

musica Dei donum

CD reviews

Gasparo (Kaspar) FRITZ (1716 - 1783): "Flute Sonatas Op. II"

Claire Genewein, *transverse flute*; Maya Amrein, *cello*; Nicoleta Paraschivescu, *harpsichord*

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Guild - GMCD 7330 (© 2009) (53'33")

Sonata I in C; Sonata II in D; Sonata III in A; Sonata IV in e minor; Sonata V in D; Sonata VI in G

Gasparo Fritz is one of the many composers from the mid-18th century whose name and works have disappeared under the dust of history. He was a respected musician, though, who once performed at the Concert Spirituel in Paris, and whose music was appreciated by Handel and Charles Burney. His Christian name Gasparo is the Italian form of his original name, Kaspar. His father, Philipp, was from Celle in Germany and had settled in Geneva as a music teacher. According to Charles Burney he was a pupil of Giovanni Battista Somis in Turin, but in 1736 he was back in Geneva where he stayed the rest of his life. He seems to have moved in aristocratic circles as the dedications of his various publications indicate. He acted as director of the musical performances of English residents of Geneva and also as a teacher, apparently to great acclaim.

Charles Burney praised him for his expressive powers and Handel judged his *6 sonate a 4 stromenti op. 1* positively, but his playing didn't meet universal approval. His concerts in France were not really successful as a result of his Italian style of playing, and when an amateur violinist from Basle heard him play, he found his ornamentation excessive. He stated that Fritz sometimes lost his rhythm and he accused him of a lack of musical taste.

Fritz' compositions are various in character and technical requirements. The *6 Sonate op. 2* and even more so the *6 Sonate op. 3* are requiring considerable technical skills, whereas the *6 Sonate op. 4* (trios) are far less demanding. The fact that the sonatas of opus 2 are set for either violin or transverse flute reflects the growing popularity of the flute at the time, especially among amateurs. Five of the six sonatas are in three movements - only *Sonata III in A* has four - and four follow the modern fashion of beginning with a slow movement. That is to say: three of those four opening movements are andantes, which are not meant to be really slow. Four sonatas end with variations on a chaconne bass.

In the programme notes Nicola Schneider writes: "The fourth sonata is very impressive, which in the first movement shows thematic echoes of the sonata in B minor for flute and harpsichord BWV 1030 by Johann Sebastian Bach". Surprisingly she doesn't mention the second movement of the *Sonata I in C* which begins with the same motif as the siciliana of Bach's *Sonata in E flat (BWV 1031)*.

The style of the sonatas can be described as *galant* which was one of the main fashions in music at the time. But, as already indicated, this doesn't mean these sonatas are easy. One of the aspects which demands great skills is the ornamentation. Claire Genewein adds extensive cadenzas at the end of some movements. This seems to be in line with Fritz' intentions: the adagio of the *Sonata II in D* contains a long cadenza written out by Fritz himself. There is a considerable amount of improvisation in these performances - the cadenzas are just examples of that. It is also part of the realisation of the basso continuo. Sometimes I feel the almost concertante style of playing the bass part goes at the cost of the rhythmic support of the flautist.

It isn't always easy to know what exactly Fritz has written down or indicated and what is the result of the performers' decisions. One example is that some passages - in particular the last movements of the *Sonata II in D* and the *Sonata IV in e minor* - are played by the cello and the harpsichord without the flute. But I haven't heard anything which crosses the line of what is stylistically conceivable.

I have really enjoyed listening to this disc. Fritz' various musical ideas and melodic invention have resulted in a set of entertaining sonatas. With their creative and imaginative performances the three artists serve them well. This disc is a fine addition to the catalogue, and it has made me curious about the rest of Fritz' oeuvre.

Johan van Veen (© 2010)