

ANTONIO VIVALDI
La Stravaganza Op. 4
(Brilliant Classics, 96614, 2023)

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The best-known organ versions of Vivaldi's concerti are those transcribed by J. S. Bach. Working in the court of Prince Johann Ernst of Saxe-Weimar, he was encouraged by his patron to write and transcribe Italianate concerti for use in the ducal court. The Prince often travelled to Amsterdam to attend organ recitals and heard transcriptions of concerti being played and Dutch publishers issued works by Corelli, Torelli, Albinoni, Locatelli as well as Vivaldi. Thus these works became known in the rest of Europe through the work of Dutch publishers.

The source used for the works on this recording is Anne Dawson's Book, a collection held in the Henry Watson Music Library, Manchester (UK). The arranger is anonymous, but it is clear that his main priority was fidelity to the score. He simplifies the orchestral part, possibly because the likely player of these arrangements may not have been a professional musician. Anne Dawson was clearly an accomplished amateur, but care seems to have been taken not to write beyond her technical abilities.

Bach's approach appears to have been the diametric opposite; firstly, in all probability he would have been writing for himself, so no concessions to technical shortcomings would be necessary. Secondly, Bach regards Vivaldi's original score as merely the starting point. He has no scruples about recomposing the work to make it, in his view, more effective and so they become concerti for solo organ 'after Vivaldi', sometime quite a long way after. It is perhaps worth noting that the very characterful instrument chosen for this recording is one upon which it would be impossible to play Bach's versions of the concerti. The compass of both the pedals and manuals is too short and there is only one (divided) manual. However, the versions chosen here fit the instrument to a nicety and, if one dare say it, are probably closer in spirit to the orchestral original than Bach's much more sophisticated exercises in the same manner. Luca Scandali is a most persuasive advocate, choosing tempi which have all the vivacity the music requires, while working within the mechanical limitations of the organ. The various colours are pungent, even initially rather startling, but have the ring of authenticity. The sound of the organ is very well captured and creates the impression that one is almost sitting with the the player. A hugely enjoyable disc.

Martyn Strachan

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Von der Musik-druck-Metropole Amsterdam aus verbreitete sich das neue Medium des Concerto grosso über ganz Europa. Und weil viele diese kontrastreiche, rhythmisch und harmonisch mitreißende Musik gern auch zu Hause spielen wollten, entstanden Transkriptionen, oft für den Privatgebrauch. So auch das Notenbuch der Anne Dawson von etwa 1716, heute in Manchester aufbewahrt, das unter anderem Concerti aus Vivaldis Sammlung „La Stravaganza“ op. 4 enthält. Luca Scandali hat sie ein einer Callido-Orgel von 1774 in Albacina eingespielt, einem 2014 restaurierten Instrument, dessen strahlender italienischer Klangfundus bereits Concertino-Farben wie das Terzregister „Cornetta“ enthält, dazu herrlich plärrende Tromboncini, die markant das Tutti färben. Scandali spielt rhythmisch straff und belebt die Solo-passagen mit expressiven Freiheiten – der Spielimpuls überträgt sich beim Hören ganz direkt.

Handelt es sich hier um eher einfache Übertragungen, so erkannten auch virtuose Orgelspieler die konzertanten und formalen Möglichkeiten italienischer Concerti.

Friedrich Sprondel