

Montanari - Violin Concertos (2015)

Written by bluesever

Monday, 11 January 2016 17:08 -

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Antonio Maria Montanari: Concerto in C Major "Dresden" *1.I. Allegro 2.II. Largo 3.III. Allegro*
Antonio Maria Montanari: Concerto *4.I.*

No. 6 in E-Flat Major, Op. 1

Adagio e staccato 5.II. Allegro 6.III. Largo 7.IV. Allegro

Antonio Maria Montanari: Concerto No. 1 in A Major, Op. 1

8.I. Adagio 9.II. Allegro 10.III. Amoroso 11.IV. Allegro

Antonio Maria Montanari: Concerto No. 5 in C Major, Op. 1

12.I. Allegro 13.II. Adagio 14.III. Allegro

Antonio Maria Montanari: Concerto No. 7 in E Major, Op. 1

15.I. Adagio 16.II. Allegro 17.III. Adagio 18.IV. Allegro

Antonio Maria Montanari: Concerto No. 8 in A Major, Op. 1

19.I. Adagio 20.II. Allegro 21.III. Grave 22.IV. Vivace

Johannes Pramsohler (violin) Ensemble Diderot

If you are looking for the Corelli-type concertos that Arcangelo Corelli never got round to writing, you can listen to the arrangements which his contemporaries made of his sonatas, such as Geminiani's Concerti Grossi based on Corelli's Op.3 and Op.5. Or you could try this new recording of six concertos by his recognised successor, Antonio Maria Montanari, five of which are receiving their world premiere recordings here. The debt to his great predecessor is apparent but that doesn't make them any less enjoyable when they are so well performed and recorded.

We have had a handful of Montanari's works on record before – one of the concertos on the new album, Op.1/8, appeared on a KuK recording entitled Corelli's Legacy (KuK110) and one of his violin sonatas on a Passacaille recording with the same title (PAS962). The best of these earlier recordings is that of his solo Violin Sonata in d minor from Adrian Chandler and La Serenissima on Per Monsieur Pisendel 2 (Avie AV2308 – review). The most onerous thing in reviewing that CD for me, in May 2015, was typing in the details.

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The title of that Avie recording reminds us that a number of Italian composers, including Vivaldi, composed music for Johan Georg Pisendel, court violinist at Dresden. The first work on the Audax recording is one such and it's not far behind Vivaldi's concertos and sonatas written for him: an inexpensive and generally stylish series of four recordings of Dresden Concertos from Naxos would be a good place to explore those (8.553792, 8.553793, 8.553860 and 8.554310). There's also a Naïve recording which Michael Cookson recommended – review – and Johan van Veen made a similar album on Alpha Recording of the Month.

With only one benchmark, for Op.1/8, recorded by the EU Baroque Orchestra on that KuK CD, this new recording is unlikely to be surpassed in the near future, though I hope that we shall have more attempts – perhaps also some editions and recordings of works by Montanari as yet undiscovered.

The KuK performance of Op.1/8, though lasting almost exactly the same time overall, adopts quite different tempi in individual movements from those on Audax:

- EU Baroque Orchestra: 1:18 + 2:27 + 2:54 + 3:01 - Ensemble Diderot: 2:10 + 2:08 + 2:46 + 2:37

That suggests that the EU players take the opening adagio too fast: I think they do, but the result is more enjoyable than I expected and both approaches work well. Ensemble Diderot adopt what is much more the general concept of adagio without allowing the music to drag and the contrast with the second movement, allegro, taken at much the same pace on both recordings, is all the more effective. You can try both for yourself from Qobuz – subscribers can stream the whole concerto and others can sample.

The other variation is in the vivace finale, taken noticeably faster on the new recording. Jonathan Woolf found Pramsohler's earlier Audax recording of sonatas by Corelli, etc., rather explosive in places – review – but there's no sense of his overdoing things in this movement. In fact, though he's faster than Riccardo Minasi who directs the performance on KuK, it's the latter who makes the music 'bulge' rather more here. It's enough to knock you off your perch the first time but I suspect that Pramsohler's more level approach will be the more satisfying for repeated hearing.

The performances overall are very satisfying indeed, with little or no sense of the 'ceaseless striving' or 'remorseless features' which MC found in the earlier recital, though perhaps some of

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the 'exultant dynamism' has worn off in the process. Maybe his thinking on baroque music has matured in the interim – what I hear on this recording sounds more like the considered and beautiful playing of someone who was influenced by Rachel Podger, whose own new recording of Biber's *Mystery or Rosary Sonatas*, just released on Channel Classics, offers a most enjoyable half-way house between extremes of interpretation of those works – review pending.

The excellent notes by Michael Talbot add to the appeal of this recording. Himself the author of a long article on Montanari, he also refers to two recent books on the baroque concerto which speak highly of the composer. He is, nevertheless, more cautious than I am inclined to be in pressing the claims of a neglected composer. ---Brian Wilson, musicweb-international.com

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