

## CLASSICAL AND BEYOND

### Angelo Maria Fioré – Complete Cello Sonatas Elinor Frey; Suzie LeBlanc; Lorenzo Ghielmi; Esteban La Rotta Passacaille 1026 (elinorfrey.com)

► Oh my, this is an elegant recording! From the simple opening bars of Fioré's *G Major Cello Sonata*, the highest calibre of music-making is established and doesn't waver for the duration of the disc. There are three strands to the program: the complete sonatas for cello by the little-known cellist of the late 17th and early 18th century, Angelo Maria Fioré; a half-dozen arias by contemporaries of Fioré which feature cello obbligato lines; and two pieces from the same period for solo harpsichord.

The handsome CD booklet features a well-written, substantial essay by Elinor Frey on the early history of the cello, the life – such as we know it – of Fioré, and a detailed contextualization of the works on the program. The cello sonatas themselves are pleasant, have a great deal of variety and are clearly idiomatically suited to the instrument. Fioré was a few years younger than his celebrated contemporary Arcangelo Corelli, and his sonatas – at their best – share a drive and musical interest with Corelli's early trio sonatas.

The arias are by Paolo Magni, Francesco Ballarotti and other rather obscure Italians of the mid-Baroque and have themes of – what else? – the raptures and torments of love. The highlight is Magni's *É caro il tormento soave il dolor* featuring sophisticated and truly moving interplay between Suzie Leblanc's voice and Frey's cello.

The performances throughout are well-conceived, leaving ample room for spontaneity and fancy. Kudos to Lorenzo Ghielmi and Esteban La Rotta for their warm and classy support.

Larry Beckwith

### Back Before Bach Piffaro The Renaissance Band Navona Records NV6106 (navonarecords.com)

► Just one look at the photographs of Piffaro's musicians – and from the sleeve notes the range of instruments played – will confirm this ensemble's sheer diversity of expertise. Listen to the 38(!) tracks and you will appreciate the exuberance of their playing.

From the outset the shawms and



sackbuts take us back to the Renaissance – we are listening to compositions by Michael Praetorius, Heinrich Isaac and many others. What is surprising is the *Chorale* (with sackbuts and dulcian) by none other than J.S. Bach. Mind you, Bach's father, godfather and father-in-law were all city trumpeters.

Then two highly popular Renaissance tunes. Joan Kimball is solo bagpipes player in *Innsbruck, ich muss dich lassen*: her intense interpretation is balanced out by Priscilla Herreid's perky recorder playing and, indeed, by some spirited crumhorn playing in the other variations.

The second variations are of *Tandernaken op den Rijn*; no bagpipes or crumhorns but the mellow and ethereal tones of the recorder. In particular, enjoy Antone Brumel's two-part scoring and the deft playing once again of Herreid and Kimball. This set is perhaps the most involved – yet enjoyable – on this CD. Play the set to anyone who still believes recorders are for schoolkids!

And so to *A solis ortus*, variations commencing with one by Coelius Sedulius for two recorders which would grace any modern church (Sedulius died in 450 – early music composition with a vengeance...). Recorders again hold sway courtesy of, *inter alia*, a Praetorius *Chorale* played on eight(!) recorders, and another *Chorale* by J.S. Bach.

German dances, as may be expected from the late Renaissance, feature heavily. In one suite shawms and sackbuts can be heard separately and in harmony, the former in the Scheidt *Allemande* with deep rich tone, the latter in the Praetorius *Passameze*. *La Volta* lives up to its name, Praetorius placing his stamp on this breathtaking popular dance.

The CD is rounded off with another suite of German dances, dominated by Praetorius. Joan Kimball arranges *Ballet des Aveugles* for bagpipes and shawm, a skirling effort with many variations, followed by the relatively delicate *Padouana* by Johann Schein played on sackbuts. This dignified piece well deserves its popularity among early music enthusiasts. And this CD is well worthy of an audience wider than just the latter.

Michael Schwartz

### Bach – Solo works for marimba Kuniko Linn Records CKD 585 (linnrecords.com)

► Playing any classical music on the marimba would have been unthinkable before 1892. After all it was only then that the instrument was equipped with additional notes to include the chromatic scale by adding another row of sound bars, akin to black keys on the piano. However, playing Bach on the marimba – if not unthinkable – would still be enormously thought-provoking, but not challenging enough, it seems, for



Kuniko, a profoundly brilliant virtuoso at home on both keyboard and percussion instruments. Still, even the fact that she has performed and recorded the music of Iannis Xenakis and Steve Reich could not have been sufficient for approaching these masterworks on *Bach: Solo Works for Marimba*.

Approaching the *Prelude No.1 in C Major* from the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, a work unequalled in the profligacy of its inventiveness, sets the tone for this exquisitely sculpted music by Kuniko. The result is a fascinating opening, with its sprightly dance-like passages and concise melody creating myriad resonances and perspectives for the cycles of *Cello Suites* and *Violin Sonatas* that follow. Here the mallets lead the ear, cherishing motivic snippets, highlighting arresting harmonic progressions with crystal-line articulation. Kuniko's enormous insight into Bach and her own limitless inventiveness make for muscular, exhilaratingly voiced and contrapuntally lucid performances of the solo works for cello and violin, in which harmony and counterpoint are implied through frequent spreading of component notes. A bedazzling set of discs, singing with innate beauty.

Raul da Gama

### Bruckner 9 Chicago Symphony Orchestra; Riccardo Muti CSO-Resound CSOR 9011701 (cso.org)

► There is no lack of fine recordings of Bruckner's *Symphony No. 9*, a work left incomplete at the time of his death in 1896. Among American orchestras, the Chicago Symphony has long been renowned for its performances of Bruckner's music, and it was the CSO who actually gave the North American premiere in 1904. So this latest recording featuring the CSO conducted by Riccardo Muti seems particularly fitting.

This is not Muti's first foray into Bruckner – he has also recorded *Symphonies Four and Seven* – but from the forbidding opening measures of *Symphony No. 9*, the orchestra displays a deep engagement with this monumental score. The first movement – 26 minutes in length – is majestic and dignified, with CSO's outstanding sound displaying rich tonal colours and a full dynamic range. We could only have hoped for a little more prominence of the renowned CSO brass section, which at times seems too muted.

The strident *Scherzo* has a rightful mood of defiance, Muti approaching it with a suitable amount of intensity.

The third and final *Adagio* is all serenity, with Muti and the CSO invoking a true sense of nobility. Even without the final movement, Muti instills a satisfying sense of

