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Encounters in Rome: Corelli and Handel

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What a joy this record is!

At the age of 21, Handel arrived in Rome; Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713),

in his 50, was the established master of instrumental music. While in Rome, Handel's oratorios *Il trionfo el Tempo* and *La Resurrezione* were premiered; Corelli was concertmaster, with Handel at the harpsichord (there's a thought!). There was cross-fertilisation between the two composers, and this meeting of giants was the inspiration for this fascinating disc.

The first piece is Handel's Oboe Concerto in G-Minor, HWV 287,(c. 1704/05) , in an incredibly expressive performance by soloist Nele Vertommen, the third movement Sarabande (marked Largo) an absolute dream, while the small ensemble maximises clarity in the fast movements. here's a *YouTube* of these performers:

Händel, Oboe concerto in g minor // Musica Gloria



Written for the newly modernised French oboe, the possibilities were suddenly wide open for composers.

Corelli wrote some 48 Trio Sonatas; the first of the two we hear on this disc is the F-Minor, Op. 3/9. The ensemble includes a "claviroganum", a hybrid instrument at use in teh Florentine court at this time. There is a tendency for history books to treat Corelli as someone who was preparatory to composers who were perhaps more 'developed' and therefore more sophisticated, but his music is supremely constructed Listen to the Largo third movement, in a performance of stunning beauty:

Trio Sonata in F Minor, Op. 3 No. 9: III. Largo



The first two pieces balance out in terms of stricture (four movements each, both slow-fast-slow-fast). time for a change, then: a Handel

Harpsichord Suite performed by Benjamino Paganini, the D-Minor, HWV 428 (split into two bits, so the “Air and Doubles” is presented later) in the programme. It really is the most remarkable sound, with a sustained pedal against harpsichord filigree at the opening: this is one possible combination of many. It is a truly stunning voyage into the unexpected (follow the *Spotify* below to hear this remarkable performance). Paganini seems to have the full measure of Handel's vocabulary.

I have come across music by Santiago di Murcia before, in recordings by Paul O'Dette and Rolf Lislevand. Lovely to hear an excerpt of his “Despacio” here (from *Folias Italianas*, Salvador Codex); it leads into the famous “La Follia, Op. 5/12 by Corelli, a violin/basso continuo dialogue that birthed a huge number of variation sets! Elise Dupont is the violinist here in a performance of great scope. Some of the textures sound well ahead of Corelli's time (they just dig in), but in fact the performance is just so full of life, while the use of clavierorganum enlarges the timbral range so much ... this becomes a truly large-scale piece . Here's a video:

Vivaldi, La Follia // Musica Gloria



We mentioned a new type of oboe above; The “Sonata con Aboé (*sic*) et violin” in C-Major, WoO 4 by Corelli is for the earlier oboe. It is Corelli's one and only piece for the oboe (and it only rarely gets an outing); and it is lush. The slow movement, Grave (there are two together) is utterly remarkable, a slow processional with flights of lament for the solo violin; and yet the succeeding, 42-second “Spirituoso et Adagio” sounds remarkably Dandelion to my ears.

A snippet of Handel's *Il Trionfo* (the Adagio from “Sonata del Overture”) precedes the Air & Doubles of the Handel D-Minor Suite, itself leading to the Trio Sonata in G-Minor, HWV 390. It really is superb programming, and the performances are perfectly on point. Listen to the eloquence of Vertommen's oboe in the *Trionfo* excerpt before the claviorganum once more fascinates in that Suite movement.

A pair of Trio Sonatas precede the final piece (this last the most famous on the album). Part of Handel's Trio Sonata in G-Minor, HWV 390 is next, its final two movements perfectly complementary. The Corelli Trio Sonata in D-Minor that follows (Op. 1/11) is just as profound and perfect, its opening Grave stunning in their performance in the intertwining of lines. During the course of the performance, Musica Gloria proves that Corelli really provided perfectly proportioned gems. Their unhurried way with the penultimate movement (Adagio), just letting the lines slowly tumble over one another, is miraculous. Tuning

is here, as everywhere, perfect.

The final piece is Hadnel's "Cuckoo and the Nightingale" organ Concerto (F-Major, HWV 295). There are some amazing bird-link effects here (I was wondering why Markis Harder-Völkman was credited a playing the "nightingale register" in the second movement until I heard all that - avian - tweeting). Here its is most definitely a "Claivoorganum" Cponcertos, given the use of harpsichord in the bridge to the third movement Larghetto.

Händel, Claviorganum concerto, The Cuckoo & Nightingale // Musica...



One can often find relevant comparisons on *YouTube*, but they don't appear to have the one I would love to use. I learned this concerto in the mid-1970s via a *Classics for Pleasure* disc of Organ Concertos performed by Nicholas Kynaston wand teh Virtuosi of England under Arthur Davison (I think it was recorded in the Fairfield Hall, Croydon, if memory serves). Used copies are to be found on eBav and Amazon of

teh LP however ... they were lovely performances, if not really HIP.

Back to this Etcenera release: the booklet is fascinating, and includes a whole section on why the particular temperament was chosen for this recording (1/6 comma meantime). This disc is available at *Amazon* [here](#); *Spotify* below.

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