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CDs

Tiorba Obbligata

Ensemble La Cigale: Madeleine Owen (theorbo),
Sara Lackie (Baroque harp), Vincent Lauzer (recorders),
Elin Soderstrom (viola da gamba)
CIGA001

www.ensemblelacigale.ca

As the title indicates, this CD showcases the theorbo as both soloist and accompanist. We usually think of this instrument in the context of continuo playing, but in these pieces all the notes were actually written out by the composers. Included are solo and chamber works from 17th century theorbists, Alessandro Piccinini (1566-1638), Giovanni Girolamo Kapsberger (c. 1580-1651), and the lesser known Giovanni Pittoni Ferrarese (1635-1677).

At just over 45 minutes this is a comparatively short CD—we've come to expect 60 minutes or more these days—but it is nevertheless very satisfying. Included are 3 multi-movement works in various instrumental combinations, generally short (the longest track on the disc is 3:47), and a number of pieces for solo theorbo by Piccinini and Kapsberger.

The three sonatas by Giovanni Pittosi Ferrarese contain movements we usually associate with Baroque suites of the following century: Grave, Alemanda, Corrente, Sarabanda, Gigue. This performance is particularly interesting in that the works were originally written for solo theorbo with continuo, but from a separate 17th century source, apparently composed anonymously, a violin part (here played on recorder) was added. Ms. Owen's CD notes describe what a chore it was to match up these pieces, as they were not in order and sometimes even had different titles. The results, however, are compelling and well worth the effort.

The solo theorbo works on this disc are its most musically sophisticated. In the CD booklet, Ms. Owen mentions that the pieces by Giovanni Pittoni Ferrarese probably had not been previously recorded, as musicologists dismiss them as minor works. They don't give the impression of being amateurish, but they do sound a bit generic in their 17th century musical language. By contrast, Kapsberger and Piccinini seem quite adventurous, a prime example being the latter's "Toccata VI," a rambling, relentlessly inventive work. This track immediately precedes what I think is the highlight of this recording, Ensemble La Cigale's lively arrangement of Piccinini's "Chiaccona in partite variate," which riffs on what must have been the 17th century's most popular bass line.

Most of us have been around the lute family long enough to be familiar with the sound of the theorbo, but if it is new to you, this is a great disc to introduce it. There is an energy and richness

to the sound Ms. Owen elicits from the instrument that immediately attracts us, especially in combination with other instruments. I particularly liked the sound of the theorbo with the harp, two instruments of such similar timbre that it would be easy for each to lose its identity in the texture, but somehow that doesn't happen. Also, Vincent Lauzer's impeccable recorder playing merits special mention.

I highly recommend this CD, but that doesn't mean it's entirely without flaws. The over-emphasized room ambiance—all too common on recordings of this literature and a perennial complaint of mine—detracts a little, especially where the recorder is concerned, and in the ensemble pieces the performers have an unfortunate tendency to accent all the downbeats, which interferes with a broader sense of musical line.

This appears to be a privately produced recording without commercial distribution, but a quick search shows that it is available from CDBaby, iTunes, and Amazon.com. It is well worth the effort to seek it out, as you'll undoubtedly be listening to it repeatedly.

Howard Kadis

Charles Mouton

Anders Ericson, Baroque Lute

Daphne 1049, released 2014

[www.andersericson.net]

53:43

The cover graphic depicting a bemused sheep (magically placed in a wooded area) is a witty allusion to the name of our composer, Charles Mouton (1617 – 1699), a late 17th-century exponent of the highly-refined French music for lute, ably performed here by Anders Ericson. The notion that Ericson is an "electric guitarist turned lutenist," as stated in a *Gramophone* review of his 2011 CD, *Relic* (Daphne 1042), is a bit disingenuous. As is quite apparent from his biographical information, in the well-researched notes to the CD under review, and upon hearing his interpretations of Mouton's highly-nuanced music, he did not just lay down his Strat and, fully-formed, pick up an instrument that resides on the opposite end of the spectrum: Ericson is no newcomer to the lute.

The recorded program presents four suites of pieces from the scant and scattered sources of Mouton's music, the first of which is a suite in c-minor from *Pièces de luth Premier Livre*, opening with a Prelude and beginning with a rather thunderous example of the 11-course lute's lowest bass note. But the tone of the suite calms measurably after this call to order, and Ericson demonstrates a fine command of the instrument and the idiom. There are also two suites (g-minor and c-minor) derived from the Lobkowitz manuscripts, an accurate source of Mouton's music that Ericson suggests may include tablatures once available in published editions that are now lost.