

**BOCCHERINI 28 Symphonies** • Johannes Goritzki, cond; Deutsche Kammerakademie Neuss • cpo 999 401-2 (8 CDs: 7:17:37)

**BOCCHERINI Symphonies: in C**, op. 7, G 491; **in C**, op. 10/4, G 523; **in D**, G 490 • Johannes Goritzki, cond; Deutsche Kammerakademie Neuss • cpo 999 401-2 (8 CDs: Vol. 1: 50:47)

**BOCCHERINI Symphonies: in D**, op. 12/1, G 503; **in Eb**, op. 12/2, G 504; **in C**, op. 12/3, G 505 • Johannes Goritzki, cond; Deutsche Kammerakademie Neuss • cpo 999 401-2 (8 CDs: Vol. 2: 69:06)

**BOCCHERINI Symphonies: in d**, op. 12/4, G 506; **in B**, op. 12/5, G 507; **in A**, op. 12/6, G 508 • Johannes Goritzki, cond; Deutsche Kammerakademie Neuss • cpo 999 401-2 (8 CDs: Vol. 3: 50:47)

**BOCCHERINI Symphonies: in Bb**, op. 21/1, G 493; **in Eb**, op. 21/2, G 494; **in C**, op. 21/3, G 495; **in D**, op. 21/4, G 496; **in Bb**, op. 21/5, G 497 • Johannes Goritzki, cond; Deutsche Kammerakademie Neuss • cpo 999 401-2 (8 CDs: Vol. 4: 61:08)

**BOCCHERINI Symphonies: in A**, op. 21/6, G 498; **in D**, op. 35/1; **in Eb**, op. 35/2, G 510; **in A**, op. 35/3, G 511 • Johannes Goritzki, cond; Deutsche Kammerakademie Neuss • cpo 999 401-2 (8 CDs: Vol. 5: 49:03)

**BOCCHERINI Symphonies: in F**, op. 35/4, G 512; **in Eb**, op. 35/5, G 513; **in Bb**, op. 34/6, G 514; **in C**, op. 37/1, G 515 • Johannes Goritzki, cond; Deutsche Kammerakademie Neuss • cpo 999 401-2 (8 CDs: Vol. 6: 50:47)

**BOCCHERINI Symphonies: in d**, op. 37/3, G 517; **in A**, op. 37/4, G 518; **in c**, op. 41, G 519 • Johannes Goritzki, cond; Deutsche Kammerakademie Neuss • cpo 999 401-2 (8 CDs: Vol. 7: 59:33)

**BOCCHERINI Symphonies: in D**, op. 42, G 520; **in D**, op. 45, G 522; **in D**, G 500 • Johannes Goritzki, cond; Deutsche Kammerakademie Neuss • cpo 999 401-2 (8 CDs: Vol. 8: 46:26)

These eight discs, initially released separately over the first half decade of the 1990s, are now being made available as a boxed set, the advantage to those hard-core Boccherinians who have not yet acquired the individual CDs being that you can now acquire all eight for the price of five. Although the Boccherini symphonies have not been neglected on disc, this is, as far as I know, the first time they have received such systematic examination—part of a wider cpo presentation of Boccherini's music—and cpo's added financial inducement should help put this set on a good many shopping lists, with every reason.

The Austrian-born British writer Hans Keller, never a man to avoid a neologism that

deserved to be invented, once memorably referred to Boccherini as an "instanding" composer. To some extent, of course, Keller was being fair: Boccherini was not one of the chaps who stood the history of music on its head. But though he rarely touches the depths of the soul, his music is always faultlessly crafted, and, more to the point, it usually sounds like no one else: Boccherini was his own man. Even in the earliest of the symphonies here (Boccherini composed some 30 of them, but apparently only these 28 survive), there is a harmonic tang to the instrumental writing that is already individual; it was to become more pronounced in his later works, chamber and orchestral alike. Another feature that characterizes so much of his oeuvre is his sensitivity to orchestral color: He handles the orchestra with confidence and audacity—he is happy to experiment with new timbres and combinations, a favorite device being to pull instruments out of the texture as soloists and play them off against the rest in little microconcertos dotted throughout the works.

Though each of these discs would justify the attention of a full-length review, describing all eight in detail would try your patience. But every one is full of the incidental delights that arise from Boccherini's constant inventiveness with color, with texture, with rhythm. To choose three almost at random: The C-Major Symphony, op. 10, no. 4, on Volume 1 brings in a guitar accompaniment (appropriately enough, when one considers that 12 of Boccherini's symphonies were composed in Aranjuez); the E<sup>b</sup>-Major, op. 12, no. 2, brings in a *concertino* of two violins, two horns, and two cellos that bring refreshing tonal contrast (the cello writing in particular is little short of exquisite); and the lusty humor of the finale of op. 35, no. 1 (Volume 5), marked *Prestissimo*, confirms Boccherini's admiration for Haydn—one of the things he seems to have learned from the Viennese master being how to make silence work for him. OK, so the music is not always deeply memorable: There is much here that, set alongside the bolder contemporary efforts of Haydn and Mozart, pales in comparison; Boccherini seems to have been a happy chap, and so he writes music that expresses his happiness (Mozart, of course, expressed joy). But music doesn't have to supply an endless parade of masterpieces; it's enough that Boccherini offers honest pleasure. And when he is in witty mood (the opening movement of the E<sup>b</sup>-Major, op. 35, no. 2 [Volume 5], for example), he comes close to being able to look Haydn in the eye.

In short, this is music that genuinely deserves to be heard. Any of the six symphonies that make up Boccherini's op. 21 (and Volume 4 and part of Volume 5 of the cpo series), all with three movements and around the 10-15-minute mark, would make a wonderful opening to a concert instead of the endless round of the same half-dozen 19th-century overtures. The same holds for the six symphonies that make up op. 35 (likewise three movements apiece and of similar duration). Minor gems, the lot of them. Listening to the entire series end to end—not something that anyone other than reviewers and other monomaniacs are likely to do—does tend to rub home the instanding qualities Hans Keller mentioned, but

take any one of these works on its own and it cannot fail to delight audiences, in the concert hall or at home before the hi-fi.

The playing of the Deutsche Kammerakademie Neuss is bright and buoyant throughout, Johannes Goritzki keeping the tempos brisk and urgent—Boccherini's external allegros scamper along with exhilarating enthusiasm. His often delicate central andantes, by contrast, are handled with real sensitivity. The recordings, made over the years 1990 to 1993, are almost all engineered and produced by Reimund Grimm, the second half of Dabringhaus und Grimm, and their quality can thus be taken as axiomatic. And Christian Speck's notes—one long exegesis on Boccherini and his life with Volume 1 and shorter, detailed notes on the music for the following seven—give evidence of a good deal of scholarly effort. All told, then, this is a set that you should seriously consider if the period is one that interests you, and it would make an ideal present for that awkward classical-music buff who already has almost everything. It has to get a very strong recommendation.

I have a last question, in the hope that there might be some statisticians out there among *Fanfare* readers. Three of these eight discs have exactly the same timing (50:47)—and what are the odds against that happening? **Martin Anderson**

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## **28 Symphonies**

- Symphony Op. 10 #4 in C Major, G. 523 (1771)
- 6 Symphonies Op. 12, G. 503-508 (1771)
- 6 Symphonies Op. 21, G. 493-498 (1775)
- 6 Symphonies Op. 35, G. 509-514 (1782)
- 3 Symphonies Op. 37 #1, 3 & 4, G. 515, 517, 518 (1786)
- Symphony Op. 41 in C minor, G. 519 (1788)
- Symphony Op. 42 in D Major, G. 520 (1789)
- Symphony Op. 43 in D Major, G. 521 (1790)
- Symphony Op. 45 #5 in D minor, G. 522 (1792)
- Symphony in D Major, G. 490 (1775)
- Symphony in D Major, G. 500 (1781)

**Deutsche Kammerakademi Neuss/Johannes Goritzki**  
**CPO 999401-2 DDD 8CDs**

The symphonies of Luigi Boccherini (1743-1805) may sound like those of Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) on a perfunctory first hearing. Both composers create works that eloquently embody the spirit of their era: they contain dazzling forays into rhythmic variety, tight and logical structure, and bold elaboration of thematic

material. Both composers admired each other and freely borrowed thematic and structural techniques. At one time, contemporary wags referred to Boccherini as "the wife of Haydn," an unfair appellation certainly, but one with a spot of truth. But Boccherini's symphonies stood well on their own and endure today because of their inherent good spirits, their charming (although timid) use of polyphony, and most of all, their intense lyricism. In fact, his lyricism is at once his greatest strength and greatest roadblock to growth. He never did sacrifice melodies to delve deeply into drama and polyphony like Haydn. He never went through a *Sturm und Drang* period; although his symphonies contain dark moments, they are never tragic. We never sense he's creating a work of heroic proportions encompassing pre-Beethovenian struggles, like Haydn's (and later Mozart's) symphonies do. While the Andantino in the Op. 45 Symphony is grave and vaguely troubling, the mood quickly dissipates with a reassuring minuet. We never sense that a war or conflict is rumbling in the background as in Haydn's Symphony #100 in G ("Military") or even his Symphony #103 in E Flat Major ("Drum Roll"). There is so much cheer and rococo ornamentation in Boccherini. He even provides a Mediterranean touch in the Symphony in C Major (Op. 10, #4) with the spirited addition of a guitar. Johannes Goritzki and his Deutsche Kammerakademie Neuss orchestra give consistent and enjoyable readings to these symphonies, never flagging their enthusiasm for his music for an instant. Throughout these twenty-eight works, they provide a picture of Boccherini as a composer of gusto and good living. Perhaps the real difference between Boccherini and Haydn is garlic.

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**BOCCHERINI Symphonies: No. 13; Nos. 15–20** • Michael Erxleben (vn, cond); New Berlin CO • PHOENIX 460 (2 CDs: 107:56)

These are 1992 recordings that originally circulated on Capriccio and have been licensed for reissue to the budget label Phoenix. They were reviewed by Brian Robins back in *Fanfare* 29:5 when they were released as part of a larger 10-CD Boccherini box containing a hefty helping of the composer's chamber works, but due to the volume of material, he didn't say much specifically about these symphonies. I suppose one must really have to have an appetite for Boccherini to consume his music in such supersized portions, for his works have long measured low on the calories scale and been deemed not likely to satisfy one's hunger for any length of time.

Unfortunately, critical opinion, even when wrong, sometimes sticks, and in Boccherini's case, to no small degree, it has. He has been the butt of many a disparaging remark, one of the unkindest dating back to the 19th century when he was saddled with the sobriquet "Haydn's wife." That was as unfair and unhelpful a brickbat then as it is now when it comes to elucidating the composer's weaknesses as well as his strengths.

As a highly accomplished cellist, Boccherini counted among his greatest strengths his furthering of cello technique and his liberating of the cello from its traditional role as a continuo or harmonic bass reinforcing instrument. This is attested to particularly in his novel quintets employing two cellos, but also in his numerous string quartets, cello sonatas, and cello concertos.

His symphonies—28 of them—are fewer and not as innovative. It's primarily in this field that Boccherini is found wanting when held up against Haydn, but the comparison is not entirely apt. Culturally, Haydn is a transitional figure, a man-about-court during his long and fruitful relationship with the Esterhazy family, but also a man of the world, twice traveling to London where concerts featuring his symphonies were sold-out events. But Haydn the master was also, in a sense, Haydn the slave, his adoring audiences clamoring for ever more dazzling works on a grand scale. He had to fulfill the supply side of the supply-and-demand compact.

Boccherini never fully made that transition to public artist. All of his symphonies were written between 1771 and 1782 for the orchestra of the Spanish Infante, Don Luis, in whose court Boccherini served as chamber musician and composer, and when Luis died in 1783, Boccherini took the same position in the court of King Frederick Wilhelm II of Prussia.

These works are crafted on a smaller scale for more modest forces, as befits the setting for which they were written; though they're all in the classical four-movement layout with a Minuet in second or third position, in style of writing they retain some of the characteristics of the *sinfonia*-type symphonies that look back to a slightly earlier era. Sonata-allegro form, where it exists, is not as clearly defined as it is in Haydn and early Beethoven, and especially in some of the stylized dance gestures, one detects a French accent, perhaps the influence of Gossec, whom Boccherini had met in Paris before taking up his position at the Spanish court.

Comparisons then with Haydn's middle-period symphonies composed during this same timeframe, I believe, are neither particularly instructive nor just in assessing the worth of Boccherini's music. In the main, these are buoyant, high-spirited scores—even the minor-key ones—perfectly crafted for their purpose as essentially formal palace entertainments. Of their type, Boccherini's symphonies are of a very high quality and repay the listener with much pleasure.

The New Berlin Chamber Orchestra is a modern-instrument ensemble, numbering, according to the group photo in the booklet, 13 players including Michael Erxleben, who plays first-chair violin and doubles as conductor.

If you're a real Boccherini glutton, waiting for you on cpo is an eight-disc set of the complete symphonies with Johannes Goritzki leading the German Chamber Academy of Neuss. That set received a strong recommendation from Martin Anderson in *Fanfare* 23:5. But if you prefer the meal in smaller servings, this two-disc set is ideal. Works are very stylishly played, even if not on period instruments, and there's not a dud among them. **Jerry Dubins**

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