

PLATTI Trio Sonatas: for Violin and Oboe in D; for Oboe and Cello in g; for Violin and Cello in G; for Oboe and Bassoon in C. Sonatas: in c for Oboe; in d for Cello • Epoca Barocca (period instruments) • cpo 777 340 (65:06)

We know very little about the life of Giovanni Benedetto Platti. Even the year of his birth is uncertain, either 1692 or 1697. He was born in Padua or Venice and raised in Venice, where his father was a violinist and where Platti presumably received his musical education. In 1722, he became a member of the musical establishment of the court of Würzburg, where he remained until his death in 1764. In Würzburg, Platti was employed in many capacities, playing the violin, oboe, flute, and cembalo, singing, and composing.

In his compositions, Platti combined Baroque and pre-Classical elements, and all of his works are reported to be of a consistently high quality. The six sonatas and trio sonatas on this recording certainly support that claim. All are in four movements, the slow-fast-slow-fast arrangement known as church sonatas (contrasted with the chamber sonata, which contained dance movements). The music is often quite engaging. Having listened to this recording several times over the past couple of weeks, I continue to find the music worth repeated hearing. The six members of Epoca Barocca give marvelous performances of these works. Their playing is impeccable and assured, and their pacing convincing. A recording of sonatas and trio sonatas on Tactus, which I have not heard, may duplicate one or two of the works heard on this recording. But most of these works appear to be receiving their first recording, and Epoca Barocca's performances may be equaled but are unlikely to be bettered by the competing recording. I can easily recommend this to anyone wanting to explore the byways of late-Baroque chamber music. **Ron Salemi**

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PLATTI Cello Sonatas No. 1 in g; No. 2 in d; No. 3 in C; No. 4 in A; No. 5 in D; No. 6 in E; No. 7 in D; No. 8 in G; No. 9 in A; No. 10 in c; No. 11 in B \flat ; No. 12 in F • Francesco Galligioni (vc); Paolo Zuccheri (violone); Lorenzo Feder (org); Roberto Loreggian (org, hpd) • BRILLIANT 95763 (2 CDs: 105:41)

With this review, I have the opportunity to continue my ongoing love affair with the

music of Giovanni Benedetto Platti (1697–1763). I first had the privilege of encountering him in a previous Brilliant Classics release of oboe and cello sonatas that I reviewed (and enthusiastically recommended) exactly nine years ago in 34:4. There I covered his biographical data and observed of his music that its style “is a felicitous blend of Italian and German elements, with the flowing melodic line and four-movement concerto style of the former melded with the more rigorous thematic development (including use of imitative counterpoint) and greater harmonic density of the latter.” The acquaintance was pleasurably renewed in 42:2 with a Brilliant Classics set of Platti’s complete keyboard sonatas (somewhat less imaginative but still enjoyable works), and a delightful Leaf Music CD of flute sonatas in 43:2.

Two of the cello sonatas on the first disc—Nos. 1 and 2—receive new recordings here, and Nos. 3 and 4 saw previous circulation on a 2010 Christophorus release; while it is not so stated, I believe that the remaining eight sonatas are enjoying world premiere releases here. A comparison of the two recordings of Nos. 1 and 2 proves most interesting. Both these performances and the previous ones by the Ensemble Cordia are excellent, but very different in character. Ensemble Cordia is softer-grained and more ruminative, with more mellow recorded sound; these renditions are vigorous, with the dramatic, knife-edge attacks in the fast movements accentuated by the slightly drier, more forward acoustic. What this set confirms is that Platti was not just another run-of-the-mill Baroque composer churning out reasonably well-wrought but formulaic pieces on deadlines, but a figure with a distinctive creative imagination. Why it has taken so long for these first-rate pieces to appear in the cello’s recorded repertoire is a puzzle, but cellists should waste no time in adding this to their standard repertoires—nor should lovers of Baroque music delay in adding this to their collections, especially at Brilliant’s super-budget price. The booklet provides notes by cellist Galligioni and artist bios for all the participants. Here’s a vote of thanks to Brilliant for continuing to promote Platti’s cause, with a call for more of the same; enthusiastically recommended. **James A. Altena**

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PLATTI Keyboard Concertos: in c; in G; in A. Oboe Sonata in c. Piano Sonata in c • Luca Guglielmi, (cond, pf); Paolo Grazzi (ob); Concerto Madrigaliesco (period instruments) • ARCANA 375 (71:47)

When one thinks of the early fortepiano, what generally comes to mind is Johann Sebastian Bach’s verdict about a Silbermann instrument that he played while in Berlin towards the end of his life. But this versatile keyboard was essentially an Italian invention, and early composers there in the 1720s began to utilize its

expressive possibilities, even though they hedged their bets by publishing works under a more generic title such as "cembalo," meaning that they could be performed on the more ubiquitous harpsichord, the clavichord, or even the organ as well. One such composer was Giovanni Benedetto Platti (1697–1763). Platti's career was every bit as broad as his better-known contemporaries, such as Vivaldi. A student of Francesco Gasparini, Platti began his profession in Venice and by 1722 had migrated northwards to Germany, where he was employed in Würzburg at the Prince-Archbishop's palace. There he remained until his death. It is therefore not surprising that his music was largely published in Germany, though much appears to have disappeared in the intervening time.

Platti's connection with the new fortepiano by Cristofori came as early as 1722 or so, when he made a special trip to Siena to witness a "keyboard with hammers" (*cembalo a marteletti*), according to the excellent booklet notes by Alberto Iesué. He was apparently impressed enough with it to write a series of concertos and sonatas that required a modicum of expressivity. Although the clavichord was capable of such, it is too soft to merit solo work in a concerto, and therefore it can be surmised that Platti meant for his works to be performed on the new fortepiano. In the recent past it was difficult if not impossible to determine this, since the bulk of his keyboard music had been lost. With the rediscovery of no fewer than nine concertos and even more sonatas, this has now been rectified, and this disc presents a selection of works that reflect just how these might have sounded with the new instrument.

The three concertos all demonstrate a varied use of style and technique. For instance, the opening movement of the G-Major Concerto is thoroughly *galant*, with long sections of triplet rhythmic motives that keep the theme rolling along. The use of parallel thirds and ostinatos in the middle strings make one think of C. P. E. Bach, and while there are no extreme pyrotechnics in the solo part, the contrasts in texture give it a pleasant air. The second movement, however, is quite Vivaldian, with a languid lament theme that spins out gradually. Here the solo is often accompanied only by a single instrument, either the bass or a violin, giving the texture a more intimate structure. There is something about the third movement with its walking bass and gigue-like theme that reminds one of Handel. This contrasts with the spare and old-fashioned sounding C-Minor Concerto, with its operatic-style opening and sequencing of motives that seems right out of Telemann. The final minuet is insistent and rather spare. In the first movement of the A-Major Concerto, a sudden intrusion of the parallel minor lends a bit of unexpected emotion to the rather pedestrian main theme. We are returned to the world of C. P. E. Bach in the song-like finale, with its sometimes wonky cadential formulas that are more chromatic than expected. In between these two works is an oboe sonata that is well composed though not entirely progressive. The soaring lyrical line of the second movement, however, has to be a flight of expressive beauty that is worth the price of the recording all on its own. The piano sonata, on the other hand, is not entirely unique, although there are some fine virtuoso licks

in the *Presto* final movement.

So, where does one place Platti? The answer is that he must be reckoned as one of the many talented Italian ex-pats living in Germany and creating music that reflects the amalgamation of German and Italian styles as they emerged from the Baroque. Whether or not one accepts that his transitional style is different or based upon his new view of the fortepiano, these are works which are solid, capable, and reflective of the aesthetic of the time. Luca Guglielmi's playing is precise and detailed as he negotiates the often repetitive passagework of Platti's concertos. His small ensemble, performing one to a part, has a nice sense of ensemble in the concertos, which helps to give a good impression of the integration that Platti's no doubt expected of his performers. It would be well performed in the future by a larger group, but I like that the individual lines are brought out with clarity. Paolo Grazzi's oboe playing is smooth and resonant. This may not be the greatest music of the time, but it is accessible and well performed. If you are interested in how the Baroque and Classical periods related to each other, you will probably want this disc. It is a fine example. **Bertil van Boer**

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Giovanni Benedetto PLATTI (1697-1763) - MusicWeb Review of Harpsichord Sonatas V.2 w/ Ravizza

Sonata No.1 in D major (1742) [13:15]

Sonata No.2 in C major (1742) [15:21]

Sonata No.3 in F major (1742) [13:17]

Sonata No.4 in G minor (1742) [13:28]

Sonata No.5 in C minor (1742) [15:31]

Filippo Emanuele Ravizza (harpsichord)

rec. Spring 2006, Studio Bartok, Bernareggio, Milan

CONCERTO CD 2026 [71:04]

Paradoxically, Platti presents the case of a composer who has generally sunk into oblivion but has also been lavishly praised in some quarters.

First, the facts. Born in or around Padua in 1697, Platti is believed to have studied music in Venice – his father Carlo is said by some sources to have played in the orchestra of St. Mark's cathedral – possibly with Francesco Gasparini and with Alessandro and Benedetto Marcello. In 1722 – along with Fortunato Chelleri (later 'Keller') and the singer Girolamo Bassani – he took up a post in the service of Johann Philipp Franz von Schönborn, Prince-Archbishop of Würzburg. Although his first patron died only two years after his arrival in Würzburg, Platti seems to have spent the rest of his life there, having married the soprano Theresia

Lambrucker in 1723, working for various members of the family of the Counts von Schönborn, notably Count Rudolf Franz Erwein, a particularly keen patron of music. Platti was a versatile musician; initially famous an oboist, he was also an accomplished violinist, cellist, flautist and harpsichordist; he taught singing and had a decent tenor voice; and, of course, he was a composer. He wrote at least one opera (now lost), several mass settings, a number of oratorios and cantatas, and over a hundred instrumental works. Rediscovery of his works is only really beginning now.

Yet almost a century ago, one musicologist was already making considerable claims for Platti. As long ago as 1910 the Italian Fausto Torrefranca published the earliest of his repeated claims as to the continuing vitality and quality of Italian music in the eighteenth century, a vitality which led him to insist that it was really the work of Italians (rather than Germanic) composers which paved the way for almost all the major later developments in music, for the classical sonata, the concerto, the symphony, the string quartet, even musical romanticism. One of his 'heroes' (along with such figures as Galuppi and Sammartini) was Platti. Platti, insisted Torrefranca, anticipated most of the innovations which German (and other) scholars had attributed to figures such as C.P.E. Bach (trying to do down C.P.E. Bach seems to have become something of an obsession with Torrefranca. Some of his arguments for Platti's precedence involve some pretty dubious juggling with dates and some pretty speculative leaps of logic). Some of his arguments are presented in his book *Le Origini italiane del romanticismo musicale; I primitivi della sonata moderna* (Turin, Fratelli Bocca, 1930). Torrefranca died in 1955. His characteristically intemperate study of Platti and his importance – *Giovanni Benedetto Platti e la sonata moderna* (Milan, Ricordi) – was published posthumously in 1963. It runs to over 400 pages and makes some pretty extraordinary claims, effectively identifying Platti as one of the most significant figures in the evolution of music in the eighteenth century. The claim is patently excessive. Yet Torrefranca's claims contain within them certain more modest 'truths'. Italian keyboard writing in the eighteenth century *was* more various and interesting than most standard histories have suggested; and Platti *did* have a certain distinctiveness as a composer and probably deserves a bit more attention than he has generally received. Neither the extreme of 'oblivion', nor the claim that he is a kind of principal progenitor of Mozart and Beethoven's sonatas, get Platti's position or merits right.

The truth seems to be that Platti is a very competent, though unevenly inventive, composer of keyboard sonatas; the best movements of the sonatas are expressive and quirky; the weakest are, if truth be told, somewhat dull affairs. There is an attractive 'vocal' quality to some of his writing, not least in some fine slow movements. There are quasi-improvisational passages where it is very hard to guess quite where the music will go next. There are passages of intricate

countermelody and of complex syncopated rhythms. There are also moments of disarming simplicity. But for all this, it is hard to imagine that many will want to go along with Torre Franca's judgement, quoted with approval in the booklet notes to this CD:

"How to portray Giovanni Benedetto Platti? ... He was a true artist, this is evident, but he was also a great artist and must take his place in history among the most important authors of instrumental music ... As far as music for harpsichord is concerned ... his style stands out over that of his contemporaries. To have a clear idea, just choose and read, one after another, those works in which he has been able to instil his true personality in the most concise and brilliant way and he conquers a place in the world of the indisputable, the highest sphere of art."

With this first volume of what is billed as a complete recording of Platti's harpsichord sonatas, played with proficient enthusiasm and commitment by Filippo Emanuele Ravizza, listeners have an opportunity to make up their own mind. Ravizza is not shy of striking colours or sharp transitions, and certainly seems to share Torre Franca's estimate of Platti's innovative style. To my ears the results seem sometimes a little forced, a little strained. But there is a great deal to enjoy in this immensely vivacious reading of the music. Ravizza plays a modern copy of an instrument by the eighteenth century manufacturer J.D. Dulcken; though no details are given it is evidently of the same 'family' as the copy of a Dulcken instrument of 1745 played so famously by Gustav Leonhardt, and its sharp, percussive sound is well suited to Ravizza's needs here.

Platti is not the staggeringly important figure of Torre Franca's claims. But he is an interesting writer for keyboards who deserves a hearing. He gets a good chance to be heard on this first CD of Ravizza's series (the second volume has also now been issued). It is a shame that the time limits of the CD mean that here we get to hear only nos. 1-5 of Platti's 1742 collection of *VI Sonates pour le Clavessin sur le Gout Italien*. The sixth heads off the second CD.

Glyn Purslove