



was sonst lieblich heißet). These movements are offset, however, by the beautifully erudite violin playing in 'Es kommen die Wolken' (*Seid willkommen, schöne Stunden*). Overall, the playing exudes a sense of command and a profound understanding of the demands of what is at times very 'metamorphic' music by dint of its often rapid and subtle changes of *Affekt*. Dorothee Miels (soprano) exhibits a similar sense of command, her flexible tone sinuous one moment and gay the next. Tenor Knut Schnoch delights with his clear tone and amazing clarity, though he could perhaps sound slightly more heroic at times, and contralto Elisabeth Graf is wonderful, her rich tone particularly suited to movements in a slower tempo, such as 'Die süßesten Züge der lieblichsten Weisen' (*Alles, was sonst lieblich heißet*). Unfortunately, she is rather let down in the lovely duet 'Bloß nach dir' (*Alles, was sonst lieblich heißet*) by bass Ekkehard Abele, who consistently sings slightly under the note. Elsewhere on the discs he is engaging, though without the flexible command shown by the other soloists.

On both discs the recording quality, as always on cpo, is extremely high. So too are the liner notes, though their scholarship is at times let down by a rather poor translation that creates confusion not present in the original German. Some of Stölzel's works have appeared on labels other than cpo, but past issues have tended to be restricted to instrumental works, resulting in an imbalance in the recordings available. Far from being of purely archival interest, however, cpo's discs of Stölzel's vocal works focus attention on the high quality of his music, which promises a fulfilling musical experience for the listener.

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GEORG PHILIPP TELEMANN (1681–1767)

SUITES FOR STRINGS

B'Rock

Et'Cetera, KTC 4027, 2008; one disc, 50 minutes

We are in the midst of a golden age for recordings of Telemann's overture-suites. In recent years, many of the established period-instrument ensembles in Europe and North America have issued at least one CD devoted to this rich and seemingly inexhaustible repertory of one hundred and twenty or so works, and two complete recorded cycles are underway – one by the Collegium Instrumentale Brugense under Patrick Peire (on modern instruments) for Brilliant Classics, and the other by the Moscow-based Pratum Integrum Orchestra (on period instruments) for Caro Mitis. This is a welcome development not only for fans of Telemann's music, but also for those susceptible to the considerable charms of the overture-suite, a genre that in modern times has been overshadowed by its flashier contemporary, the solo concerto. Such recordings, along with those of similar works by Johann Friedrich Fasch, Christoph Graupner and their contemporaries, have helped extend our view well beyond mainstays like J. S. Bach's four overture-suites and Handel's *Water Music* and *Music for the Royal Fireworks*.

The Flemish baroque orchestra B'Rock has selected three fine Telemann suites with characteristic titles for its programme: 'La Bizarre', TWV55:G2; 'La Musette', TWV55:g1; and 'La Lyra', TWV55:Es3. All three works have been recorded previously, and indeed 'La Musette' is especially well represented on disc. Their popularity relative to most comparable works entitled 'Ouverture' has at least something to do with their descriptive sobriquets, none of which, ironically enough, stems from Telemann himself: 'La Bizarre' and 'La Lyra' are the work of eighteenth-century scribes, and 'La Musette' was devised by Arnold Schering for his 1913 edition of the suite (one of the first publications of the composer's orchestral music since his lifetime).

Both TWV55:Es3 and G2 originated either during Telemann's tenure as city music director at Frankfurt (1712–1721) or shortly after he assumed a similar position at Hamburg in 1721. Perhaps they were intended for



concerts given by the *Collegium musicum* of Frankfurt's Frauenstein Society, for which Telemann served as secretary, or else commissioned by the courts of Darmstadt or Dresden (where undated manuscript sources are preserved). TWV55:G1, on the other hand, concluded the *VI Ouvertures à 4 ou 6*, which Telemann engraved, advertised, distributed and sold in 1736. The only known copy of this collection recently resurfaced in Moscow's Russian State Library, so B'Rock's performance is based directly or indirectly on a manuscript copy deriving from Telemann's edition. (The entire collection has been recorded as volume 3 of the Caro Mitis cycle.)

In many respects, B'Rock's approach to this music reflects current 'best practices' among historically informed ensembles. All of the performances are spirited, stylish and polished, and the group's string configuration of 4–3–2–2–1 (supplemented by bassoon, lute/guitar and harpsichord) is pretty much standard for period-instrument orchestras nowadays, corresponding roughly to the proportions recommended by Johann Joachim Quantz in his 1752 *Versuch einer Anweisung die Flöte traversiere zu spielen*. Yet surviving eighteenth-century performing materials indicate that 'orchestral' suites were just as likely to have been heard one-to-a-part or with minimal doublings: TWV55:G1 is transmitted via single parts in Telemann's edition and in the Darmstadt manuscript, TWV55:G2 has single parts in the Dresden collection, and TWV55:Es3 was performed at Darmstadt with an ensemble somewhat smaller than that deployed by B'Rock (the parts include two copies of violin 1, one each of violin 2 and viola, and three of the bass part). Relatively few recordings of overture-suites by any composer have used one-to-a-part strings, and it seems to me that the almost reflexive doubling of strings for music that was by no means always (or even usually) presented orchestrally is one of the blind spots of current historically informed performing practice. It is worth noting, however, that B'Rock's approach is not wholly inflexible in this respect: the two halves of the menuet of TWV55:G2 are heard initially one-to-a-part before being repeated by the full ensemble.

One other aspect of scoring deserves mention here. It has become fashionable in recent years to add a guitar to the continuo section in eighteenth-century repertoires for which there is little or no documentary evidence of the instrument's use. Telemann, so far as we know, did not use the guitar as a continuo instrument in large ensembles, nor can we trace its use in early eighteenth-century German ensemble music more generally. It does not follow, of course, that modern performances must limit themselves to scoring practices that appear in the historical record. B'Rock uses the guitar to good effect in such movements as the 'Gavotte en rondeau' of TWV55:G2 and the raucous 'Murky' and 'Harlequinade' of TWV55:G1, where strumming patterns reinforce notated rhythms or fill in empty rhythmic space. Elsewhere the effect is less convincing, though, as in the opening bars of the overture and 'Branle' of TWV55:G2, where loud strumming obscures the intricate rhythmic play between the upper string parts. In the 'Branle', incidentally, Telemann playfully notates each of the four instrumental parts in a different metre.

Some of the recording's most successful performances are of movements in the pastoral and rustic styles. Appropriately earthy (and effectively graced with some extra slides and trills) are the 'Napolitaine', 'Polonaise' and 'Musette' of TWV55:G1 and 'La vielle' of TWV55:Es3. (This last movement, from which the suite derives its title of 'La Lyra', is remarkable for a refreshingly unsentimental imitation of folk music as played on a hurdy-gurdy.) By contrast, the slow section of the overture and 'Sicilienne' in the E flat suite come across as sweetly pastoral lullabies. Not so satisfying is B'Rock's breezy rendition of the G minor menuet and trio, where I hear the pseudo-canonic texture as warranting a heavier execution and slower tempo. Well judged in my opinion but unlikely to please all ears is the extreme *inégalité* applied to quavers in the courante of TWV55:G2.

Perhaps the most interesting movement among the three recorded works is the G major overture. Here Telemann offers an ingenious send-up of the French overture as a type, and it seems possible that the Dresden violinist Johann Georg Pisendel entitled the movement 'La Bizarre' in recognition of its satirical quality (whether this title applies to the overture or to the entire work is unclear). Something already seems amiss in the dotted first section, where the second violin's line is rhythmically at odds with the others. It only gradually dawns on the listener that this is because the line is inspired by the movement's fugal second section – a clever temporal disjunction that pokes fun at the conventional rigidity of the French overture's



slow–fast–slow structure. When the expected fugue begins, the second violin refuses to take part in the exposition, rudely answering the subject in the first violin with an unrelated syncopated figure and later mocking the other instruments by playing only the dotted rhythms it ought to have supplied at the movement's outset. For good measure, Telemann inserts a few mock-serious passages as momentary disruptions of the fugue's progress. (A disruption of a different sort occurs at 3'39'': the only obvious edit I spotted in the entire recording.) The overture's third section finds the second violin still refusing to play its expected role, having in the meantime drafted the viola to its cause. Although B'Rock delivers the overture with admirable vigour, I sense that they are not fully in on the joke. But this may be just as well, for a performance emphasizing the movement's *bizarrerie* could easily undermine the subtlety of Telemann's humour.

The highly literate booklet notes by Florian Heyerick (given in English, French, German and Dutch) cover much ground in a short space – from the German taste for multicultural artworks following the Thirty Years' War to the rise of the overture-suite as a manifestation of this taste, and the career and music of Telemann ('the central figure of this period of transition') as paradigmatic of the German fascination with mixing elements of the French, Italian and Polish styles. Little, however, is said about the recorded suites themselves.

When Telemann advertised the forthcoming *VI Overtures*, including TWV55:G1, he assured potential subscribers that the music was 'of a type in which his pen is especially practised'. And especially practised it was, for the composer had already penned many dozens, perhaps even hundreds, of overture-suites over the preceding three decades. B'Rock's highly appealing recording of three complementary works reminds us how much at home Telemann was with the genre, even as he sought to expand its expressive boundaries beyond theatrical and courtly norms.

STEVEN ZOHN