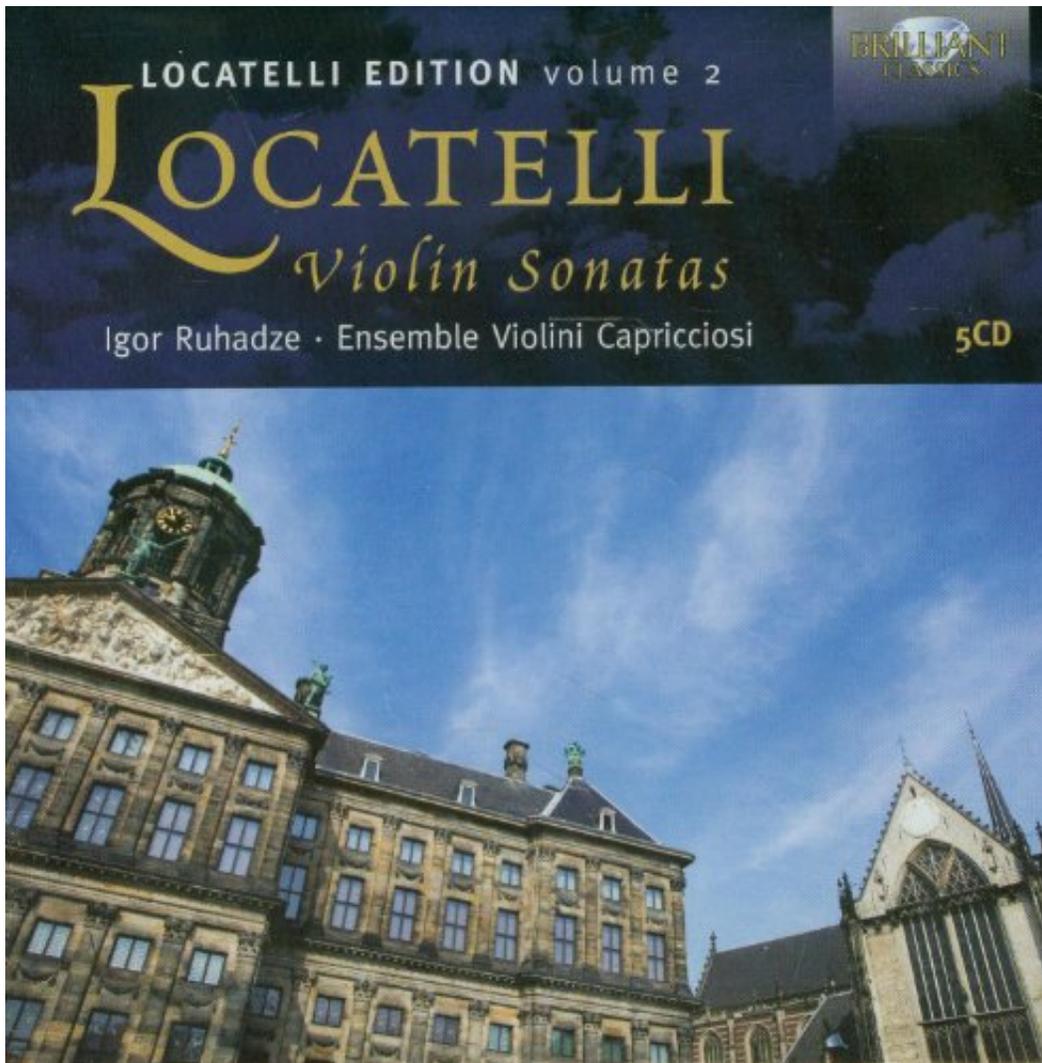


A1 Note

 LOCATELLI 12 Violin Sonatas, Op. 6. 6 Violin Sonatas, Op. 8 • Igor Ruhadze (vn, cond); Ens Violini Capricciosi (period instruments) • BRILLIANT 94423 (5 CDs: 294:44)



In Fanfare 36:3, I strongly recommended The Ensemble Violini Capricciosi's first volume of the works for Pietro Locatelli, on Brilliant 94376, comprising the composer's Trio Sonatas from opp. 5 and 8. The second volume of the series presents the entire set of violin sonatas, op. 6, and the solo-sonata portion of op. 8. It's obvious from the opening of the first sonata (op. 6/1) that the textures of these solo sonatas, thickened with double-stops, almost mimic those of the trio sonata (violinist Igor Ruhadze makes the effect seem even more uncanny in the opening of op. 6/8). (My review copy hiccupped very briefly at 1:27 of op. 6/1:.) They're advanced in other ways, as well; Vaughan Schlepp, the group's harpsichordist, notes in the booklet all the various techniques Locatelli explored in these works, including up- and down-bow staccatos and passages at what must have been the top—or over the top—of the fingerboard. Of course, many of these innovations will be familiar to those who know the 12 concertos, op. 3 and their Capricci (the whole being subtitled *L'Arte del violino*). The sonatas of op. 6 fall mostly into three movements—with op. 6/6 and op. 6/7 in four and op. 6/12 in four with an appended capriccio that climbs for extended stays into the highest positions (violinists will find that cadenza bound with those for the concertos of op. 3 in Ricordi's edition). The sonatas' general pattern, slow-fast-variations, allots the greatest amount of time to the last movement, which allows the violinist to empty for his audience a huge bag of tricks each time out (sometimes seeming overwhelmingly brilliant, as in the finale of op. 6/3 or, perhaps especially, op. 6/10—William S. Newman cited a passage from that

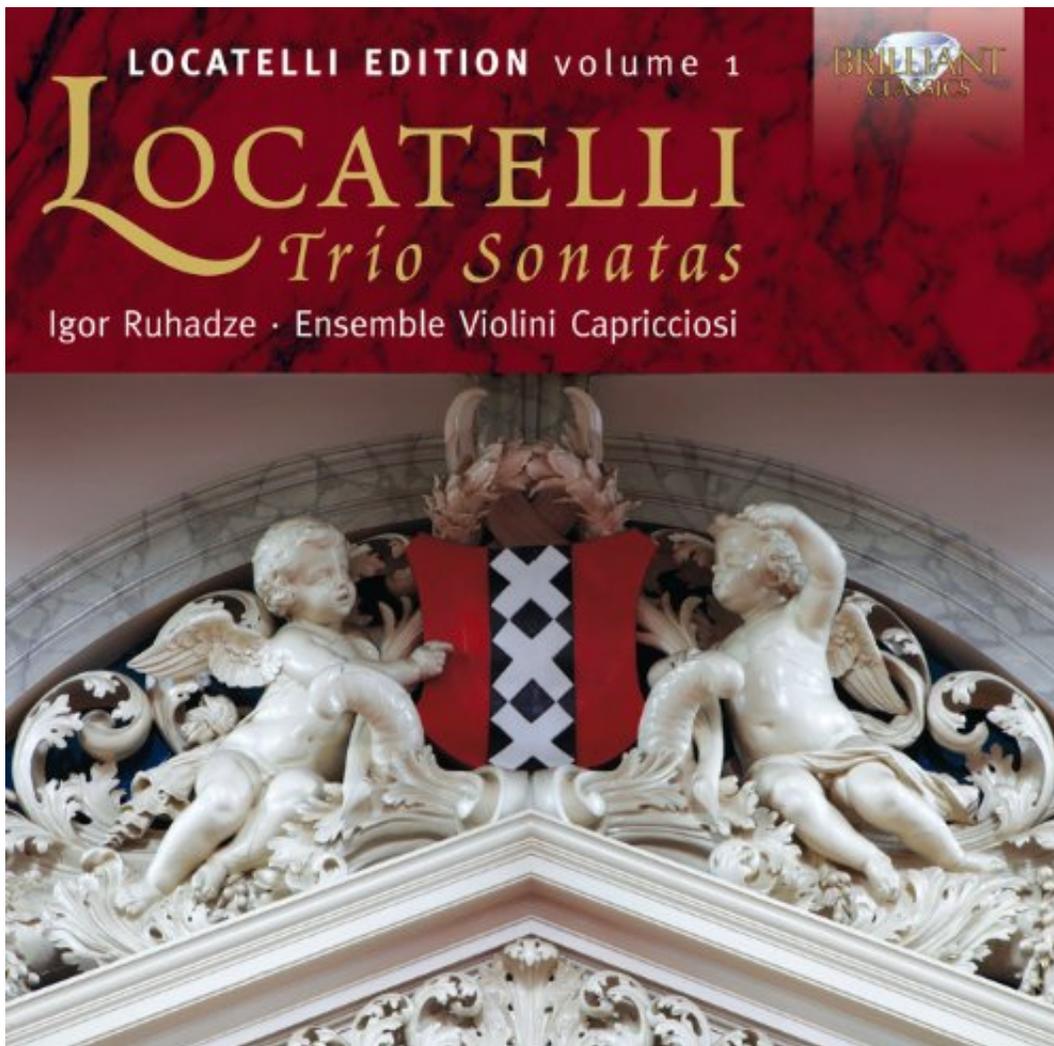
movement to illustrate Locatelli's penchant for display). But the sonatas also display an affecting chromaticism (as in the last movement of op. 6/1), a darker atmosphere, even in a major-key movement (as in the opening of op. 6/2), a sensitive style (consider the suave variation in the upper registers—Schlepp suggests that Locatelli included one in each set of variations), and jazzy syncopation (as in the Allegro from op. 6/2 or the finale of op. 6/12) that may surprise those who have come to view Locatelli as a sort of Woldemar-like violinistic charlatan, devoid of musical substance (Schlepp describes the joint playing of Locatelli and Jean-Marie Leclair in which the former dazzled, and the latter moved, their audience). A melodic turn of phrase occasionally pays tribute to Arcangelo Corelli (as in the Allegro of op. 6/3 or in the theme of the variations in the Andante of op. 6/8), which bears a strong resemblance that seems unlikely to be coincidental to the famous theme that Giuseppe Tartini borrowed for his variations, *L'Arte del arco*, or even in the opening Adagio of op. 6/11 which nearly paraphrases one of the sonatas from Corelli's op. 5, even if Locatelli didn't study with him. Igor Ruhadze, with the ensemble, which includes cellist Mark Dupere as well as Schlepp, draws a bright, full-bodied tone from his 1706 David Tecchler violin; he punches out the articulations at times with an impudence that should entertain more than it offends. The sonata, op. 6/5, contains the first variations-finale with an Allegro theme. The ensemble casts an especially solemn spell over the opening movement (of four) of op. 6/7, a Largo of particularly noble bearing, which leads to a Grave of particularly strong pathos (including a weeping cadenza). At times, as in the opening of the sonata, op. 6/12, the music looks forward to the style of Giuseppe Tartini, another Corelli admirer. And then the Capriccio *Prova dell'intonazione* dispels the Corellian reverie and brings op. 6 to a conclusion. Here's an ascent into the empyrean very similar in layout to the one Antonio Vivaldi made in his cadenza for the Concerto for the Feast of the Tongue of St. Anthony, RV 212a, and very similar in figures to Locatelli's own Harmonic Labyrinth. In recommending Locatelli's works for study though not for display, it's hard to imagine that Karl von Dittersdorf really believed these difficulties had been surpassed in his time.

The program continues with a brief Sonata in G Minor, not assigned an opus number in the booklet. This gives way to the sonatas of op. 8. The first opens (as does op. 8/2) with a movement that, once again, sounds like a paraphrase of one of Corelli's stately slow movements. That's followed by two Allegros, the first of which, again, recalls Corelli (of the six sonatas of op. 8, only two, op. 8/4 and op. 8/5, comprise four movements), the three-movement pieces following the pattern slow-fast-fast. The ensemble commands attention in the opening of op. 8/3 (labeled op. 6/11 on the cardboard jacket but correctly identified on the back of the box). Throughout the set, the partnership between the violin and the continuo instruments remains close, whatever the particular requirements of each sonata; in the Allegro of op. 8/4, they engage in especially sparkling conversation, which they continue, though with a wholesale change in mood in the more contemplative *Vivace* that follows. The opening of op. 8/5 recalls a very similar movement in Tartini's Sonata, *Didone abbandonata*. In general, these sonatas abound in contrasts: the almost Corellian Adagio of op. 8/6 following hard on the heels of the arpeggiated finale of op. 8/5, reminiscent of the last movement of Francesco Maria Veracini's sonata, op. 1/7; the entire ensemble revels in these contrasts, keeping the music fresh even for those listeners who might choose to go through the whole collection *seriatim*.

Even for those who don't want to invest the time in continuous listening to the two sets of sonatas, Brilliant's collection should prove a most enjoyable, most entertaining, and, at times, moving experience that belies Dr. Charles Burney's judgment, in his 18th-century *History*, of Locatelli as "a voluminous composer of Music that excites more surprise than pleasure." Strongly recommended, therefore, across the board. Robert Maxham

This article originally appeared in Issue 36:6 (July/Aug 2013) of *Fanfare Magazine*.

 LOCATELLI Trio Sonatas: in G, op. 5/1; in e, op. 5/2; in E, op. 5/3; in C, op. 5/4; in d, op. 5/5; in G, op. 5/6; in A, op. 8/7; in D, op. 8/8; in f, op. 8/9; in A, op. 8/10 • Igor Ruhadze (vn, cond); Ens Violini Capricciosi (period instruments) • BRILLIANT CLASSICS 94376 (2 CDs: 110:48)



Igor Ruhadze and the Ensemble Violini Capricciosi provide, in the first volume of their recording of the complete works of Pietro Antonio Locatelli, a selection of the composer's trio sonatas from op. 5 and from op. 8. Locatelli, a student of Arcangelo Corelli—or at least, as Vaughan Schlepp's notes suggest, of a member of Corelli's circle—prefigured Nicolò Paganini in the technical demands he made on performers, even anticipating some of Paganini's technical innovations (not surprising, since Paganini studied Locatelli's Caprices). The collection begins with the first four of the sonatas of op. 5 (William S. Newman suggests that they're intended for either violin or flute) and the last four of op. 8 (the first six being solo sonatas).

Violinists Igor Ruhadze and Daria Gorban play instruments made by David Tecchler in Rome in 1706 and by Hendrick Jacobs in Amsterdam in 1693, respectively; but because of the reverberant acoustic in which they've recorded their program, and because of the warm recorded sound, or possibly because of their manner of tone production, they hardly exemplify the wizened pole of the spectrum of "period" timbres. They bring a lushness to the music itself as well, as in the second movement of op. 5/1, a Largo that's really a Siciliana of sorts (the Largo of op. 5/3 provides another example), as liquid as some of the most famous examples by Antonio Vivaldi. (In this sonata, the movements run S-S-F-F, and that pattern holds throughout the next three —op. 5/4-6, as well as op. 8, with op. 8/9 cast instead in the traditional pattern of S-F (fugal)-S-F.) The ensemble sounds energetic and sprightly in such movements as the first sonata's concluding Vivace —the timbres may be lavish but they don't create any impression of heaviness. Often the textures, as in the first two movements of op. 5/2, sound homophonic, with the upper two voices running more in parallel than weaving against each other, and the Ensemble is smoothly elegant in these passages. At times, as at the beginning of op. 5/3, the melodic design recalls the stately serenity of Corelli's models (the very solemnity of the opening of op. 5/4, itself recalls the Master), but later on the music sneaks peeks into the future. The Ensemble combines energy with elegance in the, in some ways more forward-looking, sonata op. 5/5,

(though its central movement sounds generally more contrapuntal than the corresponding numbers in the other sonatas) with its very brief introductory Largo and the Pastorale, strongly reminiscent of Corelli's op. 6/8 but with some cheeky harmonic sliding at the end. The opening Largo of op. 5/6 continues with the same adventurous harmonies. The work comprises five movements, including two dances, a Gavotta and a Minuetto, and the Ensemble endows the first of these with infectious zest and spices the second with piquant tang. None of the sonatas of op. 5 in the recording represent Locatelli the diabolical virtuoso but rather the Gentleman Locatelli who, according to Schlepp, preferred to play with his fellow gentlemen than with professionals.

The four sonatas, op. 8, begin with op. 8/7, one of the five-movement works in the opus; it mixes the forward-looking homophony of the opening Andante with the backward-looking polyphony of its second-movement Fuga (albeit an energetic and cheerful, rather than an academic and dour, one). The second movement of op. 8/5 takes the collection even further from Corelli's models (and closer to the ambiance of Locatelli's concertos — the Ensemble's infectious reading makes this departure eminently clear — but the sonata itself also includes a fugal movement, this time in the fourth position of five. The four-movement op. 8/9 reflects the older model, in its pattern of movements, but also, perhaps, in its interweaving of the violin parts in the opening Largo, its more stately fugue, the Corellian repose of its Grave, and the sequences of the Allegro, all of which the Ensemble capture with no sense of tongue-in-cheek, self-conscious anachronism. The final sonata, for violin, cello, and continuo, occasionally seems, as Schlepp remarks, to be a compound of two solo sonatas (one for violin, one for cello) smashed together like two used cars (or perhaps something more dignified). It's as forward-looking harmonically and melodically as ingenious in its construction.

The Locatelli Trio (Elizabeth Wallfisch, Richard Tunnicliffe, and Paul Nicholson, with violinist Rachel Isserlis joining in the trio sonatas) energetically clothed the whole set with starchy timbres and decorated them with occasional ornamentation (Hyperion 67021/2), though, as I pointed out in *Fanfare* 19:6, those performances lack Andrew Manze's wide-ranging imagination. The Ensemble Violini Capricciosi may not quite live up to its title in the way Manze might, but they swathe the works in a richer tonal warmth (perhaps due in part to a more resonant recording venue) and they don't give so strong a suggestion of the hospital-like spic and span.

For those who know Locatelli principally through the 12 virtuosic violin concertos of his op. 3, the trio sonatas should provide an alternative point of view (with op. 8/9 serving as the terminus a quo and op. 8/5 as the terminus ad quem) that may make admirers even out of those who considered him as one of the purveyors (like perhaps Antonio Lolli or his student Michel Woldemar) of tawdry pre-Paganini virtuosic clap-trap. Strongly recommended for the music itself and for the dedicated, exciting performances. Robert Maxham

This article originally appeared in Issue 36:3 (Jan/Feb 2013) of *Fanfare Magazine*.