

A2

Jean-Marie LECLAIR (1697-1764)

The Complete Flute Sonatas

CD 1

Sonata I in e minor, op. 2,1 [13:30]

Sonata II in C, op. 1,2 [13:29]

Sonata III in C, op. 2,3 [12:31]

Sonata V in G, op. 1,5 [10:33]

CD 2

Sonata VI in e minor, op. 1,6 [13:26]

Sonata XI in b minor, op. 2,11 [06:16]

Sonata VIII a 3 in D, op. 2,8 [10:05]

Sonata II in e minor, op. 9,2 [16:35]

Sonata VII in G, op. 9,7 [12:37]

Barthold Kuijken, transverse flute; Wieland Kuijken, viola da gamba; Robert Kohnen, harpsichord

Recorded in September 1984 DDD

ACCENT ACC 30035 [50:05 + 59:01]

During the second half of the 17th century a debate was going on in France between the supporters of a purely French style and the admirers of Italian music. By the turn of the century the latter had won, and composers more and more gave in to their admiration of the Italian style and incorporated elements of it in their own compositions. In particular François Couperin was an advocate of the 'goûts-réunis', which combined elements of both styles. Another representative of this 'mixed taste' was Jean-Marie Leclair, considered one of the greatest violin players of his time.

As a young man Leclair was first and foremost active as a dancer. He worked as a ballet-master in Turin in 1722. It took him a long time to decide whether he was going to be a dancer or a violin player. He used his time in Turin to take violin lessons with Giovanni Battista Somis, a pupil of Corelli.

In 1723 he went to Paris, and published his first book with sonatas for violin and basso continuo. This was well received by press and public alike. Back in Turin he composed ballets and postludes to operas performed in the theatre. In 1728 he was in Paris again, published a second book of violin sonatas and played at the

Concert Spirituel. He travelled to London where the publisher Walsh printed a book of Leclair's sonatas, and then performed in Kassel in Germany, together with the Italian violin virtuoso Pietro Antonio Locatelli. Whereas the latter annoyed his audience with a scratchy tone and a technical show-off, Leclair was admired for the refinement and elegance of his playing. This rivalry notwithstanding, both men seemed to have a friendly relationship, as they apparently travelled together to Amsterdam.

In 1733 Leclair enjoyed official recognition when Louis XV appointed him as 'ordinaire de la musique du roi'. Leclair worked together with another brilliant violinist, Pierre Guignon, and the famous viol virtuoso Antoine Forqueray. A quarrel with Guignon about who was to direct the king's orchestra led to Leclair's resignation. He went to the Netherlands, where from 1738 to 1743 he spent three months a year at the Orange court, and the other nine months was at the service of a Portuguese businessman in the Hague. This lasted until 1743, when his employer went bankrupt.

During the remaining years of his life things didn't go that well for Leclair. He composed his only opera, *Scylla et Glaucus*, which got a mixed reception and was soon forgotten. Privately things didn't go any better: he separated from his wife, and in 1764 he was murdered, probably by his nephew.

The Italian influence in Leclair's compositions was such that his contemporary Blainville called him 'Corelly de la France'. His preference for a cantabile melody and his use of sometimes bold harmonics show the influence of the Italian style. At the same time Leclair remained a truly French composer whose sonatas contain many dance forms, even when the tempo indications are Italian.

Leclair's music is technically demanding, but shuns technical exhibition. Leclair was also very reluctant to give the performer too much freedom in the interpretation of his works, for instance by indicating painstakingly where ornaments had to be added. Another feature of his compositional style is his idiomatic writing for the instrument. Whereas some of his contemporaries wrote music which could be played on almost any instrument, most of Leclair's music is specifically conceived for the violin, and can't be played on other instruments. This recording contains all the sonatas Leclair indicated to be playable on the transverse flute. He even goes so far to write alternative passages for the violin and the transverse flute in some of these sonatas. The sonatas here are something in between the solo and the trio sonata, as the viola da gamba has an independent part. It is only in the 'real' trio sonata on this recording, though (the Sonata VIII a 3), that the transverse flute and the viol are on an equal footing.

Barthold and Wieland Kuijken and Robert Kohnen recorded these sonatas in 1984.

The reissue is especially welcome, since it is - as far as I know - the only recording of the complete flute sonatas. The level of the performance makes it even more valuable: Barthold Kuijken was, and still is, one of the best players of the baroque transverse flute. He does full justice to the character of every single movement, be it the opening adagio of the Sonata in C, op. 2,3 with its strong contrasts, or the very expressive first movement of the Sonata II from opus 1. And the gavotta from the Sonata op. 1,2 is played with the grace Leclair asks for.

Barthold Kuijken uses a beautiful original instrument by Rottenburgh from about 1745. He gets strong support from his brother Wieland, who also uses a historical instrument (Bertrand, c1690), and Robert Kohnen.

In short, this is an outstanding recording, which I strongly recommend.

Johan van Veen