

Alessandro Scarlatti - O penosa lontananza. Cantate da camera (2018)



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In this new recording, Scherzi Musicali explores the fascinating world of Alessandro Scarlatti's Arcadian cantatas: the six mostly unpublished cantatas selected here sublimates the affects of nymphs and shepherds far from their beloved. Both the arias and the recitatives are exceptionally beautiful, varied and colourful: the accomplished theatrical sense of these cantatas has stimulated the soprano Deborah Cachet, the baritone Nicolas Achten and the

abundant instrumental forces that provide a setting for their voices to a passionate and captivating realisation, in which poetry, rhetoric, inventive ornamentation and opulence of sound reign supreme. ---prestomusic.com

For too long Alessandro Scarlatti's star has been eclipsed by that of his son. Domenico's wonderfully inventive keyboard sonatas are what people may think of first when they hear the name "Scarlatti", but Alessandro was a more distinguished composer. He is said to have been the founder of the Neapolitan school of opera, and has over a hundred dramatic works for the theatre to his credit. There are also over six hundred chamber cantatas that date from every period of his career as a composer. Even if some cantatas are spurious or duplicated entries in his catalogue of works, this body of works far outweighs the younger Scarlatti's opus.

Alessandro Scarlatti's music in my collection includes six CDs that feature some of his cantatas. Nowhere near all were ever published. We should be grateful to those who chose to record a selection. Nicholas McGegan made a number of recordings, among them four on Conifer/DHM, and wonderful music it is. Of twenty-one cantatas on those six discs only two are repeated, and it is a real boon to have six new cantatas here. The different approaches are quite interesting. Marcello Di Lisa for CPO (777 748-2) and Robert King for Hyperion (CDA66875) prefer a bolder reading with a larger ensemble, whilst McGegan and Nicolas Achten on this disc employ only a handful of musicians – thus a more intimate approach.

The multi-talented Nicolas Achten sings, plays and directs. He explains in his excellent booklet notes just how his research into the performing practice of the time these six cantatas were written has coloured his decision about instrumentation in these wonderful performances. He splits his notes, after a short introduction, into four sections which among other things explain how Scarlatti the opera composer became a composer of chamber cantatas. A couple of recordings of his operas I know can attest that his approach in the cantatas is quite different. Achten also discusses the 'Arcadian cantatas' and their place in history, and how the cantatas recorded here relate to love, or love from afar, love that is tempered by separation and even unrequited love.

The six cantatas recorded here are quite charming, even if they at times portray the angst and pain of separation. Nicolas Achten has a nice light baritone voice, and he is equally well partnered by the soprano Deborah Cachet. They both have a vocal delivery ideal for this music,

a voice which is not affected by operatic displays and sensibilities. In the solo cantatas they are wonderful, but it is in the one cantata where they share the limelight, *O penosa lontananza*, that they really shine. There is an opening duet where she sings of a “painful separation” whilst he sings of a “blessed separation”. This sets the scene well for what can be seen as a humorous but tender cantata. This is followed by solos that set out each of their positions with some excellent singing.

Of the other cantatas, only *Sovra carro stellate* begins with an instrumental introduction. Here the musicianship is clearly evident. The two violins and continuo make a wonderful sound; there follows a recitativo in which Cachet’s character longs to be with her beloved during a sleepless night. All of these six cantatas (in fact every one that I know) have some beautiful music to offer the listener to enjoy. From beginning to end this disc is wonderful. Achten’s final aria *Tu resti, o mio bel nume*, in which he sings that “Departing and death are therefore the same,” is a wonderful conclusion and a perfect epitome of the musicality and storytelling of this disc.

The recorded sound is excellent. Like the music, it is quite intimate, capturing each of the performers in quite a natural acoustic. One gets the sense of a performance rather than a recording. It has a warm sound, not harsh and cold as sometimes on period recordings. This makes it perfect for this performance. The music presented here is performed excellently throughout, making this an ideal recording for those who want to explore the music of Scarlatti senior, or to add to their collection. ---Stuart Sillitoe, [musicweb-international.com](http://musicweb-international.com)

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