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Folias and Fantasias

Marin MARAIS (1656-1728)

Folies d'Espagne [18:18]

Georg Philip TELEMANN (1681-1767)

Twelve Fantasias [50:24]

Cavatina Duo

rec. June & December, 2019, Ganz Hall, Roosevelt University, Chicago, USA.

BRIDGE 9541 [70:44]

This disc will not, I suspect, be of immediate appeal to Baroque purists. Telemann's Fantasias were published as *Twelve Fantasias for flute without bass* (c.1730); Marais' *Folies d'Espagne* appears in the second volume (published 1701) of the composer's works for bass viol with figured bass continuo. Yet both are here played by flute and guitar. And how good they sound!

I suppose it all depends on how 'pure' a purist's 'purity' is. It was, after all, a common practice for composers in the baroque era to adapt their works for different instruments and combinations of instruments. Indeed, Marais himself said that he sought to make the works he wrote for the viol playable by other instruments. And, as Alan Thomas notes in the booklet essay accompanying this CD, "in this connection [he] specifically mentioned both the flute and the guitar".

Rather than debating the validity – or otherwise – of these arrangements, I prefer to consider the results, as played by the very talented Cavatina Duo. Both Eugenia Moliner (flute) and Deniz Azabagic (guitar) have to their credit a number of very well-received recordings on which they appear as the featured soloist. They are both musical and marital partners – he being from Bosnia and Herzegovina and she from Spain. I don't know how long they have worked together as a duo, but the earliest recording by Cavatina Duo that I know of, which is billed as the work of 'Cavatina Duo and Friends', is *Acrobats: The Music of David Leisner* (Cedille CDR 90000 096, 2007). Later albums have included *The Balkan Project* (Cedille CDR 9000 017, 2010), *Astor Piazzola: Music for Flute & Guitar* (Bridge, 9330, 2010), *Cavatina at the Opera* (Bridge 9448, 2015) and *Sephardic Journey* (Cedille CDR 9000 0163, 2016). If one adds to the names of David Leisner and Astor Piazzola, those of Clarice Assad (*The Balkan Project* and *Sephardic Journey*), Carlos Rafael Rivera (*The*

Balkan Project), Mauro Giuliani, Fernando Sor, Francisco Tárrega and Claude Paul Taffanel (all represented on *Cavatina at the Opera*) it is very clear how adventurous and diverse the Cavatina Duo is in its choice of repertoire. And, very impressively, they don't sound as if they are merely 'dabbling' in any of it. They sound fully at home, completely in tune with all of the music they play. That is equally true of this venture into the baroque – these performances, even if some baroque specialists might regard them as 'inauthentic', are fully in the spirit of the baroque.

Marais' *Folies d'Espagne* was one of the earliest substantial sets of variations on the so-called 'later folia'. On the history of the folia in Europe, there is a valuable study, densely packed with information, by Richard Hudson, 'The Folia Melodies', *Acta Musicologica*, 45 (1), 1973, pp.98-119. It may be relevant to note that Lully (with whom Marais studied composition) had earlier written his own much shorter piece called 'Les Folies d'Espagne' (published in 1672). Corelli's Violin Sonata 'La Folia' was published in 1700 in Rome – Marais is unlikely to have known it. Marais' *Folies* consists of a somewhat skeletal 'theme' (in G minor, with a chord progression of 16 bars) and 32 variations – slower variations alternating with faster ones. Whenever I listen to Marais' *Folies d'Espagne* – whether in a good performance on viol or the present recording – I am struck by the quasi-improvisatory quality of Marais' fluent sequence of melodic variations. Indeed, it makes me think of the way a great jazz soloist like Louis Armstrong or Charlie Parker takes flight, building new and enduring structures on a basic chord sequence.

For some time my favourite recording of Marais' *Folies d'Espagne* has been that by Paolo Pandolfo and Guido Balestracci (both playing the viola da gamba), with further continuo support from harpsichord, theorbo and baroque guitar (it can be heard on *Folia: 140 minutes of madness*, Glossa GCD923520, 2019). The Pandolfo recording has plenty of colour and variety, but I have to admit that many of the performances I have heard on bass viol or viola da gamba struggle to do justice to Marais' beautiful melodic invention or to the range of moods in the piece, "by turns stately and noble, tender and delicate, fiery and intense", as Alan Thomas puts it. But there are no such problems here. The extra fluidity of the flute and its own distinctive kind of intimacy help, but above all one needs to credit the well-judged imagination of Eugenia Moliner's playing, perceptive and essentially faithful to Marais, but also full of details unique to her instrument and her skill. The guitar part by Johannes Tappert is also integral to the success of this version, with Denis Azabagic having the opportunity to contribute some flamenco-like touches – a potent reminder of the Iberian origins of the folia. The whole is a delight from start to finish.

Convention seems to require that when discussing Telemann one should remark on how prolific he was as a composer. He was, of course, hugely prolific. But the implications of that fact need to be handled carefully. The relationship between how much a composer (or indeed a poet or a painter) produces and how good his or her individual works are is not a simple or inevitable one. The works of a prolific artist are not inevitably humdrum; each has to be judged on its own merits. While I cannot claim to have heard all of Telemann's surviving output, I have heard quite a lot of it, and my experience has been that a surprisingly high percentage of it is not only well-made but also richly creative and imaginative. That is certainly the case with his *Twelve Fantasias for flute without bass*. Any reader not familiar with these fantasias might like to take a listen either to Barthold Kuijken's 1978 recording, playing a transverse flute (Accent 7803) or that of 2013 by Dorothea Oberlinger, playing voice flute and recorder(s) (DHM 8876544162) to hear how remarkably and expressively Telemann writes for what might seem rather limited resources. These fantasias can also sound very interesting played on a modern flute, e.g. by Patrick Gallois, in 1993 (DG 437 543-2). So why record them with a new part written for guitar? Clearly the choice is not made out of any kind of necessity. So obviously talented a flautist as Eugenia Moliner is could certainly have made a fine unaccompanied recording of the

fantasias had she chosen to do so. So why this version for the duo of flute and guitar?

The new guitar part is by guitarist and composer Alan Thomas, American born, but now based at the University of York. He has frequently collaborated with the Cavatina Duo – as in his 'Trio Sefardi' on their album *Sephardic Journey*. His answer (in the CD booklet) to the question "Why add a guitar part?" is worth quoting at some length: "To reply that I was commissioned to do so by the Cavatina duo is perhaps too facile an answer, though in retrospect I can say that it is a testament to the artistic vision of Eugenia Moliner and Denis Azabagic that they were able to imagine how effective the result could be of turning these solo Fantasias into duo works [...] as I delved further into these wonderful gems of the Baroque era I too became convinced of the duo's idea that the addition of an accompanying harmonic/rhythmic part would cast a new and revealing light". Certainly, Thomas' discrete guitar writing 'supports' (without ever being obtrusive or over emphatic) some of the harmonies Telemann can only imply – however brilliantly – and in doing so it also 'supports' the emotional impact. In places, too, subtle countermelodies are introduced. That sense of fugal writing which Telemann so brilliantly produces in the first Fantasia by having the flute seem to answer itself in different registers is reinforced by Thomas' guitar writing. In this first fantasia, which is largely high-spirited and charmingly playful, not least in its closing minuet, the guitar adds a further dimension of explicit rhythm. Throughout all the considerable variety of Telemann's twelve Fantasias this sensitive added guitar part (never over busy or assertive) consistently gives a new clarity to the music, rather than distracting from, or obscuring, the subtlety of Telemann's writing.

As the work makes its way from A major to G minor (omitting the keys of B major, C minor, F minor and F-sharp major – all impractical on the kind of instrument Telemann was writing for) one is increasingly appreciative of Telemann's skill and imagination. The variety of forms and styles he draws on and the range of effects or, indeed, *Affekts*, he creates from them is remarkable.

Making substantial changes to an earlier work, especially if they are made out of an assumed superiority of taste can be disastrous. My 'favourite' example of this is provided by Nahum Tate's extraordinary remake of *King Lear* (acted in 1681). His changes included omitting the Fool completely (as unsuited to the 'dignity' of tragedy), making Edgar and Cordelia lovers (they don't even meet in Shakespeare's play) and creating a different ending (to serve a dubious ideal of 'poetic justice') – an ending in which Goneril and Regan die, Lear is restored to power and Edgar and Cordelia marry. Tate also rewrote (badly!) much of Shakespeare's verse. The result is a play robbed of all its (intentionally) uncomfortable power. But a certain degree of 'infidelity' to a text (as to a score) can be illuminating rather than destructive. So, for example, in the National Theatre's striking 2017 production of *Twelfth Night* (currently available free on YouTube), directed by Simon Godwin, Malvolio becomes Malvolia (played by Tamsin Greig). The change – and Greig's superb performance – fits neatly into (and strengthens) the play's presentation of many of its themes, such as gender fluidity and disguise, self-love and love of others, deception and self-deception, the position of servants and servitude, sanity and madness.

The Cavatina Duo's treatment of both Marais' *Folies d'Espagne* and Telemann's *Twelve Fantasias* is very definitely illuminating rather than destructive. I remember some years ago initially finding it hard to feel at home with the sound of the viol and it took me some time before I came to an appreciation of some of the great works written for the instrument (in which category the *Folies d'Espagne* certainly belongs). Had I been able to hear Marais' superb work in this version by the Cavatina Duo first, I feel sure that I would have been able to assimilate and appreciate it in its original form more readily. In no sense are these accounts by the Cavatina Duo offered as 'replacements' of the works by Marais and

Telemann – unlike Tate and his desire to replace Shakespeare’s *King Lear* by his own version (in which aim he succeeded for several decades. Something nearer to Shakespeare’s original was not staged again until 1756. Indeed, some of Tate’s changes survived into the nineteenth century). What we are offered on the present disc are highly accomplished and perceptive interpretations of *Folies d’Espagne* and the *Twelve Fantasias* which may very well attract new listeners to the originals. Even those listeners who go no further than what they hear on this disc will not have been ‘deceived’ or misled.

Glyn Pursglove

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11. Fantasia in F-sharp minor [4:32]

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13. Fantasia in G minor [5:30]

* Guitar part realization by Johannes Tappert.

** Guitar part composed by Alan Thomas