

BALLI, BATTAGLIE E CANZONI  
16th-century music for organ and percussions  
(Brilliant Classics, 95384, 2016)

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Offhand I cannot recall ever before seeing a recording of music for organ and percussion before the reviews in the previous issue by colleagues Colin Clarke and David DeBoor Canfield of music by the contemporary Danish composer Axel Borup-Jørgensen. (Clarke and Canfield both liked the highly avant-garde atonal idiom they heard there; the most polite thing I can say is that I had a totally different reaction and opted out of reviewing it.) Here we have music for those forces from a chronologically and stylistically opposite end of the musical spectrum; the subtitle of this release is a bit inaccurate, in that the compositions featured here actually date from between 1551 and 1644. No matter; this is an absolutely delightful disc. Put very simply, recall to mind any recorded collection of Renaissance dance music you may know by an early music instrumental consort such as Piffaro, and imagine that being performed on a 16th-century organ instead. The instrument utilized here was built in 1551 by Onofrio Zeffirini da Corona (c. 1510–1580) for the Church of St. Stephen Protomartyr in Lucca, Italy, and was restored in 2003. It is a splendid instrument, with all the buzz and rasp and biting tone color of its woodwind and brasswind contemporaries. The list of percussion instruments utilized is impressive: Renaissance imperial drum, darbuka (a goblet-shaped drum), djembe (ditto), def [daf] (a Persian frame drum), frame drum series, Neapolitan tammorra (a type of tambourine), rattles, sticks, claves, sistrum, and castanets. The recorded sound is vibrant; the booklet provides informative notes and color pictures, plus artist bios. The notes claim that the repertoire and performances here are the fruits of some 30 years of research by performers Occhionero and Scandali; while one scarcely wishes that so much time was required to lead to this end result, it is definitely worth the wait. Strongly recommended to all lovers of Renaissance instrumental music, and to the adventurous and curious as well.

James A. Altena

- Clic Musique !

Presenting a rare collection of pieces from the earliest days of the Italian Baroque keyboard school, this is an exciting and unusual release from Brilliant Classics. Featuring the period's leading composers and virtuosi of the organ (Cristofano Malvezzi and Giovanni Maria Trabaci were both employed as organists by the Italian nobility) this release contains some significant early collections of works for keyboard – Intavolatura de cimbalo has some of the earliest offerings from the Naples school, and the Manoscritto di Castell'Arquato is one of the most important collections of Italian keyboard music from the first half of the 16th century. The selected works also contain numerous musical forms that would later evolve into the widespread popular dance forms of the Baroque period, such as the toccata and the fugue. These early forms include the elaborate and technically demanding Recercada and the stately Ballo, of which Marco Cavazzoni and Giovanni Picchi offer fine examples. Experts in the musical heritage of their respective instruments, Luca Scandali and Mauro Occhionero bring their dedication to period performance to this distinctive blend of early instruments. Occhionero demonstrates his skills on an array of traditional percussion, including the Neapolitan tammorra, the darbuka and the djembe, all revealing Italy's important position, at a cultural crossroads in the Mediterranean. Luca Scandali plays an original late-16th-century organ in the Church of Santo Stefano in Lucca, Italy, built by master organ maker Onofrio Zeffirini. With 30 years of research activity acting as the basis for this recording, the listener is guaranteed an exciting and historically grounded musical experience.