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CDs

Adios mi amor—Music for Two Vihuelas
Delitiae Musicae (Manuel Minguillón & Jesús Sánchez, vihuelas)
Brilliant Classics 94302

After hearing this wonderful recording, and with apologies to Fredric Chopin, I am sorely tempted to allege that it could have been the great 16th-century Spanish organist Antonio de Cabezón who said that “nothing is more beautiful than a vihuela, save perhaps two.” It would serve as fitting a tribute to the beautiful sonority that characterises this recording from start to finish. The playing of Jesús Sánchez and Manuel Minguillón is clean and warm, and beautifully blended for the entire 63 minutes of recorded performance. The program is played principally on vihuelas by Spanish masters Francisco Hervás and Lourdes Uncilla, together with a few pieces using a renaissance guitar by Carlos González paired with a seven-course lute by Stephen Murphy.

The program is built almost entirely around the juxtaposition of three streams of music: arranged vocal polyphony, French and Italian lute and guitar music with strong Spanish connections, and little-known vihuela music mainly from peripheral manuscript sources. The vocal polyphony includes two of the duets from the 1547 collection *Silva de sirenas* by Enríquez de Valderrábano, one of the movements from Morales *Missa Mille regretz* and Nicholas Gombert’s magnificent motet *Assisté parata*, which have served Delitiae Musicae as a launching pad for making many new arrangements along similar lines.

The collection begins with a group of five secular songs by Francisco Guerrero in which the rhythmic precision of the vihuelists comes to the fore due to the homophony which is the unifying feature of these works. The contrasting group that follows is based on works originally for four-course guitar. These are romanesca variations by Alonso Mudarra and Guillaume Morlaye and variations on “Conde Claros” by Morlaye, solos converted into duets with stylistically coherence. A couple of them are in quasi improvisatory style, but far too studied to pass as improvised music.

The remainder of the CD program follows the pattern of alternating vocal polyphony with dance music and variations. The vocal polyphony includes Tomás Luis de Victoria’s famous Christmas motet *O magnum mysterium*, Gombert’s magnificent motet *Assisté parata*, and three pieces based on “Mille regretz.” These comprise an unadorned duet intabulation of Josquin’s original, Narváez’s famous solo setting, played by Manuel Minguillón, and Valderrábano’s duet arrangement of the “Et in spiritum sanctum” section from the “Gloria” of Morales’ *Missa Mille regretz*. This Josquin group serves to exemplify one of the central challenges of playing this music in duet. While soloists are able to achieve expressiveness and suppleness in polyphonic music, retaining rhythmic integrity without being shackled by tactus, this continues to elude even the most refined duet players.

Pieces from the 1508 *Intavolatura di lauto* by Italian lutenist Joan Ambosio Dalza make up the remainder of the program together with a couple by Valderrábano and some from peripheral manuscript sources, several recorded here for the first time. Three of these pieces are given solo performances, the two by Valderrábano were conceived as duets, and the remaining pieces are solos arranged as duets by Delitiae Musicae. The added parts are classy compositions in their own right that draw from the existing materials, forged into perfectly integrated duets. From the Dalza book we have a “Tastar de corde” played by Jesús Sánchez that introduces two “Calate alla spagnola” and the Hispano-Arabic song mentioned decades later by Francisco Salinas, “Caldibi castigliano.”

Valderrábano’s quartet setting of “Conde Claros” is presented in close-to-original format, while his “Música para discantar sobre un punto” is rearranged to distribute the virtuosic solo part between the two players, thereby distancing it somewhat from the old gittern and lute duet combination from which it doubtlessly emanates. Among the final works of the program are works from *Ramillete de flores*, the Barbarino manuscript, and the anonymous Sarabanda variations that are copied into the Vienna copy of *Silva de sirenas*. The playing is impeccable throughout, particularly Jesús Sánchez’s interpretation of an anonymous ricercar from the Barbarino manuscript.

Recorded in 2010 but not released until 2012, this recording is well worth buying. It complements other similar recordings of Valderrábano duets made by Edward Martin and Phil Rukavina as the Duo Chambure (Magnatune), the ensemble Armoniosi Concerti based in Seville and directed by Juan Carlos Rivera (Harmonia Mundi), as well as the fascinating recording of Luis Milán’s music by José Miguel Moreno and Eligio Quinteiro (Glossa) with added parts for a second vihuela.

John Griffiths

Albrecht Wörl’s Lute Book
Evan Plommer, lute
No number

These things seem to run in fashions. Lately there has been a spate of new recordings devoted to solo lute and guitar repertoire of the early 17th century and especially to French music of the era. One particular feature of this literature has caught the attention of quite a few contemporary lutenists: the use of and experimentation with alternate tunings. This is the aspect of that era’s music Mr. Plommer explores in this recording. It is directly attributable to the source of the music, a motley assemblage of...
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