

Peter Holman

English and Scottish instrumental music

As I mentioned in my last survey (*Early Music*, xli/1 (2013), pp.175–7), there now seems to be more interest in recording English 17th- and 18th-century music among musicians in countries other than England—though that may just reflect the parlous state of our recording industry. In this batch of ten CDs, only two are by English groups or individuals, though there is one of Scottish music by Concerto Caledonia. We begin with **Parthenia** (*Carpe Diem* CD-16298, *rec* 2013, 65') by the Chilean harpsichordist Catalina Vicens, using a variety of original keyboard instruments and copies in the Neumeier-Junghans-Tracey collection at Schloss Bad Krozingen. Hearing the collection complete as published in 1612 (eight, seven, and six pieces by Byrd, Bull and Gibbons respectively), it struck me how carefully it was planned to make a delightful hour's entertainment—presumably played to (or by) the original dedicatee, Princess Elizabeth. The instruments (including original Italian and Swiss virginals) sound beautiful in meantone tuning, and are mostly very well handled by Vicens. My reservations are that she plays pavans and galliards rather too slowly (the pavans sound as if the crotchet is the beat rather than the minim), trills mostly start on the note above in late Baroque fashion, and *The Queenes Command* by Gibbons is subjected to a tasteless rewrite involving an obbligato bass viol part (Rebeka Ruso) and a lot of extra divisions, inevitably inferior to the originals.

An English Fancy (Çedille CDR90000 135, *rec* 2011, 80') by the Chicago-based Settecento Trio (Rachel Barton Pine, violin; John Mark Rozendaal, bass viol; David Schrader, harpsichord & organ) begins with their equally anachronistic version of Byrd's *Sellinger's Round*, and includes arrangements of some of Purcell's four-part theatre airs as well as a suite from Simpson's Little Consort without the bass viol part (Rozendaal plays the lyra viol part) and Purcell's Pavan in B \flat with the second violin part arranged for viol. This is a pity when there is so much worthwhile English music actually written for violin, bass viol and keyboard, as a look through the Viola da Gamba Society's Thematic Index will readily show. To be fair, the CD does include some of the best works from the repertory, by William Lawes (*Fantasia Suite* no.8 in D), Jenkins

(*Fantasia Suite* in G minor, VdGS, Group IV, no.2) and Locke (*For Several Friends*, Set 2 in B \flat), as well as Tobias Hume's fine *Captain Hume's Lamentation*, played on violin and lyra viol, and Thomas Baltzar's virtuoso divisions on 'John come kiss me now' for violin and bass. Barton Pine, Rozendaal and Schrader are excellent players, and it is a delight to hear the music played on appropriate instruments, including a Renaissance violin after da Salò and an original bass viol by William Turner. I was only brought up short by the occasional unstylish ornament and by some sour organ tuning in the Locke.

By contrast, Fretwork's **Sublime Discourses: John Milton and Martin Peerson, The complete instrumental music** (Regent REGCD341, *rec* 2009/10, 62') is a perfect match of music and performers. It consists of 15 fantasias and almaines in five and six parts by Peerson, an *In nomine* with words (sung by countertenor Michael Chance) and five fantasias in five and six parts by Milton, together with Peerson's four surviving keyboard pieces played by Sophie Yates on a copy of 'Queen Elizabeth's virginals' (actually an Italian spinet) in the Victoria and Albert Museum. The project clearly owes a lot to Richard Rastall, who edited all the music (which involved reconstructing lost parts for three pieces) and provides illuminating notes. He points out that Milton (1562–1647, the father of the poet and a scrivener by profession) and Peerson (c.1572–1647, a musician at St Paul's Cathedral) were near neighbours in London, and that Peerson's viol music may have been written as part of 'a training programme' for the St Paul's boys, hence their distinctive lively and busy style, with plenty of technical and intellectual challenges. They tend to be rather similar *en masse*, with the fantasias often having the same sort of rhythmic patterns as the almaines, so it is good to have his keyboard music for contrast as well as Milton's more introspective pieces. All in all, this is wonderful playing of fine music, and it is a fitting tribute to the late, lamented Richard Campbell, whose last recording it was. I only wondered whether the viol pieces should have organ accompaniment. After all, by the time Peerson was writing it was routine to use a chamber organ in consort music, and the lack of an organ part in the sources is easily explained by the fact that he was a professional keyboard player who could have improvised from a score, as his contemporaries Orlando Gibbons and Thomas Tomkins seem to have done.

The recording of **Henry Purcell: Fantazias & In Nomines** (Agogique AG0007, *rec* 2011, 51'), by the French

group Les Basses Réunis directed by Bruno Cocset, is a strange enterprise. The 15 pieces Purcell contributed to the viol consort tradition in 1680 are played on a violin consort using varied combinations of two violins, a five-string alto and two five-string tenors, a four-string bass in BB \flat and six-string basses in GG, together with a gut-strung harpsichord in some of the pieces. I have no objection to these superb pieces being played on all sorts of instruments (saxophones might be worth trying, for instance), though there is no evidence that Purcell had these particular ones in mind—if he had anything in mind; I have argued that they are composition exercises written as part of a self-imposed course of study in counterpoint. Cocset's whimsical notes do not explain the rationale for his choices. The playing is certainly accomplished, though the all-violin ensemble tends to favour the rhythmic aspects of the music over the linear ones, to its detriment, and the harpsichord just sounds out of place—despite Cocset's claim that it helps 'to bring out the extraordinarily rich narrative and contemplative qualities of the music'.

It was a relief to turn to **Henry Purcell: Twelve sonatas in three parts** (Linn CKD374, *rec* 2011, 75'), recorded by the Retrospect Trio (Sophie Gent & Matthew Truscott, violin; Jonathan Manson, bass viol; Matthew Halls, harpsichord & organ). I need only say that this is some of the finest playing I have heard of Purcell, or indeed of any 17th-century consort music. They play with authority, conviction and with plenty of virtuosity where required, and are beautifully alive to the rhetorical qualities of this wonderful music without being showy or striving for effect. I found myself unable to fault any of the interpretative decisions made throughout the CD—a first for me so far as a Purcell recording is concerned! Retrospect has already recorded Purcell's other set of trio sonatas, *Sonatas in Four Parts* (Linn CKD332), and I hope they will go on to explore more of the rich English repertory for two violins, bass viol and keyboard.

The Business of Angels: English recorder music from the Stuart era (Pipistrelle Music [no number], *rec* 2010, 58'), recorded by a group of Toronto-based musicians (Alison Melville, recorder; Lucas Harris, Baroque guitar & archlute; Joëlle Morton, bass viol; Nadina Mackie Jackson, bassoon; Borys Medicky, harpsichord), includes grounds from *The Division Flute* and sonatas by Daniel Purcell, Lewis Mercy, James Paisible, Godfrey Finger and William Topham. Alison Melville is a good player, and there are some attractive pieces here, particularly the sonatas by Paisible and Mercy. However, too much time is wasted on arrangements (particularly a pointless version

of Handel's *Rinaldo* overture, reduced to recorder and continuo), and my enjoyment was continually spoiled by the over-prominent, over-populated, over-orchestrated and over-active continuo team—particularly when an aggressively strummed guitar appears, at times virtually drowning the recorder. The model, as so often these days, seems to be modern pop or folk music rather than historically informed performance practice. At the time, music for a solo instrument and continuo was normally copied or printed in score, implying that it was intended to be played just by two people, and it would be good to have more recordings exploring the implications of this.

The title of **Henry Eccles: Sonatas for violin and continuo (First Book, 1720)** (Musica Omnia MOO411, *rec* 2011, 94'), recorded by another Chicago group, The Callipygian Players (Martin Davids, violin; Craig Trompeter, violoncello & bass viol; David Schrader, harpsichord) does not tell the whole story. As W. B. Squire pointed out in 1923 (and is set out in the CD notes), six of these twelve sonatas were lifted in whole or part from Giuseppe Valentini's *Allettamenti per camera*, op.8, or in the case of one movement, from Francesco Bonporti's *Invenzione*, op.10—the last in Sonata no.10 in G minor, which became popular in the early 20th century in Joseph Salmon's heavily edited version and then in arrangements for all sorts of unlikely instruments. The collection was published in Paris, where Eccles was working at the time and where, presumably, his thefts went undetected. The music is remarkably consistent in style using an accomplished but relatively unambitious post-Corelli idiom, suggesting either that there are more undetected borrowings from Valentini or that Eccles was good at imitating him. The performances are stylish and accomplished, with Martin Davids mostly coping very well with the technical demands, though some of the Largo and Adagio movements are too slow for my taste.

The John Reading Manuscripts of Dulwich College (Brilliant Classics 94454, *rec* 2011, 67') is an anthology of organ voluntaries taken by Riccardo Bonci from manuscripts now at Dulwich College in London. Reading (c.1685–1764), a pupil of John Blow, was organist there from 1700 to 1702 before moving on to posts at several London churches; he bequeathed a number of his manuscripts to the College. The voluntaries recorded here range from those written in Restoration style, by Blow, William Croft and John Barrett, several of which are examples of the 'double voluntary' type, exploiting the contrast between two keyboards, and the newer multi-movement type, often featuring solos on the trumpet or cornet stop, by the younger generation, including John James, Maurice Greene, John Stanley and the mysterious German 'Mr.

Seedo' or 'Sidow'—who contributes one of the best pieces, a five-movement Handelian voluntary. Some of the others are rather dull, and this recording would mainly be of interest to organ buffs were it not for the fact that it gives us a chance to hear the three-manual George England organ in the chapel of the College, splendidly restored by William Drake in 2009 to something approaching its original 1760 form. Riccardo Bonci, an Italian organist working in London, is fluent and stylish, and does his best to keep up the interest by varying the stops and juxtaposing pieces in different styles, though the CD would have been more attractive had he included some of the other types of pieces in the Reading manuscripts, including arrangements of songs and arias and examples of his extraordinary settings of metrical psalms, with introductions and interludes between the verses and even between each line—but that would have required singers.

We go north of the border for **Robert Mackintosh: Airs, minuets, gavotts and reels** (Dephian DCD34128, *rec* 2010, 66') recorded by Concerto Caledonia (David Greenberg & Greg Lawson, violin; Alison McGillivray, violoncello; David McGuinness, harpsichord & square piano). Robert 'Red Rob' Mackintosh (c.1745–1807) came from Perthshire (where he seems to have known the Gow family), but settled in Edinburgh and played in the orchestra of the Edinburgh Musical Society. As this CD, mostly taken from a collection published in 1783, demonstrates, he was at home in the international world of art music (minuets, gavottes and a solo for violin and continuo) and well as in local traditional music (airs, reels and quicksteps). Much of it is functional dance music, and is not that compelling (at least to a mere Sassenach), though Concerto Caledonia make it as attractive as possible, partly by beautiful playing and partly by demonstrating the various ways this music can legitimately be performed. It was published in two- or three-stave form, principally for one or two violins and violoncello with or without continuo, though sometimes a keyboard replaces the violoncello. One of the pieces makes a delightful violoncello solo, and McGuinness occasionally takes the lead using a sweet-toned square piano made in Edinburgh in about 1815. My only regret was that his harpsichord is a copy of a 1584 Moermans rather than a late 18th-century English model—the type Mackintosh would have known in Edinburgh.

The trio sonata in 18th-century England (BIS, CD1765, *rec* 2009, 71') is part of an eight-CD survey by London Baroque (Ingrid Seifert & Richard Gwilt, violin; Charles Medlam, violoncello; Steven Devine, harpsichord) of the trio sonata in Italy, Germany, France and

England. There is a lot of fine music here, though it is a pity that they have mostly chosen pieces already available on CD. Of the eight sonatas—John Ravenscroft's op.1 no.8, Handel's op.2 no.5 and op.5 no.2, Avison's op.3 no.1, Boyce's op.1 no.5, Arne's op.3 no.2, C. F. Abel's op.3 no.1, and the Earl of Kelly's Sonata no.6—only the first and last seem to be first recordings, and the Ravenscroft was apparently included more to demonstrate Corelli's influence in England than for its intrinsic merits, while the Earl of Kelly perhaps belongs more naturally on a CD entitled 'The trio sonata in eighteenth-century Scotland'. I would certainly have traded in the two Handel sonatas (which London Baroque has recorded before) for more first recordings. There is plenty of worthwhile material to choose from, including trio sonatas by William Croft, William Corbett, J. S. Humphries, Michael Christian Festing, F. E. Fisher, Giuseppe Sammartini, Bendall Martyn and Charles Burney. But we must be grateful for what have; as we have come to expect from London Baroque, this is refined and satisfying music-making, the fruit of many years of working together as a group. I hope that they will record more English music, and more generally, that this rich and fascinating repertory will continue to find favour abroad.

Websites

Agogique www.agogique.com

BIS www.bis.se

Brilliant Classics www.brilliantclassics.com

Carpe Diem www.carpediem-records.de

Cedille www.cedillerecords.org

Dephian www.delphianrecords.co.uk

Linn www.linnrecords.com

Musica Omnia www.musicaomnia.org

Regent www.regent-records.co.uk

Pipistrelle www.alisonmelville.com/pipistrelle.htm

doi:10.1093/em/cau047

Advance Access publication April 29, 2014

Daniel Bangert

Baroque violin music

This selection of discs traverses some of the rich repertory for violin from the late Baroque, both solo and accompanied. The twelve recordings discussed in this review mainly date from the first half of the 18th century and include staple German and Italian works alongside less familiar fare.