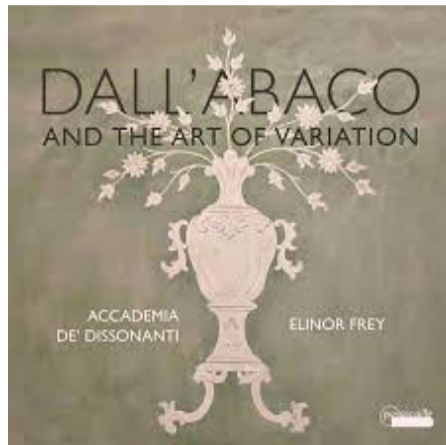




## Dall'Abaco and the Art of Variation

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Author: Fabrice Fitch



### Dall'abaco and the Art of Variation

Cello Sonata

Trio for 3 Cellos No 1

Trio for 3 Cellos No 2

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'The Joy of Cellos' would be an appropriate subtitle for this elegant, playful, infectious recital curated by Elinor Frey. The name of Giuseppe Clemente Dall'Abaco (1710-1805) is new to me, though he was renowned and widely travelled enough to have been mentioned by Charles Burney among the distinguished cellists of his time.

Generous in every sense, this disc stands out for several reasons, to two of which Frey herself draws attention. First, the variation movements that close a couple of the cello sonatas leave the responsibility for the variations to the performer, which Frey accomplishes with consummate wit and charm (a third sonata has variations by the composer). Second, the remaining pieces are for three cellos without continuo, an unusual combination and (in the hands of these three players) an absolute delight. The music itself is light and frothy, albeit with soulful accents in the slower movements and flashes of melancholy in the faster ones. The argument is more substantial in the trios than in the sonatas, as though acknowledging the greater technical resources required to carry three melodic instruments on their own (which demonstrates that Dall'Abaco was no slouch). It's far more engaging music than, say, the Goldberg trio sonatas I reviewed in the last issue.

I've mentioned Frey's skill at variation: for one of those in the C major sonata she dispenses with the continuo in favour of double-stopped drones – an unexpected, and unexpectedly profound, twist. In the next variation she leaps about the top string, encouraged by the range of Dall'Abaco's own writing, which climbs (rather unnervingly at one point) as high as a violin. In the cello trios the three protagonists complement each other wonderfully, but the continuo section in the sonatas also deserves a mention for its verve and industry, never upstaging the soloist but constantly driving the music forwards. This recital confirms Frey and Octavie Dostaler-Lalonde as exciting and astute ambassadors for the Baroque cello (the third cellist, Eva Lymenstull, is new to me, but she acquits herself equally well); I'll gladly listen to whatever new gems they unearth.

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