s description of playing technique appears, at least superficially, to differ somewhat from accounts by the previous generation, and even from his pupil Friedrich Griepenkerl’s recounting of his teacher’s approach. I wish that the text went on to explain how the sliding technique relates, for instance, to chordal or dense contrapuntal textures.

In the ensuing chapters, as an introductory dip into the literature, the reader is given quick summaries of a few basic 18th-century ornaments (Chapter 5); a selection of “Eleven Easy Pieces” presented without editorial or pedagogic annotations (Chapter 6; some of the pieces are only one or two lines in length); and samplings of late Renaissance through late 18th-century keyboard repertoire and tutors (Chapters 7 and 8). The brief final Chapter touches lightly on improvisation, ensemble playing, and recordings; it ends with speculation concerning the clavichord’s future collaboration with electronic music. There are two Bibliographies (“selected” and “extended”). No index is provided.

It would perhaps be helpful to the newcomer if the book included a quick sketch of the development and varieties of historical (and even revival) clavichords, which would provide more context for the

newcomer. (Reference books are listed in the Bibliographies of course, and some directions for further reading occur in the endnotes.) Neither are particulars given regarding fretted vs. unfretted clavichords (there are two or three passing references), tuning, or maintenance--often of deep concern to the neophyte. (Peter Bavington's book on the latter subject is included in the "Selected Bibliography.") Surprisingly, there is no discussion in the text of blocking ("chucking," the bouncing of tangents on the strings due to inadequate follow-through). This aspect of playing often puts off the newcomer, but perhaps the commentary on touch is intended to obviate this hazard indirectly. The CD offers a retrospective of eight selections (rec. 1962-82) from the author's discography. The four clavichord tracks use instruments by Thomas Goff (1936), Jacobus Verwolf (1960); Schiedmayer (1796), and Lindholm (1785). The pianos heard are by Broadwood (1795) and Steinway (1966).

RECORDINGS

A Trio of Clavichord Recordings

Terence Charlston, "Mersenne's Clavichord: Keyboard Music in 16th- and 17th-century France", Divine art dda 25134 . Clavichord after Mersenne by Peter Bavington (2011), Pitch a'=392; temperament quarter-comma meantone.

Julian Perkins, "J.S. Bach, French Suites BWV 812-817; J.J. Froberger, Partita No. 2 in D Minor, FbWV 602; G.P. Telemann, Suite in A Major, TWV 32:14 (with Sarabanda from TWV 41:A1, arr. Perkins). Resonus RES 10163. Clavichords by Peter Bavington (2008) after J.J. Bodechtel, ca. 1785; and

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after J.H. Silbermann (attr.; Nürnberg collection).

Anna Maria McElwain, "Fux, Johnsen, Lithander, Beethoven". Robert Holmin Ljud & Bild, RHLB14. 61 min. J.J. Fux, Suite in G Minor, K. 404; H.P. Johnsen, Sonata in C Major; Carl Ludvig Lithander, Capriccio in G; L. van Beethoven, Sonata in C, Op. 2, no. 3. Pitch a'=415.

Reviewed by Richard Troeger

Here are three offerings of great interest, all well recorded and well played. Among them they provide a large, if uneven, sweep across the clavichord repertoire.

To begin with the earliest material: reconstruction of the clavichord described by Mersenne in his *Harmonie universelle* (Part IV, *Traité des instrumens à cordes*, 1636/37) is naturally of immense interest. Many of us have puzzled over Mersenne's description and the famous illustration he provides. The booklet notes explain, "Mersenne's illustration has been shown to be isometric and the exact proportions he gives have enabled the British clavichord maker, Peter Bavington, to build a working example."

The very well-written notes include a description by Mr. Bavington of the conception and execution of the instrument (which is shown in five colour photos); he published a full article about it in Vol. X of the *De Clavicordio* series published from Magnano. Mr. Charlston discusses the repertoire, and provides as well a cogent description of the clavichord as a player's instrument, which I cannot resist quoting in part: "The sound is greatly affected by the five bridges, each of which has a distinctive sound with the difference between bridges most pronounced where one ends and another begins. Thus the instrument can

be said to have (at least) four registers or characters, approximately corresponding to the vocal ranges, treble, alto, tenor and bass. These characteristics are distinctive from other contemporary clavichords and set considerable technical and interpretational challenges for the player to overcome."

I have long enjoyed the qualities shared by lute and clavichord, and greatly enjoy playing lute music on suitable clavichords. (I married a lutenist; perhaps I should order a Mersenne model.) My favourite selection from the recording is an actual lute piece, "La Magdalena," by the elusive P.B. (Pierre Blondeau?). The instrument actually seems to take on the sound of a lute here, beyond what one might expect even from Mr. Charlston's very adroit arrangement (and performance). The selection of works extends from 16th-century pieces by Antoine de Fevin and Gombert to a Toccata by Sweelinck and the elaborately contrapuntal *Fantaisie* by Charles Racquet provided at Mersenne's request (the MS. found in his own copy of *Harmonie universelle*); to later pieces by (among others) L. Couperin, d'Anglebert, and Gigault. All of these are well played by the explorative Mr. Charlston, who seems to have accustomed himself quickly to the characteristics of this, yet another variation of the ever chameleon-like genus, the clavichord. Congratulations are due to Messrs. Charlston and Bavington for bringing such an experiment to so fruitful a conclusion.

Moving forward chronologically, we come to a high-energy recording of Bach's French Suites (and works by Froberger and Telemann). These Suites have long been recognized as very apt for the clavichord, but rarely recorded on that instrument. Here, we hear them divided between a fretted clavichord (after Bodechtel; French Suites 1, 5, 6 and the Froberger) and the *bundfrei*

instrument after J.H. Silbermann. Mr. Perkins is a player with a fine sense of line and direction. He plays with vigour or meditative lyricism in a healthy, unaffected manner, and makes lovely accents in time, whether by stretching beats or within strict time. He often adds ornaments to the repetitions and appears fond of providing flourishes to lead into a repetition or at the end of a work (cf. the conclusion of French Suite No. 5). The performer comments in the notes, "A particular thrill associated with the French Suites is the lack of any one definitive source. ...Collating the sources has indeed proved exhilarating and challenging--though I hope the results do not sound distractingly dangerous! It has allowed me creative freedom in combining different versions, adding some extra movements, varying repeats and realising chordal patterns--whilst also inspiring the occasional 'Perkinism.'" The extra movements include, for Suite 4, the delightful little Prelude BWV 815a, its arpeggios realized here very ingeniously by Mr. Perkins. He bravely plays the E Major French Suite on the fretted clavichord, and I must compliment him particularly on his rendition of the *allemande*, finding and expressing the diverse flow of superficially even sixteenth notes with very elegant inflections.

The recording is somewhat close in and with the Silbermann-style instrument (as is an occupational hazard with recording clavichord) has a minutely "boxy," constricted quality, but is nonetheless clear and honest. Mr. Bavington's instruments are of course very fine, and he has obviously kept them impeccably in tune during the recording sessions.

Reaching to the end of the clavichord's historical use, Ms. McElwain in her second disc provides a slight survey of the

18th-century repertoire, from the suite by Fux to a pair of Swedish *galanteries* to an early Beethoven sonata. The frequent effect of *interruptio* in the Johnsen Sonata, and the heart-on-sleeve contrast of the daisies by the precipice (so to put it), are performed with panache and sensitive timing. (It is good to hear finely nuanced chord repetitions on a clavichord recording.) The Lithander Capriccio is equally delicious, and the Beethoven as well played as I've ever heard Beethoven performed. The player shows here a spacious yet acute sense of time. To my ear, there is not an inflection that is not perfectly calibrated: the pulse is well grounded but the playing free, always "on" at the large-scale arrival points. The piece certainly "works" on the clavichord quite as well as on any piano.

The instrument is by Stig Lundmark of Tornedalens Cembalobyggeri. The model is not identified, but I take it to be the firm's reproduction (found in their catalogue) of a five-octave Specken in Stockholm's Musikmuseet (1956 / 5726). The tone is dark; in the recording, the treble seems just a trifle distant, but the recorded sound is open and clear.

Kathryn Cok , "Pavana: Music of Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck and Peter Philips", sfz music SFZMO214-LC18271. Reviewed by Charlene Brendler

Occasionally, one hears a recording that inspires the listener to sit down at the harpsichord and play this music. Kathryn Cok's "Pavana" is such a CD. Ms. Cok seems to have an affinity for this late 16th- early 17th century keyboard music, and she makes a compelling and eloquent delivery showcasing the music of Sweelinck and Phillips.

This music is distant to our time and is often played in a stiff and stodgy way, but her refreshing approach brings the featured

variations, fantasias, popular tunes, and dances to life. Highly ornamented and full of figuration, the musical style can be boring if the performer lacks a strong sense of direction, skill, and imagination. None of these musical flaws are present here.

Cok's playing is focused on what is musically important. Sensitive phrasing is a predominant feature, especially appreciated when coupled with her fine sense of timing. Her treatment of passagework is technically sure but not overly flashy, and, she even contributes additional flourishes! Ornamental figurations never interfere with the flow of a phrase. A crystalline clarity of voices in the fantasia by Philips compliments her lyrical approach, and there is a refreshing sense of play with the musical complexity in the Philips "Passamezzo Galliard".

Rhythmic nuance is pleasingly unpredictable and always serves the music. There are some liberties with tempo, as in section three of the "Galliard Pagget" by Philips, but the liberties produce effective results. Articulations are purposeful but not over-bearing, and her use of lead-ins that connect sections in Sweelinck's works is creative and unobtrusive. Cadential figures are well placed, giving the listener sufficient time to experience effectively the end of a phrase or section. Final cadential chords are consistently simple and restful, complementing the written florid passages and extemporaneous insertions.

Also, the two-manual replica of the 1638 Ruckers, built in 1999 by Titus Crijnen, is a good choice for this music. The well-recorded sound is appropriately crisp and invitingly clear and Ms. Cok does her own tuning, using quarter comma mean-tone throughout. The tuning highlights particular chords in Sweelinck's "Engelse Fortuin" and "Pavana Philippi", and makes the "Pavane Lachrymae" especially poignant.

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There is a lot to like in this dynamic recording that highlights the musical connections between Sweelinck, the “Orpheus of Amsterdam” and Philips, the self-exiled English Catholic. The musical forms popular at the time are represented with polish and creativity. This CD is highly recommended for aficionados of late Elizabethan music, as well as new listeners or players to this style.

Giulia Nuti, harpsichord, “Les Sauvages: Harpsichords in pre-Revolutionary Paris”, Deutsche Harmonia Mundi, 2014.
Reviewed by Charlene Brendler.

“Les Sauvages” presents keyboard works and composers in France during the musically awkward transitional years of 1760-1780. On this disc, Italian harpsichordist Giulia Nuti effectively demonstrates how a late French Taskin model harpsichord (with all its possible *grand ravalements*) can meet the expressive demands of this musically changing style.

Late 18th-century keyboard players and composers alike sought more expressive and dynamic capabilities beyond the usual quill plucking and register changes. Makers responded by enlarging Ruckers models: stops and registers were added, and *genouillères* (knee levers) installed to free busy hands from having to change registration. The sensuous *peau de buffle* register was also added, the leather providing a softer and less metallic pluck than that of quill. The ravalé Taskin instrument heard here is from 1788 and was recorded in the Museo degli Strumenti Musicali del Castello Sforzesco, Milano. It remains one of the few such instruments to escape destruction during or after the revolution.

Historically, it is interesting that musical style superseded the instrument’s ability to deliver the Classical era style characteristics.

For instance, Alberti bass figures, phrases requiring expressive dynamics, and parallel octaves are all musical features of this transitional era, which can sound awkward when played on a harpsichord. Even so, the French preferred the harpsichord to the fortepiano and they were late to embrace the latter. Meanwhile, French and German composers considered expressive dynamics, or at least the suggestion of them, especially important in their compositions. Ms. Nuti selected the music of such composers as Eckard, Schobert, Tapray, Hüllmandel, and W.A. Mozart to demonstrate how effective their music can be on a late French harpsichord.

The CD opens with the upbeat, energetic, and familiar Schobert E-Flat Sonata I, Opus XIV. The listener’s ears are immediately filled with the sonorous Taskin. Contrasts are readily apparent by appropriate register changes and the employment of the *peau de buffle*. In fact, Nuti’s use of this special register is a welcome relief to the basic quilled sonority heard throughout the recording. Quiet moments are effective amongst the numerous “noisy” ones, especially in the Mozart Sonata K. 310. Likewise, the Cantabile and Amoroso movements of Eckard’s B-Flat Major Sonata serve to provide a wonderful contrast and balance to flashy, more brilliant musical content.

Hüllmandel, a prominent musician who contributed to Diderot’s *Encyclopedie*, is represented here with Sonata II in A Minor, performed on the harpsichord, (although it is known that he preferred the fortepiano). It is a good example of how one can make transitional music convincing regardless of which instrument is used. Mozart may be less well served by playing K.310 on the harpsichord. The first movement sounds especially jarring, although this serves the affect of the music. It was a welcome surprise

to hear the convincing playing of the second movement: Nuti's tempo and unsentimental, yet musical approach produced a satisfying rendition.

Many are familiar with Rameau's "Les Sauvages" but the Jean François Tapray set of variations on the theme was a humorous and refreshing surprise. The technically flashy, and especially beautiful effects from textures and harmonies offered by Tapray provide a welcome alternative to Rameau's variations.

In all, my initial reservations concerning this disc were overrun by Nuti's fine performance of both familiar and unfamiliar works. Her playing and choice of music supports her liner note commentary about transitional music being suited to a variety of keyboards. This is a recording that will be especially welcomed in reference libraries for its exposure to late French taste in harpsichords, and, for presenting a player's options in adapting to the pre-revolutionary musical style.

**"Transformations : Music by Gila (Gillian) Carcas", Music&Media / MMC109 (2015).
Reviewed by Pamela Nash.**

This CD contains only one piece for harpsichord: consequently, for the interests of present readership, the following review will refer only briefly to the disc as a whole.

"Transformations" comprises of 11 works written during the last 25 years by the composer Gila Carcas (b.1963), covering a range of instrumentation from string quartet to solo winds and strings and of course, harpsichord. The composer's pre-occupation with the concept of transformation in sound — the shifting of tonality, modality and atonality and the exploration of instrumental timbres — is imaginatively conveyed across the spectrum of works, as is a nostalgia for time and place. Specific locations provide inspiration: Jerusalem's Temple Mount for the

string quartet; north-west Scotland for *By Scottish Rocks*; the South Downs' Cissbury Ring for a piece of the same name, and, in *Imaginary Moonwalk* for solo harpsichord, the catalyst is an imagined sense of place inspired by the Apollo 11 Moon landing.

Written for its thirtieth anniversary in 1999 and premiered by Jane Chapman in the same year, the piece (performed here by Marina Minkin) is an evocation of the barren strangeness of lunar landscape, of weightlessness and the "lolloping gait of astronauts". The composer's use of the harpsichord in depicting that sense of disconnection with gravity and temporal reality reveals an unwavering confidence in her medium; the imaginative use of the "landscape" of the keyboard compass, the bold spaciousness of pace punctuated by outbursts of erratic activity, and a clean delineation of musical strands defined by the spatial differentiation of the two manuals.

The off-setting of the buff stop in one hand and unmuted strings in the other — a prominent timbral strategy of the piece — emerges at times as a dialogue of two starkly contrasting voices, such as the almost deliriously meandering, improvisatory treble underpinned by a darker, more linear buffed bass, and in the work's final section, the high register use of the buff in a final flight of scalar flourishes against stark fourths on the second manual conjectures an image of twinkling stars against the blackness of space.

The only reservations are that some of the upper register chord-voicings sound grating, and that the unchecked 4-foot tuning affects the quality of harpsichord timbre in the full registration passages. The performance here (as elsewhere on the disc) is exemplary, and Minkin accentuates the transparency of the writing to eloquent effect.

Having listened to the entire CD programme, I was struck by the quality and

stylistic range of these works, from cutting edge extended string writing in *Indigo Dreams* - an invocation of the didgeridoo for double bass, superbly rendered by Danny Felsteiner - to the sweetly lyrical *Autumn*, a miniature for viola and piano, to the impassioned but accessible writing of the String Quartet no 3. Gila Carcas deserves greater recognition, and I hope that she writes further for the harpsichord.

All tracks were recorded at the Ha'Teiva studio in Jaffa, Israel, with the exception of the harpsichord piece which was recorded at The Jerusalem Music Centre. There is no programme note on the harpsichord used.

Vivienne Spiteri, harpsichord, "Isadora Sings", isidorArt: isi 03

Reviewed by Pamela Hickman

Enigmatic maverick of the harpsichord world Vivienne Spiteri has released "Isadora Sings", another CD collection of electroacoustic harpsichord alchemy. One of only a small handful of harpsichordists devoting themselves entirely to the work of living composers, Spiteri (also known by her musical alter ego of *viwie' vinçent*) is credited with single-handedly reviving the contemporary harpsichord in her adopted homeland of Canada. "*Au diable le conformisme*" is an apt byword for her artistic philosophy: for the past 30 years she has resolutely eschewed all traditional expectations of what a harpsichordist should be, throwing off all that she considers as the deadweight of the harpsichord's heritage as well as questioning the conventions of performance practice: in particular, the adherence to, and reverence for, the written score. Instead she continues to pursue headlong the possibilities for transforming and "extending" harpsichord sound, mainly through combination with live electronics

and tape, producing much cutting-edge collaborative work with composers who share her vision, not only of the harpsichord's predisposition for mechanistic virtuosity, but of how far its relationship with contemporary technology can go.

In order to appreciate the technological diversity as well as the recording quality of this disc, I would urge the use of headphones, not only to allow the listener to enter the different ambient spaces of each soundfield, but to engage fully with the immediacy and intimacy of harpsichord sound, whether in its pure acoustical form or in one of the many transformations it undergoes - "deconstructed" harpsichord sound, so to speak. It is not imperative to have technological knowledge to understand the impact of each of the five works on this disc, and from a purely objective and musical standpoint, the compositions speak for themselves. However, the absence of technical information in the CD notes may give rise to questions for the inexperienced electroacoustic listener, and since the intellectual ideas behind the sound engineering and the various recording set-ups are often integral to the work, it is always useful to know how they, and the collaborations, come about.

This is much less of an issue with the first track, *cinema - mode d'emploi* for harpsichord and effects by Pierre Desrochers. The only work on the disc without a "fixed medium" or "tape" part, it is the most musically direct and least complex for the listener, with the "effects" (from sampling and layering) creating sound blocks of rich density and enhancing what is essentially the piece's minimalist-driven, metrical nature. This is a dramatically propulsive 16-minute ride - still riveting after several playings - by a composer who demonstrates with uncompromising and devastating effect how to capture rhythmic

“groove” on the harpsichord, and how to produce pulse and accent through the textural and rhythmic manipulation of layered harpsichord sound.

If the Desrochers piece exploits harpsichord rhythm, then the title track - a collaborative work by Spiteri and composer Kent Oloffson - explores more the nature of its mechanism, with exhaustive treatment of the harpsichord strings through pitch-bending, muting, strumming and manipulation for harmonics. The sense of relish from musicians treading the line between playfulness and seriousness is tangible, but despite - or perhaps because of - the work's 25 minute duration, some listeners may find less musical cohesion here than in the other works on the disc. Yet, whilst a casual listener may assume it to be a protracted series of randomly unrelated effects, a more searching and patient one (headphones essential) will discover the joyousness of the sound transmutations: the echoing of the harpsichord effects in the electronics and the myriad sonic impressions it generates - among them bells, voices, wind, machinery, knocking and ringing.

Assuming that the title of “Isadora’s Box” for harpsichord and tape - another collaborative effort, with composer Eleazar Garzon - is an allusion to the mythical unleashing of uncontrolled forces, it captures the notion perfectly. Indeed, the tension between the more structured musical statements in the harpsichord (analogous to the containment of the box?) and the almost breath-taking flight of tape sounds (the dervish-like menace of its contents?) makes for a near-unhinged, giddy listening experience, but one well worth the discovery.

The title of “Tangram” for bass clarinet, harpsichord and tape by Hope Lee may refer to a Chinese puzzle, but the composer turns the conundrum of this unlikely instrumental

pairing completely on its head. The bass clarinet supplies not only the lower registers which the harpsichord lacks, but also provides a foil, with its soft-edged sound, for the immediacy and stridency of harpsichord tone, qualities that Lee modulates to good effect. But whilst there is still the novelty factor in the interaction of these disparate instrumental characters, there is too the tension arising out of the work's “trio” disposition; the harpsichord and bass clarinet as partners - both of them fitful, whimsical and improvisatory in feel - pitted against the pre-set, fixed dimension of the “third player”.

Jean-Claude Risset's *Pentacle* for harpsichord and tape is a five-part work of high energy and calibre but also one which possesses such technical complexity that it is hard to quantify without reference to a programme note. The spatial effect of different channels is evident, and in essence it is a frenetic dialogue between harpsichord and digital sounds - mostly harpsichord-derived - and with each of the five sections stressing an individual construct relating to harpsichord timbre. Least successful of these is the distortion of tuning temperament in the third section - a highly uncomfortable, almost a-musical sound to have to tolerate, but by contrast (and indeed, one of the highlights of the disc), is the work's dazzling fifth and final section: two minutes of a frantic *perpetuum mobile* in cascading scales with a devastating collective effect of a hall full of amplified harpsichords.

This disc would be a valuable addition to the libraries of electroacoustic music enthusiasts, and I would hope it makes an impact in that area. As for the harpsichordist, I can only speak for myself as someone who witnesses the possibilities of the contemporary harpsichord and the ways in which it continues to excite and inspire major composing talent such as that revealed by

this recording. For that reason, I firmly and warmly commend it. The performance and production values are excellent and Vivienne Spiteri's Hubbard French double after Taskin (1979) sounds with searing clarity.

"Vittorio Rieti: Music for Harpsichord and Instruments", Mark Kroll and Marina Minkin (harpsichord), Carol Lieberman (violin), Zvi Carmeli (viola), Ella Toovy ('cello), Moshe Aron Epstein (flute), Yael Zamir (oboe), Richard Paley (bassoon) and Julia Rovinsky (harp). New World Records NW 807642, 2015. Reviewed by Pamela Hickman

Of an Italian-Jewish family, Vittorio Rieti (b.1898 Alexandria, Egypt) studied Economics and Music in Milan. Following his brief military service in the Italian army in World War I, he studied composition under Alfredo Casella and Ottorini Respighi in Rome. A fine pianist, Rieti performed the solo of his own piano concerto and in Stravinsky's "Les Noces". In 1921 he met Alban Berg, Alma Mahler and Franz Werfel in Vienna, with Arnold Schoenberg also showing interest in his works. In the early 1920s he was associated with Renzo Massarani and Mario Labroca in a group they called "I Tre" (The Three), a name they chose in emulation of "Les Six". He joined the staff of Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes in 1925. From 1925 to 1940, Rieti divided his time between Rome and Paris, in Paris forming close ties with Stravinsky (who inspired him to follow the path of neo-Classicism, which Rieti proceeded to do for the duration of his life), with Prokofiev, de Falla, Kurt Weill and "Les Six". He also founded "La Sérénade", a Paris chamber ensemble dedicated to performance of modern music. Rieti wrote music for Diaghilev's "Ballets Russes" and much incidental music for Louis Jouvet's theatre company.

In 1940, he immigrated to the USA, there writing orchestral music, as well as ballet music for Balanchine. He taught composition at the Peabody Conservatory (1948-1949), the Chicago Musical College (1950-1953), Queens College (1955-1960) and at the New York College of Music (1961-1964). A highly skilled composer with a feel for proportion and the succinct, Vittorio Rieti continued to compose right up to his death at age 96 (1994.) His impressive oeuvre includes 11 symphonies, 11 string quartets, other chamber works, music for several ballets, songs, piano pieces and choral settings. Of the few recordings of Rieti's music, "Vittorio Rieti: Music for Harpsichord and Instruments" is unique in that it covers works composed throughout the composer's long creative life, highlighting his love of the harpsichord. Released on the New World Records label in 2015, it features harpsichordists Mark Kroll and Marina Minkin, also violinist Carol Lieberman, violist Zvi Carmeli, 'cellist Ella Toovy, flautist Moshe Aron Epstein, oboist Yael Zamir, bassoonist Richard Paley and harpist Julia Rovinsky. The recording was made possible thanks to a grant from the Francis Goelet Charitable Lead Trust.

Mark Kroll's research on both Rieti and his music has done much to bring them to the attention of today's listener. In the article "Vittorio Rieti and the Harpsichord Music of the Twentieth Century", appearing in the liner notes of the disc, Professor Kroll speaks of Rieti as being the twentieth century's most prolific harpsichord composer and that "his treatment of the instrument is among the best since the eighteenth century". "Triptych for Two Harpsichords" (1982) is performed by Marina Minkin and Mark Kroll. Their fine communication and vivid playing highlight the work's wit, its contrasts and energy and its capriciousness, juxtaposing modal writing and tonality with the wink of an eye.

Performing a much earlier work “Sonata All’Antica” (1946), Minkin delights the ear as she fires the listener’s fantasy with the work’s moods and surprises – its Baroque-inspired first movement – *alla Giga* – interrupted by a roguish, repetitive motif, the final notes of the movement then to be whisked away to nowhere. Following the thoughtful Adagio fantasy, the third movement, Rigaudon, ends with a folksy stomping phrase. In a performance of superb balance, splendid teamwork and verve, Kroll with violinist Carol Lieberman perform Rieti’s “Sonata Breve” (1967) giving expression to its spicy good humour, deftly dovetailing motifs in the opening movement, engaging in the sweet sentimentality of the *Andante cantabile* movement and revelling in the feisty, buoyant energy of the final Allegro.

As for the “Concertino for Flute, Viola, Cello, Harp and Harpsichord” (1963), Rieti has masterfully integrated the timbres of these instruments with French subtlety and transparency, with energy, mischief and teasing, at times precariously balancing his melodic agenda on the edge of tonality. The first movement opens with a pastoral flute solo, superbly played and shaped by Moshe Aron Epstein. The Third (Adagio) movement, hauntingly beautiful, mournful and strategically paced by the artists, presents two gorgeous solos – a harp solo (Julia Rovinsky) and the harpsichord solo (Marina Minkin), then launching directly into a relentlessly hectic Allegro.

As I hear it, the significance of Rieti’s “Pastorale e Fughetta” for flute, viola and harpsichord (1966) is in the kind of musical freedom whose source is spontaneity. Minkin, Epstein and violist Carmeli pour out the composer’s wealth of ideas with alacrity, the Pastorale moving from pensiveness and lyricism to unabashed sentimentality, to whimsy and back to the soothing mood of

the beginning. Its fragrant mélange hangs together well, to be followed by the Fughetta, whose freedom offers wild moments that alternate with more modest utterances. The final work, “Variations on Two Cantigas de Santa Maria” (written by Rieti in his eighties) is a consummate chamber music work taking its melodic inspiration from two contrasting monophonic songs (Rieti harmonizes them) from a 13th-century collection. Once stated, Rieti leaves the mindset of the middle ages to create a dynamic set of variations bristling with imagination, surprises and virtuosity. Minkin, Epstein, ‘cellist Ella Toovy, oboist Yael Zamir and bassoonist Richard Paley perform the work.

The works presented on this CD illustrate Rieti’s refined compositional craft, his imaginative scoring, his *joie-de-vivre* and wit, the clarity and economy of his ideas and his large palette of attractive timbres; add to those the skill he displays again and again in mixing the banal with the sophisticated. Rieti’s music presents constant reminders of the 15 years the composer spent in Paris and of his connection with “Les Six”, in particular Poulenc, as emerges in the spirit and scoring of the music. The works heard on the CD are excellently performed and the lively New World Records sound quality offers the listener an opportunity to immerse oneself in the detail and beauty of this repertoire.