

The Masque of Moments

Theater of the Ayre with Elizabeth Kenny, lute
Linn Records, CKD 542

A masque was an elaborate courtly entertainment in the 16th and early 17th centuries offering singing, dancing, music and pantomime with scenes and songs often based on classical Greek mythology—much like a variety show for honored guests, hosted by the king with famous poets and musicians supplying the song words and music. Members of the court sometimes took part, disguised by masks.

Theatre of the Ayre, an ensemble of instrumentalists and singers brought together by renowned lutenist Elizabeth Kenny as a platform for production of 17th-century music, here offers us a taste of the many styles of music for masques.

It is a true ensemble of eleven instrumentalists and five singers. The instruments, a combination of lutes, harps, cittern, guitar, violins, viols and violas—all strings, whether plucked, strummed or bowed, are able to convey a plethora of moods and soundscapes. They are joined in this production by members of the august Salisbury Cathedral Choir, both boys and adult professionals.

The recording was done in St. Martin's Church in Salisbury, UK, and the choice of venue adds a certain echoing, reverberating sound to several pieces.

About a third of the selections are instrumental only, the rest featuring singers and instrumentalists in groupings as small as a solo artist accompanied by theorbo, to pieces featuring several singers and three to eight instruments.

Given the ensemble nature of the music the sound of the lute is often masked, but briefly hearing the lutes on their own, especially in the two opening tracks, with their clear, pellucid tones, like glistening raindrops, made me long for more.

Two tracks deserve special mention. "While Dancing Rests" has two of the boys echoing the song lines with haunting ethereal effect. "Sweet Echo" features Theatre of the Ayre member, Rosanna Wicks, aged 15 when this was recorded. She is one to watch. Her clear, bright, assured soprano stands out among the fine singers gathered here.

If you actually read the words to the songs, you might be surprised at the explicit lines in Ben Jonson's "Why stay the bridegroom to invade, Her, that would a matron be made?" I am sure there are allusions and metaphors in the poetry lost to modern audiences. But no matter, the song will still be enjoyed.

The singing spans exaggeratedly ornamented tremolo to simple speech-like recitative. In short, there is a great variety offered in the hour plus of music from bouncing dances, solo arias, comedic sections, and instrumental pieces of complex, entwined musical lines—something to please all. The extensive booklet notes which instrumentalists are playing what instruments, and which singers are singing for each track. Above all, it offers exacting, elegant and superb execution from all the performers.

Susanna Stiefel



Up in the Morning Early

Ensemble La Cigale
Leaf Music, LM-211

Up in the Morning Early is a lively selection of beautiful melodies by Celtic composers of the Baroque period, arranged and performed by Ensemble La Cigale. The repertoire showcased in this album has unjustly been neglected by both early music ensembles and folk music groups. What stands out is the tightness of the ensemble, with all the musicians playing as one instrument. This album features music from 18th-century composers James Oswald, William McGibbon, General John Reed from Scotland, Edward Jones from Wales, and Turlough O'Carolan from Ireland, as well as tunes from the 17th-century Rowallan and Straloch lute manuscripts.

Ensemble La Cigale is a small Baroque ensemble consisting of theorbo, triple harp, viola da gamba, recorder and violin. Substituting the harp for the more commonly used cembalo has had a profound effect on the overall sound, making it both gentler and fuller. This selection of instruments is also reminiscent of the English Consort of the early 1600s, making it a good choice for tunes that were performed throughout the entire Baroque period.

The album opens with the traditional tune "John Come Kiss Me Now" in an arrangement that showcases each of the musicians in turn. This arrangement integrates variations from four different sources in a seamless manner that is entirely consistent with traditional use of this once-popular tune, passing through several changes of mood before a surprise ending.

The album is structured around four sonatas from James Oswald's *Airs for the Four Seasons*. The first two, celebrating summer and winter, feature the recorder and violin in solo sonata form. The other two, celebrating spring, are in trio sonata form. These sonatas feature the recorder player Vincent Lauzer and violinist Sari Tsuji. On the harp, Sara Lackie plays a couple of solo tunes, and is joined by the ensemble on others.

Of greatest interest to lutenists may be a set of Scottish lute tunes from the 17th-century *Rowallan and Straloch Lute Manuscripts*. Madeleine Owen's expressive lute playing comes across clearly in this set. The title track is a traditional Scottish tune played by Marie-Laurence Primeau on the viola da gamba. Each of the five musicians proves to be expressive and capable.

In this repertoire there is temptation to introduce ornamentation from today's Celtic bands, but all the musicians are true to authentic Baroque techniques. Even so, the overall sound is Celtic, particularly when the recorder and violin double each other on melody and the strings fill in rhythm and harmony.

Instead of producing yet another Purcell or Handel album, Ensemble La Cigale has focused on repertoire more characteristic of the British Isles which has inspired composers from Purcell to Beethoven. This ensemble plays with great accuracy and feeling, and many of the arrangements start from a single instrument and build to a full sound. Full ensemble pieces are interspersed with solo sections, allowing each of the musicians to show their ability.

Vincent Lauzer's recorder playing is exceptional, accurate, expressive and showing great originality in ornamentation. However, I would like to have heard more from the other instruments. This collection avoids contrapuntal density in favor of clear melodic composition with familiar harmonies, making it accessible to a wide audience.

It is my hope that Ensemble La Cigale has only begun to explore Baroque music of Celtic countries, and that they will continue to perform music in this vein. Both musicianship and recording quality are professional, and the musicians show a commitment to authentic sound without sacrificing expressiveness. Recordings of these tunes are rare, and this album will be an essential part of any collection of early Celtic music.

Chad Goerzen



Three Early Romanescas: Dalza, Mudarra and Valderrabano

by Sean Smith

This example from Joanambrozio Dalza from his *Intabulatura de Lauto Libro Quarto* (1508) is the first printed source of a venerable pasamezo. Does this point to a Venetian or Roman origin? Other Spanish titles are mentioned so there is hardly any certainty to an untitled piece. On the other hand there is a resemblance to Spanish pieces that would follow 38 years later.

Alonso Mudarra wrote and printed his only book in Seville in 1546 with a chapter devoted to the renaissance guitar. We could play his guitar version directly on a 6-course lute's inner 4

courses but the upper neck work benefits from a gentler refingering.

Enriquez de Valderrabano published his seven Romanesca variations with carefully marked gradations to warn the student from going beyond his abilities. Any of the variations could end at the double bar and he even precedes the final "Tercero grado" with a sharped third on the final for a more believable ending if the student wishes to avoid it.



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