Harpsichord & fortepiano

Vol. 25, No. 2 Spring, 2021

Musical Instrument Research Catalog
(MIRCat)

Reviews

BOOKS

Geoffrey Lancaster, *Culliford, Rolfe and Barrow: a tale of ten pianos* (University of Western Australia Publishing, 2017), ISBN 9781742589374 (paperback)

Geoffrey Lancaster is a distinguished concert pianist and conductor, an expert in historical performance practice and Professor of Music at the Western Australia Academy of Performing Arts, Edith Cowan University. His previous publications include *The First Fleet Piano* (2015), an extensive exploration of the history of the square pianoforte that arrived in Botany Bay, Australia on board the Sirius in 1788.

Lancaster begins by presenting a brief overview of the ten known extant square pianofortes of the title that include the name Culliford on the nameboard, with estimated dates between 1795 and 1798. These dates are significant, since all fall within the period when Culliford, Rolfe and Barrow began to sell instruments to the public directly, badged under their own name. From 1786 until this time, they had been under contract to make and supply a large number of instruments solely for the firm of Longman & Broderip. Ultimately, it was their 1795 court action against the latter, when attempting to recover a longstanding bad debt, that led to Longman & Broderip's bankruptcy.

In the second chapter Lancaster proceeds to set the scene of the late 18th century environment in which square pianofortes became increasingly popular in Georgian London. No longer the sole preserve of the aristocratic elite, they became increasingly sought after by the aspiring professional classes, with pianistic ability being highly regarded as a desirable accomplishment for women. The surge in demand from this new customer base, he opines, led to the larger scale production of basic models that could be manufactured more cheaply for the mass market.

The next two core chapters of the work are devoted to a substantial biographical account of the three partners, Thomas Culliford, William Rolfe and Charles Barrow, with key events in their lives presented in the form of an extended timeline. The material reported here draws in part on findings first identified in earlier publications by Jenny Nex , George Bozarth and Margaret Debenham, as Lancaster freely acknowledges. It includes discussion of the men's earlier years, culminating in their brief bankruptcy and the dissolution of their partnership in 1798, then sets out to explore what subsequently became of each of them in later life. Of the three, William Rolfe successfully continued in business as a pianoforte maker in London. Thomas Culliford disappeared into obscurity, with scant records emerging of his presence in Compton, Hampshire from time to time. It was here that he died, in 1821. It is Lancaster's account of the third man, Charles Barrow, that is most intriguing, however. He describes primary source materials, documenting Barrow's fall from grace in 1810, following his stealthy misappropriation of funds from the Naval Pay Office over a period of seven years. Evidence is presented revealing that Barrow initially obtained employment in that department in 1803, firstly as a lowly clerk, but swiftly promoted to 'Chief Conductor and Officer for paying Contingencies' on an annual salary of £330. This was a meteoric rise, which, as the author observes, suggests some powerful influence had been brought to bear on his account. By the time his embezzlement of funds was discovered in 1810, he had spirited away a total of £5,689. 3s. 9d – a staggering amount, equivalent to almost £450,000 today. Might such dishonest behaviour have been influenced by observing James Longman's unscrupulous financial dealings at close quarters, one wonders? Lancaster also reports new evidence that reveals Barrow somehow managed to slip away unapprehended, ultimately absconding to the Isle of Man where he apparently continued to live until his death in 1826, without ever being prosecuted for his crime.

The fifth chapter then considers the firm's brief foray into the realm of music publishing, providing a list and description of their known publications. Finally, the very lengthy and lavishly illustrated concluding section of the book is devoted to a detailed appraisal of the construction and inscriptions of the ten known surviving instruments of the title.

This book is an extensively researched, monumental work of scholarship in which Geoffrey Lancaster clearly demonstrates his expert knowledge and love of these early keyboard instruments when describing their tonal and performance qualities. In Chapters 3 and 4, it would perhaps have provided a more clearly signposted pathway for the reader had the biographical material been presented as concise histories for each man, rather than as an extended timeline encompassing all three partners. That said, however, the book draws together a considerable body of primary source material that will ensure its place as a valuable source of reference for historians in the field in years to come. Additionally, the descriptions of the technical aspects of the ten extant

instruments in the final chapter will be of particular interest to those involved in the restoration of pianofortes of the period. Professor Lancaster is to be applauded for his achievement.

Margaret Debenham

Peter Holman, *Before the Baton: Musical Direction and Conducting in Stuart and Georgian Britain* (Boydell Press, 2020), ISBN 978-1-78327-456-7

The scholarship of modern conducting is frequently concerned with maestros' personalities, exploring the subtle use of gesture and insightful interpretations of great music. First codified in 19th-century treaties by Berlioz and Wagner, descriptions of musical leadership in earlier periods are shrouded in false accounts that sometimes border on fantasy. Peter Holman seeks to demystify how sacred choral music and opera in the 17th and 18th centuries were led from instruments such as the organ, harpsichord or violin. It examines many aspects of choir and ensemble management, including evolutions of ensemble layout and the gradual development of directors reading from the full score. Overall, it stresses how ensemble playing was more collaborative, with responsibility for interpretation shared democratically between players. With the advent of the baton, orchestral playing became an autocracy, reflecting an appointed individual's personal vision.

Holman begins with historical developments in musical centres of Italy, Germany and France, exploring how gesture and movement may have guided musical performances. While discussing the lowly position of the *batteur de mesure* in European courts, Holman questions the widely-held belief that ensembles used an intrusive, audible beat to keep time. He forensically investigates the death of composer Jean-Baptiste Lully whose notorious self-impaling is largely the basis for this false truth.

Delving into the mirky world of cathedral politics and hierarchy of theatre management, evident is the lasting influence of Handel on sacred and secular conventions. Much of this discussion is based upon his preference to lead oratorios from the keyboard, resulting in experiments with claviorgans (harpsichord-organ hybrids) or from consoles fitted with a 'long movement'. Seemingly the methods that Handel developed became common practice well into the 19th century. British musicians were reluctant to adopt continental baton conducting, introduced by visiting German musicians such as Weber, Spohr and Mendelssohn. The careers and approaches of musicians who led from instruments other than the keyboard are also discussed. Many curiosities and characters of the British music scene are included, from Ripon Cathedral's lever-operated wooden hand – still a feature of the organ case today – to the florid recitative accompaniment of bassist and cellist Dragonetti and Lindley. Nearly all of Holman's research is focused in London and the South of England, with occasional Scottish and Irish interest through the musical life of Edinburgh and Handel's performances in Dublin, including *Messiah*.

Research into early conducting methods always proves difficult as it was a rarely documented before the 19th century. Throughout, Holman draws upon a wealth of pictorial evidence and written sources, with occasionally humorous observations. Gestures seemed confined to up-down motions or, if leading from a keyboard, indicating a pulse by 'head-banging'. Many methods described may appear cumbersome to modern conductors, but does not diminish the interpretive skill or musicianship demanded of 18th-century musicians. The dependance on skills like continuo realisation and improvisation demonstrates how well rounded musicians had to be. Although the depth of scholarship can be fairly dense, each chapter is helpfully concluded with a concise summary. Holman's postlude is a personal reflection on his own preferences as a director of early music, while paying tribute to overlooked interpreters such as Christopher Hogwood. While the main body of the book is concerned with historical research rather than a practical manual, this final chapter presents valuable advice based on several years of performance experience. Overall, this book would not only be of interest to conductors of authentic performances, but continuo players, Handel scholars and anyone interested in the history of choral music and theatre practice in Britain.

Michael Graham

Claudio Di Veroli, *Baroque Keyboard Fingering: A Method* (Lucca, 8/2020), https://www.braybaroque.ie/harps/bbbooks.html

Claudio Di Veroli dedicates the eighth edition of his Method, most appropriately, to Maria Boxall and Mark Lindley, pioneers in advocating the importance of early keyboard-fingering to historically informed performance. Most of us have drawn on their work with publications of originally fingered keyboard music adding to understanding and dissemination. The study of such fingerings in original sources, and the use of the concept of 'good' and 'bad' fingers for stronger and lesser beats, soon become instinctive, for a mild, but enlivening articulation. 'Early fingering' is now a mainstream element in teaching pre-baroque repertoire, but Di Veroli's micro-analytical approach to the subject

is applied to what came next.

I think it would be fair to say that this is a book of rules. Enrico Baiano, in his 2010 *Method for Harpsichord*, gives a warning that might be pertinent in assessing Di Veroli's work: '...the danger is always for a written text to turn into dogma, laying down sterile rules which cannot possibly encompass all the infinite variables that crop up in musical discourse'. Di Veroli offers a total of fifty-three rules to be assimilated; this daunting process is acknowledged in his suggestion of one rule per day. To categorise each by a number or letter, based on its purpose, is a logical way of proceeding; for example, Rule 3 is for crossing the third finger, but 3# if the third finger is on an accidental, and 3N if the note is crossing aN accidental; for passagework, such as chromaTic scales, a T is employed. As can be seen, some mnemonics are more obvious than others, but Di Veroli does his very best to meticulously cover permutations of notes that might be met within a musical score.

He suggests two types of fingering: 'crossing' and 'shifting'. For Di Veroli, 'the most natural way for a diatonic scale with "pairwise" fingering' is the facilitation of crossing one finger over the other, and he states that shifting the hand 'is less common than crossing, especially so in scales'. Santa Maria's early directional hand movement may pertain, and facilitate an awareness of 'good and bad' notes - as Andrew Lawrence-King has written, 'Ears and fingers must be trained in partnership'.

The time span, commencing from 1710 (although Purcell and Buxtehude are included), is not huge, but the principles of the method aim at repertoire throughout Europe (although omitting Domenico Scarlatti, considered 'clearly too late for the Baroque fingering technique'). There are plenty of examples for each rule, often by Couperin, 'because France was a most important centre for harpsichord and organ making, composing and playing in the 17th and 18th Centuries'. However contentious this premise, Couperin's advice is not always representative, explicable or consistent. Di Veroli's companion-book, *Baroque Keyboard Masterpieces*, offers 'fingerings, based on the technique prevalent throughout Europe from the second half of the 17th century till the 2nd half of the 18th century', and claims that J.S. Bach was 'most likely to have played with ancient fingerings'. Experimenting with his examples of such fingering is well worth the time, but I remain concerned that a 'technique prevalent throughout Europe' is a reductionist stance as, ultimately, one size cannot fit all, and having studied any extant original fingering, we should be governed by what elucidates our interpretation most persuasively.

In following this method, we have to accept Di Veroli's argument that 'unless a slur were specifically written in the score, the "default" or standard articulation in pre-Romantic music was always a very careful detached or "non-legato" touch, resembling the typical articulation of an oboe tonguing each note'. This almost defeats the purpose of the whole treatise (especially for repertoire in which no slurring is present), if two adjacent fingers on two adjacent notes are non-legato, does choice of finger matter? The use of a single finger can offer huge variance in the ratio of sound to silence within each note. However, as we know, hand-positions and the reliance on chosen fingerings are essential to accuracy and expression; thus, he wisely advocates limiting fingering-numbers on the score, and always obeying them.

There is a fascination in this detailed theoretical exploration of digital technique, but it must be physically realised at the keyboard. Di Veroli presents his collection of finger-choreography with numerous examples to consider and experience. Whether the fingerings suggested by composers, professional musicians or amateur players in the first half of the 18th century, should be followed assiduously, is up to the player. If it encourages us all to devote more thought to the extent to which fingering can aid historically informed articulation, and expressive musical rhetoric, then it can only be for the good.

Penelope Cave

MUSIC

Jolando Scarpa (ed), *Compositori della Scuola Romana de Napoletana*, Edition Walhall EW462 (Magdeburg, 2019)

The collection of 17 works includes keyboard music from Rome and Naples by Martino de Leonardis, Francesco de Majo, Nicola Fago, Gaetano Greco, Leonardo Leo, Raimondo Lorenzini, Giacomo Sellitto and Alessandro Speranza, and thus fully deserves the edition's subtitle 'Composizioni rare'. Many of the works date from about the middle of the 18th century, at about the time when Italian composers seem to have been turning their attention away from the keyboard by comparison to previous generations, and the selection here includes primarily individual toccatas and fugues (the latter evidently a fairly loose genre). Despite the date, the keyboard compasses are relatively narrow, and most works fit both harpsichord and organ (long pedal notes in several works suggest the latter, even if they are sometimes titled 'cembalo').

The style of the music is typical of this period of the Italian Baroque, with features including frequent (sometimes excessive) use of diminished sevenths and

repeated patterns. There are also technical challenges to explore, such as crossed hands, wide leaps and octaves in both hands. Interesting examples of compositional imagination include Lorenzini's extended modulating fugue and Speranza's *Divertimento per Cembalo*, with its entertaining imitations of birds.

The music is cleanly laid out, with a few small and easily corrected misprints; house policy evidently dictates that there are no bar numbers, and that the print margins are extremely narrow. The Editor's two-page preface lays out the historic background and discusses instrument options, but it would have been very good to include brief biographical notes on these almost unknown composers, and also a few words about some rather important performance practice issues (eg ornaments, the figured bass notation used in Sellitto's *Toccata* or the dynamics indicated in Fago's *Toccata per Cembalo*. And should the fourth variation of Greco's *Ballo di Mantova* follow the fractured pattern set up in the first bar?). Online manuscript sources are cited, but there is no critical commentary to show the editor's work. One example of why this is a problem: a very curious moment is found in a prelude by Sellitto, where the left hand is in 3/4 and the right in 6/8, for no apparent reason – whether this is exactly as indicated by the source one cannot tell, as the link provided by the editor does not lead to the manuscript.

Minor vexations of this particular edition notwithstanding, Edition Walhall have been doing good work producing interesting and unknown repertoire; their keyboard list in particular is noteworthy, and it is to be hoped that they will continue to explore such rarities.

Francis Knights

RECORDINGS

Organic Creatures, Catalina Vicens (organ/ organetto)
Consouling Sounds SOUL0139 (2019), 2 CDs, recorded 2019, 124'

Small portable organs are very familiar through Medieval iconography, as played by angels, and were also taken up as a visual metaphor for heavenly music by later artists, including the pre-Raphaelites. The most familiar form is at about 2' pitch, with a short keyboard played by the right hand and the bellows behind the pipes worked by the left. As usual with Medieval instruments, there is little specific repertoire, and much of what was played, either solo or ensemble, would have been derived from vocal originals. These small organs (the largest of which barely fit on the lap) have been undergoing a renaissance in recent years under the name 'organetto', and leading players (like the Chilean early keyboard specialist Catalina Vicens, whose YouTube videos are most instructive) and instrument makers have now shown us just what they are capable of. In particular, they should not just be seen as small chamber organs; the music may be restricted in range by only using one hand on the keyboard – drones become an important part of the style - but the ability to control the wind supply with the other (such as pulsing the bellows) means that the sonorities and expressive range are very different, even exotic. Unlike the traditional windchest organ, there is both dynamic range and the ability to bend pitches, used to remarkable effect in several works here.

Featured on this recordings are three different organetti, a 'pigeon egg' organ (with equally scaled pipes), a copy of a small instrument with tiny keys depicted by Jan Van Eyck (early 15th century), and two original traditional organs from c.1425 and 1531, in Germany and The Netherlands respectively. The early works heard here ranges from monophonic works, via organum, Machaut and Landini to intabulations of music by Binchois, Dunstable, Henry VIII and Isaac, thus reaching into the Renaissance. The issue of suitable repertoire for the organetto is also dealt with by a group of new commissions for the instrument, including music by Prach Boondiskulchok, Carson Cooman, Ivan Moody, Olli Virtaperko and the performer herself (nine works, with some New Age tendencies); they are all of interest, and blend fairly seamlessly into the Medieval sequences. Who would have thought that the organetto would prove itself to be a suitable instrument for contemporary music?!

The performances are highly expert and engaging throughout, and several further performers as well as Vicens are credited on a numbers of tracks, so up to three organetti are heard together (unlike most ensemble recordings of Medieval music, we are spared percussion in the dance works). The only caveat here is a non-musical one: the subtitle of the set is 'Medieval organs composed, decomposed, recomposed' and this concept plus the black-and-white visual presentation of the set are perhaps too self-consciously 'arty': many listeners will quite reasonably want to know about the actual instruments and their history; the performer herself; the seventeen composers featured; and the musical choices. Of these we get not a word, just two poems, one by 12th century abbess Hildegard of Bingen, the text of the opening work; reference to a weblink on the back of the booklet does not seem a satisfactory solution (especially as the website was down when I checked).

This set is strongly recommended to those interested

in the early organ and the music of the Middle Ages. The soundtrack to those Medieval angel paintings will never seem the same again…

Francis Knights

Froberger: Complete Fantasias and Canzonas, Terence Charlston (clavichord)
Divine Art dda 25204 (2020), recorded 2019, 62'

Johann Jakob Froberger, Suites for Harpsichord, vol.1, Gilbert Rowland (harpsichord)
Divine Art Athene ath 23204 (2019), recorded 2018, 2 CDs, 119'

These recordings present different aspects of Froberger: the contrapuntal music rooted in 16th century polyphony, and the suites, where Froberger was one of the pioneers. The instruments are also very different: a small fretted clavichord and a large double-manual harpsichord. Terence Charlston's latest recording was inspired by an interesting new instrument, as were his fairly recent 'Mersenne's Clavichord', and 'The Harmonious Thuringian', which used a copy of a small harpsichord in the Eisenach Bachhaus (see Paul Simmond's letter, p.50). For the Froberger recording the inspiration was Andreas Hermert's 2009 reconstruction of the original state of a much-altered 17th century German clavichord. Charlston writes that when he first saw and played this instrument he 'was immediately smitten'; he felt that it was the ideal instrument for Froberger, especially the contrapuntal music.

This CD is the first recording on clavichord of the complete fantasias and canzonas. All but one of the pieces (a two-part fantasia) are four-part fugues from *Froberger's Libro Secondo* of 1649: a presentation copy, the music beautifully written out by Froberger, with fanciful calligraphic decorations by the court scribe. The recording aims to reproduce, as far as possible, what the performer hears, including some quiet action noise. The clear and transparent sound of this clavichord focuses our attention on the interplay of the musical lines.

The canzonas are in general more lively than the fantasias, but in all these pieces there is a great variety of mood and structure, and inventive transformations and variations of the themes. Charlston is a very fine clavichordist, sensitive to the nuances of the music and the character of the clavichord: it sings in the fantasias, and it sings and dances in the canzonas. Some ornamentation is added, and the structure of of each piece is made clear. Charlston's deep understanding of the music is manifest, and in all respects this is an extremely fine recording, strongly recommended. The 20-page CD booklet is full of useful information and insights; it is free to download from the 'Shop' page on divineartrecords.com.

Froberger's suites are much more often heard than the fugues. There are complete Froberger editions by Bob van Asperen, Richard Egarr and others. Glen Wilson has recorded 23 suites; his interesting and substantial essay is available online at glenwilson.eu/article6.html. Gilbert Rowland has recorded complete sets of Rameau, Soler, Mattheson and others, and this double CD is the first of a projected complete set of Froberger's suites for Divine Art's Athene label. Nearly all of the twelve suites in this recording are of the Allemande-Courante-Sarabande-Gigue type (sometimes in a different order). In the *Libro Secondo*, five of the six suites have no gigue; one of them appears in this recording followed by a 'Chiqve' from a manuscript of 1688.

The harpsichord used is by Andrew Wooderson after Goermans (1750); it was recorded in a resonant acoustic, giving a truly luscious sound. The booklet does not specify the tuning, but it sounds like an 18th-century circulating temperament, appropriate for the instrument but perhaps less so for the music. Rowland gives a straightforward account of the suites. He plays all the repeats, and adds a great deal of ornamentation throughout. I enjoyed most of this recording; Rowland plays with energy and a good forward drive in most of the movements. The sarabandes were slow, sometimes so slow that the music did not hang together. Occasionally (for example, in the FbWV602 sarabande) the pulse was lost: a few of the bars seemed to have two and a bit beats, quite disconcerting to the listener.

I would have preferred fewer ornaments, and I felt that some other harpsichordists take a more thoughtful approach to each phrase and harmonic inflection. But my overall impression of Rowland's recording was of a glorious sound, and enjoyable music.

David Griffel

François Couperin – Complete Works for Harpsichord, Carole Cerasi (harpsichord)
Metronome METCD 1100 (2018), 10 CDs, 686'

When faced with an *intégrale* recording of any composer, a reviewer is often met with two options. The first is to sample bits and write on those; the other is more time consuming and requires scrutinising each track to make something more than a quick value-based judgement. Therefore, it was with some trepidation that I approached the new recording of François Couperin's harpsichord music, performed by Carole Cerasi. Having opted for the shorter route, I was surprised that my journey took me through all seven CDs - some several

times - and a new investigation of the scores. It proved to be a worthwhile exercise. Cerasi's name is one I have known since my undergraduate days, and it appears on several CDs in my collection, so my misgivings were not occasioned by an unfamiliarity with the performer. Instead, it was the thought of critically appraising several hours of music. Couperin demands authoritative, polished playing. When it falls short of this mark, it is often challenging to make a positive assessment. In some modern performances, elements are glossed over and leave the listener with an all-too superficial impression of the music and its composer. Indeed, for the successful interpretation of *Grand siècle* music, the performer needs to command an armoury of skills. Understanding ornamentation, tempo, and rhetoric are among these, and they need to work in tandem to satisfy that arbiter of taste, *le bon goût*.

Good taste is not learned but acquired, and although enough writers attempted to explain it, none was able to translate it into words with any success. Among these was Couperin himself, who explicitly demanded that his approach be followed, particularly when playing his music. Yet, this is the crux of the problem with some modern interpretations since many reverently adhere to the finical demands of Couperin's 1716 publication, *L'art de toucher le clavecin*. On one level, it offers sound advice to neophytes and fulfils its role as an instruction manual. Those wishing to acquire skills learn how to sit correctly, and some of his demands are valuable. However, other sections are over-detailed - if not slightly neurotic - and chastise and browbeat the reader into following only Couperin's path. He requires nothing to be added or subtracted from his music: dots, strokes and ornaments are to be played as they appear, and woe betide those who do otherwise. From this perspective, the advice he proffers can be as detrimental as it is helpful since, by following it too closely, performances may lack the freedom and spirit his music requires. Whether renowned musicians like Marchand would have taken Couperin's instruction to the letter cannot be said, but it is doubtful. *L'art de toucher* was not for those who had refined and developed their skills: they would have appropriately played Couperin's music in their own way.

Cerasi's performances on this ten-CD set demonstrate she is a 'Marchand'. She knows what Couperin wants but will not let this interfere with her playing. The result is one of the most convincing recordings I have heard of *Grand siècle* music in recent years. Her understanding of convention goes beyond what one might glean from contemporary treatises, which is apparent in nearly every track. She gives the composer everything he deserves in a polished, thoughtful and coherent recital. Ornamentation is a case in point. If the listener is aware of this *tremblement* or that *pincement*, then its execution is incorrect. In French baroque music, ornamentation is not about making the music sound busy; it is a garnish that should be given as much consideration as the note it decorates. Cerasi is such a *garnier*.

Like most treatises, *L'art de toucher* is unsuccessful in discussing the most perplexing aspect of playing in the French tradition: rhythmic alteration. In short, it is a technique whereby the player lengthens the first of two notes and shortens the second. Known as *notes inégales*, it is the defining accent of the French baroque language. It is also the most problematic since the rules are often misunderstood. Indeed, some otherwise good performances are sometimes marred by a mundane application of a formulaic swing that soon tires the listener. Cerasi is more considered, and this is manifest not least by the means by which she varies the device for rhetorical effect. Thus, in the most sensitive pieces, such as 'La Garnier' from the *Premier ordre*, we are afforded lines where melodic tension is created and dissipated at the performer's will. Add to this Cerasi's remarkable control of two techniques Couperin discusses at length, the *aspiration* and *suspension*, which deal with placing notes in relation to each other by anticipating or delaying one part slightly. These serve not only to again build and disperse melodic tension but are also a means of allowing the instrument to sing with its own voice. The instruments heard include the Ruckers/Hemsch (1636/1763) at Hatchlands, a Vater (1738) and modern copies of the Vater and of the 1769 Taskin by Philippe Humeau and Keith Hill respectively.

My last comments are reserved for what is the recording's most outstanding feature. It is not only the instruments that make the 'Couperin sound', but also how they are played. Cerasi equips herself well in this matter and judges each instrument's qualities both expressively and thoughtfully. There are places where something slightly more abrasive, if not overly dramatic, would be preferred. Take, for instance, 'La Ténébreuse', the allemande from the *Troisième ordre*. It is ripe for dramatic manipulation, especially in the contrasts between the dark, powerfully sinister first strain, the delicacy of the second and the almost Shakespearian oratory of its closing. Under Cerasi's hands, it is a little timid and risk-free. But this is down to *goût* and does nothing to mar the recordings.

My 'go to' reference recordings of Couperin have always been those of the late Kenneth Gilbert. His playing was poised, musical and consistently demonstrated a command of those aspects that others found so difficult. Yet, while listening to Cerasi's performances, the temptation was too great, and I took his recordings out for comparison. It is difficult

to find a single moment where Gilbert outperforms Cerasi. Yet Gilbert's recordings were made long ago and suffer on modern reference equipment. Thus, this new, authoritative interpretation is complemented further by the quality of its sound. The Metronome studio needs acknowledging here for a remarkable achievement. Coupled with its authoritative playing, this must surely become the go-to reference set for any wishing to know and study Couperin's harpsichord pieces.

Jon Baxendale

L'Unique: Harpsichord Music of François Couperin, Jory Vinikour (harpsichord)
Cedille CDR 90000 194 (2020), recorded 2019, 79'

Handel, Great Suites, Chaconne, Babell Suite, Erin Helyard (harpsichord)
ABC Classics 481 5711 (2017), recorded 2017, 79'

The distinguished American harpsichordist, Jory Vinikour, resident in Paris since 1990, offers Ordres 6, 7 and 8 from Couperin's *Second Livre*. These contain some of Couperin's best-known movements, and demonstrate the composer's move away from traditional dances to character-pieces. The highly-varied Ordres 6 and 7 consist entirely of character-pieces; conversely, the majestic and serious Ordre 8 in B minor - which includes the celebrated Passacaille - is the last Couperin wrote containing only traditional dances (although the opening allemande and closing gigue have titles).

Vinikour's performances are impeccable, fastidious and subtle. Every ornament is precise and neatly executed, speeds are apposite, *inégale* is stylish, he uses the resources of his Taskin copy (Tony Chinnery, 2012) imaginatively, and he is expressive but never over-indulgent. In short, he seems to have uppermost in his mind Couperin's own statement that 'j'ayme beaucoup mieux ce qui me touche que ce qui me surprend'. It therefore seems rather churlish, and perhaps rash, to say that I find some of the playing slightly understated and obedient; a little more give and take would at times have been welcome. It's interesting to compare, for example, Christophe Rousset's flexible, lingering approach to the ubiquitous *Les Baricades Mistérieuses* with Vinikour's much 'straighter' reading.

Vinikour does not eschew adding a little to Couperin, particularly when leading into *petites reprises*, and in some rondeau repetitions. Despite Couperin's table-thumping insistence in the preface to the *Troisième Livre* that what he has written must be observed to the letter 'sans augmentation ni diminution', I think he was overstating the case here to make his point. At all events, Vinikour's additions are modest, and I can't imagine that even Couperin would object. Julien Dubruque's liner notes (translated by Vinikour) contain a few inaccuracies, and he makes too much of the 'experimental' nature (because of temperament issues) of the key of B flat (Ordre 6), at that time. Couperin was not (as he claims) the first in France to use this key in keyboard music. To name but two, the Bauyn manuscript contains a suite by Chambonnières in B flat; and Grigny's organ hymn Veni Creator (1699), although modal, is effectively in B flat. Despite minor quibbles, Vinikour's thoughtful contribution to the Couperin discography is highly welcome.

Give his dislike of music which surprised him, Couperin would surely have been outraged by William Babell's arrangements of Handel! The Australian harpsichordist Erin Helyard evidently relishes them, however, and plays the Suite in F with an appropriate lack of inhibition. Babell was a busy and successful London musician, a virtuoso harpsichordist whose speciality was playing well-known Handel hits - the most famous being *Lascia ch'io pianga* - in extravagantly embellished reincarnations. He divided opinion in his own time - Burney was very critical, but Hawkins thought that he deserved his success - and Babell certainly knew Handel's own playing. Could it be, as some believe, that he reflects something of Handel's own improvisatory style? Anyway, it is all tremendously diverting, particularly the final movement based on the aria *Sulla ruota di fortuna*, where some of Helyard's extra interpolations - very much in the spirit of the enterprise - outdo even Babell and will no doubt shock some listeners. I have a Handelian friend who would use the word 'preposterous'.

The CD is largely devoted to excellent performances of three of Handel's 'Great Suites': that in F (with its opening Adagio heavily embellished à la Corelli by Handel himself), and those in E (including the 'Harmonious Blacksmith') and in F sharp minor. Helyard approaches these sophisticated and endlessly varied works with just the right spirit of adventure and daring, ornamenting copiously, adding cadenzas and building on Handel's sometimes incomplete notation to create exhilarating performances. The final work on the CD, the Chaconne in G HWV435, offers him even more scope for improvisatory flights of fancy. He plays on a wonderful Kirckman of 1773, one of four (apparently) in Australia. It has a pedal-operated machine stop, permitting the addition and subtraction of registers while playing; Helyard makes full and effective use of this. Overall, this is an extraordinarily refreshing release.

John Kitchen

J S Bach, Trio Sonatas for two harpsichords, David Ponsford and David Hill (harpsichords)
Nimbus Alliance NI 6403 (2020), recorded 2019, 72'

There is something inherently joyful at the sound of two harpsichords rollicking through Bach, played by veteran performers who have both received recognition for their work. David Ponsford, who is responsible for the edition used for this disc, has recorded a series of recitals on specially selected French organs under the title: 'French Organ Music from the Golden Age', which is also available on Nimbus Alliance. David Hill has a broad-ranging discography covering repertoire from Thomas Tallis to world premiere recordings and has received prestigious Grammy and Gramophone Awards.

The CD is accompanied by a concise but informative booklet, in which we can read that these Six Sonatas were composed for Bach's eldest son, Wilhelm Friedemann and were compiled between 1727 and 1730. In father Bach's *Nekrolog* which appeared four years after his death, these works are described as: 'Sechs Trio für die Orgel mit dem obligaten Pedal'. Playing them on a pair of harpsichords is a practical and ideal alternative, and many of the pieces may sound familiar to listeners, as several movements were arranged by Bach himself from pre-existing organ and instrumental works. Ponsford sees this as a fresh look at familiar repertoire: '...for me, the experiment of arranging Bach's Organ Trio Sonatas (BWV 525-530) was too tempting to resist...The result is a transformation of these famous trio sonatas, giving them a character that is neither better nor worse than on the organ, but very different and no less exciting'.

The disc opens with the jubilant Sonata 1 in E flat major. The sound of the harpsichords matches well, and they are both based on historical instruments: one a copy of Jean-Claude Goujon (Paris, 1749) made by Andrew Garlick, and the other of J. H. Harrass (Gross-Breitenbach, early 18th century) made by Huw Saunders. Both instruments have two keyboards (2x 8', 1x 4'), and a buff stop.

The playing is very clean and crisp throughout, with only a few fleeting semiquaver sections threatening stability. I would have loved a bit more time to luxuriate on some of the harmonic changes and enjoy slightly slower tempi in select middle movements, for instance in the second movement of Sonata 3 in D minor. The final work on the disc, Sonata 6 in G major is played with a great opening tempo and ebullient atmosphere. Recorded in Gloucestershire, at the picturesque Syde Manor Tithe Barn, this CD with a total playing time of 72' is also very good value.

Kathryn Cok

Mozartiana - Rarities and Arrangements Performed on Historical Keyboards
Michael Tsalka (tangent piano/fortepiano)
Grand Piano GP849 (2020), recorded 2018, 74'

Pianist and early keyboard performe Michael Tsalka brings Mozart's authentic sound world to the listener in his new disc 'Mozartiana'. The works are performed on a Berner tangent piano (late 18th century) and a rectangular Maucher pantalon (c.1780), both recently restored by Pooya Radbon.

The disc's first works are performed on the tangent piano (*Tangentenflügel*), an instrument boasting the timbres and potential of the fortepiano, the clavichord and the harpsichord, but with more strength than salon keyboard instruments of the time, thus serving the new aesthetic demands of the early Classical period. Tsalka opens with a familiar work, Mozart's Adagio in B minor, K540, referred to by Alfred Einstein as 'one of the most perfect, most deeply felt, and most despairing of all his [Mozart's] works'. Touching, but not dwelling on the work's sense of desolation, Tsalka gives expression to its positive energy, his adeptly-paced playing contrasting the three-chord dramatic utterance with cantabile passages, highlighting the expressive harmonic progressions, also engaging in ornamenting and interspersing some original transitions.

In 1771, Mozart attended the decadent, extravagant Venetian carnival, acquiring a taste for the Commedia dell'Arte of the Italian theatrical tradition. This inspired him to write the ballet-pantomime *Pantalon and Columbine* K446 twelve years later, in which he himself played Harlequin, with Aloysia, his sister-in-law (and first love) playing Columbine. Neither score nor script survive, only the autograph of a first violin part, but with stage directions as clues as to the piece. 'Columbine', a stock Commedia dell'Arte character, in love with the cheeky Harlequin, but betrothed by her father Pantalon to a man she despises, is locked in her house and guarded by the mischievous Pierrot. Harlequin and Columbine secretly hatch a plan to escape and elope. In this world premiere recording, Tsalka, playing the series of sparkling, spirited miniatures from the completed, edited and arranged version by German musicologist Franz Beyer (1922-2018), provides fine entertainment, giving the tangent piano carte blanche to evoke the exaggeration, coquettishness, pseudo-drama, humour and flamboyant sauciness inherent in the Commedia dell'Arte.

Then, to the very young Mozart. Following a miniature written by the 10-year-old composer, Tsalka transports us into the sound world of the fledgling composer with excerpts from the 43 tiny, untitled pieces

of the 'London Sketchbook' of 1765. The pantalon square piano's true, rich timbre inspires Tsalka 'to explore the instrument's ethereal, undamped sonorities'. According to some scholars, Mozart, now using pen and ink, was to write down the pieces without needing help. (Corrections by his father Leopold appear in pencil). Tsalka's playing features little Mozart's joie-de-vivre, inspiration and invention, but also his curiosity to experiment, as heard in some daring harmonies. Regarding dance forms, we hear the rustic origins of the Contredanse (K15h) and the graceful, swaying of young Mozart's not-unsophisticated D minor Siciliano (K15u).

Returning to the tangent piano to perform pieces from *Mozartiana: Kompositionen des Meister* - compiled, edited and arranged for piano by Swiss pianist/conductor Edwin Fischer - Tsalka opens with three small Minuets, all childhood compositions, inviting us to revisit (and reconsider) pieces we played as children. He approaches them with an air of freedom, whimsy, with some modifications, yet preserving their freshness and naivety. After more miniatures comes the late Fantasia in F minor K608, written for a large table clock that included a pipe organ; some of those organs were serious instruments serving music aficionados in Europe's stately homes. Commissioned by Count Joseph Deym, a mechanical clock enthusiast, Tsalka's gripping playing does indeed emerge splendidly at odds with the circumstances of its original performance on a *Spieluhr*, giving depth of emotion and expression to its French-style overture, the Andante and the spectacular fugue.

In the liner notes, Michael Tsalka talks of Mozart as a 'prisoner of the marketing forces of his time', compelling him to write simpler, popular music, hence the composer's 'repeated escapes into the parallel worlds of buffoonery and riddling, freemasonry, opera and the carnival'. Tsalka believes that Mozart would have appreciated interpretations of these works on two marvellous, original historic instruments, restored and revived almost 230 years after his death. Recorded at the Rochuskapelle, Wangen im Allgäu, Germany in October 2018, this disc will delight those curious to hear performance of this music on authentic instruments.

Pamela Hickman