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Sánchez and lutenist Laudon Schuett favor a milder perspective, claiming they must be mad to pursue music (no matter the lot of us, I’d wager!). No matter the interpretation, Bedlam is one of the more creative names for an early music group, evoking the sordid underbelly of Renaissance England, rich with possibility for programming.

The works included are primarily Scottish and English from the Jacobean period, with a particular emphasis on Scottish songs. For these, Sánchez studied historical pronunciation: her enunciation and the rolled Scottish “r” adds lovely flavor and authenticity to these works. Indeed, I initially assumed she was Scottish. The English pieces are all by Thomas Campion and Sánchez elegantly and naturally employs 17th-century pronunciation here as well. The few pieces that lie outside the Jacobean era are three solo lute works by the Italian composer Vincenzo Capirola, and a most arresting Scottish song by the slightly later composer, John Fethy.

The subject matter ranges from the dark and poignantly spiritual, such as “Even Dead Behold I Breathe” with its repeated lament, “O cruel, deadly feud!,” to a collection of hearty praises to the joys of May, including “O lusty May,” “In a garden so green,” and “Into a mirthful May morning.” The Scottish songs are especially attractive, often-strophic narratives, and there is a handsome selection from lute song repertory. Especially for the Scottish works (and even for English pieces), access to the lyrics and translations into modern English is useful. For this purpose the musicians have made an online pdf file, available on their website, without which you might never know that “Lyk as the dum Solse-quium” translates to the endearing “Like the sad sunflower.”

The final three pieces of the recording stand out because of the interaction between singer and lutenist, the depth of subject, and the interpretation. Fethy’s “The Time of Youth” is an intriguing piece, thoughtful, with long dramatic pauses expressing loss, where Sánchez sings “To grieve my God omnipotent I took no cure.” Of all the works presented, this one best recalls another time and connects somewhat to the more disturbing side of the duo’s evocative name.

The interaction between Schuett and Sánchez is subtle and delicate. Playfulness between the duo breaks out in “Into a Mirthful May Morning,” which requires precise coordination but remains light and witty. Finally, one cannot hear “Remember me my Deir” without recalling Dido’s repeated entreaty, “Remember me, remember me” in Purcell’s opera Dido and Aeneas, thus shaping a touching ending to this recording.

There are three Italian lute solos from the lovely Capirola manuscript which precede the other works by two generations but likely were known in England. “Recercar Sesto” emulates vocal writing and “Tientalora” is a jolly piece with an improvisatory style. Grouping the solo works together was a lost opportunity. Interspersing them among the vocal works would have been more effective programming creating contrast and variety, not to mention affording the opportunity to link the solo works to songs, either by mode or musical motive. For instance, in the liner notes it is mentioned that the “Tientalora” is based on a “fa-la-la” refrain: perhaps it could have been paired with the song, “How Shall a Young Man,” which also contains a “la-la-la” refrain. Further, the addition of lute solos within the vocal works or other changes of texture such as occasional rhythmic strumming would have been welcome, particularly on strophic or more repetitive pieces.

One final point: For any musician, and perhaps especially for up-and-coming artists, a CD serves not only as a showcase to share one’s talent and love of music, but as a promotional tool. In this regard only, the packaging has some small faults. The names of the musicians are not on the front or back covers and there is nothing describing the music either. The liner notes do include a lovely photo of the duo, however again the names of the performers are not mentioned, although everyone else involved in the recording is. And while the liner notes are thoughtful and informative, only towards the end is the duo introduced. Bedlam does provide an address for their website (http://www.bedlamearlymusic.com) which includes videos of the duo performing these pieces, a link for purchasing their CD through iTunes, and a way to contact them, but contact information directly on the CD package would be beneficial.

But these are minor issues. I find myself humming the tunes when no music is playing and return to the disc for repeat performances. I look forward to more from this duo and hope they continue to explore diverse material, engaging in all the directions their name can lead them.

Kate Benessa

Ludovico Roncalli, Works for Guitar.
Capricci Armonici, Bergamo, 1692.
Hideki Yamaya, baroque guitar
Mediolanum M005

For such a well known figure in the world of the Italian baroque guitar, it is perhaps surprising to realize that Ludovico Roncalli is known only by a single musical source, his Capricci armonici sopra la chitarra spagnola, published in Bergamo in 1692. Moreover, nothing more of him is known other than what can be gleaned from this one lone book. It is surprising that there should be no other surviving trace of a man who is described on the title page as Count Ludovico Roncalli, and that he should therefore remain such an enigma. Nonetheless, it would be difficult to dispute his claim to a noble title in light of the dedication of the Capricci armonici to the influential and “most eminent prince” Cardinal Benedetto Pamphili, great-grandson of Pope Innocent X, Cardinal Legate in Bologna from 1690, later librarian of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana and renowned as a patron of contemporary musicians including Arcangelo Corelli. In the absence of biographical information about the author, it is interesting although probably irrelevant to note that the other Roncalli from Bergamo to achieve a prominence similar to that of Ludovico is Angelo Roncalli, who from 1958-1963 ruled the Catholic Church as Pope John XXIII. Ludovico’s modern celebrity, however, began in the year of the pope’s birth. It was in 1881 that Oscar Chil esotti published his modern edition of the Capricci armonici that, in turn, provided Ottorino Respighi with access to the Passacaglia from Sonata IX of the Caprice that he was to appropriate for his third suite of Ancient Airs and Dances. Since then, the original book has been reprinted twice in facsimile and works from it have appeared in a number of recordings of modern guitar and historical five-course guitar. While the CD recordings by Sandro Volta,
What Artemisia Heard
El Mundo, Richard Savino Director
Sono Luminus DSL 921-95

What Artemisia Heard—Music and Art from the Time of Caravaggio and Gentileschi, is a new recording from the Virginia-based record label Sono Luminus, by El Mundo, directed by Richard Savino. As the title suggests, it is a compilation of music from notable composers with music spanning from 1593 to 1642—roughly the timespan in which Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio and Artemisia Gentileschi were active as painters. This is presented as a concept album, and is the result of Savino’s novel idea to present concerts that include both visual and musical art integrated into the same program. The CD follows Artemisia through the stages of her life and the locales where she lived and painted.

Savino has assembled a collection of music that Artemisia might have heard at various times throughout her life. The recording begins with a battaglia by Marco Uccellini (1603-1680) which Savino says, in his liner notes, that he selected to be a sort of prologue, evoking Artemisia’s personal battles. He is referring to Artemedia’s well-known and documented incidence of abuse and rape. We know from historical records that she was actually able to sue her attacker, go to trial, and ultimately win her case, subsequently becoming one of the first independent female artists in western history. Next, the recording focuses on five different periods in Artemisia’s life, beginning with 1593-1614 in Rome, and it includes composers such as Giovanni Girolamo Kapsberger, Benedetto Ferrari, Girolamo Frescobaldi, and Domenico Mazzocchi. The second period, set in Florence, spans 1614-1620 and features composers Gagliano, Francesca Caccini, and Allesandro Piccinini. The third period is set in Venice from 1620-1630, with music by Dario Castello, Claudio Monteverdi and Francesco Corbetta. The fourth period, in Naples, spans 1630-1638 and features music by Andrea Falconieri, Luigi Rossi, and Pietro Giramo. The fifth period is set in London and features music only by Nicholas Lanier, who according to Savino was an intimate friend of Artemisia. The final section of the recording is an epilogue, “Fan battaglia” by Luigi Rossi.

I think that the sonic quality of this album is second-to-none, especially the recorded sound of gut-strung bowed strings. From the opening “Battaglia” by Uccellini, it is apparent that it was engineered and mastered by recording personnel who really knew how to best capture the sound of early-music instruments. The gut-strung violins have a brilliant quality, showing the rough texture and response of the individual bow changes on the strings, and all of the nimble articulations are perfectly reproduced. The sound of the archlute’s low-bass courses are fantastic—really clear. The vocal parts are also beautifully recorded, with just the right amount of natural reverberation and stereo separation where there are multiple vocalists in a piece. This CD is a perfect example of how to record early music and historical instruments properly.

It is notable that this recording was not done in a church or chapel setting like many early music recordings, but instead was done at Skywalker Sound, Marin County, California. It is remarkable that such an organic and authentic sound can be achieved in a studio environment. I’ll take the acoustic quality of this recording any day over some other recordings set in historical locales around Europe.

The vision and theme of this recording is the only area where the album leaves a little bit to be desired. Imagining the music accompanied by the multimedia video presentations that Savino had included in his live performances would make it easier to follow the story line and understand what we are listening to. Play-